

# ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO - ROME

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STUDIES - 20

PIETRO BRAIDO

DON BOSCO THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIEST

IN THE CENTURY OF FREEDOMS

*“Not what is true but what is real, that is, the truth in all its historicity,  
its concreteness in becoming, over time” (Ch. Péguy)*

*“I once more recommend that you do not pay much attention to the dreams etc.  
If these help to understand moral issues, or our rules, that is okay;  
they can be kept. Otherwise they have no merit”  
(Letter to Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, 10 Feb. 1885, E IV 314)*

**VOLUME ONE**

*Third corrected and adjusted edition*

# DEDICATION

On the happy occasion of Professor Pietro Braido's 90th birthday, the ISS is pleased to offer scholars, friends of Don Bosco and Salesian Family members this third and final edition of:

*Don Bosco the Young People's Priest*

*In the Century of Freedoms*

This work, which has been revised by the author, is the result of 50 years of careful research and is a point of arrival for studies on Don Bosco at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as a point of departure for new explorations.

The occasion is an especially felicitous one given the opening of cultural events for the centenary of the death of Don Bosco's successor, Fr Michael Rua, and the imminent official celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Salesian Society.

Our most sincere thanks to the author and to everyone else, our best wishes for fruitful reading.

Fr Francesco Motto, Director of ISS, Colleagues and Friends, Rome, 24 May 2009.

# PREFACE

Don Bosco was born, lived and worked in the 19th century. In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, this century was in tense relationship with the 'principles of 1789': *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. There was equality of a broadly imperfect kind but there would be a hint of full equality. Fraternity would struggle to make inroads but, whether religious or secular, it would often appear in both word and deed. More evident would be the assertion of liberty (if not always practical, at least theoretical) through a range of political, religious, social, economic, cultural expressions and interpretations.

In terms of his upbringing, early culture and basic mentality, Don Bosco was rooted in the *ancien régime*, remaining faithful to principles other than those of 1789. And yet, his keen intelligence, more practical than theoretical, his sensitivity to problems posed by our human condition, his solid attachment to what was real, concrete and do-able, kept him constantly open to the needs of the time. Therefore he showed that he could be a man firmly anchored to tradition yet at the same time a new and surprisingly liberal innovator.

He seems to be a contradictory figure, one not easily reducible to a unity. He professed to being a priest unconditionally faithful to the Pope, while at the same time being a citizen 'fond of the government' (as he would write at one point), a man of order in a clearly secular State and with people who were openly secular and often anticlerical. He felt free in his own vocational choice as a 'priest for the young' with works located clearly and automatically within the ambit of diocese and parish. Free in the way he operated, he considered that the supreme law of *salus animarum*, the salvation of souls, must have been more than just theoretical pre-eminence over canonical norms. Free from any ties which were not reasonably respectful of the constituted authority, and especially given his undisputed dependence on the Supreme Head of the Church, he sought to form his own Religious Society. He demanded his own educational institutions which were freely established and freely operated and required them to be immune from external interference of any kind, including from any likely funding sources. He was devoted to where he came from – his hometown, region, country, and showed in fact what he was in spirit, a citizen of the world and specifically of the universal "boys' town" which he wanted to see extended beyond borders of any kind, to the entire planet. But just the same, he sometimes seemed to be a conformist. He attached considerable value to obedience in welfare-type activity, held to all Catholic truths and practices, fostered highly structured institutions for young people and adults and was allergic to any kind of protest against the established order. He did everything he could for the poor and mixed with the rich, not questioning issues of ownership and wealth but seeking only to direct them to good ends.

Don Bosco did not foment social or political revolution; he did not like revolutions and indeed rejected them. He did, though, do everything to improve the lot of humble folk and aimed at forestalling their legitimate resentment and violence which he found unacceptable. He promoted education and culture but of a functional and productive kind. He was superficially aware of critical thought and this only in some fleeting consideration of sources he employed when writing some of his short narrative works. He loved and empathised with youth but did not set them in conflict with adults, urging them rather to identify with adults, the values they offered and their wisdom. 'Reason, religion and loving-kindness' inspired everything along with the keen and vibrant aspirations of the young. But it was precisely this marriage of approaches that made him believe these aspirations needed to be set and upheld within the ambit of a prudent reasonableness, a religious sense of things that both channelled and curbed them and an intense yet tempered warmth. It was these things that would help his boys to act and regulate themselves in a civil and religious society which was to be both accepted and served.

His was the conditioned freedom of an operator who did not have a broad, systematic overview of things that might be called a systematic philosophy and reflective theology. On the one hand, he worked for the happiness of young people, which was the goal he gave them, proposing, as we shall see, to free them from the prejudiced view that religion and *joie de vivre* were compatible – at any age, from childhood to old age. At the same time he was strongly bound to a theological and moral framework which gave preference to the Commandments, laws, norms, order, and duties which freedom has to take into account, thus running the risk of limiting room for happiness. In the end, Don Bosco leaned more in the direction of a spontaneous freedom of non-alignment than one dependent on equality; a stance which aligned him very much with St Alphonsus Liguori and somewhat less with Thomas Aquinas.

The attempt is to draw up a history of this man from the ‘century of freedoms’, who was both a realist and a dreamer, using the greatest of care and balanced impartiality. The freedoms included the authentic or the false, but he was a man who was free and faithful; traditional and progressive, communicative and reserved; bold and thoughtful. We will be covering all the minutiae of the events in his life story but will attempt to select features of his personality as they took shape in that story in continuous interaction with the multiplicity of events considered historically significant. This will help us to understand him, who he was and how he did things, the institutions for young people that he gradually put in place, how he thought through the formation of his most immediate collaborators, his involvement of a great number of cooperators, the way he fitted into the civil world and that of the Church, the ideas he devised for an overall approach to educational activity, the preventive system, which suffused all forms of his activity and relationships.

In responding to this task and drawing up an overall scheme which might perhaps be a little too ambitious, summaries of Don Bosco’s life already drawn up by scholars of considerable worth have been employed. We can assume, first of all, Pietro Stella’s pioneering research, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. These three volumes, while written from a specific perspective, arrive at an essential overall profile which includes Don Bosco’s life, mentality, spirituality also considered in the light of appraisals formed *post mortem* by demanding critics.

Secondly, account is taken of the widespread biography by Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*, an exhaustive coverage of the huge task attempted by the compilers of the nineteen volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs*, Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, Eugenio Ceria. Their countless clarifications and particular considerations are born in mind, but not always taken up in this current work which is addressed rather to recalling what is essential in Don Bosco’s biography, mindset and activity, omitting the anecdotal and accidental. It is a case of more biography from Pietro Stella’s study and less commentary from Francis Desramaut’s narrative approach.

Rome, 31 January 2005.

## SHORT FORMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- AAS Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Commentarium officiale. Romae, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1909 ff.
- AGFMA Archivio Generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Roma)
- all. Allograph = written up by another hand
- ASC Archivio Salesiano Centrale (Roma)
- ASS Acta Sanctae Sedis... Typis Poliglottis Officinae S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1865-1909
- aut. Autografo = written by his own hand
- BS *Bollettino Salesiano* (Italian Salesian Bulletin from 1878); *Bibliofilo cattolico o Bollettino salesiano mensile* (from August to December 1877)
- Capitoli*
- Superiori* [G. BARBERIS], Superior chapters or minutes of meetings held by the Superior Chapter of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, from 10 December 1875
- Capitolo*
- Superiore* [G.B. LEMOYNE], Minutes of Superior Chapter meetings [from 14 December 1883]
- Cost. SDB* G. Bosco, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Motto) [1858]–1875. Critical texts, ed. Francesco Motto. Rome, LAS 1982
- Cronistoria* Chronicle [of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians], ed. I and II Giselda Capetti. Roma, Istituto FMA, Vol. I and II. 1974 and 1876.
- DBI *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*. Rome, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana 1960 ff.
- Documenti* [G.B. LEMOYNE], *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione Salesiana*, 40 vol. + 5 vols of appendices [proofs with notes and handwritten comments]
- Don Bosco* P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità nella Chiesa Studi e testimonianze*. Rome, LAS 1987
- Don Bosco* M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia*. Proceedings of the 1st Congress on international history of studies on Don Bosco (Pontifical Salesian University – Rome, 16-20 January 1989). Rome, LAS 1990
- E *Epistolario di san Giovanni Bosco*, ed. Eugenio Ceria, 4 vols Turin, SEI 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959
- Em G. BOSCO, *Epistolario*. Introduction, critical texts and notes, ed Francesco Motto, 4 vols (1835–1875). Rome, LAS 1991, 1996, 1999, 2003
- FdB ASC, Fondo don Bosco. Microfiche and description. Rome 1980
- FdR ASC, Fondo don Rua. Microfiche and description. Rome, 1996
- Istituto FMA The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
- LC *Lecture Cattolice*. Turin, March 1853 ff.

- MB *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del Beato... di San) Giovanni Bosco*, 19 vol. (from 1 to 9: G. B. Lemoyne; 10: A. AMADEI; from 11 to 19: E. Ceria) + 1 Index volume (E. Foglio). San Benigno Canavese-Turin 1898–1939 (Indexes, 1948)
- mcr microscheda (microfiche)
- Memorie* F. MOTTO, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio Bosco dal dal 1841 1841 a' suoi figliuoli salesiani* [Testamento spirituale], RSS 4 (1985) 73-130
- MO G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales. Dal 1815 al 1855*, a ed Eugenio Ceria. Turin, SEI 1946
- MO (1991) G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales (1991) dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduction, notes and critical text ed. by Antonio da Silva Ferreira. Roma, LAS 1991 [But note that references in this translation are to the Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855, Salesiana Publishers New York 2010].
- ms/mss manuscript/s
- OE G. BOSCO, *Opere edite, prima serie: Libri e opuscoli* (reprint), 37 vols; second series: Contributions to newspapers and journals, 1 vol. Rome, LAS 1977-1978, 1988
- orig. original/s
- RSS *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*. Half-yearly Journal of Religious and Civil History. Rome, LAS (Istituto Storico Salesiano – Rome) (1982 ff.)

# INTRODUCTION

Don Bosco's life shows him to be essentially a man of action. For a biography to be sufficiently faithful, it needs to pull together all the elements it attempts to synthesise: personal events in his life, his activity in his religious and educative institutions, the message which is inseparable from them and which he identifies and which highlights the fundamental stages of his life and written works throughout.

Our attempt is to more precisely clarify the aims we propose to achieve, the markedly developmental character of the research, the criteria for appraisal and critical use of sources.

## 1. Purpose and Aims

In restructuring his life story we are adopting, in the first instance, a method and mindset capable of adequately respecting the real development of Don Bosco's story. We are not coming at it from on high, from the point of its fulfilment: the founder, saint, exceptional activist. We intend to avoid the danger of narrating and interpreting his life, including his early childhood, in the light of what comes afterwards and how it ended. Instead we are attempting to recall this life as it develops through each moment, when the future is still completely unknown, or is but fragmentary and dreamed of, devised, foreshadowed or prepared for. This way the understanding of events as they occur is not conditioned by the experiences as they are relived in successive eras.

This is essential for Don Bosco since he himself or those closest to him – the Salesians principally, seeing themselves or him as a 'founder' – were inclined to view him, for didactic, edifying or reassuring purposes, from the outset. Of course, they did so in terms of the by now familiar kinds of hagiography. Thus 'predestined', he would be going through somewhat consistent preludes right from the beginning, preludes to experiences they would later describe as what really happened. But in reality, Don Bosco built up his life step by step, aiming at immediate objectives which the situation made necessary and could only later be interpreted as something like stages in an overall pattern laid out from the beginning. As we will see in the introduction to the third part, the Don Bosco of the *Cronache* [chronicles, daily records or diary entries] from 1859–62 is content to view events from his childhood and adolescence and beyond this way because he is using them as a tool for encouraging and forming his young Salesians. The *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* followed a similar purpose.

Following a strictly historical point of view, in essence we are seeking to respond to two fundamental questions: Who is Don Bosco as he grew up and became the person he did? What profile emerges from the abundant information on personal and institutional events, his manifold relationships and the more concrete of his projects and how they turned out: features of his personality, temperament, character, the less transparent elements, his idiosyncrasies and what he made himself available for? The personal side, in fact, is inseparable from his self-awareness of his mission as an apostle, someone who attracted and was a benefactor and moulder of the younger generation. Running parallel with this, a message took shape which on the one hand reveals features of the spirituality of the priest-educator of the young and, on the other, a magisterium of pedagogy and life for his close helpers. Interior life, action, words, written works, teachings, executive decisions, animation all came together indivisibly and are constructive of his historical personality.

Who was Don Bosco in his time? Or in other words, how much did he receive from and how

much did he give to the two distinct but simultaneously present worlds in which he operated – civil society and Church? In his development, by whom and by what was he influenced and along with that, what did he remain resistant to due to his temperament, culture, mentality? In this regard we endeavour to allow what he represented in and for his times to emerge, as a citizen, believer and priest. What did he offer as he carried out his mission at distinct levels of social work and activity, charity (of an educational kind), social involvement? This has to be seen in relationship with the transformations taking place in every field in the 19th century, a true revolution that had its beginnings in the decades of the Restoration, and lasted into the years of Socialism and the explosion of social problems. And again, what was his contribution to the various levels of youth ministry, in fostering moral and religious values, in the setting up of new religious, educational institutions and to various kinds of prevention?

## 2. Development in the history of Don Bosco's active life

Don Bosco's life is marked by two very precise stages, each with its own peculiarities. Ascertaining the turning point that took place in Don Bosco's life from diocesan priest to religious founder seems to be fundamental, not only for describing his personality and what he did, but also for assessing and correctly using documents in reference to those two chronologically distinct phases, thus avoiding the danger of an undue and indiscriminate, institutionalised "Salesianising" of things.

The divide between the two stages can be approximately located in the period from 1858–62 with some foreshadowing from 1854–57 and some remaining legal uncertainties from 1862–69. Defining such a discriminating moment seems important not only for outlining Don Bosco's personality and the significance of his activity, but also for the value of documents relating to the two distinct periods.

The first is Don Bosco's time as a boy, a student, then priest, fully incarnated in his home district and diocese where his mindset, possibilities, intentions, activities, permissions, collaborations and also public and private recognition (newspapers, magazines, letters, appraisal by civil and religious authorities) were tied to a very precise world: Morialdo, Castelnuovo, Chieri, Turin, Piedmont. During this period there were some purely occasional and, ultimately, insubstantial possibilities for entry into one or other religious order or congregation, or for choosing to be a missionary. This would see Don Bosco having to deal with the tough realities of daily life. Because of serious financial difficulties he was a late starter in studies that would set him on the path to realising childhood dreams of a priestly vocation, familiarising himself with a humanist and rhetorical culture which was unthinkable for a farming lad of his social and economic status; and assimilating, through diligent application, the philosophical and theological culture and spiritual formation demanded by the seminary. All this he then had to integrate through personal reading of an historical and apologetic nature, and, in the *Convitto ecclesiastico* [or Pastoral Institute but henceforth shortened to simply *Convitto*] complete his pastoral formation through a study of moral theology inspired by Liguorian probabilism as presented by Cafasso.

Meanwhile, much perplexed by the circumstances of certain categories of young people in Turin, he made ever more daring and demanding and very practical choices on their behalf. He dedicated himself to teaching catechism, founding the Oratory, enriching himself through cultural and social activities, writing popular history and devotional texts, engaging in anti-Protestant apologetics, organising lotteries, building a church. He was in contact with public administrators, private charitable institutions both run by the Church or by secular bodies, and was also in touch with Royalty and the world of politics, immediately revealing features of his personality: the art of *captatio benevolentiae* (winning people over), dramatising problems, offering solutions to improve the behaviour of young people who were 'at risk, and of risk to others', and protecting the social



order. We already see a masterpiece of his enterprise and skill in his letter to Marquis Michele di Cavour on 13 May 1846, going well beyond the mere presentation of an educational curriculum. Journals and newspapers were speaking about him and very soon he succeeded in attracting volunteers and collaborators to his own sphere of activity.

During this phase of his life, already inclined to faith in God's ordinary and extra-ordinary providence in human affairs (history is always, though to differing degrees, sacred history), Don Bosco was already convinced of his particular investiture, on God's part, in the redemption of youth. A clear indication of this is the purposeful manifesto which is his *Introduction* to the *Piano di Regolamento*, or draft set of rules for the Oratory in 1854. But he had not yet thought that through in connection with setting up a true and proper religious congregation.

One must add that it was in this first period that a shift occurred which peaked in early August 1846. It was at that decisive moment that Don Bosco, while still a diocesan priest, perfected his embryonic choice for the young and the apostolate to ordinary people, renouncing potential involvement in traditional parish structures and, in agreement with his archbishop, dedicated himself to the Oratory, not only at weekends and on Holy Days [the so-called festive oratory] but adding in a hospice, groups, school etc. Indeed, the work of the festive oratories in particular then became in some way legally recognised as an intra-ecclesial structure by the diocesan Ordinary on 31 March 1852.

Parallel to the development of the Oratory, Don Bosco added his experience of prevention to his awareness of being an educator, pastor and leader. He would codify this experience later, but it was already very much present before the birth of his plans for the Salesian Congregation. It was an experience, then, of Don Bosco who was still the diocesan priest, fully integrated within the social and religious fabric of the city and Archdiocese of Turin. This is diocesan history with its own documentation: appeals, circulars, and letters, *Cenni storici* (historical sketches) which precede and are of a different character to those drawn up with specifically different purposes in the second period of his life.

Then began the period of Don Bosco, the aspiring founder of religious institutes, and de facto founder, becoming a religious himself, forming consecrated men and later women. He worked as a religious, legislated, spoke and wrote as such. In fact the problem of young people appeared to him to be too complex and demanding to be resolved by merely occasional and voluntary involvement of spontaneous helpers. Though much shorter in chronological terms, this period shows itself to be much more intense and qualitatively relevant at the personal and practical level, with a noticeable change to mentality, relationships and lifestyle. In fact his awareness of Divine intervention with a view to broader possibilities, led Don Bosco, for himself and his potential helpers, to interpret the earlier period in a new way; he even wove in technically religious and Salesian concepts, where historical events were seen in providential, sometimes even miraculous terms, whereas in reality they took place without such a perspective at the time. This phenomenon grew more extensive right up to the conclusion of his life, giving rise to an inverted history, one that descended from top to bottom, rather than a realistic, developing history which genuinely ascended from its historical roots to its fulfilment.

### **3. Clues to the use of resources**

Dividing things into two distinct periods implies re-reading and reflecting on the use of documents, most of which come out of the Salesian era and were addressed to his religious by Don Bosco himself. The *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* can be considered paradigmatic of

these, aimed at 'making known how God himself has always been our guide')<sup>1</sup>. If we follow a less vigilant reading (and we will speak about this), the dream at 9/10 years of age in its successive iterations is interpreted as a premonition of his involvement with the Oratory and his encounter with Bartholomew Garelli on 8 December 1841, commemorated as the official date of the beginning both of the Oratory and the Salesian Society.<sup>2</sup>

When the time is right we will show how the *cronache* or diary entries of the early 1860s, reflect the magisterium of a founder and formator, aimed at inculcating in the first young Salesians the idea that their vocation came from a providential plan with its roots in the now distant past: hence the time given to dwelling on his early years, early studies, the early Oratory, including elements of extraordinary premonitions or enlightenment from on high, even punitive interventions suffered by opponents or presumed persecutors.<sup>3</sup>

It is symptomatic that the *Cenno storico* and *Cenni storici* from 1854–1862 respectively, which are different again from the *Cenni storici* prefaced to the articles of the *Constitutions* or attached to the dossiers for diocesan or papal approval of the Congregation, are largely unknown. And yet they are accessible, at least in part, to readers of the *Biographical Memoirs* and, in abridged edition, have been available for some years to any scholar of matters Salesian. They contain information closer to the facts of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, information which some consider to be undeniably autobiographical and true every time and in all details. It appears that we cannot undervalue observations offered elsewhere concerning the historical limitations of this book, despite it being extremely important from the point of view of its ideas and messages.<sup>4</sup>

It seems, then, that a careful and precise critique of sources is essential, one that does not refer exclusively to authenticity but tackles the problems of how they came about, their functions and their historical reliability. For such an audit it seems proper firstly to take account of the personality of the authors of individual documents, the time and circumstances in which they were written, to whom they were addressed and the ends pursued. This should be the case, in the first instance, for those from Don Bosco's own hand, since he is a problematic self-witness. Of the many *Cenni storici* he drew up it seems we should prefer the ones closest to the facts, while those aimed at presenting specific messages, seeking approval or authorisation, or obtaining concessions and favours, deserve consideration of another kind. This is taken up at greater length at the beginning of the history of Don Bosco as founder.<sup>5</sup>

It would also be obvious that sources and interpretations of Salesian origin, by far the greater in number, are not therefore to be used exclusively or over much as if they are to be automatically thought of as more objective and truthful than others which are no less worthy of attention and of equal value.

The rich collection which is the *Epistolario* or collection of Don Bosco's correspondence, does not present a problem. It provides a valuable parallel biography of Don Bosco, a down-to-earth, concrete one that compensates for what other documentation might communicate but in much more desultory fashion. Here the reference is especially to the *cronache* and testimonies originating mostly from the small world of Valdocco and by authors who were especially devoted, charmed, impressionable, and hence more likely to see the extraordinary in Don Bosco than record the hard and demanding daily grind, the doubts, problems, efforts and struggle, his limitations. For

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1 MO (2010) 30 (Note: the English edition used for references to MO is the Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York, 2010 edition).

2 Regarding the second of these two events, a number of documents are offered in the appendix to Volume One, for the reader's attention and personal assessment.

3 Cf. *Introduction* to the Third Part of this volume, § 2.2.

4 Cf. P. BRAIDO, "*Memorie del futuro*", RSS 11 (1992) 97-127; see chap. 24, § 1.2.

5 Cf. once again the *Introduction* to Part Three, § 2.1

some of them, a dream easily became a vision, foresight became prophecy, insight into the youthful soul morphed into ability to read consciences.

Documents from non-Salesian witnesses also need to be taken into account, including those by opponents or others from either civil society or Church who were considered less favourable to Don Bosco's initiatives or were not always so ready to accede to his requests. Biography is interested in them not only because they present knots which we need to untie, to explain or justify the hero's behaviours and attitudes, but firstly because they bring their own image and interpretation of the person into question. So, rather than assessing them in terms of reshaping their ideas if they are negative ones, we can use them to our advantage, to include them and clarify their importance.

If a balanced, critical consideration of testimonies is essential with regard to the depositions presented for the diocesan and apostolic processes for Don Bosco's beatification and canonisation, then in order to put together an historical account of Don Bosco, such consideration seems just as necessary for understanding counter-testimonies. When we weigh up the official defences, although they may successfully overcome any obstacles to the proclamation of canonical holiness, they do not necessarily eliminate all doubts and discordant points of view of the historians regarding the individual's practical achievements or temperamental characteristics.

The available bibliographies are relevant. Undoubtedly those which deal with problematic elements are of particular value to us, but especially when supported by direct contact with sources of assured worth. This has helped in identifying aspects of Don Bosco and his activity which are meaningful for outlining his personality in relation to realities and issues of his day. A number of these issues and situations are common to other individuals, his peers in the Catholic and civil world: the problem of youth, preventive solutions, the social situation, culture, the numinous and how it was deployed, money and financial wrangling, differences of view and conflict within the Church theological and spiritual orientation. What we find in Pietro Stella's *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Volume three, '*La canonizzazione*'<sup>6</sup> and in what a range of more recent essayists as well as past critics or detractors have written, is stimulating from a number of points of view.

A particularly valuable source which shows Don Bosco involved in and challenged by his humble daily grind, comes from the archival material edited by J.M. Prellezio in *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866–1889). Documenti e testimonianze*.<sup>7</sup> There, Don Bosco is pictured together with his closest collaborators in the house where he resided, viz, the Oratory at Valdocco. This is the privileged place for his biography, the habitual address for his correspondents. The daily management of this large community is the setting where his manner of being and operating matured and which characterised them as they expanded beyond national borders. It was where he was and worked regularly, uninterruptedly, concretely. It was the crucible and fount of his thinking, be it from minute or grand perspectives. The real and true Don Bosco, in fact, is revealed first and foremost in the multiplicity of the things he did rather than in developing universal and systematic ideas or in the amount of things he had to say. Deeds, works, are his being and his message. The warp and weft of his life was made up of the variegated interweaving of tasks attempted in the most diverse succession of times, places and people. In the apparent dispersion of his intense and multifaceted activity, he expresses – and this is the unifying centre of it all – his wise and practical faith in works of charity for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. This is why, in the biographical retelling, the superabundance and very repetitiveness of references and quotations is neither superfluous, fastidious nor too heavy. After all, this is the *summa vitae* of Don Bosco, substantiated by situations and events that overlap and would be

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6 Rome, LAS 1988.

7 Rome, LAS 1992.

inadequately represented by general statements understating the concrete and detailed data ever present in his packed existence: governing and administrative matters, decisions regarding local matters, personal relationships, correspondence, involvement in the education of the young and the lives of the consecrated individuals and dedicated to them, involvement in politics and the Church, reaction to successes and failures, identification with the joys and sorrows of young people and adults.

# Part one

## A MAN OF AND FOR HIS CENTURY

### Introduction

It is not possible to understand what Don Bosco did in his century nor what he gave to it, without understanding what he gained from it and how, in one way or another, he was gradually shaped and provoked by it.

A man of faith expressed through active love, he became rooted in the real world with growing intensity, 'faithful to the world' and at the same time a 'pilgrim of the Absolute' entirely dedicated to the salvation of poor and abandoned young people.

He did not fail, of course, to speak and write about his own time in a variety of circumstances, especially regarding its most significant moments. So it seems appropriate to pull together what he had to say in his writings, integrating this with updated historical notes. It will help later on, obviously, when biographical research illustrates the various formative moments which contributed to shaping Don Bosco's mentality, the reconstructions he devised and the by no means unambiguous interpretations he formulated concerning past history and his own time: a fundamentally static rural world on the fringes of new currents of thinking, the *ancien régime's* 'Latinitas' style of schooling [the basis of what we today know as Grammar School], the Tridentine style of seminary in Chieri, the *Convitto* or Pastoral Institute in Turin which were faithful to the most reassuring Roman Catholic orthodoxy, and his preferred reading in Church history and apologetics, clearly dependent on 18th century thinking.

Europe in the 1990's was the product of epic revolutions and in turn helped shape their evolution in many ways which ultimately modified an ancient order that emerged partly unscathed. We outline here a summary of developments relating especially to the geographical and political arena in which Don Bosco began his work, from the time of the Restoration until the new arrangements in the second half of the 19th century: the Italian Peninsula in political transition from the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia to the Kingdom of Italy. We then pass on to some indications concerning nearby older nations and some of the new, emerging States in Latin America to whom Don Bosco reached out either personally or through his institutions, and with effective leadership and direction.

## Chapter 1

# FROM THE RE-ESTABLISHED ORDER TO THE VICTORY OF LIBERALISM

- 1814      1 November: Congress of Vienna opens.
- 1815      9 June: Congress of Vienna concludes.  
          16 August: Birth of John Melchior Bosco.  
          26 September: Holy Alliance Pact drawn up.
- 1831      2 February: Gregory XVI elected Pope.
- 1846      Easter, 12 April: Don Bosco establishes the Oratory at Valdocco in Turin
- 1848      European revolutions:  
          24 February, Paris  
          13 March, Vienna  
          15 March, Berlin  
          18 March, Milan
- 1850      The *Siccardi* Law abolishing ecclesiastical immunity; breakdown in diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Piedmont–Sardinian State;  
          28 September: the Archbishop of Turin, Fransoni, expelled from the Kingdom.
- 1852      2 November: Camillo Cavour becomes Prime Minister.
- 1855      29 May: the law against convents [read monasteries] is issued
- 1860–61    Most of the Papal States are annexed to Piedmont–Sardinia: The Legations, The Marches, Umbria.
- 1861      26 February: the Kingdom of Italy proclaimed:  
          9 April: Rome proclaimed Capital of the Kingdom of Italy;  
          6 June: death of Camillo Benso di Cavour.
- 1865      14 May: the capital moves to Florence
- 1866      7 July: law of suppression of religious bodies.
- 1867      15 August: law liquidating Church assets.
- 1869      1 March: Pontifical approval of the Salesian Society:  
          8 December: opening of Vatican Council 1
- 1870      20 September; Italian troops enter Rome, Pius XI becomes a voluntary ‘prisoner’ in the Vatican.
- 1871      13 March: ‘Law of Guarantees’ rejected by the Pope.

- 1876            23 March: the liberal Left in Government.
- 1886            11 February: first Italian legislation on child labour.

Don Bosco was born on 16 August 1815. Given the mindset of the Heads of State gathered at the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) this year is really and symbolically to be located within the *ancien régime*, whereas the new world began or was foreshadowed by the revolutions which took place beginning with the second half of the previous century. It would mark Don Bosco for his entire life in an unresolved ambivalence between tradition and modernity, and was not without its fruitful side despite less positive interpretations, as indeed was the reality in the kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia which he was born a citizen of.<sup>1</sup>

However, he was also able to partly accept the new historical reality installed from 1847–48 and beyond, moving with relative ease in a situation which many other of the same Faith insisted were the product of an illegitimate revolution to be opposed by every means. It had its roots in the principle of liberty and equality proclaimed by the French Revolution in 1789. Adherents believed it was the mature outcome of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century and the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

### 1. Amid Revolutions and Restoration

Due to his origins, mentality and formation, Don Bosco would undoubtedly not have had an adequate perception of what each of the great revolutions in the 17th and 18th centuries had conferred on his own time: social features, with particular reference to England<sup>2</sup> and industrial and cultural ones with specific reference to the Enlightenment, as well as socio-political (French and Napoleonic) features. But in some limited fashion and along similar lines to intransigents like Joseph De Maistre<sup>3</sup> he did recall some of the causes, and the consequences for moral, religious, ecclesial life. He identified three of these in his *Storia ecclesiastica* (1845), following the widespread interpretation of Englishman Edmond Burke: secret societies, certain fanatics known as the *Illuminati*, and philosophers who believed they could change the world, resulting in liberty and equality for everyone.<sup>4</sup> The French Revolution, indeed ‘persecution’, would have been ‘stirred up’, in other words inspired, fostered by these groups. It would be seen at its worst in the horrors of Robespierre’s Terror.<sup>5</sup>

The *secret societies* and the *Illuminati* reappear as subversive elements in the *Storia d’Italia* ‘They are generally known,’ he wrote ‘under the names *Carbonari*, *Franchs-machons*, *Jacobins* or *Illuminati*, various names at various times but all in agreement on three objectives: “to overturn today’s society which they are unhappy with because they find nothing there which is convenient for their ambition nor the freedom to vent their passions.” And to succeed in this overturning they seek to “expel all religion and every moral notion from men’s hearts and put down all religious and civil authority meaning the Roman Pontificate, and the thrones.” He went on to write that they were very seductive, speaking of ‘fraternity, philanthropy, and the like.’ In reality they led to the French Revolution which began with the ‘middle or bourgeois class’, (making use of the ‘pebs’) who

1 Cf. *Ombre e luci della Restaurazione. Trasformazioni e continuità istituzionali nei territori del regno di Sardegna*. Conference Proceedings, Turin 21-24 October 1991. Rome, Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage, Central Office for archival Assets 1997.

2 Cf. C. HILL, *Il mondo alla rovescia. Idee e movimenti rivoluzionari nell’Inghilterra del Seicento*. Turin, Einaudi 2001.

3 There are a good number of families with whom Don Bosco had lasting friendships, whose names go back to the great Savoyard, including his descendents the De Maistre Fassati families.

4 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole per ogni ceto di persone. Compilata dal Sacerdote B.G...* Torino, tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1845, p. 343, OE I 501.

5 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 343-345, OE I 501-503.

became 'Sovereign' with the sad results that followed: 'For the Revolution, what lay above in society was brought low, and what was beneath was placed above; thus the anarchy of the mob reigned.' Italy was not immune from this and secret societies were introduced, spreading 'seditious ideas of liberty, equality and reform' as a prelude to Napoleon's military conquests.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, while presenting Voltaire and Rousseau, representative of the 'modern philosophers',<sup>7</sup> in the worst possible light in his *Storia ecclesiastica*, in the *Storia d'Italia* he also highlighted the progress of the 1800s thanks to an almost fifty-year period of peace in Europe 'which,' he noted 'provided room for many clever and intelligent individuals to enrich the sciences and arts with many useful ideas.'<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Don Bosco only vaguely noted the reality of the industrial revolution in its economic, social and cultural dimensions and implications. This could also be explained by the fact that it had limited influence in Italy prior to the last two decades of the 19th century. Political fragmentation was also of considerable disadvantage to the Peninsula's economy, more developed in certain of its northern regions, with a capitalist style agriculture in some areas, especially Lombardy, and a degree of industrialisation in the textile sector in Lombardy, Venezia, Piedmont and Tuscany.<sup>9</sup>

Don Bosco does not even seem to have grasped the phenomenon in France, which he had occasion to visit often from 1874–86. Having made a name for itself quite vigorously in England between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, the Industrial Revolution gradually extended to Belgium, North-Eastern France, and a considerable part of the North-East United States. In the second half of the 19th century it saw rapid and massive development in Germany, which ended up leading industrial growth in Continental Europe. Only toward the end of the 19th century did it develop in Russia, Japan, Argentina, Italy, Spain and the Scandinavian Countries. It was a complex phenomenon with an enormous impact on society, individuals, family, culture and on attitude and behaviours.<sup>10</sup>

At any rate, Don Bosco's view and appreciation of historical events was essentially religious, moral and generically social. For example, the interpretations he provides for the complex events surrounding Napoleon Bonaparte, who led troops into Italy (1796) is a theological one. He also presents him as a Consul (1799), who promoted concordats with the Church (1801 and 1803), Emperor who promoted the civil code (1804), King of Italy (1805), Conqueror of Spain (1808) who then annexed the Papal States and sent Pius VII into exile in France (1809); then the dramatic finale, his disastrous campaign in Russia (1812), defeat at Lipsia, abdication and exile on the

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6 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù dai suoi primi abitanti sino ai nostri giorni corredata di una Carta Geografica d'Italia*. Torino, tip. Paravia e comp. 1855 [1856], pp. 455-457, OE VII 455-457.

7 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 336-339, OE I 494-497

8 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 455, OE VII 455.

9 Cf. P. LÉON (Ed.), *Storia economica e sociale del mondo*, Vol. III 'Le rivoluzioni 1730-1840, part 2 'L'era delle rivoluzioni'. Bari, Laterza 1980, pp. 646-658

10 Cf. P. LÉON (Ed.), *Storia economica e sociale del mondo*, Vol. IV 'Il capitalismo 1840-1914', part 1 'Il secolo della crescita'. Bari, Laterza 1980, pp. 118-124 (The three waves of industrialisation), 282-310 (Italy); C. M. CIPOLLA, 'La rivoluzione industriale', in *Storia economica d'Europa*, taken from C. M. Cipolla, vol. III. Torino, UTET 1980, pp. 1-16; V. CASTRONOVO, *La rivoluzione industriale*. Bari, Laterza 1978; T. S. ASHTON, *La rivoluzione industriale (1760-1830)*, Bari, Laterza 1981; P. A. TONINELLI (ed), *Lo sviluppo economico moderno dalla rivoluzione industriale alla crisi energetica (1750-1973)*, Venezia, Marsilio 1997; L. CHEVALIER, *Classi lavoratrici e classi pericolose. Parigi nella rivoluzione industriale*, Bari, Laterza 1976; V. HUNECKE, *Classe operaia e rivoluzione industriale a Milano 1859-1892*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1982; D. S. LANDES, *Prometeo liberato. Trasformazioni tecnologiche e sviluppo industriale nell'Europa occidentale dal 1750 ai giorni nostri*. Turin, Einaudi 1993; V. CASTRONOVO, *Storia economica d'Italia. Dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, Turin, Einaudi 1995; P. HUDSON, *La rivoluzione industriale*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1995.



island of Elbe (1814), his flight and crushing defeat at Waterloo and subsequent confinement on the island at St Helena (1815), followed by his death (1821). The narrator highlights in particular his sacrilegious 'harassment' of the Church, and of Pius VII and Pius VIII: 'a new generation of persecution which lasted from 1798 to 1814,' with inevitable divine punishment crowned by mercy because of his sincere repentance and reformation'.<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, his description and assessment of the facts as presented in the *Storia d'Italia* were along similar lines,<sup>12</sup> though showing admiration for his military genius, finally betrayed by his unbridled ambition. Further on, the narrator emphasised, showing what is only apparent neutrality, the negative institutional and cultural transformations brought about in Europe by Napoleon and his armies; 'Napoleon made great efforts to see that revolutionary ideas spread more widely and to ensure that people rose up against their sovereigns.'<sup>13</sup>

The political restoration brought about by the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) receives scant coverage from Don Bosco. It simply meant for him a reintegration of the proceeding order, 'distributing kingdoms to those who were due for them' including the Pope (Papal States), and 'following this sharing out of kingdoms,' taking advantage of four years of tranquillity 'to repair the ills brought about by lengthy wars and revolutions.'<sup>14</sup>

By dint of the 'distribution of kingdoms' sanctioned by the final decisions in Vienna on 9 June 1815, which showed interest only in dynasties, and on the basis of the imperfectly applied principle of *legitimacy* in Italy as elsewhere in Europe, John Bosco became a citizen of an extended Sardinian State comprising Sardinia, Piedmont, the counties of Nice, Savoy and Liguria, taken from the ancient Republic of Genoa: Lombardy–Veneto, the Two Sicilies (Southern Italy and Sicily), the Papal States; the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the four Duchies of Parma and Piacenza, Modena and Reggio, Massa and Carrara (which went over to the Duchy of Modena and Reggio in 1831) and Luca, which was joined to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1847. Political fragmentation in Italy, which had existed for centuries, also meant financial, economic fragmentation with corresponding disparity in development and rigid customs controls. These became increasingly harmful in a Europe where more developed countries were moving in the direction of a growing commercial globalisation assisted by a more rapid development of communication and railways.

From a political perspective, the Congress of Vienna had been dominated by the great four powers – Russia, Austria, Prussia, England, who apart from the principle of *legitimacy*, were inspired by the principle of *balance* in both territory and power. This was intended to guarantee that Europe would avoid grand fratricidal continental wars but it ignored the principle of *nationality* and with it the notions of *liberty* and *equality* before the law and in social conditions as proclaimed by the French Revolution, and which spread throughout the Continent. These were already substantially present in the United States of America's *Declaration of Independence* on 4 July 1776.

Without realising it, Don Bosco was aligning himself with the thinking of Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor in Vienna; freedom was not a point of departure but of arrival, and order was its foundation and condition.<sup>15</sup> For Don Bosco, too, as the author of the *Storia d'Italia*, any change that did not come from above, and was not part of law and the established order was suspect and

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11 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 350-369, OE I 508-527; cf. G. MARTINA, *La Chiesa nell'età dell'assolutismo, del liberalismo, del totalitarismo*, Vol. III 'L'età del liberalismo', Brescia, Morcelliana 1986, pp. 13-26 (*Conseguenze della rivoluzione*) and 27-64 (*La Chiesa e il regime liberale*).

12 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 457-469, OE VII 457-469; cf. Chap. 9, § 4

13 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 458, OE VII 458.

14 G. BOSCO, *La Storia d'Italia...*, pp. 469-470, 476, OE VII 469-470, 476

15 Cf. 'Principi di governo di Metternich dopo il 1815', in P. RENOUVIN, *Il secolo XIX. Dal 1815 al 1871*. Rome, UNEDI 1975, pp. 441-442.

deserving of condemnation. The politics of the Congress of Vienna did not conform so much with Metternich's position nor with those of the absolute Emperors of the Holy Alliance drawn up on 26 September 1815, between the States where the three great Christian Confessions prevailed: Orthodox in Russia, Catholic in Austria, and Protestant in Prussia. The English Foreign Minister did not adhere to it but more realistically became a promoter of the *Quadruple Alliance* which was concretely in place. By dint of this, signed on 20 November 1815, the four conquering Powers committed themselves to keeping any likely resurgence of revolution in France under control, and opposing by armed intervention if needs be, any insurrection or revolution attempting to change the existing regimes in Europe.

In fact they had to act early to put down insurrections that occurred between 1820 and 1822 in Spain, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and, in 1821, in Piedmont. These were resolutely put down in March–April 1821 and April–October 1823. These interventions were decided on but with England as a dissenting voice, and for the first two, also France, at Congresses held in Troppau, Moravia in October–November 1820, Ljubjana in January 1821 and Verona in December 1822.

Absolutist regimes were effectively established everywhere in France with Louis XVIII and Charles X until 1830 and in Italy, including Piedmont, with Victor Emmanuel I until 1821, Charles Felix, (1822–1831), Charles Albert (1831–1848) who as regent in 1822 had granted a fleeting Constitution – but in 1848 promulgated *lo statuto*, and as the only Italian Sovereign, kept it. Meanwhile, forces which were revolutionary to some degree, had organised themselves into a variety of groups which leaned not only toward altering political institutions but also modernising economic, social and cultural structures: the moderate liberal and national approach with two different tendencies, one monarchic and constitutional the other republican; the radical democratic wing, close to the Jacobins. Instead, conservatives and reactionaries were working as individuals or groups to restore the old order. The conservatives were inclined to give acceptance to whatever was healthily progressive in the new times.

## 2. Religious restoration, revolutionary movements and ecclesial fidelity

In the first part of the 19th century, the Italian Church was going through concerns and anxiety with regard to the recent past and its consequences for the present. Under Pius VII, it set about initially to seriously rebuild what the revolution had demolished, recovering its older material, moral, spiritual patrimony, defending the valid things it had to offer to a much disturbed society. Some things remained unassailable: 'the mythic value of Christianity', modelled on a medieval type of 'Christian society' and an awareness of the role of guidance and direction from the Church in this, especially from the Pope.<sup>16</sup> 'Without Christianity there is no civilisation,' 'but without the Pope there is no Christianity' wrote Joseph De Maistre and, pointedly in 1847, Donoso Cortés: 'Europe's history is the history of civilisation; the history of civilisation is the history of Christianity; the history of Christianity is the history of the Catholic Church; the history of the Catholic Church is the history of the papacy; the history of the papacy in all its splendour and marvel is the history of men sent by God to resolve, at the time and on the day assigned, the great religious and social issues to the benefit of humanity and according to the designs of Providence.'<sup>17</sup>

This is the basic understanding accompanying the ever more complex events of the Roman papacy during the 19th century, symbolically expressed again at the beginning of the 20th century by the motto that would sum up the main points of the pastoral program laid down by Pius X in his first encyclical, *E Supremi Apostolatus Cathedra* on 4 October 1903, 'Restoring all things in Christ

16 Cf. G. MICCOLI *Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione. Studi sul rapporto chiesa-società nell'età contemporanea*. Casale Monferrato, Marietti 1985, pp. 21-92, especially pp. 21-42; D. MENOZZI, *La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione*. Turin, Einaudi 1993, pp. 15-71.

17 Quoted by G. MICCOLI *Fra mito della cristianità e secolarizzazione...*, p. 31 and 39.

so that Christ may be all in all.' His diagnosis saw religion – naturally the one, true, Catholic religion, the Church – as the basis of all moral and civil order. It followed from this that the moral and social ills of the day could be attributed at their roots to the 'apostasy from God where, with this rupture, nothing in truth held together.' These ills, which at the beginning of the past century were seen to have originated from the revolutions which occurred between the 18th and 19th centuries, were now judged by Pius X to have been perpetuated by the moral and civil 'revolution' which the century just concluded had gone through. They had been caused by the 'abuse of freedom' in so many aspects of public and private life. 'Deservedly, progress in civilisation' 'was extolled.' The remedy could be none other than to re-establish the rights of God and religion, represented and propounded by the Church with 'its teaching,' 'laws' and 'enormous abundance of grace for the sanctification and salvation of mankind.'<sup>18</sup>

Along similar lines, Don Bosco showed that he was especially sensitive to the religious aspects of the Restoration and the movements that followed it in Spain and the Kingdom of Naples in 1820 and Piedmont in 1821, then more extremely in 1831. Writing in 1855 in a State with a parliamentary regime, he did not so much fear the political outcomes as the likely negative repercussions on the Church. Two factors worried him in particular: their degeneration into a 'revolutionary and irreligious spirit' and the plans some people had to use them to bring about 'a single kingdom or republic of Italy,' 'and therefore send the Pope away from Rome and dethrone all the kings of Italy.'<sup>19</sup>

As for the manner of thinking through and carrying out the plan of salvation, including the restorative and conservative character common to most, there were different emphases; Don Bosco represents one of these which is worthy of interest. For believers, gospel values were not all equal to the political ones espoused by the main players in Vienna. There is more than one way to appreciate their role in history.<sup>20</sup>

As someone who narrated history, Don Bosco's viewpoint coincides substantially with that of the popes in the first half of the century – Pius VIII (1800–23), Leo XII (1823–29), Pius VIII (1829–30), Gregory XVI (1831–46). They were able to steer the activity of Catholic recovery in an authoritative manner, along with the reconquest of society. And a more detailed understanding of the documents would have led him to see, from Pius VII's first encyclical, favourite topics which he would have had very much at heart: the situation of the young people and the zeal and care they required to preserve them from the snares of those who, according to Pius VII and his immediate successors, wanted to involve them in their plans to subvert private morality and public order.<sup>21</sup>

Don Bosco tells his readers that as soon as Pius VII returned from imprisonment in 1814, he 'employed the remainder of his pontificate repairing the damage which *Masonic lodges* and Bonaparte had done to the Church': in Rome he promoted 'a mission for the clergy and the people', he re-established the Society of Jesus, 'approved the Association for the work of the Propagation of the Faith.' Finally, he assured his readers with theological optimism that, thanks to

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18 *Acta Sanctae Sedis* XXXVI (1903-1904) 140-145.

19 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 480-484, OE VII 480-484.

20 Cf. J. SCHMIDLIN, *Histoire des Papes de l'époque contemporaine*, Vol. I 'La Papauté et les Papes de la Restauration (1800-1846)', Paris, Vitte 1938; S. FONTANA, *La controrivoluzione cattolica in Italia (1800-1830)*, Brescia, Morcelliana 1968; G. PIGNATELLI, *Aspetti della propaganda cattolica a Roma da Pio VI a Leone XII*, Rome, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano 1974; A. OMODEO, *Aspetti del Cattolicesimo della Restaurazione*, Turin, Einaudi 1946; *Nouvelle histoire de l'Église sous la direction* by L. ROGIER, R. AUBERT, M. D. KNOWLES, Vol. IV. Paris 1966, pp. 301-318 (La papauté et l'État pontifical de 1814 à 1846); C. NASELLI (Ed.), *Storia della Chiesa*, Vol. XXX/2 'Restaurazione e crisi liberale (1815-1846)', Turin, S.A.I.E. 1975; H. JEDIN (Ed.), *Storia della Chiesa* VIII/1 R. AUBERT, I. BECKMAN, R. LILL, *Tra rivoluzione e restaurazione 1775-1830*, Milan, Jaca Book 1977; G. PENCO, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, Vol. II. Milan, Jaca Book 1978, pp. 225-310 (L'età della Restaurazione).

21 Cf. Encyc. *Diu satis*, 15 May 1800 by Pius VII, *Bullarii Romani* Cont. XI 23

the Pope's heroism and that of his predecessor, the 'French persecution, like that of the Roman Emperors, only brought new splendour to the Church of Jesus Christ.' We see and will see 'the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth and universal Head of His Church, to be ever more firm and triumphant.'<sup>22</sup>

However, he overlooked emphasising the work of mediation between old and new which Pius VII sought, assisted by the enlightened Cardinal Ercole Consalvi, in his *motu proprio* of 6 July 1816, *on organising public administration*. It included 'those changes which public benefit and needs might require after so many extraordinary events.' 'We ourselves notice' the Pope pointed out 'so many things considered earlier that are improved by man's ingenious investigation.'<sup>23</sup> The many who were nostalgic for the *ancien régime* would have found the document too steeped in principles and solutions inspired by the Napoleonic Civil Code.<sup>24</sup> Don Bosco, too, would have found the aforementioned Encyclical *Diu Satis* familiar for its biblical verses concerning the delicate age of adolescence: *Adolescens juxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea*.<sup>25</sup> He would also have been able to agree with the apostolic letter *Post Tam diuturnas*, 29 April 1814, to Bishop de Boulogne, Bishop of Troyes. In it, Pius VII deplores the fact that with the return of the legitimate King Louis XVII under pressure from liberal forces, a logical corollary of the 1789 principle, a Constitution had been granted which omitted almost any reference to the Catholic Religion. He considered articles sanctioning freedom of worship and conscience (art. 22) and freedom of the press (art. 23) to be especially worthy of condemnation since experience had taught that they were the cause of corrupt habits, disorder and rebellion among the people.<sup>26</sup>

Don Bosco gave less than a page (in small format) to Leo XII's pontificate, a Pope who came from the diplomatic corps and who showed a degree of moderation in temporal government and was austere in spiritual government.<sup>27</sup> Don Bosco also said he was generous to the poor and provided for their needs with 'many buildings.' And 'so that everything would be shown appropriate care,' 'he often visited hospitals and churches unannounced.' It was he who also approved the Piedmontese Religious Congregation, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary 'whose primary purpose was to preach missions, retreats and also run ecclesiastical colleges.'<sup>28</sup> Leo XII's first gesture instead towards his electors had been a concise allocution to the secret consistory on 17 November 1823 where he listed the 'deluge of so many ills' afflicting the Church: 'cruel wounds suffered in recent times,' the many enemies which orthodox faith has to confront,' 'the corruption of customs and habits reigning everywhere,' 'the countless difficulties, hardships, offences affecting the Church's life everywhere.'<sup>29</sup>

The list of ills would be extended in documents to follow. In his Encyclical *Ubi primum*, 5 May 1824, in the wake of Félicité de Lammenais' *Essay on indifference of religious matters* (1817), Leo XI denounced the ideas it originated from. It was, he lamented, 'a sect which undeservedly usurped the name of philosophy' and that, 'by feigning the charming face of piety and liberality, professed a so-called tolerance on indifference, exalting it not only in the civil field but also in matters of religion,' 'an impiety of delirious men.' Not only did 'all the sects existing outside the

22 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 369-371, OE I 527-529

23 Cf. *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XIV 49.

24 Cf. *Il governo provvisorio degli stati pontificii nell'anno 1815 e lo statuto del 1816*, "La Civiltà Cattolica" 67 (1916) 404-420; M. PETROCCHI, *La Restaurazione, il cardinal Consalvi e la riforma del 1816*. Florence, Le Monnier 1941.

25 Cf. *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XI 23.

26 Cf. *Lettres apostoliques de Pie IX, Grégoire XVI, Pie VII Encycliques, brefs, etc. Texte latin avec traduction française...* Paris, R. Roger et F. Chernoviz 1905, pp. 240-247.

27 Cf. R. COLAPIETRA, *La formazione diplomatica di Leone XII*, Rome, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento 1966; Id., *La Chiesa tra Lamennais e Metternich. Il pontificato di Leone XII*, Brescia, Morcelliana 1963.

28 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 372-374, OE I 530-532.

29 *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XVI 45-48.

Church' come from it 'but also societies which, by rejecting Divine Revelation, profess pure Deism, indeed, pure Naturalism.' 'They aim to snare the unwary by these errors, with every kind of cavil in word and in writing.' Added to this were Bible translations distributed widely by the World Bible Society. If he had then wanted to investigate the true origins of these and other evils, it would have been easy to identify them in the 'obstinate contempt for the Church's authority aimed at Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs'. The Pope concluded by inviting the bishops to enlighten the faithful regarding these truths. The 'flood surrounds us ' he assured them, 'but we have not gone under,' 'the secular princes with their power will be at our side and, as reason and experience demonstrate when the Church's cause is at stake, so is theirs. In fact it is not possible to give to Caesar what is Caesar's if we do not give to God what is God's.'<sup>30</sup> Leo XII was also responsible for the Bull *Quod Divina Sapientia* on the reform of university studies, a study which had already begun some years previously under Pius VII. The title indicated the direction it would take: *Methodus studiorum cum pietate coniuncta*. 'The progress of religion and the health of the State' depends on 'the religious and human formation of young souls' the introduction declared. The strict norms regarding the *disciplina auditorium* (Section XV, art 158–174) and *officia pietatis et religionis* (Section XVI, art 175–194) would see to this.<sup>31</sup> They were identical to the guidelines and prescriptions of the Regulations for schools promulgated in the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia in 1822. As a student at the 'college' in Chieri, John Bosco would have experienced these.<sup>32</sup>

Don Bosco makes no reference to the brief pontificate of Pius VIII (April 1829–November 1830), but we should recall at least his Encyclical *Traditi Humilitati Nostrae*, 24 May 1829. The dark shadows of society and culture were once again the topic: in the foreground were 'the vilest machinations of the sophists of the time who admitted no difference between the various professions of faith,' 'the System of religious indifference,' with its host of unacceptable interpretations of the Scriptures, and the secret societies suggested by factious men. As well as this he indicated particular concern for the inevitable corruption of the spirit of young people in their lower and upper secondary school years. The Pontiff argued that 'we must deplore the fact that when religious fear is rejected, when disciplined habits are removed, when the holiness of healthy teaching is contested and the rights of sacred and civil authorities are trodden on, there is no longer any restraint in the face of crime, error attacks.' It was urgent to ensure that 'outstanding men are responsible for the proper formation of youth that goes beyond literary culture, men outstanding for the exemplariness of their life and piety.' Finally, given such a sad state of things, he invited people to pray that 'holy religion might flourish everywhere and the true happiness of peoples be enduring'.<sup>33</sup>

One of the senior clergy close to Leo XII in his rigorous attitude to moral and doctrinal matters was the Camaldolese Mauro Alberto Cappellare, made Cardinal *in pectore* on 21 March 1825, which was then made public on 13 March 1826. As Prefect for the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, appointed to this office in October 1826, he gave extraordinary vitality to an almost extinct Dicastery, beginning a new missionary phase that would eventually characterise his pontificate, to which he was elected on 2 February 1831, taking the name Gregory XVI. Don Bosco made no reference to the historic Encyclical *Mirari Vos*, 15 August 1832. The Pope stated in his introduction that he had been able to issue it after a period of exceptional unrest. There is no doubt he was referring to the new wave of revolution that swept across Europe in 1830 and 1831. He exhorted the faithful to unite 'in vigilance and struggle for the salvation of all the people against 'common enemies.' There was a need to 'be vigilant in safeguarding the deposit of faith,' 'to

30 *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XIV 49.

31 Bull *Quod divina sapientia*, 28 August 1824, *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XVI 85, 97-100; cf. A. GEMELLI - S. VISMARA, *La riforma degli studi universitari negli Stati pontifici (1816-1824)*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero 1933.

32 Cf. Chap. 4, § 2.

33 *Bullarii Romani Cont.* XVIII 17-20.

struggle against the shameful conspiracy against ecclesiastical celibacy,' to defend 'honourable Christian matrimony.' He focused especially on 'the most prolific cause of evils that is indifferentism,' from which came 'that absurd and erroneous saying that it is freedom of conscience.' He urged people to oppose 'the awful ... unbridled freedom of the press aimed at spreading all kinds of written material among the masses.' Also worrying was the principle of authority, the doctrine of separation of Church and State, the advent of certain 'associations and classes of people allied with the followers of false religion, promoting uprisings everywhere, making themselves standard bearers of every kind of freedom, disturbing religious and civil life.'<sup>34</sup>

He felt constrained in this spirit to condemn someone who had earlier been a Catholic apologist against indifferentism, Félicité de Lammenais, and had now championed contempt for the Church's authority in his work, *Paroles d'un Croyant*.<sup>35</sup>

Instead, Don Bosco dwelt on recalling the flattering outcome due to the 'outstanding prudence' of Gregory XVI, still living when he published his *Storia ecclesiastica*: 'His subjects' he wrote 'enjoy peace and tranquillity, religion triumphs and the Gospel is spread to the remotest corners of the earth.'<sup>36</sup>This intense missionary activity referred to by Don Bosco found an especially vigorous expression in the organisation of structures for missions *ad gentes*, in setting up many Apostolic Vicariates, especially in Asia and Oceania and in the support given to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons, to which the Pope dedicated the Encyclical *Probe Nostis*, and others in Vienna and elsewhere; and in the fundamental *Instructio* on the formation of indigenous clergy.<sup>37</sup>

Gregory XVI approved the Religious Institute of the *Dames de Sacre Coeur* (Sisters of the Sacred Heart) and the *Faithful Companies of Charity* founded by Antonio Rosmini: the first two, French groups, Don Bosco noted with satisfaction 'have as their purpose the civil and Christian instruction of young girls,' while the third was involved 'in various aspects of the sacred ministry according to need.' All three, then, 'soon spread into the foreign missions where they were blessed by the Lord and led many souls into the fold of Jesus Christ.'<sup>38</sup> As chaplain to the Barolo work from 1844–46, Don Bosco was able to write, in his second edition of the *Storia ecclesiastica* in 1848, with inside knowledge of the 1846 approval by Gregory XVI 'in his final days,' of two new Institutes founded by the generous Marchioness: the Sisters of St Anne 'focused primarily on the education of youth and on any work of charity the bishops might call on them to do,' and the Sisters Penitents of St Mary Magdalene. He also mentioned the 'Refuge, for those gone astray (*Le Traviate*) who come to conversion spontaneously, and where they prepare those who have a vocation and can soon be admitted to the aforementioned Institute of St Mary Magdalene.' He could say these things from direct knowledge. He also listed five new hospitals built in Turin: St Aloysius, the Most Holy Saviour's run by the Sisters of Charity, St Philomena's run by Barolo 'for the sick or crippled girls' which he had been chaplain to for a year. There was another for boys founded by Count Louis Franchi de Fronti. He dwelt especially on the 'colossal' *Cottolengo* Work, writing; 'There are 1800 people living there of both sexes including cripples, those unfit for work, some suffering from ulcers, epileptics, all kinds of illnesses, orphans and abandoned children.' He added that 'there are many kinds of Religious offering spiritual and temporal direction: every corner inspires charity and fervour.'<sup>39</sup>

34 *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI*, vol. I. Romae, Ex Typ. Poliglotta 1909, pp. 169-174.

35 Cf. Enc. *Singulari Nos*, 25 June 1834, *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI* I 433-434. Ten years later, 25 June 1844, it was condemned as 'destroying the social order'. (*Acta Gregorii Papae XVI*...III 357-359).

36 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., p. 377, OE I 535; cf. also p. 386, OE I 544: "La religione cattolica nelle missioni è in progresso, e quantunque in alcuni luoghi perseguitata, nullameno trionfa".

37 Cf. *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI* III 83-86, 453-454; C. COSTANTINI, *Gregorio XVI e le missioni*, in *Gregorio XVI. Miscellanea commemorativa*, part II. Rome 1948, pp. 1-28.

38 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., pp. 377-379, OE I 535-537.

39 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole per ogni ceto di persone*. Second edition. Turin,

Pope Gregory XVI's times coincided with Don Bosco's years of clerical formation and his early priestly apostolate. Places, curricula, and forms of apostolates were necessarily marked by a climate of Restoration, fully recognising the post-tridentine tradition. It was based on two pillars which for centuries had translated the twofold gospel commandment of charity: the primacy of God and his glory, and carrying out works of mercy. In response to this, the priest's formation as pastor of souls and educator of the faithful meant acquiring the twofold and inseparable basic dimensions: a strong interior life and a heightened pastoral sensitivity.<sup>40</sup>

The Archbishop of Turin at the time, the Camaldolese Colombano Chiaverotti (1819–1831) and his successor, Luigi Fransoni (1831–62), found themselves in natural harmony with the teachings of the popes. Civil institutions in the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia were not in disagreement either. They had good relations with the Church, improved by means of an Accord on 27 March 1841, signed by the King on 2 April and sent to the bishops on 9 June. The tone of the letter with which Gregory XVI presented the new Nuncio, Archbishop Tommaso Pasquale Gizzi to Charles Albert on 19 April, was an eloquent sign of substantially happy relations.<sup>41</sup>

In the 1840's, Don Bosco's activity on behalf of young people in Turin took place in this context of peace. It would not be long before it would be overtaken by an unbloody but not painless 'liberal revolution'.

### 3. Introduction to social exclusion and prevention in the 1830s and 40s

It was when he was at the Pastoral Institute [Convitto] that Don Bosco came into contact with the prisons. At the *Refuge* it was the problem of female prostitution, and on Turin's streets and at the *Generale* he came into contact with abandoned youth who were at risk themselves and were a risk to society. These experiences of pastoral and social activity also created opportunities for profitable encounters and interesting relationships with people who were open in various ways to the problems of youthful and popular education. This was just a fragment of a much more complex history, both old and new, of misery, poverty and need which public authorities and private initiatives had done their best to tackle for some decades. It was the 'other face' a reality long ignored by history on the grand scale but not by contemporaries, public administrators, the forces of order, scholars and philanthropists.<sup>42</sup>

There was a noticeable population growth in the subalpine capital from 1814–1848 of around 62%, 35% of which was largely thanks to internal immigration. It was not a case of qualified labour but seasonal workers in building or transport, crafts, itinerant salesmen, domestic workers, huge numbers of farmers forced out by poverty and hunger in the countryside, most of them ending up as beggars.

It was the many beggars in the city that became the most obvious factor in social malaise especially in the Po and Dora districts and very tangibly so in the very poor suburb of Moschino. It was not rare for this form of poverty to degenerate into theft, aggression and prostitution, including

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Speirani & Ferrero Publishers, 1848, pp. 180-182.

40 Cf. Chap. 5, § 2.

41 *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI III* 122.

42 Cf. U. LEVRA, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*. Turin, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano 1988; Id., *Il bisogno, il castigo, la pietà*. Torino 1814-1848, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Torino e don Bosco*. Vol. I. Turin, Archivio Storico della Città 1989, pp. 13-97; C. FELLONI – R. AUDISIO, *I giovani discoli*, ibid., pp. 99-119; G. NALBONE, *Carcere e società in Piemonte (1770-1857)*. Santena, Fondazione Camillo Cavour 1988; R. ROSATI, *Un quartiere centrale di Torino a metà Ottocento: Po e Vanchiglia nel 1858*, "Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino" 92 (1994) 257-281; M. LEONESSA, *Delinquenza minorile in Torino alla fine dell'Ottocento*, "Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino" 92 (1994) 555-594.

by children. For those who ran foul of authority they opened 'places of piety and punishment,' homes (with a heightened mortality rate) and prisons.

Faced with these circumstances, Piedmont took a decisive step in its thinking and legislation in the penal area and in regulating the prison regime. Especially evident was the influence of thinking by Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Cesare Beccario (1738–94). This was emphasised in the Restoration as they sought a balance: 'improving everything yet preserving everything.' The science of penitentiary matters became less provincial with the knowledge that enlightened men like Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Rovero (1790–1850) and Cesar Alfieri di Sostegno (1799–1869) were working hard to gain through study trips and reading, assimilating and comparing American and European ideas and experiences.

The idea that re-education and prevention had to go hand-in-hand with necessary salutary punishment was making more ground. The key approach in places of reclusion were considered to be segregation at night, work in common by day but in strict silence. The aim was to produce 'regular, healthy, simple, hard-working habits' through constant appropriate supervision to neutralise the criminal and regenerate him morally. 'Through physical activity carried out in prison there is a great need to acquire a habit of work, instil a love for savings by the way salaries are spent, and create good religious and moral habits through the influence of prayer, the use of word, by education and instruction.'<sup>43</sup>

In the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia, but only in Turin, there was a woman's prison, the *Forzate*, entrusted to the Marchioness Giulia de Barolo in 1821. She had contributed to bringing them together out of the three mixed prisons, the *Senatorie*, the *Correzionale*, and the *Torri*. These three were then reserved for male prisoners of all ages. *La Generala* was only opened in 1845 as a correctional home for young delinquents.<sup>44</sup>

It was in this context that Fr Cafasso's 'apostolic labours in the prisons' were situated (1811–60). This was profoundly impressed on Don Bosco's memory. On 30 October 1860, he delivered the funeral oration at the solemn celebrations for his teacher in the Church of St Francis de Sales. Here he presented the image that philanthropists of the day had of him – the priest for the prisoners: 'a man gifted with enlightened zeal, gospel charity, a steady, self-assuming character, very skilful, a mature man of profound teaching. Dignified in appearance and deed, he won confidence and respect.'<sup>45</sup>

The orator's description here was not so different from the one given when he earlier stated that the prisons, 'these places of misfortune and unfortunates, are the ones most in need of the priestly ministry.' 'Besides courage and prudent exegesis there is a need for piety and knowledge of the kind proper to these kinds of people.'<sup>46</sup> Cafasso's activity confirmed Don Bosco's belief in 'the marvellous power of the holy Catholic Religion.' In fact, Fr Cafasso had become aware that those 'wretched, indeed brutalised men' had become so 'more from the lack of religious instruction than real malice.' This is why, after 'winning over their hearts' he had introduced religious practice, changing the prisons from being 'infernal bedlams' to 'human habitations' where prisoners became Christians. He succeeded in helping men condemned to death to 'convert desperation into keen hope, and set them on fire with the love of God'.<sup>47</sup> Almost by association of ideas in something he wrote two years later, Don Bosco, as we shall see, depicted the Oratory as arising out of the prison

43 G. NALBONE, *Carcere e società in Piemonte...*, pp. 185-186.

44 Cf. Chap. 7, § 2.2

45 C. I. PETITI DI RORETO, *Della condizione attuale delle carceri e dei mezzi di migliorarla*. Turin, G. Pomba e comp. 1846, in *Opere scelte*, ed. G. M. Bravo. Turin, Fondazione L. Einaudi 1969, vol. I, p. 553.

46 G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*. Turin, G. B. Paravia e comp. 1860, p. 81, OE XII 431.

47 G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...*, pp. 84-85, OE XII 433-435.



experience where adults and young people were thrown together to the ultimate harm of the latter.<sup>48</sup> So he could work preventively among the most abandoned 'young people', he planned the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, as he wrote between 1858–59, in the historical preface to the text of the Constitutions.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. 1848: Forewarnings and Consequences

Having grown up in an atmosphere of civil and religious restoration, Don Bosco could only but be influenced by the political revolution of the years 1847–55, without fully grasping the profoundly cultural significance of it all. Having established itself through a succession of politically composite groups, revolution finally led to liberal forces ultimately prevailing and remaining in power until the third decade of the 20th century. Associated with this was the gradual secularisation of the State, creeping secularisation of the social fabric, rapid exclusion of Catholics from political life initially under sufferance, then by choice. Don Bosco pointed to these phenomena in his various written works according to context, in relation to events in the Church in Turin and affecting his oratories, or to the problem of vocations to the Church and even, with explicit reference to the subversive 1855 legislation, to his way of conceiving and managing the Society of St Francis de Sales which he was already planning for in some fashion that year.

He wrote about 1848 not only briefly in his *Storia d'Italia* but also in documents he prepared in the 1870s, the historical outline he prepared on the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, the *Cenno storico della Congregazione di S Francesco di Sales*, which he presented to Rome in 1874, and the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. This historical turning point was somewhat ambiguously attributed to pressure from secret societies, but in Piedmont to the King's wisdom, though without undue manipulation from libertarian fringes. He neither perceived nor highlighted the decisive and lasting intervention of liberal elites of various political leanings: centre, centre-right, centre-left, left. He ignored the stirrings, more evident in Lombardy which was the Italian region with greater economic progress, of an emerging aristocracy involved in business, and a middle class of the modern capitalist genre promoting economic and social development through technological innovation in agriculture and the textile industry, the introduction of steamers for internal navigation and promotion of schooling for the masses. Personalities with liberal tendencies emerged among this class such as Luigi Parro Lambertenghi and Federico Confalonieri, who were politically and spiritually close to Silvio Pellico, one of Don Bosco's friends.

In the *Storia d'Italia*, Don Bosco writes very respectfully of King Charles Albert (1798–1849), his method of government, the reforms he put in place and especially his firm support of the Catholic Religion. It is true that while reigning in place of his uncle, Charles Felix, 'during the 1821 revolution he proclaimed the Spanish Constitution,' but he had immediately withdrawn it in obedience to the King and the major Powers gathered at Ljubjana 'also because,' Don Bosco wrote, 'he had already woken up to the fact that the leaders of that movement belonged to secret societies and were therefore not men to be trusted.' When he succeeded Charles Felix in 1831 'his way of governing was that of a father rather than of a sovereign. His every thought and concern was to allow order and morality to flourish once more in his States.'

In 1847 he published a number of reforms concerning the manner of administering justice and governing his subjects. The following year he then granted the Constitution (*Lo Statuto*) in which all his subjects were declared equal before the law, making the Catholic Religion the State Religion,

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48 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 60-62.

49 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 62.

however with other forms of worship simply tolerated.<sup>50</sup> Then came the war (1848), an armistice, war again, and defeat, the abdication (1849) and a few weeks later the King's death which the narrator described with moving pity.<sup>51</sup>

In the final years of his reign, Charles Albert was convinced, though with a good number of hesitations, that it was the duty of the government up with its times to lean in the direction of all the progress and discoveries achieved for the greater good of the people, 'being progressive in what is good except for what is used for evil' as he wrote to Minister Villamarina in 1846. Sensitive to the expectations of the liberal front and disturbed by the early comments of Pius IX, he decreed a first series of reforms on 30 October 1847, among which were norms for police authority regarding public assembly, and censorship, giving the press permission to tackle issues of public administration so long as they did not vilify religion, its ministers, morality, the sovereign, the government and its magistrates, foreign leaders and their families and representatives, or the honour of private citizens. In November, the Magistrate for Reform suffered a blow to his absolutist centralism when he was transferred to the office of Royal Secretary of State for Public Instruction, when the Higher Council for Public instruction was established. In charge of the new Ministry was Marquis Cesare Alfieri di Sostegno, who had succeeded the Bishop of Alessandria, Dionigi Andrea Pasi (1781–1854) in the previous body in 1844. On 17 February 1848, the King arrived at an historic decision, consequent to the public recognition of the solid alliance between the Waldensians and the monarchy, by signing the *Lettere patenti* (permits) sanctioning them: 'The Waldensians may enjoy all the civil and political rights of our subjects: may attend schools in and outside the Universities, and obtain academic degrees. However, there is no new provision regarding their practice of worship and the schools they run.'

The 'however' created problems, but on the basis of the constitution signed on 4 March, it would always find a broader application in a liberal regime. This revolutionised the existing order in many ways, although with some friction between the different formulation: 'The Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Religion is the only State Religion. Other currently existing forms of worship are tolerated in compliance with the law,' (art. 1). 'All citizens of the Kingdom, whatever their title or degree, are equal before the law. All equally enjoy civil and political rights and can be admitted to civil and military office other than exceptions as determined by the law.' (art. 24) 'Individual freedom is guaranteed,' (art. 26) 'The press will be free but law cannot restrain its abuses,' (art. 28) 'The right to gather peacefully, without arms, is recognised,' while public gatherings must be 'authorised by the police.' (art. 32).<sup>52</sup>

A further decree followed on 29 March which granted civil rights to Jews. Finally, on 19 June, Parliament approved a law proposed by Riccardo Sineo (1805–76) excluding exceptions to the enjoyment of rights provided for by art. 24 of the Constitution in cases of different forms of worship.

In the 1870s, on the basis of a very different experience of decades of liberal politics, Don Bosco evaluated the granting of the Constitution differently, not in itself but for its consequences which were still being felt and were laden with uncertainty for the future. He was in line with the bishops in the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia who, Fransoni included, accepted the Constitution out of an attitude of gospel obedience to the Sovereign, except when taking a position against the consequent liberal measures.<sup>53</sup> 'During this year (1848),' he wrote, 'political affairs and public spirit presented a drama, the resolution of which one could not yet foresee.' In fact 'many felt that the

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50 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 485, OE VII 485.

51 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 485-489, OE VII 485-489; cf. Further on, § 5

52 Cf. E. CROSA, *La concessione dello Statuto. Carlo Alberto e il ministro Borelli "redattore" dello Statuto (con note inedite di Carlo Alberto)*. Turin, Istituto Giuridico della R. Università di Torino 1936.

53 Cf. D. MENOZZI, 'I vescovi dalla rivoluzione all'Unità', in M. ROSA (Ed.), *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*. Rome-Bari, Laterza 1992, pp. 162-175.

Constitution might even grant the freedom to do good or evil according to whim.' Besides, given the emancipation of the Jews and Protestants 'they pretend there is no longer any distinction between Catholics and other believers. That was true in politics but not as a religious fact.' Faced with this kind of indifference, he noted bitterly that lay people and clergy had sent petitions to Charles Albert asking him to grant the expected emancipation and this opened the way to lively proselytism by Protestants, resulting in 'great damage to religion and morality.'<sup>54</sup> Paradoxically, the Jesuits and the Sacred Heart Sisters were expelled from the Kingdom at the same time, by decree on 25 August 1848!

Don Bosco was no less negative toward the impact on his young people: 'a kind of frenzy' he tells us 'seized the minds even of youngsters; they would get together at various points in the city, in the streets and squares, believing that it was praiseworthy to insult priests or religion.' There were even personal attacks on himself and Fr Borel. It was 'quite difficult,' he noted, 'to control such young people aroused' by that 'perversion of thoughts.'<sup>55</sup>

He would also have had to tackle new and ongoing problems of prevention connected with the freedom of the press and, no less, meetings and associations, given the rapid multiplication of *Workers Societies*, groups he maintained were generally anticlerical and irreligious. The official commencement of the first of these had already taken place at Pinerole, 38 kilometres from Turin, in February 1849. The *Workers Association* was founded in the capital in January 1850, 'having as its purpose,' the *Gazzetta del popolo* announced on 17 January 1850, 'union and fraternity, mutual assistance and instruction so they can support one another by means of an individual contribution, and educate themselves in the rights and duties of the good citizen.' The *Gazzetta* had warmly supported its foundation. This association and most that followed were kept strictly apart from any party political connotations but not from patriotic ones. Their relative neutrality was assisted by the prevalence of the mutual aid and social security aspects shared by their members, whatever other affiliations they might have had: numerically irrelevant number of observant Catholics, while others were democratic-constitutional, democratic-republican or liberal-moderate. But the republican societies instead were politicised, promoted by followers of Mazzini, inspired by ideals of a more secular religion reduced to slogans like 'God, Fatherland, Family,' 'God and humanity'.<sup>56</sup>

## 5. The Church During the Revolution

Don Bosco gave plenty of space to the new situation for the Church and the Pope brought about by the gradual liberal revolution in Italy.

With neo-guelphian pride he praised the advent of Pius IX to the papacy. Pius IX was immediately acceptable to his subjects for granting an amnesty and taking other steps towards modernising of the Papal States. Don Bosco was not begrudging in the praise he heaped upon his initial moves: 'The veneration and affection of his people accompanied each step Pius IX took: the rest of the Church echoed the plaudits of the Roman States. Romans are learning the true way to govern people from him.' The great Gioberti says that the day he saw him was the best day of his life, even the heretics admire and praise him.<sup>57</sup> In the *Storia d'Italia*, the discussion needed to take

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54 MO (2010) 155.

55 MO (2010) 155-156.

56 E. R. PAPA, *Origini delle società operaie. Libertà di associazione e organizzazioni operaie di mutuo soccorso in Piemonte 1848-1861*, Milan, Lerici 1967, 368 pp. On Turin's mutual aid and cooperation tradition see P. SPRIANO, *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista da De Amicis a Gramsci*. Turin, Einaudi 1972, pp. 18-24; cf. also G. VERUCCI, 'Anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nel movimento operaio e socialista italiano (1861-1878)', in *Chiesa e religiosità dopo l'Unità (1861-1878). Atti del quarto Convegno di Storia della Chiesa*. La Mendola, 31 August-5 September 1991, Vol. II. Milan, Vita e Pensiero 1973, pp. 177-224.

57 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, 1848, p. 182.

quite a different direction due to 'lovers of the revolution' being moved by 'the notion of creating a single kingdom by chasing the Austrians, formidable rivals of the rebels, out of Lombardy.'<sup>58</sup>

Further on he recalled 'very serious disasters' occurring in Rome and the Papal States. Don Bosco gave many pages to these.<sup>59</sup> 'A considerable number' he tells us, 'came to Rome, most of them outsiders, to stir up the spirit of the revolt, and to benefit from the same favours the Pope was granting in order to use them against him.' They were 'the same people who had created confusion in various regions of the peninsula in political affairs.'<sup>60</sup>

What was happening in Rome, meanwhile, was by now entangled with events involving Piedmont in Northern Italy: the war against Austria to conquer Lombardy-Veneto ( 24 March–9 August 1848), the armistice requested of and obtained from General Salasco (9 August 1848–12 March 1849), the turbulent democratic Ministry with Vincenzo Gioberti at the helm (15 December 1848–21 February 1849). This featured an attempt, which failed politically, to bring about Italian unity through Confederation by means of agreements between moderate princes of the Restoration, to bring an end to the Romagna and Tuscan Republics, the return of the Pope to Rome and the Grand Duke of Tuscany to Florence. Instead, what followed after a few days was a resumption of war between Piedmont-Sardinia with Austria, the lightning defeat at Novara (23-24 March 1849), the immediate abdication of Charles Albert and succession by Victor Emmanuel II. Don Bosco only gave brief mention to the Sardo-Austrian conflict but being so fond of the House of Savoy, he highlighted the courage of the two Savoyards, Prince Eugene and King Charles Albert, a lonely and unfortunate hero, 'magnanimous' in war and 'sublime' for his spontaneous renunciation of the throne.<sup>61</sup>

Parallel to this is his recall of the events in Rome. Faced with the Pope's refusal to enter the war against Austria, there was the threat of rebellion and 'setting up a temporary Government,' 'to form a kingdom or republic or almost any other kind of government that came into the rebel's heads.'<sup>62</sup> He then gives a detailed account of the papal appointment of Pellegrino Rossi (1878–1848) as prime Minister, a man who 'wanted order and observance of law' and negotiated with Naples, Florence and Turin to set up a 'Confederation of Italian States.' But by doing this he came into fatal conflict with 'the secret societies, a conflict' he noted, 'that almost always ended up with an assassination'<sup>63</sup> and this crime was in fact perpetrated on 15 November 1848. Faced with the imposition of a democratic Ministry, Pius IX had no other choice than to secretly flee to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and from Gaeta on 19 February 1849, came his appeal to the Catholic Princes to restore him to the Papal States.<sup>64</sup>

'Therefore,' as Don Bosco justified this, 'the temporal reign of the Popes can be called a gift from the various Princes: a gift approved by and placed under the protection of all Catholic Governments and therefore it is in the interests of all Christendom that the Pope can live tranquilly in his States so that he can freely exercise the supreme authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.'<sup>65</sup>

As for the restoration of the State, devoted though he was to the Savoyan Monarchy, the note Don Bosco dedicated to Charles Albert of the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia and Leopold II of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany is interesting. They refused to be part of it: 'shortly afterwards both were forced to abandon their throne and go into exile.'<sup>66</sup> Instead, he reserved unusually poetic language

58 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 484, OE VII 484.

59 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 489-514, OE VII 489-514.

60 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 489-490, OE VII 489-490

61 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 485-489, OE VII 485-489.

62 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 490, OE VII 490.

63 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 492, 502-503, OE VII 492, 502-503.

64 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 492-498, OE VII 492-498.

65 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 499, OE VII 499.

66 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 505, OE VII 505.

for the French soldiers heading towards Civitavecchia to liberate Rome: 'Those soldiers were calm, their hearts at rest: they were happy and proud because they were going to fight for the most just and holiest of causes. They were going to Rome to bring down tyranny and instead of considering danger they were thinking of real glory.' He then gave a pleasing description of the 'general enthusiasm' with which the Romans welcomed them on 29 June 1849. In truth it was a more contained welcome than he thought or wrote.<sup>67</sup>

He then went on to describe the work of General Oudinot in restoring order, using similar language. The General invited clergy to cooperate because, as he explained to them, 'the military and the clergy are the two great bodies called on to safeguard the future.' 'Only with religious sentiment and respect for authority can a disturbed society find strength and salvation,' the narrator commented.<sup>68</sup>

This principle, certainly one shared by Don Bosco, found its high point in Pius' IX's entry into Rome at four p.m. on 12 April 1850. He concluded: 'The Catholic Religion personified in Pius IX returned to Rome and the return was a powerful one, offering mercy to the ungrateful and forgiveness to those who repented. Finally the work of restoration carried out by the Catholic Powers had put the cornerstone, the head of Christendom, back in place.'<sup>69</sup>

Therefore as a man of order the narrator's judgement was a fully positive one with regard to the key players in the restoration of Rome and, following that, the Paris Peace Accord of 30 March 1856, at the conclusion of the war in the east against Russia, based on the Austro-Franco-Anglo treaty of 10 April 1854, and the Turin treaty 1855 involving 15,000 soldiers of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia who left Genoa on 28 April and 15 May 1856. Given his theology of history, Don Bosco commented: 'The conclusion of the peace, for which we are totally indebted to Austria and France, leads me to make an observation about the prosperity of those two Powers.' Napoleon III (1808–73) 'who had acted to bring the Pope back to Rome, was blessed by heaven. He became Emperor of the French and by protecting religion did great good to that nation, lifting it to new glory and splendour. Austria too was rewarded by Providence.' Convinced that 'encouraging Religion is the most powerful means of preserving States while contempt for it is their ruin,' Franz-Josef (1830–1916), Emperor from 1848 and King of Hungary from 1867, drew up a Concordat with the Holy See in 1855, abolishing some laws against the Church promulgated by Josef II, granting the Church all the favours and protection one could want from a truly Catholic Sovereign. These were initiatives that demonstrated 'how religion is a support for the thrones and happiness for the people who honour them and practice its precepts.'<sup>70</sup>

It seems as if he wanted to say that things are not like this in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, where steps towards liberalisation in 1848 had already dented the happy Agreement of 1841. In his encyclical *Nostis et Nobiscum* of 8 December 1849, issued from Portici in the Kingdom of Naples, Pius IX had sought to involve the Italian bishops in his concerns about the transformation taking place in Italy. It was a strong warning against 'lost men, enemies of truth, justice and honesty' who in the name of the most unrestrained licence of thought and word were doing everything either openly or fraudulently to 'undermine the foundations of the Catholic Religion in Italy.' A number of pages were dedicated to refuting what was mostly propagated among the faithful to alienate them from the Catholic Faith – that the Catholic Religion is an obstacle to the glory, greatness and prosperity of Italy, substituting it with Protestantism which supported free exploration of the Scriptures and 'perverse, subversive doctrines' of Socialism and Communism.

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67 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 505-506, OE VII 505-506; cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1846-1850)*. Rome, Università Gregoriana Editrice 1974, pp. 416-418.

68 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 509, OE VII 509.

69 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 514, OE VII 514

70 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 522-523, OE VII 522-523.

The remedies he proposed to the bishops were traditional ones: religious education, preaching, nurturing the Faith, administering Confirmation to strengthen faith, making use of the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, extraordinary preaching during important moments in the liturgical calendar, retreats and missions to infuse a sense of horror at the most scandalous sins: blasphemy, concubinage, non-observance of Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, fasting and abstinence. Special attention was reserved for impious books and magazines and those proposing false values and teachings, also Bible Societies which had already been condemned many times. Fidelity to the Church and the Supreme Pontiff were proposed as a key truth to inculcate.

As defined at the Council of Florence, the Pope is 'Successor to Peter, has primacy across the world, is the true Vicar of Christ, Head of the Universal Church and Father and Doctor of all Christians.' The most dangerous opponents of this were the Protestants, both old and new, Communism and Socialism which, on the basis of the principles of freedom and equality argued against what came from nature and was unchangeable; authority, right of ownership, difference in state of life of rich and poor. The rich are called to make good use of their wealth, the poor to be happy that they have an easier path to salvation. True and perfect freedom and equality were assured by holding to the law of the gospel. 'But to preserve the faithful from the wiles of their enemies,' he went on 'and to sustain them in the profession of the Catholic Religion' it needed the life and example of the secular clergy and consecrated men and women in Religious Institutes, thus requiring essential and careful formation. Religious superiors in particular were urged, in reference to admission to clothing in the Order or Congregation's habit and profession of vows, to religiously observe the Decrees issued by the 'Congregation for Religious on 23 January 1848, *Romani Pontifices* and *Regulari disciplinae*. Almost to the end of his life, Don Bosco did not feel rigorously bound by these as there will often be the opportunity to comment further on.<sup>71</sup>

There can be no doubt that given his unconditional solidarity with the Pope and his teachings, Don Bosco also shared his political choices regarding events in Rome and Naples between 1848 and 1850.<sup>72</sup> He would have found a complete summary of these in the 1850 Turin edition of the allocution *Quibus quantisque* of 20 April 1849.<sup>73</sup> Cunning men, as the Pontiff denounced them after the disillusionment he experienced in 1846–48, who aimed not only at subverting the Papal States but the Catholic Religion itself. Many of the faithful led astray by them had exploited 'the largesse bestowed at the beginning' of his pontificate for their own ends. Despite repeated warnings, 'popular uprisings' continued to the prejudice of public calm and order, turning the very granting of a Constitution into an installation of a republican regime. From this perspective, all the papal interventions in 1847 and 1848 were interpreted in a distorted fashion. And now from exile he saw Rome, 'Alas, having become a jungle filled with wild beasts.' It was a situation he felt must be corrected for the good of the people in the Papal States with the help of Catholic Powers able to restore, 'the peace and tranquillity that had been lost.' On his return he would take the necessary educational and preventive measures to see – so he assured them – 'that virtue, justice, religion, would triumph everywhere and would be ever on the increase.'<sup>74</sup>

## 6. Growing Dissent Between the Church and the Piedmont–Sardinian State, 1850–59

Don Bosco was somewhat reticent and cautious about the increasing political freedom in the

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71 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. I 198-214.

72 Cf. Chap. 7, § 3.

73 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. I 167-194.

74 *Allocuzione di Nostro Signore Papa Pio IX del 20 aprile 1849 con in fine una esposizione della medesima a modo di catechismo*. Turin, Eredi Botta 1850, pp. 7-48; cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1846-1850)* ..., pp. 363-364

Kingdom in the 1850s. With the elections on 9 December 1849, the liberal Government which Massimo d'Azeglio presided over could count on the support of a strong Centre–Right bloc. Therefore, in line with the Constitution it seemed obvious and possible to commence a policy of modernisation of the State. While it aimed at eliminating confessional features, it presupposed the fact that the religious aspect was part of social life and excluded any kind of Concordat with the Church but likewise any alignment with irreligious and anti–Catholic positions, thus following a consistent application of the political principles of freedom and equality.

Don Bosco, too, had to take note of this new approach in 1850. On 25 February, after earlier unfruitful dealings with the Holy See, the Minister for Grace and Justice, Giuseppe Siccardi, presented the House with a draft of a law aimed at a decisive shift in the Kingdom from a political entity of the *ancien régime* to an egalitarian State according to the rule of law: the abolition of the Ecclesiastical Forum, and what remained of the right to asylum, a reduction in the number of holy days of obligation, introduction of obligatory government authorisation for ecclesiastical bodies to accept legacies and donations. It was approved by the Lower House on 9 March and by the Senate on 8 April, then signed by the King the following day.<sup>75</sup> The Nuncio in Turin, Archbishop Benedetto Antonia Antonucci (1798–1879) immediately asked for a passport with a consequent breakdown in diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia, and, in 1861, the Kingdom of Italy. Relations would only be restored with the Concordat signed by Mussolini, head of Government and Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State, on 11 February 1929. In all probability, Don Bosco had no need on this occasion to disown what he had written when disapproving of the actions of Minister Tanucci, the seculariser in the Kingdom of Naples: ‘Immunity, my dear friends, derives from the reverence owed to sacred things and people.’ Instead, the Minister ‘is endeavouring to prove that immunities were contrary to civil law, almost as if civil law had no need to show the respect due to sacred places and things.’<sup>76</sup>

In all probability, he was also referring to the recent attack on immunity in the Kingdom when writing to Fr Daniele Rademacher on 10 July.<sup>77</sup> He was certainly behind his archbishop, who was forced into exile when taking a rigid position against Pietro de’ Rossi de Santarosa. The latter had strongly supported the Siccardi law, although a fervent Catholic, and on the point of death, which happened on 5 August 1859, had been deprived of sacramental absolution. The situation had been made still more difficult, however, by Archbishop Fransoni’s intransigence. Already in 1848, he had not felt able to fully accept the new constitutional regime with the consequent freedom of the press, conscience and worship and the potential ‘deconfessionalisation’ of the Savoy State. The subalpine bishops were involved in problematic and, ultimately, sterile attempts at mediation between the Government, the Holy See, and the Archbishop to get him to resign his episcopal see and find a possible honourable Roman solution.<sup>78</sup> Bishop Fantini, the Bishop of Fossano and a senator, clearly depicted the battle of conscience he was going through: ‘The episcopate is at the crossroads of two evils it might commit – disobeying the Pope or helping to destroy Religion ... let us work out some way of saving Religion.’<sup>79</sup> But the Holy See had no intention of sacrificing the archbishop whom the Sardo-Piedmontese Government wanted removed, and would even have renounced the privilege of the Forum on condition that a new Concordat could be arrived at. Turin

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75 Cf. *Legge Siccardi sull’abolizione del foro e delle immunità ecclesiastiche. Tornate del Parlamento subalpino*. Turin, Cugini Pomba e C. Editori 1850, 565 pp.; cf. M. F. MELLANO, *Il caso Fransoni e la politica ecclesiastica piemontese (1848-1850)*, Rome, Pontificia Università Gregoriana 1964, pp. 94-219.

76 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia...*, pp. 446-447, OE VII 446-447. These ideas are repeated and added to in subsequent editions.

77 Cf. Chap. 7, § 3.2

78 Cf. G. GRISERI, *L’allontanamento e la mancata rinuncia di mons. Luigi Fransoni arcivescovo di Torino*, in “Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino” 64 (1966) 375-492; M. F. MELLANO, *Ricerche sulle leggi Siccardi. I rapporti tra la S. Sede, l’episcopato piemontese e il governo sardo*, Turin, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria 1973.

79 Cf. M. F. MELLANO, *Ricerche sulle leggi Siccardi...*, p. 54.

considered this incompatible with the process of secular modernisation that was underway.<sup>80</sup>

The formal unilateral non-observance of the Accord of 14 September 1841, was followed by the decisions of the Savoy judiciary who condemned the archbishop to expulsion on 25 September 1850, and by executive decision on the 28th. The archbishop set up his residence in Lyons and remained there until his death in 1862. Pius IX had some bitter things to say about the various problems caused by the Government in two allocutions he gave to the Cardinals on 20 May and 1 November 1850, while still hoping that negotiations could be resumed.<sup>81</sup>

A decisive factor in the hardening of liberal politics in the State was the entry of Camillo Cavour into the third d'Azeglio Ministry on 10 October 1850, as Minister for Agriculture, Commerce and the Navy and interim Minister for Finance from 19 April 1857. A man of extraordinary energy and prestige, he succeeded d'Azeglio as Prime Minister on 2 November 1852. He held this office until his death on 6 June 1861 apart from a brief interregnum by the Lamarmora-Rattazzi Ministry from 9 July 1859, to 21 January 1860. He shifted the political game, achieving an alliance between the Centre-Right, of which he was the leader, and the Centre-Left, headed by Urbano Rattazzi, elected first as President of the House, then as Minister for Justice and the Interior, until he resigned after an irreparable rift with Cavour on 13 January 1858. This 'marriage', an early form of parliamentary transformation, tended to put conservative Catholics and reactionaries outside the political game. Up until then they had been a constant in Sardo-Piedmontese politics and the Kingdom of Italy.

On the occasion of the extraordinary jubilee proclaimed by Pius IX and organised as outlined in the two Encyclicals, *Exultavit Cor Nostrum* and *Ex Alus Nostris* of 21 November 1854, Don Bosco published a handbook for the faithful where he highlighted the reasoning outlined in the first of the two. It was a dialogue where the priest replies to another who is convinced that 'religious matters' were not going 'too badly,' saying 'the Catholic Religion' prospered 'very much in the foreign missions' and that a noticeable attraction of Jews and heretics to the Catholic Faith had been observed, but he also noted the evils denounced by the encyclical, giving him the text and inviting him to read it. 'Religion today is shown contempt in so many ways today in public and private,' he had the priest say, 'in speeches, newspapers, books.' There is no holy and venerable thing that is not picked on, censured and lampooned.<sup>82</sup>

A further decisive step toward secular modernisation of the State and its separation from the Church was realised by the 'law against convents' in 1855.<sup>83</sup> A draft of the law was jointly presented on 28 November 1854 by the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Cavour, and Urbano Rattazzi, the Minister for Grace and Justice, who but a few months earlier had become friendly with Don Bosco, and helped the Oratory.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, State modernisation drew its inspiration from 'separation' or 'non-confessional jurisdiction.'<sup>85</sup> Pius IX reacted immediately on 22 January 1855, with a sharply phrased allocution to the cardinals published along with a bulky dossier of documents on the long series of abuses of power by the subalpine government regarding the

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80 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1846-1850)*..., pp. 434-455.

81 Cf. *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. I 232-233, 251-261.

82 [G. BOSCO], *Il giubileo e pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese*. Turin, press run by P. DeAgostini 1854, pp. 30-31, OE V 508-509; cf. *Encyc. Apostolicae Nostrae, Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. I 587-593.

83 Cf. C. TIVARONI *L'Italia degli italiani*, part I 1849-1859. Turin, Roux Frassati 1895, pp. 383-426; R. ROMEO, *Cavour e il suo tempo (1854-1861)*, Vol. III 1854-1861, Bari, Laterza 1984, pp. 103-141; an essential and clear summary of events can be found in the essay by F. DE GIORGI, *Le congregazioni religiose dell'Ottocento e il problema dell'educazione*, "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche" 1 (1994) 172-180.

84 Cf. Em I 218 and 228; MB V 60-61.

85 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Storia della Chiesa da Lutero ai nostri giorni*, vol. III *L'età del liberalismo*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1998, pp. 84-101.



Church, beginning with 1848.<sup>86</sup> He complained about the many attacks on the Church and its sacrosanct rights, and imposed ecclesiastical sanctions 'on marauders and profaners of holy things, abuses of power and the Church's freedom.'<sup>87</sup>

Discussion in the House, which began on 9 January was suspended from 13 January to 14 February 'because of deaths in the House of Savoy: the death of the Queen, Maria Adelaide from puerperal fever (childbed fever) on 20 January,<sup>88</sup> and then of the thirty-seven year old brother of the King, the Duke of Genoa from tuberculosis on 10 February. When debate recommenced, the law was approved by the House on 2 March 1855 and presented to the Senate on 9 March. But at this point a complex political game was already in motion, leading to a special proposal from the bishops presented to the Senate on 5 May by Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana, Bishop of Casale Monferrato and a Senator of the Kingdom: draw on State expenditure to pay the parish priests' stipends with an annual sum of around a million and this would make suppression of convents, monasteries and seizure of their assets unjustifiable. Clearly the proposal was rejected. In fact it ended in a law which negatively affected financial planning, a law which dovetailed with an even more systematic draft liberal policy; the radical deconfessionalisation of the State that would now be fully secularised, excluding any compromise with the Church.<sup>89</sup> The law was approved by the Senate on 22 May, and finally by the House, also on 22 May. The King signed it the following day. It affected all religious bodies not involved in 'preaching, education, or assisting the sick.' In all, 34 Religious Orders with 334 houses and around 4,500 members 'ceased to exist' in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia 'as moral entities recognised by civil law' (art 1). 27 other religious bodies with 274 houses and around 4,000 Regulars kept their status until 1866.<sup>90</sup>

The inevitable allocution to the Consistory came on 26 July, deploring this state of affairs and threatening excommunication and other sanctions, ecclesiastical penalties for those who had proposed, approved, sanctioned the law: firstly members of Government, parliamentarians who had voted for it, the King and also any consultants, supporters, and adherents executors ...<sup>91</sup>

Writing in the *Storia d'Italia* about the five deaths in the House of Savoy, Don Bosco did not suggest an explicit link with the law on convents as he did in a letter to Portuguese priest Fr Daniel Rademacher, but perhaps he 'considered it understood.'<sup>92</sup> He referred instead to the atmosphere which had contributed to preparing for approval of the law and later, including the 1860s. In 1873–74, when he was writing and distributing the *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S Francesco de Sales*, even though he intended to identify its origins in 1848, he mentioned it in reference to the crisis in vocations for the Church. 'That year (1848),' he wrote 'a giddy spirit took off against Religious Orders and Congregations in the Church then in general against the clergy and all Church authorities. This cry of fury and contempt for religion brought with it the consequence of alienating youth from morality and piety, hence from vocations to the clerical state. So there were no religious vocations and almost none for the clergy. Religious Institutes were losing members, priests were vilified, some imprisoned others put under house arrest, so how, humanly speaking, was it possible to nurture the spirit of vocations.'

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86 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. II 5-8; cfr. *Allocuzione della Santità di Nostro Signore Pio PP. IX al Sacro Collegio nel Concistoro segreto dei 22 gennaio 1855 seguito da una Esposizione corredata di documenti sulle incessanti cure della stessa Santità Sua a riparo dei gravi mali da cui è afflitta la Chiesa Cattolica nel regno di Sardegna*. Rome, Secretary of State Press 1855, V-285. Two commercial editions immediately came out in Turin: tip. P. De Agostini and tip. scolastica di S. Franco e figli.

87 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. II 6-7.

88 She died after the birth of her child, who subsequently also died on 17 May.

89 Cf. E. BORGHESE *La crisi Calabiana secondo nuovi documenti*, "Bollettino storicobibliografico subalpino" 55 (1957) 425-487.

90 Cf. C. TIVARONI *L'Italia degli italiani*, part I 1849-1859..., p. 425.

91 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. II 436-440.

92 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 518, OE VII 518; lett. to D. Rademacher, 7 June 1855, Em I 256-257; cf. Chap. 10, § 1.

## 7. Growing gap between Catholic intransigence and Liberal politics

The process of unification led to a deeper fracture between the Church and the Italian State following the serious ‘amputation’ of the Papal States in 1859-60. The changed political map unforeseen by most, was the result of the second war of independence with Austria, brought to a successful conclusion by Piedmontese and French allies between June and July 1859. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchies of Parma and Modena set up temporary governments involving representatives of the subalpine Government. While awaiting plebiscites they imposed two dictators: Bettino Ricasoli (‘Iron Baron’) (1809–80) in Tuscany, and Luigi Carlo Farini (1812–66) in Parma, Modena and the Papal Legation of Romagna. General Manfredo Fanti gave the assurance of support from the Savoy army.<sup>93</sup>

The 11 and 12 March plebiscites in 1860 led to the earlier political entities being annexed to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. In recompense, parallel plebiscites on the 15th and 16th decided that the county of Nice along with Savoy be annexed to France. This was decided on as a reward for the decisive French assistance in the war of independence.

There is a completely internal kind of history of these events found in the early chronicles by Don Bosco’s young helpers which demonstrate the state of mind and way of thinking of his men and the Oratory. It was not in favour of the unification policy, seeing these activities as harmful to the Church’s rights, such as State control over Catholic private schools, vigilance over demonstrations supporting Pope Pius IX, measures taken against bishops and priests. Don Bosco certainly had some role to play in these accounts. In 1860 and 1861 the chronicles report damage to bells meant to ring out to celebrate the annexations. Much more eloquent, though, according to the commentator, was the clear warming from on high of the mortal illness that struck down Senator Zenore Luigi Quaglia (1781–1860, 6 April) who became President of the first session of the 7th Legislature on 2 April 1860, resulting from the elections on 25 March.<sup>94</sup> Victor Emmanuel II had delivered a rousing address to them, one where the hand of his speech writer, Luigi Carlo Farini, Minister for the Interior and reviewer, Camillo di Cavour, Prime Minister could be felt. The King declared, among other things: ‘if the Church authority uses spiritual weapons for temporal interests I, with a sure conscience and the tradition of my forebears, will find the strength to maintain full civil liberty and authority, for which I will answer only to God and my people.’<sup>95</sup>

The chronicles also referred to the solidarity later expressed by the boys from the Turin Oratories for the Pope after the plebiscite in Nice favourable to its annexation to France due to ‘the promises and threats of France and exhortation by Bishop Sola.’<sup>96</sup> Toward the end of April, the chronicles recorded that some Piedmontese had gone ‘to the Papal States to enlist under the Papal flag’ but that Cardinal Antonelli subordinated their acceptance to presentation by Don Bosco. ‘Don Bosco,’ it was noted ‘said: I believe we are only at the beginning of these evils.’<sup>97</sup> The chronicler continued: ‘Don Bosco said that if God’s hand or foreign forces did not intervene, Naples could not stand of its own accord.’<sup>98</sup>

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93 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno istorico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti*. Rome Tip. Poliglotta 1874, p. 3, OE XXV 233. On the Siccardi Law and what followed in relation to the Fransoni and Santarosa situation, cf. M. F. MELLANO, *Il caso Fransoni e la politica ecclesiastica piemontese...*, pp. 117-219.

94 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 2. These and other news items could have been taken from Don Bosco and others of his followers in “Civiltà Cattolica” 11 (1860) II 234-237.

95 *Il Parlamento dell’Unità d’Italia (1859-1861). Atti e documenti della Camera dei Deputati*, 3 Vols. Rome, Segretariato Generale della Camera dei Deputati 1961, Vol. I, pp. 54-55.

96 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 3.

97 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 5.

98 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 10.

The expedition of the Thousand was in full swing, having begun on 6 May when two ships left Genoa with Garibaldi and his volunteers, headed for Sicily to help the uprising against the Bourbon Kingdom. After a 'politically motivated' search, followed a few days later by an inspection of secondary classes<sup>99</sup> the Cardinal Archbishop of Pisa, Cosimo Corsi, under house arrest in Turin from 22 May to 21 July 1860, visited the Oratory in July. The Cardinal had taken a critical though unexceptionable approach to the new State. He never accepted combination of Civil holidays relating to new national factors with religious celebrations, continued with his defence of the Pope's temporal power and absented himself from a meeting with the King on his visit to Pisa. On the evening of 17 May, he refused to travel to Turin to meet with the Attorney General despite a formal order: he would only ultimately bend when forced to. On the evening of the 18th the police arrested him and took him to Turin by carriage. When he arrived on the 22nd he was received by Dr (Fr) Michele Angelo Vacchetta (1798–1865) who accompanied him to the house appointed for his house arrest, the Vincentian's house. According to what he wrote to Pius IX on 11 June 1860, his way of dealing with the Attorney General, Giovanni Battista Cassinis (1860–66) was to avoid defending himself because it was materially impossible to do so or level accusations.<sup>100</sup> The chronicle also refers to the Bishop of Piacenza being called to Turin 'to listen to a sermon from the bishop of bishops, the Attorney General.'<sup>101</sup>

Savoy acquired the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1860 with the intervention of the Sardinian army, and then came the annexation of The Marches and Umbria which were part of the Papal States, in 1861. But the most decisive events for the political unity of Italy occurred in March 1861, along with the dissolution of the Papal States, now reduced to just Lazio. On the 14th the House approved the draft law already passed by the Senate on 26 February, proclaiming Victor Emmanuel II as King of Italy.<sup>102</sup>

A few days later the plebiscites on 21 and 22 March 1861 sanctioned the annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Finally, on the 27th, after fiery discussion which went on for three days, the House almost unanimously approved the Government's proposal that Rome be declared the Capital of the Kingdom of Italy, confirmed by the senate at its sitting on 9 April.<sup>103</sup>

This intensified the dramatic and heart-rending matter of the 'Roman question' for the Catholic conscience.<sup>104</sup>

Don Bosco added some brief pages in the *Storia d'Italia*, beginning with the 1861 edition, on the second war of independence, dwelling on the acquisition of Lombardy by Piedmont, an extension that was 'much weakened by our Government's ceding Savoy and Nice to France.' He gave but a few laconic lines to the rest: 'In the meantime other events occurred in Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and the Romagna, then in Naples and Sicily which, both for their serious nature and because so recent, we must put off to another time before we can speak of them impartially and truthfully.'<sup>105</sup> This was his *Explicit* in every edition while he was still alive until the final one, the eighteenth, in 1887, which was a reprint of the 1873 edition. Starting from this, what followed was entrusted to a *Sommario cronologico dei principali avvenimenti dalla pace de Villafrance (1859) alla morte di*

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99 Cf. Chap. 13, § 2.

100 Cf. M. DEL CORSO, *Un vescovo nella storia. Cosimo Corsi, cardinale di Pisa. La storia di un vescovo*, Pisa, Pacini 1988, pp. 86-104.

101 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 14. On the transfer of Corsi to Turin and the "harassment of the clergy", cf. "La Civiltà Cattolica" 1860, Vol. II 740-742 and 747-748; and Vol. III 107-108 (*Il clero carcerato in massa*) and 109 (*Il cardinal Corsi carcerato in Torino*).

102 Cf. *Il Parlamento dell'Unità d'Italia (1859-1861)*... I, pp. 19-46.

103 Cf. *Il Parlamento dell'Unità d'Italia (1859-1861)*... II, pp. 111-249.

104 Cf. P. G. CAMAIANI, *Motivi e riflessi religiosi della questione romana*, in *Chiesa e religiosità in Italia dopo l'Unità (1861-1878)*. Procedures of the fourth convention on Church History, La Mendola, 31 August-5 September 1971. *Relazioni*, Vol. II. Milan, Vita e Pensiero 1973, pp. 65-128.

105 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*... Enhanced third edition. Turin, tip. di L. Ferrando 1861, p. 478.

*Napoleone III 1873* (a chronological summary of the main events from the Villafranca Peace 1859 to the death of Napoleon III 1873). It was separated from the text with the historical account by biographical profiles of ‘famous men’, introduced before the *Conclusion*, beginning with the 1859 edition. There were eight of them then and by 1873, twelve. The *Sommario* highlights in particular Pius IX’s Encyclical *Nullis Certe Verbis*, 19 January 1860 ‘to declare to the Catholic world’ he writes, ‘that he cannot renounce any of his control (over territory) without renouncing his oath.’ He levelled particular accusations against those governing the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia: ‘stirring up action and revolts in other provinces of the Holy See (to the affront of all Catholics), weakening the rights of all Princes in the Christian world, and assenting to the most pernicious of principles.’<sup>106</sup>

Cavour’s death, too, on 6 June 1861, was connected to religious celebrations at the Oratory, which civil authorities were absent from for the first time: ‘6 June, Death of Cavour on the day and at the hour when the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament had taken place. He fell ill on the Vigil of the feast of Corpus Christi.’<sup>107</sup>

His unexpected and rapid passing sanctioned a much more realistic absence but it was no casual occurrence: ‘It lead the good and not so good to say “here is the hand of the Lord”’ according to the prophecy of the author of the *Galantuomo*. However, it was a topic of profound bewilderment in political life now orphaned of its enigmatic weaver, the only one who held the thread linking every affair.’<sup>108</sup>

But in substance, Don Bosco’s little ‘kingdom’ remained somewhat extraneous to the rupture between the liberal political world and much of the Catholic world. There were occasional echoes of it. The ‘neither elected nor electors’ launched on 8 January 1861 by Giacomo Margotti in the columns of *L’Armonia* just prior to the elections for the first Italian Parliament, became the watchword for intransigent Catholics who rejected any connivance with the usurping unified State. One of the Oratory Chronicles on 7 July 1862, recorded Don Bosco’s response to a group of his young helpers who posed the problem of how to ‘conduct ourselves in such calamitous times regarding the Pope’s temporal power. He replied with the same comment he had made to some “democrats” and “liberals” that same day: “I am with the Pope, I am Catholic, I blindly obey the Pope. If the Pope tells the Piedmontese ‘Come to Rome’, well then, I too will say ‘Go!’: if the Pope says that the Piedmontese going to Rome is robbery, then I’ll say the same.’<sup>109</sup>

A simple Chronicle entry dated March 1863 is dedicated to Luigi Carlo Farini (1812–66): ‘He fell into a state of insanity.’<sup>110</sup> This glossed over the fact that he had been Minister for the Interior in the second last Cavour Ministry, and from 8 December 1862 to 22 March 1863, Prime Minister, with Michele Amari as Minister for Education (1806–89). As we shall see, Don Bosco had dealings with him as Minister for the Interior.<sup>111</sup> 1864 saw an entry on the ‘Agreement between France and Italy’ on 15 September, pulling French troops out of the Papal States, Italy’s commitment to respect this, and the transferal of the capital, Florence, which came into effect on 14 May 1865. Also noted was the publication of the *Syllabus* on 8 December 1864 ‘in which the principal errors of our century are highlighted.’<sup>112</sup> There is no mention of the Encyclical *Quanta Cura* which condemns them, dated

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106 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia raccontata alla gioventù...* Torino, tip. e libr. salesiana 1887 [identical to the 1873 edition], p. 489, OE XXXVII 489; cf. Text of the encyclical in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. III 129-136.

107 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863*, p. 70.

108 *Il Galantuomo a’ suoi amici*, in *Il Galantuomo e le sue profezie. Almanacco piemonteselombardo per 1862*. Torino, tip. Paravia e comp. 1861, pp. 71-72, OE XIII 327-328.

109 G. BONETTI, *Annali III 1862 1863*, pp. 20-24; cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia... 1887*, pp. 186-190, OE XXXVII pp. 186-190, *Dei beni temporali della Chiesa e del dominio del Sommo Pontefice*

110 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, p. 492, OE XXXVII 492.

111 Cf. cap. 13, § 2.1.

112 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, p. 102, OE XXXVII 102; texts of the Encyclical *Quanta cura* and *Syllabus* in *Pio IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. III 687-700, 701-717.

the same day. Don Bosco did include the text in the notably larger second edition of his 1854 work under a slightly modified title, along with news of a new extraordinary jubilee year in 1865,<sup>113</sup> but there was nothing about facts relevant to the history of Italy and relations between church and State which his own life story certainly had to contend with.

Following political unification, measures were taken which were harmful to the right of freedom of bishops and priests, further aggravated in southern Italy by problems connected with the struggle against 'banditry'.<sup>114</sup> There were arrests, expulsions, voluntary and non-voluntary emigration often decided by military authorities with no respect for legality, while the Prime Minister himself, Bettino Ricasoli, would have wanted there to be a regular process. A good 71 dioceses in southern Italy were left without a bishop, beginning with Naples whose Cardinal Archbishop, Sisto Riario Sforza, (1810–77) was forced into a lengthy exile from 1 August 1861 to 6 December 1866, after an earlier period of two months in 1860, imposed by Garibaldi. An easy opening for expelling bishops and priests from their respective sees and locations was created by a law passed on 18 May, 1866 – the law of suspects or Crispian law named after its chief proponent, Francesco Crispi, with its decidedly specious art. 3: 'The King's Government will have the faculty of establishing house arrest, for a period no greater than one year, of loiterers, vagabonds, members of the Camorra (Neapolitan mafia), and anyone considered suspect as outlined in the prescriptions of the penal code 20 November 1859, which will be published and will be applicable to people who give well-founded reason to believe they are acting to restore the old order of things and to harm the unity of Italy and its free institutions in whatever way.'

On the basis of this same law, the Government also pursued Giambattista Casoni and Giulio Cesare Fangarezzi who founded the *Italian Catholic Association for the defence of the Church's freedom in Italy* in Bologna in 1865. This was approved by Pius IX in a Brief on 4 April 1866. They managed to flee and the Association was dissolved. In June the following year, however, the *Italian Catholic Youth Society* came into being through a federation of two youth bodies, one founded in Viterbo by Count Mario Fani, the other in Bologna by Dr Giovanni Acquaderni. It was approved in May 1868 by Pius IX and was a seedbed of militant members of the Catholic Movement. Meanwhile civil marriage was introduced in the new civil code promulgated by decree on 25 June 1865, to come into force from 1 January 1866.

Toward the end of the third war of independence on 7 July 1866, the law suppressing 'Orders and Religious, Regular, Secular Corporations and Congregations of a conservative or cloistered nature' was promulgated. It applied to bodies leading a 'common life of an ecclesiastical nature.' The Government and the Law understood it to be an extension of the 1855 law to all religious bodies. Instead, according to the political left, whose most extreme exponent was Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, legislation had sought to also remove the right to free association. But such an interpretation was always considered, including by the Council of State, as being injurious to the principles on which the liberal State rested, and religious bodies could continue to live as *de facto* free associations.<sup>115</sup>

On 22 October 1866, however, Ricasoli, in Cavourian spirit, foreshadowed in a circular to Prefects that they should 'proceed to recall bishops who had been alienated from their Sees or put

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113 G. BOSCO, *Dialogi intorno all'istituzione del Giubileo colle pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese*. Torino, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, pp. 6-15, OE XVI 80-89.

114 Cf. Further on § 8.

115 Cf. G. ROCCA, *Istituti religiosi in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, in M. ROSA (Ed.), *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*, pp. 223-226; A. C. JEMOLO, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni*. Torino, Einaudi 1863, p. 222; N. RAPONI, *Legislazione politica scolastica e scuola privata cattolica nell'Italia liberale. Il ruolo del Consiglio di Stato*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*. Brescia, La Scuola 1999, pp. 341-374. Don Bosco, in various contexts, would show that he feared that such an interpretation might win out.

under house arrest out of a need for local or general security.’ He was aiming to reduce tensions with the Holy See and was looking to an agreed solution to the ‘Roman question.’ He was also hoping for spiritual reform in the Church. The matter was finalised in another circular on November 6. It was but a brief interval of liberal moderation. New radical approaches emerged, first with the weakening then the collapse of the Ricasoli Government. In fact elections on 10 March 1867, destabilised the moderate Right and given the impossibility of counting on a majority in the House, the Ricasoli Government resigned on 4 April. On 10 April, a new Centre Left Government led by Urbano Rattazzi took office. On 4 May, Minister Ferrara presented the House with a draft law on ecclesiastical assets in line with the earlier one. It was considered too bland and was not accepted by the Commission. On 4 July, Minister Ferrara resigned and the Finance Ministry was taken on *ad interim* by the Prime Minister. The Parliamentary Commission arrived at a more radical plan in harmony with the decidedly anti-church tendencies which emerged in debate in the House over the problems of bishops in vacant dioceses. On 15 July, ‘noting the Government’s declaration that without an appropriate law nothing in effect could be renewed in prejudice to the rights and prerogatives of the Civil power in Church matters,’ the Commission approved a motion excluding almost any rejection of the *regio placet* and *exequatur*.<sup>116</sup>

The law on seizure and liquidation of ecclesiastical assets was promulgated on 15 August, following its approval by the House on 28 July and the Senate on 22 August. Excepted were goods connected with the care of souls, especially parishes. It led ‘to these overall results: confiscation of the patrimony of all Religious Orders held in a Church depository for the maintenance of clergy caring for souls: suppression of many Church bodies (Chapters of collegiate churches, abbeys, benefices not connected with the care of souls); conversion of goods of remaining entities (except for parishes, seminaries, episcopal revenue) to state securities of fixed return, subject to inevitable devaluation; seizure by the State of a third of the converted goods; male Orders to be dissolved after government seizure of their houses; permission for contemplative monks to continue to live in their monasteries until they are reduced to six whereupon they are to be joined with other communities.’<sup>117</sup> It was a crucial moment in the bourgeois revolution and State secularisation.

Following this the *Sommario* once more began recording facts showing Italy’s designs on the Papal States.<sup>118</sup> On 3 November 1867, volunteers under the command of Giuseppe Garibaldi penetrated the Papal States, which were surrounded by Italian troops and on the move from Monterotondo to Tivoli, Garibaldi’s supporters were defeated at Mentana, near Rome, by papal troops and French soldiers.<sup>119</sup> The Pope deplored the Italian attitude and praised the heroism and faith of his soldiers.<sup>120</sup> The abolition of exemption from military service of candidates for the clergy came next, with a law passed on 27 May 1869. This too was vigorously disapproved of by the Pope.<sup>121</sup>

Don Bosco’s only reference to Vatican I, the Bull of convocation on 29 June 1868, was very

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116 “L’Unità Cattolica” entertained its readers on the history of negotiations with Rome as told by Borgatti and Tonello, reconstructed from *Documenti relativi alle negoziazioni colla Corte di Roma*, no. 165, Thursday 18 July 1867, pp. 789-791; no. 166, Friday 19 July, pp. 793-794; no. 167, Saturday 20 July, pp. 798-799; no. 170, Wednesday 24 July, pp. 813-814. This series of articles was preceded in no. 165 on 18 July by an article on *L’Unità Cattolica e la missione Tonello*, p. 789.

117 G. MARTINA, *Storia della Chiesa...*, Vol. III *L’età del liberalismo*, pp. 97-98; cf. A. RICCARDI, *La soppressione delle corporazioni religiose e la liquidazione dell’asse ecclesiastico*, in *Il parlamento italiano*, Vol. 2 (1866-1869). Milan, Nuova CEI 1988, pp. 219-238.

118 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, pp. 494-495, OE XXXVII 494-495.

119 G. BOSCO, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, pp. 494-495, OE XXXVII 494-495.

120 Cf. Encyclical, 17 October 1867, *Levate Venerabiles Fratres*; Apost. Letter, 14 November, *Ex quo infestissimi hostes*, in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. IV 371-382.

121 Allocution to the Consistory on 25 June 1869, *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, Vol. V 27-29.

brief.<sup>122</sup> By contrast he offered a copious series of notes on the Franco-Prussian war and events that followed it.<sup>123</sup>

## **8. Tension between giving education its public and national identity and allowing non-State schools freedom of management**

The sudden death of the clever and manipulative Camillo Cavour on 6 June 1861, created a very serious hiatus for the newly born Italian State. The loss was even more serious inasmuch as he had finally opted for a centralised solution of State administration against the decentralisation proposed by the Commission headed by Marco Minghetti. Not only did the task of 'making Italians' remain, but of making Italy itself, an aggregation of too many rapid annexations.<sup>124</sup>

On the other hand, the political class had fragile basic roots, since with the current electoral system only a very small part of the population had access to the vote, or availed themselves of their right to vote. Naturally there was no thought of women voting. Up until 1882 each member of Parliament was elected by several hundred votes from a socio-economic elite which was an absolutely inadequate way of representing the country. Nevertheless, Parliament and Government had to deal with enormous real problems; pacification of the territory, overcoming the enormous economic divide by comparison with Europe's more progressive States, cultural and administrative unification, structural poverty and poor public funding, widespread illiteracy and lack of culture, the initial heterogeneity of legal banking, schooling systems and the armed forces and police.

The public, popular, and technical education system and general backwardness were the most worrying divide since they radically conditioned possibilities for development. The inability to read and write affected 75% of the population in 1861: there was enormous disparity between the more developed north-east, Piedmont and Lombardy, where around 50% of males were literate and the centre, south and islands. There were also the various levels of cultural, social and political understanding within the ranks of the aristocracy and middle class, distributed across a broad range from conservatives to progressives. Contributing to this were technical people who had come to Italy from abroad, mainly to Piedmont, Lombardy, Genovesato, Veneto, Naples.<sup>125</sup>

The school system which the Kingdom of Italy inherited was the generally centralised one established in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia as a result of successive reforms introduced into the Savoy State by a variety of legislators: Carlo Bon Campagni 4 October 1848, Giovanni Lanza 22 June 1857, Gabrio Casati 13 November 1859. Awareness of the social and political value of education had led them to advocate direct State management of the school system.

We saw that Charles Albert had set up a Public Instruction/Education Ministry through Royal Permit on 30 November 1847. A year later the legislation presented by Bon Campagni sanctioned ministerial control over schools of every kind and degree, obliging them to come into line with State-run schools – range of subjects, syllabi, organisation, with an eye to Italy's cultural and linguistic unification. 'Balance of power relationships between the centre and periphery, public and private' were provided for in the unexpected draft legislation of Minister Luigi Cibario in 1854. Instead 'a gradual centralisation in the management and control of public education with consequent strengthening of ministerial authority' was provided for in draft legislation on the *Reorganisation of higher administration of public education* presented by Giovanni Lanza on 22

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122 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, 1887, p. 495, OE XXXVII 495.

123 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, 1887, pp. 495-499, OE XXXVII 495-499.

124 Cf. L. CAFAGNA, *Cavour*. Bologna, Il Mulino 1999.

125 V. CASTRONOVO, *La storia economica...*, in *Storia d'Italia*, Vol. IV *Dall'Unità ad oggi*, part 1 Turin, Einaudi 1975, pp. 10-14; cf. The solid work of synthesis by X. TOSCANI, *Alfabetismo e scolarizzazione dall'Unità alla guerra mondiale*, in L. PAZZAGLIA, *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazione socio-culturali...*, pp. 283-340.

November 1855. This then became law after a tough ride on 22 June 1857. 'A hierarchical vertical administrative structure resulted from this.' 'Ministry officials extended their jurisdiction to private schools' to 'seminaries and episcopal colleges, otherwise no admission of their students to exams and courses run by the State schools would happen.' Religious instruction was excluded from the secondary school curriculum and given in colleges (boarding schools) only on Sundays and holy days.<sup>126</sup> Protests by the episcopate against this latter measure began in 1848 and continued for years. The protests were also against taking religious teaching away from ecclesiastical jurisdiction: 'it is the most delicate and important part of public teaching' since Religion is 'the basis, support, bond of every civil society', 'because of the strict link that exists between Christian education and instruction in knowledge generally.'<sup>127</sup>

New legislation presented by Minister Gabrio Casati, with a thought to Lombardy already annexed and Emilia and Tuscany soon to follow, was approved by Royal Decree on 13 November 1859. 'The increasingly effective role of the school informing the "Italian citizen" ' led to 'strengthening State control over the administrative organisation of public education' making it ' a kind of administrative friary' according to Domenico Berti's sarcastic view.<sup>128</sup>

Undoubtedly, the law introduced a great novelty by comparison with earlier subalpine legislation: Some of its prescriptions guaranteed 'gradual application of the principle of freedom of teaching,' 'conceived in terms of competition between public and private schooling.' Nevertheless well-defined limits were placed on this principle both by the law itself and its concrete application, less in relation to 'paternal schooling' and much more in the case of schools run by private citizens and local bodies.<sup>129</sup>

The degree of Government control over Piedmontese political and cultural settings, the prevailing orientation of Government structures, contentious relationships between Church and State – in contrast to Casati's intentions<sup>130</sup> led to a restrictive interpretation of Article 3 of the legislation which defined the powers of the Minister for Public Relations: 'he governs public teaching in all its branches,' '*supervises private teaching to protect morals, hygiene, State institutions and public order.*' In practice this was scarcely liberal and in substance was inspired more by the Napoleonic system than the English one.<sup>131</sup>

Bureaucratic centralism was particularly rigid in its management of secondary education, beginning with the first level known as *ginnasio* (the first and second years of a classical education specialising in Latin and Greek). This was the kind of schooling also introduced in the Oratory in Turin 1855-59. As for management by private citizen, the *scuola paterna* or home schooling and the *ginnasio privato*. Articles 251 and 152 referred to the former: 'Secondary education provided within families for the children of the family or children of that family's relatives under the watchful eye of the fathers or whoever takes their place will be released from any obligation of State inspection' (art 252). Articles 246 and 247 instead concern the *ginnasio privato*. 246 said 'Any

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126 Cf. M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati: la costruzione del sistema scolastico nazionale (1848-1861)*, in L. PAZZAGLIA e R. SANI (ed), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita. Dalla Legge Casati al Centro-sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola 2001, pp. 9-26.

127 Cf. *L'episcopato e la rivoluzione in Italia, ossia, Atti collettivi dei Vescovi italiani preceduti da quelli del Sommo Pontefice Pio IX contro le leggi e i fatti della rivoluzione offerti a San Pietro in occasione del diciottesimo centenario del glorioso suo martirio*, 2 Vols, Mondovì, Tip. Vescovile di Gio. Issoglio e C. 1867.

128 Cf. M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati...*, pp. 28-31.

129 Cf. M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati...*, pp. 31-33.

130 Cf. S. POLENGHI, *La politica universitaria italiana nell'età della Destra storica (1848-1876)*. Brescia, La Scuola 1993, pp. 62-67.

131 Cf. M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati...*, pp. 33-35: italics ours. The entire problem is proposed again more broadly in a subsequent study: M. C. MORANDINI, *Scuola e nazione. Maestri e istruzione popolare nella costruzione dello Stato unitario (1848-1861)*. Milan, Vita e Pensiero 2003, pp. 316-446.



citizen who is 25 years old and has the necessary moral requirements is given the faculty of opening a secondary education establishment to the public with or without a boarding section, so long as the following conditions are observed,' the principle ones of which were those already cited as belonging to the Minister's powers (art. 3). Article 247 established that: 'The citizen who wishes to avail himself of this faculty will let his intention be known by written declaration to the Superintendent of his respective Province. Attached to this declaration which will indicate the municipality and district where the establishment is to be opened, will be curriculum and the names of teaches along with their titles.' 'So long as it is maintained according to the conditions indicated in the preceding articles, it can only be closed for *cause gravi* involving the preservation of the moral order and safeguarding of the principles governing public social order in the State, or the health of the pupils.'

We will see that Don Bosco shifted between the two possibilities as circumstances decreed. In the 1860's he presumed the *de facto* rather than the legal existence of his secondary classes to be an *istituto privato*, while in the four years from 1878–81 he preferred to fashion his defence of his classes on the alternative configuration, the *istituto paterno*.<sup>132</sup>

Not even immediate criticisms from the liberal sectors had any effect on the centralising nature of this law, and those liberals had in mind even more advanced systems already in force in some of the annexed regions, especially in Tuscany, very much in the vanguard with respect to freedom of teaching. Nor did the *Regolamento* with which Terenzio Mamiani, Minister for Public Education from 21 January 1860, to 22 March 1861, tried to be more flexible, have any appreciable effect. His 'more flexible' meant 'more liberal' and less literal application of the law. Even less approval met the five draft laws he had prepared with a view to modifying the Casati articles on freedom of teaching and its extension to the annexed provinces already practising it. His proposals were intended to be part of the policy of decentralisation in every area, which Luigi Carlo Farini and Marco Minghetti had tried to bring in. They followed one another in the Department of the Interior from 24 March 1860 to 1 September 1861.<sup>133</sup>

The failure to revise the Casati law reflected the failure of the policy of decentralisation. 'The failure to hold the line based on recognition of broad autonomy for local arrangement and concessions of full freedom in the education sector for citizens, families and groups, was the logical consequence of the prevailing notion of the State as the main, if not only supporter and guarantor of national unity. The Church was wary of and hostile to the new political reality and in virtue of its rootedness in the social fabric, saw this as a threat to the future of the nation.'<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, the political class felt that it was invested with the task of refounding the new, national, unified State which had risen from the ashes of the old, diverse political entities, and that it had the mission of infusing a common will and mind within the masses. This substantially elitist political class used the only range of means it could for such a class: primary and secondary schooling, the army – more illiterate than literate – national holidays, monuments and commemorative 'inscriptions' dedicated to significant figures from the past, and protagonists of the Risorgimento, the 'fathers of the nation', national exhibitions, knighthoods, worldly celebrations in the Royal Court and, more serious still, colonial exploits.<sup>135</sup> But the masses went in another direction, as would soon be demonstrated, first by Socialist, then Catholic Movements introducing

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132 Cf. cap. 28, § 1.

133 Cf. M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati...*, pp. 35-44.

134 M. C. MORANDINI, *Da Boncompagni a Casati...*, p. 46.

135 Cf. An example which can be extended to other Italian cities, in F. BONAMICO, *Caratteri e connotazioni dei monumenti celebrativi torinesi nell'Ottocento*, "Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino" 93 (1995) January-June, pp. 295-314, and an absolutely emblematic figure, a key player in the sector, Tommaso Villa: cf. S. MONTALDO, *Patria e affari. Tommaso Villa e la costruzione del consenso tra Unità e Grande Guerra*. Turin, Carocci 1999, pp. 103-129 (*Un fallito progetto di identità laica*).

parties for the masses, while many others took to emigrating. The secular, political bourgeoisie substantially failed to reach its established purpose also because of its inflexible opposition to the resistant forces in society inspired by other ideas about life.

In reality, the Casati law was a long way from interpreting and satisfying the expectation of either side.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, for its plan to be realised it also had to contend with an incredible lack of central and local administration, prepared personnel, and also ideological conflicts and cultural shortcomings. The result was that secondary schooling was favoured to the detriment of schooling for the masses, while the law, with a certain ambiguity, sanctioned the duty of municipalities to provide elementary education 'in proportion to the abilities and according to the needs of their inhabitants', at the same time obliging them to have at least one school where free elementary education was provided in the lower grades to boys and another for girls.<sup>137</sup> It then obligated fathers and those who stood in for them to 'ensure' in the way they believed was most suited 'that those of their children who were old enough to attend the public schools' were given instruction. But neither precise norms nor penalties for those who ignored them followed these demanding requirements (art. 326). Only with the law presented by Minister Michele Coppino, promulgated on 5 July 1877, were parents who had not been able to provide this through other legally recognised forms ('or by means of private schools in terms of articles 355, 356, of the 13 November 1859 law, or by home schooling') obliged to send those of their children who had completed their sixth year of age to the lower grades of elementary school in their municipality. This applied up to the age of nine. This way they could be promoted to third class, and fines were applicable to parents who did not abide by this (articles 1- 6). Herbert Spencer's thinking, Aristide Gabelli's common sense and Saverio De Dominicis' moderation mitigated the theoretical difficulties of a positivist style of pedagogy and introduced a wave of fresh approach, concreteness, social sensitivity into the curriculum and approaches of the public school, with notable and enduring influence especially on the formation of elementary school teachers.<sup>138</sup>

Though with very obvious limits, it brought an effective corrective to a certain disembodied and spiritualistic culture which was closed to scientific and technical progress and especially to more advanced teaching methods.

## 9. A Country caught-off-balance between Backwardness and Progress

Naturally, scholastic planning and more besides was taking place in situations of strong economic, cultural and structural disparity between the different regions of the Peninsula, especially in the south which had suffered the worst social scourges in Italy, though other areas too had serious deficiencies: poverty, a high level of illiteracy, absence of a developed industrial framework, a few passably rich individuals (whose recent wealth came from acquiring confiscated ecclesiastical goods) lording it over a multitude of the poor. With unification, more than a few situations were now worse.<sup>139</sup>

One of the issues the forces of law and order and to a large extent the young Italian army had to

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136 Cf. M. C. LEUZZI, *Alfabetizzazione nazionale e identità civile. Un piccolo popolo per una grande nazione (1880-1911)*. Rome, Anicia 1998; S. SOLDANI and G. TURI (eds), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, 2 Vols, Bologna, Il Mulino 1993; F. TRANIELLO, *Nazione e storia nelle proposte educative degli ambienti laici di fine Ottocento*, and G. VERUCCI, *Nazione, cultura e trasformazioni socio-economiche: le proposte educative degli ambienti cattolici*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali...*, pp. 61-91 and 93-118.

137 Section V, Chap. I, art. 317 and 319.

138 Cf. I. ZAMBALDI, *Storia della scuola elementare in Italia. Ordinamenti, pedagogia, didattica*. Roma, LAS 1975, pp. 259-304, 374-401.

139 A. ASOR ROSA, *La cultura*, in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. IV *Dall'Unità ad oggi*, part 2. Turin, Einaudi 1975; pp. 909-925.

contend with for a few years was the number of rolling insurrections troubling southern Italy right from the early days of its rapid annexation. It was described as banditry but in reality it was a complex phenomenon of social, economic, broadly cultural and sometimes political factors exploited by Bourbon supporters along with some marginal elements of delinquency.<sup>140</sup>

The armed rebellion could have meant deadly risk in the mind of international public opinion and a threat to the fragile internal unity. So reaction was tough and accompanied by countless illegal actions. The management of the repression of 'brigands and their accomplices' was reserved to the military by dint of laws passed on 15 August, 1863, the 'Pica law' named after its proponent, member of the Right Giuseppe Pica (L'Aquila 1813–Naples 1887), and on 28 February 1864, in force until 1865. These insurrections gradually faded from 1866 onward and could be considered over by 1870.

More general and ongoing was the problem posed by the profound gap between Italy and other nations of north-western Europe at economic, financial, and technical levels. Besides England, a single nation State, Belgium, France, Germany and some parts of the Hapsburg Empire were going through a period of strong development with the spread of education, rapid organisation of a modern rail network, adoption of mechanical productions systems, expansion of the credit system, a real 'agricultural revolution' and additional employment in extra-agricultural activities.

'At the height of the age of iron and coal, Italy remained a country without essential and combustible primary resources and was largely dependent on overseas countries for technical innovation and putting new capital into the financial market. Its individual backwardness was fragmentary and dispersed, halfway between rural and manufacturing activities. Much of the labour force continued being recruited on an occasional and seasonal basis between day-to-day workers and farmhands'; 'at the time of unification the national income was less than a third of French and a quarter of the English'; 'markets and country fairs continued to provide for a large part of the local trade and keeping contact between city and country, mountain and plain.'<sup>141</sup>

Modernisation of the State at a legislative and legal level would have been completely in vain had it not found rapid confirmation in the modernisation of its real base giving Italy a place among European nations that was its due as a nation of relevant dimensions and population.

From a social perspective, Don Bosco could not share the moderation typical of Turin and Piedmont in the 1860s and beyond. From 1862–1898 the subalpine capital went from a population of 179,638 to 204,715 and saw an early industrial development, with 78,000 of its citizens involved in craft and industrial activity. This did not include 20,000 in workshops. At the end of the century, Turin still did not have modern industrial equipment. Workers' conditions were generally harsh: frequent unemployment due to irregular crises, exorbitant working hours, exploitation of female and child labour, especially underpaid amongst textile workers. Though Turin did not have a vibrant workers movement comparable to those in Piedmont like Biella and Alessandria, or in Milan and Emilia-Romagna, the associative spirit among workers meant the city had many mutual aid societies. We have seen how these were mostly unwilling to take political positions and in national workers conferences were 'the most conservative wing of the organised movement.' They preserved the middle class and nobility from excessive forms of protection, since these classes were not immune from paternalism. 'Only printers, construction workers (stubborn strikers in the 1882 and 1886 strikes), railway workers and to a minimal degree mechanics, came together in small bands of resistance.' There were no trade union activities or claims though the flourishing spirit of association was the basis for more effective future developments.<sup>142</sup>

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140 Cf. C. T. ALTAN, *Il brigantaggio postunitario. Lotta di classe o conflitto di civiltà?*, in O. CALABRESE, *Italia moderna*, Vol. I 1860-1900 *Dall'unità al nuovo secolo*, Rome, BNL 1982, pp. 99-117.

141 V. CASTRONOVO, *La storia economica...*, in *Storia d'Italia*, Vol. IV, part. 1, pp. 5-9.

142 P. SPRIANO, *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista...*, pp. 3-27.

Another problem the weaker classes particularly experienced in a liberal regime was the growing fiscal pressure created by the chronic budget deficit. It was the price to pay for organising a unified State, depleting social and political stability, extending the rail network, re-organising the armed forces, developing the merchant navy. Added to this was the superfluous third war of independence. An offensive and defensive alliance was signed between Italy and Prussia in Berlin on 8 April 1866. On 9 June, Italy declared war on Austria after Prussia had already opened hostilities three days earlier against some of the German Princedoms allied with Austria. There were two defeats, one on land at Custoza on 24 June, the other on the Adriatic around the island of Lissa on 20 July. The Prussians had a decisive victory over the Austrians at Sadowa on 3 July. With the signing of the peace between Prussia and Austria on 23 August, and between Italy and Austria on 1 October, Veneto and Manova provinces were seceded to Italy through Napoleon III, who gave Veneto to the nobility of Venice. The plebiscite on 21 October then unanimously approved annexation of the region to the Kingdom of Italy. Fiscal pressure meant above all burdensome indirect taxes, which affected the masses in the first instance. The introduction of a 'forced rate' in 1866 made this burden heavier still. It gave the State the possibility of tackling the more urgent needs of the public budget by printing, within certain limits, bank notes not convertible into gold. Worsening the situation for the weaker classes was the unpopular 'mill tax' promulgated on 7 July 1868, and coming into force from 1 January 1869. The taxation percentage started with 2.9% for wheat, then went down in decreasing order on oats (1.2 %) maize and rye (0.8%), then other cereals like vetch and chestnuts (0.05%). It had been sought by the Minister of Finance, Count Luigi Cambray Digny, husband of one of Don Bosco's Florentine benefactors, Countess Tolomei Biffe. There were revolts, but they were vigorously suppressed. Undoubtedly it contributed to a balanced budget in 1875, and it was no coincidence that this signalled the end of the long reign by the Right. The Mill Tax for lesser cereals was abolished by law on July 16, 1880 with immediate effect, and was abolished for all items with immediate effect from 1 January 1884. Clearly, the precarious budgets in Don Bosco's institutions were also heavily affected.

## 10. From newly conquered Rome to the historic Left-wing Governments (1870–76)

A handful of notes in the fourth edition of the *Storia Ecclesiastica* (1870, printed in 1871) highlight the situation of the Church in the world. These were prepared by Father Giovanni Bonetti but under some degree of control by Don Bosco. They were intended to justify the convening of the Ecumenical Council, Vatican I. We find old and new formulations in words absent from Don Bosco's normal lexicon, although not alien to his way of thinking. Attention is focused in particular on the phenomena in Italy: 'The upsets in recent times and insidious attempts to mix error with religion: the so-called modern philosophers, bad books and magazines, political principles never previously heard of, various kinds of secret societies, Masonry, Socialism, free thinkers, spiritists and the like.'<sup>143</sup>

The section on the *Present state of religion* in the book was given modest reorganisation. There was an eloquent, concise note on Italy: 'Italy finds itself in a state of real agitation. Things are serious and the consequences that could flow from this are very serious,' opined the author of the *Storia ecclesiastica* which came out in the revised edition in the *Catholic Readings* November-December 1870.<sup>144</sup> Italian troops had entered Rome on 20 September. Don Bosco made no comment on this in the heat of the moment. He probably opted for silence.

The brief indications in the *Sommario Cronologico* to the events of the Franco-Prussian war

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143 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso della gioventù utile ad ogni grado di persone*. Fourth and improved edition, Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1871, p. 362, OE XXIV 362.

It was almost immediately followed by a reprint.

144 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, 1871, p. 369, OE XXIV 369.

were immediately followed by others on the Italian army's entry into the Papal States on 11 September 1870 and Rome on 20 September after symbolic resistance by papal forces 'without much bloodshed,' so not entirely unbloody (around 50 deaths). 'General Cadorna entered Rome through a breach at Porta Pia,' the narrator records. 'The holy See protests to the diplomatic corps' in a note signed by Cardinal Antonelli. Pius IX's reaction was more solemn and striking, with the Encyclical *Respicientes* of 1 November 1870.<sup>145</sup> He repeated his thinking on 3 February 1871, regarding the proposed Law of Guarantees 'to ensure the independence of the Holy See,' promulgated on 13 May 1871. The narrator simply notes: 'The Holy Father refuses to comply.'<sup>146</sup> Then came a painful flow of decrees on 4, 6 March and 18 August 1871, effectively expropriating buildings and premises, so Ministers and other state bodies could set themselves up in them. Following other similar decrees in 1872, a draft law for suppression of religious corporations in the city of Rome was presented, along with the extension of the 1866 and 1867 laws to the whole Province (Lazio). It was approved by the House on 27 May 1873 and by the Senate on 17 June. Its promulgation on 19 June began the long and difficult path of execution, the State beginning its first seizure of goods in October 1873.<sup>147</sup>

131 houses with around 2,900 Religious were affected, male and female. Emotionally, Don Bosco could not remain unaffected, so many were the bonds of friendship tying him to various Religious communities from 1858 and even more so from 1867. It has been noted, just the same, that no Religious Order disappeared following the 1866 and 1867 legislation. Indeed, while it caused countless immediate difficulties it also brought about positive effects: 'Giving all Religious the possibility of living in common as free associations, their number increased and even more to the point it encouraged them to adjust to the new conditions of life.'<sup>148</sup>

In the twenty five years of Right-wing liberalism, Italian politics had shifted towards more radical positions with some contradictions, and not without Catholic intransigence sharing some responsibility for this. The move from Right to Left occurred in 1876. With a social base close to Cavour's liberal tendencies in the 1860's, liberals on the Left were ideologically different; most were decidedly secular and anticlerical, strongly influenced by Masonry, which most of them belonged to. They achieved a notable reinforcement in the November 1874 elections. Their most authoritative exponents, Agostino Depretis (1813–87), in an address on 10 October 1875, laid out a clear program for government: defence of the secular State and the struggle against clericalism, obligatory elementary education, administrative decentralisation, a lowering and redistribution of the fiscal burden in favour of the south of Italy, fidelity to the Monarchy.

In March 1876, opposition by the left forced Marco Minghetti's Government to resign. The new Government, which Agostino Depretis was charged with forming, came into office on 25 March, wholly made up of men from the Left, representing different currents of thought. For various reasons Don Bosco soon entered into relations with them and not only with the Prime Minister: Luigi Amedeo Melegari (1795–1881) Foreign Affairs from Emilia; Giovanni Nicotera (1828–94) the Interior, from Calabria; Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826-1903) Public Works, from Brescia; the two Piedmontese Michele Coppino (1822–1901) and Benedetto Brin (1833–98) Navy. With the

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145 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, Vol. V 263-277.

146 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, 1887, pp. 496-499, OE XXXVII 496-499; cf. Letter to the Cardinal Vicar Vicario, Costantino Patrizi, *Res maximi*, 15 May 1871, *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, Vol. V 303-305; Encyc. *Ubi Nos Arcano*, 15 May 1871, *ibid.*, pp. 306-316; address to cardinals, 27 October 1871, *ibid.*, pp. 352-356.

147 Cf. A. CARACCILO, *Roma capitale dal Risorgimento alla crisi dello stato liberale*, Rome, Edizioni Rinascita 1956, pp. 116-120; C. M. FIORENTINO, *Chiesa e Stato a Roma negli anni della Destra storica 1870-1876. Il trasferimento della capitale e la soppressione delle Corporazioni religiose*, Rome, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano 1996, pp. 122-151, 173-251.

148 G. ROCCA, *Istituti religiosi in Italia fra Otto e Novecento*, in M. ROSA (Ed.), *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*, pp. 230-231; cf. pp. 223-243.

exception of Melegari, all were affiliated with the Masons. On 8 October 1876, Depretis opened his electoral campaign with a speech to electors at Stradella (Pavia) where he emphasised thinking dear to the historic Left; extending universal suffrage, obligatory elementary education, abolition of the fixed tax rate, tax reform, the electability of mayors and presidents of provincial councils, reorganisation of the railways and maritime postal services, strengthening the navy, drawing up new guarantees for national industry. The elections on 5 November, taking 70% of the votes, gave him a crushing victory.

The reception given the Prime Minister and two other Ministers at the Lanzo College, with Don Bosco present,<sup>149</sup> happened at a delicate moment, then, just a few months before they took office, in the pre-election period. It is true that the Ministries were short-term ones, generally speaking. The one that came into office on 26 December 1877, caught up in accusations of bigamy levelled at Crispi,<sup>150</sup> had to resign at the beginning of March 1878. Two weeks earlier, Don Bosco had sent him one of his well-known outlines of the Preventive system. Only the corrected and re-corrected draft copy have been preserved.<sup>151</sup> The first, though somewhat timid Italian legislation on child labour, was due to the initiative of the Left. In truth the moderate liberals did not show themselves to be particularly sensitive to social problems of the lower classes and especially the problem of female and child labour. Despite discussions, investigations, plans, only on 13 January 1884 did Domenico Berti, Minister for Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in the fifth Depretis Ministry present a draft law which was considerably watered down so as to soften the opposition's intransigence.

His successor, Bernardino Grimaldi, who came into office on 31 March 1884 in the sixth Depretis Ministry, succeeded in reopening discussions on Berti's planned legislation. It too was ultimately watered down with removal of the part regarding female labour. The law on child labour was promulgated on 11 February 1886. It prohibited children below 9 years of age from working, and for mining work, below 10 years of age. For night work, under 12's were prohibited. It was a timid solution for problems shown up in the investigations in 1876 and 1879, especially for workers in the textile industries and youngsters (the so-called *Carusi*) in the Sicilian sulphate mines.<sup>152</sup> The first law on female labour was passed in 1902. However, on another front a law legally recognising mutual aid societies, by then a widespread phenomenon, was promulgated on 15 April 1886.

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149 Cf. Chap. 23, § 3.

150 In 1854 the Sicilian politician had been married in Malta. It was an apparently religious wedding, with Rosalia Montmasson, whom he had come to know in Turin in 1852. He then separated from Montmasson, and on 22 January 1878, he married Lina Barbagallo in church, whom in 1879 he had married in a civil rite. Instead his political enemies seized the opportunity to stage a bigamy scandal. He defended himself, stating that the previous marriage was invalid because it was celebrated by a priest who was suspended *a divinis* and had no ecclesiastical delegation. The Royal procurator in Naples and the investigating judge handed down a sentence on 25 May 1878 which recognised the Maltese marriage as canonically and civilly null and void: cf. *Carteggi politici inediti di Francesco Crispi (1860-1890)*, Extracts from his archive, ordered and annotated by T. Palamenghi... Roma, L'Universelle 1912, pp. 361-366.

151 Cf. Chap. 26, § 4.1.

152 Cf. F. RONCHI, *Considerazioni intorno alla legge del 1886 sul lavoro dei fanciulli*, in "Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento" 7 (1990) 3-50.

## Chapter 2

### CATHOLIC RESISTANCE AND MOBILISATION

- 1883 May: St Vincent de Paul Conferences created for the first time in Paris.
- 1856 26 August: Feast of the Sacred Heart extended to the Universal Church.
- 1858 February-July: apparition of Our Lady at Lourdes
- 1864 Daniele Comboni, in Turin to print his *Piano per la rigenerazione dell 'Africa* (Plan for regenerating Africa), meets Don Bosco.
- 1865 *The Catholic-Italian Association for defence of the freedom of the Church in Italy* is founded in Bologna.
- 1866 13 November: St Leonard Murialdo takes over the running of the *Collegio degli Artigianelli* (Young artisans/working boys college).
- 1867 The *Societa della Gioventii Cattolica Italiana* (Italian Catholic Youth Society) founded by Maria Fani and G. Acquadern.
- 1870 1 September: the *primaria Societa Cattolica Promotrice di Buone Opere* (Primary Catholic Society for promoting good works) founded in Rome;
- Also in Rome the *Societa Primaria Romana per gli Interessi Cattolici* (Primary Roman Society for Catholic Interests).
- 1871 The *Primaria Associazione Cattolica Aristica el Operaia di Carita Reciproca* founded in Rome. (Primary Catholic Craft and workers Association for Mutual Charity).
- 1872 The *Federazione Piana delle Società Cattoliche* founded in Rome (Federation of Catholic Societies).
- 1874 First Italian Catholic Congress in Venice.
- 1875 Second Congress held in Florence decides on a regular constitution for the Work of the Congresses.

In his Allocation to Cardinals at the 22 June 1868 Consistory, Pius IX indicated his intention of calling an Ecumenical Council to open on 8 December 1869. The Bull of Indiction, *Aeterni Patris*,<sup>1</sup> followed on 27 June. It was right from 1870, when in contact with men at Vatican Council I, that Don Bosco was persuaded to extend his gaze much further to other continents, even before Europe, with preference for mission locations. One could also say that because of his devotion to the Pope and everything concerning the Pope, and being so close in heart and thought to Pius IX, after 20 September, Rome too, had a certain 'foreign' attraction for him despite it now being the capital of his own country. Until then, Don Bosco had been welcomed as a guest in Rome, and the Pope who received him was its Sovereign. But as someone coming from the subalpine region at this point, Romans could be forgiven for confusing Don Bosco with the 'invaders' visiting the dethroned king, or in other words, the Supreme Pontiff.

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1 Cf. *Pio IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, Vol. IV 405-406, 412-423.

## 1. A Church engaged in self-defence and evangelisation

Lamentations, condemnations, excommunications, expressed with a variety of emphases and tensions, studded the 19th century. We find them in a considerable range of pontifical and synodal documents and speeches, and in writings by militant Catholics close to the Holy See. But the dominant feature was the steady desire to defend, in order to first preserve then build up.<sup>2</sup>

If religion and indeed the Catholic Church has an eternal and temporal, personal and social and essential role in salvation, it is evident that convinced believers feel committed to working for that. The preventive and restorative spirit ('bringing everything together under Christ,' Eph 1:10), along with the new elements, runs through the entire century.<sup>3</sup>

There were significant manifestations of this spirit in Piedmont, too, from the outset: the reconstruction of the Society of Jesus in 1814, the rebirth in 1817 of the *Amicizia Cristiana* (Christian Fellowship) due to renewed impetus from Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830). This group had developed in Turin around 1870 through the initiative of Jesuit Fr Nikolaus Diessbach (1754–1821), regent in Turin of the Grand Chancellery. It became the *Amicizia Cattolica* (Catholic Fellowship) in 1818. Then came the foundation of the *Convitto* or Pastoral Institute the same year through the joint efforts of Lanteri and Dr (Fr) Guala. It was a centre for preparing newly-ordained priests for the ministries of confession and preaching, and a focal point for spreading the moral theology and books on asceticism and piety of St Alphonse Mary Liguori. Finally, Lanteri's religious institute, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, was approved by Leo XII on 1 September 1826.

The *Amicizia Cattolica*, for which the cultured and diplomatically capable Marquis Cesare d'Azeglio (1763-1830) bore the brunt of the work as secretary, along with managing its magazine, *L'Amico d'Italia*, saw to disseminating 'good press'. The books it encouraged were of Ultramontane inspiration, professing unconditional devotion to the Church and the Holy See: 'We cannot know the Catholic Church unless there is the Pope;' 'always have the best opinion of the Vicar of Christ when it is not popular to express this opinion.' They defended the personal infallibility of the Pontiff and supported the alliance between throne and altar: 'fidelity to the legitimate government is second nature to us,' *Potestas a Deo est*. They refuted 'modern errors' amongst which the idea that we can teach one another. They encouraged the spread of the Alphonsian movement in the areas of morals and piety, beyond Piedmont as well.<sup>4</sup> They encouraged the Jesuits' spiritual and devotional leanings. It was precisely because of their closeness to the Jesuit line of thought that Charles Felix suppressed the *Amicizia* in June 1828, but the Oblates continued the activity of spreading good literature. The Oblates also promoted Ignatian-based retreats and popular missions inspired by St Alphonsus, backing the anti-rigourist approach, as was happening at the *Pastoral Institute* which Don Bosco attended.

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2 Cf. A. GAMBASIN, *Gerarchia e laicato in Italia nel secondo Ottocento*. Padova, Antenore 1969, pp. 213-232 with extensive documentation, 159-192 (*Pastorale difensiva*) and 192-212 (*Sinodi e associazioni nuove*).

3 Cf. M. MARCOCCHI, *Alle radici della spiritualità di don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 157-176; P. STELLA – F. TRANIELLO, *Italie. De la restauration à l'indépendance (1814-1860)*, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, t. 7 (1971), col. 2273-2293; P. SCOPPOLA, *A partir de l'unification*, ibid., col. 2294-2303; A. GAMBASIN, *Orientations spirituelles*, ibid., col. 2303-2311; T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento*. Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane 1989; M. PETROCCHI, *Storia della spiritualità italiana*, Vol. III. *Il Settecento, l'Ottocento e il Novecento*. Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 1979; P. BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1991, pp. 365-383 (*La restaurazione religiosa: nuove iniziative di catechesi e aggiornati catechismi dottrinali*); cf. Chap. 1, § 2.

4 Cf. A. GAMBARO, *Sulle orme del Lamennais in Italia*, Vol. I *Il Lamennaisismo a Torino*. Torino, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria 1958, pp. 23-44 (*L'Amicizia Cattolica*), 65-105 (*L'Amico d'Italia*); G. DE ROSA, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia dalla restaurazione all'età giolittiana*. Bari, Laterza 1988, pp. 1-16 (*Le "Amicizie cristiane"*).



When the 'Saint of the century of enlightenment' burst onto the scene in the Church, it was certainly a factor in the modernisation of practical morality for a busy life inspired by evangelical dynamism.<sup>5</sup> Canonised in 1839, St Alphonsus was proclaimed Doctor of the Church, though not without some dispute, and on the following 7 July, his feast was extended to the whole Church. The event was 'a solemn sanctioning of a pastoral tendency midway between laxity and rigourism, a reminder that salvation is for everyone, and a concern for reconciling the principles and the objective order of things, with respect for the conscience of the human individual.'<sup>6</sup> Typically, the Bergamascan Provost, Fr Antonio Riccardi, proposed activating every possible pastoral initiative in his book *Dei mezzi di promuovere l'educazione religiosa in ogni classe di persona* (Some ways of fostering religious education among people of every social class).<sup>7</sup>

Among these *missions* to the people, *retreats* and *religious conferences* held a privileged place for three decades, aimed at reaching both intellectuals and the student world as well as the masses of ordinary folk. Decades further on, Pius IX urged similar broad prospects for action. Faced with the trials which the Church was exposed to from all sides, the Pope declared on 20 December 1867 that there was a ground swell of the faithful ready to defend it everywhere with weapons, the spoken word, in writing, by personal testimony, but that an intense work of evangelisation was also underway. He indicated two kinds in particular: the extensive missionary activity and the multiplicity of 'pious institutes of extraordinary value for all classes and needs of Civil and Christian society.'<sup>8</sup>

Other than pleading in words for the fruitfulness and usefulness of 'religion', meaning the Catholic Faith, the believer in the 1800s who was more sensitive to the needs and mentality of the times also wanted to prove it in deed, at the level of 'effective charity': helping the needy, the poor, the sick, girls at risk, orphans, young people at every level of society, beginning with the neglected, the ones at moral and social risk. Many categories of young people were often overlooked by school and educational structures proposed or recognised by the *ancien régime* and liberal States, which had a tendency to leave plenty of room for private initiative, but which was often heavily supervised. Such was the lot of the infant schools which Ferranti Aporti considered to be the first essential stage of education and instruction for the Christian and citizen. In fact, these infant schools were not included in scholastic arrangements in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and even less so in the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Centrality of the parish

The parish went through a decisive recovery as a basic ecclesial structure. It had experienced a consistent enrichment of functions proper to it from the beginning of the century. Following the Napoleonic suppression of religious corporations already weakened by regimes in the 18th century, and given the crisis of the confraternities the parishes became more than ever 'the unique

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5 Cf. Th. REY-MERMET, *Il santo del secolo dei Lumi. Alfonso de Liguori (1696-1787)*. Rome, Città Nuova 1983; *La recezione del pensiero alfonciano nella Chiesa*. Proceedings of the Congress held for the third centenary of the birth of St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori (Rome 5-7 March 1997). Rome Collegium S. Alfonsi de Urbe 1998.

6 G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1867-1878)*. Rome, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana 1990, p. 472.

7 Bergamo, Dalla Stamperia Mazzoleni 1831; further reprinted in 1890. On initiatives and institutions of educational and catechetical ministry in the first seventy years of the century, cf. P. BRAIDO, *Catechesi e catechismi tra ripetizione, fedeltà e innovazione in Italia dal 1815 al 1870*, in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa dalla Restaurazione all'Unità d'Italia*. Naples, Edizioni Dehoniane 1985, pp. 13-78.

8 *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, Vol. IV 383-387.

9 Cf. C. SIDERI Ferrante Aporti e le scuole infantili in Italia, "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche" 6 (1999) 17-43; in *parle infantili in Italia*, "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche" 6 (1999) 17-43; in particular, pp. 29-33; P. BRAIDO, *Ferrante Aporti e la "grande causa della educazione primitiva del popolo"*, "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 25 (1979) 7-39.

centre of worship and religious teaching, of devotion and social works.<sup>10</sup>As we have seen, it was spared by the expropriators of Church property in 1867.<sup>11</sup>Indeed, they considered the parish to be the moralising centre for the masses. Presenting the planned suppression of religious and ecclesiastical corporations on 13 December 1865, Quintino Sella (1827–84), Minister for Finance, despite being under the sway of the Enlightenment myth of knowledge ‘scientifically opposed to the papacy’<sup>12</sup>declared: ‘Parishes are the ecclesiastical institution whom the State must not only recognise as a [corporate] person in civil terms but be generous in *protecting and supporting them*, since they are the most important and best part of the Church’s hierarchy, being the place where the virtues of the priest are exercised more extensively and usefully through works of charity, their supportive word bringing unutterable comfort in the thousand troubles that beset humanity and sharing the joys and sorrows of humanity thanks to the intervention and blessing of solemn life-giving acts.’<sup>13</sup>

Even during the years of secular and anticlerical Left Wing governments, Giuseppe Merzario (1830–95) and Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826–1903) sponsored the idea in Parliament of raising the stipend for poor parish priests who helped guide the moral lives of the people. Inviting them to civic loyalty, Zanardelli used terms known to Don Bosco, though framed within a somewhat different relationship: ‘I believe that to be a good priest one needs especially to be a good citizen,’ ‘happy to give to God what is God’s but at the same time giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s!’<sup>14</sup>

In a country where the economy was mostly based on agriculture the traditional parish still held sway, the result of the tridentine reform.<sup>15</sup> ‘But the model varied in its realisation of the ideal, in the quantity and quality of its features in the different regional and social contexts. It faced more complex issues in cities where there was considerable urbanisation and in the final decades of the century in areas where there was incipient industrialisation. Yet Catholic ministry found its preferred centre in the parish, though rather biased in favour of adult ministry, since adults were called upon to guarantee that the children went to church and catechism classes after their early Christian initiation in the family context.

As the legal, territorial, structural location for the sacred, it fulfilled a heap of ritual, welfare and charitable functions. Synods insisted on it being the driving force for all forms of Christian life: celebration of the Eucharist, proclamation of the Word of God through ordinary preaching (Sundays, holy days, triduum, novenas, the forty hour devotion) and extraordinary (Advent, Lent, popular missions, and the key months of March, May, June October) as well as funeral panegyrics and eulogies,<sup>16</sup> and ‘the care of souls.’ The parish was where rites of Christian life from Baptism to First Communion and Confirmation were celebrated, along with weddings, funerals, seasonal feasts, processions. It was where devotions took place and ritual blessings of all kinds imparted on animals, crops, harvests, equipment, buildings, vehicles for protection from storms, hail, pests, etc.

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10 Cf. C. VERUCCI, *Cattolicesimo e laicismo nell’Italia contemporanea*. Milan, F. Angeli 2001, pp. 85-102.

11 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

12 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Roma, dal 20 settembre 1870 all’11 febbraio 1929*, in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 16. Roma, la città del papa. Vita civile e religiosa dal giubileo di Bonifacio VIII al giubileo di papa Wojtyła*, ed. L. Fiorani and A. Prosperi. Turin, G. Einaudi 2000, pp. 1075-1079.

13 *Atti ufficiali della Camera*, Legislatura IX, 1865-66, no. 97, p. 369, quoted by “L’Unità Cattolica” no. 72, Sunday 23 March 1884, p. 286.

14 Interventions in the House on 22 and 23 February 1883 (*Atti ufficiali della Camera*, 1883, p. 1415 e 1441): *Una predica al clero italiano del ministro Guardasigilli Zanardelli*, “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 54, Friday 2 March 1883, p. 201.

15 Cf. V. Bo, *Storia della parrocchia*, Vol. IV *Il superamento della crisi*. Rome. Edizioni Dehoniane 1992; ID., *La storia della parrocchia*, in *Parrocchia e pastorale parrocchiale*. Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane 1986, pp. 24-37; J. BOSSY, *Dalla comunità all’individuo. Per una storia sociale dei sacramenti nell’Europa moderna*. Turin, Einaudi 1998, pp. 5-33

16 Cf. F. GIORGINI, *La predicazione e le Missioni popolari tra il 1815 e il 1870*, in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa...*, pp. 79-106.

Confraternities, and later in the century, apostolic groups revolved around it.

As a remedy for growing disaffection for religious practice, there was insistence on keeping Sundays and holy days of obligation holy, since they were an abundant source of spiritual and material graces. But there were barriers, especially for the Mass. According to Rosmini's incisive view, these barriers were *the sore on the Church's left hand, the separation of the people from the clergy in public worship*. There was 'a scarcity of vital, complete instruction given to ordinary Christians' on the rites and symbols with which sacred celebrations were expressed, and the use of Latin which had not been 'the language of the people' for centuries. 'This sore can be healed' Rosmini added, and according to a precise ecclesiological notion which included *the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy*, the medicine would be to prepare a better formed clergy, culturally and spiritually.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, there was an effort to overcome the separation by suggesting less passive ways of assisting at Mass and other rites: prayers running parallel to the various moments, like saying the rosary, with a century of tradition already behind it, or the Little Office of Our Lady, or using missals in the local language, a practice which had appeared in Italy since the end of the 18th century.<sup>18</sup>

More exuberant was the flowering of *devotions*. The 19th century inherited the special devotion to the Sacred Heart (it is described as 'the century of the Sacred Heart'),<sup>19</sup> occasionally seized upon by political groups with a counter-revolutionary and intransigent mindset in France, and by Pius IX as part of the 'social kingdom of Christ,' then by Leo XIII to affirm Christ's 'right of universal authority and worldly power.'<sup>20</sup> On 26 August 1856 the Feast of the Sacred Heart was extended to the Universal Church, and on 19 August 1864 Margaret Mary Alcoque was beatified. A keen concern of Pius IX, anticipating Pius X, was to foster Eucharistic piety, with insistence on frequent Communion and early reception of First Communion by children.<sup>21</sup> There were new developments in Marian piety, with an extraordinary flourishing of Marian Congregations, pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries, the success of the Pauline Jaricot's 'living rosary,' the spread and consolidation of the 'month of Mary'.

Marian apparitions came one after the other another in France: Paris in 1830 to Catherine Labouré, the parish priest of Our Lady of Victories, Fr Dufriche-Degenettes in 1836, then on the high plains of La Salette to two Savoyard young shepherds on 19 September 1846, and at Lourdes to Bernadette Soubirous, 18 times from 11 February to 16 July 1858. On 3 July 1876 with Pius IX's consent, the crowning of the statue of the Immaculate Conception took place there in the presence of 34 bishops, while three thousand priests and a hundred thousand faithful exclaimed: 'Long live the Immaculate Conception! Long live Pius IX! Long live Catholic France!'<sup>22</sup> As well as the addition

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17 Cf. A. ROSMINI SERBATI, *Delle cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa*. Lugano, Tip. Veladini 1848, pp. 11-30; A. PISTOIA, *La parte del popolo nella liturgia secondo Rosmini*, "Ephemerides Liturgicae" 86 (1972) 313-353.

18 Cf. E. CATTANEO, *L'insegnamento della storia sulla partecipazione del popolo cristiano al culto della Chiesa*, in *La partecipazione dei fedeli alla Messa. Dottrina e pastorale*. Roma, Centro di Azione Liturgica 1963, pp. 319-349; P. STELLA, *L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana da metà Seicento ai prodromi del movimento liturgico*, in *Eucaristia memoriale del Signore e sacramento permanente*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1967, pp. 141-182.

19 Cf. R. AUBERT, *Il pontificato di Pio IX (1846-1878)*, 2nd Ita. ed. Based on 2nd French edition, ed. G. Martina. Second Part. Turin, Editrice S.A.I.E. 1976, p. 709.

20 Cf. D. MENOZZI, *Devozione al Sacro Cuore e instaurazione del regno sociale di Cristo: la politicizzazione del culto nella Chiesa ottocentesca* and F. DE GIORGI, *Il culto del Sacro Cuore di Gesù: forme spirituali, forme simboliche, forme politiche nei processi di modernizzazione*, in E. FATTORINI (ed.), *Santi, culti, simboli nell'età della secolarizzazione (1815-1915)*. Turin, Rosenberg e Sellier 1997, pp. 161-194 and 195-211; A. ZAMBARBIERI, *Per la storia della devozione al Sacro Cuore in Italia tra '800 e '900*, "Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia" 41 (1987) 361-432; S. TRAMONTIN, *Movimento cattolico e devozione al Cuore di Cristo*, "Studia Patavina" 35 (1988) 37-50.

21 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1851-1866)*..., pp. 707-710.

22 Cf. R. AUBERT, *Il pontificato di Pio IX*..., pp. 711-713.

of new feasts of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph, the century was also characterised by a gradual filling up of the calendar of the Universal Church with Saints,<sup>23</sup> encouraged especially by a considerable number of beatifications and canonisations carried out by Pius IX.<sup>24</sup>

It does not seem to be the case that Vatican Council I had any appreciable influence on bishops' pastoral letters regarding the clergy's pastoral activity. The Council had a mainly doctrinal character addressed to defining dogmas. Dominant practice preserved the system of condemnation, defence and confirmation of the Christian people's faith through preaching God's Word and the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.<sup>25</sup> Vatican I's discussions on compiling a 'small catechism' common to the entire Church highlighted the minority of Council Fathers who had sought to stress the urgency of a catechetical ministry more attentive to the great changes taking place in the more developed European societies and capable of responding to the extreme variety of situations. By far the greater number of Council Fathers coming from countries of modest or backward socio-economic and cultural circumstances aligned themselves with the question of the Church's uniqueness.<sup>26</sup>

In the last third of the century, with the passing of Pius IX's pontificate and the advent of Leo XIII's, after a long gestation the phenomena which make up our contemporary liturgical movement began to assert themselves. In Germany this was an historical, biblical, patristic phenomenon,<sup>27</sup> whereas in England it was cultural,<sup>28</sup> in line with the Benedictine monastic tradition in Belgium, renewed from the Abbey of Maredsous, especially in musical terms in Germany and Italy,<sup>29</sup> and more broadly in France. We certainly cannot ignore its distant roots in the German 'Catholic enlightenment' in the 18th century, with outstanding personalities like the Abbot of St Blasien, Martin Gerbert (1720–93) and Johan Michael Sailer (1751–1832)). Then there was the Tübingen school of ecclesiology, especially Johan Adam Möhler (1896–1838), and the Synod of Pistoia whose 'reform agenda', according to well-known liturgists, could be considered 'almost fully realised today.'<sup>30</sup> Apart from a range of suggestions for participating in worship, the first efforts and first concrete realisations of a liturgical nature in the strict sense came about through the work of Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805–75), who reorganised the Solesmes Abbey in Maine, France, and was elected abbot (1840). As much as they might be debated, but today better understood within their historical context, are the three volumes of the *Institutions Liturgique* (1840–41 and 1851). Of much broader practical impact were the ten volumes of *L'Annee Liturgique* 'A work undertaken with a view to helping the children of the Catholic Church enter into their Mother's intentions in the divine service she renders her heavenly Spouse.' In fact the liturgy is the 'prayer of the Church,

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23 Cf. J. ÉVENOU, *Liturgia e culto dei santi (1815-1915)*, in E. FATTORINI (ed.), *Santi, culti, simboli...*, pp. 43-65.

24 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1851-1866)...*, pp. 701-705.

25 Cf. G. PENCO, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, Vol. II *Dal Concilio di Trento ai nostri giorni*. Milan, Jaca Book 1978, pp. 354-355.

26 Cf. M. SIMON, *Un catéchisme universel pour l'Église catholique: du Concile de Trente à nos jours*. Leuven, Leuven University Press-Peeters 1992, XIV-461 pp.

27 Cf. O. ROUSSEAU, *Histoire du mouvement liturgique. Esquisse historique depuis le début du XIXe siècle jusqu'au pontificat de Pie X*. Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf 1945, pp. 69-91 e 93-109, Chap. IV

*L'Écclesiologie allemande au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle e La Congrégation bénédictine de Beuron*.

28 Cf. O. ROUSSEAU, *Histoire du mouvement liturgique...*, pp. 111-130 (*Le mouvement liturgique en Angleterre*).

29 Cf. O. ROUSSEAU, *Histoire du mouvement liturgique...*, pp. 151-166 (La musique sacrée et le chant grégorien); for useful additions, cf. E. CATTANEO, *Il culto cristiano in Occidente. Note storiche*, Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche 1984, pp. 452-486 (Il movimento liturgico nell'Ottocento); S. MARSILI, *Storia del movimento liturgico italiano dalle origini all'enc. "Mediator Dei"*, appendix to O. ROUSSEAU, *Storia del movimento liturgico. Lineamenti storici dagli inizi del secolo XIX fino ad oggi*. Rome, Edizioni Paoline 1961, pp. 263-369.

30 Cf. B. NEUNHEUSER – A. M. TRIACCA, v. *Movimento liturgico*, in *Liturgia*. Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni San Paolo 2001, pp. 1280-1282.

therefore most pleasing to God's ear and heart and thus most effective.<sup>31</sup> Solesmes had a decisive influence on the German monastery in Beuron, founded in 1863, where brothers Mauro and Placido Wolter were operating in a different cultural context.<sup>32</sup>

More controversial were attempts to harmonise the various expressions of sacred music with sharper liturgical sensitivity. These efforts oscillated between the rigidity of the return to Gregorian chant as rediscovered and variously interpreted by Ratisbonne and Solesmes, Renaissance polyphony, the abolition of separate choir areas, and the monopoly by the organ or similar instrument on the one hand, and on the other, more flexible, comprehensive and pastorally productive solutions.<sup>33</sup>

The mature results of the movement would be felt later. Don Bosco and his disciples were involved at the time in proposals for reform, including in the music sector, as they would also be in the future. There were some who were radically available and others, the majority, who were inclined to a more scrupulous, sometimes literal fidelity to the founder, including some who took backward steps.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. The Church's freedom during the changes of the 1860s and 70s

In the second half of the century, given the growing difficulties of the Church in Italy, which had to deal with the political scene singularly bent on modernising the political and social structure in a secular sense, the faithful were keenly called to the fray. This was some progress by comparison with the past, but always in marked subordination to leadership from ecclesiastical authority. This was demanded by the growth of consistent forms of agnostic, anti-religious secularism and more widespread anti-clericalism and professed atheism coming in the wake of condemned but varied forms of indifference.<sup>35</sup>

Beginning with 1860, Catholics in Italy were dissuaded, with increasing rigour, from being part of political life *per se*, either being elected or as electors. It was an ongoing *non expedit* which had shifted from 'it is not convenient' to 'it is morally impermissible' or in groups (among which, from 1867, the dynamic Catholic Youth Society), in defence of the Church's rights, charitable works including the *St Vincent de Paul Conferences* and later groups affiliated with the *Work of the Congresses*.<sup>36</sup> Priests inspired by increasing apostolic zeal were strongly urged to provide

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31 Dedicated to Bishop Affre and *Préface*, p. X; cf. F. BROVELLI, *Per uno studio de "L'Année liturgique" di P. Guéranger. Contributo alla storia del movimento liturgico*, "Ephemerides Liturgicae" 95 (1981) 145-219.

32 From Fr Mauro Wolter we have the *Praecipua ordinis monastici elementa* (Bruges 1880) and the five volumes of *Psallite sapienter* (Freiburg i. B. 1871-1890).

33 Cf. F. ROMITA, *Ius musicae liturgicae. Dissertatio historico-iuridica*. Turin, Marietti 1936, pp. 99-149 (*Musicae liturgicae restauratio*); E. CATTANEO, *Il culto cristiano in Occidente...*, pp. 484-486; S. MARSILI, *Storia del movimento liturgico italiano...*, in O. ROUSSEAU, *Storia del movimento liturgico...*, pp. 270-286; F. RAINOLDI, *Traditio canendi. Appunti per una storia dei riti cristiani cantati*. Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche 2000, pp. 463-513 (with added reference to "pedagogical-participative realisations, including those by John Bosco, since 1847, year of the first edition of the *Giovane provveduto*", p. 614). The ambivalence of positions, from rigid to flexible, was also prefigured by the two different documents from the Sacred Congregation of Rites on 25 September 1884 and 7 July 1894: the *Ordinance on sacred music* and the more tolerant *Regulation on sacred music*.

34 For the Don Bosco years, cf. Chap. 16, § 7.

35 Cf. P. SCOPPOLA, *Laicismo e anticlericalismo*, in *Chiesa e religiosità in Italia... Relazioni*, Vol. II, pp. 225-274; G. VERUCCI, *L'Italia laica prima e dopo l'Unità 1848-1876. Anticlericalismo, libero pensiero e ateismo nella società italiana*. Bari, Laterza 1981; ID., *Cattolicesimo e laicismo nell'Italia contemporanea*. Milan, F. Angeli 2001; P. G. CAMAIANI, *Valori religiosi e polemica anticlericale della Sinistra democratica e del primo socialismo*, "Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa" 20 (1984) 223-250.

36 Cf. G. DE ROSA, *Storia politica dell'Azione cattolica in Italia*, Vol. I *L'Opera dei Congressi (1874-1904)*.

leadership for socially committed lay people. This went beyond the bounds of traditional pastoral care. But the view was that there should not be an unreasonable gap between the priest dedicated to the strictly religious and sacramental care of souls and the priest working in the social apostolate, overcoming an artificial contrast which was becoming clearer towards the end of the century between *sacramental priests* and *movement priests*. This was a new configuration that would need to be borne in mind in formation courses for the clergy.<sup>37</sup> However, seminary formation remained largely unaltered and the 'social' priest was forced to form himself in the thick of his pastoral experience, schooled by clergy and laity who were more open to the new circumstances in society.<sup>38</sup>

In reality, there was always a minority in the Church who accepted the season of freedom and who did not regard the end of the Papal States as a disaster. Indeed, many had hoped for it both in the name of the Church's universality, and in terms of evangelical freedom in Italy. Some prestigious clergy were well known for this view, like Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–52), Antonio Rosmini (1797–185), Raffaello Lambruschini (1788-1873), as well as the anti-conformist laity like litterateur and critic Nicolo Tommaseo (1802-74), the benevolent reviewer of Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia*, politician and publicist Roberto d'Azeglio (1790-1867), novelist and poet Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), historian and author of many and varied works, Cesare Cantini (1804–95), future Salesian Cooperator. Among the bishops was Geremia Bonomelli (1831–1914) who admired Don Bosco and asked the Salesians to come to Cremona.<sup>39</sup>

Catholics also had an intense presence in the periodical print sector with a proliferation of dailies or weeklies of various leanings regarding modern society, from the conciliatory to the downright intransigent.<sup>40</sup>

Generally speaking, Don Bosco adapted pragmatically to the turn of events, while not always sharing their results, but he asked everyone for the freedom to carry out his mission on behalf of youth. But deep down, he was not alien to the idea that the loss of the Church's temporal power might make it freer and more effective in its pastoral activity. At least on one occasion he spoke in favour of a Church freed from certain ties, even though its head was a prisoner. 'Does it not seem to you to be already a great triumph for the Church' he confided to some of the clergy at Pincenza, in February 1873 who were lamenting the evils of the day, 'that in the current state of affairs it has been able to unlatch itself from certain treaties or concordats with various Governments who have attempted to choose their own bishops and parish priests?... As we see things currently in Italy, not one bishop is absent. And the fact that some have had to take up residence in their respective seminaries because they do not have their temporalities [secular properties and possessions] has that not also been something good? This way they have been able to get closer to their clerics, speak to them, come to know them better from up close. See how the Lord knows how to draw good from evil itself?'<sup>41</sup>

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Bari, Laterza 1953.

37 Cf. A. VAUDAGNOTTI, *Il cardinale Agostino Richelmy. Memorie biografiche e contributi alla storia della Chiesa in Piemonte negli ultimi decenni*. Turin-Rome, Marietti 1926, pp. 289-301; A. ERBA, *Preti del sacramento e preti del movimento. Il clero torinese tra azione cattolica e tensioni sociali*. Milan, F. Angeli 1984.

38 Cf. M. GUASCO, *Storia del clero in Italia dall'Ottocento a oggi*. Roma-Bari, Laterza 1997, pp. 99-126.

39 Cfr. E. PASSERIN D'ENTRÈVES, rec. a A. C. JEMOLO, *Scritti vari di storia religiosa e civile*, in "Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia" 20 (1966) 499-509; F. TRANIELLO, *Cultura cattolica e vita religiosa tra Ottocento e Novecento*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1991, pp. 181-188; ID., *Don Bosco e l'educazione giovanile: la "Storia d'Italia"*, in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare a cura by F. Traniello*. Turin, SEI 1987, pp. 81-111.

40 Cf. F. MALGERI, *La stampa quotidiana e periodica e l'editoria*, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico 1/1 I fatti e le idee*. Casale Monferrato, Marietti 1981, pp. 273-295.

41 Cf. E. PASSERIN D'ENTRÈVES, rec. a A. C. JEMOLO, *Scritti vari di storia religiosa e civile*, in "Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia" 20 (1966) 499-509; F. TRANIELLO, *Cultura cattolica e vita religiosa tra*

It was an attitude that allowed his voice to be heard without him being conditioned by more or less hidden forms of support (or perhaps not so hidden) from the various political, bureaucratic and financial powers.

After the Italian army entered Rome on 20 September 1870, Catholics resident in Rome closed ranks and became more intensely involved in social activity broadly speaking, giving birth to some important groups. The first was the *Primaria Società Cattolica Promotrice di Buono Opere* (Primary Catholic Society for promoting good works) which came into being on 1 September 1870, promoted and led by Frs Domenico Jacobini and Rinaldo Degiovanni. A few weeks later, in 1870-71, came the *Società Primaria Romana per gli Interessi Cattolici* (Primary Roman Society for Catholic Interests) whose intransigent daily newspaper was *La Voce della Verità* (The Voice of Truth). The Society published *L'Unita Cattolica* in Turin from 1803, transferring to Florence in 1893, and in Milan from 1864 it published *L'Osservatore Cattolico*. The *Società Cattolica Promotrice delle Buone Opere* launched an idea in June 1871 for other Roman and Catholic groups to form a federation. This eventuated in 1872 as the *Federazione Piana delle Società Cattoliche in Roma*.

This federation was corroborated on 23 February by a Brief of Pius IX's which looked forward to having a national federation of Catholic works – an unfulfilled hope. *L'Osservatore Romano* was the Roman federation's official communication. The first group to join the federation was the flourishing *Circolo di S. Pietro* founded on 28 April 1869. Its first Ecclesiastical Assistant was Domenico Jacobini. He heard about the *Union des associations ouvrières* and the *Oeuvre des Cercles Catholiques d'ouvrières* (both Catholic Worker Group Federations) which arose in France at the end of 1871 and founded the *Primaria Associazione Cattolica Artistica ed Operaia di Carità Recipoca* (Primary Catholic Craft and Workers Association for Mutual charity), very active among craft-workers and other workers with a number of affiliated Associations especially in central Italy. The dynamic Domenico Jacobini was also its Ecclesiastical Assistant and its President was Marquis Girolano Cavalletti, replaced in 1876 by Count Francesco Vespignani who, among the many charitable activities of the association, had included the school of arts and trades in 1876.<sup>42</sup>

On another front, the *Circolo di S. Francesco di Sales della Gioventù* and the *Associazione Cattolica di Venezia* launched the idea of convening a National Catholic Congress. This was then held in Venice from 12–16 June 1874. Its five sections were indicative of the major centres of interest which had polarised the thinking and work of militant Catholics for decades: religious and social works, charity, instruction and education, the press, Christian art. Instruction and education were considered the chief sector. The clearest and most incisive speaker, Sicilian Baron Vito d'Ondes Reggio (1811–85), touching on the question of the absolutely religious nature of education, stated unequivocally that so long as the State monopolised education, Catholics would inevitably be opposed to obligatory teaching, it being 'contrary to the sacred duties and rights of parental authority.'<sup>43</sup>

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*Ottocento e Novecento*. Brescia, Morcelliana 1991, pp. 181-188; ID., *Don Bosco e l'educazione giovanile: la "Storia d'Italia"*, in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare* a ed. F. Traniello. Turin, SEI 1987, pp. 81-111. Handwritten item by G. BERTO, *Appunti sul viaggio di D. Bosco a Roma nel 1873*, pp. 1-2. Don Bosco's words find a surprising echo in Catholic historiography to follow: Cf. For example, G. MARTINA, *La Chiesa nell'età del liberalismo...*, pp. 64-67 (*Una Chiesa più pura e più giovane*); ID., *La fine del potere temporale e il ricongiungimento di Roma all'Italia*. Atti del XLV Congresso di storia del Risorgimento italiano. Roma 1972, pp. 89-154.

42 Cf. F. MALGERI, *La stampa quotidiana e periodica e l'editoria*, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico 1/1 I fatti e le idee*. Casale Monferrato, Marietti 1981, pp. 273-295. Cfr. M. CASELLA, *Il cardinale Domenico Maria Jacobini (1837-1900)*, in "Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento" 58 (1971) 560-567; ID., *Mons. Giacomo Radini Tedeschi, l'Opera dei Congressi e il movimento cattolico romano (1890-1900)*, "Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia" 24 (1970) 137-139 (no. 22), 153-154 (no. 54), 156 (no. 57).

43 Cf. *Primo Congresso Cattolico italiano tenutosi in Venezia dal 12 al 16 giugno 1874. Atti*, Vol. I. Bologna, tip. Felsinea 1874, pp. 97-113, with the Congress motion approved by "thunderous applause" "amid indescribable enthusiasm" (p. 146); "La Civiltà Cattolica" continues this idea in: *Dell'insegnamento*

This view was also offered in 1877 in the course of discussions on the Coppino law on obligatory elementary schooling. Both the Casati and Coppino laws, moreover, recognised the freedom to establish elementary and secondary non-State schools. The Work of the Congresses was officially set up and approved by the Pope in September 1875, almost at the same time as the *Daniel O'Connell League for the freedom of Catholic teaching in Italy*.<sup>44</sup>

To guide Catholics who had to fit in with legislation and regulation of public and private school education in Italy, in the years that followed the 'General Permanent Committee for the Work of the Congresses, and Catholic Committees in Italy compiled and published' a clear and detailed *Manual of School legislation in Italy for use by Catholic Committees and fathers of families*.<sup>45</sup>

The 'neither elected nor elector' slogan became even more insistent for intransigent Catholics, a contrast with liberal Catholics, after the breaching of Porta Pia. In March 1871 it became an authoritative rule under the Roman Penitentiary's *non expedire* translated into a binding norm in response to the Italian bishops in 1874: *Attentis omnibus circumstantiis, non expedit*. Abstaining from politics became the dominant theme of the Catholic movement which came together in the Work of the Congresses.

Don Bosco remained outside the Congresses and kept the Salesian Cooperators Association out of it too, although some of them did take an active part. Without explicitly distancing himself from the most important organisation in militant Catholicism, generally of intransigent tendencies, Don Bosco chose other paths personally and for his institutions, and other approaches. His temperament and well-rooted convictions as a priest available to all kinds of encounters led him in fact to share monarchical loyalties, statutory legality, and to take a softer line on institutional differences, all considered a dominant feature of subalpine Catholics in the 19th century. They had learned to live in peaceful co-existence while being sure of their fidelity to the bishop and to the Pope.<sup>46</sup> However, neither Don Bosco nor his works could be thought of as being outside the so-called Catholic movement, even if the specialised historiography of the first (Salesian) generation did not give it special attention.<sup>47</sup> Instead, as Pietro Stella notes, 'More than once, Don Bosco's youthful oratories and schools for youngsters became the object of planning and were proposed as models for Catholic social action. At the very least they were seen as a potential nursery for forces that could be counted on.'<sup>48</sup>

As can be documented by so many of Don Bosco's conferences and writings, the manifest purpose of his supportive and educational institutions was the formation of the 'good Christian and upright Citizen.'<sup>49</sup> This was an approach through socially committed associations like the mutual aid

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*religioso nelle scuole, Dell'istruzione primaria obbligatoria, La scuola primaria secondo le aspirazioni del liberalismo*, in "La Civiltà Cattolica" 23 (1872) III 678-688; IV 6-17; 27 (1876) III 257-269.

44 Cf. G. DE ROSA, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia*, 2 Vols Bari, Laterza 1966; ID., *Il movimento cattolico in Italia. Dalla Restaurazione all'età giolittiana*. Bari, Laterza 1988; L. OSBAT – F. PIVA (Ed.), *La "Gioventù Cattolica" dopo l'Unità 1868-1968*. Rome, Studium 1972; P. SCOPPOLA, *Chiesa e Stato nella storia d'Italia. Storia documentaria dall'Unità alla Repubblica*. Bari, Laterza 1967.

45 Bologna, At the Office of the Ed. Committee 1883, 207 pp.

46 Cf. F. TRANIELLO, *Lineamenti storici della presenza dei cattolici in Piemonte*, in "Quaderni del Centro Studi Carlo Trabucco", 2. Turin, 1982, pp. 13-15.

47 Cf. P. STELLA, *I Salesiani e il movimento cattolico in Italia fino alla prima guerra mondiale*, RSS 2 (1983) 223-228; A. CANEVARO, *Cinquant'anni di storiografia sul "movimento cattolico" italiano*, in E. FUMASI (ed.), *Mezzo secolo di ricerca storiografica sul movimento cattolico in Italia dal 1861 al 1945. Contributo ad una bibliografia*. Brescia, La Scuola 1995, pp. 7-72; ID., *La storiografia del movimento cattolico (1980-1995)*, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico. Aggiornamento 1980-1995*. Genoa, Marietti 1997, pp. 137-138.

48 P. STELLA, v. *Bosco, Giovanni*, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia 1860-1890*, vol. II *I protagonisti*. Casale Monf., Marietti 1982, p. 55.

49 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Buon cristiano e onesto cittadino. Una formula dell'"umanesimo educativo" di don Bosco*, RSS 13 (1994) 7-75.



societies and workers clubs. Thanks to them and in addition to other parallel initiatives like the press and publishing, he felt he was fully involved in social action which was also in a certain sense political though more in deed than word. Two entries by Fr Barberis in his chronicles are also an explicit testimony to this. The first refers to a conversation on 16 March 1876. In a rare pragmatic statement on advice given to Fr Durando, his collaborator for schools and external relations, Don Bosco commented that he should 'find some excuse' to decline an invitation to take part as a representative of the Congregation at the Bologna Congress. He has said that 'we prefer working underhand and doing, rather than talking; they talk a lot at this meeting and also do good but there is much less action than there is talking.' He also regretted the Catholic Congresses silence on the *Catholic Readings*.<sup>50</sup>

Complementary to this but different again was his attitude to the Piedmontese Catholic Congress held on 11, 12 December 1878. Some of the bishops and speakers from other dioceses taking part went to the Oratory to meet Don Bosco. The chronicler informs us that there were no Salesians at the Congress. But 20 lire [around 70 euro] were sent along with a letter of support via the non-Salesian priest who was a guest at the Oratory. Also noted down were two facts that were described as a real 'glory for us at home:' the 'spontaneous and unanimous ovation' by participants when a speaker mentioned Don Bosco's name, as well as a mention in *L'Unita Cattolica* of those who had sent a letter of support for the Congress. Don Bosco was not especially enamoured of these mentions, the chronicler noted carefully, since he did not like 'appearing in public in these matters. He wanted to avoid coming under the gaze of Government authorities.'<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps not without good reason! There was an episode on 6 August 1876, when Don Bosco allowed the college at Lanzo to be used by municipal authorities for a reception for members of the new Left-wing Government<sup>52</sup> and a little later was it just a coincidence that he experienced their centralising intransigence with a decree (in practice avoided) closing down secondary classes at Valdocco?<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Specialised works in activity for the young

One of the great concerns of popes, bishops and priests from the beginning of the century, as we have seen,<sup>54</sup> was the 'criminal and manifold wiles in these saddest of times with which enemies of God and mankind try to pervert and corrupt especially immature youth.'<sup>55</sup> At the other end of the scale, there was a degree of initial suspicion regarding adults already won over to the revolution and less bound to the Church and religious practice. This led to putting an emphasis on the almost virgin world of the young to be 'immunised', protected and equipped as the new protagonists of religious rebirth and social renewal.

There were so many institutions that addressed themselves to the young. They can be classified under two categories: structured (infant schools, primary, secondary, technical schools) and open (oratories, patronages, associations, societies and youth clubs).

France and Italy, especially in the north, but no less so in Rome, were teeming with activity on behalf of the young, boys and girls, especially if poor and abandoned, though this activity was hardly tightly organised, nor was its pedagogy particularly advanced. We refer to schools of every

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50 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 5, p. 37.

51 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 14, pp. 52-53; cf. "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 291 and 292, 13 and 14 December 1878, pp. 1162 and 1166.

52 Cf. Chap. 23, § 2.

53 Cf. Chap. 28, § 2.

54 Cf. Chap. 1, § 2.

55 Cf. Apost. Lett. from Pius IX to Bishops of the Two Sicilies, *Cum nuper* on 20 January 1858, in *Pii Pontificis Maximi Acta* pars I, vol. III 12.

kind, kindergartens or infant schools, craft workshops, primary and secondary schools, boarding schools for boys and girls.<sup>56</sup>

There was a contrast between the limited impact of plentiful pedagogical reflection by Catholic Spiritualism and Religious Congregations, and the spread of their respective educational practices aimed at introducing a complex of informed values and principles of Christian life deep within the life of society. In practice, other than the parish with its specific pastoral activities, and the confraternities, 'religious Congregations especially those dedicated to forming the younger generations, knew how to foster and spread a range of Christian values and provide some significant responses to the new educational and social needs of the Peninsula, though not always in a consistent manner nor free of interruptions.'<sup>57</sup>

From a preventive perspective, of particular importance prior to all others were the infant schools, introduced by Ferrante Aporti (1791–1858) in an Italy where elementary education was not possible for many children. These schools existed thanks to private charity, bringing together children from two and a half to six years of age from all social classes, with preference given to needy families. The purpose was to infuse and develop, 'ideas and sentiments' in them which were 'in keeping with their home duties,' while learning 'the first rudiments of reading, writing and counting.' They spread rapidly, especially in Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. They were especially providential in regions where textile manufacturing employed women forced to work long and difficult hours, leaving their children, including little ones, to their own devices.<sup>58</sup> It was a radical model of educative and social prevention which Aporti saw as a first step in an integrated public school system.<sup>59</sup>

On the question of prevention from the outset of one's life, the industrial era English philanthropist Robert Owen (1771–1858), who initiated infant schools/kindergarten in 1809, had already said it was 'to prevent crimes.' He asked 'the English Government and Nation to combine forces to organise a clearly preventive, easy and practical system to educate and instruct, for all good and useful purposes, those who were ignorant and uneducated, in order to put a stop to ignorance and poverty and the vice and unhappiness that flow from this, and which are spreading so rapidly throughout the Empire.'<sup>60</sup>

He had already touched on this issue many times earlier. Addressing himself always to those with political and economic clout, he had insisted; 'Instead of punishing crimes after allowing human nature to be formed in such a way as to commit them, let them adopt the only means we can to prevent them: measures by which is possible to prevent them with the greatest of ease.' 'We have been brought up in such a way that we do not hesitate to dedicate years and spend millions identifying people responsible for crimes and lessening the countless ills afflicting human kind

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56 Cf. L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra restaurazione e unificazione*. Brescia, La Scuola 1994; R. SANI (ed.), *Chiesa, educazione e società nella Lombardia del primo Ottocento. Gli istituti religiosi tra impegno educativo e nuove forme di apostolato (1815/1860). Studi e documenti*. Milano, Centro Ambrosiano 1996; G. ROCCA, *Regolamenti di educandati e istituti religiosi in Italia dagli inizi dell'Ottocento al 1861*, in "Rivista di scienze dell'educazione" 36 (1998) 161/342; L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio/culturali in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*. Brescia, La Scuola 1999.

57 L. PAZZAGLIA, *Chiesa, società civile ed educazione nell'Italia post-napoleonica*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia...*, pp. 54-55.

58 F. APORTI, *Relazione sugli asili d'infanzia...*, in "Annali universali di statistica", vol. 85, 1845, pp. 380-381; cf. F. DELLA PERUTA, *Infanzia e famiglia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento*, in "Studi Storici" 20 (1979) 473-476.

59 Cf. C. SIDERI *Ferrante Aporti. Sacerdote, italiano, educatore. Biografia del fondatore delle scuole infantili in Italia sulla base di nuova documentazione inedita*, Milan, F. Angeli 1999, pp. 350-407.

60 *Osservazioni sugli effetti del sistema industriale*, in R. OWEN, *Per una nuova concezione della società*, Bari, Laterza 1971, p. 133

today.’<sup>61</sup>

Aporti’s preschools were also accepted by female Religious Institutions, using his original formula which soon came into combinations and conflict with other approaches especially Fröbel’s ‘kindergartens’.<sup>62</sup>

In 1883, Salesian Superior Fr Francis Cerruti wrote about Italy’s opportunity to ‘found both Aporti’s and Frobel’s approaches, that is, to take pedagogy back to the essentially Italian system of Vittorino da Feltre,’ as he himself did by writing and proposing the *Regulations and curriculum for the infant schools of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians preceded by an historical outline of the origins and institution of these schools in Italy*.<sup>63</sup>

For older children there were particularly innovative institutions aimed not only at the religious apostolate strictly so called, but also cultural and human formation promoted through Sunday schools and Night schools in literary and general education, music and singing, drama and recreational activities.<sup>64</sup>

Interest in youth works also encouraged development of youth spirituality, especially based on the, ‘Saint for young people,’ St Aloysius Gonzaga (1868–91). Gregory XVI extended his liturgical commemoration to the Universal Church and there were solemn celebrations for the centenary of his birth and death. By following him, young people were protected from considering a gospel lifestyle to be sad, the enemy of their carefree nature, opposed to their desire for happiness. This echoed the liberating advice of the biblical *Servite Domino in Laetitia* (Serve the Lord in gladness) and St Philip Neri’s ‘jump, make as much noise as you want, so long as you do not sin.’ Young people found the means in the Church and places they liked to gather in, for opening themselves up joyfully to a life of holiness: means such as prayer, the sacraments, devotions to Our Lady; encouragement to discover that fulfilment of duty can be gratifying and obedience reassuring; freedom from the turbulence of degrading passions, encouragement to be charitable to their neighbour. And when life seemed to be difficult, the invitation was to look to the goal, eternal happiness, drawing inspiration from the young martyrs of the early Christian centuries like Tarcisius, Pancratius, Giovina, Lucy and Agnes.<sup>65</sup>

Often the founders or refounders of this kind of activity and these institutions added other activities and institutions. They considered them essential for responding to the varied needs and questions of the young, and people in a wide range of material and spiritual circumstances. Prominent among these was the Apostolate of the Press, an antidote to what was considered the most dangerous abuse of the freedoms granted in 1848, with the dissemination of books, booklets, irreligious, heretical, anticlerical and subversive magazines and newspapers, which became even more dangerous as literacy improved among the masses, and schooling and culture were extended to the middle class. In the previously referenced Encyclical *Nostis et Nobiscum* at the end of 1849, Pius IX encouraged the Italian bishops to oppose perverse literature with a small amount of literature aimed at strengthening the Faith and giving healthy instruction to

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61 R. OWEN, *Per una nuova concezione della società...*, pp. 23, 28-29; cf. also pp. 40-41, 46, 50, 52, 91.

62 Cf. T. TOMASI, *L’educazione infantile tra Chiesa e Stato*. Firenze, Vallecchi 1978, esp. pp. 80-94; R. S. DI POL, *Fröbel e il Fröbelismo in Italia*, in “Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche” 6 (1999) 179-218.

63 S. Benigno Canavese, *Tip. e Libr. Salesiana* 1885, pp. 10-11. He used almost identical expressions in his *Storia della pedagogia in Italia dalle origini a’ giorni nostri*. Torino, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1883, pp. 263-265; cf. Chap. 29, § 4.2.

64 Cf. L. CAIMI *Il contributo educativo degli oratori e dell’associazionismo giovanile dall’unità nazionale alla prima guerra mondiale*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali in Italia...*, pp. 629-696. The essay by Caimi is supported by a copious bibliography.

65 Cf. P. STELLA, *Santi per giovani e santi giovani nell’Ottocento*, in E. FATTORINI (ed.), *Santi, culti, simboli...*, pp. 563-586.

people.<sup>66</sup> Widespread illiteracy was certainly a barrier, just the same, though gains were made, especially from halfway through the century, with a variety of published popular material of an informative, moral, generically catechetical, recreative or 'pleasant reading' kind: almanacs, flyers, booklets, books, bulletins, periodical collections of various kinds. These often came into conflict with various 'isms' around them – indifferentism, liberalism, secularism, scientism, Protestantism, Communism, and Socialism. Already in 1852 the *Civiltà Cattolica* offered a lengthy review of 'associations' or subscriptions to collections of good literature: the *Biblioteca Cattolica* (Catholic Library, 1841), *Tesoro Cattolica* (Catholic Treasure, 1849), *Collection of Good Books on Truth and Virtue* (1850), all from Naples. There was a Tuscan Society for dissemination of Good Books (Florence, 1850) and the *Collection of Good Books in support of the Catholic Religion* (Turin, 1849), the *Moral and Ascetical Collection* (Milan, 1850), the *New Collection of Religious Works* (Venice, 1826-39), the *Propagation of Catholic Writing Aimed at Spreading the Truths of the Christian Religion Among the People* (Rome, 1849) and the *Catholic Association* (Imolo, 1850) and so on.<sup>67</sup>

This last named, the *Catholic Association*, announced in 'Correspondence from Turin' in 1853 that 'While on the one hand heterodox propaganda works with means that are proper to it, viz., seduction through money, falsities in order to buy proselytes. On the other hand, God does not fail to provide for his Church, raising up men fired up with holy zeal who oppose heresy's inroads with the power of persuasion and through the apostolate. Of eminent worth among them, though not just for showing virtue, is an outstanding priest called D. Bosco who has often even won the admiration of his enemies for his prodigious charity and kindness to the poor and abandoned children of ordinary folk, for whom he is a father and teacher. This worthy priest, along with others, has published a series of instructional booklets on the Catholic Religion and morals under the title *Letture Cattoliche*, (Catholic Readings).'<sup>68</sup>

There was an increase in the number of New Year messages [*Strenna*, in Italian] and almanacs. *Civiltà Cattolica* had this to say: 'If we are saddened at seeing how many errors are disseminated by the *Strenne* and how the corrupters of faith and morals take advantage of them, we gain no small delight at finding that not a few of these *Strenne* nurture the holiest truths and draw people to virtue.'<sup>69</sup> Then presenting *Il Silvio Pellico-Regalo ai giovani per la primavera e per la villeggiatura d'autunno del 1861* (Naples 1861) (Silvio Pellico – Gift to the young for spring and autumn holidays 1861) in two small volumes, it said: 'a collection with the same purpose as the *Piccole Letture Cattoliche* (Little Catholic Readings) in Bologna, the *Letture amene ed oneste* (Pleasant and Decent Readings) in Modena and other similar In Siena, Turin, Rome; that is they provide an antidote for the scourge of so many bad and poisonous books infecting Italy and sully the innocence and faith of immature youth ... It will be issued every two months and the next edition will be the *Letture giovanili, religiose ed amene* (Youthful religious and pleasant readings).'<sup>70</sup>

## 5. Key players in the mission to youth in Italy

The history of religion has paid plentiful attention to popular missions taken up once more with renewed vigour at the beginning of the 19th century as a means of recovering the Faith after all the

66 Cf. *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, pars I, vol. I 208.

67 *Le associazioni cattoliche per la diffusione dei buoni libri in Italia*, "La Civiltà Cattolica" 3 (1852), IV 681-693; *Tre altre Società per la diffusione dei buoni libri*, ibid., 4 (1853) I 210-212.

68 *Stati Sardi (Nostra Corrispondenza)*, "La Civiltà Cattolica" 4 (1853) II 204.

69 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 12 (1861) II 221: it referred to *Un po' di tutto per tutti ovvero Mischiatura di molte e varie cose dilettevoli ed istruttive. Strenna per l'anno 1861*. Anno I, II improved ed., Milan, tip. e libr. Arciv. Boniardi Pogliani, 256 pp.

70 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 13 (1862) I 216.

powerful cultural, social and political upheavals.<sup>71</sup>

But broader and more ongoing was a new or renewed kind of mission within Christianity. By contrast with the popular missions which took place within canonical Church structures like dioceses and parishes, it developed on a broader scale and in a certain sense beyond these structures for people who did not flock to them and whom, generally speaking, they did not reach out to. These people were abandoned youth, attracted to their own gathering spots or to schools and technical centres which were not run by parishes, oratories or associations. And besides this group there were other members of the faithful they reached out to in hostels, hospitals, prisons, associations, so the word and grace of the gospel might reach them too.

There was an extraordinary flourishing of Institutes of consecrated men and women who provided stability and continuity to such initiatives during the century. It is within this framework, both before and after the 19th century's subversive legislation, that there was an outstanding renewal of existing Religious Orders, Institutes and the birth of hundreds of others, both male and female. Between 1819 and 1860 the Holy See approved some 40 such Italian Congregations alone. A similar number developed and flourished in the years to follow.<sup>72</sup>

It had been well predicted by Cavour on 2 May 1855 during debate on the 'laws of convents', when he replied to observations that by sanctioning the principle of freedom of association they were opening the door to the establishment of an even greater number of Religious Congregations as had happened in Belgium and France. He admitted with some regret that given freedom, for sure Religious Congregations could arise which were more able to respond to 'the spirit and needs of the times' working 'within limits useful to civil society' in the true interests of the State and of religion itself.<sup>73</sup> Women took advantage of these broader opportunities in Congregations or Associations, as players in a range of educational and welfare roles, with keen and enduring support from Civil society and the Church.<sup>74</sup>

St Gaspare Bertoni (1777–1853) initiated a recreational kind of oratory in Verona in 1802 in the guise of a 'Marian cohort', and in 1816 founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ (the Stigmatines).<sup>75</sup>

Not far away, in Venice, more serious psychological, economic and social problems followed the elimination of the Republic and its cession to Hapsburg control in 1797. The aristocracy, no longer in the forefront, and even the ordinary people, suffered a profound crisis. Not only did Venice suffer a severe population loss from 145,000 to 100,000 between 1791 and 1821, but economic, cultural and moral depression as well. On his 1821 pastoral visitation, the Patriarch, Pyrker, found poverty everywhere, estimating some 40,000 as being below the poverty line. It was in this context that two

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71 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Catechesi e catechismi tra ripetizione, fedeltà e innovazione...*, in *Storia della Chiesa in Italia...*, pp. 41-43; ID., *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi*, pp. 360-371; G. VERUCCI, *Cattolicesimo e laicismo nell'Italia contemporanea...*, pp. 109-115.

72 Cf. G. ROCCA, *Le nuove fondazioni religiose femminili in Italia dal 1800 al 1860*, in *Problemi di storia...*, pp. 107-192; ID., *Riorganizzazione e sviluppo degli Istituti Religiosi dalla soppressione del 1866 a Pio XII (1939-58)*, in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa. Dal Vaticano I al Vaticano II*. Naples, Edizioni Dehoniane 1988, pp. 239-294; ID., *Donne religiose. Contributo a una storia della condizione femminile in Italia nei secoli XIX e XX*, "Claretianum" 32 (1992), Parte II: *Dal 1801 al 1866/1873*, pp. 67-157; Parte III: *Dal 1866/1873 alla fine del secolo*, pp. 159-201; ID. *Istituti religiosi in Italia fra Ottocento e Novecento*, in M. ROSA (ed.), *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*. Bari, Laterza 1992, pp. 207-256; F. DE GIORGI, *Le congregazioni religiose dell'Ottocento e il problema dell'educazione nel processo di modernizzazione in Italia*, "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche" 1 (1994) 169-205; G. ROCCA (ed.), *Regolamenti di educandi e istituti religiosi...*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 36 (1998) 161-342.

73 CAVOUR C. BENSO di, *Discorsi parlamentari*, vol. IX. Firenze, Eredi Botta 1870, pp. 274-275.

74 Cf. L. SCARAFFIA and G. ZARRI (ed.), *Donne e fede. Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*. Rome-Bari, Laterza 1994, pp. V-X, 366-369, 448-477.

75 Cf. N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Vita e pensiero del beato Gaspare Bertoni agli albori dell'800 veronese*, Parte I. Roma, Postulazione Generale Stigmatini 1975, pp. 327-330.

priests of the nobility, Anton Angelo (1772–1858) and Marcantonio Cavanis (1774–1853) founded the ‘School of Charity’ in 1804 under the banner of charity and education. It was destined to ‘provide freely for the education of abandoned children and others whose parents had not given or were able to give them the help they needed.’ Their program was ‘education of the young regarding three issues: the body, the intellect and the heart, the last-named being the most important and therefore the most essential for a wise institution to provide. In fact, of what benefits is it for the youngster to be agile in body but dissolute and corrupt of heart?’<sup>76</sup> At the two brothers’ invitation in 1810, Maddalene di Canossa (1774–1835) founded a similar school for girls in Venice.

At around the same time in Brescia, a city of the former Republic of Venice and also under Hapsburg control, Blessed Ludovico Pavoni (1784–1849) became very active. He had noted that Brescia saw to the Christian education and upbringing of ‘cultured and civilised’ youngsters from ‘unions’, ‘congregations and oratories’ but left out were ‘the most needy’ children who were despicable and ill-equipped.<sup>77</sup> He founded a Congregation for them at St Barnaba’s church, attaching an oratory to it in 1819 and, in 1821, ‘an Institute which was a family or school and workshop at the same time.’ In 1831 there were workshops for printing, copper engraving, bookbinding, a stationery store, a silversmith’s for Church sacred vessels and the like and also others for blacksmithing, carpentry, metal and wood turning, shoe making.<sup>78</sup>

Something quite original in Rome was the spread of the declaredly apostolic work of Saint Vincent Pallotti (1795–1850), founder and leader of the Pious Society of Catholic Apostolate in an atmosphere of Catholic restoration. It was made up of priests and brothers whose purpose was ‘to promote God’s glory and propagate the Catholic Faith by every spiritual and temporal means and rekindle charity anywhere in the world.’<sup>79</sup> Their rule laid down that ‘Among the many works the Rector can assign, he will prefer to entrust clerics, other suitable individuals, experts, zealous laity with assistance and will prefer the cooperation of oratories, congregations [=groups] of young people, works of spiritual and corporal charity for the sick in hospitals, teaching in parishes or hospitals or prisons or elsewhere where the need is greatest.’<sup>80</sup>

The broad activity of instructing and educating the less cultured classes was promoted through the regular press. In Turin, this was achieved by the initiative of people working closely with popular institutions like the infant, elementary, Sunday and night schools. The founder of the *Letture popolari* (Popular Readings) from 1837–41, Lorenzo Valerio (1810–65),<sup>81</sup> announced its intended contents in the first number: ‘popular accounts always spontaneously offering a moral and religious truth, simple, easy ideas from history, geography and physics, medical information especially concerning hygiene,’ pointing out ‘charitable institutions’ which Piedmont abounded in, for example ‘the Advocate and Procurator of the Poor,’ the Savings Bank, the ‘Rosmine Shelter,’ the free drawing school, the Sisters of Charity’s Home of Mercy. Valuable moral and social results

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76 Cf. G. DE ROSA, *I fratelli Cavanis e la società religiosa veneziana nel clima della Restaurazione*, “Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa”, no. 4, July-Dec. 1973, pp. 165-186; V. BILONI, *Le libere scuole dei fratelli Cavanis*, “Pedagogia e Vita” 1953, pp. 397-408.

77 *Organizzazione e Regolamento dei giovani sotto la protezione di S. Luigi Gonzaga eretta nell’Oratorio di S. M. di Passione ed aggregata alla Prima Primaria del Collegio Romano*, in *Raccolta ufficiale di documenti e memorie d’archivio*. Brescia, Opera Pavoniana 1947, p. 9; cf. R. BERTOLDI *Lodovico Pavoni educatore*. Milano, Ancora 1949; G. GARIONI BERTOLOTTI, *Verso il mondo del lavoro. Venerabile Lodovico Pavoni*. Milan, Ancora 1963

78 *Regolamento del Pio Istituto eretto in Brescia... a ricovero ed educazione de’ Figli Poveri ed Abbandonati*. Brescia, Tipografia del Pio Istituto in S. Barnaba 1831, in *Raccolta ufficiale...*, pp. 57-58.

79 V. PALOTTI, *Scritti apostolici minori*, ed. F. Moccia. Roma, General Curia of the Society of Catholic Apostolate 1968, pp. 57-58.

80 *Regola della Congregazione dei Preti e fratelli coadjutori dell’Apostolato Cattolico. “Copia Lambruschini”, 1846*, ed. F. Moccia. Rome 1972, p. 76.

81 On the *Letture popolari* (1837-1841) and the *Letture di famiglia* (1842-1846), cf. D. BERTONI JOVINE (ed.), *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento*, Vol. I. Milan, Feltrinelli 1959, pp. XXXVI-XLV.

expressed in ways that complied with an ever vigilant State censor were gained through these: 'love for work, respect and love for public authorities, holy affection for the family.' The magazine's articles were largely drawn from publications by recognised writers such as , 'Lambruschine, Pestalozzi, St Francis de Sales, Franklin, Can. Schmid, Godwin, Miss Mary Edgeworth, Fénelon, Cantù, A. Mauri, M. Sartorie, M.e Ridolfi etc.'<sup>82</sup>

The *Popular Readings* were suppressed in March 1841 for an article considered to have gone too far in stating the foreseeable future social power of the masses. However in 1842 Valerio was successful in picking up the initiative once more with the traditional *Lecture di famiglia* or Family Readings, a weekly magazine on moral, civil, and religious education. This too was suppressed, in 1847. It had sought to soften the harshness of social differences by recalling the 'sweet name of the family' a sum total of affections and duties almost the paradigm of a 'homeland' where 'all classes of society share common feelings and work together in a noble sentiment of concord and brotherliness.' The founder and chief editor went on to say that therefore 'we tell the poor about the charity of the rich, and we will tell the rich about the virtues of the unlearned, their hardworking lives, the needs of the poor, and we disseminate the principle of charity and morals that alone can make men happy.' It also sought to disseminate 'the rudiments of physics, chemistry, natural history, hygiene, technology.' He continued; "through stories, parables, explanations, sketches, popular songs we try to show everyone the real usefulness of *Instruction, a Welfare System, Association*, the need and dignity of *Work, Education*, the holiness of *Charity, Morality, Religion*. We will note the progress of institutions which help all classes to improve, especially the poorer classes, institutions like infant schools, saving banks, industrial teaching, and instruction.'<sup>83</sup> He had recourse to contributions already published by a good forty or so writers by way of collaboration. The magazine inherited the earlier one's motto: 'ignorance is the best and the worst of poverty' and there was no lack of information on exemplary experiences of popular education, free arts, and trade schools, Sunday and night schools, courses run for peasant folk, initiatives for girls' education through night classes, infant schools, elementary schools, certain charitable institutes in Turin offering technical and work-related education, such as the *Albergo di Virtù*, the *Ospizio di Carità*, the *Ospizio delle Rosmine*, *La Mendicizia Istruita*, the Free drawing school at St Pelagia's. One of the correspondents, the learned Fr G. F. Baruffi (1801-75), writing about the Adult Night School begun at St. Pelagia's in 1846 by the De La Salle Brothers, explained how the first of these had been opened in Turin 'a few years back' through 'the generosity of that outstanding gentleman Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio.'<sup>84</sup>

In 1843, the future Archbishop and Cardinal, Carlo Morichini, published a report on *Night Schools in Rome*. The magazine in question had often praised his work *On Institutes of public charity, primary education and prisons in Rome*. There were any number of such institutes, some with ancient roots, and they had been 'federated' into an 'Institute' over which the Cardinal Vicar presided. They welcomed young workers in the evenings, both on weekdays and weekends. There they were given religious instruction, the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, the principles of line and more ornate drawing, geometry as applied to their trades.<sup>85</sup> It was with regard to the night schools that Ottavio Gigli (1816–76) set out to publish a popular education Weekly called *L'Artigianello. Letture morali ed istruttive per servire alle scuole notturne di religione e alle famiglie* (The Young Artisan, Moral and instructional readings for the use of religious night schools and families). It flourished from 1 January 1845 to October 1848. Among its *Protectors* and *Contributors* were some well-known names from the Roman clergy and the wealthy, including Morichini and Duke Scipione Salviati, both in touch with Don Bosco at a later date. The idea of the

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82 *Due parole che possono servire di prospetto*, "Lecture popolari", No. 1, 1837, pp. 1-2.

83 *Introduzione*, "Lecture di famiglia", Anno I, no. 1, 12 March 1842, p. 1.

84 "Lecture di famiglia", Anno V, no. 9, 28 February 1846, pp. 65-67.

85 "Lecture di famiglia", Anno II, no. 27, 8 July 1843, pp. 209-212.

Weekly was to contribute to the instruction and education of the children of the people, key ways to prevent 'the crimes committed by the lower levels of society.' It was meant to help the night schools for artisans/tradesmen 'who were such an important part of society. Teaching would cover the following subjects: morality, public hygiene, technology, the lives of public benefactors of humanity, religious and secular history, natural history, topics of interest.'<sup>86</sup>

There was also abundant information on popular education initiatives, night schools, Sunday schools, the Papal States and elsewhere. The *Artigianello* would also have availed itself of original articles, already published contributions by good writers. Other than Ottavio Gigli, the more frequently recurring names were Cesare Cantù, Luigi Alessandro Parravicini, Gaspare Gozzi, Francesco Tecini, Alessandro Marchetti. One notes a broader outreach from the time Pius IX came on the scene, one indication of this was the subtitle of the Weekly for the last two years (1847–48), *Giornale morale religioso ed istruttivo per l'educazione del popolo* (Moral, religious and instructional newspaper for the educators of the people).

Institutions like the oratory, arts and trades workshops, even closer to the ones so characteristic of Don Bosco, were opened and developed in Turin. A pioneer in this regard was Fr Giovanni Cocchi (1813-95), parish priest of the Annunciation parish. As an aspiring missionary in Rome in 1839 he had come in contact with an oratory 'for reasonably well-off youngsters' and on return to Turin in 1840 he founded the Guardian Angel Oratory in the very poor Moschino district on the city's outskirts. He moved it closer to the centre, in Vanchiglia, in 1841, providing religious, theatrical and gymnastic activities.<sup>87</sup> In 1847 he set up Sunday and night classes for working boys 13 years of age and older. *L'Educatore* published his 'curriculum', signed by the Directors, Fr Cocchi, assistant priest at the Annunciation Parish, and Fr Roberto Murialdo, Chaplain to His Majesty the King.<sup>88</sup>

Other initiatives prepared for and accompanied an important reform introduced in the State by law on 11 September 1845: the use of the metric decimal system from 1 February 1850. It was a provision the De La Salle Brothers were especially prepared to tackle since their roots were in the French school culture where the system was already in place by law since 2 November 1801. Already in 1833 *Tables for converting old measures into new ones and vice versa* were included in the *New process for Arithmetic for use in Christian Schools* for the Brothers' schools in Turin.<sup>89</sup> In fact, from the time they announced the opening of night classes for 'workers and artists' 'older than 16 years of age' in January 1846, it was explained that 'the metric decimal system' and 'the principles of geometry applied to arts and crafts' would be taught as an essential cultural element for forming tradesmen who were up with the times.<sup>90</sup> Given the immanent introduction of the metric decimal system, the Brothers published texts encouraged by the Inspector of Schools of Method and Primary Schools, Angelo Fava, which were widely distributed: the *Quadro sinottico e dimostrativo dei pesi e delle misure legali del sistema metrico decimale* (1848) (The Synoptic and Demonstrative Chart of legal weights and measures of the metric decimal system) and the *Norma teorico-prattica per l'insegnamento del Sistema Metrico divisa in 30 lezioni* (1849) (Theoretical and practical guidelines for teaching the Metric Decimal System in 30 lessons), and the *Aiutare al popolo piemontese per conoscere senza Maestro il nuovo Sistema dei pesi e misure* (1850) (A little guide for the Piedmontese people for understanding the new system of weights and measures

86 *Prefazione*, "L'Artigianello", anno I, num. 1, 4 January 1845, pp. 7-8.

87 Cf. G. CASALIS, *Dizionario geografico, storico-statistico-commerciale...*, Vol. XXI. Turin, Maspero and Marzorati, s. d., pp. 709-710; A. CASTELLANI, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo*, vol. I. Rome, Tip. S. Pio X 1966, p. 85 and 156, no. 16.

88 "L'Educatore", 1847, fasc. 24, pp. 762-765.

89 Cf. A. FERRARIS, *La diffusione e il successo delle scuole serali dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane negli Stati Sabaudi (1845-1855)*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 62 (1995) no. 3, pp. 159-160.

90 Cf. G. F. BARUFFI, *Scuole serali degli adulti in Santa Pelagia*, "Letture di famiglia", Anno V, num. 9, 28 February 1846, p. 66.



without a teacher).<sup>91</sup>

Aware that the help provided by the festive [weekend, holy days] oratory did not resolve the problem youngsters had, especially their family and social problems, Fr Cocchi began to take a few in to stay, in 1849. Others from the Generala were soon added. They were offered lodgings, food and the possibility of a work placement as apprentices or hired hands. For the essential financial support for this, in 1850 he founded the *Charitable association for poor and abandoned boys*, of which Fr Roberto Murialdo was the most active collaborator, and who drew up its regulations. A Royal Decree on 18 December 1853 gave the association and the *Collegio degli Artigianelli*, its main outcome, legal existence. Under the aegis of its administration with successive Presidents Count Annibale di Saluzzo, Prof. Amedeo Peyron and pedagogue Giam Antonio Rayneri, the college later shifted to where it had more room and its own workshops, at Villa Regina in 1855 and finally, from 1863 onward, in a new building on land that had been State property in Corso Palestro. The College administration was entrusted first to Fr Tasca then Fr Giuseppe Berizzi. Meanwhile from 1852, the creative Fr Cocchi launched into founding an agriculture settlement first at Cavoretto, near Turin, then moved it to Moncucco near Asti, which closed in 1878. Another was then founded at Bruere, near Rivoli. In 1868 he opened a reformatory in Chieri which moved to Bosco Marengo (Alessandria) in 1870. To make his work known, the President, Fr Amedeo Peyron, wrote a clear report on the state of the Artigianello College and the farm at Moncucco. This report was partly reprinted and much approved of by *La Civiltà Cattolica*.<sup>92</sup>

So it was no mean legacy that Leonardo Murialdo (1828–1900) took on when he agreed to run the Artigianelli College on 6 November 1866 and its associated works. In 1878 he opened a Family Home in Turin for young workers and students, and the St Joseph's Institute of Volvera (Turin) in 1881. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that Murialdo became involved in a work he had not started. At Don Bosco's insistent invitation he ran the St Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova from 1857- 1865. And in March 1873 when he decided to found the Congregation of St Joseph to guarantee continuity for his welfare and educational work, he did so not without pressure and reassurances from his closest collaborators and trusted spiritual advisers. However, once he had taken on something, he applied himself to it with maximum dedication and perfection. He undertook journeys through Italy and abroad in order to provide solid structure, spiritual and pedagogical rules and regulations for his youth institutions and Congregation. From Sicily he also went to Tunisia. On a number of occasions he visited welfare institutions and homes in France, Belgium, Holland, England, and nurtured his personal spirituality and that of his followers by spending time at shrines and monasteries. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, backed up with credible experience, the result of his excellent basic humanist, theological and social culture assimilated in childhood and adolescence at school (run by the Scolopians), the Turin university and St Sulpice Seminary in Paris in 1865–66. This was also a good opportunity for him to come into contact with the *Patronages*, the *Oeuvres de jeunesse* and charitable and social societies of Catholics on the other side of the Alps. He even visited similar experiences in London and gave his own particular spin to the preventive style in his educational activities.<sup>93</sup>

In the decades that followed he continued to take part in Congresses held by the *Union des Oeuvres Catholiques de France* in Potiers, Lyons, Bordeaux, Angers, Le Mans, visiting trade schools, agricultural schools, reformatories. More concretely, his daily contact in his own College

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91 Cf. A. FERRARIS, *La diffusione e il successo delle scuole serali...*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 62 (1995), no. 3, pp. 160-161; E. POMATTO, *1845-1995 Centocinquanta anni dall'introduzione del sistema metrico decimale negli Stati Sabaudi*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 62 (1995) no. 2, pp. 97-116; and formerly C. VERRI, *I Fratelli negli Stati Sardi*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 47 (1980) n. 2, pp. 99-105; cap. 7, § 2.1 e 3.1.

92 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 5 (1854) II 332-334.

93 Cf. *I verbali delle adunanze dei maestri del Collegio Artigianelli di Torino (1870-1878)*, ed. G. Dotta. Roma, Libr. Ed. Murialdo 2002.

with poor and abandoned youth, and groups from the Generala who were part of the correctional system facilitated his involvement in Italy through his openness, competence, growing involvement in social questions and matters affecting workers, and in militant Catholic organisations in Turin and at regional and national level. He soon joined the Catholic Workers Union founded by a lawyer, Scala, and others on 29 June 1871.<sup>94</sup> In 1876 he became the Spiritual Assistant of its Promotion Committee and in January 1880 a member of its Central Council. He also encouraged Domenico Giraud (1846–1901) in founding the bulletin known as *Le Unioni Operaie Cattoliche* (Catholic Workers Union) which became *La Voce dell'Operaio* (The Voice of the Worker) in 1863. (95) With support from Archbishop Gastaldi, the Unions established themselves in outlying areas of Turin – Vanchiglia, Borgo Sora, S. Salvario, Borgo Nuovo, S. Donato. He was also involved in the Work of the Congresses and was a member of its Permanent National Committee from 1855 to 1891. At the Florence Congress in 1875 he put forward the idea of founding a society which would sponsor youth released from Houses of Correction similar to the one in Turin. In 1877, thanks to the personal intervention of the Archbishop who was unsure of the Work of the Congresses, Fr Leonardo Murialdo became part of the Piedmontese Regional Committee for that Work. He was actively present in that capacity at three regional Congresses in 1878, 1880, and 1882. At the Mondovi Congress in 1880, he gave a report on the Family Home and agricultural schools. He was also a founding member of the O'Connell League for freedom of teaching in Italy, which came into existence with the Florence Congress. At the 1883 Naples Congress, he gained approval for the *Society Promoting Good Press* which had formed in Turin in February with Gastaldi's approval. At that point it was called the *St Charles Borromeo Association for Spreading Catholic Press*. The first number of its bulletins *La Buona Stampa* came out on January 15, 1884, and female committees for good press were also formed.<sup>95</sup>

A whole range of charitable works opened in Naples at the same time, begun by a Franciscan from the Reformed Friars Minor, a man with keen intellect and irrepressible energy, Blessed Ludovico da Casoria (1814–85). Don Bosco would have met him on a rapid visit to Naples from Rome on 29–30 March 1880, to talk to him about setting up near one of his places at Macao, Rome, where the Sacred Heart Church was under construction.<sup>96</sup> The Franciscan began by improvising assistance to the local Franciscan Family sick, equipping a modern infirmary and pharmacy in the *Palma allo Scudello* House in Capodimonte. He also setup the Moretti work there. There are more than a hundred male and female charitable institutions he established: hospitals, hospices, schools, homes for the sick, black people, orphaned or abandoned boys and girls, deaf mutes, the blind, elderly and poor, reasonably well-off or even wealthy youth.<sup>97</sup> His most typical works were the *Accattoncelli* (young beggars) and its sister institute the *Accattoncelle* at S. Pietro at Aram, Palma, and in another eight centres around the city as well as on the outskirts of Naples and other Italian cities including Macao and the Esquiline Hill in Rome, and in Florence when it was still the capital. Music was taught in all these places and there were workshops for carpenters, furniture makers, shoe makers, piano makers, lute makers, printers, bookbinders, weavers, along with embroidery and sewing.

The Accattoncelli Press, then the Artigianelli Press were renowned for decades. In 1864 he even founded an Academy of Religion and Science with positive results for Italian Catholic intellectuals, but it was blocked by the Archbishop, Sisto Riario Sforza, after its second session. As

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94 Cf. G. DOTTA, «*La Voce dell'Operaio*». *Un giornale torinese tra Chiesa e mondo del lavoro (1876-1933)*. Cantalupa (Turin), Effatà Editrice 2006.

95 Cf. G. DOTTA, *La nascita del movimento cattolico a Torino e l'Opera dei Congressi (1870-1891)*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1999, pp. 124-136, 164-168, 178-179, 246, 271-272, 293-305, 308-316, 323-330, 357-406.

96 G. BERTO, *Appunti sul viaggio di D. Bosco a Roma nel 1880*, pp. 12-17.

97 Cf. A long list of these and others in the *Saggio introduttivo* to P. LUDOVICO DA CASORIA, *Epistolario*, ed. P. Gioachino d'Andrea, Vol. I. Napoli, Provincial Curia of the Friars Minor, 1989, pp. 25-34.

an alternative he immediately founded a magazine, *La Carità*, aimed at clarifying the links between faith and science. He also gave the same name to a boarding school founded in Naples in 1866 for the education of children of the nobility and middle class, where Benedetto Croce was also a pupil and who offered wonderful testimony to it. To support his works, Ludovico da Casoria made use of the Franciscan Tertiaries but then founded two Religious Congregations, the Friars of Charity in 1859, also known as the Bigi Friars, who ceased to exist in 1871, and the Elizabethan Franciscan Sisters or Bigie, in 1862. They are still active in Italy today, and abroad. In connection with cultural initiatives, he was in contact with intellectuals of every political hue, and had very extensive personal connections, as well as through correspondence, while seeking support for his charitable works. He also developed a friendship and commonality of thinking with Umbrian Count Paolo Campello della Spina (1829–1917), a convinced conciliarist, and with the wool textile industrialist from Schio, Alessandro Rossi (1819–95).<sup>98</sup>

## 6. From missionary spirit at home to the foreign missions

As has already emerged, the missionary spirit already experienced by many at home in Italy in the 19th century increasingly became a vocation to *missio ad gentes*. This was in response to a converging set of movements from above and below, from the organisation and leadership of the hierarchy beginning with Pope Gregory XVI, and from the fervour of diocesan and religious priests and faithful in France, Italy, Germany, Austria. In 1819 Pauline Jaricot (1799–1862) founded the Work of the Propagation of the Faith at Lyons, approved by the Holy See in 1837 and recommended by Gregory XVI in his Encyclical *Probe Nostis* on 15 August 1840. The Work of the Holy Childhood also developed in France in 1843. The *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* became the chief publication of the Work of Propagation from 1876. Seminaries, apostolic schools, associations, Institutes and male and female Congregations (predominantly male) were attached to the older missionary Orders which were directly involved in or supported missionary activity: Mondovì, Genoa, Verona, Milan, Parma, Turin, and Rome. The Work of the Propagation of the Faith was established in Turin in 1814 by Cesare d'Azeglio who announced it in *L'Amico d'Italia* in June, but it disappeared in 1828 with the suppression of the Catholic Fellowship, the *Amicizia Cattolica*. It was reborn in 1836, encouraged by Clemente Solaro della Margherita and officially recognised by the King in a letter from the Grand Chancellery on 9 June 1838. It met with broad acceptance in the Piedmont-Sardinian State by bishops, priests, laity more so than in any other Italian State. The *Annales* from Lyons was already allowed back there from 1837. The first Presidents of the Diocesan Council were Canons Pietro Rineri (1838–47), Ottavio Bravo (1847–51) and Giuseppe Ortaldo (1851–80).<sup>99</sup>

We refer to just three areas – Genoa, Verona and Naples – where significant action plans were developed for missionary activity in the African Continent, which was prey to European colonial desires and only partly redeemed by the evangelising passion of courageous missionaries.<sup>100</sup>

One pioneer was the Genoese priest Nicolo Olivieri (1792–1864), who founded the Pious Work of Ransom around 1834, buying back young female slaves from Cairo markets to have them educated in various religious houses in France and Italy so they could become missionaries

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98 Cf. A. CAPECALTRO, *La vita del P. Lodovico da Casoria*. Seconda Edizione. Rome-Tournai, Desclée, Lefebvre e Ci 1893, pp. 392-418; but especially the rich collection of letters, published in three volumes, ed. Gioachino d'Andrea.

99 Cf. Y. ESSERTEL, *L'aventure missionnaire lyonnaise 1815-1862*. Paris, Cerf 2001, pp. 2551; C. BONA, *La rinascita missionaria in Italia. Dalle "Amicizie" all'Opera per la propagazione della fede*. Turin, Edizioni Missioni Consolata 1964.

100 Cf. P. CHIOCCHIETTA, "Eduxit vos de domo servitutis": contributo alla storia della rinascita missionaria nella Chiesa del secolo XIX, in "Euntes Docete" 36 (1983) 209-231, 361-390; 37 (1984) 91-119.

among women back in their own country. Then when Fr Ludovico di Casoria, whom he met in Naples, began a similar work ransoming young African slaves and began accepting them in the school at Palma in 1854, Olivieri began working with male slaves to whom he could send to his Friar friend to find places for. In 1857 Fr Biagio Verri (1819–84) assured Olivieri of his full cooperation. Verri was from Milan, where he had lavished his zeal at the St Aloysius Oratory in Porta Comasina. He succeeded the founder in running the Ransom Work. The idea inspiring the two experiences in Genoa and Naples was identical, summed up clearly by Fr Ludovico, in ‘Saving Africa with Africa.’ At Olivieri’s suggestion a school for the ‘Morette’ girls was established in 1859 as a Sister establishment to the school for black boys at Palma. In 1865 Fr Ludovico obtained the Scellal station in Egypt from Propaganda Fide, for his African missionaries but it had already been abandoned by April 1867. After Verri died in 1884, Leo XIII entrusted the Ransom Work to the Friar from Naples but his death on 30 March 1885, marked the end of it.

At Verona,<sup>101</sup>Fr Nicola Mazza (1790–1865) thought it to be sterile and suicidal to form European missionaries and young blacks and set them up in central Africa ‘amid the worst kinds of barbarities; neither priests nor young people would be safe.’ If they wanted to end up ‘more firmly propagating both Religion and civilised culture they needed to begin with young African men and women who could ‘imbibe’ ‘pure civilisation’ in Europe practically in his male and female institutes in Verona with staff who spoke their language, Arabic.<sup>102</sup>They would educate ‘girls to be women in those savage lands,’ then send them back to Africa in places his priests had already set up ‘for the redemption of those lands.’ He maintained that ‘it will be easy for marriages to take place among them, marriages very useful for fundamental propagation and propagation of the Faith; because from fathers and mothers who have learned religion and civilisation, it will be so easy to propagate both, and pass them on to their own children from infancy.’<sup>103</sup>

Beginning with ideas that originally came from Mazza, a *Plan for the Regeneration of Africa* was outlined in 1864 by Daniele Comboni (1831–81), a member of Mazza’s Religious Institute but who abandoned it after the founder died and his successor renounced missionary activity. As an alternative, Comboni started the African Missions Religious Institute in Verona, which gained diocesan approval in 1871 as the Combonian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As a theologian at Vatican Council I for his bishop, Luigi di Canossa, Comboni prepared a *Postulation pro Nigris Africae Centralis* (Proposal for Black Central Africa) for the Council, signed by a large group of Council fathers.<sup>104</sup> In 1872, he founded the Institute of Pious Mothers of Africa, gaining diocesan approval for it in 1874. The same year Pius IX entrusted the Vicariate of Central Africa to the Combonians and Comboni was appointed Apostolic Provicar, then in 1877, Vicar, and he was elevated to the episcopate. He died suddenly at Khartoum on 9 October 1881.

Comboni’s ‘*Plan*’ was no longer tied in with the ‘Ransom’, which became problematic since the Paris Treaty of 1865 banned the slave trade, though it did continue. *The Plan* was not limited to the activity of one missionary institute but was offered to the Church through Propaganda Fide, which would be in charge, bringing systematic involvement to all who intended to carry out missionary work in Africa. Neither the European missionary thrown suddenly into Africa, nor the African formed in Europe who had absorbed habits foreign to African life, was best suited ‘to propagating

101 Cf. D. CERVATO, *Preti veronesi e missioni nell'Ottocento...*, and N. DALLE VEDOVE, *Le radici dello spirito missionario a Verona*, in *Verona in missione*, vol. I *L'Ottocento, dalla Rivoluzione francese alla prima guerra mondiale*, ed. Giulio Alberto Girardello. Verona, Centro Missionario Diocesano 2000, pp. 65-106 and 107-138.

102 Cf. Letters to Fr Geremia da Livorno, in N. MAZZA, *Scritti*, ed. I. Caliaro. Verona, Casa Editrice Mazziana 2000, pp. 38-43, 49-59, 84-86.

103 Letters of 5 May 1853 to Card.. G. F. Frasoni, Prefect of Propaganda, and 22 Jan. 1858 to his successor, Card. A. Barnab, in N. MAZZA, *Scritti...*, pp. 100-104, 186-190.

104 Cf. Circular to the Council fathers presenting the text of the “Postulato”, on 24 June 1870 in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti*. Rome, Missionari Comboniani 1991, pp. 709-712, 713-714.

the Faith in his native land.' Hence the new plan which, Comboni stated, 'Would explain and extend his activity throughout almost all of Africa,' the part inhabited by black people, calling on 'the help and cooperation [of] Vicariates, Prefectures and Dioceses already established in' the continent.

*The Plan* provided for 1) '*setting up countless institutions of both genders to encompass all of Africa,*' 'in places not far from the inner areas of Africa, in safe and somewhat civilised lands where both Europeans and native Africans can live and work.' 2) They 'should take in young black boys and girls in order to teach them the Catholic Religion and Christian civilisation so as to create others of both genders, each for his or her part gradually advancing and extending to internal regions of Africa to plant the faith and civilisation they have received.' 3) Religious Orders and male and female Religious Institutions approved by the Church or recognised or permitted by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith would be called on to manage these institutions.' 4) 'New seminaries for the African missions, modelled on the plan for already existing seminaries could also be set up in the foreign Missions.' 5) All pupils of both genders should receive a thorough religious formation and besides this 'each of the men will be instructed in the practical science of agriculture and in one or more essential other skills; and each of the women will be likewise instructed in essential women's work. All this so the former will become upright and virtuous men, useful and active, and the latter will also be virtuous and capable women in the family.' Care would be taken by all those responsible to give each past pupil 'help and advice so they can be in a situation to be able to preserve the healthy principles of religion and morality they were formed in by the institutions they attended.' 6) 'Other men and women will be formed in these same institutes with a view to them gradually planting themselves in areas in the heart of Africa so as to begin to establish the salutary work of Catholicism and set up [mission] stations from which the light of Religion and Civilisation will shine forth.' Amongst young men, 'capable *catechists*' 'teachers' 'artists' [meaning tradesmen, farmers, doctors, nurses]; among young women '*able instructors*' 'in the Catholic Religion and morality and '*able teachers* and family persons.' 7) Efforts would be made to identify from among the catechists possible interest in the clerical state and where this is positive, give them six or eight years of 'instruction in the essential theological and scientific disciplines sufficient for their needs and the needs of those countries.' However promotion to the Holy Orders would take place after 'several years of proven steadiness and chastity,' 'in the initiation to an active and exemplary life in the ministry dispensing the Word, exercised in the already established stations in Africa in strict and irreproachable celibacy.' 8) 'Similarly *Virgins of Charity* would come from the group of young black women' and would be 'the most select phalanx of the female group', destined to run schools for girls, 9) 'Thanks to the most important ministry of the *indigenous* clergy and the *virgins of charity*, helped by the charitable work of *catechists*, *teachers*, *artists* [skilled workmen], women *instructors*, *teachers*, and family members, little by little many Catholic families will be formed, and flourishing Christian societies will arise' and the Catholic Religion 'will gradually extend its beneficial empire across the vast area of unexplored regions of inner Africa.' 10) While European missionaries will limit themselves to 'temporary residence, beginning and setting up the Missions and Christianity, given the greater psycho-physical adaptability of women, 'some of the regular female Institutes from Europe' 'could establish themselves' 'in countries deep within Africa that are less fatal to Europeans.' 11) 'With a view to cultivating the cleverer ones from among the native missionaries and of forming them into capable and enlightened leaders of Christianity within Africa, the Society which manages the new *Plan*, following the progress of its great work, could found four large Theological-Scientific Universities to this purpose,' at four points within Africa: Algiers, Cairo, St Denis, and an important city on the Atlantic Ocean side, possibly then building in 'some of them, large *advanced training centres*' for young blacks drawn from the group of skilled workers, that is, the ones qualified in 'arts and trades.' As a coordinating body, a coordinating administrative and executive Committee would

need to be established 'in one of the European capitals,' 'made up of capable, active Prelates and outstanding secular clergy, 'dependent on the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith.'<sup>105</sup>

It was a grandiose project and went beyond the solutions adopted in Genoa, Vienna, Naples, and by Fr Mazza in Verona. *The Plan* did not come into action but there is no question that it foreshadowed a new and modern approach to doing mission.<sup>106</sup> It has been written that 'Comboni was the prophet of Africa, a man who lived a hundred years before his prophecy could become true.'<sup>107</sup> But there was someone who had already been fascinated by it as we shall see when speaking about Don Bosco.

## 7. Spirituality of Catholic works in the 19th century

Practical Catholicism in the 19th century was transformed with new vigour into something more militant, charitable, and social. *Ora et labora* returned, with intense interaction between the two. At the heart of the St Ignatius *Spiritual Exercises* was the commitment to 'the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.' It was the 'true and solid piety' of which Pierre Collot (1672–1741) wrote in reference to St Francis de Sales' spiritual teaching.<sup>108</sup> It was the synthesis of affective and effective love proclaimed in word and by example once more by St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul. Along with St Philip Neri they were seen in the Piedmontese setting as the 'Saints of captivating charity expressed through abundant zeal to attract souls to Christ or win them back to the church from heresy. In the new religious Congregations of active life, mission often seems to be dominated by consecration, this being the source, and becomes practical charity especially in the areas of welfare, education and missionary activity: 'Charitable because it is religious.'<sup>109</sup>

At the core of apostolic sensitivity was the 'grand affair', the salvation of souls, one's own and others' souls, the two being interconnected: '*animam salvasti tuam praedestinastis.*' It was a spirituality of the apostolate which saw salvation as Christian success spiritually, in time and eternity, for everyone, though to different degrees: from the lowest, which meant escaping hell, to the highest levels of sanctity.<sup>110</sup>

This seemed increasingly less an ideal reserved for a spiritual aristocracy and became everyone's calling, identical with 'being a Christian' in 'its most essential evangelical form.'<sup>111</sup> 'The ideal is now the joining of the two lives, active and contemplative,' 'A recurring theme, then, is that of the glory of God and the good of souls, the real spirituality and apostolic program of the new century.'<sup>112</sup> Another scholar states: 'We believe that the two profound dynamics of the spirituality of the early 19th century in Italy have to be rediscovered ... on the one hand, in the great theme and Christian value of the meaning and primacy of "God's will" and on the other, in the particular configuration that comes from seeking "chastity"; 'we could sum it up in the words "Charity in God's will and only in God's will."<sup>113</sup>

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105 Cf. *Sunto del nuovo disegno della Società dei Sacri Cuori di Gesù e di Maria per la conversione della Nigrizia proposto alla S. Congregazione di Prop. Fide da D. Daniele Comboni dell'Ist.o Mazza*, Rome, 18 September 1864, in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 232-242; it was represented in a new edition (the fourth) in 1871 with frontispiece *Piano per la rigenerazione dell'Africa e il titolo Rigenerazione dell'Africa coll'Africa*, in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 840-852.

106 Cf. F. DE GIORGI, *I missionari da Massaia a Comboni. Educatori religiosi o educatori di italianità?*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali in Italia...*, pp. 150-164.

107 A. FURIOLI, *L'itinéraire de Daniel Comboni*, in "La vie spirituelle" 72 (1992) N° 702, pp. 671-685.

108 Cf. P. COLLOT, *La vera e soda pietà spiegata da S. Francesco di Sales...* In Venezia, C. Zane 1734.

109 Cf. T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento...*, pp. 314, 324-331, 382-383.

110 Cf. A. PORTALUPPI, *Dottrine spirituali*. Alba, Pia Società San Paolo 1943, pp. 442-455.

111 Cf. P. STELLA, *De la restauration à l'indépendance (1814-1860)*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, t. 7, col. 2280-2281.

112 G. PENCO, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, Vol. II..., pp. 308-309.

113 G. MOIOLI, *Frammenti di spiritualità nell'Italia settentrionale postunitaria*, in "La Scuola Cattolica" 106

In the first draft of the Rule of the Sisters of the Holy Family (1816), Leopoldina Naudet explained: 'This Union or Society of ours embraces a mixed contemplative and active life, uniting the activity of the spiritual work one is doing, with contemplation, out of which comes good and fruitful activity.'<sup>114</sup>The Augustinian and Philipian (as in Neri) roots of Antonio Rosmini's spirituality, his closeness to Ignatian and Salesian (as in St Francis de Sales) spirituality, converge in a form of life and action at the basis of both contemplation and apostolate, with the austerity of the monk and the kindness and gentleness of the missionary.<sup>115</sup>

Highlighting other emphases, spirituality was seen as an indissoluble interplay of consecration and mission in the planned proposals Blessed Ludovico Pavoni offered his followers. He wanted 'expert individuals who were also bound by ties of religious fervour and guided by the ardent flame of Christian philanthropy,' 'individuals on fire with God's love,' who 'are dedicated in every way possible to the salvation of their neighbour, clearly distinguishable for looking after and educating ... the neglected children of the masses,' 'inflamed with Christian philanthropy' and 'animated by tireless zeal for promoting God's glory.'<sup>116</sup>'My reason enlightened by faith,' Ludovico da Casoria confessed in his will and testament in September 1877 'was drawn to love Christ and Christ's poor, and it determined my wish to work for God and neighbour. My soul found its reason in working and believing.' 'Reason enlightened by faith led me to be passionate, charitable, humble and zealous' 'Love for Jesus Christ had pierced my heart, my breast, my hands, my feet, my body, and I did not ask God to work out my love in ecstasy, rapture, visions but through work, works, faith, and the salvation of souls.'<sup>117</sup>

Giovanni Battista Scalabrini (1839-1905), the Bishop of Piacenza (1876-1905) chose as his pastoral program 'the exercise of generous charity for every needy and suffering individual.'<sup>118</sup>Founder of the male and female branches of the St Charles Missionaries for Migrants (in 1887 and 1895 respectively) he inspired their activity, as he did his own, with the principle: 'God is love and the more a soul is in union with God, the more it is filled with love. This is the reason why the bishop not only loves God, his brethren, but everything that is worthy of love. Everything, I repeat, without exception. He loves everything that is true, everything beautiful, everything good, and everything holy: matter and spirit, reason and faith, nature and grace, civilisation and religion, Church and State, family and country.'<sup>119</sup>This resulted in an exuberant spirituality of pastoral and missionary activity: 'Work, tire yourself out, sacrifice yourself in every way to spread the Kingdom of God here below and save souls; and I would say, go down on your knees before the world begging the grace of permission to do good in it. 'Here is the priest's only ambition.'<sup>120</sup>

This breadth of vision and involvement was not shared by everyone. For a large part of the faithful, clergy and laity, politics was 'neither a spiritual affair, nor for the Church; not something

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(1978), pp. 453-454.

114 Cited by F. DE VIVO *Spiritualità attiva nell'Ottocento veronese*. Verona, Casa Editrice Mazziana 1971, p. 314.

115 Cf. A. ROSMINI, *Lo spirito di S. Filippo Neri*, a cura di F. De Giorgi. Brescia, La Scuola 1996, CIV-56 pp.

116 Quoted by the *Regolamento dell'Istituto di S. Barnaba* and by the introduction to the *Costituzioni della Congregazione Religiosa dei Figli di Maria*, in G. BERTOLI, *L'esperienza apostolica di Lodovico Pavoni*, ed. Giuseppe Rossi. [s.l.], Congregazione dei Figli di Maria Immacolata 1997, pp. 207-208; G. ROSSI, *Lodovico Pavoni educatore e maestro di vita. Studi e approfondimenti carismatici*. Tradate (VA), Pavoniani, Archivio Generale 2004.

117 LUDOVICO DA CASORIA, *Epistolario*, vol. I..., pp. 105-106.

118 Cited during the Process of beatification and canonisation, in M. FRANCESCONI *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini vescovo di Piacenza e degli emigrati*. Rome, Città Nuova 1985, p. 433.

119 *Discorso per il giubileo episcopale di Mons. G. Bonomelli*. Cremona 1896, pp. 14-15, cited by M. FRANCESCONI *La spiritualità di mons. Scalabrini*, in *Scalabrini tra vecchio e nuovo mondo*. Proceedings of the International Historical Convention, Piacenza, 3-5 December 1987, ed. G. Rosoli. Rome, Centro Studi Emigrazione 1989, p. 211.

120 Lenten pastoral letter, 1892, *Il prete cattolico*. Piacenza 1892, p. 25.

Christians should necessarily concern themselves about or be interested in,' since it was not 'a problem that interferes with the business of saving one's soul.'<sup>121</sup> With the *non expedit*, political abstention in Italy became a moral obligation and a Church precept. What remained open was the vast social field. Involvement in this, vigorously promoted from the beginning of the century by Pio Brunone Lanteri and Vincent Pallotti as an essential feature of lay spirituality, broadened its outreach enormously in the second half of the century. The Society of Catholic Apostolate, founded by a Roman priest, had as its aim 'inviting all the faithful of both genders, of whatever status, degree or circumstance, as individuals or as a body to perfect observance of the precept of love of God and neighbour' and 'according to the possibility, to assist Works for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.'<sup>122</sup> It was always activity duly controlled by ecclesiastical authority.<sup>123</sup> The growing problems of the second half of the 19th century were an appeal to Catholics in Italy to join the common supportive action to defend the Church's rights and promote the good of civil society. But first of all they had to see to 'personal formation and inner improvement.' This would make initiatives for 'the preservation of "Christian Civilisation"' more effective, as well as 'Conquest of far-off places,' 'defence of the Church and the Pontiff's freedom.'<sup>124</sup> They felt they were bearers of a superior proclamation of temporal and eternal salvation in the world and part of particularly reassuring ecclesial structures at the level of government and doctrine: the Council Constitutions *Dei Filius*, 24 April 1870 and *Pastor Aeternis*, 18 July 1870, culturally crowned by the recovery of Thomism thanks to the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (Leo XIII, 4 August 1879).<sup>125</sup>

## 8. South America in previously unknown historical circumstances

While political, cultural and religious circumstances in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil were different from one another, at least these countries spoke Spanish and Portuguese between them and this facilitated Don Bosco's efforts to send his religious men and women and his prudent and productive regular follow-up at a distance. In order to present this it would seem the right moment to give some brief descriptions of the various contexts.<sup>126</sup>

The 16th century dream of the evangelisers of the New Continent building a form of Christianity that would be bearer of the primitive Christian communities, underwent a reshaping once the Church was established and became the guarantor of an order sought by distant sovereigns, and thus, increasingly less missionary. The Church became more rigid over the 18th and 19th centuries, with the penetration of conservative Creole elites, Masonic Lodges, enlightened jurisdictional thinking [*jurisdictionalism*: a political doctrine where the State had control over the life and action of the Church], followed by secularism flowing from groups influenced by the principles

121 T. GOFFI, *La spiritualità dell'Ottocento...*, p. 241.

122 V. PALOTTI, *Manuali della Regola 1846, 1847, 1849*, ed. F. Moccia. Roma, General Curia of the A. C. 1974, p. 73.

123 G. MARTINA, *L'atteggiamento della gerarchia di fronte alle prime iniziative organizzate di apostolato dei laici alla metà dell'Ottocento in Italia*, in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolico italiano*, Vol. I. Padova, Editrice Antenore 1969, pp. 311-357.

124 Cf. P. BREZZI, *Spiritualità e socialità nella storia dell'Azione Cattolica Italiana*, in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolico italiano*, Vol. I..., pp. 3-16; M. AGNES, *I motivi religiosi che caratterizzano la Società della Gioventù Cattolica dal 1867 al 1874*, ibid., pp. 215-248.

125 Cf. G. PERINI, "Aeterni Patris" (1879-1979), in "Divus Thomas" (Piacenza) 82 (1979) 3-18.

126 Cf. M. CARMAGNANI - C. VANGELISTA, *I nodi storici delle aree latino-americane, secoli XVI-XX*. Torino, Otto Editore 2001; G. DE BERTIER DE SAUVIGNY, *La Restauration (1800-1848), L'Amérique latine*, in *Nouvelle histoire de l'Église*, Vol. IV. Paris, Éditions du Seuil 1966, pp. 402-408 (Ital. trad. Turin, Marietti 1971, pp. 415-421); H. J. PRIEN, *Die Geschichte des Christentums in Lateinamerika*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1978, pp. 327-511 (*Die Krisis des lateinamerikanischen "Christenheit" im Zeitalter von Aufklärung und politischen Emanzipation*); E. DUSSEL (Ed.), *Historia general de la iglesia en América Latina*, Vol. IX. Salamanca, Ediciones Sígueme 1992, pp. 233-426 (*La Iglesia y los nuevos Estados*).



of the French Revolution in 1789. The indigenous population remained outside the benefits of social life, were 'outsiders' in territorial terms and were left in their poverty, while slaves were imported through a lucrative international market. Slavery was maintained in Brazil until 1888, despite it being abolished when other Latin American States gained independence.

The rapid arrival of independence brought about an historic political shift in the first decades of the century. For Spanish-colonised America, the beginnings were encouraged by the so-called 'ambush of Bayonne' in April 1804 in the French city where Bonaparte called Charles IV of Bourbon and his son Ferdinand VII apparently to resolve their differences, but in reality to impose renunciation of the throne on both of them in favour of the Emperor's brother, Joseph. This created a propitious opportunity at various levels of society in the overseas territories for seeking a solution to long-standing problems through political independence: a hope for better conditions of life for the humbler folk, lack of tolerance of a foreign bureaucracy among well-to-do Creoles, aspirations to freedom among professionals and intellectuals. In conclusion, it would be the stronger class economically and culturally who would benefit appropriating power that the monarchy did not know how to preserve.

Successful uprisings developed in Rio de la Plata in 1810, leading up to the proclamation of the *Provincias Unidas de America del sur* on 9 July 1813, with tensions between Unionism and Federalism, and in Nuova Granada, with the proclamation of Venezuela's independence in 1811. In Mexico, too, in 1810 there was an uprising by the local and Mestizo population, ending in 1821 with a *coup d'état* leading to the Creoles taking power. With the return of Ferdinand VIII to the throne of Spain, reconquest seemed to have been successful, but in 1817 General Jose de San Martín (1779-1850) left Argentina to drive out Spanish troops from Chile and in 1819 Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) finally liberated Greater Colombia, made up of Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador and Panama. Only Peru resisted, since the Mestizos were allied with the Spaniards against the Creoles, but with a two-pronged intervention by General San Martín and Bolivar, independence came after the battle of Ayacucho in 1842. While Bolivar set up autonomous republics, San Martín preferred a monarchic regime in the south and at Iturbide in Mexico, though due to Spanish intransigence they ended up becoming republics.

Brazil's independence, instead, came about peacefully. The Portuguese dynasty took refuge in Brazil in 1808. Following the revolution in Oporto in 1820, King John VI of Braganza (1767–1826, King from 1816) returned to Portugal (1821) leaving his son in Brazil. With pressure from the Creoles he proclaimed himself Emperor, taking the title Peter I of Braganza (1798–1834). He abdicated in 1831 in favour of his son, Peter II (1825–91), who was Emperor until Brazil passed peacefully to being a republic in 1889.

The autonomy of Uruguay, belonging to the *Banda oriental* of Río de la Plata, came about in 1811 through the social and political planning of José Gervasio Artigas (1764–1850). He succeeded in attracting *Gauchos* and *Peones* around the republican independence cause and defeating the loyalists, conquering Montevideo. But in the process of liberation, he had to struggle against the Spanish, Portuguese, Argentinians, giving up in 1825, and was recognised in 1828 with particular support from England. The liberal revolution had won out across the entire continent.

Spain refused to recognise the new States. Initially it was backed by legitimist France, but France recognised them in 1833 following the liberal shift by the Monarchy in July 1830. Lack of recognition by Spain not only created difficulties for economic and commercial international relationships but posed not a few problems of a political, legal, and religious nature for the Holy See, bound by the right of *ecclesiastical patronage* which Spain intended to maintain over the territories it continued to claim as its own, until 1833. At the same time the new States claimed relationships beginning with recognition of their autonomous existence, and with it, automatically

inherited rights of *patronage*. Relationships with the Holy See were complicated by the inroads secularisation had made into the traditional South America world, drawing inspiration from the principles of the 1789 French Revolution.<sup>127</sup> These elements of secularisation had various emphases according to the regional and national elites which characterised the political and territorial reorganisation of the new nations.

When Salesians set foot in Argentina (1875), Uruguay (1876), and Brazil (1883), these features were ultimately reinforced and consolidated by dint of the various new mentalities resulting from European mass migration. In the early decades of the century, exiles from the Mazzini revolts in 1821 and 1831 took refuge from Italy, and Freemasons exercised a particularly important role in Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>128</sup> But the biggest wave of migration occurred in the second half of the century, especially from 1870 onward. Latin American countries suffered from very low demographic density. Immigration was the solution to their internal and external problems at every level, economic, social and political. Monoculture or mono-production were a decisive phenomenon. While dedicating itself to the production of foodstuffs generally for internal consumption, every country specialised in one export commodity, agricultural or mineral, according to its resources: hides, beef, cereals from Argentina; coffee, caoutchouc (rubber) from Brazil, in demand from the more industrialised nations. The broad need for labour found immediate echo in what was on offer from Europe. Of the 14 million European emigrants to Latin America between 1850-1930, 11 million landed in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, around 6 million in Argentina, Brazil and 4½ million in Brazil, while in tiny Uruguay, the number was 700,000. Half the immigrants to Argentina and Brazil were Italian. Italian and Spanish emigration increased the population in Argentina from 1,737,000 in 1869 to 3,955,000 in 1895, creating a harmonious multicultural nation, while migration to Brazil; had significant impact only in the south.<sup>129</sup>

Separation of Church and State was proclaimed with Argentina's declaration of independence. The 1853 Constitution brought in federalism but under a strong presidential system. It was only on 21 September 1880, before leaving the presidency that Avellaneda succeeded in having Buenos Aires proclaimed the federal Capital of the Republic. Up until the 1870s the land occupation was effectively limited to the outskirts of the Pampas. The rest was incorporated between 1878 and 1884 through the initiative of President Avellaneda (1874–80) and the enterprise of the efficient War Minister, Julio Rocca, who succeeded him as President in 1880. The Salesians were implicated in this through spiritual and pastoral work as missionaries to the 'Indians' and, on occasions as military chaplains. Indeed two of them, Fr Costamagna and Fr Evasio Rabagliati, along with the Vicar General of Buenos Aires Archdiocese, had gone ahead on their own as missionaries to Patagonia in May 1878, but the ship they were on was nearly shipwrecked and they had to return to base.

The Indian problem had already been decided in military terms. Between May and December 1878, a good twenty three preliminary incursions had been successfully made, aimed at splitting up groups of nations who had clustered around their respective *caciques* or native leaders, in sum a collection of some 10,000 combatants. Some 5,000 of these along with 68 caciques and their respective captains were captured in December, but the two main leaders and their tribes,

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127 Cf. P. DE LETURIA, *Relaciones entre la Santa Sede e Hispanoamérica*. Romae, Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregoriana 1959..., especially pages dedicated to the two legitimist encyclicals, *Etsi longissimo* by Pius VII on 13 January 1816, though neutralised by the declaration to the Bishop of Mérida, Rafael Lasso de la Vega, who supported Bolívar, and *Etsi iamdiu* by Leo XII on 24 September 1824 (pp. 95-116 and 241-271).

128 C. VANGELISTA, *Dal vecchio al nuovo Continente. L'immigrazione in America Latina*. Turin, Paravia 1997, pp. 23-24.

129 Cf. C. VANGELISTA, *Argentina e Brasile: due paesi di immigrazione*, in L. OPERTI (ed.), *Sguardi sulle Americhe: per un'educazione interculturale*. Turin, Bollati Boringhieri 1995, pp. 87-92 and 103-105; C. VANGELISTA, *Dal vecchio al nuovo continente...*, pp. 38-59.

Namancurá and Bigorrita, were still at large. The historic *Expedición al desierto* began in April 1879. On Rocca's orders most of the army moved from Buenos Aires, along with another four columns from San Rafael, Mercedes Rio IV and Trenque Lauquen. This planned campaign came to a successful conclusion in June at Choel Choel on the banks of the Rio Negro on the northern border of Patagonia.

It opened the way to reconquering the whole national territory as far as Cape Horn, completed thanks to the *Expedición Austral Argentina* in 1883 and the *División Expedicionaria al Atlanta Sur* in 1884. On 16 October 1884 a law was passed creating the National Territories of the Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego.<sup>130</sup>

President Julio Rocca, with the support of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, President from 1868 to 1874, Grand Master of the Freemasons, signed a law in July 1884 secularising schools by abolishing religious education. This was followed on 14 October by the expulsion of the Apostolic Delegate, Luigi Matera, and a break in diplomatic relations with the Holy See. These would be re-established in 1900 during his second six year term as President (1898–1904). The process of liberal modernisation of the Federal Republic's governing and administrative structures characterising the last third of the century, led especially by rumblings in Buenos Aires and beginning under Mitre's presidency, intensified under President Sarmiento, culminating with Julio Rocca's ascension to power.<sup>131</sup>

Uruguay, a democratic Republic, had to contend (victoriously) with neighbours besieging it. Governed for eighty years by the Colorado Party made up of urban middle class and businessmen, in opposition to the Blanco Party of landowners and breeders, it was characterised by advanced democratic customs and an exceptional level of public education by comparison with the average progress of other Latin American States. In a country with little more than 500,000 indigenous inhabitants initially the development process underwent a slow-down in the three years following the peace treaty in 1872, which ended the war from 1864–70 involving the Triple Alliance, (Argentina, Brazil Uruguay) against Paraguay. Begun with the political pretext of replacing the dictatorships of Paraguay's President, Francisco Solano Lopez, with a liberal regime, the war also had territorial gains in mind for the three allies. Paraguay emerged from this destroyed as a nation, including demographically: in 1888 the male-female ratio was one in three.

The military assumed power in Uruguay from 1875 to 1886, supported by the upper classes involved in commerce, finance, and cattle breeding. It sought to guarantee governability, stability, legality and order and introduced a reform of elementary and popular schooling. Successive Presidents were Lorenzo Latorre, (1876–79), Francisco A. Vidal (1879–82), Máximo Santos (1882–85) who introduced civil marriage, Máximo Tajes (1886–90) who moved towards suppressing religious corporations. Tajes also created a National Bank thanks to which Uruguay was able to remove itself from control by Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, leaving more room for British investment, especially in railways, tramways and electricity. From the religious and Church perspective there had been decades of controversy regarding Catholic Masons, the advances of rationalism at university level, the gradual infiltration of Freemasonry inspired by naturalistic deism. On the Catholic side, in opposition to the University Club (1868), the Catholic Club was formed in 1875. In 1871 Fr Rafael Yeregui produced *El Mensajero del Pueblo* to counteract the radical and liberal press with *La Razón* and *El Siglo* leading the fray, while the Vicar General of the diocese, Mariano Soler, set up *the Liceo de Estudios Universitarios* (1877). At the same time, Salesian Fr

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130 Cf. J. E. BELZA, *La expedición al desierto y el amanecer de las misiones salesianas patagónicas* in J. E. BELZA e al., *La expedición al desierto y los Salesianos, 1879*. [Buenos Aires], Ediciones Don Bosco 1979, pp. 9-32.

131 Cf. C. BRUNO, *Historia de la Iglesia en la Argentina, Vol. XI (1863-1880)*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Don Bosco 1974, pp. 59-75; a crisp summary in F. LUNA, *Historia integral de la Argentina, Vol. VIII Los años de prosperidad*. Buenos Aires, Planeta 1997, pp. 51-68 (Religión. Educación y Estado).

Lasagna founded the *Collegio Pio* at Villa Colón, which would come to be described as ‘the great refuge of Catholic knowledge.’

On 13 July 1878, the diocese of Montevideo was erected and the Vicar Apostolic, Jacinto Vera (1813–81) became its first bishop. He was succeeded by Bishop Innocencio Yeregui (1833–90) and in 1891 by Mariano Soler.

In Imperial Brazil (an officially Catholic, Monarchical, agricultural, patriarchal and slave-ridden society) a jurisdictionalist political, ecclesiastical decade was followed, especially after the Triple Alliance war, by a tendency to Church-State separation with civil de-recognition of religious corporations coming into law in 1865, the advance of liberalism, Freemasonry, positivism, secularisation in the 1870s, and confiscation of ecclesiastical goods in the 1880s. There was an endemic scarcity of diocesan and religious clergy, and cultural and moral preparation was inadequate for pastoral needs. At the same time, sensitivity to the slave problem was coming to a head: out of 9,939,478 inhabitants in 1872, slaves made up a million and a half of them. Slave importation was prohibited in 1850; in 1871 a law was promulgated declaring freedom for children born of slaves (‘freedom of the womb’); a law in 1884 freed all slaves who had reached 60 years of age; finally on May 13, 1888, the reigning Princess, Isabel Cristina di Braganza (1846–1921), who had married Frenchman Louis Ferdinand Gaston d’Orleans the Count of Eu (1827–92) in 1846, signed the ‘Golden law’ totally abolishing slavery. Unfortunately, the abolition did not provide for measures to help their passage to freedom. This also posed huge problems for people involved in welfare and pastoral activity, already overburdened with work for all the different categories: residents, immigrants and natives.

Republican ideas were also coming to full maturity. They had been widespread since the 1870s especially among the higher military ranks. The Republic came about peacefully on 15 November 1889.

## 9. France between 1875–1883

Don Bosco tried to forestall and dissipate menacing clouds in France in 1879–80.<sup>132</sup> The history of the nation closest to him looms larger than most in his historical accounts, especially in connection with events in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and the Papal States. In the *Sommario Cronologico* or chronological summary of the final edition of the *Storia d’Italia*, many brief notes beginning with 1869 concern ‘new unpleasanties’ between France and Russia, the war that followed, the defeat at Sedan on 2 September 1870, the proclamation of the Third Republic two days later, the bloody episode in Paris with the awful week of bloodshed in 21–18 May 1871. But there were also the negative repercussions of France’s political and military weakening after the end of the Papal States.<sup>133</sup> There were even fleeting indications in 1872, 1873 of an unlikely return to the Monarchy: ‘Rumours of the fusion of the two branches of the House of France’ meaning the Count of Paris from the Orleans branch and the Count of Chambord, nephew of Charles X of Bourbon, who had been dethroned by the revolution in July 1830 and replaced by the liberal Louis Philippe d’Orleans (1773–1850). ‘Any proclamation of the Count of Chambord’ would be founded on absolutely retrograde positions.<sup>134</sup> The *Sommario* concluded, with two simple items of information: Napoleon II’s death on January 8, 1873 and the abdication of Amedeo of Savoy from the Spanish throne on January 11 (he had come to the throne on 16 November 1870).<sup>135</sup>

The account did not consider the complexity of France’s history, which was economically,

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Chap. 28, § 3.

<sup>133</sup> G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, pp. 495–499, OE XXXVII 495–499.

<sup>134</sup> On Don Bosco and the Count of Chambord, cf. Chap. 31, § 2.

<sup>135</sup> G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia...*, 1887, p. 499, OE XXXVII 499.

socially and culturally more complex and convoluted than the fragile aggregation of state and regional entities that had recently been unified in Italy. Notwithstanding the strong growth of the Church between 1830 and 1880, the 1879 principles persisted tenaciously in the French social fabric, principles upon which the First Republic had been built. Revolution in communications, agricultural development and gradual industrialisation led to varied sensibilities and mindsets, with republican and liberal thinking taking even deeper roots among the bourgeoisie, a growing worker proletariat and the emergence of socialism, the advance of secularisation and anti-clericalism.<sup>136</sup>

1848 led Louis Philippe to abdicate, encouraging the return of the republic and political democracy with universal suffrage. Electors went from 250,000 to 9,000,000. After the 23 April elections, the clearly republican Constituent Assembly appointed an executive commission of five conservatives and anti-socialist members in place of the *ateliers sociaux* provoked a violent rebellion from 23–26 June, also resulting in the death of the Archbishop of Paris, Auguste Affre. On 10 December, elections led to Louis Bonaparte becoming President, The new regime was well accepted by the clergy and the majority of Catholics worked to make it moderate and tolerant, but the weakened social Catholics and compromised liberal Catholics made the secular and socialist opposition more resolute.<sup>137</sup>

Thanks to the many measures in favour of freedom of teaching and social welfare activity, clergy and conservative, intransigent Catholics became a more compact group who willingly aligned themselves with the *coup d'état* of the Prince-President on 2 December 1852. Naturally they shared and encouraged initiatives defending the Pope and aimed at reconstituting a theocratic and ultramontane Catholic society as theorised by the 'pope of the Gauls', Louis Veuillot, and the widely read newspaper, *L'Univers*. A weak liberal Catholic minority put up an effective opposition; it had been placed in very serious difficulties in 1864 by the *Syllabus*, while the republican, democratic, secular and anticlerical opposition grew in virulence and resolution thanks to a systematic and capable ideological propaganda campaign at every level of society.<sup>138</sup> With the elections in 1876, it was able to count on a majority in the House, further increased by the 1877 elections. The elections in February 1879 also signalled a republican victory in the Senate. President Mac-mahon's 'republic of the dukes' was over and Jules Grevy was elected, setting up a complete 'Republic of the republicans.' Moreover, Freemasonry was solidly established among the ruling class and large military groups, while a more tangible indifference to religious practice was visible among the notables and in the working world (tradesmen, industry workers). More visible too were the advances made by scientific positivism, freethinking and anticlericalism.<sup>139</sup>

It was the beginning of a process of secularisation of the State with no return, guided resolutely by men fascinated by the principles of 1789 and scientific rationalism, one that would reach extreme expression in the early years of the 20th century. But already in progress it went to the heart of everything to come: the formation of growing generations through public schooling where society's future was forged.<sup>140</sup> In the new Republican and secular era, people had to be educated 'to give to Caesar what was Caesar's,' or in other words, the State's.<sup>141</sup> Over a handful of years, a

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136 Cf. G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine 1800/1880*. Toulouse, Privat 1985, pp. 313-329; J. B. DUROSELLE, *Les débuts du catholicisme sociale en France (1822-1870)*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France 1951; H. ROLLET, *L'action sociale des catholiques en France (1871-1940)*. Paris, Desclée de Brouwer 1950.

137 Cf. G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France... 1800-1880*, pp. 96-98.

138 Cf. G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France... 1800-1880*, pp. 221-233.

139 Cf. G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine 1880/1930*. Toulouse, Privat 1986, pp. 19-36.

140 G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE *Histoire religieuse de la France... 1800-1880*, p. 234.

141 A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine. De la Révolution à la Troisième République*. Paris, Flammarion 1952, p. 475; cf. M. CRUBELLIER, *L'école républicaine 1870-1940. Esquisse d'une histoire culturelle*. Paris, Éditions Christian 1993.

range of legislation was passed, mostly pushed by Jules Ferry, (1832–93) and two clever collaborators, Paul Bert (1833–86) and Ferdinand Buisson (1841–1932).<sup>142</sup> One law passed on 9 August 1879, decreed that within four years each *département* would need to say it had an *École Normale Supérieure* [a teachers college] one for males, one for females (art. 7). Religious personnel already faced huge difficulties earlier when Jules Ferry presented draft legislation on 15 March regarding the makeup of examination commissions for students in free universities. Without any legal logic to it he introduced an article, No. 7, forbidding unauthorised members of Religious Congregations to run a public or private teaching institution, or to teach there. Approved by the House on 9 July, in January 1880, the article was rejected by the Senate. The Government intervened with two decrees, on 29 March 1880, resuming an ordinance from 16 June 1828 by the Attorney General Portalis: within three months, the Jesuits in France had to be dissolved and had to abandon their institutes and other unauthorised Congregations – all except five: The De La Salle Brothers, the Sulpicians, Vincentians, members of the Paris Foreign Mission Society, the Spiritans – had to request authorisation under penalty of dissolution.<sup>143</sup>

On 18 March 1880, Jules Ferry deprived the five Athenaeums the Church had established in 1875 of their title as universities, and the Camille Sée Law of 21 December 1880 authorised the Minister of Public Instruction to open girls secondary schools for day students which could then become boarding schools; and on the basis of the law passed on 26 July 1881, the Sèvres teachers college was opened to prepare female teachers for public secondary schools. Another law on 13 June 1881 established absolute free education for primary teaching in public schools and nurseries (art. 1). The law of 18 June 1881 imposed the obligation of certification of teachers to qualify for primary education and institutes of both public and free schools (art. 1). More drastic was the law of 28 March 1882 on compulsory education from 6 to 13 years of age, and the secular nature of primary education, starting with curricula and school texts (art. 1 and 3). Parents could provide instruction for their children outside of school buildings on weekends. Religious teaching in private schools was optional (art. 2). A law passed on 30 October 1886, radicalised the secular nature of all public schools, allowing only lay people to teach (art. 17).<sup>144</sup> Other measures were addressed to excluding religious symbols from social life.<sup>145</sup>

In the 1870s and 80s, the majority of Catholics seemed ill-disposed toward the Republican regime. Catholicism seemed bound to a generic monarchical and restorative approach to politics, if not even a reactionary one, like the view propounded by Louis Veillot and the Bishop of Poitiers, Louis Pie (1815–80) later made Cardinal (1879). This view was ‘increasingly listened to. Only a third of the bishops were not hostile to the republic,’ there were very few Republican prelates followed by a weak minority of priests.<sup>146</sup> Sensitivity to social problems was also affected and was inadequate for making inroads into the question of workers, especially in areas where the industrialisation process meant a concentration of the masses. Industrialisation was much further advanced in France than in Italy or Spain. Paris, for example, went from a population of 700,000 at the beginning of the century to 2,800,000 in 1881. Alienated from the Republic, a considerable part of the dominant Catholic culture was no less alienated from all sorts of socialism and debate on the real situation of the workers, the relationship between capital and work, social justice. Catholics

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142 Cf. v. *Lois scolaires*, in F. BUISSON (ed.), *Nouveau Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d’instruction primaire*. Paris, Hachette 1911, pp. 1093–1101, 1103–1108; A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*.

143 Cf. A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine. Sous la Troisième République...*, pp. 74–84.

144 On the “public school become secularised” see the solid work by Y. -M. HILAIRE, in G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse... 1880/1930*, pp. 57–59.

145 Cf. A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine. Sous la Troisième République...*, pp. 95–97.

146 Cf. A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine. Sous la Troisième République...*, pp. 37–51.

built only tentative bridges towards the working world and the world's languages and mindsets. But of course the St Vincent de Paul Conferences were operating; he was Patron Saint of apprentices, and there were also the active Workers Clubs which the Union of Catholic Workers Associations attempted to be an umbrella organisation for, giving rise to the Workers Union. Nevertheless, often elitist and working mainly at a moral formation level, they could have seemed to be less involved in the more concrete and serious issues posed by the Industrial Revolution and the growing urban proletariat.<sup>147</sup>

Leo XIII expected a more decisive alignment with the new republican axis of the State by the French Church, its clergy and the faithful. He tried to persuade them with his Encyclical *Au milieu des solitudes*, 20 February 1892, explicitly inviting them to accept the Republican Constitution and to seek to influence an improved legislation. This did not have the desired effect in the short term.<sup>148</sup>

Thus we have a schematic outline of a much more complex situation which all points of view had contributed to amid uncertainties, ambiguities and their own inflexibility.<sup>149</sup> This was the France Don Bosco travelled through between 1874 and 1886.

## 10. The socio-political world in Spain, 1886

Don Bosco's tiring but exultant stay at Sarrià, Barcelona, from 8 April to 6 May 1886, ended up with ideological division between observant conservative, moderate Catholics and liberal, radical secularists. Don Bosco was not personally involved at all in the journalists' polemics but his role, his works, his very educational system were not ignored by the opposing view-points.

His own mindset placed him among those at the forefront of frank, Catholic integrity which in real terms meant siding with the Monarchy and the established order. Indeed, at least for a certain periods, he had sympathised with most recent Carlist phases: Don Carlos V (1788–1855), Carlos VI (1818–61), and Carlos VII (1848-1909). These rulers had been the cause of a good three civil wars aimed at monarchical restoration in the Catholic, intransigent sense of the term. The first two took place in 1834–40 and 1860, against Queen Isabella who was open to the constitutional regime established by the *Estatuto Real* 1834. Governments led by José Maria Queipo de Leano, the Count of Toreno, and Juan Álvarez Mendizábel were followed by classic liberal measures secularising the State: suppression of the Jesuits on 4 July 1835 and confiscation of their goods; on the 25th of the same month, suppression of monasteries and convents of fewer than a dozen professed members and confiscation of their property; suppression of most Religious Orders and Congregations on 11 October. The appropriation was taken a step further by the decree on 19 February putting all seized goods on sale. While these measures may not have responded to the expectations of the treasury, they had an enormous impact, as well as a religious, political and social one, especially by encouraging speculators and the already well-healed classes, partly winning them over to liberal thinking. Finally, this reform activity was made complete on 8 March 1836 by a decree suppressing 'all monasteries, convents, colleges, congregations as well as houses of male religious communities or institutions including those of regular clerics, the four Military Orders and that of St John of Jerusalem on the Peninsula, adjacent islands and Spanish possessions in Africa.'<sup>150</sup>

147 Cf. P. PIERRARD, *Enfants et jeunes ouvriers en France (XIXe-XXe siècle)*. Paris, Les Éditions Ouvrières 1987, pp. 170-195; G. VERUCCI, *Cattolicesmo e laicismo...*, pp. 55-69.

148 Cf. *La Chiesa e la società industriale (1878-1922)*, ed. E. Guerriero and A. Zambarbieri. Part one. Cinisello Balsamo (Milan), Edizioni Paoline 1990, pp. 337-349.

149 G. CHOLVY-Y.-M. HILAIRE, *Histoire religieuse de la France... 1880/1930*, pp. 67-95.

150 Cf. V. CÁRCEL ORTÍ, *Política eclesial de los gobiernos liberales españoles (1830-1840)*. Pamplona, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra 1975, pp. 267-275, 285-294, 304-312; R. GARCÍA VILLOSLADA (ed.), *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, Vol. V. Madrid, BAC 1979, pp. 134-145.

There was straight forward opposition to Carlist thinking which identified with the Catholic Church, based on an alliance between throne and altar. This is why more than one person at Valdocco, even Don Bosco himself to some extent, was involved. They were particularly apprehensive about the 'six years revolution' (1868–74) and so were especially enthusiastic in terms of emotional involvement in the long, more general war waged by Carlos VII, first in the summer of 1869 then at the decline of Amedeo of Savoy, against the precarious Republic (1873–74) proclaimed on 11 February 1873, and again in the first year of the Bourbon restoration under Isabella's son, Alfonso XII (1874–85). In 1876, Alfonso signed a new Constitution, a moderately liberal one, consistent with the letter or manifesto he had sent on 1 December 1874 to Spanish monarchists from Sandhurst College in England. This encouraged the success of the military *Pronunciamento* at Sagunto proclaiming him king on the 29th of that month. "Whatever my fate might be' the seventeen year-old Prince stated, 'I will never cease to be a good Spaniard nor, like my predecessors, a good Catholic nor true liberal of my century.'<sup>151</sup>This remained in force until 1931.

Beginning with 1868, we find brief, occasional notes in the earlier mentioned *Sommario Cronologico* in the *Storia d'Italia*: Isabella's exile in France on 29 September 1868 (under pressure from bourgeois democratic liberalism, as monarchical as it was, along with the emerging Socialist republican and anarchy movements), French opposition to the candidature of the Hohenzollern Prince to the Spanish throne with Prussian support, Isabella's abdication on 25 June 1870 in favour of her son Alfonso XII, the election to the Spanish throne of Amedeo of Savoy on 10 November 1870 (never recognised by Pius IX), the calling to arms of his partners and all Spaniards by Carlos VII on 14 April, 1872, the assassination attempt on King Amedeo in Madrid on 18 July and his abdication from the throne on 11 February 1873<sup>152</sup> and the proclamation of the Republic on the same day.<sup>153</sup>According to Don Bosco's jottings on his dream about Paris and Rome in 1870, it was Don Carlos 'the great Warrior' coming from the North (Spain or Italy) who would liberate the Pope from prison.<sup>154</sup>

In 1872, on his way to Spain where he was going to place himself at the head of his followers who had already begun hostilities, Don Carlos, accompanied by Count Servanzi, a member of His Holiness's Noble Guard, had visited the Oratory to question Don Bosco on his expected fate. The advice he received was that if he wanted God's blessing, he should act with right intention.<sup>155</sup> Writing to Fr Francesia from Rome in March 1875, Don Bosco added a postscript: 'For Fr Tomatis: it seems that Carlists are pushing ahead.'<sup>156</sup>Over those days, Archbishop Giovanni Simeoni who had been appointed Pronuncio Apostolic and Legate to Alfonso XII in Madrid on 6 April, 1875, was about to leave for that city. In the north of Spain, fighting was already in progress. He remained there until appointed Secretary of State at the end on November 1876. Late on the evening of 2 June, a discussion between Don Bosco and a group of his trusted helpers turned to the question of Don Carlos and Simeoni's Legation to Alfonso XII. When someone commented that it would severely damage the Carlist cause, Don Bosco felt that would not be the case, interpreting the Holy Father's thinking in his own manner: 'He sent his Nuncio to the capital not in recognition of the existing government but to turn to whoever had executive power in hand – *pro tempore existente* – to further negotiations; he would be very happy to do this with him or with others, that is with Don

151 Cf. J. TERRERO-J. REGLA, *Historia de España*. Barcelona, Ramón Sopena 1981, pp.514-525.

152 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, 1887, pp. 495, 498-499, OE XXXVII 495, 498-499.

153 V. CÁRCEL ORTÍ offers a brief re'enactment of events in *La revolución burguesa (1868-74)*, in R. GARCÍA VILLOSLADA (ed), *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, Vol. V..., pp. 227-276.

154 C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco*. Edizione critica. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1978, p. 25.

155 MB X 1249-1250. Don Carlos could not have been recognised by Don Bosco if "it was known that once Don Carlos in Rome had often gone to see Don Bosco and that, going through Turin while off to begin the war, he had come to the Oratory to speak with him" (MB XI 127).

156 Lett. 12 March 1875, E II 468.



Carlos, should he be in Madrid, meaning should he have executive power in hand.’ And he added: ‘This is the true state of things. Since I was in Rome during winter I often spoke with Archbishop Simeoni about this and when I asked him what he believed he could do in Madrid he told me he was taking two sets of credentials from the Holy Father, one *nominatim* (appointment) for D. Alfonso, the other an open one where he could write down the names and details in case he no longer found Don Alfonso, or found some other prevailing cause. I always spoke openly in favour of Don Carlos but I saw that in Rome they did not think the way I did and I had to be more circumspect.’<sup>157</sup>

It was rather a subjective interpretation of a papal policy which was substantially sceptical towards Don Carlos VII and favourable to Alfonso XII, yet reluctant to accept the inevitable revision in the liberal sense of the Constitution desired by Cánovas del Castillo (1828–97), the statistician and supporter of tolerance and the middle way in solving problems, who was a dominant figure in Spanish politics for more than twenty years.<sup>158</sup>

The coup d’état on 3 January 1874 by anti-Carlist General Manuel Pavía y Rodríguez de Albuquerque (1827–96), followed by colourless reactionary governments, brought this stifled Republic to an end with the re-establishment of the Monarchy, and in December, the proclamation of Alfonso XII as King. Defeated in 1876, Don Carlos was forced out of Spain. There is still record of a visit to Don Bosco on January 3, 1886 (Don Bosco headed to Spain two months later) by a French who was going to Venice to meet Don Carlos. This unnamed individual revealed he would be discussing restoring the ancient Bourbon monarchies in Europe, beginning with Spain, and he asked Don Bosco for advice and a blessing for the Princes of the various Royal Houses. Don Bosco declared his incompetence in this matter and besides, he did not want to do anything against France where he had various works. His advice was that if there were no certainty of success, it would cause a lot of damage to Spain. However, he gave his blessing but in one sense only, that ‘God’s will be done in everything, and naught else.’<sup>159</sup> Carlos VII died at Varese in Italy 18 July 1909.

When he arrived in Barcelona, Don Bosco found a Spain that had drawn notable advantage from the moderate parliamentary and constitutional regime established in 1875 and pursued, even after the death on 25 November 1885, of Alfonso XII, ‘the peacemaker’ by his second wife Queen María Cristina of Hapsburg–Lorena (1858–1929), who reigned from 1885 to 1902. This period in fact saw the development of enormous efforts to restore the hierarchy and clergy, especially Regular clergy, where there was a renewed flourishing of religious institutes but also growing signs of anticlericalism. At the political level, the spokesman for this was the liberal, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta (1825–1903) opponent of the moderate Cánovas del Castillo.<sup>160</sup> This freeing up of things also saw a profitable period of economic expansion especially with regard to the middle class financial sector; giving a decided impetus to industrial development which had already been relatively lively in the preceding decades. Exports to France, England and Belgium of the Peninsula’s notable mineral wealth had brought in capital and this had made it possible to extend railways, develop the textile industry in Catalonia. It made possible the creation and extraordinary expansion of the Biscay industrial and financial complex. In twenty years, the Basques were in the forefront of heavy industries, maritime transport, and the Spanish banking system. Barcelona too, revealed extraordinary financial potential expressed in the huge International Expo in 1888, and

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157 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 43-44.

158 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pío IX (1867-1878)*..., pp. 335-351; P. A. OLEA ÁLVAREZ, *El carlismo y la iglesia durante el último decenio del pontificado de Pío IX (1868-1878)*. Romae, Pont. Univ. Gregoriana 1989, pp. 217-226.

159 MB XVIII 28-29.

160 Cf. J. M. CUENCA TORIBIO, *El catolicismo español en la restauración*, in R. GARCÍA VILLOSLADA, *Historia de la iglesia en España*, vol. V..., pp. 277-282.

through its exceptional expansion in the building industry. Naturally, along with this came a strengthening of traditional Catalan regionalism which did not deny its belonging to Spain but did fight any absorption of Catalonia into Castile. Furthermore, a conspicuous workers movement had already begun to make strides in the region for a number of decades, with leanings to the socialist doctrine of Bakunin, spread by his disciple Fanelli from 1869. The *Partido Socialista Obrero* was born in 1879. In 1870 the regional International Federation had been founded in Barcelona. It had a declared tendency to anarchy. Instead in regions under Madrid's influence Marxism was more prevalent, and the dissolution of the Internationale in 1874 was followed in 1879 by the foundation of the Spanish socialist Party, the PSOE.<sup>161</sup>

In 1886, Don Bosco found Catholics fragmented into a variety of currents politically speaking: integrists with the 'Syllabus' (God, King and Country) like Fr Sardá y Salvany, founder and director of the *Revista Popular*, Carlists 'of the strict observance' (!) (King, Country and God) and moderate Carlist partisans of Jaime, Carlos VII's son; Catholics who accepted political liberalism as a minor evil with Alexander Pidal; liberal Catholics like Francisco Silvela (1845–1905) and his brothers Manuel (1830–92) who were political militants, and Francisco Lastres. These latter two were on contact with Don Bosco from the preceding year;<sup>162</sup> other supporters of regionalism in Catalonia and the Basque areas.

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161 Cf. J. VICÉNS VIVES, *Profilo della storia di Spagna*. Torino, Einaudi 1966, pp. 134-150.

162 Cf. Chap. 33, § 5.

## Part two

# DON BOSCO, THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIEST IN THE CHURCH OF TURIN

### Introduction

From both a civil and ecclesiastical point of view, the first forty years of Don Bosco's life were almost completely bound up with his region of origin. He would resolutely tackle the demanding journey to priesthood from that base and spend the first twenty or more years of his priestly ministry as a member of the clergy in the Turin Archdiocese. It was in this context that he also completed his human, Christian and ecclesiastical formation, firstly in the traditional grammar school, (Latin, Greek especially) and then at the seminary in Chieri (1831–35, 1835 – 41), then at Guala's Pastoral Institute (the *Convitto*) in Turin.

As part of this vocation, with some passing aspirations to consecrated life or the missions, he would lean towards the service and education of youth, and in a precise year, namely 1846, this would become his final and exclusive choice.

He would not remain closed within himself. Rather would he become part of a more general enthusiasm for the popular apostolate, addressed mainly to the lower and middle echelons of society, the ones the youngsters he looked after generally hailed from.

As a result, the chapters in Part Two cluster around two dominant themes, his basic vocation to the people and his choice for young people. The first four chapters recall the genesis and growth of Don Bosco as a young person's priest. In the five chapters that follow, we cover the events and initiatives of the social assistance he offered following his pastoral and educative choice, which matured over spring and autumn 1846 when he founded the Oratory of St Francis de Sales at Valdocco in Turin.

This brought him early fame within the region as a priest who specialised in the education of youth in Turin using his own approach with all the features that only decades later he would call the 'preventive system'. Also emerging in its basic features was the spirituality he passed on to the men and women who helped him, extending it to all the various groups he animated in the thirty years that followed.

He did all this in full accord with his diocesan Ordinary, beginning with the choice of working among the young, dedicating himself to them full time. Only in the latter part of the twenty year period 1841–1860 did he gradually move toward setting up the Salesian Society as a Congregation of consecrated individuals. The first vows, his and those of the first group, were in 1862; the decree recognising the Society of St Francis de Sales came in 1864 and pontifical approval in 1869.

On 3 September 1861 he wrote to Fr Alessandro Vogliotti, Rector of the diocesan seminary in Turin: 'You know that for the past twenty years I have always worked and still work and hope to consume my life working for our diocese, and I have recognised God's voice in the voice of my ecclesiastical superior.'<sup>1</sup>

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1 Em I 459.

## Chapter 3

### A COUNTRY LAD DREAMS OF BECOMING A PRIEST (1815–31)

- 1815      16 August: Don Bosco born in the Castelnuovi d'Astoli municipality.
- 1817      11 May: his father dies.
- 1823      December: A farmer teaches John to spell.
- 1824      3 November: school in Capriglio with Fr Lacqua.
- 1825      March: brief schooling in Capriglio comes to an end;  
            May: vocational dream;  
            December: resumes school briefly with Fr Lacqua.
- 1827      Lent: Catechism in the parish;  
            Approaching Easter: First Communion.
- 1828      April: farmhand at the Moglia farm in Moncucco.
- 1829      Autumn: returns to Becchi;  
            5–7 November: meets Fr Calosso.
- 1830      21 November : sudden death of Fr Calosso;  
            December: division of goods, then Anthony lives separately;  
            John attends district elementary school in Castelnuovo<sup>1</sup>

In a countryside cultivated by hardworking people who trusted in Providence, a boy was born who knew nothing (and nor did his family) of the huge cultural and political revolutions on behalf of freedom that were taking place, and in the making, around Europe. He would ultimately be more than a mere spectator. John was less than two years old when he lost his father and as he reached his pre-adolescent years, he nurtured the dream of becoming a priest. However, he had to reckon with a lack of financial means and his stepbrother Anthony, who wanted everyone in the family to work to preserve and improve their situation as small landholders and tenant farmers. John would always remember Anthony's opposition, his disagreement with his plans and the trouble he caused. He would also constantly give prominence to his mother's unconditional support. She sought to be impartial and avoided confronting her deceased husband's son to the end. With the normal division of the family income and goods which took place when Anthony came of age, the dream could be made more concrete with the commencement of grammar classes, which were an

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1 Cf. with some corrections, J. KLEIN – E. VALENTINI, *Una rettificazione cronologica delle "Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco"*, "Salesianum" 17 (1955) 581-610.

obligatory platform for ecclesiastical studies that followed.

This was the *humus* in which the psychological and mental roots of the man and thrifty priest grew, the man who would handle so much money, an assured and cautious man capable of gaining acceptance, a tenacious yet flexible individual who pursued his plans ‘for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls’, as he would have heard in sermons and moral and catechetical instructions. He embodied what Lamartine had once said: ‘Not only wheat but an entire culture comes from the tilled soil.’ In his case it was the culture of a worker, innovator and builder.

## 1. Don Bosco’s beginnings in a peasant family

John Bosco was born on 16 August 1815 in the farmstead belonging to Giacinto Biglione, a tenant farmer in the village of Morialdo, and the hamlet known as the Becchi, part of the municipality of Casteluovo d’Asti, in the Archdiocese of Turin. His parents were Francesco Luigi Bosco (1784–1817) and Margherita Occhiena (1788–1856), who were married on 6 June 1812. John’s birth date is on page 145 of the baptismal register in the St Andrew’s parish, Castelnuovo d’Asti. The record, on 17 August, reads: ‘Giovanni Melchiorre Bosco, son of Francesco, and Margherita Occhiena, born the afternoon of the previous day (*‘heri vespere natus’*) was solemnly baptised by Fr Giuseppe Festa. The godparents were Melchiorre Occhiena and Maddalena Bosco, widow of the late Secondo Occhiena of this district.’

At the time, other than the parents and the newly-born child, the family consisted of Antonio (1808–49), Francesco’s son from his first marriage, and Giuseppe Luigi, born in 1813. Living with them was the paternal grandmother, Margherita Zucca (1752–1826). Also in the house were two farmhands.<sup>2</sup>

Under threat of legal proceedings from Biglione concerning unfulfilled contractual obligations, Francis had protected himself against any eventuality by purchasing a modest building with a hayloft and cow stall, on 17 or 18 February 1817. This would later be known as the ‘Cottage’ or ‘little house at the Becchi,’ the Salesian ‘Bethlehem’ because it was thought, mistakenly, that it was the house in which John Melchior was born.<sup>3</sup>

Francis died on 11 May 1817.<sup>4</sup> John was almost 21 months old. What he wrote concerning his own perceptions of his father’s death,<sup>5</sup> an expression of more than just a fleeting reaction, could be considered layered over time by his mother’s recollections and his own growing awareness of the loss, and his increasing affection for his mother. With her innate physical and moral strength and her acquired sense of responsibility, she quickly assumed both the maternal and paternal role in her steady and prudent management of the small family nucleus. We should not underestimate, however, the protective figure of young Uncle Michael who was close to his nephews. He was seven years younger than Margaret. He had worked with his brother-in-law, Francis Bosco, for some twenty months, to supplement his sister’s dowry. The Occhienas had only been able to supply a small portion of this in cash, 23 new Lira out of 150 all up.<sup>6</sup> Hence, John’s search for a paternal figure in kindly and helpful priests does not seem to have ever been an expression of

2 MO (2010) 31. In the paternal will the names of the children are indicated thus: “Giuseppe Antonio his son, and the son of Margarita and Giuseppe Luigi Cagliari, Giovanni Melchior, and other sons of his by a second marriage – all equal part and portion, and since they are still pupils and infants, he provides that they be looked after by the said Margherita Occhiena, mother and stepmother respectively, and Giovanni Zucca formerly Giambattista his cousin” (quoted by S. CASELLE, *Cascinali e contadini in Monferrato. I Bosco di Chieri nel secolo XVIII*. Roma, LAS 1975, p. 95).

3 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*. Rome, LAS 1980, pp. 12-15.

4 Officially; instead, according to MO (2010), “12 May 1817”.

5 MO (2010) 31-32.

6 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri 1831-1841. Dieci anni che valgono una vita*, Turin, Edizioni Acclaim 1988, p. 14.

anxiety – it must have already been internalised in a stable and supportive parental context.<sup>7</sup>

Three days prior to his death, his father had dictated his last will and testament to a notary. As Pietro Stella has noted: ‘notwithstanding the prospect of losing his tenancy as a farmer, Francis Bosco left land and livestock. As a whole, one could say that he had been a respectable man amongst farmers in the district ... In May 1817 he owned 8 pockets of land between meadows, crops and vines covering 272 “tables” (103.64 *are*): more precisely, they made up 2.73 hectares at a value of 686 new Lire. They were split between the Becchi district and other non-contiguous properties. The hayloft-cum-cowshed bought from the Graglias at the Gaj (the ‘little house at the Becchi’) was worth 100 lire, less a few head of livestock. Francis also owned livestock to a total value of 494 lire: two oxen, two steers, two cows, one horse. The remainder of his possessions comprised agricultural equipment, clothing, furniture and other household items. In all, he left movable goods and real estate amounting to 1,131.3 lire plus debts to a total of 445.95 Lire.’ ‘Peasant thriftiness in managing money,’ notes Stella in reference to a world not so distant from the future mentality of Don Bosco, ‘serves to explain how come Francis had left a considerable number of debts. One needs to consider that in following the peasant approach he would have been reluctant to deprive himself of the little money he had and might be more inclined to meet his debts through work and agricultural products. In poor harvest years, peasant thrift was a strong defence against the few supplies they possessed. This explains first the lessening, then total disappearance of foodstuffs in 1817 until summer 1818, in an area like Morialdo which was not poor in cultivating cereal crops.’<sup>8</sup>

In fact, ‘in 1815 an extraordinary famine afflicted Piedmont and all Italy as a consequence of atmospheric conditions and disturbances in 1814 which had seen the failure of cereal crops last through 1816 until the end of 1817.’<sup>9</sup> This was obviously felt, too, in the Bosco household and its land. The price of cereals reached dizzy heights, falling only in the following decade.<sup>10</sup> Naturally, according to the realistic information in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Mamma Margaret provided for things by looking for sustenance.<sup>11</sup> It documents the expenditure of 37.50 francs on 6 July 1817 for four *emine* of cornmeal [an ‘*emine*’ was equivalent to 23 litres].<sup>12</sup> There is also mention of the ‘usual offering’ for 10 masses celebrated by Fr Giuseppi Franchetti, school master, ‘in suffrage for the soul of the late Francis Bosco’ and the ‘usual 12 lire offering’ for 20 masses celebrated by the Provost of Castelnuovo, Giuseppi Sigismondo, both on 20 December 1820.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Religious and moral education

As for John’s religious and moral education, it is easy enough for us to hypothesise that it was primarily imparted by his mother at home and added to as he attended church as a child at the parish in Castelnuovo and the chapel at Morialdo. Pietro Stella explains; ‘The ordinary liturgical celebrations in St Peter’s rural church in the village at Morialdo were only on Sunday mornings.

7 Cf. G. STICKLER, *Dalla perdita del padre a un progetto di paternità. Studio sulla evoluzione psicologica della personalità di don Bosco*, “Rivista di Scienze dell’Educazione” 25 (1987) 340-345, (The maternal foundation of Don Bosco’s personality).

8 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 15-17. Stella summarises the text of the will reported in full by S. CASELLE, *Cascinali e contadini...*, pp. 95-100.

9 C. TIVARONI *L’Italia durante il dominio austriaco (1815-1849)*, t. I *L’Italia Settentrionale*, Turin-Rome, Roux e C. 1892, p. 19.

10 Cf. A. FOSSATI, *Origini e sviluppi della carestia del 1816-1817 negli Stati Sardi di Terraferma*, Turin, Giappichelli 1929, pp. 74-121; M. ROMANI, *Storia economica d’Italia nel secolo XIX 1815-1914*, Vol. II. Milan, A. Giuffrè 1970, pp. 33-39 (*Tra carestie ed abbondanza*), 218-233; on the drought and consequent famine in Piedmont, cf. L. BULFFRETTI-R. LURAGHI, *Agricoltura, industria e commercio in Piemonte dal 1814 al 1848*, Vol. III *Dal 1814 al 1848*. Turin, Ist. per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano 1966, pp. 33-36.

11 MO (2010) 32-33.

12 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Cascinali e contadini...*, p. 103.

13 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Cascinali e contadini...*, pp. 104-105.

Around 1820, a priest from Castelnuovo would have come there for Sunday mass. From 1823 to 1829, that is, before Fr Giovanni Calosso took up residence there, a priest would have come from Buttiglierra.<sup>14</sup> Of course, it would not be possible to explain the dream he had at nine or ten years of age which, understandably was none other than a wish to become a priest, had there not been an adequate contact with things like church, priests ... as foundation, and a good religious sensibility, over and above a healthy childhood. What has been written about the presumed chronological priority 'over a number of years' with regard to his vocation as educator compared to his priestly vocation, seems to be something of a long-shot, something imagined.<sup>15</sup>

Fully credible witnesses at the beatification and canonisation processes, all of them (except for Fr Secondo Marchiso) Don Bosco's pupils from the early days of the house attached to the first oratory, were unanimous in stating the precocious nature of Don Bosco's vocation. They were diocesan priest Fr Felice Reviglio and Salesians Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, Frs. Giovanni Battista Francesia, and Giulio Barberis.<sup>16</sup> Fr Barberis stated; 'I recall hearing Don Bosco say many times that he had always had a great desire to be a priest.' This was confirmed by Fr Francesia; 'Since he was a small boy, the Servant of God had felt a leaning toward the clerical state and this was the motive behind him wanting to pursue his studies.'<sup>17</sup>

Don Bosco only wrote down the dream for the first time in 1873, in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. It had been held in reserve for years and not given any publicity. But the dream was eloquent. He had woven an accomplished literary composition around the original 'stub', enriched by almost fifty years of experience. The mandate the 'dignified man' gives him is an educative and pastoral one: 'Start right away to teach them about the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue.' He then entrusts him to his teacher and she, the Virgin Mary, showing him his field of work, 'goats, dogs and several other animals' tells him: 'Make yourself humble [corrected from 'healthy'], strong and energetic.'<sup>18</sup> The acrobat-cum-teacher behaves like a priest in miniature as catechist, preacher, guide in prayer.<sup>19</sup> It would not be easy to imagine how even a purely secular vocation as teacher could be thought up and acted upon in this social and family context.<sup>20</sup>

His upbringing in the family and parish had to find place for regular participation at Sunday mass and, at home, morning and evening prayer, as well as anything his mother and perhaps his grandmother, who was also illiterate, could pass on orally from the small diocesan catechism they had memorised since childhood.<sup>21</sup> There were practices collected together in the *Dottrina Cristiana* in a lesson called *the Esercizio del Cristiano*, found in catechisms of French origin and, in Italy in the *Compendio della dottrina Cristiana* (1765) by the Bishop of Mondovì, Michele Casati. This had been adopted in the Turin Archdiocese too, in its newer 1786 version which had been considerably reworked, with some rigourist emphases, by the Cardinal Archbishop Vittorio Gaetano Costa. Margaret would certainly have familiarised the children with at least the simpler items among the many suggested: immediately upon rising, as the *Dottrina* taught, make the sign of the cross, lifting

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14 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 33; cf. Notes by Eugenio Valentini on Jan Klein's research in the article cited by J. KLEIN – E. VALENTINI, *Una rettificazione cronologica...*, pp. 602-607.

15 Cf. J. KLEIN – E. VALENTINI, *Una rettificazione cronologica...*, pp. 591, 595-596; F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Mémoires I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, Lyon 1962, p. 186

16 *Positio super introductione causae*. Romae, Schola Typ. Salesiana 1907, pp. 81, 83, 85, 87.

17 *Positio super introductione causae*, pp. 91 and 99.

18 MO (2010) 34-36. F. DESRAMAUT dedicates some plausible psychological considerations to the early dreams, based on the first, in *Don Bosco fondatore*, in M. MIDALI(ed.), *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana*. Proceedings of the Symposium, Rome – Salesianum, 22-26 January 1989. Rome, Editrice S.D.B., p. 119.

19 Cf. MO (2010) 38-39, 40.

20 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco*, Turin, PAS 1955, pp. 49-55

21 MO (2010) 35.

up your mind to God, then say the 'I adore thee....' In the morning and/or in the evening, the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Creed, acts of Faith, Hope and Charity: possibly offering up one's work, grace before and after meals. The catechism also taught what was to be said when the Angelus bell rang at dawn, midday and in the evening. Again in the evening the 'I adore you,' Act of Contrition, Our Father, Hail Mary etc. Also recommended were brief prayers, mortification, prayers for the dying and deceased.<sup>22</sup> One could also imagine that in the evening, following a widespread custom, the rosary would be said by the family together.

Home was also a school of moral teaching as a Piedmontese priest wrote, a man who was open to the acceptable novelties brought in from France by Napoleon and who knew the peasants in his area very well; 'I have noted that in farming families who regularly follow the Church's teaching, good manners, harmony, peace and charity reign and these are the most precious virtues. Thanks be to God they take root in our hearts free of the prejudices and are accompanied by a frugal, poor and hardworking lifestyle directed unreservedly towards its proper purpose by the religion taught, the honour given to God with a view to gaining eternal happiness.'<sup>23</sup>

The two key moments in John's development in religious practice, and which he saw as the hinges of his educational approach, were associated in his memory of his childhood with his mother: first communion, with first confession four years previously.<sup>24</sup> "I remember well how she herself prepared me for my first confession. She took me to church, made her own confession first, then presented me to the confessor. Afterwards she helped me to make my thanksgiving. She continued to do this until I reached the age when she judged me able to use the sacrament well on my own."<sup>25</sup> More detailed still was the preparation for first communion. Following a long catechetical tradition, Don Bosco always considered this to be 'the most important act of one's life.'<sup>26</sup> In his *Life of Dominic Savio* he stated with surprising certainty: 'First Communion is the foundation for one's life. It would be strange for someone who had accomplished that solemn duty well to not then lead a good and virtuous life. On the contrary one can point to thousands of unruly boys who are the desolation of their parents who are concerned about them; but if we go to the root of the evil we see that their behaviour began to be noticeable as such when there was little or no preparation for their First Communion.'<sup>27</sup>

In his case, this solemn act was preceded in Lent, 1827, by catechism in the parish aimed precisely at preparing the children to 'do their Easter duty' for the first time. Don Bosco tells us that Margaret encouraged him to make a more careful confession, protected him from noise and distraction, made his preparation with him in church, went with him to the altar rails and then made

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22 Cf. *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino*, Turin, Eredi Avondo 1786, pp. 141-146.

23 *Le veglie de' contadini cristiani. Dialoghi familiari-istruativi-morali sopra le quattro parti della dottrina cristiana ad uso, e vantaggio de' contadini, e di altre persone, che vogliono approfittarne*. Work of the Parish Priest and Vicar Forane of Villafranca Piedmont, Felice Cecca... Turin, Botta, Prato e Paravia 1806, *Prefazione*.

24 MO (2010) 33.

25 MO (2010) 33.

26 Cf. *La forza della buona educazione. Curioso episodio contemporaneo per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni*, [The power of a good education ...] Turin, Tip. Paravia e comp. 1855, pp. 15, 20, 21, 101, OE VI 289, 294, 295, 375. This text can be found in English translation online in SDL, Salesian Digital Library.

27 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1859: p. 21, OE XI 171; cf. also [G. BOSCO], *Angelina o la buona fanciulla instruita nella vera divozione a Maria Santissima*, [Angelina or the girl who is well-instructed in devotion to Our Blessed Lady], Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1860: "Communion [...] made worthily the first time brings the most chosen blessings into the hearts of children; but if by some terrible misfortune it is made unworthily: Alas, What a mark of terrible curses it brings" (p. 35, OE XIII 7). Note: English translations of both texts referred to above exist in a range of translations in print and online, more the case of online for the latter item=.



her thanksgiving with him, giving him advice and reminders. 'I think that from that day on,' her son concluded when he was nearly 60 years old, 'there was some improvement in my life, especially in matters of obedience and submission to others.'<sup>28</sup>

Evidently the *Memoirs*, in the author's intentions, were also a message and norm for both teachers and pupils.

### 3. Education and gaining skills in games

Pietro Stella notes, regarding John Bosco's schooling; 'We know nothing that we can be sure of regarding Don Bosco's childhood from 1817–1826. Would he have done the complete elementary course (two years)? Would he have begun this when he was eight or nine? Would this have been in November (the beginning of the school year) of 1823 or 1824? Would Anthony have gone there first (he signed the baptismal certificate of his children in his own hand) or would he have learned as an adult as happened with Dominic Savio's father?'<sup>29</sup>

Don Bosco tells us in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*; 'I had reached my ninth year. My mother wanted to send me to school but she felt very uneasy. The distance to Castelnuovo from where we lived was more than three miles; my brother Anthony was opposed to my boarding there. A compromise was eventually agreed upon. During the winter season I would attend school at the nearby village of Capinglio. In this way I was able to learn the basic elements of reading and writing. My teacher was a devout priest called Joseph Delaqua [= Lacqua]. He was very attentive to my needs, seeing to my instruction and even more to my Christian education. During the summer months I went along with what my brother wanted by working in the fields.'<sup>30</sup> It would not have been a particularly long period; work in the fields which Don Bosco calls 'summer time' finished in late autumn and recommenced in early spring. Naturally the problem got worse as the small boy gradually became a teenager.

However, much earlier John had begun to attend a 'parallel' school? Which played a clear role in structuring his personality. Above all were the things he learned from stories he read, heard and conversations taking place in the farm setting: everyday items, news spread by word of mouth among the people; tales told in the evening, maybe by his grandmother and other elderly people. Before telling stories to others, as Don Bosco tells us in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, in his early and later childhood he would have already heard and assimilated so much. He would have absorbed quite a patrimony of sensitivities, emotions, images, ideas, habits. Even more decisive in shaping his mentality, for sure, would have been the peasant life, folk life and culture which was not at all cerebral: life around the hearth at home with his mother also standing in for his father, and who loved him very much; the strong competition from his step brother, often resulting in conflict if we take account of the memories assigned to *Memoirs of the Oratory*; his involvement in farm work and his child's contribution to sustaining the family; the sharing of labour with the neighbours as well as sharing their expectations, hopes and fears bound up with weather conditions, and outcome of crops. It was a tough schooling in enterprise, but it also meant trust in Providence because of drought, rain hail, ice, crop and animal diseases and the precarious balance between income and expenditure. John did not only go hunting for bird's nests, even though when he told stories of himself as a young country priest or to young oratory boys or those aspiring to work in the 'Congregation of the oratories' in the city he preferred talk of 'games' rather than the tough peasant existence.

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28 MO (2010) 41-42.

29 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. I, *Vita e opere*. Rome, LAS 1979 (1st ed. 1968), p. 28, no. 10.

30 MO (2010) 33-34. Housekeeper for Fr Giuseppe Lacqua (1764-1847), primary school teacher, was Marianna Occhiena, or more familiarly Marianna, Mamma Margaret's sister.

The final years of the 1880's were particularly important from this point of view, as a farmhand during the final months of 1827 on the Campora farm at Buttigliera, 4 kms from home; and from February 1828 till November 1829 at the Moglia farm in Moncucco, some 15 kms further north. Giorgio Moglia gave evidence on 8 July 1894 at the Informative Process; 'When I was three years old I knew the young 13 year old Bosco for all the time he was at my parents' home as a farmhand. As a boy Bosco spent almost two years at our place.' 'In the two years he as at our place, young Bosco did what he could to study.'<sup>31</sup> Another elderly witness, Giovanni Filipello, a fellow catechism student with John at Castelnuovo, provided more precise and interesting details at the same Process: 'he was accepted as a farmhand on the condition they would let him attend school with the parish priest at Moncucco and he would willingly forgo his pay for that. In fact, in his free time he did go to the parish priest in Moncucco, Fr Cottino [Francesco, 1786–1840] for perhaps two years, much to his benefit, and he made progress as the Moglia family told me.' By way of gratitude at the end of the first year the Moglias gave John's mother 30 lire, and a further 50 lire when he completed his service.<sup>32</sup>

What stands out clearly in Don Bosco's recollections in the 1860s, 1870s are that his experiences as a small boy and teenager were the period of greatest development of his psycho-physical potential: his enthusiasm for rural pursuits, hunting for nests, athletic competitions with his mates, trying out conjuring, admiration for and imitation of balancing acts by street performances. He would go to the markets and fairs to learn these things, was curious, hungry for knowledge and wanted to learn. He got on well with the neighbours young and old and made use of everything in order to recreate, cheer people up and to moralise.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. An unforeseen encounter, much sweat and toil

The November 1829 encounter with Fr Giovanni Calosso (1755–1830), who had been chaplain in Morialdo for just a few months, was something Don Bosco recalled and referred to many times some years before establishing it in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* as the real beginning of his regular studies of Latin and grammar. In one of his chronicle entries, student of theology John Bonetti refers to *the beginning of D. Bosco's* studies: "After our meal in the refectory on 1 July 1861 and at the request of some of the boys, D. Bosco told us about some things, some episodes from his youth.' He was reporting on events between 1826–28 instead of 1829–30. Fr Calosso had asked him to tell him something from the sermon on judgement which the mission preacher had given in preparation for the Jubilee declared by Pius VIII on 18 June 1829.<sup>34</sup>

The boy had begun to repeat it faithfully in Piedmontese and the following day repeated it in its entirety. The priest wanted the boy to be allowed to study at all costs and took direct care of it himself. 'The following day, in agreement with my mother, I took some books and went to our chaplain's house. He immediately made me take my Donato, and I continued going to his place every day despite my brother's daily complaints. During that time I made astounding progress. I recall that over twenty six days I had studied all of Donato and I knew it literally from beginning to end.<sup>35</sup> It is enough to have seen a copy of Donato from that era (a dry Latin grammar made up of declensions and conjugations, model verbs, nomenclature) to understand what it would mean to know it 'literally from the beginning to end.'<sup>36</sup> He would encounter that text again in Chieri during

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31 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus Ordinaria Auctoritate constructi in Curia Ecclesiastica Taurinensi*, fol. 782r and 785r.

32 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus...*, fol. 773r; *Positio super virtutibus*. Rome 1920, pp. 20–21.

33 Cf. MO (2010) 38–40. It can be presumed that the *Memoirs of the Oratory* refer to real facts, expanded on and idealised so they become a message and rule of action for Salesian readers.

34 Cf. *Magnum Bullarium Romanum XVIII* (Romae 1856) 21–23.

35 G. BONETTI, *Annali* I, pp. 54–63; cf. MO (1991) 44–48.

36 Cf. *Donato accresciuto di nuove aggiunte e diviso in due parti approvato dall'eccellentissimo Magistrato*

the 1831–32 school year.

While with Fr Calosso he went from a basically oral culture, though with the first inklings of reading and writing picked up from Fr Lacqua when he was about 10, to a more systematic initiation into study from the parish priest of Moncucco, then further pursued in Chieri. Perhaps it was only from this point that he began more systematically to employ his initial ability to write, gaining ultimate competence in it. When we read the many handwritten texts that followed, we gain the impression of laborious handwriting, the writing of someone who came to cursive script late in the piece, a hand more accustomed to handling a hoe than using a pen. Of course, while he was going to Fr Calosso, when work on the farm began again in spring, his brother would protest and John would once again have an experience of the ‘two cultures’. ‘The walk to and from school’ he recalled, ‘afforded me some time to study. When I got home I would take the hoe in one hand and my grammar in the other.’<sup>37</sup>To a certain extent, this combination of study and work would continue at Castelnuovo and Chieri, imposed by the need to add to what he had paid in cash and kind in order to meet the costs of school fees, board and sustenance.<sup>38</sup>

Calosso’s sudden death on 21 November 1839<sup>39</sup> did not negate an irrevocable decision that seems to have been made even more resolute by his admiration and indelible memory of his unexpected teacher. The elderly priest had not only been a benefactor and encouraging tutor for him but a father, his first spiritual father, and in Don Bosco’s own words, exceptionally significant for his interior life and the realisation of his vocation to the priesthood.<sup>40</sup>Forty five years later he drew up a profile of him, one intentionally added to over his long and exemplary experience, for the benefit of his priests, Christian educators of the young, and promoters of clerical vocations. Above all he wrote ‘I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought and action I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal welfare. It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one’s soul. I had not had one until then.’ ‘From then on I began to savour the spiritual life.’<sup>41</sup>

From December 1830 to the end of summer 1831, John attended the elementary course at the municipal school in Castelnuovo, coming under the discipline of two priest teachers in the space of a few months, the friendly Emanuele Virano and the rough-mannered Nicolao Moglia. In fact, according to the school system established under Charles Felix on 3 July 1822, municipal schools made provision for a double class with two teachers: the first was ‘responsible for teaching reading, writing, and catechism,’ the second ‘for teaching the principles of the Italian language, arithmetic and Christian doctrine.’<sup>42</sup> It was the first official school which John Bosco, an elementary school student at 15 years of age, was able to benefit from. His attendance was made easier by a radical change at home in the Becchi: In 1830 Anthony achieved his majority and this enabled the family’s assets to be divided. The house at the Becchi was split with Anthony in one part, Joseph and his mother and brother in the other (the grandmother Margherita Zucca, had died in 1826). In 1831, Anthony married Anna Rosso, occupying the little home that the whole family had lived in since 1817, and remained there until the 1840’s when he moved into his own home built about 30 metres away. Margaret and John, instead, followed Joseph who went share farming at Sussambrino, four kilometres north of the Becchi. In 1834 Joseph married Maria Calosso. Three

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*della Riforma. Parte prima ad uso degli studenti di sesta e quinta classe di latinità.* Turin, Stamperia Reale 1824, 198 p.

37 MO (2010) 45.

38 MO (2010) 54, 71

39 Don Bosco mistakenly assigns this to April 1828, MO (2010) 46.

40 MO (1991) 44, 46; cf. G. STICKLER, *Dalla perdita del padre a un progetto di paternità...*, pp. 351-355.

41 MO (1991) 47.

42 *Regie patenti colle quali Sua Maestà approva l’annesso Regolamento per le Scuole tanto comunali che pubbliche, e Regie.* 23 July 1822, tit. II, art. 9. Turin, Stamperia Reale [1822], p. 11.

years earlier John had begun his grammar schooling (*Latinitas*) at the public school or 'College' in Chieri.

Don Bosco associated his memory of the special encounter with nineteen-year-old Joseph Cafasso in front of the church at Morialdo with the second Sunday of October 1830, the feast of the Motherhood of Mary. Cafasso was about to return to the seminary for his second year of theology. The dialogue reveals the difference in temperament between the two. Don Bosco is a master of reconstructing stories he would like to be instructive. The devout cleric signals the boy to approach him, asking him questions of a primarily spiritual kind. The fifteen-year-old replies, finally inviting the other partner in the dialogue to come with him to watch some of the outward celebrations of the rural festival. Don Bosco remembers or at least coins two solid sentences from the devout young seminarian: 'Entertainments of a priest are the church ceremonies,' 'A cleric gives himself to the Lord. Nothing in the world must be more important to him than the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.' The boy's response could not be more different from what the priest, when he eventually wrote it, gave to his boys: 'There is a time for everything; a time to pray and a time to play.'<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, years later it would be that cleric who, as well as being a generous benefactor, would be a spiritual father to his young sparring partner at Morialdo who then became a priest for young people. Evidently the latter needed much humility and strength to be able to want and accept following a demanding guide, one who was not simply acquiescent.

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43 MO (1991) 47.

## Chapter 4

### HUMANISTIC, CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF DON BOSCO'S PERSONALITY (1831–35)

- 1831 3 November: John begins grammar school (*Latinitas*) at the public school or 'college' in Chieri; In one year he completes sixth and fifth class.
- 1832 Then completes fourth and third class.
- 1833 November: begins second or Humanities year.
- 1834 Spring: makes the request, accepted, to enter the Reformed Franciscans. John does not follow up on this;
- November: begins Rhetoric year.
- 1835 Spring – summer: choice of vocation as a diocesan cleric.

At the beginning of November 1831, Giovanni Bechis loaded up his cart and brought John Bosco's trunk with all his kit to Chieri, along with two *emine* (46 litres) of wheat and half a one of millet as advance payment for board with Lucia Pianta, the widow Matta, who was subletting rooms in Chieri to boarders. Margaret and John came to Chieri on foot and along the way had sold a sack of flour and one of maize at the market in Castelnuovo to buy books, paper and pens for school.<sup>1</sup>

Thus leaving behind a not always easy adolescence, John began a decisive decade for establishing certain basic features of his personality. It was a time when intellectual culture, religious formation, moral discipline, basic spiritual experience, spending time with friends all came together. From the point of view of his intellectual patrimony, both the secular dimension, to a degree humanistic, and the ecclesiastical and decidedly clerical dimension were cultivated. The ecclesiastical cultural dimension came in the second half of the decade, intensified at the pastoral level over the three years spent at the *Convitto* or Pastoral Institute. This was completed in this and the following three years with the practical, active side which was more in keeping with his temperament and character. But the decade from 1831–41 was also of importance for the gains awaiting the by now mature adolescent in the area of inner religious and moral discipline. It was a completely new experience of community living (teachers, fellow students, friends ) and broadening of human contacts. The busy little city of Chieri offered more open and stimulating horizons of life than he had had before, although still provincial and with a relatively familiar feel to it. 'In the times we are writing about,' it was said of this city, 'there were nine thousand inhabitants. Some four thousand workers were working in twenty cotton factories and a number of silk spinning mills employed five hundred. Its markets were the best known in Piedmont.'<sup>2</sup>

There were other, broader experiences of life associated with particular aspects of the friendships he formed, felt more in classical Aristotelian and Ciceronian terms than romantic ones, like his identifying in feeling and desire with common cultural, moral and religious values.

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1 S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 29.

2 S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 33

## 1. Cultural growth in the 'college' or secondary school in Chieri

It was a mature boy who arrived in Chieri, his feet firmly planted, accustomed to work and sacrifice, ready to realise his vocation by going through the preparatory formative stage in the most suitable institution.

It was quite a cultural shift. The classical and humanistic formation he was being shaped by would find future echoes in publishing initiatives. It would be extremely useful and relevant in 1855 when Don Bosco began internal secondary classes at the Valdocco Oratory. And it would be even more so in the 1860s and 70s when the process of 'collegialisation' was being emphasised. We will have more to say about this, especially regarding the type of student. This was when predominantly classical-oriented boarding schools arose, beginning with Italy: the Italian style upper secondary was widespread in seminaries with their origins in the 16th century, following the example of the Jesuit *Ratio studiorum*. It would have been encouraged by his very young teachers who went on to become fine men of literature, Latinists and Greek scholars like Giovanni Battista Francesia, Celestine Durando, Giovanni Garino, all authors of well-written school texts.<sup>3</sup>

Side by side with this, and of tangible import, was his work culture, embodied in Don Bosco's life since childhood and still part of it in Chieri where the services he offered in this regard were essential for his support, such as in 1831 when he became an apprentice tailor in Castelnuovo for Giovanni Roberto whom he boarded with.<sup>4</sup> John stayed in four successive lodgings in Chieri, ultimately allowing him to take up full-time study. In the two years from 1831–33 he boarded with Mrs Lucia Pianta, otherwise known as the widow Matta, and being unable to pay the whole monthly board of twenty one lire, he carried water and wood, put the washing out, and helped the woman's son with his studies.<sup>5</sup> In his third year he stayed with Lucia Pianta's brother Giovanni, a café owner and pastry cook, where he worked as a helper, preparing drinks and sweets and doing domestic chores.<sup>6</sup> Before going to Pianta's it seems John found a brief opportunity to stay with Michele Cavallo, the baker, looking after his horse and sleeping in one corner of the stable. In the final year, 1834–35, he boarded in a basement for 8 lire a month with tailor Tommaso Cumino, where Joseph Cafasso was also staying.<sup>7</sup>

These were all late preparation for future 'interests' in teaching trades and crafts to his boys. The 'two cultures' (C.P. Snow), however, personally and institutionally represented two distinct worlds for Don Bosco, for equally different target audiences in terms of socio-economic condition and legitimate aspirations, while sharing life in a friendly and ordered society according to providential desires that could be taken for granted.

He also appears to project onto this stage of his life the characteristic elements of his youthful spirituality: *study and piety, emulation and humility, discipline and cheerfulness*. While he was writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory* it seems that he had superimposed the triad *cheerfulness, study, piety* on his recollections which he had already offered Francis Besucco as a 'program' of life. Yet, playful elements were recorded with these, with evident satisfaction.<sup>8</sup>

As for the order of studies at grammar school, the *Regolamento per le scuole* (School regulations) for the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia in 1822 stated: 'There will be Sixth, Fifth, Fourth, Grammar [or third], Humanities [Second] and Rhetoric [First].' Teaching 'in the fourth and Third should always be by two teachers especially appointed for this.'<sup>9</sup> The syllabi and teaching

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3 Cf. Chap. 17, § 5.

4 MO (2010) 49.

5 MO (2010) 53-54.

6 MO (2010) 60-61.

7 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, pp. 24-25, 46, 79, 84-89, 121.

8 MO (2010) 61-63 (*Society for a good time*), 53-55.

9 *Regie Patenti...* 1822, art. 69-70, p. 26.

approach would not have strayed much from what was laid down by the *Costituzioni de Sua Maestà per l'Università di Torino* and in particular the attached *Istruzione intorno alla maniera di insegnare nelle pubbliche scuole data d'ordine del Magistrato della Riforma* on 7 April 1771, made public by royal decree on June 2, 1772.<sup>10</sup> Victor Emmanuel I brought these into force with a General Edict on 21 May 1814, entirely cancelling the recent revolutionary past: 'Without regard to any other law the Royal Constitutions of 1770 and other provisions from Our Predecessors until 23 June 1800 will be observed from the date of the present edict.'<sup>11</sup>

Courses from Sixth to Rhetoric offered studies in grammar and syntax where acquiring Latin was absolutely dominant (after all these were *Latinitas* schools), and a fair idea of Greek too. The 1822 *Regolamento*, however also prescribed separate teaching of Italian, proceeding at the same pace as Latin. So it was necessary to replace texts used the century before with new ones, two tomes entitled *Nuovo metodo di imparare la lingua Latina volgarmente* [in Italian].<sup>12</sup>

The first lessons were aimed at 'reading and writing correctly, parts of speech, conjugation of auxiliary and regular verbs and some irregular ones, prepositions and their cases.'<sup>13</sup>

After an intense grammatical preparation and an essential initiation into syntax, in the Fifth year pupils did translation practice from the easier passages of the collection called *Excepta e veteribus scriptoribus*. Then in Fourth and Third year they went on to translate, which familiarised them with the writings of Cornelius Nepos, Livy, Caesar, Sallust, Cicero, Virgil. Greek study began in the final months of the Third year, starting with the alphabet up to the five declensions. This became more consistent during the Humanities and Rhetoric years: translation from Greek to Italian was reserved for the final stage.<sup>14</sup> Commenting on the authors, the teacher would need to explain the etymology of the words, their properties, elegance, synonyms, invention mythology, rites and customs of the ancient Romans, Latin metre and various genres of poetic composition. In the Rhetoric year pupils had to learn to write elegantly in Latin and deal with three kinds of oratory: demonstrative, deliberative and judicial according to what Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Vossio had taught. Topics for composition had to be drawn from Greek and Roman history concerning famous people, and on things that had happened or could have happened. Prose writers were constantly alternated with poets.<sup>15</sup>

In broad outline this was what John Bosco would have covered from 1831 to 1835. In his first school year (1831–32) his preparation allowed him to go from Sixth class or first lower grammar to Fifth class or second grammar, reaching Fourth class or third grammar the following year, then going on after a few months to Third class or upper grammar. With regards to promotions the *Regolamento* established that: 'Promotions from a lower to a higher class will not ordinarily happen except at the end of the school year or in the first half of November from lower classes to third class. But there can be an extraordinary, very rare case depending on the magistrate's decision or on the Deputation.'<sup>16</sup> Moving from Sixth to Rhetoric, our mature student would have had, in order, as teachers; Fr Valeriano Pugnetto (or Fr Gioachino Vogliasso), Fr Placido Valimberto, cleric Vincenzo Cima, Dominican Giacinto Giusiana, Fr Pietro Banaudi and young teacher Fr Giovanni Bosco.

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10 Cf. A. F. DUBOIN, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, provvidenze, editti, manifesti, ecc. ...*, vol. 16, t. XIV, 1847, pp. 249-255, 1315-1324.

11 Cf. C. TIVARONI *L'Italia durante il dominio austriaco (1815-1849)*, t. I *L'Italia Settentrionale*, p. 4.

12 *Regie Patenti... 1822*, tit. IV *Della congregazione, dell'insegnamento...*, capo II *Dell'insegnamento*, art. 170, p. 47; cf. G. MENTELLINO, *La scuola primaria e secondaria in Piemonte e particolarmente in Carmagnola dal secolo XIV alla fine del secolo XIX*. Carmagnola, The author 1909, pp. 36-37, 42.

13 Cf. G. MENTELLINO, *La scuola primaria e secondaria in Piemonte...*, p. 44.

14 Cf. G. MENTELLINO, *La scuola primaria e secondaria in Piemonte...*, p. 44-45.

15 Cf. G. MENTELLINO, *La scuola primaria e secondaria in Piemonte...*, p. 42-43.

16 *Regie Patenti... 1822*, tit. IV *Della congregazione, dell'insegnamento...*, capo III, § IV *Delle promozioni*, art. 191, p. 52.

School exercise books which have survived, at least those from his first year, suggest a somewhat limited cultural level, but this would have been quickly enriched thanks also to the amount of parallel reading he did, as he tells us forty years later in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: 'When I finished my homework,' he wrote 'I had a lot of spare time; I used to devote part of it to reading the Latin and Italian classics.'<sup>17</sup> Writing of his 'public speaking and private performances' he gives us some amazing details: 'Since I had an exceptional memory I knew by heart long passages from the classics, the poets particularly. I could quote at will from Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Parini, Monti and others as if they were my own.'<sup>18</sup> He also refers to the methods he had for obtaining the Latin and Italian classics cheaply, a kind of cheap loan (1 *soldo* or 5 cents per book) from the Jewish bookseller Jona Elia. He explains: 'I read a volume a day from the Popular Library series. In my fourth year of *Ginnasio* I spent much time reading the Italian authors. During the Rhetoric year I turned to the study of the Latin classics. I began to read Cornelius Nepos, Cicero, Sallust, Quintus Curtius, Livy, Tacitus, Ovid, Virgil and Horace amongst them.' However, he recognised the superficial and fun side of this reading<sup>19</sup> and this is credible given the encyclopaedic range he recalls.

He was not always at the top in terms of scholastic results. The *Regolamento* established that 'At the end of every month [the teachers] will pass on to the Prefect of Studies a monthly report where they will note for each pupil: 1) The Lesson, adding up the various marks for the *decuria* for the month. 2) The seating position earned in class for the *lavoro di posti* [a special task on which that position depended. The *decuria* was a merit group] and the number of errors made. 3) Seating positions won or lost as a result of class competitions. 4) Obedience.'<sup>20</sup> This overall evaluation was the basis for waiving or reducing the *minervale* [annual school tax] or school fees. From the municipal records we see that John Bosco was dispensed from paying the yearly rate of 12 lire for the 1832–33 school year only, while for 1831–32 he had paid 9 lire and in 1833–34 and 1834–35 he paid the full amount.<sup>21</sup>

Other than being the first sure step in the direction of his desire to join the clergy, the grammar course meant that Don Bosco acquired a healthy stock of knowledge and especially, thanks to his age, (16–20) and mature judgement, the basic elements of a personal study method. Many years later as an educator, and perhaps more concerned with reminding his boys of the need for piety and spirituality more than making a fuss of his achievements, he emphasises the negative side of the impact humanistic culture had had on him during his youth in Chieri, rather more than he needed to. Referring to his first year of philosophy at the seminary he wrote: 'I had some mistaken notions about my studies that could have had sad consequences had I not been saved by a truly providential event. Accustomed to reading the classics all during my school days I had grown so familiar with the outstanding characters in mythology and pagan fables that I found little satisfaction in anything ascetical. I had reached the point where I could convince myself that fine language and eloquence could not be reconciled with religion. The very works of the Holy Fathers appeared to me as the products of limited intellects, excepting always the principles of religion which they expound with force and clarity.' Reading *The Imitation of Christ* put an end to this possible crisis with results that were radically contrary to what was in fact the case: 'To this book I owe my decision to lay aside profane literature.' Here too, it is clear that Don Bosco had a pedagogical intent in mind for the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, one which went well beyond merely recording the historical facts. In the 1870's he was particularly concerned by the invasive presence in schools of

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17 MO (2010) 71.

18 MO (2010) 66.

19 MO (2010) 72.

20 *Regie Patenti*...1822, tit. IV *Della congregazione, dell'insegnamento*..., capo II *Dell'insegnamento*, art. 169, p. 47

21 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri*..., p. 74.



pagan classics, and sought to avoid these by introducing Latin Christian writers.<sup>22</sup> However he confessed that he had found in the *Imitation of Christ* 'so much doctrine and morality, more than he had ever found in 'whole volumes of the ancient classics.'<sup>23</sup> This classic of 'modern' spirituality would often appear among the spiritual books he suggested as reading for young people and adults, along with the Gospel, St Alphonsus' *Apparecchio alla morte* (Preparation for death) and *La pratica di amar Gesù Cristo* (The practice of loving Jesus Christ), St Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout life*, and the lives of the saints.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, the student now become cleric would have found the seminary a time of heightened sensitivity, more intense recollection, a place where asceticism was more emphasised. But it would not be correct to force the contrast. In reality the public school in Chieri could almost be thought of as a pre-seminary, both for its moral and religious discipline and its results. Don Bosco writes: 'At the end of the Rhetoric course, of the 25 students, 21 of them embraced the clerical state.'<sup>25</sup> Rather, we should not underestimate the limitations of the type of culture imparted there. It was essentially passed on by grammarians without the life that came from literary and general history of these same classic texts and the complementary appropriate for broadening knowledge and giving rise to a proper critical spirit. In Don Bosco's case it was being offered to someone who was just beginning to learn these things and was submitting himself to this teaching approach at a time when on average, his fellow students from good families were finishing, and at his age (16–20) had the possibility of applying themselves to much more demanding and stimulating studies, assuming such existed at the time of narrow-minded restoration, closed to the anxieties of transition to new worlds. The reminiscences that followed and even the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, transmitted an image from those years of a world wholly revolving around the college or secondary school and the minor events and details associated with it, far from ecclesial, social, political, cultural events preparing for new times and which it was not easy to open up to later.

## 2. Moral and religious discipline

By dint of the 1822 *Regolamento*, pupils were structurally immersed in a total formation scene which included cultural, ethical and religious formation that went well beyond mere instruction. This was a notable factor, though not the only one, for the specific influence the Jesuits had on Don Bosco. The *Regolamento* respected the one adopted by the Jesuits in the college at Novara, opened in 1818 and printed on 7 November under the title *Prospetto del Collegio reale di educazione sooto la direzione de' Padri della Compagnia di Gesù: Regolamenti generali* (Prospectus of the Royal College of Education in Novara under the administration of the Jesuit Fathers: General Regulations), extended to the college in Turin. It was drawn up under the aegis of the powerful Censor of the University, Giovanni Battista Viotti, by the Jesuits in Novara led by the Prefect of Studies, Fr. Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio (1793–1862).<sup>26</sup> In it, cultural, moral and religious formation were seen to be inextricably linked, as made explicit by the *Regie Patenti* that brought it

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22 Cf. Chap. 17, § 5.

23 MO (2010) 93.

24 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' Suoi Doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà...* Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1847, p. 18, OE II 198; ID., *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri di buon cristiano*. Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1856, p. 38, OE VIII 38; ID., *Porta Teco Cristiano ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocché ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova*. Turin, Paravia e comp. 1858, p. 29, OE XI 29; ID., *Il cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*. Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, p. 209, OE XIX 209.

25 MO (2010) 74.

26 Cf. A. LIZIER, *Nel primo centenario del Regio convitto nazionale di Novara 1808-1908. Le Scuole di Novara ed il Liceo-Convitto*. Novara, G. Parzini 1908, pp. 176-181, 193-199.

into force.<sup>27</sup>We know that the *Regolamento* found profound echo in Don Bosco's awareness, obviously reinforced by later contacts and experiences, not only by analysing the text but also from the precise memory he had of it still in the 1870's when he was writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. It was joined with appreciation and sympathy for a structure that included not a few restoration and repressive features. This might also throw some light on the 19th century side of the preventive system as promoting a not entirely convincing protected freedom. Religion was its principal tool. He writes, 'Here, it is good to recall that in those days religion was a basic part of the educational system.' He then pointed to the absolutely irreproachable nature of language in the religious and moral field and the range of Sunday religious practices. He went on to argue: 'This strict training produced marvellous results. Many years went by without any swearing or unbecoming words being heard. The pupils were docile and respectful at school as they would have been at home. And it often happened that in very large classes everyone gained promotion at the end of the year.'<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, in Don Bosco's mature mind, the prescriptions were substantially in line with the core of his educational system as applied particularly in the more prevalent and protected institutions of the day, schools for boarders known as colleges. The identity of ideas is undoubtedly visible in the basic underlying principles of religion, morality, order inspiring all of school life, but it can also be perceived in the various ways in which they are applied – the means, practice, approaches. Although there are differences between the one and the other system, these are particular forms of implementation, mentality, spirit, style that in changed times reveal a keener attention to youthful sensitivity and a more marked adaptation to their psychology, according to the principles of reason and loving-kindness, guaranteed by watchful assistance.

He would have re-interpreted, in the spirit of greater spontaneity and flexibility of the preventive system, instructions he felt were absolutely necessary, though codified in repressive terms in the third and fourth volumes of the *Regolamento* entitled: *Delle scuole pubbliche e delle scuole Regie e della Congregazione, dell'insegnamento, e degli esami nelle scuole sì pubbliche Regie* (Concerning public and royal schools and the Congregation, teaching and exams in both public and royal schools). As an educator, Don Bosco would have softened or even eliminated a number of the more dictatorial statements in the *Regolamento*: the visible control over making use of the Sacraments Penance and Eucharist, expulsion from school for failing to carry out relevant duties (art. 37 and 38). As for boarders (in the colleges) he was certainly in agreement with the obligation of attending "mass on school days and feast days for the congregation or failing this, parish functions.' (art. 39).<sup>29</sup>

He could also feel very much in harmony with instructions in other more preventive, protective articles: 'Strictly prohibited for students are swimming, going to theatres, gambling wearing masks, going to dances, playing in streets, cafes and other public places, going out to dinner, eating and drinking in hotels and restaurants, hanging around cafes in groups for gossip, and performing in domestic theatres without permission from the Prefect of Studies.' (art. 42): students could not 'keep books that had not been inspected and allowed' by the Prefect of Studies (art. 15) 'Irreligious and ill-mannered students, the incorrigible, those guilty of obstinate, scandalous disobedience of superiors' orders, or criminal acts, will be expelled from school by way of example.' (art 46).<sup>30</sup>

He could have agreed no less with the insistent requests made of teachers regarding surveillance or assistance of the pupils: 'will keep an eye on,' 'will assist' are the recurring verbs for

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27 *Regie Patenti*...1822, p. 3.

28 MO (2010) 55-56.

29 From the '40s to the '50s we will see that Don Bosco would sometimes use the word 'congregation' as a synonym for youth gatherings on Sundays or the Oratory: cf. Chap. 6, § 5.2 and 10, § 2.

30 *Regie Patenti*... 1822, tit. III, capo I, § II. *Dei doveri degli studenti in generale*, pp. 19-21

schools, at the entrance to the church, in the classrooms ( art 54–57).<sup>31</sup>

Of significance was the obligation for students to attend the *Congregation*, something Don Bosco would have accepted for much of its content but it was somewhat at odds with the free and joyous involvement of the Oratory, even if similar to attendance required in the colleges and hospice: (All students will attend mass on school days.) (art. 134) In Lent it was also prescribed that ‘students will attend catechism every school day, which will take place before the usual time for starting school.’ (art.138).<sup>32</sup>

We can note similarities between the practices of piety Don Bosco introduced into his oratories and, even more so, in the boarding schools and those established for the student congregation in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. ‘In the morning congregation,’ it said ‘the following order will be observed: 1.Spiritual reading in the initial quarter of an hour; 2. Singing of the *Veni Creator*; 3. Nocturne with readings and the Ambrosian hymn depending on the season, from the Office of Our Lady; 4. Mass; 5. Singing of the Litany of Our Lady, to allow time for the celebrant’s thanksgiving and for Communion; 6. Instruction; 7. Singing of the psalm *Laudate Dominum Omnes* etc, with verse and prayer for his Royal Majesty.’ (art. 158) ‘In the afternoon congregation the following order will be observed: 1. Spiritual reading in the first quarter of an hour; 2. Singing the usual prayers, and saying the acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition; 3. Catechism for three quarters of an hour (art.159).’ And it went on: ‘The retreat will begin in the evening of Friday after Passion Sunday and will conclude on Wednesday morning of Holy Week. The introduction will be on the first evening, and on each of the four consecutive days there will be two meditations and the two instructions as well as saying the Office of the Blessed Virgin and other functions the Spiritual Directors believe convenient. On the Wednesday morning the retreat will conclude and Easter Communion will take place with the permission of the bishop’ (art. 164).<sup>33</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that John prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation. He had still not received it, even though 18 years of age. From the Confirmation Register in St Martin’s parish, Buttigliera d’Asti, we see that John Bosco, son of Francis, was confirmed on 4 August 1833 by Bishop Giovanni Antonio Gianotti from Turin, who from 15 April was Bishop elect of Torres (Sassi). John’s sponsors were Giuseppe Marzano and Countess Giuseppina Melina of Capriglio. Wisely, in the solemn centenary celebration of this event, the official speaker, Salesian Fr Guido Favini focused on the Holy Spirit and his gifts as the protagonist in Don Bosco’s activity and work.<sup>34</sup> He was clearly inspired by the study of a Dominican, Fr. Ceslao Pera, *I doni dello Spirito Santo nell’anima del B. Giovanni Bosco*.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Trustworthy adults and a network of constructive friendships

By temperament and because of the people he stayed with each time, John did not only attend school; he was not a simple home-school-church kind of boy. He also had a busy social life in a wider, more lively world than the domestic scene at Becchi. There were many real opportunities offered him in Chieri to develop varied relationships; priests and teachers who were kindly and available; new classmates, young people and adults he met outside the school context, people who helped him. He did not forget his friends from Morialdo and ‘from time to time’ he tells us ‘on a

31 *Regie Patenti...* 1822, tit. III, capo I, § III. *Delle obbligazioni de’ Professori, Maestri...*, p. 23.

32 *Regie Patenti...* 1822, tit. IV, capo I, *Della Congregazione, e dei Direttori spirituali*, § I. *Della Congregazione*, pp. 40-41.

33 *Regie Patenti...* 1822, tit. IV, capo I, *Della Congregazione, e dei Direttori spirituali*, § II. *Dei Direttori spirituali*, pp. 44-46.

34 Cf. *Il centenario della Cresima del Beato Don Bosco*, BS 57 (1933) no. 10, October, p. 292.

35 Turin, SEI 1930.

Thursday [the weekday holiday] I went to visit them.<sup>36</sup> It was about twenty five kilometres there and back and the effort was compensated for especially by spending a few short hours with his relatives. It was a taste of the long autumn holidays to come during which, as well as revising some of the weaker aspects of school subjects and the inevitable time for play, he would certainly also have been involved in the more urgent work in the fields.

The author of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, founder and formator of a group of educators, did not fail to make judgements on his teachers and other educators at the college in Chieri, stressing their good educational and teaching qualities as well as pointing to some of their limitations. He makes particular mention of three priests, recalling above all as 'the first person I met' Fr Eustachio [=Placido] Valimberti (1803–45). He gave him useful advice for settling in to this new world and presented him to the Prefect of Schools in Chieri. The other two seemed to have been more significant still. One was intentionally suggested as a model within the framework of a budding *preventive pedagogy*; the other seems to be a prelude to a more complete *pedagogy of confession and spiritual direction*.

Fr Pietro Banaudi (1802–85) seems to have been an educator with a preventive approach. His pupils feel the need to celebrate a 'feast of gratitude' in *statu nascenti*, which ends with a sad event. 'Professor Banaudi' the *Memoirs of the Oratory* note 'was a model teacher. Without having recourse to corporal punishment he succeeded in making all his pupils respect and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons and they love him like an affectionate father.' Then follows a heap of terms familiar to the writer's pedagogical vocabulary. The celebration the pupils prepare for their teacher is a photocopy of the 'feast of gratitude' celebrated at Valdocco. 'Both teacher and pupils were of one spirit and each of us strove for ways to express the joy in our heart.'<sup>37</sup>

Another priest recalled with particular affection is a young Canon from Chieri who went on to be Don Bosco's confessor throughout his entire theology studies, Giuseppe Maria Maloria (1803–57). In some ways he was also his spiritual director, much respected furthermore for the vocational help he offered.<sup>38</sup> 'I had the good fortune' he recalled 'of choosing as my regular confessor Dr Maloria.' 'He always had a warm welcome for me. Indeed he encouraged me to go to confession and communion more often.' 'I have to thank my confessor if I was not led by my companions into certain unfortunate pitfalls inexperienced boys in large schools have to regret.'<sup>39</sup>

As for friends and classmates, the chapter headings in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* reveal the wide range and type of relationships: *My Companions* — *The Society for a Good Time* — *Christian Duties* — *Good companions and practices of piety* — *Humanities and Rhetoric* — *Louis Comollo* — *A Jewish Friend, Jonah the Jew*.<sup>40</sup> School, recreation, emotional and self-formation interests all converge there. This was the nature of the informal 'Society for a Good Time' in particular, the name given to an unstructured but lively and active group,<sup>41</sup> whose unwritten rules were reduced to two: 1 'Avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian.' 2. 'Exactness in the performance of school and religious duties.'<sup>42</sup>

Among the 'truly exemplary' members already in the Society's first year he recalls Guglielmo Garigliano, a future priest (1819–1902), and the very young Paolo Vittorio Braja (1820–32). 'Reserve and piety' was something they shared. It does seem less credible that they gave him

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36 MO (2010) 56

37 MO (2010) 61.

38 MO (2010) 73.

39 MO (2010) 56.

40 MO (2010) 53–65.

41 MO (2010) 53.

42 *Ibid.*

'good advice' and was probable that they received such from him since he was more mature in years and experience. A new piece of information emerges, revealing further contact with the Jesuits: 'On feast days after the practices of piety we used to go along to St Anthony's Church where the Jesuits gave marvellous catechetical instructions with plenty of stories I still recall.'<sup>43</sup> It was probably also a school of thought with a more flexible moral outlook. Then follows the appearance of Jonah his Jewish friend (1816–70/73) whom he got to know during his Humanities year (1833–34) and Luigi Comollo (1817–39) who came to Chieri to begin his Humanities year when John was just beginning Rhetoric.

It is interesting to note how Don Bosco, at nearly sixty years of age, speaks of some whom he became particularly friendly with, and uses terms and emphases that seem to be in contrast with his habitual reserve and caution where particular friendships are concerned. However, he recalls them as friendships with an intense spiritual content and with the same pedagogical purposes they inspired when writing the lives of a number of boys in 1859–64. In Comollo's case the friendship was prolonged and deepened at the seminary<sup>44</sup> through an increasingly heightened sharing of spiritual sensitivity. It was an encounter between a devout and submissive student and a self-willed one who was loved and admired and had no time for bullies. He did not hesitate to tackle them in defence of his weaker friend when they attacked him.<sup>45</sup>

The relationship which began at Giovanni Pianta's café with the young Jew, Jonah or Jacob Levi, ended up with his friend converting to Catholicism. He was solemnly baptised at *Santa Maria della Scala*, the Chieri Cathedral, on 10 August 1834, changing his first name and surname to Luigi Bolmida. His godfather was Mr Giacinto Bolmida and his godmother Mrs Ottavia Maria Bertinetti. She and her husband were outstanding future benefactors of Don Bosco.<sup>46</sup> When Don Bosco was writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Luigi Bolmida was possibly still living with the family in Turin as a weaver and dyer.<sup>47</sup>

In the *Memoirs* this friendship was a window intentionally opened on the appeal to charity and the apostolate which was, for Don Bosco, the basis of every genuine friendship. In this case it was wrapped in sincere affection and a sharing of common tastes. 'Every spare minute he had' he records, 'he spent in my room; we sang together, played the piano or read. He liked to hear the thousand little stories I used to tell.'<sup>48</sup> This style shows up as a model of the relationships in Chieri and softened the strong moralistic kind of devotion in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* which could have diminished the cheerfulness of the group of friends. Don Bosco had particular intentions in mind when he dedicated a good number of pages to the playful and happy aspects of his student existence, as we see from the subtitles in two of the chapters; *Games — Conjuring tricks — Self-defence — A race — A jump — The magic wand — The top of the tree*.<sup>49</sup> In 1873, while recalling these exploits in Chieri with some emphasis he said: 'In the midst of my studies and other interests, such as singing, music, speech training, and dramatics, which I took undertook wholeheartedly, I also learned a variety of new games. Card tricks, marbles, quoits, walking on stilts, running and jumping, all of which I enjoyed and in which I was by no means mediocre, even if I was no champion.' And again; 'I often gave performances both in public and in private ....' '... conjuring was a source of wonder'<sup>50</sup> Then there was his victorious challenge to the acrobat.<sup>51</sup> Was

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43 Cf. MO (2010) 55.

44 MO (2010) 57-60.

45 MO (2010) 59-60.

46 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 95.

47 Cf. S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, pp. 113-115.

48 MO (2010) 62.

49 MO (2010) 66-71.

50 MO (2010) 66.

51 MO (2010) 69-71.

it all a true and faithful historical account? What it was, for certain, was a desire to indicate a youthful approach to a good and happy existence.

#### 4. Vocational decision

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco dramatises the difficulties, doubts and anxieties accompanying his choice of vocation. He stresses his disorientation and deep desire for a steady hand to point out God's will for him, the lack of a more directive spiritual guide, the decision he made for the Franciscans cancelled almost immediately. It once more seemed to betray the pedagogical objectives inspiring *the Memoirs*.<sup>52</sup> He would be very happy to be, for his boys and Salesians, the kind of clairvoyant and responsible director he sought in vain for as a student of rather mature age – able to indicate with reassuring firmness the path God had assigned to them and by which they could more easily achieve salvation.<sup>53</sup>

But perhaps the choice for John did not have to be especially problematic after so many years of struggle and sacrifice in order to study. There had to be no doubt about priesthood as the goal. There could have been some doubts as to the type of clerical status that would be closest to his spiritual aspirations and, as a not exactly secondary motive, accessible to Margaret's and Joseph's financial possibilities. It has been said, and not without foundation, that 'this was the real reason why Don Bosco was attracted to choosing the Franciscan Order, since he was worried about the heavy burden on his mother, who was paying his board at the diocesan seminary.' Archbishop Fransoni required two payments 'one of 27.50 lire and the other 15 lire for each month.'<sup>54</sup>

John finally decided to enter the Franciscans, and let this be known to the Reformed Conventuals of St Francis at the Church of Our Lady of Peace on St George's Hill in Chieri. Fr Isidoro Braja, the uncle of John's deceased friend Paolo Vittoria Braja, was there at the monastery. The Franciscan Fathers at the Monastery of Our lady of the Angels in Turin examined John Bosco's request and gave a positive answer. The result of his acceptance was minuted thus; 'In the year 1834 the youth Giovanni Bosco born at Castelnuovo, baptised on 17 August 1815 and confirmed, was admitted to Our Lady of the Angels monastery of the Reformed Order of St Francis. He fulfils the requirements and was voted for unanimously 18 April. From Book II, registering young postulants to the Order admitted between 1669–1838. Fr Constantino de Valcamonica, Brescia, Fr Rezzato.'<sup>55</sup> Don Bosco never clearly indicated the reason for his subsequent change of mind and the decision to continue with the Rhetoric year and on completion of his grammar schooling, to enter the seminary. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he first speaks of a dream, then of his confessor 'who did not want to hear of dreams or Friars' and who invited him to follow his 'own inclinations and not the advice of others.' Finally, he mentions the request to Fr Comollo, his friend's uncle, for advice. Ultimately he states that he had followed Fr Comollo's resolute advice: 'Let him don the clerical habit. As he goes on with his studies he will better understand what God wants him to do.' 'Aloofness from the world and earnest piety will help him overcome every obstacle.'<sup>56</sup> Probably he had received assurances of support from his mother and brother, the parish priest of Castelnuovo, and other family friends.

In a circular on 7 August 1829, Archbishop Chiaverotti had laid down strict conditions for conferring the cassock, reserving examination of a vocation to the Archbishop. Required for

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52 MO (2010) 72-74.

53 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Autour de six logia attribués à don Bosco dans les Memorie Biografiche*, RSS 10 (1991) 25-30.

54 E. DERVIEUX, *Un secolo del Seminario Arcivescovile di Chieri 1829-1929*. Chieri, Premiata Officina Grafica Gaspare Astesano 1929, edizione extra-commerciale, cited by S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 83.

55 Cited by S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 97.

56 MO (2010) 74.

admission were: 1) a 'certificate' or statement from the city or community of birth, or the candidate's hometown declaring family circumstances, patrimony and father's occupation; 2) Certification of having completed Rhetoric, which was the essential gateway to philosophy courses; 3) Certification of good behaviour, attendance at the holy sacraments, parish ceremonies, declaring whether the bearer showed signs of a vocation to the clerical state.<sup>57</sup>

The Chieri City Council issuing the certificate requested by the student John Bosco on 28 August 1835 'for the purpose of admission to the exam for donning the clerical habit to which he aspires' stated; 'The behaviour of said Gioanni has always been, since he was a young man, respectable, upright, well-mannered, edifying and he offers excellent prospects.'<sup>58</sup>

Due to the threat of cholera in Turin, the vocation exam was held in Chieri in September before the Archpriest of the Cathedral, Canon Massimo Burzio (1777–1847), naturally with a positive outcome.

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57 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società. Aspetti della Restaurazione religiosa a Torino*. Rome, LAS 1993, p. 184, n. 94.

58 Cited by S. CASELLE, *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...*, p. 140.

## Chapter 5

# CULTURAL, SPIRITUAL ECCLESIASTICAL FORMATION (1835–41)

1835 25 October: clerical clothing

3 November: John enters the seminary in Chieri: Two year philosophy course begins.

1837 November: begins five years study of theology.

1840 Summer: preparation for examination on treatises in the 4th year of Theology:

Autumn: passes 4th year of theology exams and is ordained subdeacon; November: begins 5th year theology.

1841 5 June, vigil of Feast of the Blessed Trinity, ordained priest in the church at the Archbishop's residence.

It is understandable that on returning to the Becchi, John had to remain in keeping with the lifestyle of an aspiring seminarian. 'I gave up acrobatics and dedicated myself to reading good books' he noted in the *Memoirs of the oratory*. Obviously he worked with 'the youngsters, entertaining them with stories, pleasant recreation, sacred music' and teaching 'daily prayers and other things more important at that age,' and 'even the older ones [who] were almost ignorant of the truths of the Faith.'<sup>1</sup>

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* should be close to reality in recalling this shift to a clerical way of life. In fact it reflects ideas and sentiments we see a few years later in sermons written between his time at the seminary and then the Pastoral Institute, in the testimony of Giuseppe Burzo, a cleric for whom he had been prefect or assistant in the dormitory,<sup>2</sup> and in his life of Louis Comollo.<sup>3</sup> It was also the direction propounded by Cafasso.<sup>4</sup> 'Having made up my mind to enter the seminary, I took the exam,' Don Bosco went on to write between 1873–74 'I prepared carefully for that most important day because I was convinced that one's eternal salvation or eternal perdition ordinarily depends on the choice of a state of life.'<sup>5</sup> John put on the clerical habit at the hands of the parish priest of Castelnuovo d'Asti, Pietro Antonio Cinzano, on 25 October 1835. Many decades later, he recalled his state of mind over those days in somewhat severe terms, and made drastic resolutions. 'After that day I had to pay attention to myself. The style of life I had lived up until then had to be radically reformed.' The seven points in the rule of life he set himself were not completely original. They partly reflected rules for students at the 'college' that were included in the royal *Regolamento* (set of regulations) of 1822 for public schools: avoiding going to a range of public

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1 MO (2010) 74.

2 The testimony was sent from the *Convitto* on 16 April 1843, Em I 49-52

3 [G. BOSCO], *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*, Turin, By Speirani e Ferrero 1844, 84 p., OE I 1-84.

4 P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 261.

5 MO (2010) 76.



places, magic and acrobatic performances; practising a retiring lifestyle and temperance; replacing secular reading with religious reading; practising daily meditation and spiritual reading; recounting some edifying story or useful maxim each day.<sup>6</sup>

Then follows reference to the ‘memorable talk’ with his mother on the eve of departure for the seminary. The true clerical habit was ‘the practice of virtue.’ Better ‘a poor farmer for a son than a priest who neglects his duties.’ He was ‘consecrated to the Blessed Virgin’ by her from birth, and it was his duty to love ‘friends who have devotion to Mary’ and to ‘always promote devotion to Mary.’<sup>7</sup> Margaret was speaking to a twenty year-old in concepts that, as his personal resolutions demonstrate, were more than familiar to him.

## 1. At the seminary

On 3 November, the new cleric entered the seminary at Chieri, a branch of the one in Turin for those who were not looking to follow up with academic degrees. The Turin seminary, in the intentions of its founder and the man who wrote its regulations, Archbishop Colombano Chiaverotti, Pastor of the diocese from 1818, sought to be a very serious institution aimed at shaping a priest dedicated to pastoral activity. The ‘ecclesiastical spirit was to be instilled through the abundance of the ‘divine word’ strongly marked by priestly piety, respect for the Church, modesty in speech and conversation, civilised dealings with people, by acquiring solid moral virtues, especially sobriety and chastity.’<sup>8</sup>

The twenty-year-old John appeared to emphasise his own commitment with a singular comment on the motto above the sundial outlined on the wall around the building’s courtyard: ‘*Afflictis lentae, celeres gaudentibus horae.*’ ‘That’s it, I said to my friend [Garigliano]: let’s always be cheerful and time will pass quickly.’<sup>9</sup> It sounded like a comment more appropriate for a recalcitrant schoolboy than a seminarian wanting to undertake a long and demanding journey of self-formation. What sounds truer is the rule of life he said he had asked his philosophy professor for, Dr Francesco Ternavasio (1806–86). He asked how best to fulfil his duties and win his superiors’ good will. The answer he got was laconic and partly tautological: ‘ “Just one thing”, the good priest replied, “the exact fulfilment of your duties” ’.<sup>10</sup>

John was quite convinced about becoming a priest when he entered the seminary, and this was backed up by his fidelity over a long period. He knew how much sacrifice his studies at the public school had cost the family and what a burden the monthly boarding fee was, and having what he needed for his years in the seminary would continue to be. It was not for nothing that he was perfecting the art of begging that would be so essential and further refined in the future.

Three of his requests have been found from his first three years of theology, asking for a subsidy from the Royal Treasurer General’s office. The requests were prior to 16 January 1838, 12 February 1839 and 30 March 1840 respectively. His reasoning was modestly put: in the first one his being ‘without a father and almost completely without financial means’ but wanting nevertheless ‘to pursue the career to which it seems God has called me:’ in the second ‘being unable to expect any assistance from my relatives, since they have to ask others for food’ and proposing to ‘continue in the career I have undertaken and to which I feel I have been clearly called by God;’ and in the third he asked for the costs associated with establishing the ecclesiastical patrimony

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6 MO (2010) 77-78.

7 MO (2010) 79.

8 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 155-213 (Formative concerns and concerns regarding the seminary)

9 MO (2010) 79.

10 MO (2010) 79.

which his brother Joseph and a 'kind person' had made possible, with a view 'to being able to persevere in the clerical state I have undertaken and to which I consider I have been uniquely called by God.' The first two requests were accepted and he was given 90 lire in each case.<sup>11</sup> It was the cost of six months basic board. The 'kind person' was Giovanni Febbraro 'son of a surgeon who had moved from S. Paolo Sobrito to the Castelnuovo city centre,' an acquaintance of Don Bosco's brother Joseph from his work as a shareholder in Sussambrino.<sup>12</sup>

His life at the seminary, kept busy by the daily round of classes, personal study, practices of piety and spiritual formation, was characterised especially by his meeting up once more with Luigi Comollo who arrived there in 1836, and by his encounter with Fr Giovanni Borel (1801–73) who preached the retreat in Spring 1838. His renewed acquaintance with Comollo led him to him better appreciate the spirituality of their friendship, so different were they in temperament and expressions of piety, but even closer on their journey to the holiness demanded by priestly dignity.<sup>13</sup> They were also brought together by Comollo's precarious health and strong spiritual leanings and increasingly ardent desire for heaven. This was further whetted by his dramatic final illness and finally placated by a confident death, followed then by his ghostly return on the night of 3 April.<sup>14</sup>

John's aspiration to the serious nature of the priesthood at all costs could have been put to the test but also strengthened during the summer holidays when he attended religious celebrations, far too worldly in his estimation, while meeting other clergy.<sup>15</sup> The aspiring priest soon found the remedy: 'Henceforward I resolved to be more reserved. I was convinced that he who would give himself entirely to the Lord's service must cut himself off from worldly amusements.'<sup>16</sup> The encounter he had with Fr Borel confirmed this direction. He described this in brief passages in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* a few weeks after the latter's death (9 September 1873: 'He appeared in the sacristy.' (John as a student of theology was the sacristan that year, 1838. 'With a smiling face and a joking manner of speaking but always seasoned with moral thoughts.' Everything pointed to him being 'a worthy priest': his manner of preparation for and celebrating Mass, his popularity and 'the fire of charity' in his preaching, his way of administering the sacrament of penance, his wise advice, especially about vocations.<sup>17</sup> It is obvious that the description offered in 1873 was expanded on from what he had glimpsed in 1838 given the wealth of experience from their collaboration in the 1840s and '50s and their unbroken friendship.

## 2. A structured cultural formation

As for his cultural formation as a seminarian, what Don Bosco states thirty years later might surprise us, but not as much, when he compares it with the formation given at the Pastoral Institute; 'The *Convitto ecclesiastico* completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma, and that speculative: and in moral theology, only controversial issues. Here one learnt to be a priest.'<sup>18</sup>

It was a widespread impression of those coming out of institutes of cultural formation. They

11 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, "Sacra Real Maestà". *Considerazioni intorno ad alcuni inediti di don Bosco*, RSS 13 (1994) 270-271.

12 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 12-22, 36-38 and A. GIRAUDO, "Sacra Real Maestà"... , p. 270, no. 9; *Costituzione del patrimonio ecclesiastico dalli signori chierico Giovanni e Giuseppe fratelli Bosco e da Febbraro Giovanni. Ricevuto il 23 marzo 1840... da me Carlo Beltramo Notaio*: copy drawn up in 1875 by notary Carlo Razzini from Buttigliera d'Asti, ASC A 0201001.

13 MO (2010) 82-83, 87-89.

14 MO (2010) 90-91.

15 MO (2010) 85-87.

16 MO (2010) 87.

17 MO (2010) 91-92.

18 MO (2010) 100.

believed they were lacking the skills and practical guidelines their activity required, but they did take account of the mental structures the disciplines taught them and given them. Of course, there is no doubt that a certain kind of teaching could have just filled heads rather than helping to give them some structure. It might have led Don Bosco in the 1870's to an implicit critical attitude towards those who did not share his rather 'unseminary' way of forming Salesian clerics and who, in his opinion, wanted to isolate them in study centres far from the places and demands of action in the field, having them exclusively caught up in arid and bookish studies. However, he didn't deny the need for appropriate essential studies in philosophy and theology, though never displaying particular interest in pure speculation.<sup>19</sup>

Deep down, Don Bosco was only highlighting real limitations which at a time of more general protest Fr Giacomo Perlo (1816–98) denounced in more drastic terms. He was a pastor of souls who had studied theology at the seminary in Chieri from 1833 to 1837. 'The theology they made the clerics do,' he wrote harshly in 1848 'was antique, barely of any use even in Luther's day; not a hint of living, current questions. Even the books of some of the best theological writers were forbidden in the seminary and one needed to squeeze into the narrow confines of the little one got from the professor. Of course, not a whiff of literature, history, or any other noble discipline whose books were banned from entering those sacred walls.'<sup>20</sup>

Fr Giovanni Giacomelli (1820–1901), who entered the seminary in 1836 and from 1873 was Don Bosco's confessor, told Fr Giulio Barberis about Don Bosco's somewhat protesting attitude as a theology student: 'Don Bosco had a very good memory and applied himself very well to his studies but on some occasions, and these weren't so rare, although he studied the lessons he also read various other theological writers by way of comparison, so did not study *ad litteram*, as the custom was. When questioned, he knew the answers, but sometimes he would alter opinions a little or advance views a little different from the treatise. I recall one time when a professor scolded him; "Study the treatise literally like the others." It was one of the things he adapted to with difficulty.'<sup>21</sup>

In fact, although Don Bosco was writing about it 35 years later, the six years in the seminary were, after his grammar schooling, the only time when the cleric Bosco had the chance to work full time at his specifically priestly culture and formation for looking after souls with a view of to exploiting his talents in future forms of apostolate, including the apostolate of the pen. He would have had to conscientiously follow the professor's explanations during the lengthy time given to lessons and learning, which would then be reviewed in the hour with the tutor spent looking at further explanations and memorisation and new ideas and discussions in daily group meetings. The teachers were good. The authors they drew their inspiration from and had themselves followed while doing their doctorate at university were generally serious and demanding ones. Besides, the requirements regarding study and exams were demanding ones and the candidate in this case was self-willed, intelligent and responsible.

The *Constitutions* of the Turin seminary, promulgated by Archbishop Chiaverotti in 1819, came into being from pastoral intentions and also the concern to raise the cultural and spiritual level of the students. It was he, too, who had wanted the other branch of the seminary opened in Chieri in 1829. The new seminary had a Pro-rector as its superior and philosophy and theology studies were organised according to a scheme similar to those in Turin. The Archbishop wrote the

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19 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 13-17, (OE XXV 243-247), presented to cardinals of the commission set up to decide on approving the Constitutions.

20 G. PERLO, *Alcuni cenni sopra un nuovo ordinamento del clero...* Turin, Tip. di G. Cassone 1848, p. 26.

21 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 6, pp. 37-38. The testimony would have been given, along with others, at a casual meeting on 26 March 1876. Fr Giacomelli entered the seminary for his first year philosophy in 1836, while Don Bosco was beginning his second year, but they attended the same classes, since the teaching was done in cycles.

*Epistolae ad clerum* along similar lines. He also made a point, year after year, of addressing the seminarians on their formation.<sup>22</sup> By vocation, the cleric was called to be the 'light of the world and salt of the earth,' but how could he fulfil this essential part of his vocation without 'seriously applying himself to study? Woe to the ignorant cleric!'<sup>23</sup> A serious cultural formation was considered essential in demanding times, and in a time of restoration. This required 'a generation of clerics inspired by right intention, and who were holy and learned, urged on by pastoral zeal.'<sup>24</sup> One article of the *Constitutions*, aimed at guaranteeing methodical and serious study, responded to the archbishop's 'Woe to.....': 'After piety, application to study is absolutely necessary for anyone wanting to be effectively formed as a worthy cleric. So we direct that in the time assigned to study each one be at his desk and in his cell, studying quietly so as not to cause disturbance to those around him. It is not allowed to read any other book during study time even if it belongs to the subject being studied, unless with special permission from tutors.'<sup>25</sup>

The various moments of cultural learning from 3 November to 25 June, filled in very busy days beginning at 5.30 a.m. (earlier in late spring), and finished towards 9.30/10.00 in the evening. About an hour and a quarter was reserved for personal study between rising and breakfast, half an hour in the early afternoon, two hours in the evening from 5 to 7 p.m. Teaching for groups was mainly done through lessons: two hours sessions (an hour and a quarter each for students of philosophy) in the morning and one in the afternoon and 'groups'.<sup>26</sup> Given only one chair of philosophy and one of theology, the subjects were taught in a cycle. From the accounts register at the Chieri seminary it does not seem that text books were used. The earlier mentioned testimony of Fr Perlo also suggests that following the tradition of the preceding century, professors of both philosophy and theology dictated their lessons.<sup>27</sup>

Printed texts were advised for whoever was preparing for the autumn exams over summer, as would have happened to cleric Bosco. During the third year of theology, in fact, he got the idea of jumping from third to fifth year, preparing for exams in the fourth year subjects over summer. The reason he gave the archbishop was 'his advanced age of 24.' He was kindly received and granted permission.<sup>28</sup> According to the testimony of the assistant priest at Castelnuono at the time, Fr Stefano Febbraro, the exam text would have been the *De Eucharistia* by Dominican Pietro Maria Gazzaniga (1722–99) and the *De Poenitentia* by Antonio Alasia (1731–1812).<sup>29</sup>

As for tutorials and groups or discussions (the '*sabbatine*'), the *Constitutions* gave precise indications: '1. Every day of the scholastic year, except Saturday each week and the Solemnity of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception, there will be a tutorial and groups. 2. The tutorial will last an hour. The first half an hour will be taken up with questions and expounding on the previous tutorial and the second in explaining and going through the lesson assigned for the following tutorial. Groups will last half an hour and will take the form of a '*sabbatina*' on the last of the issues explained and studied.'<sup>30</sup>

22 Aldo Giraudo has carried out an in-depth research into these and other issues in the cited monograph, *Clero, seminario e società...*, summing up the situation at the Chieri seminary in three solid chapters: *Preoccupazioni formative e fondazione del Seminario di Chieri (1829)* (Chap. III), *L'organizzazione del seminario* (Chap. IV), *Il modello formativo* (Chap. V: especially, pp. 277-288).

23 A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 267-268.

24 A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 188.

25 *Costituzioni pel Seminario Metropolitano di Torino. 1819*, pt. II, Chap. III, art. 1°, in A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 374.

26 *Costituzioni pel Seminario...*, in A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 353-354.

27 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 269-276.

28 Cf. MO (2010) 94.

29 *Documenti* XLIII 8.

30 *Costituzioni pel Seminario...*, part I, Chap. V, cited by A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 357: articles 4 and 5 present detailed outlines of how the week develops with tutorials and study groups for the various disciplines (pp. 357-358).

This potential cultural formation certainly offered breadth and a more solid foundation for Don Bosco's anthropological outlook and dogmatic and moral concepts which, until then had remained at the level of his boyhood catechism and the Christian doctrine picked up in grammar school. Don Bosco's basic cultural and ecclesiastical knowledge came from the seminary.

### 3. The two year philosophy course

It is not easy to describe what Don Bosco might have taken from his two years of philosophy. Teaching was imparted by Fr Francesco Stefano Ternavasio. It followed the syllabus prescribed in the public schools, comprising treatises on logic and metaphysics, ethics, geometry and physics.<sup>31</sup> From the handful of handwritten pages by the student Bosco on introductory lessons in philosophy we find expressions and concepts familiar to the different systems which could have been linked to a philosophy inspired by distant empiricist, Lockeian roots but with a good number of adjustments of a spiritual kind in real terms. The thinking of Francesco Soare (1743–1806) had developed in this direction. Also converging on this was the work of the moderate but very cultured Giuseppe Matteo Pavesio (1757–1800) who Don Bosco's teacher could not ignore. He wrote three volumes on *Elementa logices ... metaphysices ... philosophiae moralis ad subalpinos*.<sup>32</sup> Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, who had done his two years of philosophy at the University of Turin in 1829–31, had as his professor of logic and metaphysics Giacomo Andrea Abba (1780–1836) who was of a similar learning. These 'authors of several philosophical works, amongst which *Elementa logices et metaphysices*, Taurini 1829 : *Delle cognizioni umane*, Turin 1835, fundamentally continued on from his predecessor's teaching,' (G. B. Benone, a disciple of Locke). Abba, however, had tried to temper sensism and spiritualism inasmuch as he taught that ideas derive not only from the senses but also from the soul. He also critiqued Antonio Rosmini's *Nuovo saggio sull'origine delle idee*. Gastaldi took the path ending up with Rosminian teaching and then passed severe and negative judgement on the philosophy teaching he had received from the university,<sup>33</sup> stating that he was indebted to Rosminian philosophy for helping him avoid the problems of psychologism and subjectivism.<sup>34</sup>

The philosophy Don Bosco seems to have absorbed to some extent was of an empiricist and spiritualistic kind, though with strong practical and ethical emphases. In one of his exercise books we find a definition which is certainly a copy of what his teacher had dictated: 'Science of the true and the good' 'pursued' 'by right reason' 'for man's true happiness because it teaches man to judge things rightly and use them well and enjoy them according to the prescription of law.' 'We divide it into Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics.' 'Logic and ethics belong to the spirit: Metaphysics to everything separate from matter, Physics to the body. The first duty of Philosophy is to cure the soul of its illnesses, defend the rights of reason, expand it and perfect it.'<sup>35</sup> When writing a description of Silvio Pellico, Don Bosco described him as a 'great philosopher, poet and writer,' adding: 'Philosophy which has as its aim to make truth known and guide man to avoid evil and do good, found a great nurturer in Abbot Antonio Rosmini.'<sup>36</sup>

Altogether these concepts seem to reflect the contents of the systematic work of the aforementioned Giuseppe Matteo Pavesio, a collegiate theologian and from 1787 trustworthy teacher of moral philosophy at the Turin Athenaeum with 'a reputation as a learned theologian and

31 A. GIRAUDDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 274.

32 Taurini, Ex typographia Regia 1793-1795.

33 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, Vol. I *Teologo, pubblicista, rosminiano, vescovo di Saluzzo: 1815-1871*, Casale Monferrato, Edizioni Piemme 1983, p. 24.

34 "Il Conciliatore Torinese", no. 79, 4 July 1849.

35 *Bosco Gioanni. Codice contenente sonetti ed altre poesie...*, p. 61, ASC A 2260414.

36 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù da' suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni...* Second edition, Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1859, p. 466.

a true Christian.<sup>37</sup> His work *Institutiones philosophicae ad Subalpinos* was considered to be almost 'a testament of the philosophical teaching over the last thirty years [of the 18th century] at the university.'<sup>38</sup>

At the beginning of his *Ontologia* he quotes in particular 'Locke, Condillac, Soave, Draghetti and other more recent metaphysicists,'<sup>39</sup> but names like Leibniz, Pascal, Grozio also appear. His philosophy seeks to guarantee the objectivity of general ideas relating to the reality of the world, man, God. Religion (the author's religion, is the Christian Faith. He was a deacon) has a privileged role. 'The task and most fertile result of philosophy is to open up man to man and, if I can put it this way, escort him on the journey to wisdom and happiness.' This is why philosophical reflection starts with 'contemplating man,' the harmony of his bodily structure and his inwardness, then moving on from the senses, through imagination, to his rationality. 'The mind fired up by this strength then rises to the heights of heaven, descends into the depths of the abyss, observes the abundance of human creation, discovering the true dignity of man as 'an autonomous and free being born not so much for himself but for God and other men such that he feels religiously bound to his creator by the strong bond of the eternal law and the relationship with reason.' 'All of mankind, in fact,' he had written in earlier pages 'is like a single family where all men are brothers. Almighty God, then, is the supreme emperor or rather, common father.' 'Religion comes from this as the foundation of all virtue, and piety, love of God, instils in man a communion of reason, relationship, likeness. From this come all the duties to which this wonderful animal made for social co-existence is bound.' Knowing and doing are already tasks Aristotle had assigned to man: they are the obligatory path to temporal happiness and blessed immortality. 'The task of the philosopher, then, is to lead man to knowing and doing' so that he can achieve 'happiness'.<sup>40</sup>

Also interesting is the relationship established between *Ontology and Natural Theology*. After having shown 'the way all our abstract ideas are formed,' the author indicates the shift from ideas about 'the properties of entities' to demonstrating the existence of God: this is done 'through reason, beginning with notions about things in this universe which we perceive through the senses.'<sup>41</sup> Pavesio uses these arguments familiar to Don Bosco's catechism and apologetics; physics, metaphysics and a moral, historical argument. According to Pavesio, the *physical* argument 'has the greater force.' Man 'in fact uses the senses to perceive the breadth, order and arrangement of this universe and the direction of all things towards a determined end... all that did not come about by chance.' The *metaphysical* argument is 'the most valid of all and in the final analysis is the one we must have recourse to when dealing with atheists who are sceptics or pretend to be such... Thanks to reflection and reasoning, Man considers the existence of the spirit, the origins of movement, what is in nature and governs it, the range of causes in created things, and weighs up their difference and contingency' which postulate the Absolute and the Necessary. The historical and moral argument comes into play when, ultimately advancing in the correct use of his cognitive faculties, man 'investigates men's convictions, goes back through their history and the origins of kingdoms and discovers in the absolutely extraordinary identity of their agreements just as many testimonies proving and making evident God's existence.'<sup>42</sup> With regard to the 'metaphysical' argument, Pavesio referred in a particular way to Samuel Clarke, 'who deduces how

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37 G. CASALIS, *Dizionario geografico, storico-statistico-commerciale*, Vol. XI. Turin, G. Maspero 1843, p. 163. Casalis dedicates pp. 162-181 to Pavesio. C. CALCATERRA writes extensively about him in *Filopatridi. Scritti scelti, con prefazione sulla "Filopatria" e pagine introduttive ai singoli autori*, Turin, SEI 1941, pp. 379-432.

38 P. STELLA, *Giurisdizionalismo e giansenismo all'università di Torino nel secolo XVIII*, "Salesianum" 20 (1958) 383.

39 G. M. PAVESIO, *Elementa metaphysices...*, p. 143.

40 G. M. PAVESIO, *Elementa logices...*, pp. 1-2, 16-20, 28: under the heading *Hominis contemplatio*, pp. 1-30.

41 G. M. PAVESIO, *Elementa metaphysices...*, p. 145.

42 G. M. PAVESIO, *Elementa metaphysices...*, pp. 180-181, 185,

reason can come to know God and his attributes from very evident principles duly connected in a certain geometrical order.<sup>143</sup>

Don Bosco would be seen to be inclined to similar reasoning in apologetics, combined with common sense and popular thinking where amazement and admiration are interwoven, faced with the marvellous order of the universe, the concatenation of causes that hark back to a Prime Cause, the universality of belief in the existence of God and the worship shown him. 'It is not enough to open your eyes and contemplate what is presented to our gaze,' he had written in the early 1850's 'to have a clear idea of the existence of a *Creator* God from whom everything has its beginning; a *Preserving* God on whom everything depends. Do you see this clock? Who made it?... Could it not have made itself? Certainly not... Now, seeing this world where so many marvellous things exist, will we say it formed itself?... Only almighty God could have formed it? As we need a watchmaker to make a watch, so for the universe we need to admit God as the prime mover, that is creator.' 'He is the prime cause without which the earth would not exist. He is the most wise maker who gives order and movement to all things.' 'The existence of God is such an easy truth to know when in every age, in every place, even barbarians or the uncivilised have all had awareness of God's existence, have all offered worship to a Supreme Being, as even worldly writers have demonstrated.' Inevitably the traditionalist system finds support within this view: 'This universal notion of the divinity was undoubtedly placed in men's hearts by the Creator and clearly communicated to Adam the first man in the world, and passed on by him from generation to generation to all his descendants. This idea, as we have seen, becomes clearer to the senses from the view of this universe publishing the glories of its creator in so many ways.'

He then returns once more to the 'metaphysical' and 'physical' arguments, not dissimilar from Pavesio's thinking: 'The things that exist in the world show the existence of a Creator God in many ways, a truth we touch by hand if we just consider ourselves. The marvellous structure of the human body presents as a masterpiece of a maker of infinite ability. The faculty of thinking, judging, willing, which we sense is another proof of God's existence: since I could not have given these faculties to myself I must conclude that they come from God. Besides, if we observe the marvellous union between our body and soul, the relationship of the whole person with things outside of himself: as much the little as the big things, the sky, earth, the fishes in the sea, the animals on the ground, the birds in the air, they all say in unison: there is a *God who created us, a God who preserves us*.'<sup>144</sup>

Don Bosco also philosophised when he was recounting the anecdote about the poultry man who managed to confuse an unbeliever by getting him confused in the different problem of which came first, the chicken or the egg, keeping his listeners in suspense as they admired the challenge by one and the confusion of the other, and cheering when they heard: 'You can go from the egg to the chicken as much as you want, but you finally have to conclude that there is an omnipotent God who created the chicken and the egg.'<sup>145</sup> He also reminded the Oratory boys of it in a letter he wrote from the Sanctuary of St Ignatius at Lanzo Torinese on 22 July 1864, first of all telling them of the animated discussion that took place on the upper level of the *omnibus* with 'two doctors, two lawyers, a scholar and two others' on matters concerning 'bible history.' Don Bosco was obviously the victor in the discussion as he tells it. 'Then the conversation led to philosophy and theology: they wanted to support Spinoza's pantheism, Manete's dualism etc. etc. but they soon had to back down. Then they began to get rowdy and shouted so loudly against the existence of God that I thought it best to allow them to let off steam so I could reply to them. When things had calmed

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43 G. M. PAVESIO, *Elementa metaphysices*..., p. 189.

44 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, pt. I, tratten. I *Conoscenza di Dio*, pp. 7-8, 10-11, OE IV 201-202, 204-205.

45 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. I, tratten. I. *Conoscenza di Dio*, pp. 8-9, OE IV 202-203

down a bit, jokingly I told them the story of the hen in the hen shed. I questioned them thus: "You", I said to one of the doctors "Which do you think came first, the chicken or the egg?" No one knew how to answer. The solution came from an anonymous traveller: "I would give the chicken and the egg to a good cook to prepare and serve us up for lunch after all this rain. But you, good doctor, you can go from the egg to the chicken as much as you want, but you have to conclude that there is a God who created either the egg, or the chicken from which the egg came."<sup>46</sup>

What we can infer is that Don Bosco had not been initiated into a serious realistic and spiritual philosophy. Undoubtedly there was no room in Ternavasio's teaching for a metaphysics of being which was of Thomistic or Scholastic derivation of any kind. The purely empirical and phenomenological succession of 'first' followed by 'then', took the place of cause and effect. No philosopher was born of the Chieri experience, but certainly a man capable of order and consequence in reasoning was. Yet he was given the ability to have recourse to all the tools which the eclectic ecclesiastical philosophy of the era could offer him to give a somewhat rational and plausible basis for whatever teaching was revealed, illustrated by the theological treatises, *De Deo eiusque attributis*, *De Trinitate*, *De actibus humanis et de Conscientia*, and others.

#### 4. The four years of theology

Likewise, with regard to the teaching of theological disciplines, we have no precise information on the texts professors used or followed. To some extent they could have been the ones they had worked with at the University of Turin, where the Moral teacher without peer was Alasia. 'One needs to add that the seminary in Chieri had only a modest library, set up in Autumn 1834 with collections and spare copies in storage at the Turin seminary and, as seems to be the case, added to by only a few titles over the years.'<sup>47</sup>

The curriculum showed no signs of Exegesis, Biblical Hermeneutics, Church History, Canon Law, Pastoral Theology, but we know the theological treatises used in lessons from the tutorials and group meetings: *De locis theologicis*, *de Deo eiusque attributis*, *de Trinitate*, *de incarnatione*, *de gratia Christi*, *de Sacramentis in genere*, *de baptismo et confirmatione*, *de eucharistiae sacramento et sacrificio*, *de poenitentia*, *de ordine*, *de actibus humanis et de conscientia*, *de religione*, *de peccatis in genere et de peccato originali*, *de iustitia et iure*.<sup>48</sup>

As for Moral Theology and Ecclesiology, a reliable scholar writes: 'In sum, in the early decades of the 19th century, the Turin diocese offered the following scenario: in the Theology and Law faculties, in the Seminars and Moral Conferences probabilism was taught, whereas in Ecclesiology (in spite of official neutrality) the theses were along anti-infallibility lines and were critical of papal primacy. Rigorism was applied in pastoral practice. Among the clergy and certainly the knowledgeable ones from among whom bishops were chosen, moderate philo-Gallican thinking was common in the sense indicated earlier (i.e. jurisdictionality).'<sup>49</sup>

During Dogmatic and Moral, cleric Bosco would not have embarked on a scientific study of theology properly so-called. Theological formations did not even seem to have led him to considering one or other of the great Christian dogmas as the core of his spirituality and catechesis. His theological thinking revolved around the problem of eternal salvation and found its centre in God the Creator, Father and remunerator who sent his Son among humankind. This son became the Saviour and Redeemer in Jesus of Nazareth. His specifically Christian mentality seems more directly influenced by his early catechetical instruction, and the popular religiosity he

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46 Em II 60-62.

47 A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 275-276.

48 A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 275, n. 141.

49 G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883...*, Vol. I, p. 33.



had experienced which was then culturally reinforced by his secondary schooling and the reading which would enthuse him and offer his content for his later production as a popular and youth-oriented educator and writer, content that was historical, religious, biblical, ecclesiastical, apologetic, eucological. We find the last-mentioned content in the *Giovane Provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) without overlooking the *Porta Teco Cristiano, Il Mese di Maggio*.

Instead, there appears to have been considerable influence from the *Theologia Moralis* of Giuseppe Antonio Alasia, the classic moralist of the University of Turin and the two theological seminaries. It was also the basis of moral teaching at the Pastoral Institute. This was built on the fundamental concepts of the voluntary human act, norms, law, freedom of indifference, conscience, and aimed at resolving conflict in systems thought up to help make a doubtful conscience more practically certain, using law and freedom. Alasia, who was strong on reason and systematic treatise and with a clear pastoral orientation, aligned himself with a probabilist and tutorist position.

As much as Don Bosco might have been led to align himself with the probabilist school of thought of Saint Alphonsus Liguori which was taught at the Pastoral Institute under Fr Luigi Guala (1775–1848) and Fr Cafasso, he seems to have kept, in relation to various moral problems, some traces of Alasia's moderate rigorism. On the other hand he was already familiar with identical solutions learned in the family and his grammar schooling in Chieri, coming from both the *Breve catechismo* and the *Catechismo ad uso dei giovani già ammessi alla comunione, e degli adulti* contained in the *Compendio della dottrina Cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino* by Cardinal Gaetano Costa, an archbishop who shared and propounded Alasio's ideas.<sup>50</sup> These concerned a considerable range of moral situations and behaviours: occasions of sin and related obligations, practical behaviour relating to observance of the sixth and ninth commandments, the integrity of confession and the duty of confessing doubtful sins and their seriousness, or whether or not they had already been confessed, frequency of confession and communion.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, from a *cultural* point of view we see that his philosophical and theological formation had not led Don Bosco to formal, critical adherence to a well-defined dogmatic and moral system, one which was structured and provided structure. He did not come away from the seminary with a scientific approach to research and conceptual thinking which would have helped him in various areas with a formal critique of the sources he was drawing from. This would have led him to approach various authors with a broad and eclectic mindset when he was writing on religious or theological themes or telling stories about history, Scripture, the Church or secular, civil topics and when involved in producing material in apologetics and polemics.

## 5. Preference for history and militant apologetics

Don Bosco the seminarian did not stop at the culture he had absorbed over his years of schooling. As we have seen, we can attribute a certain foundation to his 'conversion' as he put it, from his enthusiastic reading of the classics (which we should not take too literally) to *The Imitation of Christ*. At any rate, it was a fortunate and fruitful encounter. Without doubt, and this would be fully in accordance with the mentality revealed by his earliest publications and pursued for decades, his real preference was for Bible and Church History and for Apologetics. 'Subsequently I went on to read Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testaments*' he tells us in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.

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50 Cf. O. FAVARO, *Il catechismo torinese del card. Costa nella storia della catechesi italiana (1786)*, Turin, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia patria 1989, pp. 117-141 (Moral theology). On the crisis of moral theology in Piedmont, shaken by arguments between philojansenism, moderate rigorism and so-called *benignismo*, with explicit reference to Alasia, cf. P. STELLA, *Crisi religiose nel primo Ottocento piemontese*, "Salesianum" 21 (1959) 53-63.

51 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 258-259.

'Next I tackled the *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War* by Flavius Josephus; Bishop Marchetti's *Discussions on Religion* followed; then Frayssinous, Balmes, Zucconi and many other religious writers. I even enjoyed Fleury's *Church History*, unaware that it was a book to avoid. With yet more profit I read the works of Cavalca, Passaventi and Signeri, and all of Henrion's *History of the Church*.<sup>52</sup>

Don Bosco explains the abundance of his extra-curricular reading since he had plenty of time at his disposal due to his good memory and the fact that 'paying attention at lectures and just reading the treatises were sufficient.' According to him he was also able to apply knowledge of other languages to his learning. 'One subject close to my heart,' he tells us 'was Greek.' 'At this time too, I studied French and the principles of Hebrew. These three languages Hebrew, Greek and French, always remained my favourites after Latin and Italian.'<sup>53</sup>

He certainly did not have an equal understanding of these languages and he did not say that the above-mentioned authors had all been read while at the seminary or even all read in their entirety. He probably made a single list of authors and books he had had over the years that followed,<sup>54</sup> especially ones of direct and immediate help in writing books on religious history, youth spirituality and apologetics.

There was evident use of Calmet for the biblical timeline in his *Storia sacra* (Bible history), of Bérault-Bercastel in the *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church history) and probably a certain influence of Frayssinous' *Difesa del Cristianesimo* (Defence of Christianity) which was published in Italian in Turin in 1829. Don Bosco drew the title for his important work on Catechetical instructions, *Il cristiano istruito* (The well-informed Christian) from Segneri's *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione, Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co'suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo* (1853). Finally, in all of his narrative works, including the *Storia d'Italia* (History of Italy) he openly connects with Bercastel and Fleury and authors (among whom he quotes Ferdinand Zucconi)<sup>55</sup> inspired by the interpretation of history illustrated in Bossuet's *Discorso sopra la storia universale*. As we know, it is an interpretation of the millennial history of human affairs from an essentially theological providential hagiographic and moralistic perspective. As a storyteller, Don Bosco certainly had in mind ideas that Bercastel openly espoused in his lengthy *Storia del cristianesimo*: 'Church history has faith, discipline and custom as its object, meaning to say the principle and effects of the Church's authority, its principles of government, various ways of sanctifying its members, the marvellous help the Holy Spirit has furnished it with against all the efforts hell has made to destroy its unity and stain its brilliance... So I have limited myself to dealing with its most outstanding successes, hence purely isolated excerpts from history and especially profane and deviant episodes will find no place in this masterful edifice.'<sup>56</sup> 'Hence my purpose' he went on to say 'is to make known throughout the work the Lord's unfailing protection of his people, the holiness no less than the infallibility of the Church, likewise its beauty and splendour, even at times of great darkness and despite the stains that have frequently disfigured a portion of its members. Nothing

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52 MO (2010) 93.

53 MO (2010) 93-94.

54 For example, the apologetic work by J. Balmes (1810-1848), *El protestantismo comparado con el catolicismo en sus relaciones con la civilización europea*, in 4 volumes, which came out from 1842 to 1844. An Italian edition came out in a number of cities on the Peninsula: the closest to Don Bosco was Carmagnola (tip. Pietro Barbiè, 1852, 2 Vols) entitled *protestantismo paragonato col cattolicismo nelle sue relazioni colla civiltà europea*.

55 Pietro Stella finds analogies between the *Lezioni sacre sopra la divina scrittura* (1729) by Zucconi and treatise III of the second part of the *Cattolico istruito*; but he maintains there is a stricter link with the explanatory notes on the Bible translated by Antonio Martini. Clearer instead is the partial dependence of the *Vita di S. Pietro* on the *Ragionamenti* by Cesari on the *Vita di Cristo e su i Fatti degli apostoli* (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., p. 75 and nos 81-83).

56 *Storia del cristianesimo* by the Abbot of Bérault-Bercastel translated into Italian with dissertations and notes by Abbot Giambattista Zugno, Vol. I. Turin, Tip. Cassone, Marzorati e Vercellotti 1831, pp. 15-16.

could be more helpful for nurturing a re-enlivened faith.<sup>57</sup>

In his books, however, Don Bosco connects with a form of Catholic historiography which prefers to emphasise the 'triumphs' instead of the 'stains' where Church and papacy are concerned, leading to a more optimistic view of the events surrounding them.<sup>58</sup>

It does not seem possible to identify precise strands of spiritual reading in his written and oral devotional material, such as *Cavalca* and *Passavanti*. Nevertheless certain topics are not absent due more to convergence than dependence. Further on we will note a shared interest in the miraculous in the church community and in individual Catholics, drawn from copious historical references.

## 6. Moral, spiritual formation and discipline

The seminary was a precise way of modelling the attitudes and behaviours typical of the priestly personality. Don Bosco was formed this way at the seminary in Chieri.

A basic component was discipline regulated by the Constitutions and spirit of St Charles Borromeo. Don Bosco offers us a description, maybe more a caricature of it in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. 'The rector and other superiors usually saw us only when we returned after the holidays and when we were leaving for them. The students never went to talk to them except to receive corrections. The staff members took weekly turns to assist in the refectory and to take us on walks. That was all.' 'In fact if a superior came on the scene for no particular reason the seminarians would flee left and right as if he were a monster.'<sup>59</sup>

This depicts a formation system judged from the point of view of the preventive approach, and contradicts what he himself would write a few years later about the 'two systems' 'used throughout the ages in the education of youth.' The 'preventive system' as he conceived of and practised it does not exactly reflect what had been the practice for centuries in the seminaries. They were like so many other colleges, public schools or secular and Catholic boarding institutions which sought to form the mature and responsible adult through a system of consistently severe and demanding rules, making the law known then supervising to see it was observed, proposing ideals then checking to see if they were being personally achieved, avoiding 'any kind of familiarity' and preferring forceful reminders for inner motivation through wise but firm spiritual direction, instead of indulging in forms of assistance that substituted for personal responsibility or did away with it altogether. A formation through loving-kindness or gratifying familiarity was not appropriate for the man of God, even if he was young. He was a person apart, meant to be austere and exemplary.<sup>60</sup> Such was the kind of priest sought by Archbishop Chiaverotti and established by the 1819 Constitutions, translated into the Regulations at the Chieri seminary.<sup>61</sup>

Don Bosco also seems to have given us a vague early summary classification of his fellow seminarians with gloomy references to 'dangerous' clerics, 'a plague to good and bad alike,' 'bad language' and 'impious and obscene books.'<sup>62</sup> We need to bear in mind that his first impressions of the seminarians and relations with superiors are replaced, at the time he left the seminary, with kinder ones, also in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: 'In the seminary I was always quite fortunate in that I always enjoyed the affection of my companions and all my superiors.' 'I found the day I had to leave the seminary for the last time very difficult. My superiors loved me and showed continual

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57 A. H. BÉRAULT-BERCASTLE, *Storia del cristianesimo*, Vol. I..., p. 30.

58 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 70-71 e nn. 64-65.

59 MO (2010) 80.

60 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*. Rome, LAS 1999, p. 143.

61 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, pp. 245-288 (formative model).

62 MO (2010) 80-81.

marks of benevolence. My companions were very affectionate towards me. You could say that I lived for them and they lived for me.' 'You can imagine how sad was the parting from that place where I had lived for six years; where I found education, knowledge, an ecclesiastical spirit and all the tokens of kindness and affection one could desire.'<sup>63</sup>

In reality the seminary had been a place of intense ecclesiastical formation. The seminarian's day was filled with duties, all regulated and lacking room for individuals to avoid them. Practices of piety, meditation, liturgical celebrations in and beyond the seminary, lessons, tutorials, and study groups followed one after the other in precise rhythm, and to a certain extent adult relationships between subjects and superiors, life in common among the students were regulated by respect and reserve. A possibility for a strong spiritual bond between the student and his confessor was available. In fact, the one known as the spiritual father only had to be concerned with the outward behaviour of the seminarians, following them up whenever, guiding them as a group in all their moral and religious behaviours and also looking after their health.

A few years after ordination, when asked to offer a description of the exemplary seminarians as represented by Giuseppe Burzio, whose prefect he was in 1840–41 school year, Don Bosco began by describing this young man as 'a perfect model of the cleric.' He showed this by explaining features that were also a self-portrait. As he wrote in his testimony of 16 April 1843: 'From morning to evening there was no part of the timetable he did not keep to exactly. He considered every article of the Regulations to be very important and observed them all equally and faithfully with exactitude.' 'He was more prompt than anyone else with his study tasks,' 'he jealously guarded every moment given to them,' 'but even greater was his commitment to piety.' 'At recreation he was very careful in the way he spoke with and treated his fellow students. Then, since he was so respectful to his superiors, he always spoke of them with the greatest esteem.' 'With anyone he had some confidence in he spoke as a very balanced person and someone of practised virtue.'<sup>64</sup>

No different was the model seminarian described a few months later in the *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolare virtù, scritti da un suo Collega* (Historical sketch of the life of Luigi Comollo.....), offered as a 'true model' to seminarians living 'in the same place and under the same discipline.'<sup>65</sup>

It is an interesting confirmation that outward discipline was meant to model inward discipline. Strengthening this were meditations, conferences, sermons aimed at heightening the awareness in these young 'Levites' of their future pastoral responsibilities and the corresponding demanding and austere spirituality. Whether or not Don Bosco went through a crisis of predestination, as Fr Francesca said, he continued to have this heightened sensitivity. 'These fears of his' Francesca testified at the Diocesan Information process for the founder's cause of beatification and canonisation 'Don Bosco himself confided in me.' The crisis would have been overcome with his confessor's help, reminding him of the Gospel, insisting on Christ's 'si vis': *Si vis ad vitam ingredi*, suggesting: 'His grace will not fail you, it is enough for you to correspond to it.'<sup>66</sup> To be honest, the concern for the salvation not only of others but his own above all was a constant in Don Bosco's existence and was still there during his final illness and death, as documented in the *Memorie dal 1841* otherwise known as his spiritual testament, and by commentaries on his final illness.<sup>67</sup>

At any rate it was a pivotal factor in priestly spirituality and Christian catechesis insistently proposed by the one who would become Don Bosco's teacher of moral theology and counsellor

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63 Cf. MO (2010) 95.

64 Letter from Don Bosco "Dal Convitto di S. Francesco d'Assisi, Torino, a di 16 aprile 1843" to Fr Felice Giordano of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary to whom Burzio belonged: Em I 49-52.

65 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, p. 3.

66 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia delle religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 63-64.

67 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 125-126.

after seminary life, Fr Joseph Cafasso, both in his *Meditations* and his *Instructions to the clergy*.<sup>68</sup> This spirituality of salvation, eternal salvation, especially demanding and pressing for the priest and replete with personal and pastoral responsibilities, was ultimately heightened by reflections offered the priest by St Alphonus Liguori, the Master of moral theology followed at the Pastoral Institute, as commented on by Alasia.<sup>69</sup>

All these things would remain with Don Bosco's life and practice as the educator of the young and formator of Salesians, along with other elements drawn from his broad adherence to the spirituality of love, following St Philip Neri, St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul, but especially because of his innate perception of youthful sensitivity. At the seminary in Chieri the chief commemorations 'almost patronal celebrations for clerics' were the Immaculate Conception, 'the greatest of all the solemnities at the seminary,' St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga, models of clerical holiness. The chapel at the seminary took its name from the Immaculate, 'its principal patroness.'<sup>70</sup> Also dedicated to her was the main altar in the Church of St Philip next to the seminary, while the four chapels were dedicated to St Philip, St Charles and the Guardian Angel, St Francis de Sales, St Valentino, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul: 'Every chapel (was) decorated with two paintings, 8 spans high by 5 wide depicting some historical fact about said saints.' Laid down for 29 January was the 'Novena and feast of St Francis de Sales with Mass, exposition [of the Blessed Sacrament] around 9 a.m. and in the evening a sermon and Benediction was prescribed, and on 26 May, 'the feast of St Philip....with solemn sung Mass and sermon and Benediction in the evening.'<sup>71</sup> These were also the things and symbols which Don Bosco would hold on to in the future, not without a special Salesian touch. 'On the Feast of St Francis de Sales,' the Constitutions established, study begins immediately after the ceremony has concluded and will continue until the time for tutorials, if these can be held all other things to the contrary. At a convenient time in the morning there will be solemn Mass and the panegyric prayer said by the vice-prefect of the chapel.'<sup>72</sup>

## 7 Friendships and an aura of the numinous

The seriousness and reserve with which Don Bosco spent his life at the seminary also came from the strict circle of friends he appears to have surrounded himself with : Guglielmo Garigliano, already a school friend from the public school in Chieri and who entered the seminary at the same time, and two others who came in the second year, Giovanni Giacomelli, confessor to his famous friend from 1873 until his death, and Luigi Comollo. The intensity of spiritual involvement became more profound, especially in relationship with the latter, even though John did not approve of all his austerity while sharing his beliefs concerning the duties of the good seminarian and the inward and outward traits of priestly life. These would be an essential part of the spiritual pedagogy the future educator of youth, lay people and clergy would subscribe to. A special hint of this, before the *Life of Louis Comollo*, can be found in the rather intense memorial work, *Infermità e morte del giovane chierico Luigi comollo scritto dal suo Collega C[hierico] Gio Bosco* (Sickness and death of the young cleric Luigi Comollo written by his colleague, Cleric John Bosco), written after his friend's death, 2 April 1839.<sup>73</sup> What the dying man said, elaborated on by the writer, demonstrates their

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68 Cf. G. CAFASSO, *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can.o Giuseppe Allamano*, Turin, Fratelli Canonica 1893; ID., *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can.o Giuseppe Allamano*, Turin, Fratelli Canonica 1893.

69 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 65-66.

70 A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società*..., p. 264

71 *Chiesa di san Filippo in Chieri e Nota delle feste e novene che si celebrano nel corso dell'anno nella chiesa di S. Filippo Neri*, cited by A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società*..., pp. 444-445.

72 *Costituzioni pel Seminario*..., part I, Chap. II, cited by A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società*..., p. 351.

73 The text is published by J. CANALS PUJOL, *La amistad en las diversas redacciones de la vida de Comollo escrita por san Juan Bosco. Estudio diacrónico y edición del manuscrito de 1839*, RSS 5 (1986) 221-

common beliefs. Christian existence, he said, is by its nature preventive. Although the hour of our death is uncertain, the fact it will happen is certain; life, then, should be none other than 'a preparation for death and judgement.' What followed was a lesson Don Bosco would always have in mind as a believer and preventive pastor and educator.<sup>74</sup> His friend's spiritual testament was also his own. Don Bosco has a brighter outlook than Comollo but it is not as if he minimises in substance the salutary fear that can accompany whoever is approaching God's judgement, just and merciful as he is. In *The Companion of Youth*, Don Bosco will not hesitate to introduce solemn meditation and prayer regarding death, judgement, hell and the eternity of punishment, and the realistic *Prayer for a happy death*. In his evening talks to the boys at the Oratory he would not fail in the future to often repeat his dreams on the Last Things, and his frequent premonitions of coming deaths.

This aspect of his educational approach was perhaps also reinforced by some hard to define contact with spiritual writers quoted in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Passavanti, Cavalia and Segneri.<sup>75</sup> The moral rigor running through *Lo specchio della vera penitenza* (The mirror of true penitence) (1354) by the Dominican Friar Jacopo Passavanti (ca. 130–1357) is notable. He also wrote a widely read treatise on miracles the reality, origin, scope and interpretation of which he subjects to careful theological analysis, after a lengthy and severe treatment of 'diabolical science' used by the devil to upset the human spirit and lead it astray: it is gained and used by man to the detriment of others through black magic. Similar demands on Christian living are also proposed by the moral and ascetic works of Domenico, who does not indulge in any kind of laxity, either in his *Disciplina degli spirituali* (Discipline of Spiritual people) or his *Trattato delle molte stoltizie che si commettono in della battaglia spirituale* (Treatise on the many [thirty] foolish errors committed in the spiritual battle), nor in *Lo Specchio della croce* (The mirror of the cross) or *Il pungilingua* (The sharp tongue) about the countless sins of the tongue including ones committed in the 'various dissolute dances and songs,' sins 'of tricksters, enchanter and evil-doers' and 'necromancers.' Nevertheless his *Medicina del cuore ovvero Trattato della pazienza* (Medicine of the heart or Treatise on patience) has 'a brief and devout Treatise' in it where, as well as the commandments, it also speaks of 'remedies against desperation,' 'certain other fine recommendations that give us great hope and the comfort of God's kindness' and, finally, 'the glory of eternal life.'

With regard to the famous Jesuit preacher, Fr Paolo Segneri (1624–94), we could indicate in particular a chapter on a topic which was especially dear to Don Bosco in the *L'incredulo senza scuse* (The unbeliever without excuses), and very valuable for his apologetics: '*The spirit of prophecy perpetually manifested in the Church, making it a witness to truth.*' 'If we look at the Universal Church,' the learned and devout Jesuit writes 'I say once more that this gift will never be lacking, as indeed is true of others called gifts of grace because, according to the words of the Apostle, these make up the wonderful mystical body of the faithful and are ordained to eminently benefit not only ourselves but their neighbour too: taking one of these gifts away from the Church would be like wanting to leave it incomplete.'<sup>76</sup>

It is in the context of beliefs of this kind that we can locate the agreement John writes about, that he signed with his friend Comollo after they had read 'a long passage from the lives of the saints,' 'whichever of us is the first to die will, if God permits it, bring back word of his salvation to his surviving companion.' His friend kept that promise the night after his burial. It was amid a violent and thundering noise that the voice of Comollo was heard clearly. Three times he repeated

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74 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 259.

75 *Lo specchio di vera penitenza e Lo specchio di [o della] croce* by Passavanti and Cavalca, from 1874 to 1880, find a place in a number of editions of the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana*.

76 P. SEGNERI, *L'incredulo senza scusa*, Vol. II. Reggio E., Per Pietro Fiaccadori MDCCCXXV, pp. 206, 215.

"*Bosco I am saved,*" causing 'fear and terror' instead of serenity and peace. John's comments; 'God is omnipotent. God is merciful. As a rule he does not heed such pacts. Sometimes, however, in his infinite mercy, he does allow things to come to fulfilment as he did in this case I have just described.'<sup>77</sup> Already in 1844, ending the story of his friend's life with a chapter on *Consequences of his death* in 'the change of behaviour which took place among the seminarians,' the author observes that 'all this took place mainly after his death, one of which was witnessed by a whole dormitory full of people.'<sup>78</sup> This is an unequivocal indication of Don Bosco's propensity as a young and mature individual, to the miraculous.

## 8. Reaching his long-suffering goal

The five years of theological studies became four. In the first three years Don Bosco followed the normal pattern for these courses. At the beginning of spring in year Three, and precisely on 29 March 1840, he was given the tonsure and four minor orders in Archbishop Fransoni's private oratory in Turin. Having passed the exams in the treatises he had prepared for over summer 1849, replacing attendance at courses for the Fourth year, he received the subdiaconate on September 19, 1840. A Saturday in autumn in the bishop's church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. On 27 March 1841, *Sitientes* Saturday, or the Saturday before Passion Sunday, he was ordained deacon in the archbishop's private oratory.

We find nothing in *Memoirs of the Oratory* about the immediate preparation for priesthood, which he received on 5 June, the Saturday of the fourth week in Pentecost in the archbishop's church of the Immaculate Conception. But at the beginning of the *Memoirs from 1841*, Don Bosco does dedicate a few brief lines to it. He prepared with a retreat which began 'at the House of the Mission [in Turin] on 26 May, the Feast of St Philip Neri, 1841.' The sermon at the end was on the topic: 'The priest does not go to heaven or hell alone.' The ordinand sealed his long retreat with nine Resolutions saying; 'These reminders were written in 1841.' Most of them were penitential in nature: taking 'walks' only 'out of serious necessity,' 'using time well,' putting up with everything for 'the salvation of souls,' temperance in eating and drinking, plenty of work and not too much sleep at night and none during the day. Of particular interest, obviously is the fourth one: 'The charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.' The eighth concerns his prayer life and the last, his reserve in dealing with women.<sup>79</sup>

Over the three days following his ordination, Masses were celebrated in gratitude to the people who were very dear to him: on Trinity Sunday in the Church of St Francis of Assisi 'Where Fr Caffasso was dean to the conferences,' Monday at the Consolata 'to thank the great Virgin Mary,' Tuesday in Chieri 'in St Dominic's church where my old professor Fr Giusiana, was still living' (1774–1844). The first solemn Mass was celebrated in Castelnouvo on Thursday 19 June, the feast of Corpus Christi. Don Bosco recalls: 'I sang Mass in the local church and then took part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament. The parish priest invited my relatives to dinner [Anthony among them, presumably] clergy and people of standing in the vicinity. They were all happy to be part of it because my compatriots loved me very much and they were all glad everything had turned out well for me. I went home that evening to be with my family.'<sup>80</sup> Naturally it was at his brother Joseph's home where his mother also now lived.

He helped the parish priest over the months that followed looking after the children in particular. Moreover according to what he wrote, some wanted him to be the assistant priest at Castelnouvo while 'the good people' instead, from Morialdo wanted 'to double the salary paid to chaplains up till

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<sup>77</sup> MO (2010) 90-91.

<sup>78</sup> [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, pp. 76-77, OE I 76-77

<sup>79</sup> *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 88-90

<sup>80</sup> MO (2010) 96.

then' in order to have him as their chaplain. Even another offer arrived: 'to be tutor at the home of a Genoese gentleman with a salary of a thousand francs.'<sup>81</sup>

He followed none of these sure offers. His future lay elsewhere even though three years later he spent a short period once again dealing with the problem of his state of life.

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81 MO (2010) 99.



## Chapter 6

# TURIN AS A TURNING POINT: MORAL ACCULTURATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE ORATORIES (1841–46)

- 1841 Summer: Consults Fr Cafasso on decision for the future:  
November; enters the *Convitto ecclesiastico* (Pastoral Institute) in Turin where Fr Cafasso involves him with other residents in catechism for young people and adults;  
3 December: writes his first sermon at the *Convitto*.
- 1843 10 June: Don Bosco gains his confession licence;  
30 November: Writes his final sermon at the *Convitto* .
- 1844 *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo*  
Autumn: chaplain at the 'Refuge' while waiting to become chaplain at the Little Hospital of St Philomena:  
8 December : blessing of chapel (oratory) at the Oratory.
- 1845 May–December: the wandering Oratory – from St Peter in Chains to the Mulini (Mills) Dora:  
Summer: spiritual director at the Little Hospital:  
*Il Divoto dell'Angelo Custode e Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole.*
- 1846 January: the Oratory at the Moretta house and the Filippi field:  
April: the Oratory finally settles at Valdocco;  
August: says farewell to the Refuge;  
First official contact with *La Generala* correction centre.

When Don Bosco crossed threshold of Fr Guala's *Convitto ecclesiastico* or Pastoral Institute in Turin on 3 November 1841 to add to his priestly formation, he did not imagine that the three years to come would be a prelude determining a radical turning point in his life. Nor was entering the *Convitto*, as we have seen, to be taken for granted, given other more reassuring immediate prospects. Don Bosco tells us how he did not feel able to choose his future of his own accord and that he went to Turin to consult with Fr Cafasso, informing him of something which is only partly credibly: 'For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal.' It seems unusual that this familiarity had not led disciple and guide to arrive at a clear solution earlier: 'You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers

and come to the *Convitto*.<sup>1</sup> However, by unhesitatingly accepting the advice given, Don Bosco set out on a path that would take him far from the hypotheses that had thus far emerged, and also far from his master's hidden plans. The explicit aim was practical moral formation for pastoral purposes. But the impact of the city of Turin and the fate of youth whom Don Bosco would always describe as 'poor and abandoned,' 'of risk and at risk' would become increasingly decisive.

Turin was not new to him in 1841. He had visited the city on various occasions. But it only became his city from November that year, and day by day he learned to know and love it, as it was, for both its positives and negatives. Turin was the Capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont, Liguria, Sardinia, Savoy, the county of Nice). It was ruled by an absolute monarch, Charles Albert (1798–1849), who, in the last year of his life, abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emmanuel II (1849–1878) in a political climate that had profoundly altered relationships between those who wielded power, The Sovereign, Government, and Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The Archbishop of Turin, from 1832 to 1862 (he had already been the Apostolic Administrator from 12 August 1831 to 24 February 1832) was the Genoese Luigi Fransoni (1789–1862), a rigid defender of the old order. Turin was a bureaucratic city with many factories and craft workshops, and was experiencing a demographic and building expansion, also due to immigration. It grew five-fold from 1801–91, from 65,000 to 320,000, where there was a thirty year period 1835–64 (from 117,000 to 218,000), reaching its peak from 1848 to 1864 (from 137,000 to 218,000). Together with this came an increase in social problems, including juvenile delinquency, both male and female. This was the city's 'other face.'<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco's concern for the young was predominantly in this area. His encounter with poor and abandoned youth combined with his early publishing activities which reached wider audiences. From the outset, in fact, Don Bosco had the feeling that poverty co-existed with other problems, material and spiritual, which went well beyond economic poverty.

This was one reason why the idea was growing on him of a vocation as a popular writer, which he immediately put into practice with his first efforts printed in 1844–46, written before the Oratory settled in Valdocco in April 1846, and before he finally left the Barolo works in August that year.

For identical reasons, similar activities were extended to adults amongst the masses: preaching, periodic press, catechetical, apologetic and narrative books and booklets.

## 1. Pastoral apprenticeship while at the *Convitto* or Pastoral Institute

Don Bosco's family and farming roots, social sensibilities, his realistic cultural preferences, relationships with the ecclesiastical world, especially with fellow townsman Fr Cafasso, predestined him to a Pastoral Institute that would not be like the University directed by Stanislao Barbero (1806–76) or the seminary directed by Canon Enrico Fantolini (1788–1858). He entered an Institute which was practical rather than learned, addressed to pastoral work for all Christians. It was Rome-oriented and also oriented toward a non-elitist, non-rigorous moral theology, one which was benign and merciful and within reach of everyone's ethical grasp.<sup>4</sup> It was founded by two priests, Brunone Lanteri and Luigi Gala.<sup>5</sup> The latter, who was Rector of the Church of St Francis of Assisi from 1808, set up a private course in moral theology inspired by St Alphonsus Liguori. The course or 'Conference' was legally recognised by King Victor Emmanuel I on December 16, 1814,

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1 MO (2010) 100.

2 Cf. Chap. 1, § 4 and 6

3 Cf. Chap. 1, § 3.

4 It was this set up, considered minimal, that led Vincenzo Gioberti, also an admirer of the "respectable men" who worked at the *Convitto*, to make harsh criticism of the institution: cf. V. GIOBERTI, *Il gesuita moderno*, Vol. V. Milan, Bocca 1940, pp. 285-287.

5 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883...*, vol. I, p. 36.

and with 12 priest students in 1817–18 it became an ecclesiastical college or Pastoral Institute (*Convitto ecclesiastico*). Fr Joseph Cafasso entered there in January 1834 as a student, and was co-opted as a tutor in autumn 1837.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the worsening health of Fr Guala, Cafasso succeeded him in running the public Conference at the beginning of the 1843–44 school year; and also continued with the private one in the afternoon. The immediate tasks awaiting Don Bosco as a student there were clearly laid down in the *Regulations* and based on the reasons for which the *Convitto* came into being. In view of ‘the need for the Church to have good ministers’ as the Preface stated ‘the study of practical moral theology was always recognised as being necessary for clerics after the five year theology course’ and ‘some practice on preparation for the pulpit.’ ‘Three full years’ were dedicated to these. By this means they sought to avoid the ‘scarcity of good confessors able to deal with all kinds of people’ and the risk of ‘losing the ecclesiastical spirit whereby so many of the plants nurtured with great effort and at great expense, and who gave such god hopes for excellent results during their final years [of theology] became sterile for want of the final stage of cultivation.’<sup>7</sup>

The daily timetable was geared to providing adequate room for each formation dimension: times given to individual and community prayer; hours of personal study in one’s own room; study presentation and a moral Conference from 11.00 a.m. until lunchtime at 12.30 p.m.; recreation or a walk after lunch then further time for personal study; ‘a moral Conference and Confession practice’ from 7.00p.m. After recreation following supper, ‘at 9.30 p.m. at the sound of a small bell, silence and prayer in common, examination of conscience, then rest.’<sup>8</sup>

The rules tended to create an environment suitable for shaping a cleric who was reserved, detached, austere, following the dictates of one of the Council of Trent’s canons partly included in the *Regulations*: ‘Nothing disposes others more effectively for piety and regular worship of God than the life and example of those dedicated to the divine ministry ... it is highly appropriate, therefore, that clergy called to share in the Lord’s cause, order their life and habits in such a way that by what they wear, how they carry themselves, walk, speak and in all other things, they show they are serious, measured, and religious.’ To obtain this, ‘the holy synod lays down that in future ... provisions will be observed which were often wholesomely decreed in the past by the Supreme Pontiffs and Sacred Councils concerning the life, uprightness, behaviour and teaching of the clergy, and also regarding the duty to avoid extravagances parties, balls, gambling, pastimes and abuses of every kind as well as secular business affairs.’<sup>9</sup>

Among other things along these lines, the *Convitto* prescribed: ‘Silence will be observed at all times except during recreation where, however, the voice should not be raised too much. Care will be taken not to make noise in the corridors, on the stairs, on entering or exiting the bedroom and especially in the study where silence must be strictly observed.’ ‘It is forbidden to stay in the reception area, talk to the doorkeeper and other domestics of the house.’ ‘It is not permitted to go to lunch outside the *Convitto* without the Rector’s permission.’ ‘Residents of the *Convitto* will always be dressed in the cassock.’ ‘Going for walks they will avoid the most frequented spots and

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6 Joseph Cafasso was ordained priest in the Tempora (beginning of autumn ) September 1833.

7 *Regolamento del Convitto ecclesiastico nella casa detta di s. Francesco di Torino diretto dal teologo collegiato Luigi Guala*, manuscript published in A. GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società...*, p. 392 (the entire text, perhaps the original draft, is found on pp. 392-398). In describing the life of those living there, the preference is to use the text probably closer in its details to what Don Bosco experienced, published by G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Turin, Fratelli Canonica 1895, pp. 357-363 (*Regolamento del Convitto ecclesiastico compilato dal Teol. Luigi Guala*).

8 *Regolamento del Convitto...*, in G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso...*, pp. 358-359.

9 *SS. Conc. Tridentini decreta*, sess. XXII, 17 Sept. 1562, *Decretum de reformatione*, can. I; cf. *Regolamento del Convitto...*, in G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso...*, p. 360.

will be accompanied by other residents and will be occupied in useful conversation.’ ‘It is forbidden to go to public performances and loiter in coffee shops.’ ‘Cheerfulness, and kindness to everyone is recommended; particular friendships over familiarity and holding hands [are discouraged]. ‘They will practise civility, cleanliness and mutual charity, reflecting on the fact that since they are neighbours with common tasks it is of great importance for them to make the effort to live with people of all kinds of temperament. This is more easily achieved by adapting to others.’ Finally, ‘Since there’s no opportunity during the year for a retreat, the year will conclude with one at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius, and residents will make it their duty to attend.’<sup>10</sup>

Obviously the primary activity was cultural formation, and practice in moral theology applied especially to the ministry of the confessional. This approach was innovative by comparison with a theological and pastoral world mostly oriented to a rigorist and probabilist, Gallican and jurisdictionalist approach. It harked back to a movement formed at the beginning of the century<sup>11</sup> ‘leading initially to a shift in the trend and then in the second half of the century to a reversal’ determined by the dominance of ‘Alphonsian moral theology over probabilism, and ultramontanism which supported papal primacy and infallibility.’ The approach found ‘room and support, especially outside the University among persons of prestige and some religious forces such as the reborn Jesuits, the *Amicizie* (Fellowships), Brunone Lanteri and his Oblates, theologian Guala and his St Francis *Convitto*.’<sup>12</sup>

Don Bosco was indelibly influenced by this as a priest caring for souls, and as an educator, founder and imitator of a great school of priestly formation *par excellence*; the key links in the chain, it has been said, were St John Bosco, disciple of Cafasso; Guala, disciple of Lanteri; Servant of God, Pio Brunone Lanteri, disciple of the Jesuit Scießsbach.’<sup>13</sup>

The official moral theology text at the Convitto was the *Theologia moralis in compendium redacta ab Angelo Stuardi* by Antonio Alasia, nicknamed the ‘Alasiotto’,<sup>14</sup> but the text had been re-presented and explained in Alphonsian terms. Cafasso’s balanced position tended to overcome the antagonism between supporters of Alasia’s probabilism. This was expressed by declaring fidelity to Saint Alphonsus Maria Liguori and was inspired by great respect for everyone, especially through wise adaptation to varied spiritual circumstances and a love for the peace of mind and ultimately the eternal salvation of each individual. This had to result in a pastor of souls whose teaching was benevolent and kind in dealing with people.<sup>15</sup> One authoritative biographer writes that when Cafasso was explaining legitimately controversial viewpoints he did not wish to impose any of them but wanted his priests ‘to hold views which would redound in practice to the greater glory of God and to the benefit of the penitent.’ Indeed, he said that, ‘he would alter his own viewpoint at any time so long as it was for the good of his penitents.’<sup>16</sup>

It seems that Don Bosco was echoing this when giving what was only apparently an evasive answer on 16 January 1864 to someone who asked him for his ‘opinion on approaches to the

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10 *Regolamento del Convitto...*, in G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso...*, pp. 359-361.

11 Cf. Chap. 5, § 4.

12 G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883...*, Vol. I, p. 33; on Lanteri and the *Amicizie*, cf. Chap. II, § 1.

13 F. BAUDUCCO, *S. Giuseppe Cafasso e la Compagnia di Gesù*, “Scuola Cattolica” 88 (1960) 294.

14 A. ALASIA, *Theologia moralis breviori ac facilliori methodo in quatuor tomos distributa*, Turin, Paravia 1834-1835 (II ed.); A. ALASIA, *Theologia moralis in compendium redacta ab Angelo Stuardi...*, 4 Vols. Turin, Alliana e Paravia 1836-1837: a further edition of these came out in 1848, 1849 and 1851, in four volumes, “ad recentiorum codicum praescripta accomodata” and “pluribus annotationibus aucta” by Can. Lorenzo Gastaldi.

15 Cf. L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso fondatore del Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Vol. I. Turin, Scuola tipografica salesiana 1912, pp. 95-111

16 L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso...*, Vol. I, pp. 101-102.

efficacy of grace.’ He replied: ‘I have studied these matters at length but my approach is what redounds to the greater glory of God. Am I interested in having a strict system and then sending a soul to hell, or taking a broader view so long as I send the soul to heaven?’<sup>17</sup> This attitude points to studies tackled enthusiastically along with a practical mindset which is alien to disembodied theoretical stances and in no way inferior to his master in his love for souls and their salvation, nor in the loving-kindness of his approach.

After two years of initiation into preaching and penitential practice, and after passing the (oral) exam before Fr Liugi Gala and Stanislao Barbero on 10 June 1843, Don Bosco was given permission to exercise the ministries of Confessor and assistant priest, signed by the Vicar General, Canon Filippo Ravina.

## 2. Writer of sermons for the people

Chiaverotti’s *Regulations* on *study* had two articles on preparation and preaching. ‘Study time’ it established ‘will be divided into practical moral theology and practising eloquence [elocution] and liturgy, according to the time assigned.’<sup>18</sup> The text Guala had originally drawn up was more explicit and expansive: ‘Time given to study will be apportioned primarily to practical moral theology and, if needs be, treatises in dogmatic and polemical theology, keeping some time aside for writing sermons according to the guidelines given, beginning with retreat meditations. This is preferred because it is the most natural and useful item for retreats and fits into pretty much all preparation for the pulpit and is especially useful in the confessional. After these they will prepare explanations of the Gospel and instructions.’ (art.10). Also: ‘Each one will write an essay on the study done in moral theology once a week and as applied for use in the pulpit once a month, in the way proposed by the director according to each one’s ability.’ (art.22).<sup>19</sup>

The best of Don Bosco’s preaching efforts which have come down to us illustrate this praxis. There are some others probably written at the seminary after subdiaconate and before diaconate, more basic and rough, and others from later years. There are three from his seminary years on *The Word of God*, *The Passion of Jesus – Jesus in the Garden*, *Forgiving our enemies*. Of those written at the *Convitto*, twelve were dated by Don Bosco himself and run from 3 December 1841 to 30 November 1843. A further eight, undated, certainly go back to the same period since they are of a similar literary form and style and with similar errors in language and spelling.<sup>20</sup>

In general they respond to the request to prepare texts for use in retreats and missions to the people. The distinction between and the function of the twin series, meditations or instructions, is illustrated by Don Bosco himself in a lengthy introductory sermon. ‘Retreats’ he writes, ‘can be described as a series of meditations and instructions intended to move people to friendship with God. Looking at retreats from this perspective I would say they are useful and necessary for everyone. I said, first of all: a series of meditations and instructions. In these [the meditations] we look at why man was placed in this world and what great wrong he does when he acts contrary to this end and what a great reward has been prepared for him if he acts in accordance with it; acting to the contrary we will see what terrible punishments await him. Then in the instructions we will look at the deeds of our past life, the present state of our soul and what in the most convenient way for each one to have a clear conscience. Could there be anything else more necessary for man than this?’<sup>21</sup>

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17 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, p. 9

18 *Regolamento del Convitto*..., in G. COLOMBERO, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso*..., p. 361 (Piety and study).

19 *Regolamento del Convitto*..., in A. GIRAUDDO, *Chiesa, società e clero*..., p. 395.

20 Cf. *Prediche autografe*, ASC A 225.

21 *Introduzione*, 2 April 1842 [pp. 2-3 of a text with a good 17 pages

In the sermons written in his first two years at the *Convitto* on almost a monthly basis as a homiletic exercise, or also for pastoral practice, Don Bosco covered the topics indicated reflecting the requirements and tone demanded. We can already see this from the titles. Meditations have topics such as the *Purpose of Man, Death and Eternity, the Two Standards, God and the devil, Mortal Sin, the Death of a Sinner and of the Just Man, Mercy, the Passion of Jesus, Happiness of Paradise*. Instructions were on *Charity, Forgiving our Enemies, Chastity, the Word of God, the Institution of the Eucharist, receiving Holy Communion*.

The contents anticipated ones that would become recurring themes in Don Bosco's varied kinds of popular and youth-oriented pastoral ministry in the future: retreats, the exercise for a happy death, goodnights, conferences, books on piety. Typical, for example, is what he said about 'reward' in the meditation on the two standards, and what he said about the temporal and eternal good for those fighting under Christ's standard. He said the same things decades later in conferences to benefactors of Salesian works.

As items written 'in school', these sermons display certain characteristics of their author: the elementary nature of their structure, absence of creative fantasy, limited vocabulary, plain simple style, all echoes of what he had learned in Rhetoric. The Don Bosco of the future would not be substantially different from the priest who emerged from a certain kind of seminary and ecclesiastical formation with its tutorials, formal writing traditional theological and spiritual content, pragmatism in relation to fixed goals and results to be achieved.

This is a side of his personality which contrasts with his creative features as a man of action: spirit of initiative, insight into practical demands, the uncontrollable nature of such activity, the daring way he carried thing out, his breadth of perspective, Especially in his systematic writing or works of animation, which were almost always brief, these characteristics led him to clear definitions, saying things just the right way, concretely and effectively. They were personal, new syntheses: one thinks of the first article of the *Regulations for the Oratory* and his definition of it, or *the Confidential Reminders for Rectors*, or the two documents on the preventive system in 1877 and 1878, or the general articles of the *Regulations for the Houses*.

In reality, they are two distinct but complementary and inseparable sides of a unified manner of being and doing. The complete Don Bosco needs to be understood from the two poles which distinguish him: saying and doing, writing and realising. This latter factor would now show up in a ways that were quite *sui generis*. Naturally it would be seriously reductionist, including from an historical point of view, to overlook the *inner spirit* which inspired, moved, unified it all: human, Christian, priestly.

### **3. From Catechism class to orator**

What would become an irreversible choice from the second half of 1846, found embryonic expression from 1842–46. After and beyond the period of developing culture within the closed setting of the seminary and when he came into contact with totally new problems in the Savoy capital, Don Bosco began to arrive at a clear insight as to his real field of activity; apostolic activity, exercising his priesthood by working in circumstances of particular material and spiritual need even to the point of feeling a serious call to the foreign missions. No other pastoral offer attracted him, and even less that of being a tutor at the *Convitto*.

So, to be honest, Don Bosco's turning to the youth apostolate was not the result of a sudden conversion nor could it be located in some episode as a premonition, some kind of Damascus experience. It was the result of an evolution taking place over years and months in contact with phenomena typical of a metropolis in full development like Turin. The attraction to looking after the

young began to predominate step by step, especially looking after those in difficulty and at risk, in prison, excluded from society, migrants. Beginning with the catechetical experience at the *Convitto* he felt urged to practise what were germinal forms of oratory which sought to be more than simple religious practice or instruction or a school of Christian doctrine. It was a prelude to his definitive choice.

It is not always clear in Don Bosco's mind, however, what is the distinction between the Catechism classes at St Francis of Assisi's (for which he was more a simple collaborator at the beginning, rather than the initiator, even though he did take it over eventually) and the oratory. It is not entirely clear what role he had – key player or helper? First among equals? – when Fr Borel made a formal request to the Archbishop in December 1844 in the name of his fellow chaplains Frs Pacchiotti and Bosco, for permission to bless 'a room in the house they were due to live in, with free access to the public street.' This became 'an oratory for youngsters under the patronage of St Francis de Sales.'<sup>22</sup>

From then on, the chapel or oratory gave its name to the entire youth work, the Oratory. Apparently confirming this is a letter written in 1846 from the Refuge to Marquis Michele di Cavour, the Vicar of the city, emphasising the motives, content and significance [of the Oratory]. 'This catechism class,' Don Bosco wrote 'began three years ago [1843] in 'the Church of St Francis of Assisi, and because the Lord blessed his work, the youngsters increased in number, filling the available space. When, for reasons of employment, I went to set myself up at the Pious Work of the Refuge in 1844, these good youngsters continued coming here for their spiritual instruction. It was precisely at that time, together with Frs Borelli [sic] and Pacchiotti, that we presented a memo to the Archbishop, who authorised us to convert one of our rooms into an oratory where we taught catechism heard confessions and celebrated Mass for the above-mentioned youngsters.'<sup>23</sup>

The Oratory, understood as a place of religious practice where young people are gathered after being picked up from the streets or from wherever, for religious, recreation and cultural activities, was not new in Turin. As indicated earlier, it had already been promoted by the creative Fr Cocchi.<sup>24</sup> The term was in constant use by Don Bosco and his colleagues in public and private documents at the Refuge to indicate catechetical activities from the end of 1844, but especially from 1846 after the work settled at Valdocco. They understood the term to designate 'a society of boys who come together every Sunday and feast day in an oratory ... to learn their catechism, attend holy Mass, approach the Sacraments and sometimes receive benediction' not without the obvious, more or less culturally significant leisure activities.<sup>25</sup> In a letter addressed to Fr Borel from the Becchi on 11 October, 1845, Don Bosco asked: 'Did catechism go well?'<sup>26</sup> But from the second half of 1846 in letters to the same individual, the recurring term is always 'oratory': 'How many times a day I think of the Oratory!'<sup>27</sup> 'Continue, Father, to tell me the good and the bad things about the Oratory and they will keep me well entertained.'<sup>28</sup> 'I am very happy that things at the Oratory are progressing as hoped.'<sup>29</sup> This would be the definitive term in the years to come.

In a petition to Victor Emmanuel II in November 1849, the 'gathering's of young people' were

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22 Request prior to 6 December, the date of the decree of authorisation, with Fr. Borel delegated to bless the room (8 December) and permission to "celebrate Holy Mass there, and give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament during the holy triduum, ore whenever some solemnity is celebrated" (Em I 55); cf. also D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*. 1861 1862 1863 1864 *Le doti grandi e luminose*, pp. 58-59.

23 To Marquis Michele di Cavour, 13 March 1846, Em I 66.

24 Cf. Chap. 2, § 5.

25 Letter to municipal authorities from the three spiritual directors at the Refuge, prior to 3 July 1845, Em I 57.

26 Em I 60.

27 Letter of 22 Aug 1846, Em I 69.

28 Letter of 25/27 Aug. 1846, Em I 70.

29 Letter of 31 Aug. 1846, Em I 71.

said to go back to the two years of the wandering Oratory (1844–46), finding permanent location in 1846. It was both a chapel and a youth institution. ‘Fr Bosco,’ he wrote ‘... in the desire to provide for the needs of the most abandoned youngsters, began gathering them on weekends in one place or another around the city, always with approval of the civic and ecclesiastical authorities. The Lord blessed such work and an oratory succeeded in establishing itself between Porta Palazzo and Porta Susina. Its title was the St Francis de Sales Oratory with more than five hundred boys attending, a large number of whom were from the prisons or at risk of ending up there.’<sup>30</sup>

The public was made aware of the name through the first grand circular for the important lottery on behalf of the Church of St Francis de Sales being built in 1851–52. In some ways the circular was the beginning of the myth of 1841, projecting a reality onto that date which was actually in its embryonic stages and not distinct, and which would only become more defined later.<sup>31</sup> The circular, dated 29 December 1851, presented the *Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, a festive oratory and an already incipient hospice as ‘a modest work of charity’ ‘undertaken ten years ago.’<sup>32</sup>

The historical leap is evident. For the unaware reader (but not for the spectator ten years earlier) the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was born in 1841. The superintendent General of Finance had to have read the letter asking for approval of the ‘projected Lottery’ this way. The one responsible for the work, whose signature on the letter (‘Fr John Bosco, Director of the Oratory’) was preceded by sixteen ‘administrators and casual members,’ had indicated that the lottery was organised out of a desire to ‘achieve lasting duration for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales’ which is ‘mentioned in the attached circular.’<sup>33</sup> For similarly unaware readers years later, Don Bosco also located the birth of the Salesian Society on the same date and, in documents in the 1870s, he even somewhat casually interpreted the origins of the Salesian Cooperators Association as being in that year.<sup>34</sup>

It was a way of giving a licence of ‘antiquity’ and trustworthiness to institutions he wanted seen as enduring, solid, experienced and fruitful. He did this in the two ‘historical’ introductions to the *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* in the first draft in 1858/59, beginning with a presentation of the ‘Congregation of St Francis de Sales’ whose primary purpose was to promote the spiritual good of ‘that class of youngsters who are exposed to greater risk of their eternal salvation because they are poor.’ He was idealising things a little when he said that it began ‘in Turin in 1841.’<sup>35</sup> This date was then confirmed in the preface he wrote, aimed at explaining the beginning of the youth gatherings in 1841 and developments of the oratory that followed, putting all this under the heading, *The origin of this Congregation*.<sup>36</sup>

Keeping closer to the reality, Don Bosco had prepared a written book in 1854, known as the *Cenno Storico* or *Historical Outline* or pluralised as the *Cenni Storici*, or *Historical Outlines*, explaining the precise genesis of the Oratory. Its roots lay in the catechism classes which, according to the *Cenno storico*, Fr Cafasso (and residents he invited) offered ‘for a number of

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30 Em I 90. Similar indications are presented in a request for aid sent on 20 February 1850 tyo the *Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita* (Em I 95-96).

31 Bartholomew Garelli appears much earlier. Documents in the *Appendice* (appendix) talk about the boy who became the symbol of the oratorians.

32 Em I 139.

33 Letter of 9 December 1851, Em I 136-137.

34 Cf. an analysis of this position carried out with historiographical rigour by P. Stella, RSS 2 (1883) 451-454. One, however, must admit that Don Bosco himself lies behind the misunderstanding. He wrote, or allowed to be published at the beginning of the second number of the new *Bibliofilo cattolico o Bollettino salesiano mensile* a brief *History of the Salesian Cooperators*, in which he speaks of collaborators at the Oratory right from the beginning and indiscriminately calls them Cooperators: cf. BS 1 (1877) no. 6, September.

35 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 60.

36 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 62-68.



years ... to young bricklayer's assistants in a room attached to the sacristy of the aforesaid church.<sup>37</sup> So, Don Bosco was associating himself with the catechism classes already established at the *Convitto* before he arrived. According to the availability of space and disciplinary needs, these already involved some moderate recreational activity.

What he wrote in the first preface to the *Constitutions* was somewhat different: 'Right from 1841, Fr John Bosco joined other clergy in gathering the most abandoned boys from around Turin city in appropriate quarters, to entertain them with games and at the same time give them the bread of the divine word.'<sup>38</sup> According to this version, then, it was a collective initiative but with him as the key player. In the 1862 *Cenni storici*, the origin of the oratories was also located back in the time he was visiting the prisons along with other *Convitto* residents, almost as a complement to what was indicated in the *Cenno storico*. The solution emerged from his diagnosis of how so many boys were ending up in prison: 'We began to offer appropriate catechism classes in the prisons in the capital, and soon afterwards in the sacristy at the Church of St Francis of Assisi.'<sup>39</sup>

Cafasso's first reliable biographer, Luigi Nicolas di Robilant (1870–1904) offers good documentation based on statements by eyewitnesses on the existence of such catechism classes, including material aid given to needy young migrant boys, especially chimney-sweeps from the Val d'Aosta, where Don Bosco's teacher was in charge. Cafasso entrusted the work to three priests, Frs Giacinto Carpano (1821–94), Peitro Ponte (1821–92) and Giuseppe Trivero (1816–94), who then also worked in the Turin oratories promoted by Don Bosco.<sup>40</sup>

The charitable and pastoral work Fr Cafasso did for youth, both personally and directly and as a formator of priests caring for souls is also significant, then for the influence he could have had on the future 'father and teacher of the young.' It is not difficult to trace the roots of Don Bosco's passion for the salvation of souls to his seminary training enriched by the time he spent at Guala's *Convitto*, further expanded by the advice and example of his spiritual director and moral theology tutor, Fr Cafaso. For the two men running the *Convitto*, zeal was the focusing quality of priestly spirituality as a whole. Undoubtedly, this was the teaching that found fertile ground in Don Bosco, who was already prepared in childhood and adolescence, and already inclined to a clerical vocation. It found further nurturing in the meditations and instructions offered during the retreats residents of the *Convitto* normally attended at the end of each year at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius at Lanzo, which was run as a retreat house by Guala since 1814. Bosco began attending these from the end of his first year at the *Convitto*. He summed up the sermons he had heard in a tightly packed manuscript of seven foolscap pages entitled: *Retreats made at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius at Lanzo from 7 June 1842. Preachers: Rev Fr Menini* [Ferdinando Minini, Turin, 1796–1870] *from the Society of Jesus for the instructions, and Fr Guala for the meditations.*<sup>41</sup> Guala offered classic topics: man's purpose, sin, death, judgement, hell, God's mercy, Christ as the example of the priest, means of salvation, Paradise, God's love.

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37 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 38.

38 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) p. 62

39 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 60-62. The same version was given by Don Bosco in the text drafted for the second edition of Chap. XIV *L'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales* in the *Biografia del giovane Mazzarello Giuseppe* by Fr G. B. Lemoyne... Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1872, pp. 65-77: cf. *Appendice*.

40 Cf. L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso fondatore del convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Vol. II. Turin, Scuola tipografica salesiana 1912, pp. 1-16. On the debate concerning the priorities of the oratory beginnings, based on substantial ambiguity of terms and partisan spirit, as well as ignorance about the oratory founded not far from Valdocco in 1840 by Fr Giovanni Cocchi, see brief bibliographical indications in the edition by [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 38, note on lines 54-56.

41 *Esercizi Spirituali fatti nel Santuario di S. Ignazio...*[6 pp. Not numbered] ASC A 2250601.

Fr Minini had drawn a portrait of the holy priest representing God for mankind, and a representative of man before God. He had to protect himself from being lukewarm, and from scandal, had to practise continence by having recourse to both positive and negative means, dedicate himself to prayer, acquire the knowledge proper to his state 'given the circumstances of the time,' diligently prepare his sermons for the faithful, be inspired by the virtues of the Good Shepherd through meekness and the worthy, attentive and devout recitation of the Divine Office. As a confessor he was to be father, judge, and doctor of souls and as a pastor he should combine deep inner devotion and dignified outward behaviour in celebrating the holy Mass.

The topic of zeal seems to be given prominence in the manuscript, covered on the sixth day: '1. Zeal for souls – as far as necessary, *unusquisque recuperet proximum suum secundum virtutem suam* – every priest is bound to zeal for souls because whoever is of the altar must serve the altar. It is the only certain way of saving our soul. Quality of zeal; charity is the plant, zeal is the warmth and irrigation. Charity must be kind – *charitas benigna est* – we catch more flies with a drop of honey than with a barrel full of vinegar; St Francis de Sales – *charitas non emulatur*, no division amongst priests nor with lay people: *in dubiis libertas, in omnibus charitas*. 2. (Continued). *Caritas patiens*, is patient – is not jealous – In whatever you do, in whatever ministry, so long as you win over souls to God – *non agit perperam, non opera indarno* – be zealous at the right moment but always with kindness – *non querit quae sua sunt, sed quae Jesu Christi* – pay attention to the saying: *non questum lucrum animarum sed questum pecuniarum* – don't seek remuneration for preaching, or undertaking tasks or any clerical office – avoid business contracts enriching one's relatives, making money – beware avarice.'<sup>42</sup>

The above was also Cafasso's thinking. For him the priest was a tireless fighter against sin, the worst evil in the world, made worse by ignorance of its evil nature, 'a huge and uncalculable evil.' 'That fire, commitment, zeal – is the total reason, the very marrow, and substance of our ald.'<sup>43</sup>

On the priest's responsibility regarding the salvation of souls, Don Bosco, like Cafasso, could be seen to be in perfect harmony with indications found in the *Regula Cleri* by S. SALAMO and M. Gelebert, also published in Turin in 1762. Various lines relating to priestly dignity, zeal for souls, example and pastoral charity, would often enter Don Bosco's words and writing in the future: 'Dionysius the Areopagite rightly says: "of all the divine things the most divine is to cooperate with God in saving souls;" Lord, so I may love souls, give me your love so I can then say: "*da mihi animas*;" before preaching pray, so you can show you are an example of good works. Jesus began by doing and teaching'; 'have purity of intention so every word is directed to the glory of God and the salvation of souls'; let 'sweet charity, loving warmth and meekness' be used when catechising children and instructing the poor.'<sup>44</sup> The '*da mihi animas*' and '*divinorum divinissimi*' and similar sayings were ones Don Bosco could also have found in another author he knew as well.<sup>45</sup>

So, Cafasso's intervention was decisive, at the end of the experience at the *Convitto*, in Don Bosco's definitive choice of vocation. As he himself confided to his first young collaborators on 7 May 1861, he had the strong feeling of tackling the foreign missions and an idea he had, in 1834, of entering an institute of consecrated life, and, more exactly, the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin, now came back to him. In possible preparation he had also begun to tackle at least some basic understanding of one or other of Spanish, French, English.<sup>46</sup> But his vigilant teacher and counsellor

42 *Esercizi Spirituali fatti nel Santuario di S. Ignazio...*, pp. 2-3.

43 G. CAFASSO, *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*, pp. 169-174; cf. also pp. 175-182.

44 S. SALAMO et M. GELABERT, *Regula cleri ex sacris litteris, sanctorum Patrum monumentis Ecclesiasticisque sanctionibus excerpta*. Trivulii [Treviglio], G. B. Messaggi 1827, t. I, pp. 22, 107-109, 122, 139-156.

45 Cf. C. ARVISENET, *Memoriale vitae sacerdotalis* (Turin 1795; Alessandria 1829; Naples 1838, 1844), Chap. 53 *De zelo animarum*.

46 Cf. D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*, 1861 1862 1863, p. 48; G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, p. 55; P. STELLA,

cut the missionary planning short: 'Go if you can, but you can't go a mile, even stay a minute in a carriage, so how could you cross the ocean? You'd die on the way.'<sup>47</sup> And faced with the resistance of the aspirant to religious vows, as Turin priest Giacomo Bellia later indicated (he was one of the first occupants of the 'house attached' to the oratory), the reasoning became more pressing, presenting the clear mission in hand in opposition to any other foolish call: 'Who will think of your boys? Don't you think you are doing good by working with your boys?' The conclusion was more than advice: 'Continue your work on behalf of the boys. This and none other is God's will.'<sup>48</sup> 'You, no, don't go' was the laconic command handed down to us as an entry in Ruffino's diary.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, paradoxically, it could have been the influence of Cafasso which helped his strong missionary vocation to grow. A specific side of the zeal of the teacher of so many of Turin's priests, in fact, was his keen, concrete and active interest in the missions and missionaries. He was a generous benefactor and correspondent in their regard. On the other hand, the missionary spirit was rooted in Lanteri's and Guala's Christian and Catholic fellowship (*Amicizia*), which was taken up again vigorously after being eclipsed for almost a decade, with broad royal approval in 1838.<sup>50</sup> Don Bosco too, as a missionary among the young, would continue to nurture the spirit of *missio ad gentes*, thanks to his contact with the press and people promoting it in Turin: *Annali della Propagazione della Fede* and the *Museo delle Missioni cattoliche* and, in particular, Canon Giuseppe Ortalda (1840–80).<sup>51</sup>

According to Cafasso, a priest of Don Bosco's character should not be lost to the diocese nor simply be integrated within parish structures, since he was so much cut out for an urgent and relevant mission within it. To make this possible, the most immediate solution could be none other than the Refuge. This is in keeping with the testimony thirty years after the fact, which Don Bosco provides in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* when he recalls the command: 'Pack your bag and go with Dr Borelli; you'll be director of the Little Hospital of St Philomena; you will also work in the Refuge. Meanwhile God will show you what you have to do for the young.'<sup>52</sup> Among other things, he could count on the understanding of two zealous and available priests, Frs Borel and Sebastiano Pacciotti, and on the well-known generosity of Marchioness Giulia di Barolo, who immediately gave her chaplain, temporarily redundant, a salary of 600 lire. At least in the first year of residence, while awaiting the opening of the Little Hospital in summer 1845, his task at the Refuge could comfortably be reconciled with the demands of the youth apostolate and writing activity. He helped the two chaplains and they helped him.

#### 4. Chaplain at the Barolo Works (1844–46)

In written material in which Don Bosco recalled the early experiences in Turin – the *Cenno storico*, *Cenni Storici* and *the Memoirs of the Oratory* – information is almost completely focused on the question of catechism classes and the Oratory. Omitted is any news of pastoral activities carried out in the early years of his priesthood, where, he preached, especially over 1844–46, the functions he exercised and experiences he had while working in the Barolo Works. Yet it is not difficult to imagine the wealth of ideas and practical suggestions that could have come from

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*Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., p. 168.

47 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*, 1861 1862 1863, p. 48; cf. L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *San Giuseppe Cafasso fondatore del Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, 2nd edition revised and updated by Mgr. Dr. Jose Cottino. Turin, Edizioni Santuario della Consolata 1960, pp. 654-655.

48 *Dalle Memorie sul Servo di Dio Don Cafasso di don Giacomo Bellia* [pp. 1-3], ASC A 1030110. The text is transcribed in the quoted life of Cafasso by L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *San Giuseppe Cafasso fondatore...*, revised and updated by Jose Cottino, p. 655.

49 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*, 1861 1862 1863, p. 49.

50 Cf. Chap. 2, § 6.

51 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 168-169.

52 MO (2010) 108.

meeting up with people of such human and spiritual character as Giulia di Barolo and Silvio Pellico, plus the daily contact with institutions of intense charitable vitality engaged in preventive or rehabilitating activity on behalf of women who were socially humiliated and morally and physically damaged.

#### 4.1 *At the Refuge and the Little Hospital*

Frenchwoman Juliette Colbert de Maulévrier (1786–1864) became the Marchioness di Barolo when she married Tancredi Falletti di Barolo (1782–1838) in Paris on 18 August 1806. He belonged to one of the wealthiest Piedmontese aristocratic families. She had spent her childhood and adolescence amid the ferocity of revolutionary repression in Vandée [Loire Valley, N.W. France] and in exile with the family in Holland and Germany (1790–1802). The two had come to know each other at the Napoleonic Court and felt attracted to one another. They were of a similar broad and deep culture, alike in their moral integrity, social sensitivity, rock-solid faith which was of a more intransigent kind in the young woman and inspired by liberal openness in the case of the Marquis. The couple, unable to have children, only established themselves permanently in Turin in 1814. With the support of her generous husband, the noble woman soon dedicated herself to welfare-type activity on behalf of women at risk and who could also be of risk to society. After visiting prisons over a three year period – the *Senatorie*, the *Correzionale* and the *della Torri* – in 1821 she succeeded in being entrusted with supervision of the *Forzate* female prison by the subalpine government, giving her considerable discretion in who was to be taken in there. The Marchioness immediately asked for and obtained the collaboration of the Sisters of St Joseph of Chambéry. The first of them arrived in Turin on 1 September 1821 followed by others as their charitable initiatives grew.

In 1823, the Marchioness founded the Pious Work of the Refuge, a rehabilitation centre for fallen women in Borgo Dora. The local jargon was *pericolate* or ‘women at risk.’ The Refuge was named as such because it was placed under the patronage of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners. It and its regulations were approved by royal permission on 7 March and 4 April respectively, in 1823. It could accept around forty penitent women who had freely requested it with the intention of redeeming themselves. For anyone wanting a more elevated spiritual commitment, the Retreat, or cloistered monastery of Magdalenes was opened in 1833, approved along with their constitutions by Gregory XVI on 3 April 1846. They were officially known as the Institute of Sister Penitents of St Mary Magdalene (today the Daughters of the Good Shepherd).<sup>53</sup> Their superior until 1847 was Sister Clémence Bouchet from the Sisters of St Joseph; from that year (1847) one of the Magdalenes became Superior. Then came the Retreat for reformed girls of between 7–14 years of age in 1841. These were known as the Little Magdalenes. This was followed in 1845 by the Little Hospital of St Philomena, with 60 beds, for therapy and instruction of crippled children and girls. In 1846, an orphanage, known as the Guliette, was opened next to the Religious house belonging to the Sisters of St Anne. The orphanage was built to receive dozens of young orphaned girls so they could be raised and educated for free until they came of age.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of the Little Hospital was already under consideration in 1832. A number of difficulties, plus the desire to build it in Turin where it could more easily have access to medical help had

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53 *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI* III 474-475.

54 Cf. R. M. BORSARELLI, *La marchesa Giulia di Barolo e le opere assistenziali in Piemonte nel Risorgimento*, Turin, G. Chiantore 1933; C. SICCARDI, *Giulia dei poveri e dei re. La straordinaria vita della MARCHESA DI BAROLO*, Cavallermaggiore, Gribaudo 1992, 326 pp.; A. TAGO, *Giulia Colbert MARCHESA DI BAROLO. Piacenza, Congregazione delle Figlie del Buon Pastore 1994*, 215 pp.; U. LEVRA, *L'altro volto di Torino...*, pp. 133-139: more attentive to the presumed or real deficiencies of the Barolo works.

delayed the project. It opened on 1 August 1845.<sup>55</sup> It accepted poor girls from three to twelve years of age. They were given basic instruction and work skills proportionate to individual ability. They were also assured of specific medical assistance. Management was entrusted to the Sisters of St Joseph and nursing assistance was provided by volunteer women who received a stipend but these were soon replaced by the Magdalene Tertiaries who, in 1851 became the Oblates of St Mary Magdalene. Don Bosco was their first spiritual director.<sup>56</sup>

Here, we cannot record his being with the Barolo institutions as a collaborator of the chaplains at the Refuge, then spiritual director of the Little Hospital, without considering that he had direct awareness of the circumstances and problems young and adult women faced, women at risk whom society thought of as vulnerable either because they had been in poverty since childhood or were disabled or psychologically disadvantaged. Further on, he had little cause to speak of such delicate and complex issues in documents which tended more to highlight the history of his catechism classes and oratories for boys. Even less did he speak of those issues with his young Salesians who were exclusively looking after boys. However, occasionally he would mention prostitution – close by the Oratory – and some of the conversions he had won. In a goodnight on 6 August 1862 he spoke of having heard the confession of a dying girl in a house, concluding ‘How fortunate that girl was that God gave her the time to make her confession. But you had to be there to see her other friends, their hair standing on end, their lips all bruised, their rolling and bewildered eyes, to understand what a terrible scourge sin is for them and even worse when they are facing death.’<sup>57</sup> A girl from Turin who had abandoned ‘her home to live a dissolute life’ was the chief character of an example Don Bosco gave in the *Mese di Maggio*, after meditation on the *sin of dishonesty*;<sup>58</sup> she had been seriously ill and was reconciled with God, thanks to Our Lady, as happened to another young woman who ended up ‘losing her devotion and innocence’ after ‘willingly engaging in frivolous behaviour with her friends.’<sup>59</sup>

This is a side of his experience which reveals in at least a small way the broader and deeper impression he must have gained, but had not spoken of, over the two years of his paid and much appreciated work as chaplain with Barolo. Before any awareness of particular documents (and eloquent ones, evidently unknown to him but applied in Barolo’s thinking and activity),<sup>60</sup> the principle which had inspired her different works had to have struck a chord with him: offering the bread of faith and preceding and accompanying this with the bread of daily sustenance; looking to the salvation of souls by caring for both body and soul; lovingly rehabilitating them instead of repressing them (‘When justice has exhausted its role let charity begin its part’); freeing them from the ever present risk of slavery and urging them to higher levels of human and religious perfection, starting from whatever existential circumstance. It meant believing in the unfathomable resources of the human being and the mysterious potential of grace, preferring approaches which focused on the power of love rather than on the threat of punishments to recall people to their unavoidable responsibilities before God and other human beings, instead of presenting facile temptations to deceptive mirages.<sup>61</sup> There is no doubt that for Don Bosco, it had to be an organised if not

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55 News of this was provided with unconditional applause by the journal “Letture di Famiglia”: 4 (1845) no. 45, 8 November 1846, p. 358.

56 Cf. R. M. BORSARELLI, *La marchesa Giulia di Barolo e le opere assistenziali...*, pp. 227-231; A. TAGO, *Giulia Colbert...*, pp. 102-104.

57 Cf. D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863 1864 Le doti grandi e luminose*, pp. 25-27.

58 *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*. Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia 1858, pp. 148-149, OE X 442-443.

59 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 163-164, OE X 457-458.

60 Cf. MARCHESA DI BAROLO, *Memorie, appunti, pensieri, tradotti dal francese e pubblicati per la prima volta da Giovanni Lanza*, Turin, tip. G. Speirani e figli 1887, pp. 1-49.

61 Significant testimonies on Barolo’s convictions and charitable experience are found in the book by S. PELLICO, *La marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo. Memorie*, Turin, tip. G. Marietti 1864, 145 pp.; a summary of the Marchioness’s rehabilitation work is offered by A. TAGO, *Giulia Colbert...*, pp. 68-94.

academic 'schooling' in the preventive system.

For this reason too, the view seems well-founded that two small works published between 1845 and the beginning of 1847 are no strangers to these experiences. We are thinking of the *Divoto dell'Angelo Custode* (Devotee of the Guardian Angel) (1845) and the *Esercizio di devozione alla Misericordia di Dio* (Exercise of devotion to God's Mercy) (1847).

Devotion to the Guardian Angel, as well as, being common among the De La Salle Brothers with whom Don Bosco had relations in pastoral work,<sup>62</sup> was typical of Barolo, along with her devotion to Our Lady and St Joseph, as we also see from the text of the Constitutions. In particular, in times of silence the three people explicitly indicated for praying to are the Lord, Our Lady, the Guardian Angel.<sup>63</sup> It seems reasonable then, to connect the booklet dedicated to the Guardian Angel, published in 1845, to the priestly service Don Bosco offered at the Refuge. The title of the ten considerations and the 'spiritual ditty' at the end of them are inspired by particularly tender thoughts easily associated with the ones expressed in the *Esercizio di devozione alla Misericordia di Dio*. The angel's gift is a divine outpouring of love: '*God's goodness in giving us Guardian Angels; the Angels love us out of respect for Jesus and Mary; daily benefits of the Guardian Angels; special assistance of the Guardian Angels; tenderness of the holy Angels for the 'sinner'; the tenderness we owe our Guardian Angel because he loves us.*'<sup>64</sup> These considerations prepare for the mystical encounter with the Guardian Angel, which he recalls with a vocabulary of increasing significance: 'The provider and director of each of us , 'loving concern,' 'loving consoler,' 'loving intercessor,' 'fondest care,' 'our loving protector,' 'most loveable protector.' The *Spiritual ditty, the soul and the angel* achieves a high point of special and delicate intimacy. The soul (including in a Jungian sense), almost a lover, begins the dialogue with a quatrain, the first three lines of which run thus:

*Little angel of my God  
Of you I am not worthy  
Little Angel of my God...*

These return unchanged as the 'chorus' to each reply of the beloved. The fourth verse expresses new sentiments; it questions, asks, confirms; 'What are you doing near me? Don't you know how weak I am? I would like to fly with you, I would like to please Mary, Oh tell me where Jesus is; do you approve of fear? I am filled with happiness; give me your heart and I will give you mine.' The angel concludes with the reassurance:

*I'll take your heart, you have mine  
They will never be parted  
Ah! Let us be of one heart  
For him who created us.*<sup>65</sup>

*The soul and the Guardian Angel* was included two years later in the *choice of hymns* section of *The Companion of Youth*, while in the main text of the *Companion*, only a brief *Exercise of devotion to the Guardian Angel* was included, and this had a rather severe tone to it: 'Do not disdain to take so much care of me, abominable sinner that I am,' 'deign to take much care of this poor soul of mine, defend it from the devil's wiles and assaults,' 'lower yourself and come down to earth from heaven to carry out your ministry on behalf of such a vile creature as I,' 'Most kind spirit, how much effort you make to save my soul.'<sup>66</sup>

62 Cf. G. FORNARESI, *Il culto dell'angelo custode nel pensiero e nelle opere di S. G. B. de La Salle*, in "Rivista Lasalliana" 59 (1992) no. 4, pp. 284-299.

63 *Costituzioni e Regole...*, part II *Direttorio spirituale*, tit. VIII Del silenzio, p. 495.

64 [G. BOSCO], *Il divoto dell'Angelo custode*, Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1845, 72 p., OE I 87-158.

65 [G. BOSCO], *Il divoto dell'Angelo custode...*, pp. 61-63, OE I 147-149.

66 [G. BOSCO], *Il giovane provveduto...*, 1847, pp. 124-126, 342-344, OE II 304-306, 522-524.

The brief *Esercizio di divozione alla Misericordia de Dio* also reveals strong links with the *Refuge* and the *Little Hospital*. It was published a few months after Don Bosco resigned from the Barolo works. It does not seem too outrageous to suggest that it may have been inspired, practised and written during the time he exercised his ministry there. We are informed by Barolo's first biographer that 'from 1840 onward, she introduced the so-called *Exercise of mercy* into her institute to be used on the seven last days of *Carnevale*. She successfully petitioned Pope Gregory XVI for various indulgences for this Exercise.<sup>67</sup> The texts requesting these and those granting them by Gregory XVI and Pius IX from spring to summer 1846, take up the first pages of the booklet.<sup>68</sup> The petition was based on the fact that this exercise of devotion had been 'practised for some years' in the 'religious communities in the pious establishments of St Anne and St Mary Magdalene set up and recently approved' by his Holiness. The exercise was 'directed to imploring the Divine Mercy for the conversion of sinners in the first three days and thanking him for his benefits in the three days that followed.'<sup>69</sup>

The first indulgences were granted on 16 March 1864 and communicated by a decree from the Congregation for Indulgences on 6 April. On 8 March, Gregory XVI had already approved the Institute of the Sisters of St Anne and its Constitutions. Founded in 1834, its purpose was, 'to pursue education of the needy class both for girls in their childhood, and adult women in poor towns and villages, also making themselves available to offer their neighbour any other service of charity consistent with their state and which, in case of necessity, their superiors may ask of them. But they will not allow this to distract them from the careful education of girls who receive it in their monasteries. They will not, however, teach them sciences and skills proper to a more elevated [socially] education. They will only and by all means possible try to form them in piety and everything that can help make good Christians and good mothers of families.'<sup>70</sup>

The *Exercise of devotion* begins with the belief that 'we are all sinners, all unhappy because of our guilt, all in need of forgiveness and grace, all redeemed by Our Lord's precious blood, all called to eternal salvation.'<sup>71</sup> The seriousness of sin and the severity of justice are not denied but the aid of mercy is guaranteed for the sincere penitent. It has been claimed, not without good reason, that we find in this little booklet not original material but material taken from existing sources, added to from long devotional practice, the roots of loving-kindness, a term which recurs in it under various forms.<sup>72</sup>

There are some other flashes of illumination we can still glean from the work carried out by the spiritual director at St Philomena's Little Hospital. This regards especially the painful experiences which he brightened up through his cheerfulness and encouraging presence. We can deduce this from a passage in a letter written to Fr Borel from the Becchi on 17 October 1845: 'I received your letter yesterday in which you notified me of many pleasing things. Tell Mother Clémence to have courage and we'll pass on regards when we go to Turin. Tell Mother Eulalia to hold firm and not fall ill. Then tell the Mother of the Hospital to keep our girls cheerful and I'll give them a bun on my arrival.'<sup>73</sup>

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67 G. LANZA, *La marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo nata Colbert*, Turin, Giulio Speirani e figli 1892, p. 179.

68 [G. BOSCO], *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin, tip. Eredi Botta [1847], pp. 3-12, OE II 73-82

69 [G. BOSCO], *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio...*, pp. 3-4, OE II 73-74.

70 *Costituzioni e Regole dell'Istituto delle Suore di S. Anna della Provvidenza*, part I, tit. I, art. 1-2, in *Acta Gregorii Papae XVI III 477*

71 [G. BOSCO], *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio...*, pp. 14-15, OE II 84-85

72 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995), 265-266.

73 Em I 62. Sr Clémence Bouchet had important roles both in the Congregation she belonged to, which she was also the Superior General of, and with Barolo, whom she helped found the Sisters of St Anne and the Siter Penitents of St Mary Magdalene. Mother Eulalia, a Sister from 1828, had worked with the Orphans in Turin, at St John's Hospital and in the prisons, and had been in charge of the "Forzate"; from 1842 she was the Superior at the Refuge where she remained until 1847. The Superior of the Little

We can see from a 1864 letter to the Novice Mistress of the Magdalenes that Don Bosco also did some teaching, especially arithmetic.<sup>74</sup> What has been written about Don Bosco's prolonged relationship with the Magdalene monastery is also plausible.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.2 From the wandering oratory to its permanent location, and Don Bosco's final choice (1845-46)

The opening of the Little Hospital on 1 August 1845 meant the chaplains had lost rooms (this had already happened some months earlier) assigned to the oratory; 'We had to find another place,' Don Bosco wrote.<sup>76</sup>

This was the beginning of the oratory's wanderings to various locations used simply for catechism classes or only for recreation; St Peter in Chains, the *Mulini* or Dora Mills, the Moretta house, the Filippi field and ultimately Valdocco. For mass and other sacred ceremonies Don Bosco went with the boys to one or other church, with a preference for some as he tells us in the *Cenno storico*: 'On Sundays I took them sometimes to Sassi, sometimes to Madonna di Campagna and sometimes to the Cuppucini (Capuchins) on the hill' or occasionally to the Superga.<sup>77</sup> His friend, Fr Pietro Abbondioli (1812–1893) was the parish priest at Sassi and at *Monte dei Cappucini* the priests gave Don Bosco's boys a great welcome.

The first stopping off point for catechism was at the church in the St Peter in Chains cemetery on 25 May 1845,<sup>78</sup> not at the Mulini Dora as Don Bosco was already saying in 1854, information which biographers followed for almost a century.<sup>79</sup> We cannot exclude the possibility that Don Bosco, already in touch with the De La Salle Brothers, took them there that Sunday knowing that the 'congregation of catechists of St Pelagius' had used it without needing special permission for three Sundays in May on the 11th, 18th, and 25th.<sup>80</sup> But the city Treasury [responsible for many of the city's daily affairs] had already considered, on 23 May, to prohibit its use and this was made known some days later, not in reference to the boys from Don Bosco's oratory but to the above mentioned congregation which had gathered there to say the Office of the Dead.<sup>81</sup>

The fleeting presence at St Peter in Chains interrupted, according to Don Bosco, by the acrimonious accusations of the chaplain, former Capuchin Fr Giuseppe Tesio (1777–1845) at the insistence of his housekeeper, was followed three days later by the sudden death of the accuser.<sup>82</sup> It created a situation which favoured Don Bosco. It gave Barolo's chaplain the possibility of being in touch with the city authorities to present them with the oratory's activities and support Don Bosco's appointment as new chaplain at the cemetery church – which would help his oratory. On 29 May, Fr Borel wrote to the wife of Count Bosco di Ruffino, one of the Mayors, asking her to have a word

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Hospital over the two year period 1845-1847 was Sister Giacinta Maddalena Bellagarda, who, after she professed her religious vows in 1835 was a teacher in the school at Borgo Dora and the Refuge (Cf. Em I 62-63, historical notes, lines. 13 and 14).

74 Letter to him from Sister Maddalena Teresa on 16 December 1864, ASC A 1451610.

75 Cf. L. LARESE-CELLA, *Era una marchesa... Profilo storico-sociale di Giulia di Barolo*, Turin, Gastaldi 1968, pp. 54-58.

76 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 42.

77 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 44-45; MO (1991) 141-142.

78 The presence at St Peter in Chains was so fleeting that, when writing to Marquis Cavour, Don Bosco does not even mention it, speaking only of the move from the Refuge to the Mulini Dora.

79 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'“Oratorio” di don Bosco presso il cimitero di S. Pietro in Vincoli in Torino. Una documentata ricostruzione del noto episodio*, RSS 5 (1986) 199-220.

80 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 204-206.

81 "The Treasury" the decision read "having heard the information provided about the meeting of the aforesaid catechists in the chapel at the Cemetery of St Peter in Chains, decides that from now on access to the chapel will be forbidden for such use, asking the mayors where possible to assist the authority of the Vicar to restrain the catechists from the many meetings they would like to hold there", quoted by F. MOTTO, *L'“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 206.

82 MO (2010) 117-118.



with her husband, if she thought it prudent, about the request which Don Bosco – ‘Chaplain of Marchioness Barolo’s Work of the Refuge’ – was about to pass on to city authorities ‘to be appointed chaplain of St Peter in Chains’ so he could use the place to continue the work begun at the Refuge.<sup>83</sup> From an outline of the 17 petitioners provided by the City treasurer we see that the request had been signed by Frs Borel, Sebastiano Pacchiotti and Bosco, considered ‘Worthy priests, all three of them,’ dedicated to a ‘noble and holy’ mission. Nevertheless, the one who drew up the outline invited the other members to ‘consider if it would suit the silence of the graves and whether sometimes a pre-existing connection [with the cemetery] might not weaken the absolute dedication to the important service the city must ensure.’<sup>84</sup> Instead, a certain Fr Felice Colombo from Avigliana was chosen, a school-teacher at Giaveno. He was also given the task of celebrating Sunday Mass at St Martin’s chapel in the Mulini Dora.<sup>85</sup>

The three priests were not put off, sending in a request for at least partial use of the place. They said they were directors ‘of a society of boys who gathered every Sunday and feast day in an Oratory under the protection of St Francis de Sales, opened at the house where they lived, to impart catechism, attend mass, approach the sacraments and sometimes receive benediction.’ In ‘recent celebrations’ the number of boys had risen to 200, requiring ‘a larger Oratory.’ So, for a ‘work of recognised great benefit for young people’ they were asking for permission to use the ‘oratory at the cemetery of St Peter in Chains, ... very suitable in many respects for the exercises of piety practised in their oratory.’ According to the Minutes, when the Treasury met on 3 July, the request ‘was rejected, the consideration being that it does not seem appropriate for the church intended for the cemetery to be put to other use beyond that for which it was built.’<sup>86</sup>

But following a new request, they gave ‘Fr Borel the faculty of using the chapel at the Mulini for catechising the boys,’ the condition being, they explained, that ‘no one be allowed within the boundaries of the houses at the Mulini and that no hindrance be created for celebrating Sunday and feast day Masses for all employees of the Mulini. The time for catechism will be set between midday and three p.m.’<sup>87</sup> Catechism classes commenced on 13 July, and lasted until December. In a letter to Marquis Michele di Cavour on 13 March 1846 Don Bosco wrote: ‘The number of youngsters coming there was huge and often surpassed two hundred and fifty. But from this church too, the city authorities ordered our catechism classes to be located elsewhere for the coming January, without giving us any reason.’<sup>88</sup> It was caused by protests from the inhabitants around the Mulini. The representative group of Decurions, at its session on 7 November, had received these complaints and the Treasury, on 14 November, told Fr Borel that from January he would no longer be able to ‘avail himself of the chapel at the Mulini.’<sup>89</sup>

The harsh winter in Turin led Don Bosco to a new solution. For catechism on Sunday afternoon he rented three rooms in a house not far from the Refuge. It belonged to Fr Giovanni Antonio Moretta (1777–1847), then for recreation purposes a few weeks later he rented a nearby fenced-off field to the east of the house, from brothers Pietro Antonio and Carlo Filippi.<sup>90</sup>

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83 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 211.

84 F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 212.

85 F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 213.

86 F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 214.

87 F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 215.

88 Em I 66.

89 F. MOTTO, *L’“Oratorio” di don Bosco...*, RSS 5 (1986) 215. In a *Memoriale dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales (1844-1849)*, drawn up by Fr Borel, published by P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 545-559, we find the note: “On the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 13 July, he took possession of S. Martino. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent he left S. Martino” (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 547).

90 In the *Memoriale*, mentioned in the previous footnote, on 21 February Fr Borel records: “Buys a gate for the field. Invoice and items for the gate” (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 546).

Their stay at the Moretti house lasted from December 1845 to April 1846, since complaints from other tenants in the building, which had 20 rooms, meant the rental was not renewed.<sup>91</sup> Two hundred metres away there was a fifteen metre-long shed under construction up against a building which Francesco Pinardi had rented out to a certain Pancrazio Soave who had tried to set up a starch factory there. It would become the final stop for their wanderings.

Don Bosco summed up the final stages following the departure from the Mulini Dora in a letter on 13 March 1846 to Marquis Michele di Cavour: 'We were in a real fix. To abandon the work begun, which seemed to be so valuable, we were unhappy about. Only his Excellency Count di Collegno, after speaking with you, encouraged us to continue. During this winter we did part of it at our own house and part in various rooms we had rented. Finally, this week, we negotiated a site with Mr Pinardi with whom we agreed on the sum of two hundred and eighty francs for a large room that can serve as an oratory, plus two other rooms with an adjacent area.'<sup>92</sup> The letter to Cavour shows no trace of the dramatic version Don Bosco presents in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.<sup>93</sup>

Don Bosco began paying rent for the new site, thanks to substantial contributions from Fr Cafaso,<sup>94</sup> to provide a chapel and sacristy for the oratory and an attached third room for recreational equipment. It opened on Easter Sunday, 12 April, The following day Fr Borel, delegated by the Archbishop, blessed it.

Oratory members must have increased rapidly in numbers if, on 10 August 1846, the author of the *Memoriale* recorded an expenditure of 39 lire for 650 copies of the *Six Sundays of St Aloysius* 'distributed to the boys for 6 lire per hundred.'<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, on 5 June, Don Bosco succeeded in renting three rooms on the first floor of the Pinardi house at 5 lire a month from 1 July to 1 January 1849. Clearly the moment had arrived for a radical choice of residence and life.<sup>96</sup>

The exclusive choice of oratory work had really been maturing over some months, also due to the incompatibility of the mission to boys and his role as chaplain at St Philomena's little Hospital. Among other things the misfortune of the wandering oratory had coincided with Don Bosco's increasingly poor health. The Marchioness di Barolo (who was in Rome seeking approval of her institutes) supported him with motherly concern, using the good offices of Fr Borel. She insisted he look after the health of the priest from Castelnuovo which, by his own admission was poor due to overwork.<sup>97</sup> In a letter on 3 January 1846, Fr Borel reassured her that on the day after Epiphany Don Bosco would take up a period of rest.<sup>98</sup> But his stay with his friend Fr Abbondioli, parish priest at Sassi, did not resolve the problem since the boys did not stop coming to find him, and he wore out his lungs hearing confessions.

Don Bosco himself gave us the details in abundance in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.<sup>99</sup> 'These boys went to confession to him and he brought them back to Turin' the Marchioness wrote to Fr Borel on 18 May, highlighting the situation. She praised Don Bosco's work but stated she would only continue to pray for him 'on condition he went far enough away from Turin so he would not be able to endanger his health which' she concluded 'as much as I admire him concerns me more.'

91 In the *Memoriale* mentioned on 2 April, it is noted that: "Having been sent away we are holding the oratory at the Moretta house and have paid up for all of April" (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 547).

92 Letter of 13 March 1846, Em I 66-67. "Camera", in this and other letters in the future, means a room, a habitable room, lodging.

93 MO (2010) 124-126.

94 Cf. *Memoriale dell'Oratorio...*, in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 545-559

95 *Memoriale dell'Oratorio...*, in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 549.

96 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 75.

97 MO (2010) 144.

98 Cf. letter of Fr Borel in MB II 352-353.

99 MO (2010) 144.

'He [Cafasso] chose the excellent D. Bosco and presented him to me' she had prefaced her comments with in the first part of the letter. 'I liked him from the first moment and found that sense of recollectedness and simplicity in him that is proper to holy souls.' But she also pointed to the inconvenience created by the boys milling around in front of the Refuge waiting for their priest with the risk, one way or another, of untimely encounters with 'troubled girls.'<sup>100</sup>

It was becoming inevitable that Don Bosco's 'professional' relationships with the Marchioness would come to an end: 'I have already considered my response,' he told the energetic Marchioness 'You have money and will easily find as many priests as you want for your institutes. It's not the same with the poor youngsters;' 'I will resign from any regular responsibility and devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters.'<sup>101</sup> But the Marchioness did not subsequently withdraw her generous munificence, though Don Bosco writes nothing about this in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.

Early in July returning from the Oratory to the Refuge one Sunday, Don Bosco fainted and had to go to bed, suffering fever. Given the seriousness and progression of the illness and how it ended, one might believe it was a serious lung infection, perhaps bronco-pneumonia. Once the crisis had passed he underwent a lengthy convalescence in his birthplace.<sup>102</sup> Before leaving Turin early in August, he took leave of the Little Hospital and the Refuge, and Fr Borel saw to bringing his friend's personal belongings to the rooms in the Pinardi house. He had already taken up the work of looking after the Oratory some weeks earlier.<sup>103</sup>

Don Bosco kept in constant contact with him by letter from Castelnuovo.<sup>104</sup> When he had finished his long convalescence of almost three months, on 3 November 1846 he set himself up with his mother in the house he had rented in June.

#### 4.3 Meets up with a good friend whom he admired: Silvio Pellico (1789–1854)

According to Don Bosco's biographers, he asked Silvio Pellico (24 June 1789–31 January 1854) to write the hymn *Angioletto del mio Dio*. The poet would also have composed other hymns published in *The Companion of Youth* [at least in the Italian *Il Giovane Provveduto*]: *Cuor di Maria che gli Angioli, Un disordine infinite, Paradiso, Paradiso*.<sup>105</sup> If they are Pellico's, they belong to the religious and recreational production the poet reserved for particular celebrations by institutions, or for Barolo's communities, mostly published long after his death.<sup>106</sup> It does not seem to be coincidental that among his poetic compositions is one dedicated to the unknown young martyr St Fortunola and that Don Bosco, probably for a celebration at the Refuge or the Little Hospital, had given a panegyric on her, a bare outline of which remains in his own handwriting.<sup>107</sup>

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100 Letter from the Marchioness to Fr Borel on 18 May 1846, ASC A 1010104, quoted in MB II 463-466.

There are some good clarifications on Giulia Barolo and St John Bosco in A. TAGO, *Giulia Colbert...*, pp. 104-108.

101 MO (2010) 127

102 MO (2010) 145-146

103 Cf. F. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco. Inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della Casa madre dei salesiani in Torino*, Turin, SEI 1935, pp. 92-94.

104 Cf. Chap. 7, § 1.

105 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, 1847, pp. 329-330, 339-344, OE II 509-510, 519-524; MB II 133, 269, 549; VII 40.

106 Cf. S. PELLICO, *Inni italiani per le annuali Feste della grand'opera della Propagazione della Fede nella Diocesi di Torino*, Turin, Tip. Giulio Speirani e figli 1882; unpublished plays, with a preface by Giovanni Lanza. Turin, Collegio degli Artigianelli - Tip. E Libr. San Giuseppe 1886.

107 Cf. S. BARONI, *Santa Fortunola martire... Cenni storici con un inno di Silvio Pellico in lode della stessa Santa*, Lucca, Tip. Arciv. San Paolino 1883: the text of the hymn is also found in the *Complete works* of Silvio Pellico with additions by Pietro Maroncelli to "Mie prigioni". Milan, Libreria di Dante 1857, pp. 355-356; G. BOSCO, *Discorso per S. Fortunola V. M.*, scheme handwritten ms, ASC A 2250706.

A collaborator and counsellor of the Barolos in family and other confidential matters, Pellico was confirmed in his fully private role by the Marchioness after her husband's death. Pellico came into contact with her charitable works and those who worked in them, especially with the mother institution, the Refuge, and the two official chaplains, Frs Borel and Pacchiotti and from autumn 1844, with Don Bosco.

Lemoyne writes of the 'friendly relationships' between Don Bosco and Pellico in a number of contexts. In Lemoyne's judgement, as a 'rookie' writer, Don Bosco submitted his written material to him, receiving useful advice.<sup>108</sup> Don Bosco had written some of the verses of the 'Angels' poem<sup>109</sup> on a bookmark in his breviary.<sup>110</sup>

Pellico was the son of Savoyard Margherita Tournier di Chambéy and she had dedicated him to St Francis de Sales, so along with Don Bosco he shared a special devotion to the saint of kindness. The poet and dramatist wrote to Dominican Fr Feraudi; 'I am pleased you love this most kind Saint, since my parents always inspired me with a special devotion to him. He is not only the protector of our Francois [his brother, a Jesuit] but almost a family Saint. As a child I was crippled, made a novena to him and began walking.'<sup>111</sup>

It was certainly Don Bosco's familiarity with Pellico that inspired the affectionate pen portrait he gave him in the second edition of the *Storia d'Italia* in 1859. It presumed direct personal acquaintance as well as a natural commonality of Christian faith. He wrote that Pellico 'had a smiling, kindly countenance and warmth. He was full of kindness and was humble in speech and when greeting friends and acquaintances.' Following the Spielberg experience, Pellico had spent the last twenty years of his life 'in study and exercising virtue,' beginning with writing 'the marvellous work entitled *Le mie prigioni*.' [My Prisons]. 'The purity of style,' he emphasised, 'simplicity and sublimity of his moral and religious ideas make this book accessible to and useful for anyone who is less educated. I advise you to give it careful reading and you will certainly gain no little benefit from it; 'he was very much concerned with the welfare of the young and always experienced much pleasure every time with advice, or with some pecuniary means, he could find work for a beggar, instruct an uneducated individual, or help some young person to take up study. Among the things he said, it is worth indicating a letter written to a Protestant about the evil irreligious books cause for the tender minds of the young.' Following the death of his parents and brother 'he gratefully accepted' 'the honourable hospitality' offered him by the Marquis and Marchioness di Barolo, and 'was revered by posterity' after his sudden death.<sup>112</sup>

Silvio Pellico wrote a letter from Rome on 23 December 1845, in the name of the Marchioness di Barolo, asking him to inform Fr Borel. It was addressed to her secretary, Domenico Burdizzo, asking him to inform Fr Borel of some things to be done regarding Don Bosco's 'poor health' and the need he had to look after it by taking a break for some time. She would continue to give him the 'fee agreed upon.' The Marchioness asked Borel to 'share this information' with Don Bosco, 'encouraging him to benefit from it,' and to find a temporary substitute for him. Pellico also wanted to pay his respects to Don Bosco through Burdizzo, as well as to the two chaplains at the Refuge, Borel and Pacchiotti;<sup>113</sup> a sign of more than a casual acquaintance.

Two facts referred to in the early 1860s are a further confirmation of reminiscences that were more than just passing ones. At the beginning of 1861, a dream Don Bosco recounted on the

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108 Cf. MB III 314-315; IV 634; V 118

109 Cf. S. PELLICO, *Opere complete*..., pp. 309-311.

110 MB XVIII 806.

111 In *Epistolario italiano*, ed. C. Durando. Turin, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1877, p. 385; cf. also the letter to his sister Giuseppina, quoted by D. Massè, *Un cattolico integrale del Risorgimento*. Rome, Edizioni Paoline 1959, p. 203.

112 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia*..., 1859, pp. 460-466.

113 Letter of 23 December 1845, in MB VII 608.

evening of 31 December 1860, was still needling the consciences of residents at the Oratory. In the dream the boys were subjected to an examination of conscience directed by three key figures: Fr Cafasso, Silvio Pellico, Count Cais,<sup>114</sup> the last named being the only living member of the trio at the time. Then in the *Catholic Readings* at the end of the year, Don Bosco published Pellico's work *Notizie intorno alla beata Panasia*, along with the biographical outline from 1859, reworked and added to with a quotation from a surprisingly contentious statement Pellico had made against Gioberti's *Prolegomeni* (1845), dedicated to him. He strongly disagreed with the violent attack on the Jesuits. Don Bosco commented conscientiously: 'As an excellent and courageous Catholic, he disappointed Vincenzo Gioberti's hopes.'<sup>115</sup>

## 5. From the morality of duty to Don Bosco's Salesianity

The evolution of structure and the fundamental vocational choice were also sign, effect and cause of a new mentality and new capabilities being formed. Don Bosco, priest and pastor, increasingly became the educator, and his pastoral ministry more focused on youth. The Seminary and *Convitto* had not given him any specific preparation for this, but they had created basic mental structures which, given his intelligence and innate realism, furnished him with ample opportunity to add to these new features as he began working with young people.

This evolution is more visible in his ecclesiology, choice of devotions, moral orientation, radically induced by the *Convitto* and enriched through personal reading. In terms of approach, the impact of Liguori's teaching and his contact with the circumstances of young people in Turin encouraged a substantial practical, rather than cultural incorporation of 'Salesianity' taken in its broadest sense,<sup>116</sup> including some interconnected elements of the spiritualities of Vincent de Paul and Philip Neri.

### 5.1 The post-tridentine current of moral theology and pastoral ministry

The imprint of the post-tridentine tradition is expressed in a Catholic mentality which Don Bosco shared, formed initially in the family and parish through religious practices, the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, Mass and Communion, preaching, catechism. It was a religion and morality of duty, the ten commandments, the precepts of the Church, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Such a mentality was consolidated by theological, moral and pastoral experience, assimilated first of all in the seminary, then in a more detailed way at the *Convitto* with a clear emphasis coming from Guala's and Cafasso's more benign approach. This was confirmed more substantially by his confessional practice and way more explicitly formulated in his lives of young people published between 1859 and 1864. But it can already be found in its essential elements in writings from the 1840's.

Don Bosco never came under the fascination of the idea of 'dogmas generating piety,' but was essentially a follower of a Liguoran and Cafasso style moral theology based on the law-conscience combination, undeniably a kind of code-of-conduct approach so much more necessary in the pedagogical context. Integrated with this perspective, however, is the higher fulfilment of God's law and the religious duty of *pietas*, be it the glory of God and the salvation of souls, or active charity

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114 Cf. D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, pp. 2-5; G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti tratti dalle prediche e dalla storia*, pp. 65-68 and *Annali* I, pp. 1-6.

115 *Notizie intorno alla beata Panasia pastorella valsesiana nativa di Quarona* collected and written by Silvio Pellico. Preceded by a biography of the author. Turin, Tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1862, pp. 3-15.

116 Furthermore, it was emphasised that "all the Alphonsian works on divine love, beginning with the *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo (1768)* depend in large party on St Francis de Sales"; this is generally true of all his works on asceticism (G. DE ROSA, *Tempo religioso e tempo storico*, Vol. II. Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura 1994, p. 113).

proposed explicitly as the privileged path to holiness.

These basic traits can already be traced in the *Cenni storici* on Comollo in 1844, the *Storia ecclesiastica* in 1845, the *Sei domeniche e la novena de san Luigi Gonzaga* in 1846.

The book on his friend Comollo is both a memory of a past which the author looks back on affectionately, and an exemplary legacy for the future. Dedicated to the seminarians in Chieri, the *Cenni* offers them 'the example of the virtuous actions' of a fellow seminarian which 'can serve as a true model' on their journey to priesthood. The values of centuries-old Christian tradition are given privileged place in the main character's asceticism; discretion with 'people of the opposite sex,' obedience, 'great tenderness in religious matters,' the 'spirit of mortification,' 'exemplary mortification of all external senses,' 'exactness in doing one's duty,' 'recollectedness,' 'commitment to religious observance and matters of piety,' 'love for and devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.' This was combined with a 'balanced and cheerful frame of mind,' which meant he was 'always cheerful and happy, and kind in speech.' 'He had a friend [John Bosco] in whom he could especially confide when discussing spiritual matters.' 'In recreation, group meetings, on walks he always wanted to discuss knowledgeable things ' or school subjects; and again, during holidays he was 'regular in frequenting the sacraments, the sacred ceremonies, teaching catechism to the boys in church.'<sup>117</sup>

In the 1854 edition, the biography reproduced the same outline, though in the preface *To the Reader*, the author refers to it as 'a note on the life of a young man who over a short space of time practised such beautiful virtues that he can be proposed as a model for every faithful Christian who wants to save his soul.' 'Here we find not extraordinary actions but everything done with such perfection that we can apply to young Comollo the words of the Holy Spirit: *Qui timet Deum nihil negliget*; he who fears God does not neglect whatever can contribute to making progress in advancing in the ways of the Lord.'<sup>118</sup> This was, however, only the case for half of this brief work of 82 pages (90 in the second edition). The language becomes more anxious in the second half with a succession of upsets, conscience-searching, warnings about the 'final judgement': the early indicators of the illness, its worsening state, his spiritual testament then death, funeral, the brief reference to 'appearances' after death.<sup>119</sup> The severe and solemn reflection on the Last Things between the two friends also betrays anxiety and well highlights some of the darker side that perseveres in Don Bosco's pedagogy even after it is nourished with cheerfulness and loving-kindness.

Don Bosco, though, is not systematic and he amazes us yet again by his freedom of spirit. In a moral approach consisting of obligations, he introduces, in a wise and natural way, from his earliest written efforts, the lighter relief of the theological virtues. 'Those movements of tender emotions,' he writes of Comollo as a young lad 'of kindness and being content with spiritual matters, were the result of keen faith and ardent love so strongly rooted in his heart, and they guided him in all his actions.'<sup>120</sup>

'Bolster my spirit with keen faith, firm hope and ardent love,' the devotee prays to his Guardian Angel.<sup>121</sup> This intermingling of theological and moral virtues would often be the case in the future. St Pancratius is a child who 'was the delight of his family and is proposed as a model for his companions because of his obedience to his parents and exact fulfilment of his duties.' The young

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117 [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, 1844, pp. 6-39, OE I 6-39

118 G. Bosco, *Cenni sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue rare virtù*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1854, p. 7

119 Cf. [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, 1844, pp. 42-77, OE I 42-77; G. Bosco, *Cenni sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo...*, pp. 49-88

120 [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, 1844, p. 34, OE I 34.

121 Cf. [G. Bosco], *Il divoto dell'Angelo custode...*, p. 71, OE I 157; cf. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, 1847, p. 124, OE II 304.

martyr displayed a 'keen faith, firm hope ardent love which meant none of life's perils, not even the cruellest of deaths could separate him from the love that is found in true followers of Jesus Christ.'<sup>122</sup> 'Keen faith, deep humility, ready obedience, fervent and generous love' also co-exist in Peter, the leader of the Apostles.<sup>123</sup> For those who are chaste, all virtues come together; 'You see how they are patient in sorrow, loving towards their neighbour, at peace when abused, resigned when ill, attentive to their duties, fervent in prayer, keen to know God's word. You can see that in their heart they have keen faith, firm hope and ardent charity.'<sup>124</sup> Obviously this trait is more than evident in the life of someone like St Dominic Savio.<sup>125</sup>

These two perspectives, the moral and the theological, are not given a reflective and carefully elaborated unity by Don Bosco, but one or the other prevails depending on the context. We see this in the attention he gives to the gradual nature of pedagogy. Where he remains firm on requiring exact observance of rules and regulations, or in how he presents duties and obligations, not without hints of fear, recommending various 'escape routes' instead of encouraging the acquisition of strong virtues in open confrontation with difficult and risky situations. In other contexts we can admire a Don Bosco who can appreciate and value the positive potential which young people are the bearers of, can encourage their spirit of initiative; who dislikes unnatural and superfluous regimentation, proclaims the gospel of cheerfulness as part of piety itself, urges work and study which, for those who tackle these with faithful and tenacious effort helps them grow in moral and social quality and dignity.

Don Bosco's theological and educational thinking found plentiful expression, too, in his first demanding written work, the '*Storia ecclesiastica*, 1845, Its composition implied his preferred reading of earlier years and, probably, also the beginnings of 'historical catechesis' close to Fleury and preferred reading limited just to catechetical ideas. While utilising Bercastel, the underlying inspiration appeared to be coming from ultramontane writers, in particular Jesuit Fr Jean-Nicholas Loriquez (1767–1845) according to whom Church history was, 'the most useful and iconic way of nurturing love and respect for religion in the young,' meaning the history of the Catholic Church: 'What more worthy object of our admiration could there be than seeing the battles it sustains and the victories it continually achieves?' What a noble spectacle it is to see it always assailed but ever triumphant.'<sup>126</sup>

The centrality of the Pope, which he asserts in the preface, finds more complete expression in the apologetic writings of the 1850's. However it is already something clearly premeditated: 'It seems that certain writers are embarrassed to speak of the Roman Pontiffs' and he confirms his position with the definition he provides of the Church: 'The congregation of all those who profess the faith and teaching of Jesus Christ and are governed by a Supreme Head, His Vicar on earth and though the Church might call itself Greek or Latin or Gallican or Indian, it is nonetheless the same Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church.'<sup>127</sup>

The text, then, is consistent with what the preface promises, following Bercastel, concerning the educational, apologetic and catechetical reasons for recounting 'the most brilliant events directly regarding the Church.' 'Events that are wholly profane, of a civil nature or dry or less interesting' he explains, 'or are questionable, are events I have omitted or only hinted at; those which seem more

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122 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire con appendice sul Santuario a lui dedicato vicino a Pianezza*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia 1856, p. 11 and 35, VIII 205 and 229.

123 G. BOSCO, *Vita di san Pietro Principe degli apostoli Primo Papa dopo Cristo*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1856, fasc. XI January 1857 of the "Letture Cattoliche", p. 65, OE VIII 357

124 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 152, OE X 446.

125 Cf. Chap. 10, § 8.

126 J.-N LORIQUEZ, *Storia ecclesiastica da Gesù Cristo sino al pontificato di Gregorio XVI ad uso delle case di educazione. Traduzione dal francese con alcune aggiunte*. Turin, G. Marietti 1844, 172 pp.: the quote is taken from the Preface, p. 3.

127 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, p. 9 e 14, OE I 167 e 172.

moving I have dealt with more circumstantially so that not only is the intellect instructed but the heart, too, is affected and gains great spiritual benefit.' He concluded: 'Perhaps there is nothing more necessary and more enjoyable than this history which explains the beginnings and progress of this religion, making clear how it has been preserved and propagated amid much opposition.'<sup>128</sup>

Therefore, his narrative favours the occasions, people and events which have effectively displayed the characteristic marks of the Church. It is *one*, under the Pope, 'Vicar of Jesus Christ' from whom every decision is given value and authority. The ecumenical councils are infallible not so much because of episcopal collegiality but for their papal ratification. The Church is above all *holy*. Fundamentally, Don Bosco's *Storia ecclesiastica* writes of a 'hegemony of saints.' Among his choice of popes he favours the saints and among these (other than hermits, monks, religious) emerge the saints of charity, or at least, the charity of saints. The Church is holy because it possesses the means of sanctification, sanctifying doctrine, effective saints. Besides, because it is *thaumaturgic* (= miraculous), only in the Church can we find the reality and guarantee of prophecy and miracle; his saints for the most part are also represented as able to predict events, read consciences, do miraculous deeds, things he denies all founders of other religions, and heretics.<sup>129</sup>

These are theological and at times popular beliefs which Don Bosco shared and which remained with him throughout his life and would be increasingly made evident in the association of his quality as an apostle to the young with his being something of a seer, clairvoyant, and being seen as a man of the invisible, the supernatural. 'Whoever has heartfelt recourse to God in prayer obtains many graces and even miracles,' he wrote later in the third edition of the *Storia sacra*.<sup>130</sup>

Don Bosco was firmly convinced, as priest and writer, that the supernatural, understood both as the divine reality of grace and as the extraordinary,<sup>131</sup> is at home in the only true religion which is the Catholic Church. Already, the history of the People of God of the Old Covenant, as Don Bosco emphasised in the *Storia sacra*, was a history of miraculous and amazing events. The *Storia ecclesiastica* is also just as sacred. Even the *Storia d'Italia*, as we will see, is a history of facts in which God is active beyond ordinary providence, by means of interventions beyond the normal course of events. The extraordinary constantly accompanies both the happy and sorrowful events in the Church: persecution, heresies, martyrdom; in the protection shown Christians and even more so in the punishment of persecutors, heretics, schismatics, unbelievers. The idea of punishment inexorably striking down enemies or persecutors, heretics, rebels is a guarantee of the *non praevalerunt* that has been promised.<sup>132</sup>

The extraordinary shines through above all in Christ's life. Preaching and miracle sum up his whole public life: he who 'goes around blessing is essentially a miracle worker,'<sup>133</sup> and 'unprecedented portents' follow the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.<sup>134</sup>

Also, and by analogy, he recounts the faith of the preachers of the Gospel that moves mountains (Mt 17:20), the lives of the saints and finally of every true Catholic enlivened by profound evangelical faith. These people's virtues and merits are frequently associated with miracles and prodigious deeds. It seems that the word is not sufficiently persuasive without them.

128 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., pp. 9-11, 13, OE I 167-169, 171.

129 Cf. F. MOLINARI, *La "Storia ecclesiastica" di don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp.215-228.

130 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra... Terza edizione accresciuta*. Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1863, p. 119

131 The twofold significance was also clear to Pius XI, when he stated that in Don Bosco "the supernatural had become almost natural, the extraordinary had become almost ordinary" (Address on 19 March 1929, on the occasion of the reading of the decree on miracles for Don Bosco's Beatification, *Discorsi di Pio XI*, ed. Domenico Bertetto, Vol. II 1929-1933. Torino, SEI 1960, p. 37).

132 F. MOLINARI, *La "Storia ecclesiastica"...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 207-210, 213-215.

133 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., pp. 24-28, OE I 182-183 (among the more sensational miracles recorded are Cana and the resurrection of Lazarus).

134 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., p. 31, OE I 189.



Paul confounds the Jews 'proving to them with the Scriptures, and *more* so by his miracles, that Jesus Christ was truly the Messiah foretold by the Prophets, and sent by God to be the Saviour of mankind.'<sup>135</sup> Holiness itself, other than being linked with God's word, means a special link with the prodigious.

The rapid spread of the Faith in the world is due 'primarily' to the 'innocence of the early faithful,' to their 'detachment from earthly things,' their 'heroic charity,' to the 'miracles backing their words.'<sup>136</sup> Prototypes indicated are St Gregory the Miracle Worker and St Anthony of Padua.<sup>137</sup> The former 'was compared by the Fathers to Moses and the Prophets for his gift of prophecy and miracles, and to the Apostles for his virtue, zeal and effort, and especially for the multitude of prodigies he worked.'<sup>138</sup> St Anthony of Padua's 'marvellous preaching' attracted endless crowds for 'the unction, fire and dignity, more angelic than human of his words; 'but it is worth noting,'

Don Bosco warns us 'that such preaching was accompanied by constant fasting, prayer and other rigorous penances, and a multitude of miracles that had him known as the "Thaumaturge" or worker of miracles.'<sup>139</sup> He likened an endless band of other saints to them. To saint Benedict 'God granted the gift of prophecy and made his holiness resplendent through a large number of marvellous deeds,' among which raising up a novice and predicting the destruction of the monastery of Mountcassino.<sup>140</sup> The king of England was converted after being 'touched by the holiness of life and the miracles' of the missionaries sent by St Gregory the Great.<sup>141</sup> St Romuald 'had the gift of prophecy with which he foresaw many things in the future, and also knew hearts from within, being able to reveal sins by name.' Then comes a list of great miracle workers like St Bernone of Cluny, St Gregory VIII, St Bernard, St Dominic, St Catherine of Siena, St Frances da Paola, St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul, St Alphonsus Liguori.<sup>142</sup>

However, we can detect a not so hidden Manicheism in this early Don Bosco, in his view of the world and of history. On the one hand the Catholic Church shines resplendent with its popes, saints, and is wrapped in the supernatural, while on the other there is the 'world', heretics, those behind the schisms and promoters of revolutions. A bridge between the two is doubtlessly thrown across by the heroism of the saints of charity, but it is still a shaky one. Don Bosco's later and broader efforts among young people and in his works, his contact with people of every social and cultural category when seeking support, collaboration, recognition meant that the divide between the two became less pronounced and the dualism somewhat mitigated.<sup>143</sup>

## 5.2 Oratory and Spirit of St Francis de Sales

The connection between the catechism classes and St Francis de Sales was certainly an initiative which was agreed upon between Don Bosco and the two chaplains at the Refuge, Frs Borel and Pacchiotti. It should be no surprise. St Francis de Sales had been presented to Don Bosco both at the Seminary and at the *Convitto*. The Barolo work, too, was particularly tied to the figure and spirituality of the Savoyard Saint. *The Constitutions and Regulations of the Institute of the Sisters of St Anne* established, regarding *Meditation*: 'The Sisters will follow the method of St Francis de

135 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 39-40, OE I 197-198. Emphasis is ours.

136 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 93-94, OE I 251-252.

137 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 72-74 and 242-244, OE I 230-232 and 400-402

138 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, p. 73, OE I 231.

139 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 243-244, OE I 401-402.

140 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 159-160, OE I 317-318.

141 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 165-166, OE I 323-324.

142 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 198, 199-200, 212, 222 and 224, 236-237 and 242, 282-284, 322, 322, 341, OE I 356, 357-358, 370, 380 and 382, 394-395 and 400, 423, 440-442, 480, 499.

143 Cf. F. MOLINARI, *Chiesa e mondo nella "Storia ecclesiastica" di don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 146-155.

Sales prescribed for meditation in the second part of the *Philothea* (*The Introduction of the Devout Life*).<sup>144</sup> According to the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he knew that 'the Marchioness Barolo had in mind to found a Congregation of priests under the title, and with this intention she had a painting of this Saint done.'<sup>145</sup>

At a study seminar on the topic *Don Bosco and St Francis de Sales*, Pietro Stella posed the question: *Fortuitous encounter or spiritual identity?* He replied: 'From all we have said it is evident that in the early 1800's the encounter with Charles Borromeo and Francis de Sales was obligatory for every seminarian and hence also for Don Bosco. The time at the *Convitto* in Turin and then in the setting of the Barolo works contributed to the growth of a kind of predilection in him and the shift from Francis de Sales as patron and model of Educators – spiritual identity? I would rather say affinity, of kindred kind, and devotion to the saintly intercessor within the setting of tridentine religiosity. All this does not exclude the fact that there may have been a potential openness to a more specific, organised spirituality lived according to the teachings of the saintly model and teacher.'<sup>146</sup>

In this light the other two reasons adduced by Don Bosco to explain the name given to the Oratory are plausible. It was almost an order to those who would work there: take as your protector and model the Saint of gentleness both as educators of the young and apologists for Catholicism against Protestant proselytism.<sup>147</sup> We already see this in the portrait of the apostle of the Chablis drawn up in the *Storia ecclesiastica*. He recalls there what happened after the Council of Trent: 'Apostolic zeal was aroused in a great number of Gospel workers who healed the wounds in the Church caused by heretics through their effort and holiness and gave it back the fervour of primitive times. Among those deserving of mention are St Pius V, St Theresa, St Charles Borromeo, St Philip Neri, St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul.'<sup>148</sup> He emphasised their pastoral and apologetic side. This was then repeated with a strong missionary tone, in the portrait he drew of St Francis de Sales: 'Driven by the voice of God who called him to great things; with only the weapons of kindness and charity he left for the Chablis. At the sight of demolished churches and destroyed monasteries, crosses pulled down, he was inflamed with zeal and began his apostolate. Heretics created a storm, insulted him and tried to assassinate him. He quietened every uproar by his patience, preaching, writing and outstanding miracles, won over the assassins, disarmed all of hell and the Catholic Faith triumphed so that, to put it briefly, in the Chablis alone more than seventy two thousand heretics were led back into the bosom of the true Church.'<sup>149</sup>

After the blessing of the chapel dedicated to St Francis de Sales at the Refuge, there are more than a few documents leading to the title of the future Salesian Oratory, a title which rapidly became official and final. It already appears in 1845 in the request to the municipal authorities to use a larger site for 'a society of boys who gather together every Sunday and holy day in an Oratory under the protection of St Francis de Sales.'<sup>150</sup> They would certainly have celebrated the Feast of St Francis de Sales in January 1846 if we find Borel, in his *Memoriale dell'Oratorio* recording expenses on 1 February: 'Various items to be given as prizes on the day of St Francis's feast.'<sup>151</sup> Other collective requests followed, usually in Borel's hand, addressed to the Archbishop, or still others by 'priests involved in the instruction of boys from the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

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144 *Costituzioni e Regole*, part II *Direttorio spirituale*, tit. II, art. 491, in *Acta Gregorii papae XVI* III 491

145 MO (2010) 113.

146 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco e S. Francesco di Sales: incontro fortuito o identità spirituale?*, in *San Francesco di Sales e i salesiani di don Bosco*, eds J. PICCA and J. STRUS'. Rome, LAS 1986, p. 157; cf. pp. 139-159 and especially, pp. 139-140, 143-144, 147-148

147 MO (2010) 113.

148 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, p. 305, OE I 463.

149 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 321-322, OE I 479-480

150 Request prior to 3 July 1845, the date of the negative response from City Council (Em I 57-58).

151 Cf. *Memoriale dell'Oratorio...*, in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 546.

recently opened at Valdocco outside this Capital.’

On 11 November 1846, they asked the Archbishop if they could begin ‘the holy practice of the *Via Crucis*,’<sup>152</sup>In one that followed after the Oratory was set up at Valdocco, they asked if they reconvert the earlier oratory for secular use at ‘the Little Hospital of St Philomena.’<sup>153</sup>Towards the end of June 1847 they turned to the administrators of Turin in order to obtain used furnishings to equip a Sunday school for many boys, as they said, who wanted, ‘to learn to read and write.’<sup>154</sup>Signed by ‘Fr John Bosco’ alone, instead, was a letter addressed to the Archbishop on a date prior to 18 December 1847 in which ‘Fr John Bosco and Fr Borelli, who see to the spiritual direction of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales having opened a new oratory between the Viale de’Platani and R. Valentino *Porta Nuova*’ asked Archbishop Fransoni ‘to delegate the parish priest of Our Lady of the Angels to bless it and allow holy Mass to be celebrated and to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament as he had already agreed to for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales by decree dated 6 December 1844.’<sup>155</sup>

Particularly prominent was the presentation Don Bosco made of himself and the Oratory at the beginning of a petition addressed to Pius IX on a date prior to 14 December 1848, asking for the faculty to distribute Holy Communion at Midnight Mass at Christmas: ‘Fr John Bosco, Director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin, humbly puts to your Holiness that this Oratory was erected in that city with the permission of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and is usually attended by a pious gathering of boys. No members of the opposite sex attend.’<sup>156</sup>

The presentation of St Francis de Sales as the titular saint of the Oratory reached its peak in petitions to Pius IX, all dated 28 August 1850, with a view to gaining indulgences (the first two petitions) and the faculty for blessing rosaries, crucifixes, and indulgenced medals (the third). The synonymous use of the terms ‘congregation’ and ‘oratory’ appears here. ‘Congregation’ could have meant those who came together at the individual oratories, or the group of clergy and lay people involved in promoting the various activities or, more appropriately, both of them together.<sup>157</sup> ‘The Turin priest John Bosco’ as was written in one of the petitions ‘respectfully explains to Your Holiness that a Congregation has been legitimately erected in that city under the title and protection of St Francis de Sale, of which congregation he is the Director. It has no other purpose than that of instructing abandoned youth in religion and piety.’ He asked for various indulgences for the ‘members’ and finally ‘a partial indulgence of 300 days to be applied to all those, who, while not being members, come to the procession usually held in honour of the above mentioned Saint, on the first Sunday of each month of the year.’<sup>158</sup>

Identical terminology for similar requests was used for ‘a Congregation under the title and protection of the Holy Guardian Angel of which he is the Director.’....and in relation to the ‘procession which is usually held in honour of the above-mentioned Guardian Angel on the first Sunday of each month of the year.’<sup>159</sup>He petitioned the Pope once more for the three oratories, asking him ‘to grant, at least *ad triennium*, the faculty for blessing rosaries, crucifixes, medals with

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152 Em I 74, orig. ms orig. of Fr Borel’s, without a signature. The positive response of the Provicca, Celestino Fissore came on 11 November.

153 Letter prior to 5 October 1847, orig. ms orig. of Fr Borel’s, without a signature, Em I 78.

154 Letter prior to 22 April 1847, orig. ms orig. of Fr Borel’s, without a signature, Em I 75.

155 Em I 79, copy, with signature.. To the “priests making the request” the archbishop granted “the faculty of celebrating Mass there, and giving Benediction for the Sacred Triduum, or some other solemnities” (Em I 79, note to line 11).

156 Em I 82, orig., without signature. To “an oratory under the title of St. Franc. di Sales” and to the other two referred to in the first petition already quoted (v. § 3), to Vittorio Emanuele II on a date prior to 14 November 1849 (Em I 90, orig. without signature).

157 Cf. *Regolamento dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, pt. I, Chap. I, p. 1; Chap. 10., § 2.

158 Em I 109, orig. all., without signature.

159 Em I 110, orig. all., without signature.

application of the holy Indulgences.<sup>160</sup>

To crown this period we cannot omit mention of a saint whom Don Bosco considered key to his youthful spiritual pedagogy, St Aloysius Gonzaga. *The six Sundays and novena to St Aloysius* which he published in 1846 could be a bridge thrown in the direction of his devotional and spiritual work for young people – his most significant and enduring one, *The Companion of Youth (Il Giovane Provveduto)*. The book includes the contents of this slender booklet, omitting the first pages of which contain an *Outline on the life of St Aloysius*.<sup>161</sup>

Anticipating what he would say in the presentation of *The Companion of Youth* ‘to devotees of St Aloysius,’ Don Bosco wanted to offer ‘a model and exemplar allowing you to form an approach to life which can lead you to true happiness. St Aloysius is proposed as an exemplar of innocence and virtue for everyone, but especially for youth.’<sup>162</sup> The biographical profile based on the *Vita breve di san Luigi Gonzaga scritta novellamente* (Piacenza 1829) by Antonio Cesari (1769–1828) of the Oratory of St Philip, was extremely demanding, and was then revisited in the more significant moments on days in the novena and on the feast day: *St Aloysius laments his sins, Penances of St Aloysius, St Aloysius, exemplar in the virtue of purity, St Aloysius detached from the goods of this earth, St Aloysius’ charity to his neighbour, St Aloysius’ love of God, St Aloysius gives himself permanently to God, St Aloysius, model of prayer, the precious death of St Aloysius, the glory of St Aloysius in heaven*. A complete program of youthful spiritual life was being offered, organised for each Sunday in four stages or steps: consideration, brief prayer, practice, and the prayer to ‘St Aloysius, the Saint of angelic habits.’

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160 Em I 111, orig. all., without signature.

161 [G. BOSCO], *Le sei domeniche e la novena di san Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del Santo*, Turin, tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1846, 47 pp.; cf. G. BOSCO, *Il provveduto...*, pp. 55-75.

162 [G. BOSCO], *Le sei domeniche e la novena di san Luigi Gonzaga...*, p. 7.

## Chapter 7

### DON BOSCO THE EDUCATOR REVEALED (1846–50)

- 1845 Don Bosco and De La Salle Brother Hervé de la Croix.
- 1846 13 March: Letter to Marquis Michele di Cavour;  
April: Oratory permanently established on the outskirts of Turin at Valdocco;  
Don Bosco in contact with “*La Generala*” correction home;  
Early November: Don Bosco moves to Valdocco with his mother.
- 1847 April: the St Aloysius Sodality begins at Valdocco:  
May: opening of the hospice or ‘house attached’;  
8 December: St Aloysius oratory opens at Porta Nuova.
- 1848 21 October: first issue of *Amico della Gioventù*
- 1849 Spring-summer: Don Bosco’s work as seen by public opinion;  
autumn: Don Bosco re-opens Guardian Angel oratory in Vanchiglia.
- 1850 The oratories in the public eye – Church and State.

Following his catechetical and oratory experiences, Don Bosco became known in his lifetime and to historians not just as a priest engaged in pastoral activity, as preacher and confessor, but as an educator and social worker for young people and ordinary folk. He developed his tireless welfare style of activity carried out through a renewed preventive approach.

Further on we will outline the additional dimension of religious founder, but the essential personal and social characteristics of Don Bosco the educator all came together and found expression over two decades: 1840, 1850.

#### 1. Personal activity in solidarity with diocese and citizens

In the early history of the oratories, especially the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco’s name is often linked in official documents with the names of priests at the Refuge. Fr Borel, sometimes representing the groups before the archbishop and city authorities, was involved over many years in rental arrangements and buying and selling with reference to the Valdocco Oratory.<sup>1</sup>

It is no coincidence that the accounts register between 1844 and 1849 was kept by Fr Borel, who also kept a kind of diary, the already mentioned *Memoriale dell’Oratorio*.<sup>2</sup> The reason is simple enough. Dr (Fr) Giovanni Battista Borel, until 1841 Royal Chaplain, and from 1828 to 1843 also spiritual director at St Francis da Paola’s schools, was a man who had the complete trust of the Marchioness Barolo and was a priest with much prestige and authority among Turin’s church and

1 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 75-77, 84-85, 157, 590.

2 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 545-559.

civil authorities.<sup>3</sup>

Borel was certainly decisive in the birth and consolidation of the formal oratory initiative. Yet there is no doubt that Don Bosco's choice of residence at Valdocco, his withdrawal from work arrangements at the Little Hospital, his being joined by his mother in the Pinardi house, all confirmed his direct and exclusive personal responsibility for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. This did not prevent him, years later, from recognising that 'Many clergy, among whom Frs Vola, Carpano, Frivero, played a part in matters at the Oratory.'<sup>4</sup> A prelude was the signature he added at the foot of the page to a letter to Rosminian Fr F. Puecher on 5 October 1845: 'D. Bosco Gio, Director of the Work of the Refuge in Turin,'<sup>5</sup> where 'the work' includes the Oratory he was head of at the Refuge as well as his service as chaplain.

Letters sent to Fr Borel between 11 October 1845 and 30 September 1850 show Don Bosco to be the protagonist, assisted by other priests: as well as Fr Borel and Fr Sebastiano Pacchiotti (1806-72), both colleagues at the Refuge, there were Fr Antonio Bosio (1820-95) 'a person of excellent character and humour.'<sup>6</sup> Actively involved but not members of the core group were Frs Giuseppe Frivero (1816-94), Giovanni Carpano (1821-94), Roberto Murialdo (1815-82), his cousin, St Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900) and Fr Pietro Ponte (1821-92) the chaplain at St Anne's Institute run by Barolo. He even allowed himself some criticism of these. He wanted Fr Fivero to adopt a more welcoming approach: 'It is okay for Fr Frivero to help out at the Oratory, but be careful – he deals with the boys a little over-energetically and I know that some of them have already been put off by that. See that every dish at our Oratory is seasoned with oil.'<sup>7</sup> He wanted shorter sermons from another faithful collaborator: 'Just tell Fr Vola to be briefer when preaching.'<sup>8</sup> The following year, in a letter to the administrators of the *Mendicita Istruita* (Schools for the Poor), the group of people working in the various oratories seemed to have been further enriched by the explicit presence of lay people: 'up till now everything has progressed with the aid of some charitable clergy and lay people,' even if Don Bosco only names the priests 'who have dedicated time especially:' 'Frs Borrelli, Carpano, Vola, Ponte, Grassino, Murialdo, Giacomelli, Prof. (Fr) Marengo.'<sup>9</sup>

Longer lists of clerical collaborators in the management of the three Turin oratories and drawn up by Don Bosco either to thank them or encourage them to renew their solidarity, can be found in the *Cenni storici* (Historical outlines) of 1862. Here he makes particular mention of the 'well-deserving' Fr Borel who 'was the soul and support' of the oratories 'by exercising his sacred ministry there, and with his material and moral aid,' and Fr Baricco.<sup>10</sup> These were diocesan priests who were apprehensive about the situation of so many young people, convinced they should work with Don Bosco in a cause they felt was in tune with their priestly sensitivity and their common sense of belonging to the local Church. Some problems arose from this kind of supportive

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3 Cf. N. CERRATO, *Il teologo Giovanni Battista Borel inedito*, RSS 17 (1998) 151-177, in particular, pp. 162-163.

4 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 52. The Vola referred to is certainly Giovanni Battista, also quoted in an 1862 list ([G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 81), rather than his older brother, Fr Ignazio (1797-1858), who from 1847 was chaplain at the Good Shepherd Monastery.

5 Em I 59.

6 To Fr Borel, 17 October 1845, Em I 62.

7 Letter of 31 August 1846, Em I 71.

8 Al teol. Borel, 25 September 1849, Em I 89.

9 Letter of 20 February 1850, Em I 96. Fr Giovanni Grassino (d. 1902 at 82 years of age) always remained a faithful friend of Don Bosco; Fr Prof. Francesco Marengo (1811-1882) taught dogmatics at the Turin seminary and also at Valdocco for Salesian clerics and clerics of other dioceses: cf. BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, p. 92

10 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...* in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 69 (cf. also p. 65). Fr Pietro Baricco (1819-1887) was a city councillor, member responsible for Instruction, and deputy mayor.

involvement, though, especially at the St Aloysius oratory. In order to preserve unity of spirit, discipline and administration, as he wrote in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco indicate that he very soon drew up 'a set of Regulations' in which he 'simply set down what was done at the Oratory and the standard way in which things ought to be done.' Later he added considerably more extensive information: 'Since this [the Regulations] has been printed elsewhere [in 1877] anyone can read it as he wishes ... Many bishops and parish priests asked for copies, studied them and adopted them when they introduced the work of the oratories to the cities and villages of their respective dioceses.'<sup>11</sup> But for the earlier decades they could only refer to handwritten copies in the hands of people responsible for the oratories: a certain number of these copies have been preserved.

Other than the collaborators mentioned, some also helped with financial aid. In Borel's *Memoriale* we read such names as Frs Carpano (often), Borel, Vola and Francesco Paolo Rossi, Frivero, Pacchiotti. They were joined by a numerous group of benefactors: other than Fr Cafasso there were Canons Fissore, Fantolini, Melano, Zappata and Bravo, Frs Aimeri and Berteu, Vincentian Marc'Antonio Durando. There were also members of the aristocracy: Count Luigi Provana di Collegno, Count Bonaudi (often), Marquis Gustavo di Cavour, Marchioness Barolo herself (often), Countess Valperga di Masino, Baroness Borsarelli. Canon Giacinto Duprè (1797–1872), son of banker Luigi Duprè (1767–1852), also appears. Listed are professionals, shopkeepers, craftsmen: Giuseppe Gagliardi, Giuseppe Engelfred, Benedetto Mussa, entrepreneur Federico Bocca, lawyers Molina, Claretta and Blengini, two 'laundry owners.'<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, religious activities connected with the term 'oratory' itself in its original meaning occupied prime of place: the chapel as the place where the Sacrament of Penance and Eucharist were administered, where they celebrated, prayed, catechised, adored the Blessed Sacrament, honoured the Virgin Mary and the saints; in brief, 'piety in the youngsters who came in great numbers, was very much' established.<sup>13</sup>

There were also cultural activities, beginning with weekend classes, which according to the varied scope of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, served 'to keep youth away from 'idleness and vice on these days,' and hopefully 'use some time on Sundays and holy days for learning to read and write.'<sup>14</sup> Recreational activities and the marked atmosphere of celebration were no less prominent. We find good testimony of this in Borel's *Memoriale dell'Oratorio*. There are often expenditures to buy holy items but also just as much expenditure on celebrations – even more for St Aloysius' oratory – and games.

There is frequent mention of 'paid for' for equipment and items for various kinds of recreation, and for rewards; 'items to be given as gifts for the feast of St Francis;' 'other gifts for the boys;' 'to Vallino for games;' 'to Tonnello for various games;' 'for various games;' 'for the games box with key etc.;"'invoice concerning games box;' 'for shoes, games, books etc.;" 'for games;' 'for 5 *rubbi* [little less than half a quintal] of *griolle* [toasted bread];' 'to the cabinet maker for 2 planks to make "rifles";' 'for 19 "rifles" settled for 15 *soldi* [a *soldo* = 5 cents] each;' '19 rifles for L. 10;' 'games – gratis;' 'rings for games;' 'chestnuts and one *tese* [a volume measurement] of apples;' 'from Fr Carpano for St Aloysius' feast day;' 'breakfast;' 'snack;' 'for breakfast, St John's, received from Vola;' 'received from the boys and other individuals for Superga;' 'paid, for salami, cheese and bread;' 'accordion;' 'excursion to Stupinigi;' 'to Vigna for a game of *bocce*.'<sup>15</sup>

11 MO (2010) 149. In the preface to the first draft of the Salesian Constitutions he reports events in the early 1850s (*Cost. SDB* [Motto] 66).

12 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 545-559.

13 Letter to the archbishop from "Priests looking after the instruction of young people at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales recently opened in Valdocco outside the capital", November 1846, Em I 74.

14 Letter of "petitioners", Fr Borel and Don Bosco, to the mayors of Turin, April 1847, Em I 75

15 *Memoriale dell'Oratorio...*, in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 546-557.

Of particular importance in all respects is the previously mentioned letter of 13 March 1846 with which Don Bosco presented the Oratory to the authoritative and authoritarian Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour (1781–1850), the city Vicar or in other words, holder of the highest and most complex role in the city – magistracy, administration, police.<sup>16</sup> Don Bosco reveals typical personal traits in that letter which remained with him throughout his lifetime: his dedication to the mission to youth outside canonical structures, the idea of the oratory as an institution with religious and human objectives, his emphasis on the value of the moral and social [‘political’] development of the work, the ability to encourage cooperation and agreement from people wielding power. With this in mind, he did not fail to use the rhetoric of *captatio benevolentiae*, undoubtedly effective when dealing with someone protecting public order in an absolute regime. But this is not the only thing worthy of note. The letter was a clear manifesto of the charitable work already undertaken, the choice for youth, oratory initiatives and the approach taken there.

This diocesan priest foreshadowed the core of commitment which he would preserve and perfect as a founder too, for himself and for his institutes. He turned to ‘His Excellency’, whom he knew was totally committed ‘to everything concerning good public order, civil and moral.’ This ‘leads us to hope,’ he wrote ‘that you will not ignore some information about catechism classes which are directed to the good of youth and which you yourself indicated you wanted to be part of on occasions.’ In particular he explained the educational program the Oratory was proposing, attracting ‘youngsters at weekends who will not attend any church for instruction if left to themselves. We do this with kind words, promises, gifts and the like. It focused on four reassuring principles: ‘1. Love for work. 2. Approaching the holy Sacraments. 3. Respect for all authority. 4. Avoiding bad companions.’ Part of earlier experiences, these principles had already ‘produced marvellous results.’ ‘What is noteworthy,’ he pointed out to the protector of public order, ‘is the quality of these youngsters, the majority of whom are between ten and sixteen years of age without the principles of religion and education, most of them prey to vice and in danger of giving cause for public complaint or being placed in places of punishment.’<sup>17</sup>

The previously cited petition to Victor Emmanuel II in November 1849 offers a similar program and emphasis on the educational and social objectives of the three oratories. He also indicated in this petition ‘a hospice with twenty five beds to provide for the most urgent needs of such boys.’<sup>18</sup>

And since there were unemployed boys among those coming to the festive oratory, and those staying at the hospice, there was no lack of effort to place them as helping hands or apprentices with businessmen, storekeepers or tradesmen, where they were followed up during the week. This was of assistance to the employers, those who provided the work, and helped the apprentices themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The *Regulations* had rules regarding this both for the boys coming to the Oratory and its resident boys. By guaranteeing dignified working hours and salary for these employees, Don Bosco fitted in with the practice followed by long-established charitable institutions in Turin such as the *Albergo di virtù* and the *Mendicità Istruita*. With regard to the latter, which Don Bosco would turn to for financial aid on a number of occasions, he was easily able to get to know their *Regulations*, approved on 11 July 1831, which had articles of considerable interest to him: the Work ‘looks after finding a capable employer for new pupils, one who is of good standing and appropriate to the choice of skills or trade each pupil has said he wants to take up, and when an employer is found he will establish the appropriate apprenticeship contract for a term of no more than four years, seeing to the pupil’s advantage in this contract.’ Also, ‘for the full term of their

16 Cf. G. CASALIS, *Dizionario geografico...*, Vol. XXI, p. 424.

17 Em I 66-67.

18 Em I 90.

19 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...* and [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 39, 40, 79.



apprenticeship they must be given complete freedom and availability for all Sundays and feast days throughout the year.’ Frequent visits by those responsible for the Work ensured that the contract was respected and the pupil’s behaviour and output was checked.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Introduction to the world of education and pedagogical integration

As a priest educator in Turin, Don Bosco found growing opportunity to improve attitudes and behaviours and acquire profitable understanding and skills for carrying out his specific mission. Undoubtedly contributing to and enriching this new culture were his encounters with the De La Salle Brothers, his involvement with the *Generala* Correctional Centre and a degree of acquaintance with some of the expressions of contemporary pedagogical culture in Turin.

### 2.1 Encounter with an Institute of professional educators

Don Bosco dedicated his first important book, the *Storia ecclesiastica* or Church history, ‘to the most honourable Bro. Hervé de la Croix, Provincial of the De La Salle Brothers.’ From 1844 to 1854, Bro. de la Croix had been Provincial Visitor of the De La Salle Brothers in Piedmont.<sup>21</sup> The Brothers came to Turin in October 1829 where they were called to run the primary schools managed by the *Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita* or Schools for the Poor. At the beginning of February 1830, they opened their first three classes. Encouraged by the first of the two Mayors, Count Giuseppe Provana di Collegno, they were also entrusted with the lower municipal schools in the two suburbs of Po and Dora in 1831–32 and also in other areas – Carmine, Palazzo di Città, S. Carlo, S. Filippo – from 1832–33.<sup>22</sup> The headquarters of the Brothers and for the first schools of the *MendicITÀ* was at St Pelagia’s church. The municipal schools were established in the Moschino and Madonna degli Angeli districts, near S. Filippo and the slaughterhouses in Borgo Dora near the Porta Palatina where the Brothers’ residence was, at St Barbara’s.<sup>23</sup>

‘The esteem and respect I profess for your honourable self,’ Don Bosco wrote in his presentation of the book ‘urges me to dedicate this brief work to you, the only homage I can pay you ... Please take it under your powerful protection so that it is no longer mine but yours, and by all means let it fall into the right hands of whoever can benefit from it.’<sup>24</sup>

This was also a form of the *captatio benevolentiae* which Don Bosco was a master of, with a view to gaining endorsement for possible dissemination of his book in the Brothers schools, and those of the Sisters of St Joseph or in general in the field of popular education. But it is also a pointer to the more than superficial personal acquaintance with Bro Hervé and perhaps even of a certain familiarity with him.

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20 Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *La gioventù “povera e abbandonata” a Turin nell’Ottocento. Il caso degli allievi-artigiani della MendicITÀ Istruita (1818-1861)*, in *L’impegno dell’educare*, ed. J. M. PELLEZZO. Rome, LAS 1991, p. 398.

21 Cf. Fr. CLEMENTINO, *Fratel Hervé de la Croix secondo Visitatore della Provincia Piemontese*, “Rivista Lasalliana” 3 (1936) 229-262.

22 cf. C. VERRI, *I Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane e la storia della scuola in Piemonte (1829-1859). Contributo alla Storia delle Pedagogia del Risorgimento*, Erba (Como), Casa Editrice “Sussidi” [1958]; Bro. U. CREMONESI, *I Fratelli entrano nelle Scuole Comunali inferiori di Turin*, “Rivista Lasalliana” 45 (1978) 19-51; ID., *I Fratelli nelle Scuole Comunali di Turin per una scuola popolare gratuita*, “Rivista Lasalliana” 45 (1978) 98-136.

23 Cf. *Primo Centenario dei Fratelli delle scuole cristiane in Turin 1829-1929*, Turin, R. Rattero 1929, pp. 57-70; Fr. CLEMENTINO, *Fratel Hervé de la Croix...*, “Rivista Lasalliana” 3 (1936), 229-262. Young Michael Rua attended classes at St Barbara for two years, 1848 to 1850 concluding his primary education. In 1850-1851 he was admitted to Second Grade at St Primitivo high school, a complementary course to a technical education (cf. A. AMADEI, *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua*, Vol. I. Turin, SEI 1931, pp. 16 and 19-20).

24 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, [pp. 5-6], OE I 163-164.

In fact, by 1845, Don Bosco was not unknown to the Brothers nor they to him.<sup>25</sup> Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, based on the testimony of Giovanni Cagliero, accredited Don Bosco with a number of apostolates such as confessor, and preacher, going back to his years at the *Convitto*. The beneficiaries of these, in addition to the Church of St Francis of Assisi, would have been the prisons, the *Albergo di Virtù*, schools run by the De La Salle Brothers, the St Francis de Paola College, Sisters and pupils of the Institute of the Faithful Companions, the Retreat run by the Daughters of the Rosary, the Good Shepherd Institute opened in 1843. This broad apostolate continued 'beyond 1860.'<sup>26</sup> In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco recalls 'the many commitments' 'in the prisons, the Cottolengo Work, the Refuge, the Oratory and the schools' [where the Brothers taught]. He also recalled his deteriorating health, the break he took at Sassi near Turin, and all the boys who came to him there. They were not only Oratory boys, 'but also pupils from the De La Salle Brothers.'<sup>27</sup> This information is confirmed to a degree by references in the earlier mentioned letter of the Marchioness Barolo to Fr Borel on 18 May 1846 concerning Don Bosco's worsening health: 'Meanwhile he is working and spitting blood.' 'Dear Doctor. Do you believe that hearing confessions of hundreds of boys and encouraging them is doing nothing?'<sup>28</sup>

But the somewhat extremes claims of Alberto Caviglia seem to be only partly sustainable: Don Bosco was 'a very keen scholar of Lasallian methods.' 'He called the Brothers 'his *formators* in pedagogy'<sup>29</sup> and contact with them 'gave Don Bosco the means for studying their pedagogical methods, how they ran their schools, and what De La Salle's sons call the twelve virtues of a good teacher.'<sup>30</sup> But it is completely plausible that working with the Brothers could have been fruitful for him at the level of educational experience and pedagogical reflection assisted by some reading of items like Bro. Agathon's *Le dodici virtù di un buon maestro* (The twelve virtues of the good teacher) which came out in its Italian edition in Turin with Marietti in 1835,<sup>31</sup> and further on Bro. Théoger's *Virtù e doveri di un buon maestro* (Virtues and duties of a good teacher).<sup>32</sup> He certainly may have had considerable interest in the night schools for workers which they planned in 1845 and began in January 1846. In the years that followed, these showed exceptional development.<sup>33</sup> There were also other social and educational initiatives in places and at times around him.<sup>34</sup>

Teaching methods and educational style as practised by the Brothers and universally appreciated by civil administrators and bishops alike were fully in accord with what Don Bosco

25 Cf. S. SCAGLIONE, *Don Bosco e i Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane. Nel primo centenario della morte di San Giovanni Bosco*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 55 (1988) no. 1, 3-39.

26 Cf. G. B. LEMOYNE, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco...*, Vol. I. Turin, Libreria Editrice Internazionale "Buona Stampa" 1914 [reprint of 1st edition 1911], p. 259.

27 MO (2010) 144.

28 Letter quoted in MB II 463-466.

29 A. CAVIGLIA, *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco"*, Vol. I, Part I, *Storia sacra*, Preliminary note. Turin, SEI 1929, p. XXV, no. 1.

30 A. CAVIGLIA, *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco"*, Vol. I, Part II, *Storia ecclesiastica*, Preliminary note. Turin, SEI 1929, p. 6. Similar statements are found in G. RIGAUT, *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétienues, tome VI L'ère du Frère Philippe. L'Institut parmi les Nations*, Paris, Librairie Plon 1947, pp. 40-41. The first Italian edition of the *Conduite* came out in Turin in 1844: *Norma delle Scuole Cristiane del Venerabile Della Salle*. Turin, tip. Musso 1844.

31 Cf. S. SCAGLIONE, *Secondo centenario della traduzione italiana delle "Douze vertus" di Fr. Agathon. Un classico della pedagogia Lasalliana*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 64 (1997) no. 3, pp. 152-165; ID., *Chiavi di lettura delle "Douze vertus d'un bon maître". Un classico della tradizione educativa lasalliana*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 60 (1993), pp. 141-149.

32 This is dealt with more explicitly in Don Bosco's book on the preventive system, Turin, P.A.S. 1955, pp. 106-115, *Don Bosco, i Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane e la pedagogia lasalliana*; cf. more recently, P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, pp. 115-119.

33 Cf. *L'Opera della Mendicizia Istruita. Scuole serali per gli adulti*, "Letture di famiglia" 4 (1845) 393-394 (the first news appeared in the "Letture di famiglia" 23 August, p. 268); G. F. BARUFFI, *Scuole serali per adulti*, "Letture di famiglia" 5 (1846) 65-67; cf. Further on § 3.1.

34 Cf. Chap. 2, § 5.

would describe in 1877 as the 'Preventive system.'<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to read a circular to mayors and parish priests on 23 August 1833 'on how to provide relief and aid to the poor.' Antonio Tonduti de l' Escarène showed preference for the De La Salle Brothers and the Sisters of St Joseph when it came to managing charitable works and especially schools for pupils 'from the popular and poor class.' He came from Nice, and from 1831–35 was Charles Albert's first Secretary of State for Internal Affairs. Looking at the difference between 'lay people' and the Brothers and the Sisters, other than 'stability, regular principles and unity of procedure' 'we have much faith' he explained 'in the loving-kindness with which the Brothers and sisters we have mentioned attend to the tedious task of teaching boys and girls. Greater care and diligence could not be expected from a father and mother if they were to take up teaching their children themselves.'<sup>36</sup>

Don Bosco could only share the esteem of the Sovereign, his Minister and many Piedmontese bishops for the Brothers in their management of schools. He indicated as much to Bishop Gianotti of Saluzzo and we could add Bishop Giovanni Antonio Odone of Susa, both friends of his.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2 Contacts with a House of Correctional Education

We know that Don Bosco also had contact with the House of Correctional Education known as *La Generala*, founded in 1845. It 'gathered and governed boys condemned to correctional punishment for carelessly committing crime, and other boys kept in prison for correctional purposes. It involved work in common, silence, and segregation in cells at night time.'<sup>38</sup>

What Giovanni Bonetti wrote in the *Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales) could be considered substantially reliable: 'From the time the Government opened this Penitentiary and entrusted its management to the Society of St Peter in Chains, Don Bosco gained permission to go there from time to time to be among those poor boys who were worthy of the greatest compassion. With permission of the Director of Prisons, he instructed them in Catechism, preached to them, heard their confessions ...'<sup>39</sup> He then seized an opportunity to recall an excursion in 1855<sup>40</sup> when Don Bosco was able to take 300 of the inmates on a day out to Stupinigi, bringing them all back to the reformatory before sunset.<sup>41</sup> There is a degree of legend in this version. It was in the framework of the Regulations which, along with other privileges, also provided for excursions as a reward for boys who had done very well – the 'honour' level.<sup>42</sup> From a letter of Canon Charles Fissiaux (1806–67), founder and Superior of the Brothers of the Congregation of St Peter in Chains, to the Secretary of State for Internal Affairs on 22 April 1846, it seems that a group of deserving inmates were accompanied on an outing in the woods at Stupinigi. The Canon stated: 'The boys enjoyed themselves immensely and after having lunch in the woods we returned home without my experiencing the least problem.'<sup>43</sup>

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35 Cf. E. POMATTO, *Un vescovo per la Scuola Cattolica. Mons. Giovanni Antonio Gianotti*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 60 (1993) no. 1, pp. 31-32 (quotes from the *Conduite* and the *Regole of the Institute in the Italian edition*). Gianotti was bishop of Saluzzo from 1837 to 1862 and the Brothers arrived in 1841.

36 Quoted by S. SCAGLIONE, *Un vescovo per la scuola cattolica*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 63 (1996), pp. 86-87; and already by E. POMATTO, *La fondazione dei Fratelli di San Vincenzo e i Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 59 (1992), pp. 116-118.

37 Bro. Secondino Scaglione writes about Bishop Odone in the quoted article, *Un vescovo per la scuola cattolica*.

38 *Società Reale pel patrocinio dei giovani liberati dalla Casa d'educazione correzionale*, Turin, Bocca 1847, p. 2.

39 BS 6 (1882) no. 11, November, pp. 180-181.

40 The religious of the French Congregation of St Peter in Chains pulled out of the *Generala* in 1848.

41 The account was released the first time in *Opere religiose e sociali in Italia. Memoria del conte Carlo Conestabile. Traduzione dal testo francese*. Padova, tip. del Seminario 1878, pp. 23-26.

42 Cf. C. FELLONI e R. AUDISIO, *I giovani discoli*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Turin e don Bosco*, Vol. I, pp. 116-117.

43 C. FELLONI e R. AUDISIO, *I giovani discoli*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Turin e don Bosco*, Vol. I, p. 118. In this perspective we can easily locate the brief considerations that Eugene Ceria develops in the preface to

But there is a well-documented special link Don Bosco had with the *Generala*. By Royal Brief on 21 November 1846, Charles Albert approved the establishment of the 'Royal Society for patronage of young men released from the House of Correctional Education', along with its statutes. Among other things it said: 'The Society has the charitable aim of preserving from the risk of re-offending, those who have been released from a house of correctional education in any province they belong to, by finding the means for them to complete their religious, civil and job-related instruction' (Chap. 1, art. 1); 'the duration of this follow-up will be fixed at three years from the day the young man leaves the correctional institution.' (art. 4) 'the Society comprises active and paying members. Both these features may be found in a simple member. The active members are those obliged to personally take responsibility for following up releases.' (Chap. 2, art.9); '... the obligation of follow-up is restricted to a single release.' (art. 11); 'active members contract the obligation of receiving the young releasees entrusted to them when they leave the correctional institute, finding a place for them, keeping an eye on them and helping them with means the Society provides.' 'They will render account to the Society of the results of their care in accordance with the instructions given when they took on the task.' (art. 13).

The chief promoter of the Society had been Count Ilarione Petitti di Roreto (1790–1850), a liberal Giobertian who was far removed from the cultural and, in a certain sense, political and operating approach of the Jesuits, the *Convitto* and the Marchioness Barolo. In a letter Petitti wrote to Vincenzo Gioberti on 10 August 1847, he described Fissiaux as 'Jesuitical' and explained that 'at the time the Society was founded, he asked me to include some Jesuits among the founders, and the well-known Dr Guala, along with some of his own. But frankly, I refused, telling him to choose between the Jesuits and ourselves.'<sup>44</sup> Yet 'Don Bosco's name appears among the first fifty seven subscribers to policies belonging to the Society,<sup>45</sup> which attracted people of various political and cultural leanings, though mainly moderate Catholic liberals. Names we find include Cesare Alfieri di Sostegno, Cesare Balbo, Roberto D'Azeglio, Gustavo and Camillo Cavour, Ludovico Peyretti di Condove, Luigi Provana di Collegno, Federico Sclopis, Carlo Bon Campagni, Carlo Ignazio Guilio, Riccardo Sineo, Luigi Franchi de Front, Filippo Asinari di San Marzano, Antonio Piola, G. Vegezzi Ruscalla, G. C. Bruna, G. Eandi, Ch. Fissiaux (who had drawn up the draft Statutes).<sup>46</sup>

Acceptance on Don Bosco's part (as an active member of the Society) of a young tailor released from the *Generala* is documented only by a letter of Fr Alasonatti's (his helper) on August 14, 1855.<sup>47</sup>

At any rate, even though his involvement with the *Generala* might be difficult to describe in terms of the proportion of time he gave to it, it was real, and it gave Don Bosco an experience of what the possibilities might be for two different educational systems, the repressive and the preventive, and whether they were alternatives or complementary. The possibility that they might coexist seemed to be what was the practice at the Institute in real terms, since it was both penal and re-educational. This was theoretically confirmed by the *Rapports* (Reports) which Fissiaux may have listened to *viva voce*.<sup>48</sup> In fact, according to the Speaker it was the task of the 'Central House'

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Vol. XV delle *Memorie Biografiche del beato Giovanni Bosco*. Turin, SEI 1934, pp. 7-8.

44 *Carteggi di Vincenzo Gioberti*, Vol. II Letters from I. Petitti di Roreto a Vincenzo Gioberti (1841-1850), ed. Adolfo Colombo. Rome, Vittoriano 1936, pp. 69-71.

45 C. FELLONI and R. AUDISIO, *I giovani discoli*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Turin e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., p. 119, n. 92: "cf. AST, Sez. I, ME, *Opere pie per comuni e borgate*, m. 223 ult. Add., *Programma di una società caritatevole per il patrocinio dei Ditenuti liberati dalla Casa di Educazione correttiva del 9 July 1846*"

46 Cf. R. AUDISIO, *La "Generala" di Turin. Esposte, discoli, minori corrigendi (1785-1850)*. Santena, Fondazione C. Cavour 1987, pp. 210-211.

47 MB V 228-231.

48 Cf. *Rapport sur les premiers résultats obtenus dans la Maison d'éducation correctionnelle pour les jeunes détenus du Royaume de Sardaigne présenté à la réunion qui eut lieu le 7 juin 1846 pour la*

for correctional education regarding 'young delinquents' to 'prepare them for a better future, save them from "shipwreck" and punish them, of course, but above all correct them.'<sup>49</sup>

The approaches to moral and religious education were ones that Don Bosco also practised in part and would later introduce more and more consistently into his youth institutions. They could certainly be found among the various aids to human development which Don Bosco undoubtedly shared: literacy, culture, work, music, and singing. There was plenty of room given to emulation in particular, a classic method among the various incentives for mending one's ways and improving oneself. The inmates were distributed over three or four classes of merit with ongoing incentive to achieve a higher level, or at least not fall back from the level achieved. Naturally, the most sought after level was the 'honours' class. Beside the reward of going for outings, it brought other advantages with it: additional food and drink at table, chats with relatives, the ability to send and receive letters, authorisation to spend part of one's remuneration on purchase of clothing, books, 'useful items.'<sup>50</sup>

His contacts with the *Generala* could have had considerable influence on Don Bosco's formation as a pedagogue, but also demonstrated and developed his rare ability to be part of lay initiatives whose purpose it was to benefit poor and abandoned youth. Getting to know people and becoming known was an art he was already showing he possessed in its fundamentals. He would very soon reap its benefits.

### 2.3 Presence in the press: Press for educators and daily press

It did not take long before Don Bosco also began to encounter written material and individuals from the 'pedagogical arena' and discover some interaction between this and his own educational experiences.<sup>51</sup>

According to Don Bosco's main biographer, Lemoyne, he would have already had a powerful formal pedagogical experience in September-October 1844. By royal invitation on 4 June 1844, Ferrante Aporti was called to Turin to run the first course of a planned School of Method. Lessons went from 26 August, and throughout September, followed by regular exams. Archbishop Fransoni was firmly opposed to the initiative, bringing him into serious conflict with Charles Albert,<sup>52</sup> and he asked Don Bosco to assist him by passing on comment on the orthodoxy of the priest from Mantova's teaching.<sup>53</sup> We do not have adequate documentation to decide if and for how long Don Bosco attended. If he did attend the full course he would have felt in perfect harmony with the founder of the *infant schools*, and Aporti would be considered the first pedagogue to be his teacher in the preventive system.<sup>54</sup> The lessons were published the following year in various inserts in the

*distribution des Prix par monsieur l'abbé Fissiaux*, Turin, Imprimerie Royale 1846; *Second Rapport sur les résultats... qui eut lieu le 26 September 1847... par monseigneur l'abbé Fissiaux*, ibid. 1847.

49 C. FISSIAUX, *Rapport...1846*, pp. 6-7. For further information, cf. P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, Rome, LAS 1997, pp. 224-226

50 C. FELLONI and R. AUDISIO, *I giovani discoli*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Turin e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 116-118; R. AUDISIO, *La "Generala" di Turin...*, pp. 161, 173-180, 185-188.

51 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Stili di educazione popolare cristiana alle soglie del 1848*, in *Pedagogia fra tradizione e innovazione. Studi in onore di Aldo Agazzi*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1979, pp. 393-404.

52 Cf. A. GAMBARO, *Diaboliche piemontesi contro un'opera dell'Aporti*, "Il Saggiatore" 2 (1952) 44-50. Monaldo Leopardi, in *Le illusioni della pubblica carità*, had found religious and social 'heresies' even in the little *Catechismo per l'infanzia* (1834) from the nursery school apostolate.

53 Cf. MB II 209-223; in particular, pp. 213-214.

54 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, pp. 107-110. Radical scrutiny of what the *Memorie Biografiche* say about Ferrante Aporti (MB II 209-223, VI 82) needs to be made. It is an uncritical echo of reactionary Catholic thinking of the time which found their key proponent in Archbishop Fransoni and Count Solaro della Margherita in Turin. The latter was Charles Albert's "Minister and First Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs" from 7 February 1835 to 9 October 1847: cf. *Memorandum storico politico*. Turin, Speirani e Ferrero 1851, pp. 304-312.

teachers' journal, *L'Educatore primario. Giornale d'educazione ed istruzione elementare*, which Don Bosco certainly knew about.<sup>55</sup>

In June 1846, Lorenzo Valerio's popular magazine, *Letture di famiglia* publicised what an anonymous individual had said about Don Bosco's oratory initiative in Valdocco (who could have asked him about this?), briefly pointing to his aims, content, approach. It linked Don Bosco with Fr Giovanni Cocchi who was running a similar kind of work.<sup>56</sup>

Some months earlier, a favourable review of Don Bosco's *Storia ecclesiastica* had already appeared in a teacher's journal. The author was young teacher and priest Giuseppe Ramello (1820–61), already among promoters of the Society for Education and Instruction. He was the elementary school inspector in Susa and teacher of Method at Voghera.<sup>57</sup> The reviewer writes of the 'learned and good priest author of the work in question, who does not put his name to it out of modesty.' He highlights the fact that 'sentences are clear and fluent, and the language is quite pure, even showing flashes of eloquence. It flows smoothly throughout, is gently moving, attracts the reader to what is good.' He shows great insight into the author's established purpose and method. 'He is convinced of the great educational principle that one must enlighten the mind to make the heart good, and his entire narrative hinges on this.'<sup>58</sup>

Don Bosco read this review and grasped the perceptive comment, incorporating it in the preface to his next book in catechetical narrative style, the *Storia sacra* (Bible history). 'On every page I have kept to the steady principle of enlightening the mind to make the heart good and (as one very good teacher puts it) popularise study of the Holy Bible as far as possible, since it is the foundation of our holy Religion, containing and proving its dogmas. It then becomes easier to move from this biblical story to teaching morality and religion, which is why no other teaching is more useful and important than this.'<sup>59</sup>

It is clear that Don Bosco had in hand a copy of *L'Educatore Primario* with this review, but he had also read the first issue with its agenda-setting editorial in which the editor, Fr Agostino Fecia (1803–76) from Biella had emphasised the word 'popularise'. Don Bosco quoted it just as he had noted the point made by Fr Vincenzo Garelli (Don Bosco writes 'Varelli) in an article entitled *Dell'insegnamento della storia col mezzo di tavole* (Teaching history by means of tables, diagrams), published in another issue:<sup>60</sup> 'Since many wise teachers have shown that Bible history can be taught with the aid of diagrams, showing the facts which they then refer to, so in this case we have provided various diagrams concerning the most enlightening facts.'<sup>61</sup>

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55 Now found together in F. APORTI, *Scritti pedagogici editi e inediti*, ed. Angiolo Gambaro, Vol. II. Turin, Edizioni Chiantore 1945, pp. 439-485.

56 "Letture di famiglia" 5 (1846), No. 25, 20 June, p. 196, *Scuole e solazzi domenicali pei poveri*. Lettera al Direttore delle *Letture*.

57 Cf. "Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione" 1 (1849) 119-120 and 2 (1850) 476. In the second half of the 1850s, Fr Ramello was censured by Archbishop Fransoni for his liberal thinking: in a letter from Lyon to Can. Fissore, the archbishop referred, among other things, to his articles published in the *Istruttore del popolo*, in *Avenir* in Nice and in the *Civiltà novella*, magazines open to reconciling the Church with modern thinking: L. FRANSONI *Epistolario. Introduzione, testo critico e note* ed. M. F. Mellano. Rome, LAS 1994, p. 167; regarding the priest's position see letters from 21 March, p. 169, 2 and 5 April, p. 172 and pp. 173-174, 1 July 1858, p. 222; to do more reflection on his thinking he was entrusted to Don Bosco (Letter of 7 May 1858, p. 177), who in the 1857-1858 school year employed him to teach grammar in one of the early internal classes at Valdocco.

58 "*L'Educatore Primario. Giornale d'educazione ed istruzione elementare*" 1 (1845) N° 34, 10 December, p. 576.

59 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone...* Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1847, p. 7, OE III 7.

60 "*L'Educatore Primario*" 1 (1845) N° 24, 30 August, pp. 404-407 (the tables were anticipated in N° 13, p. 208).

61 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, pp. 7-8.

Don Bosco could also have seen recognition in the review of his *Storia sacra* of motives he would certainly have felt agreement with. It appeared in the form of a 'letter from a school teacher' signed 'Fr M.G.'<sup>62</sup> The reviewer confessed to not personally knowing the author but of having heard tell of the 'great good' he was doing and of having read 'several of his valuable writings.' He then dwelt on a description of the experimental origins of the book, identifying its central 'theme', its industriousness: it was a 'truly active' Bible History. Don Bosco could not have found better publicity in a pedagogical journal and by someone who was such an expert in educational matters. Above all, the reviewer saw the way he had educated and his pedagogical reflection reduced to a summary of basic ideas; staying with the mindset of a young person, the way his books on religious history came out of his catechetical narrative style, his use of illustrations, and the emergence of an intuitive and active teaching approach strictly connected with education, focused on basic concepts such as 'encouragement in virtue and abhorrence of vice' and, inseparable from piety and virtue, work, the fundamental category of his spirituality. His literary form was also appreciated: 'The style is popular but in pure Italian. It is in dialogue form, which means the boy immediately understands what he is reading.'<sup>63</sup>

Another minor, explicitly school text book in both its first and second editions was reviewed by *Il Conciliatore Torinese* in 1849.<sup>64</sup> This was his work on the metric and decimal system, *Il Sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità preceduto da le quattro prime operazioni dell'aritmetica ad uso degli artigiani e della gente di campagna*.<sup>65</sup> The reviewer noted that Don Bosco was 'ever intent on the good of the ordinary people,' 'filled with true philanthropy of the kind called Christian charity.' Indeed the reviewer invited people 'to follow in Don Bosco's footsteps' if they truly had at heart the moral and civil progress of the people' or 'seek to instruct the people in the light of truth and form them in virtue, not corrupt and demoralise them, inflame their passions and take from them the only good they have, their simplicity of mind and heart and affection for religion.' The reviewer finally praised the 'well-organised work and its easy, clear and popular' approach.<sup>66</sup>

It is undoubtedly significant that the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, a festive oratory and hospice, soon came to the notice of a high-level pedagogical journal, the *Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione*, the official journal of the newly founded 'Society' or teachers association in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.<sup>67</sup> The initiative to make reference to Don Bosco's work arose at a meeting, on 3 May 1849 of the Society's central committee, made up of representatives of every level of schooling including university. They wanted to pay attention to 'private institutes run by generous individuals who educate a great number of children of both sexes without making a noise about it and almost in the shade.' They had mentioned Dr Della Porta, parish priest of Our Lady of Carmel, Fr Giovanni Cocchi, assistant priest of the Annunciation parish, and 'Don Bosco who brings together almost 300 children at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where he catechises them, instructs them, and gives them gymnastic exercises.'<sup>68</sup> Mention was then made of Dr Borelli from Castagnale, the vicar forane of Busca, Dr Vachetta, Fr Carpano. The job of writing about Don Bosco's Oratory had been entrusted to Casimiro Danna (1860–84), who held the Chair of Arts at Turin University. For a year (1847– 48) he held the Chair of the

62 It could have been Michele Garelli (1806-1867), brother of Vincenzo, future superintendent of studies in Turin who was good to Don Bosco. Michele Garelli, from Mondovì, ordained priest in 1830, was a teacher in primary and secondary schools until his death.

63 "L'Educatore. Giornale di educazione ed istruzione" 4 (1848) September, pp. 542-543.

64 "Il Conciliatore Torinese" 2 (1849), 9 June and 29 August.

65 Turin, by Gio. Battista Paravia e comp. tipografi-librai 1849, 80 pp. A few weeks later the *Edizione seconda migliorata ed accresciuta*, came out from the same publisher, reproduced in OE IV 1-80.

66 "Il Conciliatore Torinese" 2 (1849), 2 June. On the *Conciliatore*, cf. § 3.2.

67 Cf. G. CORALLO, *La Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione e la sua attività*, "Rassegna di Pedagogia" 10 (1950) 3-20.

68 "Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione" 1 (1849) May, p. 240. Also named later were Fr Borelli from Castagnole, the vicar forane of Busca Fr Vacchetta, and Fr Carpano.

Higher School of Method (later, Pedagogy) which from 1848 was held by Father and Professor Gian Antonio Rayneri (1809–67), one of the founders of the earlier mentioned Society of Instruction and Education and its president, following the more nominal than real presidency of Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–52). Two months later, Danna published a summary report on what Don Bosco was doing in Valdocco: it was not a pure list of facts but a fine pedagogical analysis of objectives and approaches.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the basic information had Don Bosco himself as its source; ‘a priest,’ the reporter wrote, ‘whom I cannot name without open and profound reverence.’ His language is a giveaway, so much like Don Bosco’s: ‘He gathers from 400–500 boys in that lonely enclosure at weekends to keep them out of danger and prevent them from straying and to instruct them in the principles of Christian morality. He does this by keeping them amused with enjoyable and honest recreation after they have attended ceremonies and exercises of religious devotion.’ ‘The bait’ he stresses, ‘for attracting such a huge group, besides a reward of some holy pictures, raffles and sometimes a little snack, is his calm approach. He is always trying to spread the light of truth and mutual love in those young souls. When one considers the evil avoided, the vices prevented, the virtue sown, the resulting good, it seems incredible that there should be obstacles and opposition to his work.’ The reference was to opposition from certain parish priests (which Don Bosco himself acknowledged)<sup>69</sup> who feared the young oratorians would desert their parishes, though in reality the boys never felt they belonged to any parish. The misunderstanding was soon cleared up.

The reporter did not fail to mention Charles Albert’s protection of the Oratory, the opening of the St Aloysius’ oratory in Porta Nuova, and the closure of Fr Cocchi’s Guardian Angel oratory. He then dedicated some purple prose to the hospice: ‘When he knows of or meets someone living in squalid misery, he does not lose sight of him but takes him back to his place, restores him, throws away his filthy clothes and gives him new ones, gives him something to eat morning and evening until he can find him an employer and work so he can earn an honest living for the future, and so he can be more securely educated in mind and heart. Some priests are helping with the many expenses a work of such inestimable value requires. But most of this comes from the personal resources of this true minister of the One who said he is meek and restores weary spirits.’<sup>70</sup>

At the local level, Don Bosco was already what he would be seen to be decades later with national and international outreach by then.

### **3. Oratory Developments (1846-52)**

Humble in its origins, Don Bosco’s first institution grew slowly but with increasing vigour and fame, like the Gospel mustard seed. This is owed to the fact that he was a man of such inner strength, such solid human and Christian faith, such outstanding ability that he was able to involve and enthuse people. But in the end he presented an image of himself that was more expansive than things really were. It would remain thus in the future.

#### *3.1 Rapid take off of a diocesan work that would become a universal one*

Some summary information on the stages of development are provided by Don Bosco himself in his earliest ‘memoirs’ of the Oratory: the 1854 *Cenno storico* (Historical outline) and the 1862 *Cenni storici* (Historical outlines – note the o-i difference!). His lack of precision regarding dates takes nothing away from the truth of the accounts. It simply reveals an overworked man who can

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69 Cf. [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 45; MO (1991) 120.

70 “Giornale della Società d’Istruzione e d’Educazione” 1 (1849) July, pp. 459-460.



be allowed an occasional lapse of memory.

'In November [1846]' he tells us "I established my residence in the house attached to the Oratory."<sup>71</sup> Next to his room there was another small one for his elderly mother Margaret (1788–1856), an intrepid peasant woman who had left home, her other son and grandchildren to share John's bread, work, effort, concerns and mission to the young, in faith and in the hope of paradise.

According to the *Cenno storico*, setting up rooms in the Pinardi house was preceded, a month earlier, by the commencement of Sunday and night classes, with an indication of subjects offered: reading, writing, singing, bible history, the basics of arithmetic and Italian. He would have advised the public of these.<sup>72</sup> But it is very different to locate them in the space and time he indicates, viz., in the Moretta house in the winter 1845–46.<sup>73</sup> Even less well-founded would seem to be an anticipation of formal organisation at the Refuge at the end of 1844.<sup>74</sup> Obviously we cannot exclude sporadic efforts at literacy for individuals or some small temporary group.<sup>75</sup> In a letter to the royal *Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita* (Schools for the Poor) on 29 February 1850, Don Bosco spoke of the 'singing classes every evening' and 'Sunday classes' with some public performances already offered.<sup>76</sup> In another letter to the same body on 18 November 1852, he spoke of 'Sunday and night classes already in place for three years.'<sup>77</sup> Those who were looked after by the *MendicITÀ Istruita* knew very well that the first night classes formally organised in Turin were set up by that organisation at the suggest of Brother Hervé de la Croix, the Provincial Superior of the De La Salle Brothers, who had been given the job of running them since January 1846.<sup>78</sup>

In the years that followed, these schools functioned regularly from October to March from 8-10 p.m. Great would have been their surprise had they been able to read the *Memoirs of the Oratory* where it said that Don Bosco's night classes had inspired others set up by the Turin City Council (on 17 December 1849),<sup>79</sup> when in fact they were first modelled, on ones the Brothers were running and to whom the City Council entrusted the classes.<sup>80</sup>

News of the Sunday classes at the Oratory are documented in a petition to city authorities in April 1847 asking to make use of 'used benches, desks or tables, possibly lying idle 'in store rooms of schools around the illustrious city.' The petitioners were 'Fathers John Borel and John Bosco,' involved in the 'spiritual direction of young students [artists] at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, opened in Valdocco in the vicinity of the pious house of the Refuge.' This was followed by indication as to the purpose of the work: 'Having seen how many of the boys who come there are

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71 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 52.

72 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico... e Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 51-52 and 72-73.

73 MO (2010) 119 and 140, 148.

74 MB XVII 850-858.

75 Don Bosco himself has us understand this: "When we came to Valdocco we also started a regular night school"; "We had begun them at the Refuge, put them on a more regular basis at the Moretta house, and better yet as soon as we had our established place at Valdocco": MO (2010) 141.

76 Em I 96.

77 Em I 173.

78 Cf. Fr. AQUILINO, *Le prime scuole serali a Turin*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 1 (1934) no. 3, pp. 446-452; S. SCAGLIONE, *Don Bosco e i Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 55 (1988) no. 1, pp. 18-23; A. FERRARIS, 1845-1995 *Centocinquantenario dell'istituzione delle prime scuole serali in Turin ad opera dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 62 (1995), pp. 18-36; ID., *La diffusione e il successo delle scuole serali dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane negli Stati Sabaudi*, ibid., pp. 159-176.

79 MO (2010) 142-143; [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 51; cf. G. CHIOSSO, *L'oratorio di Don Bosco e il rinnovamento educativo nel Piemonte carloalbertino*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 100-102

80 Cf. B. PASIN, *I primi cinquant'anni della provincia religiosa di Turin dei F.S.C.*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 39 (1972) no. 1, pp. 79-81; C. VERRI, *I Fratelli negli Stati Sardi*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 47 (1980), pp. 103-105; B. MAGLIOZZI, *I "Fratelli" in Turin: il rinnovo della convenzione con il Comune (1850)*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 47 (1980), pp. 286-302 (The Council night schools entrusted to the Brothers and increase in Council night schools).

keen to spend some time on Sundays learning to read and write, and wanting to meet this yearning of theirs which wonderfully supports our hopes of keeping the youth away from idleness and vice, with advice from wise individuals, [we] decided to open a free school for these boys.<sup>81</sup> In fact from 1 March 1847, Don Bosco was able to rent and make use of the whole of the Pinardi house, giving him the possibility of beginning an embryonic hospice and, in his own words, ‘increasing some of the night classes.’<sup>82</sup>

Also documented are two demonstrations or performances by the Sunday classes in Bible history during the summer of 1848,<sup>83</sup> and one by the night classes for the third Sunday of Advent 1849<sup>84</sup> which *L’Armonia* also made reference to.<sup>85</sup> Around 1861–62, when Don Bosco recalled these events surrounding the Sunday classes, he noted that ‘the public performances we gave satisfied well-known personages like Fr Aporti, the City Mayor *Cavaliere* Bellono and *Cavaliere* Dr (Fr) Baricco’ who attended. But Giorgio Bellono, a lawyer, was Mayor of Turin from 1850–52. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco would name among those present ‘the distinguished Fr Aporti, Dr Peter Baricco, Professor Joseph [=Giovanni Antonio] Rayneri.’<sup>86</sup> The night classes flourished at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for decades, and up to 1878 were given an annual subsidy of 300 lire for lighting. The curriculum was extended to include French, singing and music, including piano.<sup>87</sup>

Don Bosco noted another two relevant facts for 1847: organisation of the St Aloysius Sodality, mother and prototype of the other sodalities, and the founding of the St Aloysius Oratory in a suburb on the southern outskirts of the city opposite Valdocco on the northern outskirts. ‘The St Aloysius Sodality was established’ he writes ‘with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority: to encourage all the boys to celebrate the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius, we bought a statue of the saint and had a banner made.’ On the day of the Saint’s feast, the Archbishop came to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large number of boys and we put on a short comedy with singing and music.<sup>88</sup>

Don Bosco drew up *Regulations* for the Sodality, approved by the Archbishop on 12 April 1847. It is a significant document of Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy for boys of a certain level of spirituality and the unaltered basis for the regulations of the Immaculate Conception (1856), Blessed Sacrament (1857) and St Joseph 91859) Sodalities.

St Aloysius Gonzaga was proposed as the model for observing what was prescribed in each article: ‘Avoid everything that might cause scandal and try to give good example everywhere but especially in church.’ (art. 1). Approach the sacraments of Penance and Communion every fortnight and on major feasts: they are in fact ‘the weapons which will lead to certain victory over the devil’ (art. 2). ‘Avoid bad companions like the plague and guard well against obscene language’ (art. 3) ‘Be very charitable to your companions, easily forgiving any offence.’ (art. 4) Put ‘great effort into good order at the Oratory, encouraging others to virtue and to join the sodality.’(art. 5).

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81 Letter, April 1847, Em I 75.

82 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 53.

83 *Saggio dei figliuoli dell’Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales sopra la storia sacra dell’Antico Testamento / 15 August 1848 ore 4 pomeridiane*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1848.

84 *Saggio che danno i figliuoli dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales sul sistema metrico decimale in forma di dialogo il 16 December 1849 ore 2 pomeridiane*. Help from illustrious prof. D. G. Ant. Rayneri. Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1849

85 “L’Armonia”, 17 December 1849, OE XXXVIII 14.

86 [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 71; MO (2010) 142.

87 Cf. [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 72-73; MO (2010) 166; J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, pp. 104, 118, 148, 159-160, 162, 193, 210-211. At the beginning of the 1876-1877 school year they were transferred, with better results, “before supper” (J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 49).

88 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 53; MO (2010) 149-151.

Ensure spiritual and material assistance for sick members.(art. 6). ‘Show great love for work and fulfilment of duties; be obedient in all things to all superiors.’ (art. 7).<sup>89</sup>

For the Feast of the Immaculate Conception that year, Don Bosco goes on to note: ‘a *new oratory was opened at Porta Nuova* in the Vaglianti house, now the Turvano house, under the title of St Aloysius Gonzaga’ and its management was entrusted to Fr Giacinto Carpano. In 1849 Barolo’s chaplain, Fr Pietro Ponte, took over and remained in charge until 1852. Don Bosco added that it was run according to the same rules as the first oratory and was very soon filled to overflowing.<sup>90</sup>

Again in 1847, as indicated, he had started on an embryonic shelter or hospice, made possible by having more room available in the Pinardi house: ‘We gave shelter to two poor boys, orphans, without a trade and ignorant of religion; and thus began the shelter which continues to grow.’<sup>91</sup> For a number of years it was called ‘the house attached.’ The oratory for non-resident boys remained the main work. Later the hospice achieved the same level and dignity and interest on Don Bosco’s part such that Oratory with a capital ‘O’ indicated, be it at Valdocco in Turin or in other cities, a youthful education complex including an oratory for non-residents and a boarding section for academic and trade boys who were either orphaned or from poor circumstances. For some years, however, the ‘house attached’ was a single hostel for boys going to work or school in town. Don Bosco explained it a little more precisely in the 1862 *Cenni storici* when the hostel became a boarding section for boys living in; ‘Among the boys attending these oratories we found some so poor and abandoned that almost any care we took of them was rendered almost useless without a place where they could be given food, clothing and lodging. We tried to provide for this need with the house attached, also called the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. At the beginning we rented a small house, in 1847, and began to take in some of the poorest boys. At that time they were going to work in the city, returning home to the Oratory to eat and sleep. But the serious need we felt coming from various towns around the province convinced us to extend acceptance to boys not frequenting the oratories in Turin.’<sup>92</sup>

In the first six or seven years, lack of space did not allow him to go beyond the probably exaggerated number Don Bosco gives for 1848 in the *Cenno storico*: ‘1848, the number increased to fifteen.’<sup>93</sup> The number of residents would have reached a hundred only in 1856–57 when the hostel had already become a hospice for trade/working boys and (academic) students, a model, then for similar ones opened years later at Sampierdarena in Genoa, in Nice, Marseilles, Florence, La Spezia, Sacred heart in Rome, Buenos Aires, Sarriá in Barcelona, Lille. 1848–49 offered Don Bosco opportunity to show a side of his personality that would not change much into the future; his refusal to side with any political faction. An episode in February 1848 puts this in a clear light. It shows in a well-defined way his ambivalence in the way he recalled institutional changes taking place in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia over those years. With the consent of Charles Albert a ‘Citizenship Commission’ took on the task of organising a huge national celebration for February 27, aiming to involve every institution and social force in support of the King’s ‘spontaneous’

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89 The text of this and other regulations is kept in the ASC E 452 *Compagnie religiose*.

90 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 54-55.

91 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 53. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* there is a description of the first to be taken into the hospice, “a lad of fifteen” from Vallesia, and “very soon we had a companion for him”: MO (2010) 151-153. From the registers we see that the first two to be taken in were two young men from Turin, one a student, the other a working boy (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 175-176).

92 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 74-75.

93 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 54. The fragmentary records entrusted to the house Register, drawn up by Don Bosco for 1847-1850, indicate some movement of residents who were often temporary, also including Fr Carlo Palazzolo, Fr Pietro Ponte, a cleric Danusso, cleric Bertagna (for a month) (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 558-566).

granting of the Statute or Constitution.

Heading up this effort was Catholic militant Marquis Roberta d'Azeglio, who also wanted schools and educational institutes of any kind to take part.<sup>94</sup> There could not fail to be a formal invitation to Don Bosco and the boys from his oratories as he himself vividly recalled in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. Faced with all the reasons why it could be to his advantage, he opposed it in conscience, convinced that 'to acquiesce would mean accepting principles which I judged would have disastrous results.' He told the man inviting him of his 'firm system to keep out of anything political. Never *pro*, never *con*.' He wanted to keep an unalterable 'politics' of welfare and education: 'to do what little good I can for abandoned youngsters, using all my powers to make them good Christians in regard to religion, upright citizens in civil society.'<sup>95</sup>

This was his style right from the beginning of his oratories. Nothing of a military appearance was to be allowed as part of gymnastics, and even less so any kind of military exercises properly so-called, as had happened in the case of the liberal-leaning and audacious Fr Giovanni Cocchi. During the revolutionary movements in the 1840s, Cocchi passed on his patriotic tendencies to the boys at his oratory to the extent that 'keen to move from manoeuvres to fact and to face up to the enemy' around two hundred boys accompanied by Cocchi himself undertook a long trek in March 1849 to the war front, returning only when they heard of the defeat of the Piedmontese-Sardinian army at Novara after the four-day war (20–23 March).<sup>96</sup>

This event also led to a change of management at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia, as recorded in the *Cenno storico*: 'Because of the war, Fr Cocchi [sic] closed the Guardian Angel Oratory and it remained closed for a year. Then it was sub-leased to us and its administration was entrusted to Fr Vola.'<sup>97</sup> The 1862 *Cenni storici* gave a slightly varied version: 'Fr Cocchi had already opened an oratory there [in borgo Vanchiglia] but he had to abandon it due to his other work. At the same place and with almost identical scope the Guardian Angel Oratory, near the Po, re-opened to the public in 1849. Its management was entrusted to Fr Roberto Murialdo.'<sup>98</sup> Effectively, from October 1849 it came under Don Bosco and his collaborators<sup>99</sup> in premises rented out to lawyers Bronzini Zapelloni and Daziani, and remained under his overall direction until 1871. The same year, through the initiatives of the parish priest, Fr Ilario Maurizio Vigo, another new oratory was opened in the parish of S. Giulia.<sup>100</sup>

A note in Borel's *Memoriale* opens a window on the frenetic activity of purchase, exchanges, sale of land carried out by Don Bosco to ensure room for the future development in the work and also to gain more for the existing work. Research into records at the land register kept in the City of Turin's Historical Archives throws light on this data, revealing interesting speculative activity by Don Bosco beginning in 1848–50. On 9 March 1848 he bought the Moretta house for 11,800 lire with hayloft, garden and paddock included. In the space of a year, from March 1849 to June 1850, he resold it for 14,810 lire.<sup>101</sup> This allowed modest but certain extensions. '1849. All of the Pinardi

94 Cf. C. PISCHEDDA and R. ROCCIA (ed.), 1848. *Dallo Statuto Albertino alla nuova legge municipale. Il primo Consiglio comunale elettivo di Turin*, Turin, Archivio Storico della Città 1995.

95 MO (2010) 163-164.

96 Cf. A. CASTELLANI, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo*, Vol. I, pp. 406-407.

97 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 55-56.

98 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 66.

99 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Breve ragguaglio della festa fattasi nel distribuire il regalo di Pio IX ai giovani degli oratorii di Turin*, Turin, tip. Eredi Botta 1850, p. 9, OE IV 101.

100 MO (2010) 162; cf. M. BASSO, *Nel Moschino il primo oratorio torinese, in Santa Giulia in Vanchiglia. Storia di un quartiere. Nel 200° anniversario della nascita della marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo*, Turin, "La Grafica Nuova" Cooperative 1985, p. 64.

101 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Turin e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 145-146. Similar activity but with a strong preponderance of purchases for consistent extension of the work and their expenses were registered for 1851, 1853-1854, 1860-1861, 1863, 1864, 1868-1870, etc. (*Ibid.*, pp. 146-150).

house, the area in front and behind the house, was rented. The church was extended by almost a metre; the number of boys was increased to thirty,' probably an exaggerated number.<sup>102</sup>

In conducting his affairs, Don Bosco sought to follow not only teachers of a Liguorian moral stance, but ones who also demonstrated careful and correct administration of goods and money, much of which came from charity. Frs Guala and Cafasso were men of this kind. His benefactors knew from the outset that their money was in hands that had dealt skilfully and honestly in good works.

### 3.2 Out in the open and duly recognised

As the one responsible for three oratories, Don Bosco was becoming more and more known to public opinion and also in the highest religious and civil circles. What certainly struck the imagination of spectators was the unusual surge of hundreds of boys, especially poorer ones, to religious and recreational institutions run by a country priest. It was a spectacle assured of visibility in a city of between 130,000 and 140,000 inhabitants. In November 1849, he wrote to King Victor Emmanuel II about 'more than five hundred boys attending the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.'<sup>103</sup> He wrote to the administrators of the *MendicITÀ Istruita* of a number 'sometimes from six to seven hundred boys from twelve to twenty years of age, most of them from the prisons or in danger of ending up there.' And he spoke of a 'total of boys at all three oratories often reaching a thousand.'<sup>104</sup> He wrote to the young Portuguese priest Fr Daniele Rademacher on 10 July 1850, describing the feast of St Aloysius celebrated at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, in reference to Confirmation for '150 of our boys,' 500 communions and more than 1,600 boys at the 'evening ceremonies.'<sup>105</sup> A month later he even wrote to Cardinal Antonelli: 'The more than three thousand young people from Turin who come to the oratories are of one heart and mind in the respect due to the Supreme leader of the Church.'<sup>106</sup>

Of course he was not working only for the sake of publicity. In the activity of rehabilitating and empowering young people, especially young workers, in religious, moral and hence civil life, he knew how to have recourse to powerful means such as retreats. Already in 1847 he had tried a first experiment with the Oratory boys. The preacher was Fr Federico Albert (1820–76),<sup>107</sup> beatified in 1984. We have a clearer description from Don Bosco when he repeated the experiment in 1848. Then he had around fifty participants and it meant them staying a whole day and overnight in premises at the Oratory,<sup>108</sup> made possible by having all of the Pinardi house at his disposal. Originally it had been sublet by Soave on 1 December 1846 but from March 1847 the entire ground floor had become available. The preachers were Fr Giuseppe Gliemone (1820–88) from Rivoli and the popular Fr Borel.

Another retreat, documented by a list of participants, took place in July 1849. Rather more boldly, Don Bosco offered a retreat to any boy from the city at the end of the same year. He got permission to bring them together in the Church of the Confraternity of Mercy, which was more central and larger than the narrow Pinardi chapel on the extreme north-east outskirts. In order to encourage the largest possible attendance of boys, he wrote a notice, had it printed and distributed. [He called it an *Avviso Sacro*, a significant document of the demanding kind of Catholic piety he proposed to young people who were already in and part of a Christian environment.] It

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102 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 55

103 Em I 90.

104 Em I 96.

105 Em I 104.

106 Em I 107.

107 Cf. MB III 221-223.

108 MO (2010) 157.

allowed him to address a passionate appeal to ‘fathers and mothers, employees and heads of factories and businesses’ who had ‘the present and the future well-being of the young’ at heart, ‘that portion of human society on which our present and future hopes are founded, the portion worthy of our most attentive concerns.’ He went on to say that ‘if they are educated the right way, there will be order and morality; if to the contrary, then there will be vice and disorder’ and ‘only Religion is capable of beginning and completing the great work of true education’ so much more necessary, faced with ‘the efforts evil individuals make to instil irreligious principles in the fickle minds of the young.’ Nor did he fail to make a direct appeal to his target audience; ‘My dear young people, delight and pupil of the divine eye, you will not regret putting up with a few inconveniences of the season in order to gain great good for your soul, a god that will never fail you.’ He concluded with the Latin (and then the Italian translation) of the text from Lamentations 3:27 which was especially dear to him: *Bonum est viro, cum portaverit jugum ab adolescentia sua*: it is good for someone to bear the yoke from a young age. The daily timetable came next, commencing at 7 a.m. on Saturday 22 December, then the name of the one issuing this invitation: ‘S. Bosco Gioanni.’<sup>109</sup> He had involved some avant-garde priests: Frs Borsarelli, Borel, Gastaldi and Ponte.<sup>110</sup>

In September 1850, Don Bosco ran a retreat at the seminary at Giaveno, about 40 kms from Turin.<sup>111</sup> Some boys from the town were allowed to join in. From the list Don Bosco made up there had to be some one hundred and thirty participants.<sup>112</sup> Giuseppe Brosio (1829–33) ‘the sharpshooter’, one of Don Bosco’s pupils and helpers, has left us with a picturesque description of their return journey, including a visit to the *Sacra di San Michele*.<sup>113</sup>

During the years of the political revolution between 1840-1850, Don Bosco’s approach was cautious but he did not slacken his commitment as a priest for young people and a religious writer for ordinary people<sup>114</sup> when certain aspects of this revolution seemed to him to threaten their faith and religious practice. Such was the case, in his opinion, of the laws on freedom of the press and emancipation of Waldensians and Jews, resulting in a proliferation of newspapers and books which were damaging to Catholic orthodoxy and the dignity of the clergy.<sup>115</sup>

It was also his concern to maintain good relations with the religious and civil world around him. He offered concrete services, to make his work acceptable. ‘This year [1848]’ he told us ‘piano and organ classes began and the boys began going out to sing Masses and Vespers from the choir lofts around Turin, Carignano, Chieri, Rivoli etc.’<sup>116</sup> He was also careful to maintain good relations with the City Council administration and others who counted in Turin. In 1849 or rather 1850, as he recalled in the *Cenno storico* ‘The City Council sent a commission to visit the Oratories and afterwards to express their satisfaction they sent a letter offering a grant of 600 francs. The Schools for the Poor (Mendicità) also helped the Oratories with a providential grant.’<sup>117</sup> 1850 was when he made the first documented request already referred to for ‘charitable assistance’, to the *Mendicità Istruita*.<sup>118</sup> 1,000 lire were made available. Don Bosco referred to this in a new request on 18 November 1852 ‘still mindful of and grateful for the aid the worthy gentlemen of the Schools for the Poor gave three years ago ... To help the three Oratories set up in this city.’<sup>119</sup>

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109 *Esercizi spirituali alla gioventù. Avviso sacro*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1849, ASC A 1760103.

110 MB III 603-607.

111 A letter from Don Bosco to Fr Borel on 12 September it certain documentation of this. 1850, Em I 111-112.

112 The list is presented on a stamped sheet, dated 21 September 1850, to the Opera di S. Paolo, which took on the costs of the retreat, ASC A 2220403-404.

113 G. BOSIO, *Relazione*, quad. I 28-29, ASC A 1020806.

114 Cf. Chap. 8.

115 Cf. Chap. 1, § 4.

116 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 55.

117 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 55.

118 Letter of 20 February 1850, Em I 96-97.

119 Em I 172-173.

The founder of the Oratories also ventured into journalism. On 4 and 15 July, thanks to some Catholic clergy and laity, two newspapers came into existence in opposition to the anticlerical *Gazzetta del popolo* (which first came out on 16 June 1848) and others of democratic tendencies.<sup>120</sup> The papers offered a different cultural perspective. The first echoed a stance somewhere between moderate and conservative. The second was closer to the neoguelfian Gioberti and Rosmini; *L'Armonia della Religione con la civiltà* [*L'Amonia*, in short] initially came out twice weekly, then three times weekly, and daily from 1855. The *Conciliatore torinese. Giornale religioso, politico, letterario* [*Il Conciliatore* for short] was initially twice weekly, then three times weekly, and was managed by Fr Lorenzo Renaldi, the editor being Fr Lorenzo Gastaldi – Don Bosco's friend and benefactor – but it closed down on 28 September 1849.<sup>121</sup>

Don Bosco imitated them, though rather more modestly, from 2 October 1848 with *L'Amico della Gioventù. Giornale religioso, morale e politico*. (The friend of youth. A religious moral and political newspaper). It was initially three times a week but soon ran into financial problems. We can argue this from a circular in January 1849 aimed at gaining members through shares worth 20, 30 or 199 francs, and bearing the signature: 'Under the management of Fr John Bosco.'<sup>122</sup> Its short life ended at the beginning of May 1849 when it merged with *L'Istruttore del popolo*, which first appeared in Turin on 2 February 1849. Its motto was *God and Country*, to safeguard the King's sovereignty while respecting the sovereignty of the people. It closed down at the end of 1850.<sup>123</sup>

*L'Amico della gioventù* came into existence during the time of the Salasco armistice (9 August 1848 to 12 March 1849). When it first came out there was a government supported by moderates with Perrone and Pinelli, then came one with a democratic majority presided over by Gioberti, so *L'Amico's* merger with *L'Istruttore* leads one to think it may have supported the notion of the neoguelfian kind, an Italian federation with restoration of the Papal States and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany under the military leadership of Piedmont-Sardinia.<sup>124</sup> However, up till now we have only found the first edition of *L'Amico della gioventù* with its editorial signed by 'the management', though probably written by Don Bosco. The writer highlighted the positives and negatives of freedom of the press granted by Charles Albert, and the absence of a popular newspaper 'whose chief aim is to keep intact and increase as far as possible the primary good of the people: their sincere and inviolable attachment to our Catholic Religion, joined with a true and solid Christian education because (and we must confess this) in the current emergency the people, and youth especially, are subject to many prejudices, and can be led into substantial error.' More precisely it aimed, 'to confirm the people in the Catholic Faith, show them its indivisible truth, its heavenly beauty, the wonderful good that comes from it as an inexhaustible source on behalf of the individual and the whole of society. And also to instruct and educate the people in virtue ... Therefore no effort will be spared in the newspaper regarding everything that can serve and enlighten the human intellect and, better still, the heart.'<sup>125</sup>

Both *L'Armonia* and *Il Conciliatore* made flattering comments about Don Bosco and the Oratory

120 Cf. B. GARIGLIO, *La "Gazzetta del popolo" nel biennio rivoluzionario*, in *Giornali e giornalisti a Turin*, Turin, Centro Studi "Carlo Trabucco" 1984, pp. 11-65.

121 Cf. "*Il Conciliatore Torinese*" (1848-1849). *Un caso significativo di stampa conciliarista*, in *Giornalismo e cultura cattolica a Turin. Aspetti storici e testimonianze fra 800 e 900*, Turin, Centro Studi "Carlo Trabucco" 1982, pp. 11-36; F. DELLA PERUTA, *Il giornalismo dal 1847 all'Unità*, in A. GALANTE GARRONE - F. DELLA PERUTA, *La stampa italiana del Risorgimento*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 1979, pp. 247-569.

122 Em I 83.

123 Cf. D. BERTONI JOVINE (ed.), *I periodici popolari del Risorgimento...*, Vol. I, pp. LXXV-LXXVI, 289-299; F. DELLA PERUTA, *Il giornalismo dal 1847 all'Unità...*, pp. 327, 475-476.

124 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 502-503, OE VII 502-503, quoted in Chap. 9, § 4.

125 From "*L'Amico della gioventù*" Don Bosco drew *l'esempio* in 1858, which followed the meditation on the *Misericordia di Dio* in the *Mese di maggio*: cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 122-123, OE X 416-417.

within a short time from each other. It would not be foolhardy to think that he played some part in encouraging the publicity they gave to the work of the oratories. In both newspapers, Don Bosco could count on sympathisers and friends, the first of these being Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi. The 2 April 1849 issue of *L'Armonia* wrote that the Oratory 'came into existence some years ago ... in the poorest suburb of this metropolis almost exclusively inhabited by workers who live from the product of their daily labours.' It is 'one of those works of charity for which the Catholic spirit is the inexhaustible source.' Founded by 'a zealous priest anxious about the good of souls' who has dedicated himself entirely to the compassionate work of removing the great number of children who live around there, from vice, idleness and ignorance and who unfortunately grow up without religion and proper nurture due to the poverty or neglect of their parents.' A list followed of the wide range of activities the boys were involved in and mention made of the interesting pedagogical novelty of Don Bosco's constant presence among them: 'their teacher, companion, exemplar and friend.' No one should be surprised, given such a lively 'method' that the Oratory was attended, 'usually by four hundred boys' on weekends. Instead of growing up 'in ignorance and vice, they were on the path of virtue and work.' Finally, the columnist spoke of the fact that on 25 March, two members of the Peter's Pence Committee had visited the Oratory to solemnly receive a donation of 35 [=33] francs.<sup>126</sup>

Some days after, on 7 April, *Il Conciliatore* made no less an effort. Its editor, Fr Gastaldi, published a glowing picture of the 'Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin' and its leader: 'A humble priest with no other wealth than immense charity,' who for some years had been gathering 'five or six hundred boys every Sunday to instruct them in Christian virtue and in due course make them children of God and excellent citizens.' 'It is heart-wrenching to see ... hundreds and hundreds of children ... exposed to dangerous pastimes' throughout Sundays and then 'return home even more dissipated, irreligious and disobedient.' 'The new disciple of Philip Neri' 'has taken to going around Turin on weekends and when he sees groups of boys intent on games, he goes up to them and asks if he can play and as soon as he has become somewhat friendly with them he invites them to continue their game in a place he believes is far more suitable to relax in.' 'Don Bosco, (for such is the name of this outstanding cleric)' has worked a miracle: 'His word has a marvellous effect on the hearts of those boys ... his dwelling is a refuge always open at any hour of the day to any boy.' After mentioning the founding of the second oratory 'outside Porta Nuova' he concludes by hoping other priests will be ready 'to follow in his footsteps, opening their sacred precincts up to boys where devotion is surrounded by honest fun. Only this way can we heal one of the deepest wounds in civil society and the Church, which is the corruption of the young.'<sup>127</sup>

At the beginning of spring 1850, when Archbishop Fransoni had already returned from voluntary exile in Switzerland for some weeks (the return lasted from the end of March 1848 until the end of February 1850), an important event took place for Don Bosco's educative and social work. The senate and Ministry, he said sent along 'a Committee of Deputies and others appointed by the ministry of the interior' to visit the oratories, and gave a favourable report on them.<sup>128</sup> Following the Senator's visit (Count Federico Sculpis, Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini and *Cavaliere* Luigi Provano di Collegno) and after hearing their report,' the Senate of the Kingdom,' we were told by *L'Armonia* on 26 July 1850 'made a unanimous decision that the King's Government support such a well-deserving institution of religion and society.'<sup>129</sup> Don Bosco also wrote of it to an unidentified member of the clergy, attaching 'a page from the *Gazetta Piemontese*' which referred to 'what was said at the Senate's recent sitting in February 1850 (v. *Gazetta* p. 24 at the foot of the first column)

126 "L'Armonia", Monday 2 April 1849, OE XXXVIII 11-13.

127 "Il Conciliatore Torinese" 2 (1849) no. 42, Saturday 7 April.

128 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 56; cf. With some inaccuracies, MO (2010) 197.

129 "L'Armonia", Friday 26 July 1850, OE XXXVIII 15-17; also reported in [G. Bosco], *Breve ragguaglio...*, p. 22, OE IV 114.



regarding our oratories and the boys who reside there.<sup>130</sup> We recall that the Senate had approved the contested Siccardi law on 8 April.<sup>131</sup> Senator Luigi Provana di Collegno had spoken and voted against it, while Senator Federico Scolpis spoke and voted in favour.<sup>132</sup>

By now Don Bosco's oratory initiative had really taken off, reaching the higher echelons of the Church, Cardinal Antonelli and Pius IX. In March 1849, as we see mentioned by *L'Armonia*, he promptly enrolled in the *Obolo di s. Pietro* movement (Peter's Pence), conceived after November 1848 to aid Pius IX who was exiled to Gaeta, and he promoted a collection among the boys at the two oratories. The amount collected (33 francs) was handed over publicly to members of the Committee on 25 March, Passion Sunday, where one boy gave a speech and they all sang a hymn to the Pope. Pius IX's thanks and blessing came in May through Archbishop Antonucci, the Nuncio in Turin, and in April 1850 Cardinal Antonelli begged pardon for the delay in sending two packets of 60 dozen rosaries, a personal gift of the Pope's to the boys. When Pius IX returned to Rome, Don Bosco organised a huge gathering of boys from the three oratories at Valdocco on the afternoon of Sunday 21 July. The solemn distribution of rosaries, one for each boy, took place after an address by Fr Andrea Barrera (1802–79), a member of the *Dottrinari*, and Canon Ortalda with Canon Simonino and the speaker by their side. Then followed a speech by one of the oratory boys, 'some military drill' by a 'citizen militia squad' and the final hymn, rounded off with 'prolonged and cheerful cries of "long live Pius IX, long live the Vicar of Jesus Christ"'.<sup>133</sup> Don Bosco had bravely turned the ceremony into a celebration for the Pope just in the year of the first serious rift between the Savoy Government and the Holy See. On 9 April 1850, the King had ratified the Siccardi law and at the beginning of May the first of two judicial processes against Archbishop Fransoni took place, resulting in him being sentenced to one month's imprisonment, which he served at the Citadella, being released on 2 June. The second trial took place on 25 September when he was sentenced to banishment from the Kingdom.<sup>134</sup>

Don Bosco made no bones about his feelings on political and religious events in a letter on 10 July 1850 to Portuguese Fr Daniele Rademacher who as a young priest had helped him in 1846–48. Among other things, Don Bosco assured him that he thought of him 'always as a priest of the Oratory and the St Aloysius Sodality.' 'Oh, how many things I have to tell you! he went on, 'I won't speak of the politics that you already know from the newspapers but will just say some things about religion. For many centuries Piedmont was the "Benjamin" of the Holy See; a great many of its leaders are venerated on the altars. Piedmont honoured religion and religion was its glory. Now this is no longer so. The three Powers have declared their hostility to religion. Some unbridled newspapers vomit with impunity as much impiety and falsehood as they can invent, against everything that smacks of religion, and few days go by without some priest being insulted by these scoundrels. However, we are greatly consoled by the blessings the Lord lavishes on our Oratories.'<sup>135</sup>

He opened the *Breve ragguaglio* (Brief update) similarly, noting the 'difficult times which have constrained the Supreme Pontiff of the Church to abandon the Holy See and go to foreign regions,'

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130 Letter of 19 February 1851, Em I 124.

131 Cf. Chap. 1, § 6

132 Cf. *Legge Siccardi sull'abolizione del foro e delle immunità ecclesiastiche. Tornate del Parlamento subalpino...*, pp. 443-452, 487-493.

133 [G. Bosco], *Breve ragguaglio...*, pp. 3-27, OE IV 93-119. Don Bosco recorded this clearly also in the *Cenno storico*: "The Pope moves away from Rome and flees to Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples and the children at the Oratory took up a collection by which the Holy father was very moved and had a letter of thanks written by Cardinal Antonelli, and he sends his holy blessing to the children of the Oratory. Then from Gaeta he sends a package of 60 dozen rosaries for the children of the Oratory, and solemn distribution of these was done with great celebration on 20 July. v. printed booklet for that occasion" ([G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 55).

134 Cf. Chap. 1, § 6.

135 Em I 103-104.

then went on to describe the Peter's Pence initiative as being in harmony with the attitude of Piedmontese Catholics. In fact, Don Bosco explained, 'Piedmont, which has stood out for its devotion to the Holy See in every area, and especially after being governed by the Savoy Royal Family, has also stood out on this occasion.'<sup>136</sup> But that was not sufficient. Don Bosco wanted direct information about his celebration to reach the top. On 28 August, he sent a letter to Cardinal Antonelli along with some copies of the *Breve ragguaglio*, explaining 'the great consolation felt' on receiving the 'two large and generous packets of rosaries to be distributed among the boys whom Divine Providence has somehow entrusted to me.' The core of the letter reveals the deep Catholic convictions which, in turbulent 1850, inspired Don Bosco's personal life as a priest, his activity as a Christian educator, and also the behaviour of his boys and his open disassociation from the hopefully temporary 'political and religious' attacks. 'The more than three thousand youths from Turin attending the oratories' he assured him, 'are of one heart and mind for the respect owed the Supreme Leader of the Church.' Regardless of what is said or done to alienate them from Catholic unity, they all honourably reject it and are prepared for any circumstance rather than say or do something against the religion which the Roman Pontiff is Head of.' So much so, that a notice had been put up in many work places: 'Quiet, do not speak ill of the Pope; there is an oratory boy here.' It is true that not everyone thought this. 'The number of desperate individuals is very small and as daring as they are, they embark on many a path to overturn the political and religious order. But we can nurture the firm hope among us that their efforts will only have a passing effect and that, moved by the prayers of good people, the Lord will bestir himself to quieten the storm and bring back the earlier calm.'<sup>137</sup>

#### 4. Ideal support for young people and his friends

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was providing structure to the work that was now his, the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, prototype of all others. He was offering some essential ideas on his so-called youth spirituality, and spirituality for those who educated the young. Three books converged on these matters initially; *Storia sacra* (Bible History) *Il giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) (1847), and *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de Paoli* (1848) (The Christian guided in virtue and civility according to the spirit of St Vincent de Paul).

In 1845, the author indicated he was 'fully satisfied' with 'Histories' of the Old and New Testament used by the 'boys'.<sup>138</sup> But on closer examination, he said he was 'disappointed' with them. They were too bulky or too brief, neither simple nor popular, lacking in chronology. 'In almost all of them' one could find 'a number of expressions which resulted in ideas which would be less than clear in the fickle and tender minds of the boys.'<sup>139</sup> He made a similar though even more serious judgement in the 1870's: 'Lack of a popular style, unsuitable stories, and long or outdated questions were common defects. Many events were presented in a fashion dangerous to the morality of the youngsters. All of them failed to focus on points that should serve as the foundation for the truths of our faith. The same could be said of facts referring to external worship, purgatory, confession, the Eucharist and the like.'<sup>140</sup>

In fact, the *Sacra storia*, more than the *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church history) was a model of catechetical narrative that Don Bosco preferred in his direct activity among young people. We have seen that some of his basic concerns in writing religious histories were perceived and shared by reviewers, and he reacted quickly accepting some of the suggestions coming from Piedmontese

136 [G. Bosco], *Breve ragguaglio*..., pp. 3-4, OE IV 95-96.

137 Em I 107. He concluded by asking support to obtain the spiritual favours requested of the Pope (cf. texts of petitions to Pius IX, Em I 109-111).

138 G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., pp. 7-8, OE I 165-166 (*Preface*).

139 G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*..., pp. 5-6, OE III 5-6 (*Preface*).

140 MO (2010) 141-142.

pedagogy as represented by the *Educatore Primario*. We have also seen how, in his opinion, the first aim of Bible history had to be a catechetical and moral one: 'enlightening the intelligence and encouraging a good life.'<sup>141</sup> We have identified, above all, the general themes and catechetical ideas emerging from his demanding work as a good basis for a youth spirituality seen in historical terms:<sup>142</sup> the image of God as a Father who protects his innocent children, preserving them from hunger and death, forgiving the repentant ones, but also a judge who deals justly with those who resist him: 'If you are faithful to him he will bless you; if you break his law you will suffer great evil.'<sup>143</sup> 'The lord protects the innocent and often allows calamity to strike the guilty.'<sup>144</sup> 'Thus the Lord protects the innocent and either in this life or the life to come those who do wrong will suffer from it.'<sup>145</sup> The greatest sign of his merciful presence to mankind is certainly the 'promise of the Saviour' that runs through the whole of the Old Testament, renewed and confirmed and reaching its peak in Isaiah, 'the prophet who more than any other spoke of the future Messiah and with such clarity that reading what he wrote seems like reading the life of Jesus Christ in the Holy Gospel.'<sup>146</sup> Faithfulness to God is expressed by observing the divine precepts and practising virtues, especially religion or devotion, chastity, hard work, love and service of our brothers and sisters.

We also find in the *Storia sacra* the feature which connects to the *Storia ecclesiastica* and, invariably, writings that followed; the extraordinary and the miraculous. According to Don Bosco it is first in the list of reasons as to why we think 'the biblical writers' are inspired: 'Miracles worked especially by the prophets' and 'prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus Christ; and many other events that are perfectly fulfilled in him.'<sup>147</sup> 'Our Saviour began his preaching with miracles' at Cana.<sup>148</sup> After dealing with teachings and parables the author stated at the beginning of his chapter on miracles: 'What we have referred to up till now concerning our Saviour has helped us get to know him especially as a man. The miracles show him as God; since a miracle is an effect overcoming any created force it can only come from God who alone is uncreated and the master of all thing.'<sup>149</sup>

This motif continues to be found in later writings in relation both to Christ and the Church from which holiness and miracles are inseparable. The Church 'is holy because of its head and founder Jesus Christ ... Many saints throughout the ages have illustrated this through their brilliant miracles.'<sup>150</sup> Instead, neither saint nor miracle is quoted in all the lives of heretics, unbelievers, apostates.<sup>151</sup> The decade from 1850–59 saw more of this kind of thing and more so later when the portentous invaded not only Don Bosco's catechetical and educational activities, with increasing insistence, but also his work of leadership and encouragement, as founder, of candidates to Salesian religious life.

*Il giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) 1847, was very clear in the way it illustrated the content and methods suggested to young people to enable them to live their Christian vocation fully. More impressively it was a book of practices of piety suited to helping them nurture their devotion and virtue: sacred ceremonies, prayers, meditations, spiritual devotions. In the preface 'to

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141 Cf. § 2.3.

142 Analysis undertaken by N. CERRATO, *La catechesi di don Bosco nella sua "Storia sacra"*, Rome, LAS 1979, in particular, pp. 201-247, 291-328.

143 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., p. 66, OE III 66.

144 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., 1853, p. 114.

145 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., 1876, p. 114, OE XXVII 320.

146 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., p. 114, OE III 114.

147 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., p. 12, OE III 12. Similar is said of Jesus Christ and the apostles in the *Maniera facile di imparare la storia sacra*, 1855 (pp. 47-48, 62).

148 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., pp. 166-167, OE III 166-167.

149 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra*..., pp. 179-180, OE III 179-180; On the miracles, cf. p. 200, OE III 200.

150 [G. Bosco], *La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. Avvisi ai cattolici*, Turin, tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1850, p. 11, OE IV 131.

151 [G. Bosco], *Avvisi ai cattolici*. Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, p. 15, OE IV 177.

the young', Don Bosco also presented it as a 'method of Christian living' 'both cheerful and content,' 'short and simple,' aimed, in keeping with its title, at ways and means for 'doing your duties, practising the exercises of Christian piety, saying the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and the main Vespers of the year, with a choice of hymns added, etc.'<sup>152</sup>

It can be viewed from three perspectives: from the point of view of content; from a formal point of view; in terms of context. Content can be located within the tradition of Christian Piety at that time,<sup>153</sup> also part of the world in which Don Bosco grew up and operated, and based on the key elements of prayer, sacraments and religious observance.<sup>154</sup>

The first part contained a series of reflections on God and his relationship with the young, the duties of a Christian, meditations for each day on eternal truths, the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga. The second and third parts, with the concluding section dedicated to hymns, reflected what was indicated by the title. It was a spiritual world dominated by the idea of salvation and how to achieve that in an attitude of responsibility and fear. A central notion was the one of flight, in order to protect virtue, especially the virtue of purity: flight from idleness, bad companions, bad conversations, scandal. These were the saving precautions Don Bosco had assimilated from the Catechism and his later study of Antonio Alasia's moral theology and that of Alphonsus Liguori. Meditations were especially on the Last Things, eternal truths which the youngsters had been and were still invited to contemplate in the innocent and austere life of St Aloysius Gonzaga.

In formal terms, or looking at its specific nature, the manual was based on two categorical assertions opposed to the wiles of the devil. These were spelt out in the preface from the outset. To counteract the devil's wiles which tempted the young man to couple religion with sadness, youth with thoughtlessness, Don Bosco sought to show his young readers that instead there is perfect congruence between religion and cheerfulness, and that the age of youth can and must be a responsible and constructive age. Death may come at any moment and a thoughtless, unaware, idle youth, after a dissipated and unsatisfying life, could irreparably compromise one's salvation. In any case, youth is the key to one's entire earthly existence. There can be no proper adulthood or old age if it is not prepared for and built up from the serious commitments taken on earlier in life. As a result, he highlights or at least hints at significant 'horizons of youthful spirituality,' the 'special relationship young people have with God' and the tendency to holiness; a whole gamut of specific virtues like the love and fear of God, obedience, purity; the use of available means; catechetical instruction, practices of piety, devotions, work, play, singing, example; choice of a state in life, and 'family spirit.'<sup>155</sup> In a preventive and supportive pedagogy, advice, warnings, reminders to be vigilant found special expression through abundant use of the 'Word of God.' 'Nurture and food for the soul' are often gained through biblical stories, history, and Church history but are even more frequently identified in three classic forms: 'preaching, explanation of the Gospel and catechism,' and the like.<sup>156</sup> The result of using all these potential means is peace of mind, a happy heart, the satisfaction of being reconciled with one's conscience, with God and with one's neighbour.<sup>157</sup>

However, it was not the manual of piety alone that could legitimate the two basic assumptions of

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152 G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto*..., 352 p., OE II 183-532.

153 Cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di san Giovanni Bosco*, Rome, PAS 1960, capo I *Letteratura ascetica per la gioventù in Piemonte* (pp. 21-45), Chap. II *Le fonti del giovane provveduto*, pp. 46-79.

154 The title of Chap. XII of the second volume of P. STELLA's, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. II *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, Turin, LAS 1981 (1st edit. 1969), pp. 275-357.

155 Cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"*..., pp. 80-126.

156 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto*..., pp. 18-19, OE II 198-199, *Cose necessarie ad un figliuolo per diventar virtuoso*, art. 6<sup>th</sup> *Lettura e parola d'Iddio*; *Regolamento della compagnia dell'Immacolata*, art. 12, in G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*... Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1859, p. 79, OE XI 229

157 Cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"*..., pp. 90-99.

the preface and guarantee achievement of the ends proposed: 'Becoming the consolation of your parents, an honour to your country, good citizens on earth so you can one day be the fortunate inhabitants of heaven.'<sup>158</sup> *The Companion of Youth* could be thought of as a way of life because the religious experience it proposed was tied in with the whole system and lifestyle which, according to Don Bosco, the boys were immersed in on a daily basis at the Oratory and in other Catholic educational institutions of the kind – schools, colleges (boarding schools). It is completely plausible that it mirrors systems of piety found in the 'complete' institutions rather than just in the festive (weekend) oratory, and was a book that, in all probability, few boys from the Turin oratories read from beginning to end.<sup>159</sup> In his Christian inspired community, those without a family found the niceties of home, the certainty of fatherliness and brotherliness in the person of the Director/Rector and teacher/educator, the joy of friendship, the prospect of fitting meaningfully into society because they had a work culture and capacity which gave them dignity and enabled them to earn a living. There was also a general style of cheerfulness guaranteed by the endless possibilities educative genius could 'invent': play, theatre, excursions, music, singing. Hence, Don Bosco could specify his method or 'way of life' as cheerfulness, study, piety. This was the system employed, substantially unchanged, over the following decade in institutions directed and led by Don Bosco, and which he insisted on in the brief works and biographies of the 1850's and 60's. It could be a mistake to think we could find the totality of the experience or an exhaustive picture of his youth spirituality in a single book.

As for the use of *The Companion of Youth* it is probable that the meditations in the first part were offered for reflection to pupils in the colleges and hospices, by reading a passage at the end of the daily mass. This was the practice followed in many of the boarding schools in the first half of the 20th century. For morning and evening prayers accompanying the celebration of mass, the more widespread custom was to keep to versions found in the diocesan catechism. It is quite plausible that this is what was mostly the case for boys attending the festive oratory.

Another book which reveals Don Bosco's spiritual preferences is *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*.<sup>160</sup> Aimed at the faithful of any age it speaks of a priest – and Don Bosco reflects this person – confirming his insight into the mission of the 'homo Dei' (man of God) among the people and the young, which guided him in selection of material for his *Storia ecclesiastica*, especially stories of saints, most of them clergy and religious, but also including significant lay people, and stories of saints of charity.

In its compilation, the result of selection and readjustments to the original work of Fr Ansart, though for the most part simply copied,<sup>161</sup> the two features of the priest emerge which we find in his biography and proposals. The priest is a man of God, of the sacred, set apart, adorned with the classical virtues of the exemplary cleric. He is also a man for the people, a man of charity, sharing both in his basic attitudes and approach to activity. St Vincent de Paul, 'corresponded marvellously to this. Animated by a true spirit of charity, there was no kind of calamity he did not rush to help with; the faithful oppressed by slavery by the Turks, babies left helpless, errant youth, girls at risk, derelict Religious, fallen women, convicts pilgrims, the sick, tradespeople without work, beggars – they all felt the results of Vincent's fatherly charity.' The Priests of the Mission [Vincentians] came together in a Society of Common Life in his image and the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity was established, 'having as its primary purpose assisting the sick in hospitals.' As a priest

158 G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, [p. 5], OE XI 187.

159 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *All'ascolto di don Bosco nel 1867*, in C. SEMERARO (Ed.), *Religiosità popolare a misura dei giovani*, "Colloqui salesiani", 13. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1987, p. 103.

160 Cf. *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di san Vincenzo de' Paoli. Opera che può servire a consacrare il mese di July in onore del medesimo santo*, Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1848, 288 pp., OE III 215-502.

161 Cf. D. MALFAIT - J. SCHEPENS, "Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli", RSS 15 (1996) 273-316.

he was an 'admirable, shining mirror of the Church for his clarity, miracles, and virtue, the splendour of France, support of the foreign missions.'<sup>162</sup>

Not dissimilar in their apostolic intentions and zeal were colleagues whom Don Bosco had collaborated with in prisons and teaching catechism at the *Convitto*, and whom he had as collaborators at the oratories. They, too, were driven by the spirit of the Gospel, represented in Turin by models such as St Philip Neri, St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul. The book confirmed above all how much St Vincent de Paul meant within the subalpine religious world. At least six communities of the Daughters of Charity were at work there, dedicated to the care of the poor, the sick, and wounded soldiers in military hospitals. The Vincentian House in Turin was a centre of priestly spirituality: Durando (1801–80) founder of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazarene, and the equally special St Joseph Benedict Cottolengo who founded the Vincentian Sisters in his Little House of Divine Providence to assist the sick<sup>163</sup> and in 1833, to prepare teachers for the primary classes at the Little House and in poor villages. He had also founded the Congregation of the Brothers of St Vincent.<sup>164</sup>

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162 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, pp. 328-329, I 486-487.

163 Cf. M. MARCOCCI, *Alle radici della spiritualità di don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 168-170; E. VALENTINI, *Due santi simili. Don Bosco e San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, "Palestra del clero" 57 (1978) 1474-1497.

164 Cf. E. POMATTO, *La fondazione dei Fratelli di San Vincenzo...*, "Rivista Lasalliana" 59 (1992), no. 2, pp. 112-135.

## Chapter 8

### RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL WORKER (1849–54)

- 1849 Beginning of the Mutual Aid Society
- 1850 Apologetic shift in Don Bosco's writing;  
November–December preaching in Milan.
- 1851 First extension to the Oratory;  
20 July: laying of foundation stone for the Church of St Francis de Sales;  
December: launch of the first public lottery.
- 1852 31 March: Don Bosco appointed Director-in-Chief of the Turin Oratories;  
20 June: Solemn blessing of the Church of St Francis de Sales.
- 1853 March: beginning of the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings);  
First trade activities in the 'house attached', added to from 1853–62
- 1854 Summer: cholera in Turin.

Don Bosco was a man from the rural world of the provinces. He could have gone unnoticed and his work might have also been limited to his suburb or at the very least, the city. Instead, his approach and style in the Oratory initiative came at the right moment between the old and the new regimes, the enterprise of its promoter and favourable circumstances ensuring the work would rapidly take root and have surprising resonance. This was even more the case in the second decade.

Due to Turin's economic and social situation, its religious and cultural tradition, and beginning with the upper class, the city was open to private and public charity. Old and new welfare-type institutions were an expression of this. The Little House of Divine Providence, founded at the beginning of 1829 by Canon Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo (1786–1842) was to become a symbol of this. In 1833 it gained recognition from King Charles Albert. By 1850 it already accommodated 1,300 patients.

Turin was both the capital of Savoy and the main city of the province. It was well-ordered and compact, allowing Don Bosco to have personal contact with all categories of people from the Royal House and Court to the aristocracy, from government ministers and senators and other representatives of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, from provincial authorities to city administrators, from the archbishop to clergy at every level, right on down to business people, tradesmen, the ordinary people.

All this would play a useful part, too, in relationships at all levels in the Kingdom of Italy when it was established as a natural extension of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia under the aegis of the Savoy monarchy and later when Florence, and then Rome, became Italy's capital. Enterprising as he was, Don Bosco found it easy to plant, then maintain the institutions he was interested in, extend his involvement of people and gain consensus, despite some momentary hesitations, and above all create increasingly broader interest in his initiatives, from his local suburb to the city, region and central-north Italy.

## 1. An explosive decade in Don Bosco's life

With help from the clergy and lay people who dedicated zealous help with the oratories, Don Bosco increasingly became the one responsible for them and, of course, uniquely so in the case of the St Francis de Sales oratory. This primacy of responsibility and prestige was recognised in public opinion at the highest levels.

Was the ambition he was accused of by some, of a different quality, or was it superiority or something else? He himself felt constrained to defend himself in a lucid Introduction to the *Piano di Regolamento dell' Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco de sales* or draft regulations for the boys Oratory of St Francis de Sales. Referring to the drawing up of these regulations he made two points: 'I have often begun the task then stopped because of the countless difficulties that had to be overcome.' 'Perhaps some will find expressions that appear to show I am seeking glory and honour. Do not believe it.'<sup>1</sup>

St Leonard Murialdo had certainly not read these lines and others that followed, unpublished at the time, when he said at the information process for beatification, with a degree of reserve: 'I heard some clergy who did not interpret the opening of these oratories of Don Bosco well, because they thought it was a work in which he was seeking his own ambitions, but I never believed that was his intention and always admired the fortunate and beneficial outcome of his works.'<sup>2</sup> Why could it not be, instead, the result of the practical faith of the priest reacting to the unrestrained impulses of the vocation he had pursued with such tenacity? He ended the *Introduction* with a profession of intense fervour and charity: 'When I gave myself to the aspect of the sacred ministry I understood that I was consecrating my every effort to the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. I understood that I was working to make good citizens on this earth who might then one day, be worthy inhabitants of heaven. Thus may God help me to be able to continue until I breathe my last breathe. Amen.'<sup>3</sup> He had indicated the same intention when presenting youngsters in *The Companion of Youth*, 'with a way of life which is short and easy.' 'I can assure you' he told them with the fervour of St Paul, at the end of the preface, 'that you will find books of this kind by people who are much more virtuous and learned than I am, but it would be difficult to find someone who loves you more in Jesus Christ and who desires your eternal happiness more.'<sup>4</sup>

Don Bosco was accustomed to a peasant style of patience. He could dream big but he knew that his plans were only realisable slowly and in accordance with the available finance and personnel. At the same time, though, in order to achieve the aims he had in mind, as a passionate and energetic human being he immediately demonstrated an almost innate ability to arouse consent, create public opinion and attract private and public charity. 'The art of involvement', propaganda, publicity was something that accompanied him throughout his lifetime, distinguishing him from other enterprising types who were doing good. It is a quality worth emphasising. Don Bosco tended to dramatise situations and then point to the solution through exceptional activities. He won a huge number of people over to his initiatives, forming a close-knit group of supporters. An outstanding example of this was the lotteries in all their stages: setting up the commission, looking for men and women to promote them, appealing for donations for prizes, selecting collectors, selling tickets, organising the draw, announcing winners, even setting up a new minor lottery with a quality prize ... won by the organiser himself.<sup>5</sup>

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1 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento per l'Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino nella regione Valdocco*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 37.

2 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus...*, fol. 1046r, testimony of February 20, 1893.

3 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 38.

4 G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, [p. 5], OE VII 5 and 7.

5 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e la società civile*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 234-235.



In general, whatever the immediate reason for requesting help, the one that came first was always the one most suited to touching people's sensitivity and their purses: 'poor and abandoned' boys, boys who were ill-advised,<sup>6</sup> 'at risk and of risk [to society].'<sup>7</sup>

The use of this terminology in a circular on 20 December 1851 brought protest from some who did not want to be seen identifying with brainless miscreants and found the language offensive. Giuseppe Brosio, an oratory boy at the time, referred to it in the earlier mentioned report in which he tells us he was part of a lively group of protestors who suggested 'a respectful and simple correction.' 'The impending storm gradually calmed down.'<sup>8</sup>

There were some very strong statements as it turned out, in the 20 December circular. They were aimed at stirring up feeling, even concern, among potential benefactors. He was looking for items, prizes, donations for a lottery to finance extensions to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and construction by then in progress, of its attached church.<sup>9</sup> The promoters gave initial information on the origins, aims of the Oratory and who it was for: a 'work of charity' they said 'aimed uniquely at the moral and intellectual benefit of that section of young people, who were 'exposed to the ongoing risk of corruption' through parental neglect, by hanging around with the wrong kind of friends or 'because of poverty.' More precisely there were two categories of young people accepted: first of all, 'idle and ill-advised youngsters, living off begging from society and who often commit all kinds of wrongdoing.'

Second, those who 'worked as tradesmen or in industry around the city' and on weekends 'spent the little they earned during the week on gambling and other trivial pursuits.' The opening of the Oratory brought extraordinary pleasure to the boys, because of everything that was offered them: the opportunity to satisfy their Christian religious duties, 'a moral and civil education,' 'various games to develop their physical strength and boost their spirits in honest ways,' also the possibility of cultural growth, thanks to the basic teaching given through Sunday classes and, in winter, also night classes: 'reading, writing, the basics of arithmetic and Italian,' 'using the approved measurements.' Religious, moral and civil education drew its inspiration from traditional ideals: 'instilling affection in their hearts for their parents, fraternal kindness, respect for authority, gratitude to benefactors, love of work and, more than anything else, instructing their minds in Catholic and moral teaching, leading them away from bad ways, instilling the holy fear of God in them and accustoming them, over time, to observe religious precepts.'<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Consolidation and extension of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

Don Bosco added a new brick to his educational and supportive edifice by setting up a *Mutual Aid Society* at the Oratory for boys who attended from outside. 'On 1 June that same year a *Mutual Aid Society* was established ... One may refer to the book we published.'<sup>11</sup> The Society began in 1849. Its regulations were printed toward June 1850 with a *Notice* signed by Don Bosco.<sup>12</sup> The final article, No 18, said: 'The current regulations will come into force on the first day of July 1850.' Don Bosco had felt the need to be in the worker's world where, as we have seen, worker societies of

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6 Circular, 20 December 1851, Em I 139.

7 To Count Clemente Solaro della Margherita, 5 January 1854, Em. 1 212.

8 G. BROSIO, *Relazione*, quad. II 1-4, ASC A 1020806.

9 Cf. § 5.

10 Circ. 20 December 1851 Em I 139-140; cf. the same text republished in booklet *Catalogo degli oggetti offerti per la lotteria a beneficio dell'oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco*, Tu tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1852, pp. V-VII, OE IV 149-151.

11 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 57; MO (2010) 175

12 [G. Bosco], *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della compagnia di San Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*. Torino, tip. Speirano and Ferrero 1850, 8 p., OE IV 83-90.

liberal or democratic leanings were spreading.<sup>13</sup> In the first five articles, the regulations established that ‘The purpose of this society is to lend aid to companions who fall ill or find themselves in need because they are out of work for reasons beyond their control.’ ‘No one can be admitted to the society unless enrolled in the St Aloysius Sodality.’ ‘Each member will pay one *soldo* [five cents] each Sunday. Aid for each sick member will be 50 cents per day until he returns to perfect health. In cases where the sick member is admitted to hospital [‘some pious work’], the aid will cease and not recommence until he is released to begin his convalescence.’ ‘Those without work through no fault of their own will begin to receive the above-mentioned help eight days after they become unemployed.’<sup>14</sup>

But Don Bosco’s first concern was to provide consistency and greater possibility of acceptance at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in its dual aspect of hospice and festive oratory. Building development had become urgent, allowing him to respond to increased demand for shelter. In 1850, he purchased land which was the property of the seminary, located to the south of the Pinardi house beyond the Via della Giardiniera. He obtained permission for the purchase from Archbishop Fransoni at an audience granted on 7 March at the Villa di Pianezza, where he had taken up residence on 26 February on his return from exile in Switzerland, awaiting the Government’s pleasure so he could come back to Turin. Don Bosco made reference to it in a note to the Rector of the seminary, informing him that he had found the Archbishop ‘cheerful and very much at peace’ and, as he was by nature, sure and tenacious in his thinking and determined in his approach.<sup>15</sup> The contract was drawn up on 29 June: for 3,800 square metres of paddock and garden he paid 7,500 lire. On 19 February 1851, in joint ownership with Frs Cafasso, Borel and Roberto Murialdo, Don Bosco bought the Pinardi home and shed with hayloft, garden and part of the vegetable garden equivalent to 3,699 square metres for 28,000 lire.<sup>16</sup> As with the land adjacent to the Moretta house purchased between 1850–51, he recovered 16, 835 lire from the sale, between 1850 and 1854, of ‘parcels of vegetable garden including one to Giovanni Battista Coriasco and another to Rosmini, and a ‘plot usable for industry.’<sup>17</sup>

Between 1851–52, he put down the foundation of the Church of St Francis de Sales located to one side of the Pinardi house, facing south. A collapse briefly blocked construction an extension to the east of the Pinardi house with a wing parallel to the church, where Don Bosco also established his room and office. The new building was already available in October 1853, allowing a considerable leap forward in the number accommodated in the ‘house attached’, at least several dozen. Numbers did not go over the hundred mark before 1856.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Preaching in Milan as a guest of the St Aloysius Oratory

Don Bosco made his first trip outside Piedmont, with a passport, at the end of 1859. It is from the passport that we gain our first information as to his height, 38 inches or 1.63 metres, not too small

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13 Cf. Chap. 1, § 4.

14 [G. BOSCO], *Società di mutuo soccorso...*, pp. 4-5, OE IV 86-87

15 Cf. letters to Canon Alessandro Vogliotti on 7 and 28 March 1850 (Em 1 98 and 100); on the Fransoni matters, cf. Chap. 1. § 6.

16 Land and buildings were bordered to the east and north by the Filippi brother’s house and gardens, the Giardiniera road to the south and Mrs Bellezza’s house to the west. On January 26, 1853 Don Bosco, together with Fr Cafasso, redeemed the Pinardi property for 10,000 lire from the shared ownership of Frs Borel and Murialdo. On Cafasso’s death, thanks to his will, on June 23, 1860, Don Bosco became sole owner. (G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 146-147).

17 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 145-146.

18 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 178.

by comparison with the average height of Italians in the mid-19th century.<sup>19</sup> He had been invited to preach a Mission for the jubilee in the parish of St Simpliciano in Milan, the biggest parish (in terms of population) in the city, and at the St Aloysius Oratory, the most flourishing oratory in the Lombard metropolis. He arrived there on 29 November 1850, and preached for eighteen days. He was the guest of Fr Serafino Allievi (1819–91), 31 years old assistant at the oratory founded by generous Count Giacomo Mellerio (1777–1847), a friend of Romini's, and which was opened on Via S. Cristina on 12 May 1844. A strict collaborator of the Oratory Director was Fr Biagio Verri (1819–84) who had been at Valdocco a year earlier and who returned in 1857 to ask Don Bosco's advice on taking a different direction in life. It confirmed his decision to cooperate with Genoese Fr Nicolò Olivieri (1792–1864) in the *Pia Opera del riscatto delle Fanciulle More* (Pious Work for the Redemption of Moslem Girls) from Africa. Later on, Fr Daniele Comboni would be in touch with them. At the beginning of 1864, he met Don Bosco a number of times regarding his plans for evangelisation.<sup>20</sup>

According to what has been recorded, the mission went well. His sermon on Judgement was of a traditional kind, intended to strike salutary fear in people and move them to conversion. He preached a triduum to the young people from the oratory with a meditation in the morning and evening and some reminders to conclude with. We have some brief notes on outlines of stories or dreams on the difficult path to eternity. Then followed topics dear to him: the precious nature of the soul and the obligation to direct everything to saving one's soul – 'If you lose your soul you have lost everything'; the great evil of scandal in God's eyes, for oneself and others; death, its uncertainty of time and place; 'Woe to the one who waits in order to convert,' 'You might lack the time, the will, the grace.' 'The speaker also took note of possible objections; 'the thought of death saddens us,' 'we are still young,' 'there's time.' He offered a clear answer to each of these: 'The damned thought that and meanwhile they are crying out in hell "*Oh si daretur hora*" [if only there was time]. Finally, the retreat was given a brighter note with the meditation on Paradise. In his concluding sermon the preacher gave advice and recipes for how to become a saint, ending with a 'unique reminder; prepare for death each month.'<sup>21</sup>

But no less important were the real and virtual links Don Bosco was able to establish with the people from Milan. At St Aloysius he got to know the Prefect of the Oratory, *Cavaliere* Giovanni Brambilla, of whose family traces are found years later in the *Epistolario* [Collection of Don Bosco's letters]. There was also a future correspondent, Giuseppe Guenzati, a textile merchant working at the Oratory, along with another business colleague, Giuseppe Pedraglio. The most interesting meeting was with Fr Allievi who was attracted then and later by Don Bosco's integrated notion of the oratory: not only a place for coming together at weekends but also for night school, a place for disseminating reading material, for making retreats; also a weekday oratory for students to help 'fulfil their school duties [= homework] and for giving rise to and nurturing a vocation to the clergy;' finally, a free boarding house for students. Allievi was also keen on the idea of 'a congregation of priests for the oratory' dedicated to the regular management of the oratories in the city.<sup>22</sup>

19 Blessed Tommaso Reggio, Bishop of Ventimiglia from 1877 to 1892 had met Don Bosco on a number of occasions, since, as we will recount further on, the Salesian work at Vallecrosia was in his diocese (cf. Chap 23, § 1.1) In his funeral eulogy on March 1, 1888, the Bishop remembered him thus: 'Small of stature though he was, his appearance reminded one of a peasant son.' (*Nelle solenni esequie di trigesima in suffragio del sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco...* S. Pierdarena, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1888, p. 23).

20 Cf. ..Chap. 2. § 6.

21 *1° giorno degli Esercizi dettati nell'Oratorio di S. Luigi in Milano 2 dicembre 1850* [pp. 1-3], ASC A 2250211.

22 Cf. his *Pensieri* 1863, a memorandum presented to Carlo Caccia Dominioni (1802-67), Auxiliary Bishop (1855-67); in G. BARZAGHI *Tre secoli di storia e pastorale degli Oratori milanesi*. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1985, pp. 236-238.

On his return from Milan, Don Bosco brought the Regulations of the St Aloysius Oratory back with him, identical to the prototype, the St Charles Oratory. We will note later the undoubted structural dependence on this of the regulations Don Bosco drew up. It would be less realistic to believe there was any dependence in spirit, and in the way to run an oratory. Don Bosco's oratory had been around for some years and was so vibrant it had already given rise to two others, in contexts and with a target group, aims and management approach that were noticeably different.<sup>23</sup> There is ample documentation to demonstrate his capacity for leadership and animation and a very personal style which had already taken shape prior to the encounters in Milan.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. Don Bosco recognised as Director-in-chief of the oratories (31 March 1852)

While engaged in buying and selling in the outlying district of Valdocco, Don Bosco had to deal with a certain lack of agreement regarding his primary responsibility for managing three oratories. In fact, his name was often found linked with those of his regular collaborators. In the previously mentioned request for aid from the *Schools for the Poor* on 20 February 1850, he signed the request 'as the one in charge of these three oratories' after naming various priests 'particularly dedicated' to them.<sup>25</sup> In another letter in February 1851 he asked the Pope for indulgences for the boys as 'Father John Baptist Bosco with his priest friends working in the oratories for young working boys in the city of Turin.'<sup>26</sup> In July 1851 'Fr J. Bosco and other clergy looking after the oratories for young people' sought 'permission to bless the foundation stone' for the Church of St Francis de Sales.<sup>27</sup>

Undoubtedly, Don Bosco was recognised by everyone as the sole and exclusive individual responsible for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, but some of his collaborators were probably convinced that they were at least equally responsible for managing the other two. No surprise then that at the beginning of the 1850's there was some dissatisfaction and concern expressed by a few, and some divergence and approach among them.<sup>28</sup> Even St Leonard Murialdo, toward the end of his life, wrote to one of his confreres about the incompatibility of his cousin Roberto with Don Bosco: 'The Lord makes use of people to benefit others and also makes use of them to crucify and thus sanctify them. Would you like an example? Don Bosco and my cousin Dr (Fr) Roberto Murialdo were both saints, yet one was the others cross. Don Bosco was never happy with what Roberto was doing at the Guardian Angel Oratory, so Roberto was a cross for Don Bosco; and vice versa, Don Bosco was a cross for Roberto because he was never happy with him.'<sup>29</sup>

More relevant was the impatience felt by Fr Pietro Ponte and his helpers in charge of the St Aloysius Oratory. They reproached Don Bosco for his excessive autonomy in the way he worked, the unequal distribution of financial resources and equipment, the lack of reciprocity among the three youth centres. Naturally, there was no doubt that Don Bosco, while maintaining overall direction of all the three oratories, was focusing his major efforts on the Francis De Sales Oratory, providing more room, buying things, planning new buildings. There was also his growing interest –

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23 Cf. Chap. 10. § 2.

24 In this regard we can clearly see the differences on a number of points of view from G. BARZAGHI *Tre secoli di storia e pastorale degli Oratori milanesi...*, pp. 257-273; ID., *Il significato storico della presenza salesiana nella diocesi di Milano*, "Scuola Cattolica" 125 (1997) 307-336; along the same lines as G. Barzaghi, E. APECITI *L'oratorio ambrosiano da San Carlo ai giorni nostri*. Milan, Ancora 1998, pp. 64-69.

25 Em I 96-97.

26 Em I 124.

27 Em I 131.

28 These facts are recalled in Chaps. XXVII and XXXII-XXXIII of MB IV 309-317 and 366-386 on the basis of documents from that period amongst which the quoted *Relazione* (Report) by Giuseppe Brosio, quad. 11 1-4.

29 Letter to Vincenzo Blotto 3 December 1895, in S. LEONARDO MURIALDO, *Epistolario*, ed. A. Marengo, Vol. V. Rome, Libreria Editrice Murialdana 1973, p. 54.

within and beyond the festive oratory – in the ‘houses attached’. The Porta Nuova district and St Aloysius Oratory became the focus of his special attention in the 1870’s with subsequent results in the early 80’s when the oratory was complemented by the newly constructed Church of St John the Evangelist and attached college.

Fr Borel took the initiative in healing the rifts. He did so by referring to their spirit, which we see immediately in the opening paragraph of a letter he wrote to Fr Pietro Ponte who was in Rome with Marchioness Barolo and Silvio Pellico. ‘The good of the oratories weighs on me a lot,’ he wrote on 23 October 1851 ‘since we recognise that unity among our members at whatever level is the best advice, because this way we will have God with us. Therefore let us all be in agreement, with divine assistance, in promoting this unity so much desired, both by working together more in this spirit and by removing everything that runs contrary to it.’ Fr Ponte replied on 4 November: ‘The unity you so much desire among the oratory directors is the main object of my concern, and I yearn with all my heart for a time when all our differences are resolved, because when we are in agreement surely we can hope for more abundant help from the Lord and our efforts can be more deserving. I believe that the origin of the disunity we deplore among us comes from not having a leader we can turn to, and from excessive *silence* reigning among us. I am not alone in deploring this. Please try to remedy these inconveniences and the source of the disunity will have been removed.’<sup>30</sup>

This discussion highlights how heartfelt was the mission of the oratory work in Turin for so many diocesan priests who supported Don Bosco in the perception of the problematic situation of young people, priests who were available to adopt common approaches to doing something about it. Nevertheless, his closest collaborators, led by the zealous and enterprising Fr Borel, were well aware that genuine solidarity could not diminish his role as protagonist in this oratory work. For his part, Don Bosco would never have renounced his own primary responsibility in carrying out a mission he felt he had been given not from below but from above.

There are some interesting pointers in this regard, documented by correspondence in the early 1850’s. Writing to Antonio Rosmini on the possibility of a ‘new building’ for the Valdocco oratory, he employed a special expression: ‘Already a few similar oratories have been opened in Turin which, *however it may seem*, I find myself at the head of.’<sup>31</sup> A month later, dealing with the same issue with a close collaborator of Rosmini’s, Fr Carlo Gilardi, he showed how building development at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was tied in with the interests of the others: ‘Having material and spiritual support for the oratories which Divine Providence has seen opened on the three main sides of the city,’ ‘the Government and the City, keen on public instruction, have shown themselves in favour of the oratories and have often shown a desire to establish day schools in all three oratories. I have not been able to meet this desire for want of teachers.’<sup>32</sup> In a letter to Cardinal Antonelli on 28 August 1850, he signed himself as ‘Fr John Bosco, Director of the city oratories near the Refuge,’ attaching separate petitions to the Pope for spiritual favours on behalf of the ‘Congregation’ set up in each of them.<sup>33</sup> In one of the petitions he further describes himself as the ‘Director of the Oratories entitled the Guardian Angel, St Aloysius Gonzaga and the Francis de Sales Oratory established in Turin to instruct abandoned youth in religion and piety.’<sup>34</sup>

Dossier no. 4589 of the *Grande Cancelleria* found in the City of Turin’s Historical Archives is headed: ‘Bosco, Father Giovanni, director of the three Oratories.’ Among others there, we find a letter from July 1851 in which Don Bosco asked Victor Emmanuel II for a grant to help with managing the three oratories, signing it: ‘Your humble supplicant, S. Bosco Gio. Director of the

30 The two letters can be found in MB IV 313-315, 316-317.

31 Letter of March 11, 1850, Em 1 99.

32 Letter of April 15, 1850, Em 1 101-102.

33 Em I 108.

34 To Pius IX, August 28, 1850, Em 1 111

aforementioned oratories.’ Canon Ottavio Moreno, in charge of the Royal Treasury, also wrote to the King about Don Bosco ‘at the head of three gatherings of young people who come together, under the banner of religion, and these gatherings, as St Philip Neri did earlier, are called oratories.’ The Canon was supporting the request for a grant (he suggested the considerable sum of 10,000 lire) for the construction of the Church of St Francis de Sales.<sup>35</sup>

Don Bosco had no need to be particularly concerned, since he was sure of the goodness of his cause and totally absorbed in looking for ways and means to increase the vitality of, and guarantee stability and continuity to, the work he had undertaken. It was precisely in 1851–52 as we shall see later, that he was bringing together and working on a group of young men (boys really) who would cooperate with him in perfect harmony and spirit in realising his plans on behalf of ‘poor and abandoned’ youth. He was aware that it would have been more difficult getting this from adult collaborators, as well-intentioned as they might be, but of different temperament, already formed and less able to join in with his spirit and temperament.<sup>36</sup>

At the end of March 1852, at the request of Fr Borel and some ‘priests, promoters of the young people’s oratories in the city,’ ratification arrived from Archbishop Fransoni. Fr Borel, who was with Don Bosco from the outset, had ‘respectfully’ requested Archbishop Fransoni to first of all appoint a ‘spiritual director’ for each of the three oratories, suggesting Don Bosco for St Francis de Sales, Fr Rossi for St Aloysius, and Fr Roberto Murialdo for the Guardian Angel Oratory. He then asked that the latter two be subordinate to the first ‘as has been the practice up until now.’<sup>37</sup>

The Archbishop, who was always well-disposed toward Don Bosco and his work, did not delay in replying. The text of the decree he issued demonstrated unconditional faith in the priest of the oratories, dispelling any doubt and protest. But above all it was an official document conferring a ‘mission’ on Don Bosco, no longer just something he felt in subjective terms but as someone ‘sent,’ and this coming from God through his high representative on earth, the bishop and pastor of the diocese. He was already familiar for some time with a truth of faith which was equivalent to a dogma: ‘Our Pastors unite us to the Pope. The Pope unites us to God.’<sup>38</sup> The solemn nature of the Archbishop’s literary form was an expression of this: ‘*Licence as Director-in-chief of the Oratories of St Francis de Sales, the Holy Guardian Angel and St Aloysius in Turin for Fr John Bosco ...*’ ‘I congratulate you, worthy priest of God, since by working with tireless charity, you have been able to establish the never adequately praised congregation of poor boys in the public Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco. We judge it appropriate to attest, via this letter, to our great pleasure by appointing you, effective as of now, Chief Spiritual Director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, to which we would like those of St Aloysius Gonzaga and the Holy Guardian Angel to be joined and be dependent on, so that the work begun with such auspicious potential may progress and grow in the bond of charity for the true glory of God and great edification of our neighbour. We grant you all the faculties necessary and appropriate for this purpose ... Given in Turin on this thirty-first day of March in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-two. *Signed* Filippo Ravina V.G. *Counter-signed* Ballardore, Chancellor. *Copy conforms to the original.* In faith, Turin, 12 May 1868. Dr Gaudi, Pro-Chancellor’<sup>39</sup>

35 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, “*Sacra Real Maestà*”..., RSS 13 (1994) 275, 295, 308-309.

36 Cf. Chap. 10 § 3 and Chap. 11, § 6.

37 Archiepiscopal Archives Turin, *Provvisioni semplici* 1852 v. 1, p. 362: the text is reported in Em I 152, note on line 7.

38 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo*, Turin, tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1850, p. 1, OE IV 121; ID., *Avvisi ai cattolici*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, p. 3, OE IV 165.

39 The copy of the document was provided for Don Bosco who had asked for it to include it in a memorandum entitled *Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii et nonnulla decreta ad eamdem spectantia* (Turin, Tip. dell’Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales 1868, pp. 1-2, OE XVIII 573-574) to be presented to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in support of the request for

## 5. A church 'for abandoned youth'

Don Bosco began with nothing in financial terms. Critically, buildings and land were leased, not owned. But the time for buying and expanding did arrive. The first considerable construction in terms of dimension and cost was the church dedicated, obviously to St Francis de Sales: 'The first such church' he wrote to Rosmini 'to be built for abandoned youth in Piedmont.'<sup>40</sup> In fact, with the growing number of boys flocking to the Oratory and the increase in residents of the 'house attached,' the small chapel he had established in the primitive Pinardi shed became too small. Initially it measured 15m long and 6m wide, though later enlarged somewhat. On the other hand, the new church was 28 metres by 11.308 metres compared with the 90 square metres of the earlier chapel. Don Bosco left a note on it in the *Cenno storico*: 'The number of boys coming to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales is extraordinary, so we have planned another church and on 20 July, [1851] *Cavaliere* Cotta laid the foundation stone and Canon Moreno blessed it among a huge crowd of people.' There was also an enthusiastic address from Fr Barrera.<sup>41</sup>

Authorisation to build was sought from Mayor Giorgio Bellono on 12 June. Signed by Don Bosco and Engineer Federico Blachier was an attached 'Plan for building a church and extensions to buildings related to the shelter for youth at risk to be erected at Valdocco, a district within this city.' The building council gave a favourable opinion on the plans on 24 June, and the City Council approved them on 30 June. The King also expressed his pleasure on 25 June.<sup>42</sup> Construction was entrusted to contractor Federico Bocca, who is also found along with Blachier among the members of the committee promoting the Lottery organised to tackle the realisation of the twofold project.

Before trying the lottery approach, Don Bosco turned to charity, widening the circle of relationships with Church and civil authorities and private benefactors. The first letter we know of was to Antonio Rosmini on 28 March, already mentioned. Inviting him to 'lend a charitable hand' he informed him that 'expenses for the church' had been 'calculated by the architect as being thirty thousand francs.'<sup>43</sup> Fr Carlo Gilardi replied in his superior's name, offering a certain number of books, all the works of the founder, allowing him to keep the proceeds from their sale. Don Bosco accepted.<sup>44</sup> On 13 June, he also appealed to the King and whoever in the Court was able to support the request.<sup>45</sup> Given a mostly positive opinion from the Royal Treasurer, Canon Ottavio Moreno, the Sovereign sent a personal grant of 1,000 lire and had a further 10,000 lire disbursed over three instalments.<sup>46</sup>

Don Bosco could rely on two great faithful benefactors, both women, among others at Court: Countess Carlotta Callori di Vignale and Marchioness Maria Fassati, 'ladies in waiting' of Queen Maria Adelaide, two noblewomen who often appear in this history. He also sent a letter and circular to the bishops of Piedmont.<sup>47</sup>

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approval of the Salesian Society.

40 To Antonio Rosmini, May 25, 1851, Em I 126. Don Bosco wrote similarly of a setting adapted as an 'oratory' for the boys religious practices describing it as a 'chapel destined solely for the boys' or of 'the first chapel destined exclusively for youth,' in the *Cenno storico* and *Cenni storici* respectively (in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 42 and 63) in reference to the room adapted at the Refuge in December 1844.

41 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico*..., in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 56; MO (2010) 170

42 Cf. Em I 128.

43 Em I 126.

44 To Fr C. Gilardi, 4 June 1851, Em I 127.

45 Cf. text of the letter in A. GIRAUDO, "*Sacra Real Maestà*"..., pp. 296-297; and the favourable opinion of the Economist General on September 24, 1851, pp. 308-309.

46 Cf. letters of reply from the King and the Prefect of the Royal House, Duke Pasqua di S. Giovanni indicated in Em I 128-129 and the protocol note from the ministry of Grace and Justice, headed by Giovanni De Foresta, Em I 132.

47 Cf. Em I 131-134.

As work progressed, Don Bosco saw that donations were insufficient for managing expenses that had gone well beyond what had been predicted, given that he was also enlarging the hospice at the same time. The time was ripe for attracting the attention of public opinion. 'Our Church' he wrote to Rosminian, Fr Francesco Puecher on 22 October 1851 'has gone as far as the roof and this autumn we hope to lay the tiles. It's just that the architect's calculation of fr. 20,000 has tripled before the work is completed.'<sup>48</sup> The same day he asked the city mayor for exemption 'from paying the tax owed for the permit to build the church and extend the attached premise.'<sup>49</sup>

All he could do was have recourse to an expedient that would get him out of trouble on any number of future occasions: a lottery. 'Lacking the money to continue the church,' he wrote in the *Cenno storico*, 'we put our hand to a lottery to be held the following year and this found most favourable reception. We collected three thousand, three hundred [more precisely 3,521] items which, when costs were subtracted, gave us a net result of 26 thousand francs.'<sup>50</sup> Perhaps it was more, if one considers that 99,999 tickets were allowed at 50 cents a ticket.<sup>51</sup>

The lottery took off officially on 9 December 1851, when the request for approval was submitted and granted the same day by the Superintendent of Finance, Count Alessandro Pernati di Momo, a benefactor of the Oratory. He appeared among the 'promoters' of the 1857 lottery along with his wife, Count and Countess Cacherano di Bricherasio. She was also a promoter for the 1865–67 lotteries, while her husband was a member of the organising committee. 'Administrators and other members' – people making up the committee – were priests, nobility, City Councillors, professionals, bankers, entrepreneurs.<sup>52</sup>

There was no category of individual he did not reach out to, beginning with civil authorities, the Prefect, Superintendent of Finance, the Mayor, and not just for the bureaucratic requirements. A circular and letters were sent out to individuals of every social stratum.

In the first part of the lengthy circular he recalled the origins, ten years earlier, and development of the 'modest work of charity' known as the *Oratory of St Francis de Sales*. In the second part he noted current urgent needs; The growing number of boys had led to the need 'to put our hand to a larger building' and to build a more spacious 'new chapel.'

Ordinary finances being insufficient, the promoters had seized upon the idea of a lottery, asking for donations of any kind, 'silk, wool or metal' or 'the work of a renowned artist or simple artisan, or of a hard-working craftsman, or from some charitable noblewoman' to be offered as a prize. The lottery was able to encourage the collaboration of 'the special benevolence with which people at every level and of every degree had promoted and encouraged the Oratory's development in various ways: the Senate, Government, City Hall, King and Queen, 'prelates and distinguished personages.'<sup>53</sup>

Don Bosco had an opportunity with this first important lottery to qualify himself in a new 'profession', one he would then exercise for the rest of his life – distributing lottery tickets by post<sup>54</sup> or by hand in casual encounters or planned visits, to people, at every level of society. He sent 200 to the Bishop of Acqui, the Capuchin Modesto Contratto, and received the corresponding 100 lire.

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48 Em I 134.

49 Em I 135.

50 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in Don Bosco nella Chiesa, p. 57; MO (2010) 172-174.

51 Cf. ...July 14, 1552, quoted in G. BRACCO.....

52 Cf. *Verbale dell'estrazione della lotteria a beneficio dell'Oratorio maschile di San Francesco di Sales in Valdocco, 14 luglio 1852*, ASC A 0210619, cit. in G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO, *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 133, no. 21

53 Circ. 20 December 1851, Em I 139-141.

54 He wrote a gracious letter under the form of a home visit, with regards, compliments, to his faithful friend Canon Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi (1812-91) from Vercelli; future Bishop of Vigevano (Em I 141-142).



Other bishops accepted and sold more than 2,000 tickets.<sup>55</sup> A thousand lire, the result of the 'charity of the faithful of the diocese,' reached him from the Bishop of Biella, Pietro Losana; he wanted it to be a sign of recognition for the help given young people from Biella who were coming to the Oratory 'to enjoy themselves, be instructed and keep holy the days dedicated to the lord.'<sup>56</sup>

While the lottery was being run, Don Bosco sent out a circular of invitation to a performance of what pupils attending the night classes had learned. Ferrante Aporti and the Bishop of Casale, Luigi Nazari di Calabiana were present, and most appreciative of it.<sup>57</sup> At the same time he appealed to various individuals for a range of favours: the Minister for War, Alfonso Lamarmora; Fr Stanislao Gazelli, the Court Almoner; the Mayor of Turin to obtain sufficiently large premises to display gifts, a hall near St Dominic's church; printer Pietro Marietti, one of the depositors for the donations and in charge of moving them to the display hall; Count Camillo Cavour, Minister for Finance, whom he asked for exemption from postal expenses for the lottery; the Superintendent General of Finance for additional expertise and repeated postponements of the draw, from 30 April 30 to 31 May, then 30 June, and finally, 12 July,<sup>58</sup> given the arrival of new donations, the relevant reports and an increase in the number of tickets.<sup>59</sup>

At the end of this first huge gamble, Don Bosco sent a complimentary dossier 'To the illustrious and well-deserving ladies and gentlemen who contributed to the success of the initiative. It contained a copy of the *Appeal* dated 16 January 1852 (the text of the printed circular sent out on 20 December 1851, the *program* for the lottery, the list of committee members (20), promoters (46 men and 86 women).<sup>60</sup>

The *Cenno storico* also records the rapid completion of the church: '1851 [=1852]. On 20 June, the day of Our Lady of Consolation, the new church was blessed and the sacred ceremonies celebrated for the first time with great display, much joy and in the presence of a large number of distinguished individuals. The following poem gives an indication of what happened on that day: *Come augel di ramo in ramo* etc.'<sup>61</sup>

The date of the blessing was indicated in advance in a letter to Bishop Losana: 'You can imagine, My Lord, the joy and consolation I will experience from now on, just at the thought of the solemnity which will take place on that day we have so much awaited.'<sup>62</sup> He had initially invited the Archbishop of Vercelli, Alessandro d'Angennes, to bless the church, then the Bishop of Ivrea, Luigi Moreno. They could not accept due to other commitments. The latter's brother, Canon Ottavio, was not present. Don Bosco's great friend and benefactor and sensitive to works of charity in Turin, he passed away on 2 May at 73 years of age. The blessing was done by Fr Agostino Gattino (1816–69), parish priest of Sts Simon and Jude, the parish the Oratory was in.

The church offered the possibility of celebrating church ceremonies even though it lacked many of the essential accessories and furniture: an altar to St Aloysius, choir loft, candlesticks, bell tower, pulpit, marble balustrade, bell, baldacchino. These were provided by excellent and devout benefactors: a well-to-do gentleman who worked at the St Aloysius Oratory, Michele Scanagatti, Fr Cafasso, banker *Cavaliere* Giuseppe Luigi Duprè (d. 1884), Marquis Domenico Fassati (1804–78),

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55 Cf. to Bishop M. Contratto, 21 May 1852, Em I 158.

56 Cf. to Bishop P. Losana, 4 May 1852, Em I 155-156.

57 Cf. Circ., May 14, 1852, Em 157.

58 Cf. Letters from January to June 1852: Em I 144-145, 146, 148-149, 150, 151-152, 154-155, 159, 163-164.

59 Cf. Em I 164.

60 *Catalogo degli oggetti offerti per la lotteria a beneficio dell'oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco*. Turin, tip. dir. da Paolo De-Agostini 1852, XVIII p., OE IV 145-162.

61 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico*..., in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 57.

62 Letter of 4 May, Em I 156.

Count Carlo Cays (1813–82).<sup>63</sup>

The 1852 lottery was followed by three other smaller ones in 1852–55.<sup>64</sup> The main prize for the lottery, which was under-subscribed, was an ingenious iron safe.<sup>65</sup> The one that followed in 1854 used prizes remaining from the earlier one.<sup>66</sup> (Among the valuable items for the 1855 lottery were nine paintings and two bas-reliefs. President of the Committee was Doctor Giuseppe Vallauri, who gave free medical service to the Oratory. The draw took place on 12 July.<sup>67</sup>

## 6. First initiation in apologetic prevention for Christians.

The freedom granted in Piedmont over the end of 1847 and the early months of 1848 as we have seen, were viewed negatively by Don Bosco for the abuses they gave rise to in his opinion.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, spiritually aligned with Guala's and Cafasso's Pastoral Institute or *Convitto*, he had certainly experienced the turbulence and emotions of those months, recalled decades later by an historian of the Piedmontese Church and Cafasso's biographer.<sup>69</sup> In any case, not given to nostalgia and sterile complaints, he could not but feel committed to just one thing: using freedom for good. On many occasions, he insisted on encouraging the boys to have no human respect in opposing the libertine's mirage of freedom and in making use of true freedom.

In his *Avvisi ai Cattolici* (Advice to Catholics), offering *three special reminders for youth*, Don Bosco wrote: 'And when they say we are in a time of freedom does that mean to let everyone live as he wants? We have to say that this freedom is not given by God but by man, and therefore must in no way be confused with religious matters; or we could respond that if we are in a time of freedom, then let us live as we want to in matters of Religion.'<sup>70</sup>

It was an invitation to openness and freedom which shortly afterwards he put into the mouth of the main character in his biographical account *La forza della buona educazione* (The power of a good upbringing). Peter was encouraged to break the precept of abstinence from meat by his friend, who appealed to the new order set up by the *Statute* or new constitution: 'You are well aware that we are in a time of freedom, a time when everyone can write, speak, think and do as he wants.' Peter replied: 'The freedom you speak of has no place where matters commanded or forbidden by legitimate human authority are concerned and much less so before God. In heaven there is no constitution which can abrogate the Divine Law ... But if you want to insist on the word "freedom" let's do it his way: I'll leave you free to eat what you want because I can't stop you, and you will certainly have the courtesy to leave me free to eat what I want.'<sup>71</sup>

What especially concerned Don Bosco was Protestant proselytism. This was represented for him by the Reformation group known as the Waldensians who were active in Turin and Piedmont. In reality, much of Italy was traversed by countless Protestant preaches under the banner of the

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63 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 58-59.

64 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO, *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 130-138.

65 Cf. letter to Superintendent of Finance on 13 February and August 1853. Em I 189 and 202-203

66 Cf. letter to Superintendent of Finance on 27 January 1854, Em I 215-216; circular, 13 March, Em I 222-223.

67 Cf. letter to Superintendent of Finance on 21 November 1854, Em I 238-239, and 22 March 1855, Em I 251; circular, 8 May, Em I 253-254; letter to Mayor, 11 July, eve of the draw, Em I 260-261; circular, 16 July, Em I 261-262.

68 Cf. Chap 1, § 4.

69 Cf. T. CHIUSO, *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai giorni nostri*, Vol. III, Chap. V. *La Riforma e lo Statuto. Prime contese e prime vittorie*, Turin, Giulio Speirani e figli 1888, pp. 201-251; L. NICOLIS DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso...*, Vol. I, p. XXXIX e 182-183.

70 [G. BOSCO] *Avvisi ai cattolici...*, p. 27, OE IV 189.

71 G. BOSCO, *La forza della buona educazione...*, pp. 59-60, OE VI 333-334.

multi-hued phenomenon of the *Risorgimento*. They attempted to fit in with the national *Risorgimento* movement, with a view to promoting radical religious reform.<sup>72</sup> The ‘evangelisation’ of Italy was something that international Protestantism viewed with enthusiasm, and did not skimp in funding many initiatives aimed at mass Christian re-conversion. They felt that traditional Catholic culture was in crisis, most recently made more vulnerable by the presumed decline of the papacy.<sup>73</sup> Further ahead we will see that Don Bosco did not stop at Piedmont and did not tire of pursuing and opposing Protestant propaganda wherever he believed it was particularly threatening. It was one of the reasons behind establishing a number of works for young people in Vallecrosie, La Spezia, Florence and Rome.

From 1850, the Porta Nuova area in Turin was a centre of Waldensian activity. In 1847 Don Bosco opened the St Aloysius Oratory there. A few dozen metres away on 20 October 1851, the Waldensian community attended the solemn ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone for their first church in the area, and a month later Jean-Pierre Meille (1817–84) founded the weekly *La Buona Novella*.<sup>74</sup> The pastor of the Waldensian community in Turin was Amedeo Bert (1809–83). Meille was the evangelist mentioned by Don Bosco along with Francesco Pugno in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.<sup>75</sup>

Bert, pastor from 1833 of the ‘Chapel of the Protestant legation in Turin and from 1849 of the newly erected Waldensian parish, had published a prominent work on the history of the Waldensian: *Catholic Christians according to the primitive Church*.<sup>76</sup> This historical, theological presentation of the evangelisation origins of the Waldensian Church and the dramatic events up until their emancipation on 17 February 1848,<sup>77</sup> was prefaced by an important introduction on freedom of conscience, worship and proclamation in a non-autocratic, civil and political society.<sup>78</sup> The book was dedicated to Marquis Roberto Taparelli d’Azeglio, main promoter of the petition to King Charles Albert for the emancipation of the Waldensians and Jews. A further six hundred citizens, clergy and laity, had signed it.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the appendix had a prominent ‘Note’, *Comparison with some Roman Catholic teachings and the Holy Scripture which Waldensians accept*.<sup>80</sup>

Years later, and somewhat shrewdly, Don Bosco noted that with the advent of press freedom ‘Catholics trusting in civil legislation which up till then had protected and defended them’ now found themselves disarmed before the Protestants: while the latter ‘were prepared and provided with every material and moral means’ Catholics ‘had a few classical or erudite newspapers and books

72 Cf. G. SPINI, *Risorgimento e Protestanti*, Turin, Claudiana 1998 (reprint of revised and expanded 1989 edition).

73 Cf. V. VINAY, *Luigi Desanctis e il movimento evangelico tra gli italiani durante il Risorgimento*, Turin, Editrice Claudiana 1965, 369 pp.; V. VINAY, *Spiritualità delle Chiese evangeliche in Italia fra il 1861 e il 1878, in Chiesa e religiosità in Italia dopo l’Unità (1861-1878)...*, *Relazioni II...*, pp. 129-153; P. RICCA, *Le Chiese evangeliche*, in G. DE ROSA, T. GREGORY, A. VAUCHEZ, *Storia dell’Italia religiosa*, Vol. III *L’età contemporanea*, ed. G. De Rosa. Roma-Bari, Laterza 1995, pp. 407-440; M. FINCARDI *De la crise du conformisme religieux au XIXe siècle. Les conversions au protestantisme dans une zone de la plaine du Pô*, “Archives de Sciences sociales des Religions” 43 (1998) no. 102 (April-June) 5-27 (with a copious bibliography).

74 On the Evangelical and Waldensian movement from 1840 to 1860. cf. V. VINAY, *Storia dei Valdesi*, Vol. III *Dal movimento evangelico italiano al movimento ecumenico (1848-1978)*, Turin, Editrice Claudiana 1980, pp. 11-72.

75 Cf. MO (2010) 182

76 Cf. A. BERT, *I Valdesi, ossia, I Cristiani-cattolici secondo la chiesa primitiva abitanti le così dette valli di Piemonte. Cenni storici*, Turin, Gianini e Fiore 1849, XXXV-498 p.

77 Cf. Chap 1, § 4.

78 Cf. A. BERT, *I Valdesi...*, pp. I-XXXV.

79 Cf. in A. Bert... the text of the petition to the King, Azzeglie’s circular to the bishops of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the reply from four of them. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco regrets the initiative and the signature of ‘600 prominent citizens, and a great number of whom were clergymen’. [MO (2010)], in reality less than a sixth of the total number.

80 Cf. A. BERT, *I Valdesi...*, pp. 399-410.

but no newspaper, no book to put into the hands of ordinary people.’<sup>81</sup> This was the most vulnerable group among literate people, and even more lacking in experience were poor and abandoned young people. This was the target group he wanted to address through his written material (and in time with the *Letture Cattoliche* or Catholic Readings), adopting a popular language and simple style.<sup>82</sup> What he said at the beginning of his series on the lives of the Popes became an oft-repeated and brief, condensed literary profession of faith. ‘I should first state that I write for the people, therefore avoiding any affected style, any doubtful or pointless discussion. I try to reduce style and content to the simplicity that comes from combining historical precision with theology and Italian grammar’<sup>83</sup>praised by many and, if anything, originating from the ‘desire to be simple’ which ‘sacrificed all the more legitimate ambitions of the writer.’<sup>84</sup> More precisely put, neither by temperament nor culture had Don Bosco ever flirted with abstract and complicated prose. Whoever it was he was addressing, he adopted only concrete, immediate, terse language and as a result simplicity could sometimes become simplification of opponents’ motives and arguments, or lack of critical approach when opposing them or using sources, a tendency to a reductive form of polemic. His writing could, if anything, be easily understood, persuasive, reassuring for believers who needed reassurance and to be confirmed by others’ knowledge rather than be acculturated and persuaded. Don Bosco’s polemical approach followed that of his times, which meant opposing sides being defensive and precise in identifying and separating out the things that divided them rather than seeking what united them. The anti-roman opposition of priests who had abandoned the Church was especially bitter and provoked like reaction from the other side.<sup>85</sup>

His first apologetic, polemical catechetical work goes back to 1850. He was illustrating the arguments that *The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church is the only true Church of Jesus Christ. Advice for Catholics. Our Pastors unite us to the Pope, the Pope unites us to God*. In around twenty pages, the Catholic Faith was reduced to its essentials in points more obviously under threat from heretics and non-Catholics. Alarm bells were already ringing from the opening gambit ‘To the Catholic reader: Catholics, open your eyes. Serious traps are being laid for you in an attempt to separate you from the One, true holy Religion that is only preserved within the Church of Jesus Christ.’ The bishops and the ‘Vicar of Jesus Christ’ had ‘in various ways’ warned of ‘the snares set for Catholics’ and the ‘many evil-intentioned people.’ ‘They [the new evangelism]’ the author warned, ‘are fooling themselves and fooling others. Do not believe them. Rather, pull together as one heart and mind with your pastors who always teach you the truth.’ In fact ‘where the Successor of St Peter is, there is the true Church of Jesus Christ. No one is in the true Religion unless he is a Catholic; no one is Catholic without the Pope. Our pastors and especially the bishops unite us with the Pope, the Pope unites us with God.’<sup>86</sup>

In the pages that followed, under the heading ‘Basics of the Catholic Religion’ Don Bosco presented an apologetic scheme he never abandoned in the future: I. *General notions of the true Religion*; II. *Only one religion is the true one* [the Catholic Church which alone has the characteristics of the Divinity; One Holy, Catholic, Apostolic]. III. *The Heretics’ churches do not have the characteristics of the Divinity*. IV. *There is no Church of Jesus Christ in the Heretics’ churches*. [the ‘heretics’ are, indiscriminately, ‘Jews, Mahommedans, Waldensians, and

81 MO (2010) 180.

82 Cf. MO (2010) 180-81.

83 G. BOSCO, *Vita di san Pietro principe degli apostoli...* [fasc. XI January 1857 of the “Letture Cattoliche”], p. 7, OE VIII 299.

84 Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di “Don Bosco”*, Vol. I, Part I, *Storia sacra*, p. XIII (Introductory note); Vol. III, *La storia d’Italia*, Turin, SEI 1935, p. LXI (Introduction); cf. also p. LXVI; M. BARBERA, *San Giovanni Bosco educatore*, Turin, SEI 1942, pp. 104-105.

85 On the ‘almost inevitable’ controversy see the realistic observations of V. VINAY, *Storia dei Valdesi...*, vol. III, pp. 46-59.

86 [G. BOSCO], *La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana...*, pp. 3-5, OE IV 123-125.

Protestants, i.e. Calvinists and Lutherans ‘as well as Waldo, ‘the head of the Waldensians’]. V. *A response to the Protestants* [‘when they say “we believe” in Christ and the Gospels therefore we are in the true Church’]. VI. *Protestants agree that Catholics are in the true Church*. If they do not want ‘to be eternally damned’ they should enter or re-enter or persevere in the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church.<sup>87</sup>

The *Avvisi ai cattolici*, adjusted and expanded, was republished in 1853 as the *Introduzione alle Letture Cattoliche* or Introduction to the Catholic Readings.<sup>88</sup> Small changes can be found throughout, but no. II was considerably expanded: *Only one is the true Religion*, and no. III: *The Heretics’ Churches*, insisting on the feature of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity found in the Catholic Church and absent in all the others. There was a completely new no. VI: *Three special reminders for youth* showing how ‘the young Catholic should behave in these times in order not to be fooled in religious matters.’ This focused on avoidance, and trust in the priest: ‘1. As much as possible avoid the company of those who speak of immodest things or try to deride our Holy Religion. 2. Never get into debate about Religion and if they try to make things difficult for you in this regard simply tell them: when I am sick I go to the doctor, if I have a dispute I go to my lawyer or the procurator, if I need medicine I go to the chemist, and in Religious matters I go to the priests who have studied Religious matters. 3. Never ever read bad books or newspapers.’<sup>89</sup>

This work reappeared in 1872 entitled *Basics of the Catholic Religion*, substantially unaltered from the 1853 version.<sup>90</sup> Following item IV, however, was a clear echo of Vatican Council I in the addition of three items: *About the Head of the Catholic Church*, *About Papal Infallibility*, *Advantages of the definition of Papal Infallibility*. They stressed the centrality of the papacy in the Church. The Pope is given ‘absolute authority, usually called *Primacy of honour and jurisdiction*, by dint of which he can command and forbid everything he judges appropriate for our spiritual and eternal benefit.’<sup>91</sup>

A significant sign of the changes he made were the consistent additions and modifications introduced into the second edition of the *Storia Sacra* (1853) which were no longer in question and answer form.<sup>92</sup> While moral aspects were retained and strengthened, a significant range of texts and references were added which highlighted the author’s specific intention to be controversial as well as catechetical, when it came to Jews and Protestants. The unity of Divine Revelation in both Testaments was emphasised strongly by going back to two fundamental statements; the expected Messiah has arrived and he is Jesus Christ, Son of God; the Catholic Church is the only legitimate Church of Christ.<sup>93</sup> This new arrangement, which we see evidence of in many variations throughout the text, was foreshadowed in the *Preface*, found in the heading *History of the New Testament* and in the *Introduction* to the seventh era dedicated to the history of Christ and in the *Conclusion* which was more developed than in the first edition. In the *Preface* he explained the christological outlook he wanted to provide by rewriting the text: ‘The providential aim of the Holy Books having been to keep faith in the Messiah promised by God after Adam’s fall, alive in mankind. Indeed the entire Old Testament history could be said to be a constant preparation for that most important event and

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87 [G. Bosco], *La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana...*, pp. 7-23, OE IV 127-143.

88 [G. Bosco], *Avvisi ai cattolici...*, 31 p., OE IV 165-193.

89 [G. Bosco], *Avvisi ai cattolici...*, pp. 25-27, OE IV 187-188.

90 G. BOSCO, *Fondamenti della cattolica religione*, Turin, tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1872, 43 p. OE XXIV 503-54; the three new paragraphs take up pp. 17-31, OE XXIV 519-533.

91 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Fondamenti della cattolica religione*, pp. 18-19, OE XXIV 520-521; the power of the Pope is further described in pp. 19-20 OE XXIV 521-522 and ultimately restated in the definition of infallibility: cf. pp. 24-25, OE XXIV 526-527.

92 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone arricchita di analoghe incisioni. Compilata dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*, 2nd and improved edition. Turin, Speirane e Tortone 1853, 200 pp.

93 Cf. N. CERRATO, *La catechesi di don Bosco nella sua “Storia Sacra”...*, pp. 71-80.

sought to note in a special way the promises and prophecies regarding our future Redeemer.<sup>94</sup>

This argument was put forward once more for the seventh era in the *Introduction*: 'Since the coming of the Saviour is the most important dogma on which our whole holy religion is based, it will certainly be of great use to briefly bring together here the main prophecies regarding it, noting how these come true in the person of Jesus Christ.'<sup>95</sup> Some concerned the fate of the Jewish people with decidedly archaic emphases. 'Among other things' the author noted 'the Prophets predicted that the Jews would be chastised by God for having the Messiah put to death, that all the Gentiles, that is all the idolatrous nations, would be called to the true Faith in the place of the unfaithful Jews. All these prophecies were literally fulfilled, as each one can see in the history of the Church, where we see that the Jewish nation a few years after the Saviour's death, was completely scattered, still remaining without a Temple, King and Priesthood.'<sup>96</sup> Later in the book, greater emphasis, in clearly anti-protestant polemic, was placed on the institution of the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.<sup>97</sup> There was an eloquent addition to the powers given to St Peter: 'feed my lambs, feed my sheep,' reinforcing the primacy of the pope and weakening the power of the bishops and the episcopal college, foreshadowing still more pointed statements in the future: 'By these words he wanted to signify that He was giving him and all his successors full and complete power *not only over the simple faithful but even over all the other Apostles and his ministers in all matters regarding faith and morals* and all matters regarding the spiritual good of the Christian faithful.'<sup>98</sup>

Finally, there was a new historical and doctrinal *Conclusion* illustrating the three 'special truths which are the basis of [obviously the Catholic] religion:' '1. The coming of the Messiah and therefore the vain expectation of the Jews. 2. The existence of a Church divinely founded by this Messiah. 3. Such Church being the Catholic Church or Church of Jesus Christ, both because the truths of the Holy Books are the same truths that our Church now teaches and because of its visible Head who governs us.'<sup>99</sup>

The contents of the book were represented by the diligent catechist in his *Maniere facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo Cristiano del 1855* (Easy way of learning Bible history for the use of the Christian people in 1855.)<sup>100</sup>

In the *Cattolico istruito* which we will deal with more extensively in the following chapter, Don Bosco tried a daring comparison with the well-equipped adversary Amedeo Bert. He dedicated four passages to the book *I Valdesi* (The Waldensians), mentioned earlier. They were critical comments with a superficial style of comparison in terms of the substance of the problems posed, and so very argumentative, even caustic. In truth, he had neither the time required for serious discussion nor a sufficiently developed theology or deeper critical understanding of Church history or precise notions on the freedoms resulting from the 1848 Constitution. One of the four passages was substantially an effort to lay bare the double series of 'lies' (errors of meaning, contradictions, mistakes in chronology, non-existent citations) that would demonstrate *the bad faith of Waldensian ministers*. It was no accident that *L'Armonia* quoted it literally when reviewing this issue of the *Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>101</sup>

In this case too, Don Bosco's pragmatic apologetics were not aimed so much at refuting his adversary's reasons and convincing him of his error, but rather at pastorally reassuring the faithful,

94 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 5.

95 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, pp. 145-148.

96 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 148.

97 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 191.

98 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 192. The added text shown in Italics.

99 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, pp. 193-194.

100 Cf. Chap. 9, § 5.

101 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XVII and XVIII, pp. 74-91, OE IV 380-397; *Bugie di Amedeo Bert, ministro valdese*, "L'Armonia", 21 June 1853, OE XXXVIII 25-26.

illustrating the historical and doctrinal reasons that should confirm them in a strong sense of belonging to their own Catholic community, by over-simplifying the other party's reasoning and radicalising its weak points.<sup>102</sup> What motivated him was his awareness of the exceptional risk of eternal loss which the faithful were running if lured to abandon the Church outside of which there was no salvation. 'Eminence!' he wrote in unusually anguished language to Cardinal Antonelli a few months before beginning the *Letture Cattoliche*, 'the wild beast is out of its lair and there is no armed hunter to terrify it; there are merely some secondary servants crying out for all their worth, but a dark and gloomy racket seeks to drown out their voices. The fact is that the Protestants are beginning to put up another church here in Turin.'<sup>103</sup> In fact it was opened on 15 December 1853.

He appeared to be heaping more risk upon himself, along with some positive reaction, as a result of his disturbing argumentation and publication of the *Letture Cattoliche*, which became the major vehicle for it. 'I was insulted by Protestants in writing, by word and with threats on several occasions,' he wrote to his friend Pietro De Gaudenzi, 'but the Lord has seen that at the moment I am visited almost daily by Protestants who come here to discuss what they find in *Letture Cattoliche*, but in good faith.'<sup>104</sup> Further on, he made other reference to this: 'The *Letture Cattoliche* are going well ... but poor D. Bosco is being got at and I am threatened terribly day and night. Still, no one can do any more that the Lord allows to happen.'<sup>105</sup>

Don Bosco entertains the readers in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* describing the attempts on his life and other attacks.<sup>106</sup> *La Civiltà Cattolica* also received reports of this. It announced the beginning of the *Catholic Readings* and reported some reactions: 'His enterprise has been blessed by the Church authorities and right from the time a trial edition was issued, it has aroused the ire and fears of heterodox propaganda. Two anonymous individuals sought him out. They spent two whole hours trying to dissuade him from publishing the *Catholic Readings*, first with exaggerated praise, then by encouraging him to take up historical writing, then by offering a bribe and finally by making atrocious death threats. He remained firm and these emissaries left empty-handed. We can infer the value of such publication from this. It is fully aimed at simple folk. May God bless him and his beautiful enterprise along with him.'<sup>107</sup>

## 7. The *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings)

Though not alone in his efforts, Don Bosco opened another front with the *Catholic Readings* in the peaceful struggle to advance, broaden and bolster his religious and moral, youthful and popular activity already going back some years. We will be providing a picture of this activity in the following chapter dedicated to Don Bosco's literary production in this very busy decade, so here we simply point to its beginnings and the involvement of people springing from it.

Don Bosco had already felt challenged by the problem of a Catholic popular press, and responded with the ambitious *Amico della gioventù* (The friend of youth).<sup>108</sup> A few weeks after it had closed down, a counter attack in this sector was proposed in a much higher and more authoritative setting. During the Piedmontese Bishops Conference at Villanovette from 25–29 July 1849, a commission was established made up of the Bishops of Ivrea, Bishop Moreno, and Mondovì, Bishop Ghilardi. Its job was to draft a plan for a periodical publication 'of the best and most useful

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102 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., p. 237; F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 302-310.

103 Letter of 31 May 1853, Em I 197.

104 Letter of 7 April 1853, Em I 194.

105 Letter of 19 January 1854, Em I 215.

106 MO (2010) 184-190.

107 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 4 (1853) II 204-205.

108 Cf. ...Chap 7, § 3.2.

ecclesiastical books.’ The Bishop of Ivrea also offered ‘communication and some reading material on a planned pious association for propagating good books for the faithful’ and ‘the bishops fully approved it and decided to back it.’<sup>109</sup>

Going quickly to the facts, in August, Bishop Moreno began publishing his *Collection of books in defence of the Catholic Religion* and shortly afterwards he began planning the *Letture Cattoliche* with Don Bosco. They began in March 1853.<sup>110</sup> To make it happen, the Bishop of Ivrea had made Fr (Dr) Francesco Valinotti available. He was its administrator over the first decade. But he had been involved from the outset in meetings with Don Bosco in Ivrea as well as by correspondence. On 10 June 1852, when Bishop Moreno was invited to celebrate the rite of blessing of the Church of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco informed him: ‘I have received the plan for our “library” from Mr Gallenghe with modifications you have wisely suggested. When you come to Turin we can talk about what we need to do next. At the beginning of the coming week I will send you the manuscript of *Avvisi ai cattolici*.’ This latter became the *Introduction* or No. 0 of the *Letture*,<sup>111</sup> Moreno replied, excusing himself for being unable to accept the invitation due to prior commitments but said he was ‘very happy to read the manuscript’, telling Don Bosco he had spoken with various members of the clergy about the *Letture* initiative and found they agreed with the need and that it should not fail to succeed.<sup>112</sup>

At the beginning of July, he announced that he was busy with the manuscript, sending back, ‘a page of variations and minor additions.’ He then expressed a wish ‘to know the changes’ introduced by Don Bosco ‘to the plan for booklets to be printed and distributed every month.’ ‘This enterprise,’ he added ‘is something I like very, very much and I beg you to put all the effort you can into it. I have already gained the support of zealous individuals and someone has given me a blank cheque to help with expenses.’<sup>113</sup> He was then careful to tell Don Bosco he was already seeing to the printing of the *Soldato Cristiano* (Christian soldier) for the army. He concluded: ‘The need continues to grow, so let’s put our hand to this small library. Let me know by return mail of any changes needed for the schedule.’<sup>114</sup> The following month he insisted: ‘I am waiting impatiently for your promised letter and I hope we can finally conclude arrangements for the Library.’<sup>115</sup>

In his 1852 *ad limina* Report, Bishop Moreno announced: ‘Since what has been published in the *Collection of good books in defence of the Catholic Religion*, which I have already spoken of, is not well understood by the people, that is, workers and farmers, I have thought of another publication to begin next January, which will consist of brief dialogues, dealing with what concerns the Catholic Religion and Christian living, in common and simple language. A small booklet will be published in Turin every month, the cost for a year being no more than two lire.’<sup>116</sup>

He was still pressing Don Bosco in December for a speedy start to the undertaking: ‘Everything should be ready for beginning this periodical publication. I am asking Your Reverence therefore to agree on the schedule with Canon Vallinotti and send it to me promptly so we can have it printed and distributed. We need to think of a third person, clergy or lay, to help. I suppose you will have

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109 Cf. Official minutes published by G. TUNINETTI, *Alle origini delle conferenze episcopali: Villanovetta di Saluzzo (1849)*, in *Contributi e documentazioni di storia religiosa*, Turin, Quaderni del Centro Studi “Carlo Trabucco”, 19, 1993, p. 110.

110 On the undoubted collaboration between Don Bosco and Bishop Moreno in the initiative, cf. P. BRAIDO, *L’educazione religiosa popolare e giovanile nelle “Letture Cattoliche” di don Bosco*, “Salesianum” 15 (1953) 650-655; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 347-368; L. BETTAZZI, *Obbediente in Ivrea. Monsignor Luigi Moreno vescovo dal 1848 al 1878*, Turin, SEI 1989, pp. 162-201.

111 Em I 160.

112 Letter to Don Bosco, 12 June 1852, ASC A 1422401.

113 Letter to Don Bosco, 4 August 1852, ASC A 1432402.

114 Letter to Don Bosco 16 August 1852, ASC A 1432403.

115 Letter to Don Bosco 4 September 1852, ASC A 1432404.

116 Quoted from L. BETTAZZI, *Obbediente in Ivrea...*, p. 176.



done the work of expanding the *Avvisi ai cattolici*? 'Unfortunately, Protestant propaganda is becoming even bolder. For our part let us provide Catholic propaganda.'<sup>117</sup> The bishop's involvement seems even more direct in the last letter of his in our possession, from February 1853: 'On Monday I wrote to Dr Vallinotti, asking him to let you know of the request by some for more frequent publications of 24 or 36 pages each, without increasing costs for subscribers. I am now letting you know of my idea that could also be shared by colleagues [we do not know which ones]. Since some are not so fond of material arguing against error and would much prefer edifying reading, we could satisfy their taste by publishing some of this kind every month.' He was thinking of a monthly edition of 36 pages with lives of the saints for that month, or for the first fortnight one year, the second the following year. It could also draw inspiration from the *Diario Cristiano* published by Marietti. He explained that he would 'gladly prepare the manuscript without adding to you or your colleague's work. Talk about it then, and next week you can write to me about it.' He then indicated 'very favourable reactions' he had received and the 'interest' aroused by no. 0 of the series, the *Avvisi ai cattolici*: 'From that I recommend you spare no effort and concern on the next issue.' He concluded: 'I presume you will have been in touch with Canon Zappata, and that he will give you full attention to reviewing items to be published, and there will not be much need to make observations or criticisms. As I told you, also send written or printed material to me here which you want speedily checked.'<sup>118</sup>

In his 1861 *ad limina* Report, he referred to 'Periodical publications, that is, the *Raccolta di buoni libri in difesa della religione cattolica* (Collection of good books in defence of the Catholic Religion) and the other entitled *Letture Cattoliche*, both founded by me, the former in the August 1849, the latter in January 1852 (sic). They are still going, and doing well everywhere with a circulation by now of two million copies. Also continuing is the monthly publication *Biblioteca Ecclesiastica* which I also founded in May 1851.' Before the final split with Don Bosco in 1866, he again stated: 'The periodical publication, the *Letture Cattoliche*, begun in 1853 at my initiative and expense, is still running. I have also tried to expand distribution of the other collection, the *Libri buoni*...., also founded by me in July 1849.'<sup>119</sup>

Considering future events, it is surprising to find Don Bosco's explicit acknowledgement of Bishop Moreno's clear involvement in a letter to Cardinal Archbishop of Ferrara, Luigi Vannicelli Casoni. He sent along a free copy of the *Letture Cattoliche* with the letter encouraging him to distribute it. 'The Most Reverend Luigi Moreno, Bishop of Ivrea and editor-in-chief of these *Letture*, himself gave me the honourable task of writing to Your Eminence about this matter and would have added a letter of his own had he been forewarned of the departure of the aforesaid Fr Novelli.'<sup>120</sup> The *Plan for association* [membership/subscription] with subscription details was printed on the fourth cover page of no. 0 *Introduction to the Catholic Readings*, which was the *Avvisi ai cattolici* from February 1853. Subscriptions in the first decade ran from March to February of the following year. Of some importance are the indicators given in the first and sixth points: 'The books proposed for distribution will be simple in style, in popular language, and will contain material exclusively regarding the Catholic Religion.' 'Subscriptions in the towns and provincial areas will be received by people assigned by the respective diocesan Ordinaries to whom this work is especially recommended.'

Annual subscription cost L 1.80 for the right to receive either an issue of 108 pages monthly or two fortnightly issues with the same overall number of pages. On 8 February 1853, *L'Armonia* drew similar information from the booklet serving as an introduction to the *Letture Cattoliche* sent as a supplement to the preceding issue of the newspaper. It also provided information on the schedule

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117 Letter to Don Bosco, 13 December 1852, ASC A 1432405.

118 Letter to Don Bosco, 10 February 1853, ASC A 1432406.

119 Quoted from L. BETTAZZI, *Obbediente in Ivrea*..., p. 177.

120 Letter of 19 December 1853, Em I 209.

distributed some days earlier.<sup>121</sup> Then, on 21 June, taking its cue from Don Bosco's argument in the *Cattolico istruito* against Waldensian minister Amedeo Bert, *L'Armonia* recommended 'the very useful association which in its three months existence has already gained around *fifteen thousand* members.'<sup>122</sup>

A circular on 30 October 1854, contained a detailed description of the religious and moral, negative and positive prevention that was the *Letture Cattoliche's* aim, especially when dealing with Protestant propaganda. The *Letture Cattoliche*, the writer explained, came from 'seeing the refined skills the enemies of our holy religion were employing to spread error and corrupt the morals of the people' and was 'aimed at protecting the Christian people from the many kinds of religious conspiracies aimed at them.' Addressing himself to the potential subscriber or promoter he concluded in worried tones: 'Perhaps you will be amazed that I am recommending myself to you so keenly in this matter, but be convinced that we are in very dire times for the followers of the Catholic Religion. The perils threatening us require the co-operation and concern of all good people and especially the clergy.'<sup>123</sup>

Thus a real mobilisation was put in place to achieve wider circulation. It was split into two categories: 'Members (associates) or subscribers,' and 'Correspondents' responsible for collection and distribution in centres with a post office capable of sorting the parcels. Repeated appeals made them aware of the need to collaborate. At the end of the first year, those responsible for the *Letture Cattoliche* felt a need to express their 'gratitude to the Reverend Bishops who deemed it their work to give us their protection; to the worthy clergy, our confreres who cooperate with us; and to the noble and generous souls who have supported this work through their membership.' Also emphasised was the urgency of still more effective collaboration, recalling the defensive and constructive purpose of the initiative: 'procuring the benefits for society and religion that both expect from good people in current times;' 'halting the immorality, corruption of spirit and heart that are being spread increasingly in so many ways throughout out poor land, especially in villages, among ignorant and uneducated people.' 'The enemies of the Catholic Religion and society are working with incredible activity and every means possible to pervert the spirit, corrupt the hearts of simple and lukewarm people.' The conclusion was an appeal for unity, the style of which was a prelude to all the appeals Don Bosco made whenever he wanted to bring Catholic militants together, including the Cooperators, officially launched in 1876: Unity and agreement are necessary for this holy and eminently social work. So let us be unified, let us be in agreement and work energetically. God will bless our efforts, will give the needed increase to our work and we will have the consolation one day of seeing our enemies, the enemies of the Catholic Faith and society either convinced of their error and that their dreams are utopian, in which case they will convert and join us, or scorned and confused, they will be swamped in the mud of their defeat and be unable to cause further harm.'<sup>124</sup>

Condemnation of the perils' and involvement of people working together reappear in appeals sent out at the end of the second year. In a letter to the Vicar General in Turin in which he indicates he has made changes to the *Dottrina Cristiana della Diocesi* relating to the recent definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco complained 'that the *Letture Cattoliche* were less distributed in the city and archdiocese than elsewhere, thinking that perchance the parish priests and vicar foranes were ignorant of it. 'In view of the efforts being made to spread perverse books and newspapers' he thought it appropriate to at least make a note or reference to it at the

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121 Cf. *Le Letture Cattoliche*, "L'Armonia", 8 February 1853, OE XXXVIII 23.

122 *Le bugie di Amedeo Bert, ministro valdese*, "L'Armonia", 21 June 1853, OE XXXVIII 25.

123 Circular to Vicar generals of dioceses, 30 October 1854, Em I 233.

124 *Ai nostri associati*, in fasc. 23-24, 25 February 1854, *Ai contadini. Regole di buona condotta per la gente di campagna utili a qualsiasi condizione di persone*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. DeAgostini 1854, pp. 3-8, OE VI 41-46.

bottom of the *Letture* letter: 'You will understand better than me' he said frankly 'the extremes we have already reached and towards which we are heading full tilt.'<sup>125</sup> He focused especially on the corruptors' main weapon – bad books. His way of putting it was that they were speculating on 'gold in human passions to the detriment of faith and morals, and preparing incalculable evils for the family, the whole of society!' He insisted that the *Letture Cattoliche* initiative 'is not any kind of bookish speculation nor just topics of interest: it is a work of zeal, a work of religious and social charity, a completely moral work.'<sup>126</sup> It is about instructing and confirming good people in principles of Catholicism, enlightening and attracting people who have been led astray from their religious duties through friendliness and the gentle love that was so characteristic of our Divine Master.' Meanwhile 'Protestant associations or societies are glorying in the fact that they are spreading millions and millions of their books and other writings, corrupting faith and morals among Catholics.'<sup>127</sup> A letter he sent to the Bishops of Tortana, Giovanni Negri, was similar in content: 'This humble work of ours is no bookish speculation not just topics of interest but a work of social and religious economy ... In order to be able to continue countering the thousands of bad books and leaflets being disseminated to corrupt the faith and morals of simple folks, with instructive and moral reading, we need your valuable patronage and wise counsel.'<sup>128</sup>

Don Bosco also directly and personally requested the support of individuals of prestige. He asked a special blessing from Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli, Secretary of State: 'Deign to add a further sign of your kindness by blessing the *Catholic Readings* association; bless the many unfortunate young people who are deceived in a thousand ways where religion is concerned; bless me, a poor priest, who needs it more than anyone else.'<sup>129</sup>

Similar appeals were addressed to the Archbishop of Ferrara and of Florence, Cardinal Luigi Vannicelli Casoni;<sup>130</sup> and Archbishop Gioacchino Limberti.<sup>131</sup>

As a means of persuasion, the circular Cardinal Costantino Patrizi, the Vicar of the Holy See, had issued on 22 May to the Bishops of the Papal States, was reprinted in the September 1858 edition of *La Guida della gioventù nella via della salute* (Youth Guide on the path to salvation), by Claudio Arvisenet. It urged the bishops 'to show pastoral concern by introducing [the Catholic Readings] into their respective dioceses.' This had wonderful results according to Don Bosco: 'The number of members today touches on twelve thousand just in the Roman States',<sup>132</sup> possibly more a wishful figure than a real one. At the beginning of 1861 the overall balance was very positive: 'more than two million copies' circulated 'over eight years' so an average of 21,000 subscribers, members of the faithful who were getting hold of the Readings annually. But compared to what the opposition was said to be doing, it wasn't such a large number. 'The books and pamphlets' he wrote 'published and circulated over the last ten years in Italy' by enemies of Catholicism and society, amounted to 'more than 30 million, without calculating ones coming from abroad and other

125 To Canon F. Ravina, 20 December 1855, Em I 277-278.

126 *Agli associati ed ai benemeriti signori corrispondenti*, in fascicolo 23 and 24, 10 and 25 February 1856, *Libro della orazione domenicale scritto da San Cipriano*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1856 [on the cover, following the original yearly rhythm of the *Letture Cattoliche*, from March to February 1855], pp. 3-7.

127 *La Direzione ai benemeriti corrispondenti ed ai signori associati*, in fasc. 12 February 1857, G. BOSCO, *Due conferenze tra due ministri protestanti ed un prete cattolico intorno al purgatorio....* Turin tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1857, pp. 1-5, OE IX 21-25.

128 Letter of 30 January 1857, Em I 315.

129 Letter of 31 May 1853, Em I 197-198.

130 Letter of 19 December 1853, Em I 209.

131 Letter of 21 January 1861, Em I 435.

132 *Ai benemeriti corrispondenti ed ai benemeriti lettori delle Letture Cattoliche*, in fasc. 7 September 1858, *La guida della gioventù nelle vie della salute*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1858, pp. I-IV. Then (pp. V-VIII) came the Circular of His Eminence The Cardinal Vicar, sent out by order of His Holiness to bishops and archbishops of the Papal States on behalf of the *Letture Cattoliche*.

cheap material of every hue and kind!’<sup>133</sup>

The appeals were followed by a list of Correspondents whose job was to receive membership or subscriptions. We note that over the years, Correspondents were particularly faithful to their task and that there was a modest increase in registration (of Correspondents). Almost all of them were priests. In 1855, four laymen appear (two of them booksellers) and two communities of Sisters in 1861. *L’Armonia* frequently advertised the *Letture Cattoliche*, offering information about subscriptions and often pointing to specific issues. It gave special importance to the 4 November 1858, issue with the above mentioned circular of Cardinal Patrizi, the Vicar of the Holy See.

As to the *Letture Cattoliche*’s popular quality, Don Bosco expressed his thinking to Marquis Giovanni Patrizi, referring to culturally well-equipped writers whom his partner in Rome had suggested: ‘In all cases I must advise you that in printing so many booklets we need to ensure that topics are suited to the people for their language style and simple sentiments, otherwise subscribers will join, then leave at the same time. The collaborators you have spoken of do not write like this. They are used to speaking to educated people and it would be a real rarity for them to descend to the level where they would be understood by the people.’<sup>134</sup>

With this kind of sensitivity, it was natural that he would quickly seize upon the initiative launched by a Catholic militant, a clever mathematician and scientist, the aristocratic Blessed Francesco Faà di Bruno (1845–88). On 10 November 1853, under the headline *Almanacchi pel 1854* (Almanac for 1854), *L’Armonia* gave this item of news: ‘A National Almanac has appeared called ‘*Il Galantuomo*’ (The Gentleman) with lots of very useful statistics, nice teachings, lots of concern for religious matters, social life, agriculture. It sells for 20 cents.’ On 12 November it added a precise bibliographic indication – *Almanacco nazionale per l’anno 1854* – and a table of contents: To my readers:

Movable feasts etc,  
Calendar,  
Statistical Information,  
Foreign currency equivalents  
Rules for nurturing children,  
Meteorological information

In the shade of an oak  
Country bumkin’s ditty  
Main State celebrations  
Six tales by Ven. Simon  
Anecdotes  
Moral sayings<sup>135</sup>

The Almanac had no connection with the *Letture Cattoliche*. During a study period in Paris in 1849-52 as a high-ranking official, Faà di Bruno came into contact with the St Vincent de Paul Society and its Almanac work begun in 1849. It resulted in three good and widespread yearly almanacs: *L’Almanach de L’Atelier et du Labourer* (1849), *L’Almanach du Labourer* (1850) and *L’Almanach de l’Apprenti* (1851). It was considered a matter of urgency in Turin to counter the anti-clerical almanacs, *Fischietto* and *Gazzetta del popolo* with an intelligent and popular Catholic almanac. The idea, which matured in summer 1853, was promptly realised with the collaboration of his brother, an agronomist, and the parish priest of the noble city of Bruno.<sup>136</sup>

This initiative and its product pleased Don Bosco, who had it sent out as a *Strenna* (New Year message) for *Letture Cattoliche* subscribers. From 1854–56, Faà di Bruno was again in Paris to further his mathematical studies and happily handed over his ‘creation’ to Don Bosco, who integrated it into the regular flow of the *Letture Cattoliche*. Announced once more by *L’Armonia* on 25 November 1854 and 1 December 1855, other than an opening item to its friends, focused on

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133 *Agli associati e corrispondenti delle Letture Cattoliche*, in fasc. 11, January 1861, *I figli virtuosi per Luigi Friedel*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia 1861, pp. II-III.

134 Letter of 8 August 1858, Em I 358.

135 *Il Galantuomo. Almanacco nazionale per l’anno 1854*, “*L’Armonia*”, 12 November 1853, OE XXXVIII 26.

136 Cf. M. CHECCHETTO, *Francesco Faà di Bruno: agli inizi del cattolicesimo sociale in Italia*.

*Tra apostolato laicale ed impegno sociale*, in *Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825-1888). Miscellanea*, Turin, Bottega d’Erasmus 1977, pp. 392-394.

the cholera, it provided varied information on the calendar – movable feasts, fairs, markets..... scientific curiosities, pointers on practical life like money values, recipes for alternative drinks instead of wine, hints for cleaning clothes, anecdotes, poems, discoveries, inventions.<sup>137</sup>

On 1 December 1855, *L'Armonia* noted: This is the easiest way to spread awareness of the progress of natural sciences among the people. Have no doubt that it requires more than average ability to tackle these matters in a way adapted to the people. *Il Galantuomo's* writers are superb in this talent.<sup>138</sup>

## 8. Cholera 1854

Don Bosco ended the *Cenno storico* with these notes: '1854. New works not resumed given our poor income ... Lack of foodstuffs, lack of work placing many young people at risk to both body and soul, so we have taken many in and numbers have increased to eighty.'<sup>139</sup> A few months later, he had a more serious reason, cholera, requiring financial outlay adding to the 1,250 lire annual cost of rental for premises and other ongoing costs to maintain churches, and the night classes at Valdocco: 'Maintaining some of the poorest and most abandoned whose numbers this year should go up to ninety because of many boys orphaned and left abandoned by the sad onslaught of the cholera *morbus*.'<sup>140</sup>

He dramatised this a year later in a letter to the Schools of the Poor (*Mendicità istruita...*) and another to the Mayor of Turin. In the former case he used expressions similar to those in the *Cenno storico*, offering bold (and exaggerated???) numbers and costs: 'The great lack of foodstuffs and cessation of work put many abandoned boys at even greater risk. Perhaps they would have ended up badly if not assisted materially and morally. Some of them, around a hundred, most of them orphaned by the fatal onslaught of cholera last year, have currently been taken in at Valdocco, others are being helped otherwise in whatever way we can, and there are more than a thousand five hundred of them across all these oratories.'<sup>141</sup>

In the letter to the Mayor, Giovanni Battista Notta, he broadened the range of expenses and detached what he was requesting as 'an extraordinary grant.' 'Last year with the fatal onslaught of cholera, to bring our current house up to the standard required by law and give shelter to boys already here and for ones orphaned in these sad times, I have had to undertake the serious expenditure of more than ten thousand francs,' only covering 'half [of what is needed].'<sup>142</sup>

After plague epidemics in past times, and more recently outbreaks of typhus and smallpox, the cholera *asiaticus*, affected populations in successive waves in Italy and elsewhere in Europe during the 19th century. There were five critical waves in 1835–37, 1849–50, 1854–56, 1865–67, 1884–85. They were particularly serious in Rome, Naples, and Palermo in 1835–37, 1854–56, 1865–67. Again in Naples and Palermo in 1884–85. The epidemics in 1854–56 and 1865–67 were also more generally felt. As well as striking the southern regions of the Peninsula, cholera, also made its impact in the northwest regions including Genoa and Turin.<sup>143</sup>

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137 "L'Armonia", 25 November 1854, OE XXXVIII 27-28.

138 *Il "Galantuomo", almanacco nazionale per il 1856*, "L'Armonia", 1 December 1855, OE XXXVIII 30.

139 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 59.

140 To the administrator of the Royal Work of Schools for the Poor, 13 November 1854, Em I 235.

141 To the President of the Royal Work for the Schools of the Poor, 21 November 1855, Em I 271. The same day he sent the President a personal note, giving the reason for his request: 'he year is critical especially for bread,' (Em I 271).

142 Letter of 21 November 1855, Em I 272.

143 Cf. L. DEL PANTA, *Le epidemie nella storia demografica italiana (secoli XIV-XIX)*, Turin, Loescher 1980, pp. 226-232.

Cholera broke out in Turin in summer 1854, affecting Borgo Dora especially. Of the 2,533 infected 1,438 died and the parish of Sts Simon and Jude in Borgo Dora, which the Oratory belonged to, had 53% of the total number of deaths. It saw the mature and available boys and adults belong to the St Aloysius sodality mobilised to assist those affected in their suburb. *L'Armonia* informed readers of this on 16 September, explaining that Don Bosco had been able to present the Health Commission with a list of 14 boys who had offered themselves. Tommaseo, writing from the city on 3 October 1854, congratulated him.<sup>144</sup> Members of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences collected dozens of orphaned children. Among those given shelter at the Dominican monastery was Pietro Enia. He was taken in at the Oratory as an orphan. He nursed Don Bosco faithfully until his final illness.

Naturally, Don Bosco did not involve the younger boys in any direct activity, encouraging them to be involved in other ways. In October, when the cholera was already diminishing, Dominic Savio wrote to his father: 'Having been able to spend an hour alone with Don Bosco, since up till then I was never able to be alone with him more than ten minutes, I spoke about many things, among them an association for cholera insurance. He told me it was already underway, and if it hadn't been for the cold spell now passing through, things would be really disastrous. I also joined up. It is something to pray about.'<sup>145</sup>

On 10 August 1854 *L'Armonia* (its somewhat hidden informant was behind it, of course) had already stressed the impact of the epidemic based on the measures taken by the Oratory and costs relating to it. It recalled especially how much Don Bosco was doing for abandoned boys and costs incurred, to maintain and accommodate a hundred boys, more this year, when lack of provisions was affecting everyone's purse.' It then went on: When the cholera arrived, new and urgent expenses were required to fix up the premises, reduce the number of beds in the same area and thus provide other rooms for this purpose, provide linen, etc.' Clearly this 'excellent and charitable priest' found himself 'in dire straits' but nevertheless was 'ready for whatever sacrifice rather than abandon his dear boys now they needed more help than ever,' declaring that he was 'indebted' to generous donors for whatever he had been able to do.<sup>146</sup> Inflamed with charity he was a credible educator in charity in both word and deed.

In relation to the more intense welfare activity following the cholera, on 9 September, *L'Armonia* spoke of the opening of a bookbinding workshop at the Valdocco Oratory, hoping that 'as well as offering better prices,' job suppliers would cooperate 'in supporting a work of public charity' given that eighteen boys had already been taken in there who had been orphaned by the deadly cholera emergency and that still more others would have soon be taken in.'<sup>147</sup>

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144 Cf. MB V 114-118.

145 Letter of 5 September 1855, quoted by A. CAVIGLIA *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco"*, Vol. IV *La vita di Savio Domenico e "Savio Domenico e don Bosco"*. Studio, Turin, SEI 1943, pp. 86-87.

146 *Soccorso all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, "L'Armonia", 10 August 1854, OE XXXVIII 26-27.

147 *Aprimento di un laboratorio a beneficio di poveri*, "L'Armonia", 9 September 1854, OE XXXVIII 27.

## Chapter 9

### AMONG THE YOUNG AND THE PEOPLE THROUGH WORD AND THE PRESS (1853–59)

- 1853 *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione (Letture Cattoliche, or LC)* (The Catholic instructed in his Religion);
- 1854 March; *Conversione di una valdase* (Conversion of a Waldensian woman);  
December; *Dramma: Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante* (LC) (Playscript: an argument between a lawyer and a Protestant minister);
- 1855 March: *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia sacra* (LC) (Easy way of learning Bible history);  
June: *Conversazione tra un avvocato e un curato di campagna* (LC) Conversation between a lawyer and a country parish priest);  
November; *La forza della buona educazione* (LC) (The power of a good upbringing). *La storia d'Italia* (LC) (The history of Italy) [1856]
- 1856 January: Series on the lives of the Popes begins with the *Vita di san Pietro* (LC) (The life of St Peter);  
Preaches mission to the people at Viarigi (Asti) – *La chiave del paradiso* (The key to Paradise).
- 1857 End of November: popular mission at Saliceto Langhe (Cuneo).
- 1858 21 February–21 April: Don Bosco's first stay in Rome;  
April: *Il mese di maggio* (LC) (The Month of May);  
July: *Porta Teco Cristiano* (LC) (Christian handbook).
- 1859 January: *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* (LC) (Life of Dominic Savio).

Don Bosco was able to mobilise a good group of adults for his boys. This way they already became a target for his educative and pastoral activity, and even more so, they belonged to the ordinary people. Like the boys, ordinary people were a target group for the same activity of defending the Faith and fostering Christian life, an activity he developed through various forms of the written and spoken word. For Don Bosco, writer and publisher for young people and the masses, the decade 1850–59 became his most productive in terms of both quality and quantity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 229-248, Chap. X *Don Bosco scrittore ed editore*; ID., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*..., pp. 327-368, Chap. XV *Imprese editoriali*; F. TRANIELLO (ed), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*. Turin, SEI

We note certain aspects of this here, following a chronological and thematic process: occasions for extraordinary preaching to ordinary folk; the way the *Lecture Cattoliche* were imagined and the early publications he concluded in it (1853–54); the predominantly biographical, historical, catechetical and educational nature of his output (1855); books of a devotional nature (1856–58); the series (from A–P) on the lives of the popes, beginning in 1856 and continuing through to 1865.

## 1. Defender of the Faith and defender of grace

When he invited Fr Alasonatti to share his bread and work at the Valdocco Oratory, Don Bosco found a reason that went beyond his concern for the boys. Fr Alasonatti was no preacher but he was able to be of quiet support: 'I am being invited to go to this town and that one for triduums, novenas or retreats but I dare not move from here since I do not know who I can leave my house to. How much good we can do!'<sup>2</sup>

In reference to the 1850s, Don Bosco's first important biographer wrote that 'very many parish priests in Piedmont wanted to have him preach in their churches' (and if he was able to, Don Bosco never refused).<sup>3</sup> Documents remain of his preaching popular missions or retreats and a considerable number of panegyrics. We limit ourselves to a few instances.

Of particular importance was a mission he gave in January 1856 in the rural setting of Viarigi (Asti) aimed at restoring and preserving the Catholic Faith. In 1847, a former parish priest, Fr Francesco Antonio Grignaschi (1813–83) from Cimamulera in the Upper Novara region, had settled there. He was a visionary inclined to Milleniarism.<sup>4</sup> He proclaimed himself to be the new Messiah, 'an incarnation of the Son of God in the church to recall it to the purity of its holy origins.' He was also associated with a woman who was similarly 'enlightened', known and advertised as 'the Blessed Virgin in person.' Other than his presumed extraordinary deeds, Grignaschi had a reputation for a rather flamboyant kind of mysticism. He pestered the parish priest at Viarigi and the priests in nearby parishes as well as other priests and faithful. He had also published a book, *Crux de cruce. Il Messia e la riedificazione e purgazione della Chiesa e la conversione degli Ebrei* (The crux of the cross: the Messiah and the rebuilding and purgation of the Church, and conversion of the Jews), which was placed on the Index on 21 February 1850. Grignaschi had earlier been suspended *a divinis* by the bishops of Novara and Casale, and in 1848 was referred to the judiciary but on 12 September that year, the judge declared the case be dropped. However, on 10 November, the Court of Cassation [for legal appeals] annulled that decision, passing the matter onto the main Court of Appeal. This court in turn acquitted the accused and his accomplices but on 10 March, the Court of Cassation annulled this decision too and referred the case to the Casale Appeals Court. A new and final trial took place in the first fortnight of July 1850. The allegation was one of contempt for religion, and fraud. Grignaschi was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. The others got off with minor penalties. The trial prosecutor then published a book with excerpts from the trial leading up to the sentence, finally commenting: 'And this is how the trial finished. It will continue as a perpetual monument to the pride, presumption, weakness and credulity of human nature midway through the 19th century!!'<sup>5</sup>

The town remained in a state of agitation, requiring intervention from the forces of public order.

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1987; *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 411–447, part IV: essays by F. Traniello, S. Pivato, F. MALGERI.

2 G. B. FRANCESIA, *D. Vittorio Alasonatti, primo prefetto della Pia Società Salesiana. Cenni biografici*. S. Benigno Canavese, tip. e libr. salesiana 1898, pp. 25–26; Em I 181.

3 MB V 765.

4 Cf. R. GREMMO, *Il nuovo Messia e la Madonna rossa. Francesco Grignaschi e la rivolta religiosa contadina di metà Ottocento tra Ossola e Monferrato*, Biella, Storia ribelle 1997.

5 *Dibattimento nella causa criminale vertita davanti il Magistrato d'Appello di Casale contro il sacerdote Francesco Antonio Grignaschi... e complici accusati di attacchi contro la Religione dello Stato e della Truffa....* Casale, Tip. Corrado diretta da Giov. Scrivano 1850, 288 pp.



Huge changes were wrought by the oratorical power, zeal and charity of the diocesan Bishop Filippo Artico (1798–1859).<sup>6</sup> In 1857, Grignaschi's release from prison was 'imminent and the new parish priest, Fr Giovanni Battista Melino, believed it opportune to invite Don Bosco and Canon Borsarelli from Rifreddo to preach a mission in order to root out the remaining consequences of this absurd sequence of errors. The preaching was also attended by townspeople who believed in the visionary and were stubborn devotees of the *Madonna Rossa* (Red Madonna) was marked by a series of meditations on the Last Things, including references to real sudden deaths which come as a warning.<sup>7</sup> Don Bosco was interested in the salvation of the poor priest whom he visited in prison at Ivrea, helping him and leading him to a complete abjuration. The excommunicated man made this declaration before his bishop and two authorised clerical witnesses, among whom was Fr Antonio Belasio. This was published by *L'Armonia* on 3 July 1857.<sup>8</sup> Once out of prison the priest then went to see Don Bosco at the Oratory. He then retired in privacy to Liguria where he remained, poor and alone, until his death (1883).<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, the popular mission from November to December 1857 at Saliceto Langhe in Mondovì diocese was held in a calm and receptive context. It was in Saliceto Langhe that Don Bosco began writing a letter to Count Pio Galleani d'Agliano on 29 November 1857 in these words: 'While I am here in Saliceto to preach the retreat, I have taken a look at letters I need to answer.'<sup>10</sup> The journey from Mondovì to Ceva was full of surprises but more difficult beyond Ceva from Montezomolo towards the rocky crags of the Appenines along snowbound roads and mule tracks. The success of his preaching was extraordinary among these hardworking people who encouraged the preacher with cries of "Continue! Continue!"

The most typical of the sermons quoted was the one describing an imaginary journey of the soul. It was called the *Procession*, or rather it was an anti-procession, a prelude to his future dreams of hell. Only a small group had set out on the road to the shining gates of the heavenly Jerusalem; by contrast the procession setting out under the standard of a strange individual was overflowing with people. They were heading towards a door, opening through the blackened walls of a gloomy prison through which one could glimpse roads plunging into chasms from which there was no return.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Ideal orientations for the *Letture Catholiche*

Even a summary examination of the *Letture Cattoliche* booklets over the first fifteen years (more clearly reflecting Don Bosco's direct activity) shows us that their principal aim was the religious and moral instruction and education of the people and youth, with particular emphasis given to an anti-protestant slant in support of the Catholic faith.<sup>12</sup> A symbolic testament to this was his most significant work in this area over the decade: *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co'suoi figliuoli secondo I bisogni del tempo*. (The Catholic instructed in his religion; a father talks to his sons according to the needs of the time).<sup>13</sup> It was the result of a

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6 Cf. T. CHIUSO, *La Chiesa in Piemonte...*, Vol. III, pp. 310-313.

7 Cf. "L'Armonia", Friday 1 February 1856, OE XXXVIII 30-32.

8 Cf. "L'Armonia", 3 July 1857, p. 600.

9 *Documenti* V 149.

10 Em I 336.

11 MB V 774-776.

12 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'educazione religiosa popolare e giovanile nelle "Letture Cattoliche"...*, pp. 653-672; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 351-368; L. GIOVANNINI, *Le "Letture Cattoliche" di don Bosco esempio di "stampa cattolica" nel secolo XIX*, Naples, Liguori 1984.

13 The work, of 111 and 340 pp. contains two series of 'conversations', 12 in the first and 42 in the second. It came out over 6 issues of the *Letture Cattoliche* published alternating with others, during 1853: March 10 April, 25 May 10 and 25 July and 10 September. It drew generously from other authors: 'Aimé is the

broader project he had underway, as we can see from the more limited plan presented at the beginning of the first part.<sup>14</sup> It was a popular presentation seeking to outline the most ambitious theological and historical dissertations ‘of true religion,’ ‘of the Church,’ ‘of *historia haeresum*’ (the history of heresies) and controversies. Its preventive intention was declared expressly by the father in his preliminary talk with his sons.’ ‘The times in which we live, dear boys, the dangers we face in religious matters today, are reason for me to strongly fear that as you begin to deal with the world you might be drawn into error and possibly error that will ruin your souls. This is why I want to protect you from some of today’s perils by explaining some of the main points of our holy religion over a few sessions.’<sup>15</sup>

The project was probably a bit too grand for a man besieged by a thousand other problems and culturally less equipped for a demanding confrontation with fiery opponents, as well as being under pressure from a publishing schedule.<sup>16</sup> He was also armed with historical and theological data, documents and interpretations that could not but amaze and irritate his better prepared opponents. In a pamphlet he published in the April 1854 *Letture Cattoliche*, Don Bosco defended his efforts as a compiler of facts, assuring the reader he was drawing ‘from other books of greater substance’ generally ‘cited in footnotes.’ Not only this, but he guaranteed readers that he did not intend ‘printing the least item concerning the Protestants without documentation to prove what is said.’<sup>17</sup> He was relying on authors he considered to be unexceptionable scientifically and was moved by his great passions: defending the faith of simple people against invasive and aggressive forms of proselytism among other things, and conversion of the wayward, especially Catholics who had fallen into heresy.

The conversations could be classified into four groups. The 12 in the *first part* take up topics belonging to apologetics or fundamental theology: the existence of God and religion, the possibility and need for Revelation and how this came about in the Old Testament and was fully realised in Christ in the New, then perpetuated in the Catholic Church.

The second set, the first 12 conversations from *part two*, are dedicated to the Catholic Church, including apologetic and dogmatic considerations. Overall the aim is to demonstrate that only the Catholic Church is the ‘Society’ which preserves ‘the Religion of Jesus Christ’ and exhibits the marks of the church founded by the Saviour. A third series of 14 sessions goes back over the history of Muslims and non-Catholic Christian Confessions from the Greek Schism to the three great modern heresies, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicism, with special attention to the Waldensians.

Finally, 16 conversations deal with controversy, aimed at showing Protestant infidelity to the teaching of Jesus Christ, contradiction, arbitrary ‘variations’, the ‘hotch-potch’ of reforms – all converging on the fundamental error which ‘consists in free interpretation of the Bible which is commonly called private spirit.’<sup>18</sup>

The first group is directed above all to the Jews who are still expecting the Messiah, while it is certain that he came in the person of ‘Jesus Christ, true God and true man.’<sup>19</sup> Their responsibility is

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source of the *Cattolico istruito*, along with Gerdil, Perrone, Bellarmine, Charvaz, St Alphonsus, Moore’ (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., p. 240, n. 33).

14 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, *Oggetto di questi trattenimenti*, pt. I, pp. 5-6, OE IV 199-200.

15 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, *Oggetto di questi trattenimenti*, pt. I, pp. 5-6, OE IV 199-200.

16 This shows up in some mistakes in numbering the ‘conversations’: nos. VII and VIII have been skipped in the first series, and no. XVI in the second.

17 *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei esposti dal Sac. Bosco Giovanni*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1854, pp. 32-41, OE V 400-409.

18 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XXXIV *Errore fondamentale*, pp. 245-252, OE IV 551-558.

19 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. I, tratten. XII [X] *Gesù Cristo vero Dio e vero Uomo*,

explained on the basis of a completely negative argument. 'The majority were stubborn, and following the deceptions of the Scribes and Pharisees they did whatever they could to see that the Messiah was put to death.' This stubbornness was foretold by the Prophets who 'clearly said that to pay for this wilful blindness they would be chased out of their lands and scattered throughout the world without a King, without a Temple and with no Priesthood.' 'At the sight of the enormous deicide they were preparing to commit against the one who had come to save them,' Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the people: again 'a prophecy of the gospel comes true in them every day, that is, that this people is scattered without King, Temple and Priesthood, stamped with its mark of divine displeasure.'<sup>20</sup>

Central to the *Cattolico istruito* is the theme of the Catholic Church, as it is, of course, in all the religious instruction and education Don Bosco gave the boys. It is there implicitly or explicitly. Rather than the theologian or apologist or controversialist by profession, Don Bosco sought to be a pastor of souls, catechist, Christian educator. When writing, he was thinking of the Oratory and the people he had met during popular missions who were at risk of Protestant propaganda which, according to him, alienated them from the Catholic Church and robbed them of the necessary means of salvation, when he was sure that the 'true religion was preserved in the Church of Jesus Christ outside of which there is no salvation.'<sup>21</sup> Therefore, even if the structural aspect seemed to dominate in his notion of Church, in reality what was at the heart of it more than anything else was the saving, sanctifying and life-giving nature of it. His insistent attribution of the marks exclusive to the Catholic Church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – had not only an apologetic function but was also a way of vigorously affirming it as the unique guarantee of God's ongoing presence, giving grace and eternal salvation through Christ, more than being something structural. *Unity* was what generated grace: in it we have 'one and the same Faith,' 'one Baptism, one God, one Saviour Jesus Christ,' 'one and the same worship, one morality, one government.'<sup>22</sup>

Extremely important for a pedagogy of salvation in line with the *Storia ecclesiastica* of 1845, is *holiness*. 'Jesus Christ being holiness by his very nature, it follows that his Church must be all purity and holiness, excluding the least little thing from its dogmas and doctrine that might run counter to the Divine Majesty.' Indeed, not only *must it be* but it is *holy* 'because its Head, Jesus Christ, is holy, the source of holiness, ruling and governing with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is holy because it has the most effective means for sanctifying souls, such as the sacraments, the sacrifice of the Mass, public prayer [=liturgy], the evangelical counsels and the like.' And again, 'because it has had a great number of saints in every time and place.' Furthermore (another characteristic already underlined in the *Storia ecclesiastica*) 'because in every age God has shown through brilliant miracles, that he approves of the worship offered in this Church.'<sup>23</sup>

This is the light in which we need to read everything Don Bosco writes of the Church concerning its apostolicity. Both the structure and holiness of the Church are rooted in Christ who is at the origin of any valid apostolic succession. It is 'founded on the truths taught by Jesus Christ and preached by the Apostles,' and still today by their successors, joined to them through uninterrupted succession.<sup>24</sup>

Of identical importance is the mark of *catholicity* and '*romanità*' since the Bishop of Rome is the

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pp. 50-53, OE IV 244-247.

20 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. I, tratten. XIV *Cenno sopra gli Ebrei* [pp. 59-73], pp. 60-61, 64, OE IV 254-255, 258. He had already told the story of "deicide" and the consequent dispersion of the Jews in the *Storia ecclesiastica* (1845), pp. 52, 56-57, OE I 210, 214-215.

21 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. II, 85 and 86, OE IV 279 and 280.

22 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. IV 95-96, OE IV 289-290

23 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. V 99-100, OE IV 293-294.

24 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. VII 107, OE IV 301.

successor of St Peter, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on Earth;<sup>25</sup> and because the Roman Church 'believes and professes all the truths taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles,' 'even today it stretches back as far as Jesus Christ its founder.'<sup>26</sup>

Without wanting to dignify a catechetical teaching of extreme simplicity with learned theological labels, it is undeniable that Christology is at the basis of ecclesiology and we cannot ignore it if we want to correctly understand the conversations of an ecclesiological nature dealing with the *Church's hierarchy*, the authority of the Councils, the Church and the Pope, and finally the *visibility* of the Church and its Head.

Certainly, in opposition to the Protestant thesis of the Church's invisibility and inward nature, Don Bosco insisted strongly on claiming visibility to the point of apparently ignoring the aspect he simply wanted to deny the exclusivity of.' In the Gospel,' he writes,' the Church is compared to fully visible things. Jesus compares it to a LARGE BUILDING' of which Peter is the cornerstone; he compares it to a MOUNTAIN, a KINGDOM, a FIELD, a VINEYARD, a THRESHING FLOOR, a SHEEPFOLD, all very visible things.<sup>27</sup> The 'Roman' Catholic Church' is a "building" "which for more than one thousand eight hundred years has been battered with the most severe blows but has nevertheless remained always visible, always beautiful, always grand and majestic."<sup>28</sup> It is more familiarly likened to a family and a flock governed by the 'Pope, the universal father of all the Christian faithful, the Supreme Pastor of Christ's flock.'<sup>29</sup>

It is not completely clear what relationship Don Bosco establishes between the authority of the ecumenical councils (he speaks of the first in conversation IX), the authority of the Church (Conversation X) and the authority of the pope (Conversations XI and XII). The Councils are infallible, only when 'presided over' by the pope 'in person or through his legates and 'approved' by him.<sup>30</sup> 'The authority the Church's ministers exercise in the sacred ministry was really given them by Jesus Christ.' He gave his ministers, that is 'the Apostles or their successors,' the assurance that he would guarantee them from all risk of error: 'I will be with you *omnibus diebus*, all days, until the end of the world.'<sup>31</sup> The authority of teaching in the Church resides in the pope to its highest degree and more 'especially' still, the authority to govern.<sup>32</sup> Above all, this seems to be reserved to the pope,<sup>33</sup> while the bishops seem to be functionaries of his. Putting it in simpler terms, he writes: 'He is a father who receives orders from God and passes them on to the bishops, the bishops to the parish priests, and the parish priests to us; a wonderful harmony by which someone at the lowest level can speak with God in a sure way and be advised by God himself.'<sup>34</sup> In similar very simple words, 'the Roman Pontiff, unable to attend to the particular needs of each member of the faithful by himself alone, needs other ministers below him, dependent on him, who, by preaching the divine word and administering the holy Sacraments, promote doctrine and holiness in people.'<sup>35</sup> 'It is according to the nature of things for Don Bosco that the Church is hierarchical and also monarchical,<sup>36</sup> almost a theocratic monarchy.'<sup>37</sup> Finally, the pope's governance is the most manifest

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25 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. III 94, OE IV 288.

26 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. VI 103, OE IV 297.

27 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XI 26-28, OE IV 332-334.

28 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XI 36, OE IV 342 ; cf. pt. 1, Tratten. XI earlier. OE IV 332.

29 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. X 22, OE IV 328; On the Church family cf. pt. II, tratten. XII 41, OE IV 347.

30 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. IX 9-10, OE IV 315-316.

31 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. X 17-18, 20, OE IV 323-324, 326.

32 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. X 21-22, OE IV 327-328; tratten. XI 27, OE IV 333.

33 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. X 22, OE IV 328.

34 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. IV 96, OE IV 290.

35 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. VIII 4, OE IV 310.

36 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II...*, p. 133.

37 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. VIII 3-4, OE IV 309-310.

sign of the Church's visibility.<sup>38</sup>

It might seem that the apologist has prevailed over the pastor of souls, but not so. Don Bosco is implacable in his question to those who contradict him: 'Jesus Christ founded his Church so that all men might be saved, but how can they come to it if it is hidden?'<sup>39</sup> How can the faithful know the holiness of the Church 'without a visible head who in God's name, assisted by God, distinguishes truth from error, the just from the unjust?' How can they 'come to a centre to preserve the same Faith, the same doctrine and recognise the true sacraments initiated by Jesus Christ if the head is lacking, a teacher who keeps them safe?'<sup>40</sup> In reality, the pope is not the ultimate foundation. The ultimate foundation is Jesus Christ, and the formula 'Church of Jesus Christ' is one that constantly recurs in Don Bosco's ecclesiological discourse. There is no doubt that for him, only this strongly hierarchical, pyramidal Church is structurally enabled to guarantee salvation because it has as its founder and ongoing foundation 'an omnipotent architect,' 'Jesus Christ.'<sup>41</sup>

Almost two thirds of the book is dedicated to the history of errors and controversies. The aim is not to inform readers of the grand ideas of those in error to enter into dialogue with them but only to lead them to abhor them and avoid any contact with them: 'We must avoid their teaching, be horrified by it, keep away from them and not develop any familiarity with them. Ask the Lord God to have mercy on them and enlighten them with his grace.' 'The cunning and refined malice the enemies of religion employ should convince everyone to cut off any familiarity with them.'<sup>42</sup> The way he presents them, in fact, is completely negative, and as for the historical information and apologetics, we cannot recommend that the author be taken as a model and teacher, no matter how much he is driven by an undoubted ecumenical enthusiasm of '*ut unum sint*.'

The first conversation in the history category is dedicated to Mohammedanism, one of the range of religions, Don Bosco writes, 'which has none of the marks of divinity, and which we call false religions.' This grouping clearly seems to be artificial when he can say: 'they [false religions] can be reduced to Judaism, Idolatry, Mohammedanism and Christian sects as professed by Greek schismatics, Waldensians, Anglicans and Protestants.'<sup>43</sup> By Mohammedanism' he begins 'we mean a collection of principles taken from various religions such that when they are practised they end up destroying any principle of morality.' It goes back to Muhammad, 'this famous fraudster whose 'religion' consists of a 'monstrous mixture of Judaism, Paganism, and Christianity' practised by 'people from Arabia,' 'who are part Jewish, part Christian, and the rest pagans.' 'To get them all to follow him Muhammad took some of the religion they profess, choosing especially the points that most favoured sensual pleasures.' The difference between the Christian Church and the Mohammedan religion is 'huge' with diametrically opposite results: 'in short, the Christian religion makes man happy in this world in a certain way and then raises him up for enjoyment in heaven. Muhammad degrades and debases human nature, having all happiness reside in sensual pleasures, reducing man to the level of filthy animals'<sup>44</sup>

The chapters dedicated to his closest adversaries and ones he considered most dangerous, the Waldensians, are particularly strong. They speak of *The true origins of the Waldensians*, the many

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38 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XII 37-47, OE IV 343-353. Don Bosco's thinking fits in, in less elaborate form, with theological currents which were by then dominant in the 19th Century: cf. Y. M. J. CONGAR, *L'ecclésiologie de la révolution française au concile du Vatican, sous le signe de l'affirmation de l'autorité*, in *L'ecclésiologie au XIXe siècle*, ed. M. Nédoncelle e al. Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf 1960, p. 90-91, cf. 95-106.

39 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XII 35, OE IV 341

40 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XII 39, OE IV 345.

41 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XI 36, OE IV 342.

42 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. X 24-25, OE IV 330-331.

43 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XIII, p. 50, OE IV 356.

44 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito*..., pt. II, tratten. XIII, pp. 50-51, 53-56, OE IV 356-357, 359-362; cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica*..., (1845), pp. 173-176, OE I 331-334.

signs of *Bad faith of Waldensian Ministers*, the Separation of Waldensians from the Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup> As for their historical roots, he speaks first of Luther, then Calvin and Beza and finally of the Anglican schism 'with a sad heart' saying that it was because of 'the general ignorance of the people' and 'the bad behaviour of some clergy.' This latter was one of the three causes that served as a pretext for 'promoters of the new reform.'<sup>46</sup>

The link is shown between the lives of individuals and their teaching. Therefore the father 'very willingly' talks to his sons about 'the lives of these two heretics, Luther and Calvin, so they can 'understand their bad behaviour and be able to judge what account to make of their teachings.'<sup>47</sup> Luther was, 'by all accounts an eccentric man.' 'He had a bold intelligence, an enterprising mind but was proud, ambitious, and quick to rebel, to slander people, and was given to every vice, especially immodesty.' 'His hypocrisy meant he kept the perversity of his heart hidden for some time and he got as far as being ordained priest.' Finally, his superiors saw that 'he was proud, insolent, disobedient to everyone, so he was expelled from the cloister.' Then Luther 'removed his mask, threw off the religious habit, fled from the monastery' and using an opportunity to preach about indulgences in 1517 he began 'preaching against the religion of his birth and which he had been raised in and to whose defence he was consecrated by solemn vows' 'giving free reign then to the worst radical teachings.'<sup>48</sup> After his troubled, agonising and remorseful death 'his soul had to go to render account to the Supreme Judge for all the wickedness he had committed in his life and the many souls who went and unfortunately still go to eternal perdition through his fault.'<sup>49</sup>

Darker still is his presentation of Calvin's life. Born with a 'troubled and bold nature' to a family that was by no means an edifying one 'he began wandering the world at fourteen, became corrupt and soon began living a dissolute life.' 'Condemned for an abominable crime, an unmentionable one, he fled and took up studies in Orléans and Bourges, where a Lutheran convinced him to join that heresy and he later became a 'major heretic himself: that is, at the head of other heretics' making 'a new mixture of Luther's errors and other heretical errors' such that his principles 'could be taught not to men but to wild animals.' 'An apostle of iniquity,' he brought every kind of vice 'wherever he could exercise authority, and acted like a tyrant.' His death was an appropriate fulfilment of such a life. At the 'terrible moment' when he had to present himself at 'God's judgement seat,' 'his courage failed:' 'he called on God' and cursed him, called on demons,' 'cursed his studies and writings until his body was riddled with worms and sores and gave off an intolerable stench, a fearful consequence of and just punishment for his criminal habits. He died a miserable death.'<sup>50</sup>

Don Bosco's understanding in this area is rudimentary. He had already used the same kind of language in the *Storia ecclesiastica* about 'Jewish priests, Doctors of the Law, hypocritical Pharisees, all terrible enemies of the Saviour.'<sup>51</sup> It is a culture drawn from uncritically examined historical and apologetic literature of one kind or another, simplistically selected for a readership which was easily satisfied, and put together on the basis of a mental structure he had absorbed through the style of teaching (manuals) at the seminary and personal reading.

But the long-winded polemic which often spills over into pitiless diatribe, concludes with

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45 G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XV-XIX, pp. 62-100, OE IV 368-406: the series jumps from no. XV to no. XVII.

46 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, respectively tratten. XX-XXIII, XXIV and tratten. XXV, XXVI-XXVII, pp. 101-127, 127-137 and 137-142, 142-157, OE IV 407-433, 433-443 and 443-448, 448-463.

47 G. Bosco *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XX, p. 102, OE IV 408.

48 G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XX, pp. 106-109, OE IV 412-415.

49 G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XXI, pp. 116-118, OE IV 422-424; cf. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, (1845), pp. 301-302, OE I, 459-460.

50 G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XXIV, pp. 129-133, 136-137, OE IV 435-439, 442-443; cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, (1845), pp. 292, 306, OE I 450, 464.

51 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, 1845, pp. 28-29, 31-32, OE I 186-187, 189-190.

something that puts his earnest pastoral concern into a clear light, neatly overcoming even the most obvious cultural lacunae. There are ‘a couple of words’ addressed to the ministers and their faithful. His argumentative approach merges with a pressing invitation to think seriously about one’s salvation, also appealing to tutorism. He reasons that if you truly believe the Bible to be clear, and the Holy Spirit enlightens everyone who listens to your preaching, above all if you also claim that one can be saved in the Catholic Church and that the Church believes that whoever perseveres in the Protestant Church is lost, why not prefer the solution considered to be a certain one by both Catholics and Protestants? This was a passionate plea to Catholics, Protestants and pastors of the Reformed Churches. To the first and second group he simply says: ‘Catholics, live at peace in your religion and be careful not to become Protestants. And you, Protestants, become Catholics.’ More articulate and heartfelt is the appeal to pastors, inviting them to own his earlier exhortation, reminding them to reflect on their responsibility: ‘If you speak thus you will do yourselves great good and draw many away from error. Otherwise you will deceive yourselves and deceive so many souls who come along naively to listen to you.’ And then how will you answer ‘the Supreme Judge when he asks you to render account for the souls whom you lead astray from Catholicism’s sure path and introduced them to the path, in your view, of uncertainty of being saved and, in the view of Catholics, a path that inevitably leads to eternal perdition? These words are those of a brother who loves you and loves you more than you believe; words of a brother who offers his whole being and what he could have in this world for the good of your souls. I am overcome with terror and fearful that the salvation of your souls and those of your followers is uncertain. So I lift up my eyes and hands to Heaven and invite you and all good people to pray to the God of mercy that he may enlighten you all with rays of his heavenly grace. Thus, returning to the paternal sheepfold of Jesus Christ we can make all Paradise happy, achieve peace for your souls and a well-founded hope of salvation for all.’<sup>52</sup>

As we will indicate further on, the exhortation became a touching invocation in a short story he wrote the following year *Conversione di una Valdese* (Conversion of a Waldensian woman).

### 3. Apologetics and popular devotion (1853–54)

In the same year, through apologetic in tone, Don Bosco’s brief *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo del S.S. Sacramento* (Historical information on the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament) was addressed completely to Catholics.<sup>53</sup> Don Bosco already addresses them in the presentation of this item, touching immediately on the subject of miracles as proof of the exclusive truth of the Catholic Church. ‘May the Lord bless all the people of Turin’ was his wish ‘and keep all Catholics in the Holy Catholic Faith, the only religion that can offer real miracles as confirmation of the truths it professes.’<sup>54</sup> ‘Miracles have the merit of being an irrefutable argument for Catholic truth: ‘We have certain documentation which tells us that from the time of Our Lord Jesus Christ until today, miracles have been worked in the Catholic Church in every century,’ while Protestants cannot ‘show a single miracle in favour of their sect.’ He condenses his argument in a concise syllogism: ‘Only God can work miracles,’ ‘these miracles have been worked only in the Catholic religion,’ therefore, ‘only we Catholics find ourselves in the true religion.’<sup>55</sup>

Only in the *Storia d’Italia* did Don Bosco spend some time replying to readers who might doubt

52 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. XLIII *Due parole ai Ministri Protestanti* (A couple of words to Protestant Ministers), pp. 331-332, OE IV 637-638.

53 [G. BOSCO], *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo del SS. Sacramento avvenuto in Torino il 6 giugno 1453 con un cenno sul quarto centenario del 1853*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, 48 p., OE V 1-48.

54 [G. BOSCO], *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo...*, p. 4, OE V 4.

55 [G. BOSCO], *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo...*, pp. 5-6, OE V 5-6.

the absolute validity of such an argument and who might be in crisis because they were under the spell of an extraordinary man called Apollonio, from the city of Tiano [=Tiana]. 'I think you would want to ask me; "Who are the wizards? Did Apollonio tell the truth?"' he writes to doubters. He quells their fears by distinguishing a divine gift from human knowledge: 'True miracles and true prophecies can only come from God, who never allows them to be used to confirm falsehood. As for Apollonio, I believe he could very well have known, even at a distance, the hour of Domitian's death, because he was aware of and maybe even complicit in the conspiracy, and told of the day and time it would take place. So there was nothing supernatural that took place regarding Apollonio the wizard.'<sup>56</sup>

The Eucharistic miracle in Turin, on the other hand, had been worked by God especially for salvific ends. Don Bosco illustrates this in his *Dialogo tra un torinese ed un forestiere* (Dialogue between a man from Turin and a foreigner) added to the historical notes: '2. To confirm Catholics in that great truth taught by the Catholic Church, viz, that in the Blessed Eucharist there truly is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, alive and glorious as he is in heaven. 3. To give all Christians a sensible argument for this truth against Waldensian heretics who were already in the valleys around Luserna near Pinerolo and who denied, as they still deny today, the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist ... Finally, God saw that the memory of this glorious event was preserved and handed down to us in all certainty to act as a bulwark for the people of Turin against the assaults of heresy which seeks to make inroads among Catholics under specious and always false forms.'<sup>57</sup>

The booklet also gave rise to a touching 'family story' with Don Bosco and his successor as the main characters. Michael Rua was still a simple cleric. As a slender, somewhat frail seventeen-year-old, affected by the death of his two brothers, Luigi and Giovanni, within the short space of two years, it was natural for him to also think his own life would be short. Reassuringly and as a guarantee of a long life, Don Bosco entrusted him with the task of republishing this booklet on the fiftieth anniversary of the first edition. Faithful as he was, in 1903 Fr Rua duly fulfilled his 'father's wish'. He gave the introductory pages the title *Preface and Prophecy*, recalling some of his critical moments health-wise: his service to cholera victims in 1854, the strange weight loss in 1856 which made him believe he had tuberculosis and a serious bout of peritonitis in 1868. Don Bosco had kept his word.

Judgements on certain aspects of Protestantism are again summary and trenchant in the pamphlet *Fatti contemporanei in forma di dialogo* (Contemporary facts in dialogue form) in 1853. After a conversation with a Protestant minister, John goes off muttering to himself: 'I do not want to embrace a religion where its ministers have a house full of wives and kids, a religion without a head, sacraments, and no mark of divinity.'<sup>58</sup> He had often been heard to say ... Felix confides in his friends ... that the Protestants' most powerful sermon was about money and he never believed it until he saw it proven.'<sup>59</sup> No less a disillusionment was the plainness of the Protestant church: 'At least there could be something in their churches that could inspire devotion like there was in Jewish ones!...no cross, statue, altar; ; in short none of the things that move people to religious emotions in Catholic churches with much more expression.'<sup>60</sup>

Yet, Don Bosco wanted to persuade readers that the intention behind his apologetic work was irenic and conciliatory, as he assures them in his presentation of the *Dramma. Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante* (A Play. An argument between a lawyer and a Protestant

56 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 121-122, OE VII 121-122.

57 [G. Bosco], *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo...*, pp. 26-27, OE V 26-27.

58 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. DeAgostini 1853, pp. 9-10, OE V 59-60

59 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, p. 15, OE V 65.

60 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, p. 17, OE V 67.



minister) 1853. After guaranteeing he was presenting 'historical facts', things that really happened, he confesses: 'In everything I say to you about the Protestants, I intend to exclude any personal allusion, only aiming at their doctrine and its errors.' 'While variety and plot make this an enjoyable piece, the error will also be made clear and truth known, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, and the honour of our Holy Catholic Religion.'<sup>61</sup> This is the real reason why the characters during the scene discuss faith and works, the Sacrament of Penance, the Pope and the bishops. 'The bishops are secondary pastors who are united one heart and soul with the Supreme head of the Church and look after the health of souls redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.'<sup>62</sup>

The biographical story on the conversion of a Waldensian woman in 1854<sup>63</sup> was aimed at a convincing demonstration of the superiority of the Catholic Faith over the Waldensian confession rather than indulging in theoretical discussion. It speaks of the opposition the main character, Giuseppa, faced in wanting to join the Roman Church. There is *gioie de vivre* in the Church, fraternal communion, hard work because 'only in the Catholic Religion ... are there the helps needed not to fall into sin and the appropriate remedies for removing sin if one has the misfortune to commit it' through forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. There is faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, religious practices, the certainty of being in the authentic Church of the Apostles at the head of which is the Pope, Vicar of Jesus Christ, successor of St Peter, the discrete and reassuring presence of the priest and his fatherly loving-kindness. 'Your religion has true confession, true ministers, and pastors.'<sup>64</sup> 'We can say that comparing Protestantism with Catholicism' Don Bosco concludes 'was the light which helped Giuseppa know that the Waldensian religion was invalid.'<sup>65</sup> There is a final reminder to Catholics to be grateful and faithful, and above all there is the earnest invitation to separated brethren to return. 'The Catholic Church' he assures and beseeches them, 'extends her loving arms like a pitying mother: come, return to the religion that was the religion of your fathers for a thousand five hundred years; come and enter the fold of Jesus Christ once more and join with the Supreme Pastor ... return to the fold that your ancestors once abandoned.' A particular request is addressed to the Waldensian and Protestant ministers and pastors.' He asks them for radical conversion to the Catholic Faith; 'You who preach that the one who abandons his religion is doing wrong, who in your own words should be telling Catholics to be wary of abandoning the religion of their birth and which they were raised and instructed in, should tell Protestants that your elders were Catholics and did wrong by abandoning Catholicism and that the only way to remedy this wrong is to return to the very religion your elders once abandoned. You know these truths better than others, so you should be the first to give good example ... If you do this you will repair the eternal ruin of so many souls who come to listen to you; you will repair the ruin of your own soul and be saved. Courage then, Protestants and Waldensians and all who follow some reform outside the Catholic Church. Renew the marvellous spectacle in the Christian world of Christianity's earliest times and we will be of one heart and soul. I can assure you in God's name that all Catholics will reach out to you with loving arms to welcome you with joy.'<sup>66</sup>

Two letters some months later to Luigi Desanctis (1808–69) were inspired by identical pastoral zeal. He was a Roman religious priest who had followed Protestant thinking and abandoned the Catholic Church in 1847. He then fled to Malta, evangelising and beginning intense activity as an

61 [G. BOSCO], *Dramma. Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, pp. 3-4, OE V 103-104.

62 [G. BOSCO], *Dramma. Una disputa...*, pp. 51-53, OE V 151-153.

63 [G. BOSCO], *Conversione di una valdese. Fatto contemporaneo*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. DeAgostini 1854, 108 p., OE V 249-367: it took up the first two issues of the second year of the "Letture Cattoliche" (March 1865).

64 [G. BOSCO], *Conversione di una valdese...*, pp. 17, 21, 29, 32, 37-38, 54, 65-67, OE V 275, 279, 287, 290, 295-296, 312, 323-325.

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66 [G. BOSCO], *Conversione di una valdese...*, pp. 105-107, OE V 363-365.

opponent of the Catholic Church. He married in June 1849 and moved to Geneva in 1850. Involved with the '*Église évangélique libre*' he gradually shifted in the direction of the more structured Waldensian Church and was made pastor in 1852 with a mandate to go to Turin and work with Meille. He arrived there at the end of September but due to a disagreement with the authoritarian Meille and the intransigence of the Table Moderator he was in crisis, so in 1854 he first resigned, then withdrew his resignation and became a freelance evangelist with the Italian Evangelical Society of Turin, a body with Congregationalist leanings.

There were months of deep inner turmoil and strong confrontation. In 1864 he returned to the Waldensians in Florence, where he spent his final years.<sup>67</sup> At the time of his crisis in Turin, Don Bosco thought he saw the favourable moment, a true time of grace and encounter with a priest who had been wayward and then become a teacher of error. He wrote to him: 'From things I have seen printed in the newspaper it seems you are in disagreement with the Waldensians. Moved solely by the spirit of affection and Christian charity I am inviting you to come to my place whenever you wish. To do what? Whatever the Lord inspires you to do. You will have a room to live in and a modest table with me; I will share my bread and stipend with you.'<sup>68</sup>The reply seemed to offer a glimmer of hope and Don Bosco replied in turn, offering 'My humble but loyal friendship' citing names of others similarly inclined priests in Turin who would show charity to their apostate confrere –Canon Anglesio, Fr Borel, Fr Cafasso – and offered to meet at the Oratory or Desanctis' home.<sup>69</sup>

We do not know what the answer was, but in a letter to him on 26 May 1855, Don Bosco again expressed his concern and hope as a friend: 'I seem to sense from your writings and words that you are not fully at peace and I was looking for the right moment to demonstrate the concern I have for your eternal salvation. Since you have given me the gift of your friendship, you could come and talk one-on-one of your hopes and fears. It would not be to argue, which should not happen between friends, but to discuss and know the truth. So I have been eager to see you again. Now, I can tell you frankly what I want and with all my heart what I want is the salvation of your soul. I am willing to make any spiritual and temporal sacrifice to help you. You only need to tell me if you can believe you can be at peace and be saved; if you think a good Catholic can be saved in his current religious situation; if you think a Catholic or Protestant [dissident] would have greater guarantee of salvation.'<sup>70</sup>

Prior to Don Bosco, Sister Assunta Canevori had also written to Desanctis on 29 September 1854. She had seen him working very zealously for cholera sufferers in the 1835–37 epidemic when the priest was still a Religious with the Clerics Regular, Ministers to the Sick (Camillians). Concerned when she heard he had fallen into heresy, she begged him to look to the salvation of his soul and return to the Church.<sup>71</sup> Desanctis had already made his choice and not such a clear one according to Don Bosco. In fact he wrote during those days: 'From some of the correspondence and some chats someone had with Desanctis, it seems positive to me that he did not abandon Catholicism for religious reasons and that for reasons quite apart from religion he continues to live in his current belief system.'<sup>72</sup>

Not having received further reply, Don Bosco resumed his freedom to be the apologist, taking aim at the one he had attempted to approach with sincere friendship. He was persuaded to do this

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67 Cf. V. VINAY, *Luigi Desanctis e il movimento evangelico fra gli italiani durante il Risorgimento*, already quoted; v. *De Sanctis, Luigi*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Vol. 39 (1991) 313-316.

68 Letter of 17 November 1854, Em I 237.

69 Letter of 30 November 1854, Em I 239.

70 Letter of 26 May 1855, Em I 254.

71 Cf. E. COMBA, *Storia de' Valdesi*, Florence, Tip. Claudiana 1893, p. 390.

72 Cf. *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni*. Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1855, p. 121, OE VI 265.

after seeing a pamphlet against the Catholic notion of the Sacrament of Penance which Desanctis published in Malta in 1852.<sup>73</sup> This issue was too sensitive for the priest of the young and the people who considered Confession to be one of the main pillars of a genuine Christian and pastoral educative system. He could not remain silent and his argument could only be in dialogue form, since he considered it the best literary form for having an impact on all kinds of people, but especially young people and adults from the working class. His apologetic pamphlet came out as a double issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* in June 1855 under the title *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione* (Conversations between a lawyer and a country parish priest on the Sacrament of Confession). At the beginning, the author declared he was arguing 'not with calumny, gossip or bad faith which are the ordinary weapons our enemies use,' and he assured the reader that 'as far as possible' he had 'abstained from naming authors and impieties in the writings of enemies of Confession.'<sup>74</sup> But in refuting Desanctis's pamphlet, attached as an appendix, he did not hold back. He began with a quick run-down on the author, which was by no means kind, and offered a pitiless criticism of his essay, which he said was the product of the 'clouded intellect' and 'hardened heart' of an apostate. 'I can assure the reader, he wrote with unusual bluntness, that we find here neither reason nor religion; the man speaking is delirious,' 'nor should we marvel at that because, as I said, the corruption of the best becomes the worst,' 'one abyss calls on another abyss, and the best, when corrupted, becomes the worst.'<sup>75</sup>

As for its contents, Don Bosco's pamphlet was the ultimate defence of the central role of the Sacrament of Penance in the Faith. Whoever wishes to strip it away is trying to alienate Catholics from it.<sup>76</sup> As an antidote, of more benefit to lukewarm Catholics than to Protestants, he intended to prove 'with the Gospel and history in hand' that 'the need for Confession was recognised by the Gentiles themselves; it was practised by the Jewish people at God's command and this practice was elevated, by the Saviour to the dignity of a sacrament.' He came out with a special pleading for the Catholic Church: 'Let us remain closely united to the religion established by Jesus Christ which has the Roman Pontiff, his Vicar on earth, as its visible head. Among all the vicissitudes of centuries it has had to fight but has always been triumphant.'<sup>77</sup> The characters in the dialogue were mature and convinced believers – Peter, Andrew, Germano – who bravely tackled superficial Catholics, 'new theologians' in convivial meeting places where 'according to today's craze' he writes, 'after arguing about some political questions the discussion led to religious ones.' Peter is the one who carries on the more developed discussion, elaborating on the plan Don Bosco had promised in the preface.<sup>78</sup> The lengthy discussion, guided by Germano, unwound in eight conversations to do with the divine institution of Confession practised by the Apostles and their successors in the early Church, from the 5th century to the Lateran Council, and from then until the Council of Trent. It was in use amongst Gentiles and Jew, of great comfort to the Christian and an effective means of voiding evil and doing good.<sup>79</sup>

Different in tone, quite biting in fact, was the *Avviso* (Notice) at the beginning of the preceding

73 Cf. L. DESANCTIS, *La confessione. Saggio dommatico-storico*, 5th edition. Turin, Fontana 1851, 84 p.; at Pinerolo, Bodoni 1852, 83 p., etc. In 1892 it had reached its 22nd edition.

74 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. IV-V, OE VI 148-149.

75 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. 113-115, OE VI 257-259. In his refutation of De Santis' essay, Don Bosco shows himself to be more aggressive than other apologists preceding him and on whom he appears to depend: cf. *Errori di Luigi Desanctis sul dogma della confessione del teologo Benedetto Negri*, Turin, tip. G. A. Reviglio 1852, 173 p.; *Sulla dottrina e disciplina della Chiesa Romana intorno al sacramento della confessione. Discorso del dott. Alessandro Belli monaco Cassinese in Badia di Firenze contro il Saggio dommatico storico di Luigi Desanctis. Seconda edizione corretta ed accresciuta*, Florence, tip. Galileiana 1851, 136.

76 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, p. III, OE VI 147.

77 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. IV-VI, OE VI 148-150.

78 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. 7-86, OE VI 151-230.

79 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. 20-86, OE VI 164-230.

little book *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei* (A collection of curious contemporary happenings)<sup>80</sup> followed again in 1854 by two other strongly polemical pamphlets in the second year of the *Letture Cattoliche*. In the first of these, by Jesuit Fr Giovanni Perone, *Catechismo intorno al Protestantismo ad uso del popolo* (Catechism on Protestantism for use by the people,<sup>81</sup> the appendix on *Barbetti o Valdesi* (The bearded ones, or Waldensians) was particularly strong. The other, an anonymous item, *Del commercio delle coscienze e dell'agitazione protestante in Europa* (Commerce in consciences and Protestant agitation in Europe)<sup>82</sup> denounced the mercenary nature of heretical propaganda. Don Bosco was no less polemical in the *Avviso* presenting the *Raccolta*: 'Consider it good advice for our readers on this subject, how Protestants have shown themselves to be shameless, especially when we see the facts. They show it in what they say, their private letters and the newspapers they publish. We expected them to argue and tell us of some error we have printed but it was not so. All they said, wrote and published was but a fabric of rude comments and insults about the *Letture Cattoliche* and against its editor. In saying rude comments and insults we are granting them some degree of victory, without even pausing to reply. We have always made the greatest effort never to publish anything that might be contrary to the charity that every human being in this world should show. So, gladly forgiving all our detractors, we will try to avoid personalities but reveal error wherever it is hidden.'<sup>83</sup>

In the facts and dialogue contained therein, however, other than a resolute critique of Protestantism, we find a striking lament regarding the position of Catholics affected by indifference, for whom 'all religions are equally good' for achieving salvation. Giuliano and Giovanni (Convinced believers who were Protestants and returned to Catholicism) and another, Carlo, incorruptibly Catholic, set out on the task with arguments in line with the best orthodoxy. Carlo, in particular, faced with craftsmen complaining about the *poverty of the vintage*, the famine which meant few people were asking for their products, sought the cause of this in lack of morality and lukewarm religiousness: 'If I think of the contempt shown religious matters the shameful way people speak of the Pope, the bishops and other ministers of religion; if I consider the way some Catholics praise heresy and even celebrate the opening of the Protestant Church; if I consider the irreligious and filthy things written, printed and sold publicly in books and newspapers; if I consider the sacrilegious theft and the derisory comments they make about the holiest things of our religion, my good friends, I have to say that, it is such sins that are the cause of our misfortunes.' 'The only way to remedy our ills is to let go of sin and become virtuous.'<sup>84</sup>

The pamphlet that followed, *Il giubileo e pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese* (The jubilee and devout practices for visiting churches)<sup>85</sup> was an eminently devotional one. However, Don Bosco did not fail to introduce references to Protestantism, to preserve and protect the faithful from it. Awareness of the origins of 'jubilee' 'which came to the Catholic Church from the Jewish synagogue' he wrote, 'will also serve to refute the accusation that Protestants and some Catholics level at the Catholic Church, almost saying that jubilee and holy indulgences are a recent institution.'<sup>86</sup>

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80 *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei*, 45 pp., OE V 369-413, fasc. 3-4 April in the second year of the "Letture Cattoliche".

81 Issue 5-6, May, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1854, 148 pp.

82 Issues 13 and 14, September, Turin, P. De Agostini 1854, 111 pp.

83 G. BOSCO, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei...*, pp. 3-4, OE V 371-372.

84 G. BOSCO, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei...*, pp. 12-15, 28, 31, OE V 380-383, 396, 399.

85 Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1854, 64 p. OE V 479-542. The work was republished with additions in issue 2 (February) of the *Letture Cattoliche* 1865, Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1865, 96 p.; and again in two editions in 1875, Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, 96 p. and again in two editions 1875, Turin, tip. e libr. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1875, 114 pp.

86 [G. Bosco], *Il giubileo...*, pp. 3-4, OE V 481-482: cf. also, pp. 30, 32, 39, 43, OE V 508, 510, 517, 521; pp. 3-4, OE XXVI 189-190.

#### 4. Book on human and civic education (1854–55)

In the second half of the decade, Don Bosco appears to soften his efforts at protecting from error to give more room to positive and constructive prevention to do with truth and what is good. He preferred, at this point, to promote Christian instruction and education which included a strong human civic and political base in line with his familiar formula of the 'good Christian and upright citizen.' He alternated books dealing directly with moral and social education, such as *La Forza della buona educazione* (The power of a good upbringing) and the *Storia d'Italia* (History of Italy), religious instruction and catechetics such as the *Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra* (Easy way of learning Bible history). *La Chiave del paradiso* (Key to Paradise) *Il mese di maggio* (The month of May), *the Porta Teo Cristiano* (Christian companion/handbook) and hagiographical works like the *Vita di san Martino* (The life of St Martin).

We will examine the more significant motifs in the various works, emphasising first the human, civic and political aspect, then later the more explicitly Christian aspect. We will treat the lives of the popes separately, as they present interesting common elements. Don Bosco dealt with the human and Christian education of youth in a biographical genre in the already mentioned *Power of a good upbringing*, which became the November 1855 issue of the *Letture Catholique* or Catholic Readings. It reflects the French world, since this was the world of the text Don Bosco drew most on in the first part of the story.<sup>87</sup> Thanks to his mother's care (without her husband's support) as a wise Christian educator, the main character, Peter, lived a life of dignified poverty and did early work in not always exemplary settings. He survived unscathed through various episodes where workmates regularly swore, indulged in unbecoming conversation, and stole things, while he earned the respect of his employers. At ten years of age, over lunch break he would attend the Oratory of St Francis de Sales when it was still at the Refuge, to prepare for his First Communion, 'the most important event in his life.' He went back there in the evening 'to listen to explanations of things he had not understood well at midday' or 'to learn to read and write.'

As an eleven-year-old, he took part in the triduum in preparation for the Easter duty (Communion). He continued going to the Oratory in the years that followed, taking part in the various religious and recreational activities, used *The Companion of Youth*, and took part in the retreat at Giaveno in September 1850. He played a leading role in reconciling his father by living a harmonious life at home, and through his kindness. Among his workmates he was able to recognise and oppose the widespread lack of observance of the Church's precepts on fasting and abstinence, day of rest, Sunday Mass, Easter duty – and do so successfully, winning their respect and admiration. During military service, which he tackled with spontaneous civic awareness, he was impressive for his serious moral approach and readiness to help his illiterate fellow soldiers. During the Crimea Campaign he kept in touch with his spiritual director, showing how he was ever faithful to the principles of morality and religion.<sup>88</sup> The *Power of a good upbringing* ends up becoming a celebration of the three basic institutions which work together in Peter's upbringing: the family especially the mother, the parish priest and the oratory.

The most demanding and important work of the decade, which *The month of May* and *Life of Dominic Savio* also came close to for their importance, was certainly *La Storia d'Italia* or History of Italy.<sup>89</sup> More than a school textbook it was a work of literature, easy to read as an attractive historical narrative. It was also a handbook of Religious, moral and social education. One can also note, in its structure, an intrinsic sense of education to love of country, Italy, conceived of

87 Cf. J. SCHEPENS, "La forza della buona educazione". *Étude d'un écrit de don Bosco, in L'impegno dell'educare*, ed. J. M. Prellezo. Roma, LAS 1991, pp. 418-433.

88 G. BOSCO, *La forza della buona educazione...*, pp. 15-25, 51-59, 65-66, 93-95, OE VI 289-299, 325-333, 340-341, 367-369.

89 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, 588 p., OE VII 1-588.

geographically as running from the Alps down to Sicily. Corresponding to this, in Don Bosco's mind, was linguistic, religious, cultural, national and hopefully, political unity. Each edition had a map, and already in some of these, prior to Don Bosco's death, the names of the cities in the South Tyrol had been Italianised.<sup>90</sup> Don Bosco wanted his history to be the history of 'Italians', beginning with the first inhabitants who were more evolved, at the beginning, then even the first Romans, who were uncouth and wild.' These original inhabitants gradually brought about unity, finally domesticating and assimilating the various peoples who invaded the Peninsula beginning with the Gauls: it was an assimilation which reached a high degree in the colonies of Greater Greece.<sup>91</sup>

The outstanding educational value of the book was worthy of an extremely positive review by Nicolo Tommaseo in Turin from 1854 to 1859. 'Tommaseo, a Catholic and patriot, had to sympathise unhesitatingly with a similarly Catholic and patriotic writer even though there might have been some disagreements between them.'<sup>92</sup> They disagreed at the level of historical critique, but this was balanced by their prevailing agreement on educational objectives and the suitability of the book for the needs of the young.<sup>93</sup> One should not be surprised that in 1903, when the Salesian Congregation sought to obtain civil recognition from Emperor Franz Jozef, there were serious problems of national spirit and irredentism [emancipation of Italians from foreign occupation], which the Imperial Ambassador to the Holy See and the Emperor himself believed they had identified in the *Storia d'Italia* used broadly by Salesians and others as a school text book.<sup>94</sup>

Don Bosco wrote to his friend, Canon Edoardo Rosaz di Susa, the day after Victor Emmanuel 11 was proclaimed King of Italy, approved by the Senate on 12 February 1861 and the House [of Representatives] on 14 March: 'Fossano (Cuneo) 15 March 1861, Year 1, Day 2 of the Kingdom of Italy.'<sup>95</sup> These words which seemed quite permissible between two Piedmontese inevitably fond of Savoy, had a celebratory but ironic touch.

Though by the nature of its subject it necessarily had to include the fact that its immediate readership was Italian, as part of its educational function it did not end up providing a nationalistic perspective, either for them or for others, but looked at a range of universal and basic values for all readers. Every page, in fact had, and supported, ethical and religious context and inspiration before any particular educational objective, and was aimed at the holistic individual and social formation of youth in general, not only the youth of one or other country. The author himself declared this perspective when spelling out the *purpose and manner of dividing* his *History of Italy*: 'Keeping to certain facts, the more fruitful items more useful for teaching in moral terms,' he says, 'I leave aside frivolous conjecture, too much footnoting, and also political discussion that is too erudite, since these are not useful and are sometimes harmful to youth ... I have done what I can so my work can be useful for that part of human society which is the hope for a happy future, its youth. I present historical truth, include a love of virtue, avoidance of vice, respect for religion. These are the real purpose behind every page.'<sup>96</sup> So, for Don Bosco, complete historical truth was not only what came from rigorously checking events but also and inseparably, by illustrating their

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90 Cf. description of the map on pages 7-10, OE VII 7-10.

91 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 19, 24, 28-29, OE VII 19, 24, 28-29.

92 A. LANTRUA, *Il Tommaseo e Don Bosco o della storia educatrice*, in *Cultura e educazione. Studi in onore di Giovanni Calò*, Florence, Editrice Universitaria 1955, p. 195; cf. F. TRANIELLO, *Don Bosco e l'educazione giovanile: la "Storia d'Italia"*, in F. TRANIELLO (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 81-111.

93 Cf. N. TOMMASEO, *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù dal Sacerdote G. Bosco Torino*, in "L'Istituto" 7 (1859), no. 48, Saturday 26 November, pp. 764-765; *Ancora della Storia d'Italia scritta dall'Ab. Bosco*, in "L'Istituto" 7 (1859) no. 51, Saturday 17 December, pp. 810-811.

94 Cf. S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia Austro-Ungarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (1868 ca. - 1919). Rome, LAS 1997, pp. 160-165

95 Em I 442.

96 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 3 and 5, OE VII 3 and 5.

immanent educational potential.<sup>97</sup> It was no extrinsic device or mere accessory element or something forced, that we find ‘morality’, from one chapter to another, of the kind he finds in the Roman hero Coriolanus. ‘He was a young man who loved his country and was renowned for the respect he had for his mother.’ He was killed by the Volsci after trying to take revenge for his unjust exile from Rome. ‘The story’ Don Bosco concludes, addressing his young readers ‘teaches us that we should be wary of anger and the spirit of revenge because these two passions often lead us into such a quagmire that we can no longer extract our feet without causing serious injury.’<sup>98</sup> He wants it to be a simple application of history as *magistra vitae*. The educational message of the book, therefore, is not only revealed by its frequent moralistic warnings but is above all intrinsic to the narrative itself.

The assumption behind the entire historical and pedagogical discourse is very simple, and one we have already noted: the hierarchical, stratified concept of society as a natural immutable, God-given datum, made up of rich and poor; those who wield power and their subjects, governors or governed. Everyone, including the one who governs, is subject to someone superior, the ultimate ‘someone’ being God, and should people do wrong they will be punished ‘the more severely because they are richer and more powerful.’<sup>99</sup> In a Christian regime, if subjects must obey secular rulers. These latter are seen on a hierarchical ladder where subjects must recognise who is above them on earth: religious authority, the Church and ultimately its head the pope, the final step on the hierarchical ladder leading to God.

It is a concept that controls the various realities in play in the historical narrative: religion, meaning the true religion represented by the Catholic Church, the basis of the social order with the pope as model and ultimate guarantor of social and political order. Then there is the principle of authority, rejection of revolution under any form, the duty of subjects to obey, conditions for authority to be legitimate, the absolute prevalence of a monarchical regime over a republican one, the ambiguity of democratic potential which might be a prelude to revolutionary demagoguery, the temporal goods of the Church as a guarantee of freedom and social faithfulness.

Inequality as an inevitable and providential property of social coexistence finds its paradigmatic expression in the relationship between rich and poor, benefactors and those who benefit in the first number in the serious *Lives of the Popes* dedicated to St Peter, a work that came out just a few months after the *History of Italy*. Having described the charity of Tabitha, the rich woman from loppo, Don Bosco concludes: ‘The poor learn from this that they must be grateful to those who give them alms. The rich learn what it means to take pity on and be generous to the poor.’<sup>100</sup> It is what God, who is the same Father to all, asks of them both.

We can say similar things of the wider social and political world with God as its foundation, guardian and judge. It is obvious for Don Bosco to state that no social order exists without the morality of individuals, especially those who govern, and that it would be precarious if it did not find its ultimate foundation in its own religious nature before that of the people. ‘Without religion, it is impossible to restrain abuses.’<sup>101</sup> ‘God punishes irreligion even in individuals at the highest level.’<sup>102</sup> The historical principle, which is closer to Bossuet, inspires this and all Don Bosco’s historical narrative: God punishes those who oppose his plans for human events, including in extraordinary ways. Most of the general warnings in the *Storia d’Italia* are inspired by this. An

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97 These ideas were expressed resolutely by Don Bosco in 1860 to the Minister for Public Instruction [Education] in Italy, historian Michele Amari: cf. Introduction to Part 3, § 2.1; Chap. 13, § 2.3.

98 G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia*..., pp. 43-45, OE VII 43-45; cf. other “moral issues” pages 51, 53, 54, 55, 59, 71, 75, 76, 80, 83, 96, 108, 140, 142, 189, 199, 262, 268, 285, 288, 293, 297, 364, 369, 386, 446, 447.

99 G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia*..., p. 36, OE VII 36.

100 G. Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro Principe degli Apostoli*..., p. 104, OE VIII 396.

101 G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia*..., p. 25, OE VII 25.

102 G. Bosco, *La storia d’Italia*..., p. 29, OE VII 29.

impressive example is what happened to Julian the Apostate who wanted to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem: 'Balls of fire burned up all the material he had prepared.' Rebellious Julian dies and 'angrily' recognises that '*Galileo has won, Galileo has won.*'<sup>103</sup> Similar, though not identical, was the case of Napoleon's fate, though tempered by his sufferings in remote exile. Don Bosco's judgement of him is split between admiration of the greatness of someone who brought an end to the Revolution and was a great leader, and condemnation of his persecution of the popes, emotion at his Christian death in solitude on Sant'Elena, 'a poor shoal in the Atlantic ocean.'<sup>104</sup>

In more decisive historical times, however, dependence on God becomes a more immediate and proper reference to two providential realities where God's power and wisdom are more certainly visible: the Church and within it the pope, a guarantee of conformity with the Divine Will and a model of government who does not indulge in foolish popularist and revolutionary aspirations but is fully dedicated to procuring the true good of the nations. 'Infallibility in the spiritual order and sovereignty in the temporal order are two perfectly synonymous terms: both express high level potency which dominates all others and from which they all derive,' Don Bosco quotes, obviously in agreement, from the book *Del Papa* by J. De Maistre in the summary he dedicates to it. 'The only difference' De Maistre continues with Savoyan political insight, 'is that in his temporal sovereignty, infallibility is humanly presumed, while in his spiritual sovereignty it is divinely promised.'<sup>105</sup>

The [Catholic] Religion, the Church, the papacy, following a notion widespread among fundamentalist Catholics, were the safest defence of the social and political order across Europe by especially in Italy.<sup>106</sup> One of the most evident proofs was the voluntary exile of the popes in Avignon. 'History' Don Bosco notes 'shows us perfectly that Italy without the Pontiff becomes a country exposed to the saddest things.' 'When troubles and discord force the Roman Pontiff to leave Rome, this forewarns us of serious evils for Italy and Religion.'<sup>107</sup> Over broader areas and more distant times, the schism in the East and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 were already evidence of this. 'It was a terrible collapse' Don Bosco comments 'that dragged the most beautiful nations in the world into dark acts of barbarism, since those who did not want to recognise the legitimate authority of the successor of St Peter had to submit to the barbarous oppression and harsh slavery of infidels who acted as tyrants.'<sup>108</sup>

Leo X's advent to the papacy was a positive counter-proof. 'Providence' Don Bosco writes, 'raised up a man whom history rightly calls *the regenerator of the arts and sciences in Italy* and, we could say, in all of Europe.' But, 'among all the consolations he experienced for the glory of Italy. Leo X had to suffer much because of Martin Luther's heresy.'<sup>109</sup>

Weakening or striking at the principle of hierarchical authority, means opening the gate to all kinds of trouble, finally ending in cruel confrontations and civil strife. A warning of this was the 'revolution of the Gracchi.' The narrator notes: [The people] having been abandoned to unemployment, the plebs began to be jealous of the lot of the rich and wanted to lay their hands on their possessions, which was true robbery because someone who has acquired his goods honestly has the right to enjoy them.<sup>110</sup> 'The rebellion by Masaniello' he notes as the story continues, 'produced no other results than bloodshed, a tyrannical government, death and exile. How true it is that revolutions do not make people happy!'<sup>111</sup> Incompetent leaders do not promise anything good.

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103 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 151, OE VII 151.

104 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 457-458, 463, 465, 469, OE VII 457-458, 463, 465, 469.

105 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*.... Second edition, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia 1859, p. 440.

106 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 375, OE VII 375.

107 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 306, 315, OE VII 306, 315.

108 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 338, OE VII 338.

109 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 383, OE VII 383.

110 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 79, OE VII 79.

111 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., p. 428, OE VII 428.



'Heaven do not bless those who rebel against their country' he writes of the Ghibelline Dante Alighieri.<sup>112</sup> The narrator firmly disassociates himself from any kind of revolution, political or social.

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Within this framework of ideas and in the cultural and social context in which he was writing, Don Bosco drew arguments from further historical experiences for a principle that could be spelt out in these words: the true citizen who is also a good Christian is the obedient subject of any legitimate superior. The invitation is not only to obedience but even to 'affection' of subjects for their sovereigns. This was the great benefit, he notes, of the gospel message: It was absolutely necessary for a teacher to come who would teach rulers how to command and subjects how to obey by the holiness of his teaching. The religion of Jesus Christ did this.<sup>114</sup>

Consensus is made up of personal and social uprightness, enterprise and hard work. Already in Italy 'in far distant times,' 'some made every effort to cultivate the land, others attended to arts and trades' or 'industry' were productive capital activities.<sup>115</sup> They were qualified by good schools 'established to instruct the upper classes and also the lower class of people.'<sup>116</sup> All these factors were pillars supporting the peaceful, fraternal, prosperous and happy political community: 'war brings no good to nations.'<sup>117</sup>

More frequent still were facts that led to much more demanding comments on the serious responsibilities of rulers, and the conditions and qualities that make them legitimate and guarantee good government. The three most emphasised were competence, well-to-do circumstances and upper class membership, religiosity. In the first instance it was essential to attribute civil and political authority to rulers who claimed their legitimacy from competence. The narrator teaches that 'those who have not acquired the knowledge needed for governing people, due to age or occupation, are not capable of affairs of State.'<sup>118</sup> He adds that from the very origins of Rome, 'since to profess an area of knowledge you have to work at it exclusively, patricians should occupy themselves solely with matters of State.'<sup>119</sup> Competence, in turn, was inseparable from elevated social and economic *status*. Practically every civil society, for it to remain well-ordered, required the presence on the one hand of 'the best' and the noble, those who are well-off and, on the other, people who could, however, become plebs of the worst kind if they were rebellious.<sup>120</sup> The Republic of Venice, for example, had for many centuries 'become the most famous republic in Italy because it had always been governed by the best, and had never fallen into the hands of the people.'<sup>121</sup> This was a reaffirmation of hierarchical social order like in Rome when they drew inspiration from nearby peoples to 'promote art and sciences so some could attend to commerce and cultivation of the fields while others thought of administration of the State and defence of the country.'<sup>122</sup>

Still, not to be overlooked was the reminder of the foundation, religiosity, which generates justice, the most important virtue for a person of government.<sup>123</sup> Don Bosco offered proof of this by recalling events involving some of history's main players: emperors, kings, leaders of maritime republics. He confirmed it with two pieces on the 'restoration' of the Papal States following the

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112 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 300, OE VII 300.

113 Cf. G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 84-91, OE VII 84-91.

114 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 109, OE VII 109.

115 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 22, 26 and 36, OE VII 22, 26 and 36.

116 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 22-23, OE VII 22-23.

117 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 12, OE VII 12.

118 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 20-21, OE VII 20-21.

119 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 21, OE VII 21.

120 Cf. G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 265, 411, OE VII 265, 411.

121 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 370, OE VII 370.

122 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 19, OE VII 19.

123 Cf. Chap. 11, § 8.1.

Roman republican revolution of 1848-49. 'I would like you to bear in mind' he wrote in moralising tones, 'that Pius IX, Ferdinand II the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Charles Albert and all the other Italian princes alike were all willing to do what was good for Italy. Mazzini and his followers, out of hatred for the monarchy and religion, prevented them from pursuing this enterprise, upsetting their plans and causing huge harm to princes and people.'<sup>124</sup> He drew his argument from this: 'The army and the clergy are the two great bodies called on to safeguard the future ...; disturbed society can find strength and salvation only in religious sentiment and respect for authority.'<sup>125</sup>

In Don Bosco's view, hereditary monarchy was a better form of government than a republican regime so long as it did not degenerate into tyranny.<sup>126</sup> As a faithful Savoyard he had his readers note: 'With the Romans, such a law was lacking. With us the law is that the first-born son succeeds his deceased father as king. We call this legitimate succession. Learn to respect it.'<sup>127</sup> It was not by chance that he gave space to narrating the origins and events pertaining to the Savoy dynasty.<sup>128</sup> As for republics, as a supporter of the pope and the monarchy he said: 'When Rome became a republic, far from experiencing happiness it found that in place of a true leader they had to suffer many who became tyrants.'<sup>129</sup> He certainly had no better opinion of the Roman Republic of 1849.

The nearest rebuttal was provided by the fact that it was the subversives who prevailed in the French Revolution, 'an extraordinary event that threw Europe into confusion and forced Italy to experience horrors and calamities similar to when it was subjected to the Goths, Lombards and Normans.'<sup>130</sup> Don Bosco identifies the roots of this in the Enlightenment, undoubtedly a time of great progress in the 'sciences' and 'arts' but one that 'made it so easy for secret societies to carry out their plans.' Under different names they sought to subvert the existing social and order.<sup>131</sup> This was not a subjective evaluation but, in more or less refined terms, a broadly accepted view at various levels of Catholicism, even at the top.<sup>132</sup> Again, it was the secret societies which sought to upset the European order reconstituted by the Congress of Vienna and also in an attempt to destabilise the Papal States.<sup>133</sup> They met some success with the proclamation of the Roman Republic but which was very soon annulled by the 'restoration' wrought by French troops and the return of Pius IX.<sup>134</sup> In 1850, 'the Catholic religion as personified by Pius IX returned to Rome and returned powerfully by offering mercy for ingratitude and forgiveness for the repentant.'<sup>135</sup> For the narrator, democracy was an ambiguous and untrustworthy regime which could easily degenerate into demagoguery and revolution.

This most important of Don Bosco's narrative works ended with a theological interpretation of the most recent historical events. The key players were two Catholic sovereigns, Napoleon III and Franz Jozef. According to Don Bosco, the former directed and the latter was the arbiter of the Paris Peace Accord of 30 March 1856 at the end of the Crimean war. Napoleon had acted in 1849-50 to bring the pope back to Rome and, as President of the French Republic, 'became Emperor of the French, and by protecting religion did great good for the nation, raising it to new glory and

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124 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 502-503, OE VII 502-503.

125 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 509, OE VII 509.

126 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 49, OE VII 49.

127 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 134, OE VII 134.

128 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 315-331, 396, 413-417, 428-441, 479-489, OE VII 315-331, 396, 413-417, 428-441, 479-489.

129 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 40, OE VII 40.

130 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 454, OE VII 454.

131 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 455-456, OE VII 455-456; cf. Chap. 1, § 1.

132 Cf. P. LADRIÈRE, *La Révolution française dans la doctrine politique des papes de la fin du XVIIIe à la moitié du XXe siècle*, "Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions" 33 (1988) no. 66/1, July-September, pp. 87-112.

133 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 475-479, OE VII 475-479.

134 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 489-514, OE VII 489-514.

135 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 514, OE VII 514.

splendour.' 'Austria too' he noted 'was rewarded by Providence. Recognising that favouring religion is the most powerful way of preserving States and that contempt for it is their ruin, Franz Jozef began establishing many things favourable to religion.' 'This shows how religion supports the throne and the happiness of the people who honour it and practise its precepts.'<sup>136</sup>

There is an interesting chapter on *The temporal goods of the Church and the reign of the Supreme Pontiff*. Don Bosco left it intact in editions following Rome's capture, convinced that some sovereign territory should be available to the pope so he could freely exercise his spiritual mission.<sup>137</sup> The author is especially careful to demonstrate the natural and legitimate origin and nature of the Papal States.<sup>138</sup> But he was even more concerned with the showing of spiritual and temporal benefits. In essence, defending the pope's temporal authority was equivalent to wanting to guarantee him freedom of pastoral and charitable action and safeguarding similar freedom for the entire Church. Years later he wrote: 'The popes have always used their temporal power and considerable wealth offered them by devout faithful, to do good with it, all kinds of good in whatever manner and form ... The lower classes of society found refuge and aid only in the Church. The popes opened the doors of hospitals built by them at great expense to take in the sick and the needy. That is the destination of these goods, such is the spirit of the faithful and the will of the Church.'<sup>139</sup> But the Church must also be free and independent in exercising its spiritual duties ... The Church and its Supreme Head was free and independent in the early centuries, but at the cost of life.'<sup>140</sup> In conclusion, '1. It is really necessary for the ppe to live in a free and independent country so he can freely make judgements in religious matters. 2. Such temporal dominion is not only something belonging to subjects of the Roman States but we could call it the property of all Catholics who, like affectionate children, have agreed and must still agree to preserve the freedom and goods of the head of Christianity.'<sup>141</sup> It is clear that Don Bosco also accepted all the theological, spiritual and historical claims of intransigent Catholic argument.<sup>142</sup>

Finally, it could be interesting to recall that while compiling his *Storia d'Italia*, Don Bosco came into contact with books that suggested the line (which had political origins) he never abandoned as priest, educator, formator and legislator: 'Make yourself loved rather than feared.'<sup>143</sup>

## 5. Books on religious education (1855–58)

*The Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra* (Easy way of learning Bible history) was offered Catholics in dialogue narrative form.<sup>144</sup> It drew its inspiration from the doctrinal and theological shift found in the third edition of the *Storia sacra* in 1853 which, in the author's words, was a compendium. 'My aim,' he explained 'is to note how various truths professed by Catholics and denied by the enemies of our Religion are contained in the Bible.'<sup>145</sup> It was a typical Bible history

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136 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 522-523, OE VII 522-523.

137 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 208-214, OE VII 208-214 *Dei beni temporali della Chiesa e del dominio del sommo pontefice*.

138 Cf. also [G. BOSCO], *I Papi da san Pietro a Pio IX. Fatti storici*, Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, Chap. XIII *Donazioni fatte alla Chiesa Romana. Potere temporale de' Papi* (pp. 39-41, OE XVIII 365-367), Chap. XIV *Inviolabilità e legittimità del potere temporale del Papa. Vantaggi di questo potere temporale. Testimonianze di Bossuet, di Fleury e di Napoleone* (pp. 41-44, OE XVIII 367-370), Chap. XV *A che servono i beni della Chiesa* (pp. 44-46, OE XVIII 370-372).

139 [G. BOSCO], *I papi da san Pietro a Pio IX*..., pp. 44-45, OE XVIII 370-371.

140 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 209-210, OE VII 209-210.

141 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia*..., pp. 213-214, OE VII 213-214.

142 Cf. P. G. CAMAIANI, *Motivi e riflessi religiosi della questione romana, in Chiesa e religiosità in Italia dopo l'Unità (1861-1878)*..., *Relazioni II*, ..., pp. 67-84.

143 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 304-305.

144 *Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano per cura del sac. Bosco Giovanni*, Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1855, 94 p., OE VI 49-143.

145 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile*..., *Al Lettore*, p. 3, OE VI 51.

form of catechesis of the kind Claude Fleury was already offering at the end of the 17th century in his *Catéchisme historique* (1863). It presented the fundamental truths of dogma and morals revealed not only systematically but also as manifested in God's revelation to his people in the history narrated by the Holy Books.

The *Vita di san Martino* led Don Bosco into a familiar world where he also saw the essence of the Catholic Church guaranteed by its divine origins through countless miracles. The author promised readers they would see in the book 'a summary of the wonders performed by this saint so universally venerated.' 'The Gospel is filled with similar kind of deeds. The Saviour, too, said that his followers would perform still greater deeds.' Now 'finding ourselves in the religion in which the promises of J. C. are kept, we have a most certain and clear argument that assures us that we are fortunate to find ourselves in his holy religion.'<sup>146</sup>

The *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire* was packed with many prodigious events, 'marvellous things,' 'great miracles.'<sup>147</sup> Biographical items are followed by dozens of pages dedicated to the extraordinary and the miraculous, and this continued over the centuries and in the present at the Pianezza shrine near Turin. 'Whoever wants to thread together the series of wonders performed by St Pancratius in this place,' he wrote 'and refer to each of the sick healed, those freed from possession by evil spirits, the deaf who regained their hearing, the blind who recovered their sight, the mute who now speak freely, the fevers banished, the disabled who are now whole, would need to write any number of volumes.'<sup>148</sup> From the *Important note* which served as a preface, Don Bosco announced: 'The marvels worked by this Christian hero are so great in number and so outstanding in themselves that I have only been able to choose some in order not to be writing too many large books.'<sup>149</sup> It was the most natural thing for Don Bosco that these could only happen in the Catholic Church, raising it neatly above 'the other societies who also boast that they are Christian.' 'They have no martyrs they can say has died to confirm the truth of his belief; nor do they have any saint who has worked a miracle, not even a sanctuary where one can point to the signs of a miracle worked or a grace received.' Such 'sects' have 'neither martyrs nor saints, nor miracles, nor sanctuaries.'<sup>150</sup> He did not fail to renew the invitation to fidelity by Catholics and for 'those outside the true Church' to return: God 'grants everyone the light to know the truth, strength to recognise error, courage to abandon it and come to the fold of Jesus Christ to form one only flock on earth and then be with him one day to sing his mercies eternally in heaven.'<sup>151</sup>

*La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica I doveri di buon Cristiano* (The key to heaven in the hands of a good Catholic who practises the duties of a good Christian) was an anonymously written item which Don Bosco enriched and retouched to promote an essential Catholic catechetical instruction and Christian devotional practice.<sup>152</sup> It was a less voluminous *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth), a more straightforward booklet that Don Bosco presented *To the kind reader* in the following words: 'You will find here, devout reader, a compendium of the truths of the Catholic Faith and the way to practise various exercises of Christian piety with a choice of hymns. Everything was taken from the best authors: I only made the adjustments and variations that seemed necessary and appropriate for the popular mind and according to the tunes.'<sup>153</sup>

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146 *Vita di san Martino vescovo di Tours per cura del sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Turin, tip. Ribotta 1855, pp. III-VI, OE VI 391-394.

147 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, 96 p., OE VIII 195-290.

148 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, p. 67, OE VIII 261.

149 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, p. 5, OE VIII 199.

150 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, p. 7, OE VIII 201.

151 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, p. 8, OE VIII 202.

152 [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...* Turin, tip. Paravia e comp. 1856, 192 p., OE VIII 1-192

153 [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...*, p. 3, OE VIII 3.

Following the *Compendio di ciò che un Cristiano deve sapere, credere e praticare* (Compendium of what a Christian should know, believe and practise), a catechetical summary of Christian doctrine, and before the *Esercizi particolari di cristiana pietà* (Special exercises of Christian piety),<sup>154</sup> there were two texts, the first of which has no equal for conciseness and lucidity in all of Don Bosco's productions. Don Bosco did not write it but it is certain that he had a hand-written copy of it in his possession and had then revised and adjusted it, appropriating it as his own. It is the *Ritratto del Cristiano* or Portrait of the Christian. Its scope was the modelling of one's life on that of Christ in the 'certainty of one day being glorified with Jesus Christ in heaven and reigning with him in eternity.' 'In the life and action of a Christian one should find the life and actions of Jesus Christ himself ... in such a way that the true Christian must say with the Apostle St Paul: it is not I that live but Christ who lives in me.' Therefore, he prays 'as J. C. prayed on the mountain, recollected, in humility, with confidence.' Like Jesus Christ he will be 'accessible to the poor, the ignorant, the children,' and not be arrogant in dealing with people. He will be 'all things to all men' edifying, charitable, kind and simple – in imitation of Jesus who 'washed his apostles' feet.' 'He will consider himself to be less than others and servant to all.' As Jesus was obedient at Nazareth and to the Father 'unto death on the cross,' he will be obedient 'to his parents, employers, superiors' and to God 'whose place they take.' 'Like Jesus and Lazarus at Cana and Bethany he will be 'sober, temperate, attentive to others' needs.' As Jesus did with John and Lazarus so will he behave among friends, confiding secrets of the heart and only interested in leading those who have lost the state of grace back to it. He will be patient in physical and spiritual suffering ready to accept patiently any illness and even death, as Jesus Christ did.'<sup>155</sup>

The second item was woven together from *Pensieri Sopra l'Eternità* (Thoughts for eternity) which invites the Christian to recognise the precariousness, seriousness, and responsibility, the dignity of his existence and the greatness of his ultimate destination: 'Remember, O Christian, that you are a man for eternity. Every moment of your life is a step towards eternity.'<sup>156</sup>

Before his *Choice of hymns* Don Bosco added his favourite page from his 1850s work, the *Fondamenti della cattolica religione* (Foundations of the Catholic religion) which he had already included in the second edition of the *Giovane Provveduto* in 1851.<sup>157</sup>

The best doctrinal summary of an enlightened Christian life offered by Don Bosco in this period, and perhaps throughout his life, is undoubtedly *Il mese di maggio* (The month of May) which is catechetical, dogmatic, soteriological and sacramental in nature.<sup>158</sup> In it he summarises the truths of the creed with particular insistence on the church and its pastors. Salvation, sin, the last things are given emphasis – altogether, ten meditations are dedicated to them. The Sacraments of Confession and Communion are duly illustrated. Marian devotion is given ample emphasis too, and we find the first appearance in Don Bosco's writing of the invocation to Mary as *Auxilium Christianorum*. He speaks of the Church as a 'loving mother,' 'a merciful mother who goes looking for her children with the most loving solicitude,' 'a family,' 'tender mother.'<sup>159</sup> It spells out a principle which is very dear to him: 'Since there is only one God, one Faith, and one Baptism, there is also only one true Church outside of which no one can be saved.'<sup>160</sup> And since it has only one head, the pope, 'Universal father of all Christians,' 'we can say that our parish priest unites us with the

154 [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...*, respectively 99.5-20 and 29 f.f. OE VIII 5-20 and 29 ff.

155 [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...*, pp. 20-23, OE VIII 20-23.

156 [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...*, pp. 24-29, OE VIII 24-29.

157 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri...* Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1851, pp. 322-332; [G. BOSCO], *La chiave del paradiso...*, pp. 171-180, OE VIII 171-180..

158 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, 192 pp., OE X 295-486; cf. P. STELLA, *I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il "Mese di maggio" di don Bosco*, "Salesianum" 20 (1958) 648-694.

159 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 33, 34, 38, 42, OE X 327, 328, 332, 336.

160 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 35, OE X 329.

bishops, the bishops with the pope, the pope unites us with God.<sup>161</sup> They are pastors we are to obey, teachers who are to be listened to, guides to follow, ministers of grace to be availed of.<sup>162</sup>

The profoundest meditation, perhaps, is the one assigned to the ninth day on the *Dignity of the Christian*. Here we find the most beautiful pages written by Don Bosco on the theological essence of Christian life which begins with baptism. It can be considered the theological basis of the commitment to conforming one's life to Christ which Don Bosco sought in the *Ritratto del cristiano*. The meditation takes for granted the awareness of the great dignity of every human being for his 'corporeal gifts' and the 'precious qualities of the soul created in the image and likeness of the creator himself.' It aims above all to represent to the Christian the wonderful inner wealth given him in the Sacrament of Baptism. It brings about a miraculous metamorphosis: from 'slave of the devil and enemy of God' destined for hell, to a candidate for paradise 'who has become the object of God's preferential love,' and made capable of responding thanks to the infusion of the 'virtues of faith, hope and charity.' 'Thus having become Christians,' Don Bosco continues 'you have been able to lift your gaze to heaven and say: 'God the Creator of heaven and earth is also my God. He is my father. He loves me and orders me to call him by this name: *Our Father who art in heaven*. Jesus the Saviour calls me his brother and as his brother I belong to him, his merits, passion, death, glory and dignity. The sacraments this loving Saviour instituted were instituted for me. The Paradise my Jesus opened by his death he opened for me and he keeps it ready for me. So I might have someone who thinks of me, he wanted to give me God as a Father, the church as a Mother, his divine word as a guide. So know, O Christian, your great dignity. *Agnosce, Christiane dignitatem tuam*.'<sup>163</sup>

In the conclusion 'the most beautiful ornament of Christianity,' 'the mother of the Saviour, Mary most holy,' we could say '*Mater ecclesiae*', is prayed with the invocation *Auxilium christianorum, ora pro nobis*.<sup>164</sup> In his precise *Example*; 'We read in the litanies: Mary Help of Christians, "*Auxilium christianorum*.'" 'The glorious Pius VII ... instituted the feast in her honour that is called the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, in 1815.'<sup>165</sup> Further on he reminds the reader that Mary 'is not only Help of Christians but also the support of the universal Church.'<sup>166</sup> He also suggests to the faithful that 'Mary helps all who are devoted to her at the hour of death. Such is also the thinking of the Church which called Mary *auxilium christianorum*, Help of Christians.'<sup>167</sup> In fact, Mary is also a help in individual fragility, as said in the booklet published in the same months: 'If our weakness exposed us to frequent risks, we must follow the example of our elders and have recourse to the one who is the help of Christians.'<sup>168</sup> We are witnessing here the flourishing of a title destined for extraordinary development in Don Bosco's lifetime and in the story of the institutions he founded.

Mostly dedicated to the great Christian truths, *Il mese di maggio* gave little space to morals, which was channelled into three topics: '*the sin of dishonesty, the virtue of purity, human respect*. We can note the strong connection Don Bosco establishes, namely from a youth and preventive perspective, between the victory against sins of 'dishonesty,' describing their spiritual and physical evil in dark tones and prevention from occasion of such sins ('avoiding obscene talk, bad reading, people given to gambling, drunkenness and similar abuses'), the Sacraments of Penance and

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161 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 40, 45, OE X 334, 339.

162 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., p. 46, OE X 340.

163 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 60-62, OE X 354-356.

164 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 63-64, OE X 357-378.

165 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 64-65, OE X 358-359.

166 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., day XXX, p. 171, OE X 465.

167 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., day XXXI, p. 177, OE X 471. The last two texts are reproduced literally in *Angelina o la buona fanciulla instruita nella vera divozione a Maria Santissima*. Torino, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1860, pp. 88 and 91, OE XIII 36 and 39.

168 G. BOSCO, *Vita del sommo pontefice S. Callisto I*, Turino, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1858, p. 62, OE XI 134.

Eucharist, 'listening to God's word and reading good books, saying three Hail Marys morning and evening to Mary Immaculate and kissing her medal,'<sup>169</sup> and again taking as our model the 'Queen of Virgins,' 'dealing with people who love this virtue and especially avoiding people of the opposite sex,' and finally imitating her 'by modesty of the eyes, sobriety in eating and drinking, avoiding theatre, balls and other dangerous shows.'<sup>170</sup>

A brief summary of an ecclesiological kind and varied notes on prevention and moral and religious growth are offered by the anonymous *Porta Teco Cristiano* or Christian handbook,<sup>171</sup> also from 1858. It is a collection of strongly moralistic type counsels within the framework of a decidedly pragmatic spirituality. The dogmatic basis is reduced to the already noted topics on the Church of Jesus Christ, 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic,' and on the pope 'the head of the Catholic Church,' on salvation, the Last Things, and the obligation of pursuing salvation by fulfilling the duties of one's state in life.<sup>172</sup> Especially dear to Don Bosco's heart were the duties of various states in life for which he suggested suitable advice. In fact, in the preliminary note *To the Reader*, he recommended that 'fathers, mothers, parish priests and all involved in looking after souls not only read them but get the people they are looking after to read them,' maintaining that they were of 'more than average value ... both for spiritual and temporal matters' concerning Christian families.

There are eight series of notes and reminders: *General reminders for the Christian faithful and the father of the family by Bl. Sebastiano Valfrè; Particular reminders for heads of families, drawn from Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers; General reminders of St Philip Neri to youth; Particular reminders for service staff [domestics]; Reminders by Bl. Sebastiano Valfrè in two letters written to two mothers of families; Important advice for girls concerning their social duties; Special reminders for women domestics.* They are all items of somewhat archaic moral practice, preventive, defensive and protective in nature and for the conservative, patriarchal family.

Less narrow in perspective is the brief hagiographical work on the holy martyrs *Mario, Marta, Audiface e Abaco*,<sup>173</sup> which appeared three years later as a proposal for education within the family. Mario and Martha were wealthy, but inspired by the Gospel. 'They gave to the poor whatever remained from what they needed for themselves' and they raised their children in the holy fear of God, piety, faithfulness to duty. Charity was something the united family, parents and children demonstrated, and it was also how they faced up to court proceedings, their suffering, martyrdom, with scenes similar to ones described in the Bible from Maccabees.' The hagiographer tells us that 'Along the way they lifted up fervent prayer to God, asking him for his powerful help to keep them firm in the faith. At the same time they encouraged one another to be brave in offering their lives, and going together to enjoy being with Jesus Christ in Heaven.'<sup>174</sup>

## 6. The Series on the Lives of the Popes (1856–65)

It was during January 1856 that Don Bosco began a series of sixteen biographical issues on the lives of the popes from the first three centuries. He began with *Vita di S. Pietro* and later included St Paul. They were numbered alphabetically from A – P. The series concluded in 1865 with the booklet *Pontificato di S Eusebio e S. Melchiade († 314)*. Similar in style and scope was the December 1857 issue dedicated to the lives of St Polycarp and St Irenaeus. These lives came, at

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169 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, day XXIV *Il peccato di disonestà*, pp. 144-150, OE X 438-444.

170 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, day XXVI *La virtù della purità*, pp. 150-154, OE X 444-448, p. 153, OE X 447.

171 [G. BOSCO], *Porta Teco Cristiano...*, 71 p., OE XI 1-71.

172 [G. BOSCO], *Porta Teco Cristiano...*, pp. 5-7, OE XI 5-7.

173 *Una famiglia di martiri ossia vita de' santi Mario, Marta, Audiface ed Abaco e loro martirio con appendice sul santuario ad essi dedicato presso Caselette per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1861, 96 p., OE XIII 57-152.

174 G. BOSCO, *Una famiglia di martiri...*, p. 39, OE XIII, 95.

least initially, from the catechetical and apologetic preaching with which Don Bosco sought to consolidate the truths of the faith proclaimed by the Church, among his boys and readers; the Church founded by Jesus Christ, the Pope, Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, priesthood, Catholic worship. They drew their truth from the basic thesis: the Catholic Church as it is today, Roman, ruled by the pope as it was from the beginning.

Don Bosco explained the basic purpose of the series in his preface to the *Life of St Peter*: 'I have often wondered how to calm the hatred and aversion some show in these sad times against the popes and their authority. It seemed to me that an effective way was knowledge of the facts regarding the lives of those Supreme pastors who took the place of Jesus Christ on earth and guided our souls on the way to Heaven.' 'It was with this thought in mind, O Catholic reader, that I decided to tackle recounting the activities of the Supreme Pontiffs who governed the Church from Jesus Christ until our days.'<sup>175</sup>

Obviously, Don Bosco was not so interested in the historical quality of the lives of the popes. While he did want to remain faithful to the sources, which were generally second-hand ones, Don Bosco had neither the cultural equipment, mentality, nor the time to provide a prior critical examination of them. But what is clear and interesting is his educational and catechetical intent which led him to the defence and religious acculturation of the young and ordinary people: showing them the truth of *doctrine* through *deeds*, doctrine he had absorbed over the time spent in studies and thanks to personal reading. He offered this to them to bolster a more militant faith.

Historical or not, depending on our critique, there are many Catholic truths, according to the author, which the 'lives of the Supreme Pontiffs' clearly and irrefutably demonstrate. There is perfect, unbroken continuity between Christ, Peter, Linus, Cletus and the popes who follow them as far as the beginning of the 4th century. With the popes, and by virtue of the popes, the undeniable and recognised heads of the Church, the Church has always shown itself to be the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. The popes of the first three centuries are all saints and martyrs. In general their childhood, pious, pure, obedient and studious youth predestined them to the clerical state and their pontifical service. Chosen from among the best of the Roman clergy, they excelled in apostolic zeal, missionary outreach to the pagans, their ardent pastoral care of the flock of persecuted faithful, their charity to the poor, the imprisoned, and often their special concern for those growing up.

They governed the local and the universal Church wisely and firmly, encouraging the Eucharistic liturgy in the catacombs and private homes, administering the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. They maintained disciplinary and doctrinal unity in the whole Church against heresies and schisms, and local churches had ultimate recourse to them: *Roma locuta, Causa soluta*. In religious dogmatic or disciplinary controversies they defined (and there was no appeal) what was true and what was false, convened Councils and promulgated or confirmed their decisions by their authority.

All of them ended up heroic martyrs or with lengthy imprisonment and their lives were completely dedicated to the service of Christ and the Church.

Again, considerable space was given to the extraordinary and the prodigious, something especially dear to Don Bosco, as we have already noted several times. It was dear to him for temperamental and apologetic reasons. In this area too, the lives of the popes were connected with the gospel, especially the first two, dedicated to Sts. Peter and Paul. In the case of Peter the extraordinary goes from the portentous to the thaumaturgical at the level of supernatural grace in the proper sense. This was seen particularly from Pentecost onward; 'The tongues of fire were a symbol of the courage and ardent charity with which the Apostles gave themselves to preaching

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175 G. Bosco, *Vita di san Pietro Principe degli apostoli...*, pp. 3-4, 6-7, OE VIII 295-296, 298-299.



the Gospel. It was then that Peter's heart became completely new and he felt such courage and strength that even the greatest undertakings seemed like nothing to him.<sup>176</sup>

Not only the first miracle, but many others had Peter as their protagonist. 'All the Apostles worked miracles ... St Peter shone out above them all. Such was the trust all the faithful had in him and his virtues that they came from all sides including from distant countries, to Jerusalem to see his miracles.'<sup>177</sup> He would continue to work many more over the centuries through his Roman Basilica: 'Whoever wanted to write about the many pilgrimages people made there in every age, from all over the world and involving every class of people, or the multitude of graces received there, the spectacular miracles worked there, would need to write many large volumes. We will content ourselves with a few hints as we gradually speak of the popes in whose pontificate such wonders were worked.'<sup>178</sup>

Miracles are attributed to Paul and Barnabus, though to a lesser degree.<sup>179</sup> The popes follow in their footsteps, in life and after death, often in support of the 'martyrs': 'While many Christians gave their lives joyfully for the Faith, to support them in their faith and add still more to the number of the faithful, God worked miracles never before seen in the Church.'<sup>180</sup> During the pontificate of Sixtus II, 'marvels accompanied St Lawrence everywhere and while he was in prison, God was pleased to work many miracles, both to let his power be known to the faithful and to glorify his holy name in the person of his martyrs.'<sup>181</sup> 'Marvels' 'miracles' and 'prodigies' multiplied around the blood and relics of the saints.'<sup>182</sup>

With regard to the apostolate of the press, the decade ended significantly with some foretaste of an initiative that was to follow closely upon it but which would continue throughout Don Bosco's life and that of the Salesian Society. 'In 1859 he thought of forming a society to help him counteract bad books with as many good books as he could. He therefore wrote an outline of a *Society for spreading the Catholic Readings and other Catholic books*.'<sup>183</sup> Not long after, dated 6 March 1860, he sent out a circular to collect 'donations so it would be possible to distribute good books in hospitals, especially among soldiers. Things went quite well; many bad books were collected and burned and were replaced with good books. Now the effort continues to propagate perverse press and many priests and religious preaching during Lent or at retreats, as also a number of parish clergy and others, would like to counteract this growing evil. They are asking for religious books or other devotional items but lack the means to purchase them with.'<sup>184</sup>

In autumn 1866, in agreement with the parish priest at Castelnuovo, he officially founded the *Society for spreading good books (1859-60)*.<sup>185</sup>

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176 G. Bosco, *Vita di san Pietro Principe degli apostoli...*, p. 66, OE VIII 358.

177 G. Bosco, *Vita di san Pietro Principe degli apostoli...*, pp. 84-85, OE VIII 376-377.

178 G. Bosco, *Vita di san Pietro Principe degli apostoli...*, pp. 163-164, OE VIII 455-456.

179 G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo dottore delle genti*, Turino, tip. di G. B. Paravia 1857, pp. 17, 19, 28-30, 31, 46-47, 72, 85, 115-120, 158-161, OE IX 183, 185, 194-196, 197, 212-213, 238, 251, 281-286, 158-327.

180 G. BOSCO, *La persecuzione di Decio e il pontificato di san Cornelio I papa*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1859, p. 28, OE XII 28.

181 G. Bosco, *Il pontificato di san Sisto II e le glorie di san Lorenzo Martire*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1860, p. 30, OE 298.

182 A good five chapters of the work are dedicated to it, G. Bosco, *Il pontificato di san Sisto II...*, pp. 52-70, OE XII 320-338

183 MB VI 487-488. The program's text follows.

184 Em I 397.

185 MB VIII 487.

## Chapter 10

### INSTITUTIONAL REGULATIONS (1853–59)

- 1842      2 April: St Dominic Savio is born;
- 1854      Summer: Fr Vittorio Alasonatti, the first regular collaborator, arrives at the Oratory;  
Sunday 29 October: St Dominic Savio enters the oratory;  
Regulations of the Oratory and the 'house attached' are drafted.
- 1855      Approval of the law against Religious Orders;  
Autumn: beginning of internal secondary classes (1855–59);
- 1856      Youth groups, sodalities develop;  
25 November: death of Margaret, Don Bosco's mother;
- 1857      6 March; death of St Dominic Savio;  
Public lottery run for the three oratories;
- 1862      Another public lottery for the same purpose.

From 31 March 1852 Don Bosco was officially the one who bore prime responsibility for the three festive oratories in Turin. And gradually he was also affirmed, in increasingly visible ways, as the one who ran the Oratory with its house attached, the latter a prelude to future colleges for students, technical/vocational institutes, hospices and orphanages. He became very well known as an apostle of good press through a periodical publication which survived for almost a century after his death. He also emerged as a defender of the Catholic cause through his work and by his writing. And finally, he became possibly the best known priest at many levels of the city he operated in and in many areas throughout the region.

The second half of the decade saw consolidation of these various job titles and increasingly regulated activities: the shift from the house attached as just a boarding facility to a hospice for working boys and students; finalisation of regulations for the Oratory and hospice– cum–college; development of youth groups; a grand lottery to support increasingly costly works financially; the arrival and proposal of a living model of youth spirituality *par excellence* in the life on earth, put into writing as the *Life of St Dominic Savio*.

Over these same years, Don Bosco also began to give substance to the idea of a binding and permanent body of workers for his existing and future youth institutions, in the form of a religious association or congregation. It was a turning point, and although in ideal continuity with the experiences he had had thus far, it gave them a further dimension, determined by the new course Don Bosco was now setting his life.

#### 1. Subversive legislation and Consecrated life

The legislation suppressing Religious Orders, and confiscation of their assets, debated and approved by the House and Senate of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia in the first half of 1855, could have delayed this new direction, but by temperament and intuition, Don Bosco was prepared to conceive of and plan educational and religious arrangements that were absolutely free of political and legal restraints and control. The debate in the House and Senate on the draft law presented by Cavour and Rattazzi at the end of November 1854 was both fiery and tortuous, as we have seen.<sup>1</sup>

Don Bosco felt involved in the event in more than one way. He refers to it at least indirectly especially in a letter addressed to Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi who was working in Liverpool as a member of the Rosminian Institute of Charity. On January 16, *L'Armonia* had published a *Letter from a priest in Turin to the clergy of the Sardinian Kingdom* in which the authoritative Canon encouraged his clerical brothers to exercise 'the *right of petition* recognised by the Constitution,' as had happened in England in 1853 in a similar circumstance. He encouraged them to pray that God might not seek to 'punish our State because it had sanctioned this plan.'<sup>2</sup> He anticipated Pius IX's Allocution on the law to the Cardinals on 22 January by saying: 'it has been declared *anti-Catholic* by the Supreme Pontiff who has reminded them that it was *sacrilegious theft*.'<sup>3</sup> In his letter to his Rosminian friend, Don Bosco made no reference to the public appeal by *L'Armonia*, nor did he make explicit reference to the draft legislation, only saying incorrectly that it had already been passed by the Chamber of Deputies [=House of Representatives]. But he wrote of 'calamitous times' for Religion, of the King who was 'devastated' but 'surrounded by people of bad faith who had sold out' and of resistance by the clergy. He expressed the hope that the Senate would quash the law but expected the worst: 'If God's hand lies heavily upon us, and allows some tragedy to occur, we will certainly have the consolation of having done as much as possible.'<sup>4</sup>

While the law was being debated in the Senate, the April *Letture Cattoliche* came out as a single article bearing the title: *The Church's assets, How they are stolen and the consequences, by Baron di Nilinse* [A. Collin de Plancy, 1793–1881] with a brief appendix on events particular to Piedmont.<sup>5</sup> It was an historical summary relating to similar events in England in past centuries and made reference to 'heaven's revenge' striking the profaner, administrators and those who had acquired ecclesiastical goods: 'some died of violent illness, others had to suffer harm either financially or to their reputation, or in their domestic lives while others suffered relentlessly whether personally or among their descendants.'<sup>6</sup> The *Introduction* promised that 'we will only speak reservedly and circumspectly of contemporary events, since they relate to living persons and we do not want to offend our neighbour.'

Nevertheless, in the appendix on particular events in Piedmont, a summary was given of harassment by way of legislation passed between 1774 and 1855 against religious individuals and institutions, consecrated buildings and objects, and where the response in each case was some inevitable calamity.<sup>7</sup> The two most recent: in 1848 the House 'at the beginning of July, approved suppression of the Jesuits, Oblates and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart.' There was no escape: 'the Piedmont army experienced a terrible defeat in Lombardy toward the end of July,' 'the beginning' of the tragedies and injuries 'which everyone knows about.' In 1854, on 4 May 'the Archbishop of Turin was sent to the Cittadella. That same day 'A severe frost killed off grass, the willows and even some trees, causing 15 or more millions worth of damage to Piedmont.' He went

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1 Cf. Chap. 1, § 6

2 "L'Armonia", 16 January 1855, p. 44.

3 Cf. T. CHIUSO, *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai giorni nostri*, Vol. IV. Turin, Giulio Speirani 1892, pp. 201-202.

4 Letter of 23 February 1855, Em I 248.

5 Turin, Ribotta 1855, p. 83.

6 [NILINSE], *I beni della Chiesa...*, p. 66.

7 [NILINSE], *I beni della Chiesa...*, pp. 76-83.

no further than that. The explanation: 'We remain silent about the most recent matters because sadly they are too well known to all.'

The numerous examples of the guilt-punishment relationship were further confirmed by the merit-reward relationship in just two obscure events.<sup>8</sup> We could consider what Don Bosco wrote in 1855 toward the end of the *Storia d'Italia* as an implicit reference to current events in this historical context. At the beginning of Chapter XXXVII on the modern era, he emphasises the order and security of the Papal States after the pope's return. On the one hand, he recalls some 'atrocious deeds and great calamities' in 'our towns.' In order: the assassination of the Duke of Parma, Ferdinand Charles III, on 26 March 1854; the very serious damage wrought by the cryptogam [a fungus] on 'the fertile vineyards of Italy and especially those in Piedmont.' The last page of the chapter was dedicated to deaths. 'At the beginning of 1885, Piedmont suffered misfortunes the like of which there has not been in Italy's history. In a very short space of time five individuals from the Royal House died, among whom Maria Teresa, the Queen Mother of our august Sovereign, and the reigning Queen Adelaide ... the funeral rites for the two queens Queens were still not over when Ferdinand, the Duke of Genoa died ... Some months prior, one of the King's sons had already died and shortly after another also went to his grave.' However, he avoided reference to the law and instead traced out a morality tailored to the boys, in harmony with the rest of the book's intentions in that regard: 'A terrible example which should teach us how death has no respect for dignity or wealth or the most tender and flourishing age!'<sup>9</sup>

Not so easy to interpret was another letter he wrote to Daniele Rademacher. 'You will have seen in the newspapers' he wrote two weeks after the promulgation of the law, 'that Rattazzi's famous project was approved, signed and everything is ready for it to be executed. What an upset! What dismay! How many unfortunates excommunicated!' But then he added: 'the number of good people is considerable; fervent prayers are being offered up everywhere.' The text that follows reveals once again his familiarity with the extraordinary: 'A truly courageous person inspired by God wrote to the King several times advising him that evil upon evil would be heaped on him if he did not withdraw the fatal law; he spoke of and described the deaths of the two Queens twenty days earlier, and the death of the Duke of Genoa a month earlier and of the King's sons too, a month earlier. He wrote to the King before he signed the law: 'If your Majesty signs that decree you will be putting your signature to the end of the Royal Family of Savoy and will no longer enjoy the same health as before. You will soon be lamenting new losses in your house. This year there will be serious disasters in your fields, a serious mortality rate among your subjects. We will see how these matters come to pass. We do not know if it will be cholera or typhoid that will shortly be seen in various towns around Piedmont. Despite this, the King did sign the law and from then on his health has been seriously inconvenienced! This is why it is said that the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs has been charged with beginning discussions with Rome as soon as possible.'<sup>10</sup>

Was Don Bosco the 'truly courageous person inspired by God' who 'wrote to the King several times'? It does not seem plausible, though many, following Lemoyne, think it was him.<sup>11</sup> Were this to be so, or if Don Bosco was the one to pass it on or perhaps simply the chronicler, a rather special side of his personality and notion of religion would emerge: the tendency to think that God intervenes directly and tangibly in the course of human affairs to warn or punish, and does not hold back from overall revenge. He will shortly speak of a God who punishes unjust persecutions, whether on the occasion of the searches (persecutions, he interprets them as) in May-June 1860 or on 14 May 1862, when the Salesians came together for their first vows and he reminded them of the fate of those who had placed obstacles in the way of the Congregation.

8 [NILINSE], *I beni della Chiesa...*, pp. 81- 82.

9 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 518, OE VII 518.

10 Letter of 7 June 1855, Em I 257.

11 Cf. Cf. *Documenti* V, Chaps XIV and XV pp. 93-98 and 99-106.

Don Bosco never made a mystery of what he thought about politics and his relationship with it. From 1848, when he made his position clear to Roberto d'Azeglio,<sup>12</sup> till 1883 when, on return from France he rejected the accusations by certain newspapers that he had also been there to support moderate candidates in the elections,<sup>13</sup> we note no cracks in his rigid attitude of abstentions and neutrality (neither *pro* nor *con*) and which he asked of his members. He introduced an obligatory article on the matter into the Salesian Society's Constitutions, and only when forced to by ecclesiastical authority did he respectfully remove it.<sup>14</sup> He restated his position when recalling the searches and inspections endured in 1860.<sup>15</sup> He repeated it at the authoritative First General Chapter in the 25th clarifying session.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1855 case, it is presumable that he acted as he always did and said. Other reasons were also involved. It does not seem credible that Don Bosco, so much in need of help from everyone, beginning with those in power, would dare have such a sudden confrontation with the Court of Savoy. It is even more problematic to image he would put a stop to such a broad and resolute plan with visionary premonitions, a plan set in motion by very determined non-believers, some of whom he knew, and a King who, despite his authoritarian ambition, knew the limited room provided by the Constitution, the Parliament and the Executive. Concretely, it is clear that these presumed prophecies were aimed at a false target: only a reactionary would have made up these prophecies and sent them, someone who ignored 1848 and the end of royal absolutism. The real target, rather, would have to have been those promoting the law, firstly Urbano Rattazzi and Camillo Benso di Cavour, whom Don Bosco knew well, and those who voted it in. However, threats of God's punishment did not stop human history and much less so legislators who believed in the goodness of the cause they were fighting for and who were not likely to believe in presumed acts of God in political matters.

Much more certain, significant, and long lasting in its results would be his indirect involvement in events surrounding the law. It underlies his role as religious founder, in positive resources and fears and hesitations that were intertwined. Other than than the improved personal relationships with Rattazzi that followed, which had begun in spring 1854 with substantial donations by the Minister, he was able to draw certain reassurances from the parliamentary debate as he moved in the direction of plans for a religious foundation. The Minister had explained things clearly to him in the course of the debate in the House. The current draft of the law, he said, 'left members of religious communities the complete and free choice of coming together and living any kind of life they pleased.' 'It is ecclesiastical authority which sanctions religious ties.' The effect of the law under discussion 'is not to prevent whoever wants to live with others – let him so live: whoever wants to depend on a superior – let him so depend. Each one is given complete and absolute freedom for that.' 'They will enjoy all rights and can exercise all the options which apply to citizens of the State.'<sup>17</sup>

Camillo Cavour, a vigorous supporter of 'a free Church in a free State' had been even more liberal in the course of the debate. 'The Government does not intend by the current law to bind or harm the freedom of citizens in any way' he said, in opposition to Senator Sclopis who said the law was not liberal. 'It is not aimed at preventing people from choosing to come together to live in one or other religious way – and to be truthful, if it were otherwise, If I saw anything in this draft law that directly or indirectly tended to restrict the freedom of citizens, I would strongly oppose it.'<sup>18</sup> To

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12 Cf. Chap. 7, § 3.1.

13 Cf. Chap. 31, § 2.

14 *Costituzioni* [1864], Chap. 3, art. 7; *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 230, 231; Chap. 14, § 2.2 and 3

15 Cf. Chap. 13, § 2.3 (again 'neither pro nor con')

16 Cf. Chap 26, § 1.2.

17 U. RATTAZZI, *Discorsi parlamentari*, collected and published under the editorship of G. Scovazzi. Rome, Eredi Botta 1877, vol. III, pp. 219-220, 234, 293.

18 *Discorso alla Camera del 2 maggio 1855*, in *Discorsi parlamentari del conte Camillo di Cavour*, collected

democratic objectors or those on the Left, the thought that ‘the principle of freedom of association’ was dangerous, opening the door to setting up ‘a much greater number of Religious Congregations than currently existed’ he replied: ‘We are not against all Religious Congregations; we are against those that no longer respond to the spirit and needs of the times..... such that if the needs of today’s society give rise to Religious Congregations intended to satisfy such need and if this is done freely and spontaneously, far from seeing an inconvenience in that, we see real progress.’<sup>19</sup>

It was an involuntary prophetic vision of many Religious Institutes which would be established within civil society – Don Bosco’s included – free from the hindrances of legal recognition and the inevitable controls.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Educational management of the Oratory

The great changes going on in the kingdom did not restrain Don Bosco in his initiatives. The year the *Letture Cattoliche* were born and his building efforts began also signalled the beginning of the internal workshops for tailoring and boot-making. Then in 1854 came bookbinding, and in 1856 carpentry and cabinet-making. In the final months of 1861, the idea of a print-shop took shape, already suggested to Don Bosco by Antonio Rosmini in 1853.<sup>21</sup> Authorisation from the Prefect of Turin was given on 31 December, and was communicated to Don Bosco by the public security authority on 2 January 1862. The first book came off the Oratory of St Francis de Sales press in May: it was a book on morals by well-known Bavarian religious writer Christoph Schmid (1768–1854). *Teofilo ossia il giovane romito* which appeared as the May single booklet issue of *the Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>22</sup> This unilateral change of print-shop gave rise to strong disagreement with Bishop Moreno.<sup>23</sup> The blacksmith and metalwork workshops opened in 1862, and the bookstore in 1864.

In parallel with this, between the 1855–56, and 1857–58 school years, the first three secondary years were established, and in 1858–59, the fourth year, then the fifth in 1859–60. Among the academic students were many who aspired to the priesthood. Since the 1840s Don Bosco had already been taking in priests, clerics or young men at the house who were pursuing a career in the Church.<sup>24</sup>

This frenetic activity *ad extra* in no way weakened his educational interest in the young families he felt personally responsible for and who needed his regular presence, his educative and general support. Over these years he also developed his activity as a legislator and formator. He drew up or improved regulations for the Oratory, hospice and college, enriching them with an educational potential that became the custom for all his future youth works.

Meanwhile, as indicated earlier,<sup>25</sup> Don Bosco was helped by the fact that from summer 1854 he could count on the collaboration of a devout and zealous priest and co-worker who intended to share full-time in his calling as an educator and, later, his bread, to work as a religious. Until his death he was the silent administrator–cum–accountant of the precarious Oratory economy, and looked after discipline. This was Fr Vittorio Alasonatti (1812–1865), elementary school teacher at

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and published by order of the Chamber of Deputies, Florence, Eredi Botta 1870, Vol. IX, pp. 272-273.

19 *Discorso alla Camera del 2 maggio...*, C. CAVOUR, Discorsi parlamentari..., Vol. IX, p. 274.

20 Cf. Chap. 1, § 9.

21 Cf. Letter in August 1853, *Epistolario completo di Antonio Rosmini Serbati*, Vol. VII. Casale Monferrato, G. Pane 1893, p. 140.

22 Cf. *Teofilo ossia il giovane romito. Racconto ameno del canonico Cristoforo Schmid*, Turin, tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1862, “Letture Cattoliche”, Anno X, fasc. III, maggio, 127 pp.

23 Cf. Chap. 15, § 4.

24 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, Chap. 8 *Giovani e adulti convittori a Valdocco*, pp. 175-199.

25 Cf. Chap. 9, § 1.

Avigliana, his birthplace 25 kilometres west of Turin at the entrance to the Val de Susa. This priest and teacher had come to know Don Bosco over a good number of occasions when he was with his boys on trips from retreats to Giaveno or the *Sacra di S. Michele*. According to Fr Francesia, who wrote his life, Don Bosco had already invited Fr Alasonatti to join him in 1853. He finally made the decision, leaving his elderly father, and entered Valdocco on the vigil of the Assumption 1854.

Once Don Bosco had official responsibility over the oratories, he felt encouraged to give more complete shape to the regulations, taking the ones for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales as the model. In the already mentioned *Introduction*, he stated the reason for and meaning of these regulations: ensuring conformity of discipline between the different oratories, and unity of spirit among those who worked there. In 1854 he drew up the first set. Its first printed edition in 1877 would be known as the *Regolamenti per gli esterni* (Regulations for externs or day boys). This could be considered the complete and finished edition. There is no doubt he drew inspiration from a number of models, despite some complex bits and pieces that were never put into practice.<sup>26</sup> However, the regulations at least partly reflected what was Don Bosco's habitual practice in writing up regulations and constitutions, which he thought of not as founding codes but more a condensation of his experiences in the development and gradual structuring of his institutions. His oratory did not have its origins in regulations; it preceded them by many years, so the use of already existing sets of regulations would obviously be affected by the experiments he tried out in the Oratory along the way.

Seen this way, it seems we should soften some of the categorical statements we find about his dependence on earlier regulations, or his idea of the oratory and the educational and welfare-type activity carried out there.<sup>27</sup> There are some very clear differences in Don Bosco's rewriting of these texts: his particular tone of humanity and kindness, his special attention to the psychology of the young person, his notable simplification of religious practices, the room given to play and recreation, the lively character of celebrations and gatherings.<sup>28</sup> We can draw all this from the 28 handwritten pages plus one particularly interesting page where he outlines the oratory in typically bosconian terms. Also visible are the many and significant corrections and additions he has made to the text.<sup>29</sup>

The *Regolamento* is in two parts, of 13 and 10 chapters respectively. The first part opens with a preface containing a description of the institution, already indicated in its essential terms in texts we have partly noted previously. The Oratory is not a school of Christian doctrine only, nor just a place of prayer (*oratorio*) but nor is it a mere 'recreation park' or just for play or 'Sunday school'. It is all these things. This is how he sought to adapt to the emerging needs of the young and society. In general it tried to 'achieve all the civil, religious and moral, benefits for the most abandoned young people' who are likely to be 'young people from twelve to twenty years of age, most of them coming out of prisons or in danger of ending up there.' 'The purpose of the oratory' it says at the beginning of the Regulations 'is to entertain the youth on Sundays and holy days with pleasant and honest recreation after they have attended the ceremonies in church.'<sup>30</sup>

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26 Quoted are the *Regole dell'Oratorio di S. Luigi eretto in Milano il giorno 19 Maggio 1842 in contr.a di S. Cristina N. 2135* (internal title: *Regolamento Organico, Disciplinare e Pratico dell'Oratorio Festivo di S. Luigi in P. Comasina, Contrada di S. Cristina 2135 D.*) The text is contained in a large handwritten notebook found in the ASC D. 487 *Regole di altri istituti*.

27 Cf. G. BARZAGHI *Tre secoli di storia e pastorale degli Oratori milanesi...*, pp. 253-273; ID., *Don Bosco e la chiesa lombarda. L'origine di un progetto*, Milan, Glossa 2005, pp. 232-242, 262-264.

28 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco...*, 1955, pp. 67-92; ID., *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 283-287.

29 *Regolamento dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco* [28 pp.], ASC D 482, fasc. 01.

30 We have found an almost identical formulation in the article published in 1849 by C. Danna in the "Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'educazione". Not so many months later Don Bosco repeated it for the administration of the Schools for the Poor: 'By means of pleasant recreation, attracted by some

This definition is followed by a clarification of three factors: '1. *Entertaining the youth on Sundays* ... with a particular view to youth who are working, since they are especially exposed on these days to idleness, bad companions, two channels which open the way to every kind of disorder. However, students who want to come ... will not be refused. 2. *Pleasant and honest recreation*, aimed at recreating, not oppressing, and adapted to the individuals who come. 3. *After attending ceremonies in church*: religious and moral instruction including the principles of our holy Religion, is the chief aim. The rest are optional extras, and an enticement for the boys to get them to come.'

The basic quality of those who populate the oratory is also described in the preface, drawing on the name of the patron, St Francis de Sales: 'This oratory then, is placed under the protection of St Francis de Sales to indicate that the basis for this congregation both for those who command and those who obey must be the charity and kindness which are characteristic virtues of this saint.'<sup>31</sup>

Rules for the approach to be taken are offered in the first part of the Regulations, an approach from which the preventive system emerges, already part of Don Bosco's thinking and action long before it is formulated. The preventive features are much more emphasised than they appear in any of the texts he relied on.

The *Rector* 'should stand out among all those in charge for his piety, charity, patience.' 'He should constantly show himself to be friend, companion, brother to everyone, therefore he should always encourage each one to be faithful in fulfilling his duties, as a request and never as a severe command.' 'Let him hear the confessions of those who come to him of their own accord.' 'Let him try to win their [the boys] respect and good will by kindness and example, trying every means possible to nurture their hearts with love of God, respect for holy things, frequenting the sacraments, filial devotion to Our Lady and everything that is involved in true piety.'<sup>32</sup>

The *Prefect* 'is the ordinary confessor for the boys. He will say Mass, teach catechism and, if needed, also give instruction from the pulpit.' 'He is entrusted with seeing to night and Sunday classes.'<sup>33</sup>

The *Invigilators* 'will correct boys nicely when they see someone chatting or sleeping. They will do so by moving as little as possible from their place, and without ever hitting anyone, even for serious reasons, or telling them off harshly and in a raised voice.'<sup>34</sup>

A pressing appeal is addressed to *Catechists* who hold a particularly delicate and demanding office: 'By teaching catechism, as catechists you are doing a work of great merit before God and man. Before God, because you are cooperating in the salvation of souls redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ; before men because your listeners will forever bless the words with which you pointed out the way for them to become good citizens and the means for them to purchase eternal life.'

Then come some practical pedagogical rules: 'Five minutes before catechism classes ends, at the sound of the bell offer some brief example drawn from Scripture or Church history, or explain some argument of Faith clearly and in a popular way, or a moral parable highlighting the ugliness of some vice or the beauty of some particular virtue.' 'The vices that must often be fought against are blasphemy, profaning Sundays and holy days, dishonesty and theft, lack of good resolution in confession.' 'Virtues to mention are: charity with one's companions, going to Confession and

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amusements, and with catechism, instruction and singing, some of them became moderate and loved work and religion.' (letter of 20 February 1850, Em 1 96).

31 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 1, p. 1

32 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 1, art. 1, 2, 6, p. 2.

33 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 2, art. 5 and 7, p. 3.

34 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 7, art. 5, p. 8.



Communion.’ ‘Let each catechist be always cheerful and let it be seen that what he is teaching is very important, as indeed it is. When correcting and advising, use words that encourage and never ones that leave people disheartened. Praise someone who deserves it and be slow to blame.’<sup>35</sup>

The *Pacifiers* have the job of ‘preventing brawls, altercations, swearing and any other kind of bad talk.’ ‘Where corrections need to be offered, see that they are done in private ... except where it is necessary to repair a public scandal.’<sup>36</sup>

Rules for *Recreation Monitors* were detailed. Art. 2 says: ‘The amusements or games allowed are bocce, tiles, seesaw, stilts, giant swing, darts, skipping [‘corda’ could also be tug-of-war], gymnastics exercises, *occa* [*gioco dell’oca* or goose game], draughts, chess, bingo, races or *barra rotta*, game of crafts [*mestieri*], *mercato* [we do not know what kind of game this was] and any other game which can contribute to an agile body.’<sup>37</sup>

The role of *Patrons* or *Protectors* was a demanding one. They ‘have the important task of finding an employer for the poorest and the most abandoned, and seeing that apprentices and working boys who attend the Oratory are not with employers who will endanger their eternal salvation.’ ‘It is also the role of the Patron to bring back to the house those who have run away, and help those without work to be placed with an employer.’ ‘They will be careful to note the name, surname, and residence of employers who need apprentices or tradesmen to use for their projects.’ ‘In any agreement with employers the first condition is that they are Catholics and that they leave the pupil free to keep Sundays holy.’ ‘When they become aware that a pupil is in a situation of risk they will look after him to see that he does not cause any trouble; they will advise the employer if it seems appropriate and meanwhile will attempt to find a better place for their protégé.’<sup>38</sup>

Finally, everyone employed at the Oratory was reminded that ‘since all roles are being exercised as an act of charity, voluntarily, each individual should fulfil his role zealously.’ Everyone was ‘warmly recommended’ to show ‘charity, mutual tolerance in putting up with others’ faults’ and ‘to promote the good name of the Oratory, its employees and encourage everyone to show good will and confidence towards the Rector.’<sup>39</sup> In essence, qualities and duties reflected the indicators of the catechetical tradition codified in the *Constitutions and Rules of the Sodality and Schools of Christian Doctrine* by St Charles Borromeo published in Milan in 1585, the distant origins of the regulations for the modern oratories.<sup>40</sup>

Significant guidelines are also provided in the second part. In particular the first chapter on *Conditions of acceptance* is an important addition to the preface of the first part. What ultimately results from this is the bosconian specialty of an institution aimed at carrying out a clearly preventive kind of activity on behalf of a certain kind of boy. ‘1. Since the essential purpose of this Oratory is to keep youth from idleness and bad companions, especially on Sundays and holy days, everyone can be accepted regardless of his level or situation. 2. The poorest, most abandoned and ignorant of them, however, are accepted and nurtured by preference since they have greater need of assistance in following the road to eternal salvation ... 5. Let them be kept busy in some art or trade because idleness or unemployment can bring all the vices with them, making any religious instructions futile. Whoever is employed and wants to work can go to the Protectors and will be helped by them. 6. When a young person enters this Oratory, he must be deeply convinced that

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35 *Regolamento dell’oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap 8, art. 1, 8, 11-12, 16, pp. 8-10.

36 *Regolamento dell’oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 9, art. 1 and 3, pp. 11-12.

37 *Regolamento dell’oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 11, pp. 12-15.

38 *Regolamento dell’oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 12, art. 1-2, 4-6, pp. 15-16.

39 *Regolamento dell’oratorio...*, pt. I, Chap. 13, art. 1 and 4, p. 16.

40 Cf. *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, ed. A. Ratti, Vol. III. Milan 1892, col. 149-270;

P. BRAIDO, *Breve storia del “sistema preventivo”*, Rome, LAS 1993, pp. 26-29.

this is a place of religion where the singlemost concern is to make him a good Christian and an upright citizen. Therefore it is strictly forbidden to swear, engage in talk contrary to good morals and to the holy Catholic Religion. Whoever commits such faults will be advised the first time in a fatherly way. If he does not mend his ways the Rector will be made aware and will send him away from the Oratory. 7. Unruly boys too, can be accepted, but care must be taken that they do not give scandal and efforts be made so they show willingness to amend their ways and behave better.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note that the chapter relating to *Behaviour in recreation* comes before the one spelling out rules for *Behaviour in Church*, followed by the chapter on *Behaviour outside the Oratory*.<sup>42</sup> The fifth and sixth chapters explain all the *Religious practices*,<sup>43</sup> especially stressing their major importance in the life of the young, and dealing with the Sacraments of *Confession and Communion*. In this regard there is the following advice among others: 'Remember boys, that the two strongest supports for keeping you on the road to heaven are the two Sacraments of Confession and Communion.' And being consistent, some rules for freedom in this matter follow: 'Let each one approach them freely out of love and never out of fear.' 'I advise all the boys at the Oratory to do what the Catechism for the Archdiocese of Turin says, that is: 'It is good to go to Confession every fortnight or at least once a month.' 'The confessor is the friend of your soul and therefore I recommend you to have full confidence in him. Tell your confessor every secret of your heart and be convinced that he may not reveal even the least thing he has heard in Confession.' His advice is especially important concerning one's 'choice of state [in life].'<sup>44</sup>

In the *Cenni storici* written over 1861–62, Don Bosco reduces his experience of the oratory ideal to a neat and complete summary. Perhaps the most interesting thing is that when he recalls and reviews his experience as a brief overview, it seems more original and true than when he sets out to draw up regulations. Having to make detailed choices of a regulatory nature he ends up clipping the wings of a reality that was in itself much richer and more flexible and open to various solutions.

For example, though he is presenting above all a solid religious and moral formation in the text, when he recalls concrete experience he highlights in particular the novelty of his oratory, emphasising three significant expressions of this: the 'prizes', 'amusements', the 'kind welcome.' He concludes with the classic formula he had appropriated no later than 1849: 'These oratories can be defined as places aimed at entertaining youngsters at risk on Sundays and holy days with pleasant and honest recreation, after they have attended the ceremonies in church. Beyond the churches there are fenced-off areas which are large enough for recreation, and appropriate rooms for classes and to shelter the pupils from the bad weather in the cold season or in case of rain. The way we attract them to come is: small prizes, amusements and a kind welcome. Medals, holy pictures, fruit, some breakfast or a snack; sometimes a pair of socks, shoes or other clothing for the poorest of them, or finding them work; keeping them at home or with employers. The amusements are: bocce/bowls, tiles stilts, various kinds of seesaws, giant swings, gymnastics, military exercises, singing, concerts with musical instruments and singing. But what attracts the boys most of all is the kind welcome. Long experience has told us that achieving a good result in the education of youth consists especially in knowing how to make ourselves loved so we can then make ourselves feared.'<sup>45</sup> The reality is much greater than the rules: the oratory in action is a place for growing up, a decidedly youthful place.

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41 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. II, Chap. 1, art. 1-2, 5-7, pp. 17-18.

42 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. II, Chap. 2-4, pp. 18-21.

43 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. II, Chap. 5, p. 21.

44 *Regolamento dell'oratorio...*, pt. II, Chap. 6, art. 1-3, pp. 21-23

45 [G. BOSCO], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 67-68; cf. Chap. 7, § 2.3.

### 3. The 'Draft Regulations' for the house attached

The hospice began as a small hostel for workers and students, as an adjunct to the Oratory. Then between 1853 and 1859 it became a complete institution in itself, a hospice or college–boarding school. This led to a certain impetus being given to the preventive principle and a firming up of discipline.

This new face of the educational system would be further emphasised in following decades when the Oratory grew larger and the college experience became more extensive. It was codified in a special way in the pages on the preventive system in 1877 and in the *Regulations for the houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales*.

The 1850 Draft was briefer and still carried clear marks of the regulations for the festive oratory, except in the appendix for students where an 'other' Don Bosco timidly emerges: the director of a college with the strong connotation of the junior seminary, hence the educator of young people setting out to become clerics. At the time of the early drafts of the Regulations proper, the hospice was a single hostel of modest dimensions and somewhat like a patriarchal family. In 1853–54 there were from 20–40 living there and Don Bosco was more a *pater familias* than a superior.<sup>46</sup>

The *Piano di Regolamento* (Draft Regulations) is in two parts, with 9 and 7 chapters respectively. The first part also has an *Appendix for students* with two chapters. In the preface to the first part, entitled *Purpose of this house*, and using language that recurs unchanged in the conferences and writings over the decades that followed, it speaks of young oratory boys 'who find themselves in such circumstances that spiritual means are futile without offering them temporal aid.' 'These boys are already somewhat older, orphans or deprived of a fatherly presence, because their parents cannot or do not want to look after them. They are without a trade and without instruction.' 'Exposed to the most serious risks to body and spirit, their ruin cannot be prevented unless a kindly hand is extended to them to take them in, set them on the path to work, order, religion.' The purpose of the house was to 'accept boys in such circumstances.'<sup>47</sup>

A number of roles are then regulated, some tied to the oratory style inasmuch as there were still boys working outside. For example, the 'Protector is a benefactor who takes on the very important task of finding an employer for the boys at the House, and being watchful to see there are no employers or companions with or because of whom their eternal salvation might be imperilled.'<sup>48</sup>

The roles anticipated could be adequately covered between Don Bosco, Fr Alasonatti, the cleric Rua who was studying philosophy and theology and growing in authority, clerics John Cagliero, John Baptist Francesia, Joseph Rocchietti and other trustworthy boys soon to be ready for one or the other role:<sup>49</sup> Rector, Prefect, Catechist; then assistants, protectors, dormitory leaders, domestic staff (cook, waiter, receptionist or doorkeeper), trade supervisors. Mamma Margaret who was the factotum for all household chores, had no need for rules! The dormitory leader in the *Regulations* was a living portrait of the good assistant, the typical figure of educative prevention. He was in place before the boys arrived, was often of the same age, and by 'good example' showed himself to be 'just, exact in everything, full of charity and fear of God.' He 'watched over' them carefully to forestall any kind of bad talk, any word, gesture or behaviour even in fun, that was contrary to the virtue of modesty.<sup>50</sup>

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46 Cf. *Piano di Regolamento per la Casa annessa all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, ms. all., ASC D 482, fasc. 02. , ASC. It refers us to a clean copy of a handwritten manuscript with Don Bosco's corrections, 36 pages all up.

47 *Piano di Regolamento...*, p. 3. The conditions relating to the young candidates are outlined in distinct articles in the 1st chapter: *Accettazione*, pp. 4-5.

48 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. I, p. 11.

49 Cf. Chap. 11, § 6.

50 *Piano di Regolamento ...* pt. I, Chap. VII, art. 2 e 5, pp. 12-13.

An *Appendix for students* follows, that is, the 'boys among the residents ... who show an aptitude for study or for one of the liberal arts. What we find here is the image of what later became the students' section at the Valdocco Oratory: a college which was simultaneously a junior seminary. This fell into place perfectly once Don Bosco had succeeded in organising a full secondary course there. In fact 'no one is admitted to study unless he: 1. Has special aptitude for study and has done well in his classes, 2. Is certified for his outstanding piety ... 3. No one is admitted to studying Latin unless he wants to embrace the clerical state, though he is free to follow his vocation once he has completed his *Latinitas*. [grammar] course.'<sup>51</sup> The reality was confirmed by the rules codified in two chapters regulating student life. It clearly concerns a cultural and spiritual elite of whom it was believed much should be asked: we are talking of young seminarians or at least privileged individuals. This is the setting Dominic Savio and friends grew up in.

As for religious and moral education, this high degree of regulation became total, at least on a par with what Don Bosco had experienced at the seminary, the fundamental difference being that it was integrated and enriched with affective and joyful elements which transformed the atmosphere, where the relationships were of a human, familial, amicable kind.

It was prescribed for religious practice that: '1. Each student must be a model of virtue for all the boys in the House, both for fulfilment of his duties and for piety. It would certainly be a disgrace for a student continuously occupied in spiritual matters to be inferior in behaviour to a trade student occupied all day in his heavy work. 2. On the second Thursday of each month everyone will make the exercise for a happy death, preparing himself a few days earlier by some exercise of Christian piety. 3. Since everyone is recommended to have a regular confessor, each student will have a fixed confessor whom he will be careful not to change without sharing this with the Superior. This is to ascertain that the pupil is regularly guided by the Rector. Those who give themselves to study, which is all work of the Spirit, have a greater need for spiritual nurture. But it is even more essential for the student to have the same confessor, so that when the grammar course has been completed he can have a solid basis for judging his vocation. 4. Let each one have full confidence in his confessor and regularly manifest his inner self to him and follow his advice, This is of the greatest importance since in doing so, the confessor will be able to give him the most appropriate advice for his soul.'<sup>52</sup>

Study times were affected by the various time-tables of the schools the boys attended outside. Diligence and application were controlled and evaluated by the assistant and 'decurion' [group leader]. The Draft Regulations said: 'Other jobs will be found' for people who were not hardworking and they would be reminded of it if they did not amend their ways. 'The one who has no fear of God, abandons his study because he is working in vain. Knowledge does not enter a mind intent on wrongdoing; nor does it reside in a body enslaved to sin.' 'The virtue to be particularly nurtured in students is humility. A proud student is a stupid ignoramus. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God ... The beginning of every sin is pride.'<sup>53</sup>

Disciplinary matters prevail in the second part. The title is *Discipline of the House* and it established rules for *piety, work, behaviour towards superiors and behaviour with companions, modesty, behaviour in the House and outside the House*. Fear of God and ways to acquire it was also instilled in the trade students: prayer, approaching the Sacraments of Penance and communion, listening to God's word. It recommended choice of a regular confessor, 'to open every secret to,' attending Mass, spiritual reading, 'being virtuous from youth,' special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, St Francis de Sales, and St Aloysius Gonzaga.<sup>54</sup>

51 *Piano di Regolamento...*, *Accettazione*, pp. 19-20.

52 *Piano di Regolamento...*, *Appendice...*, Chap. 1 *Condotta religiosa degli studenti*, art. 1-4, pp. 20-21.

53 *Piano di Regolamento...*, *Appendice*, Chap. 2 *Dello studio*, art. 1-3, 6-7.

54 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 1 *Della piet *, art. 1-2, 4-8, pp. 23-25

The chapter *On Work* offered items of considerable interest. 'Man ... is born for work.' 'By work we mean fulfilling the duties of our state be it study, some skill or trade.' 'Through work' we can make ourselves 'worthy of society, religion and do great good for our souls.' The age of youth 'is the springtime of life; whoever is not used to working as a youth for the most part ends up being lazy into old age, a disgrace to where he came from and his family and perhaps causes irreparable harm to his soul, since idleness brings all the vices along with it.'<sup>55</sup>

*Obedience* is discussed in classic terms as 'the foundation of all virtue for a young person.' This translates into pressing exhortations: 'Be assured that your superiors have a keen understanding of the serious obligation which urges them to seek your benefit in the best way possible, and that they have no other aim than what is for your good when they advise, command and correct.' 'Honour and love them as people who take the place of God and your family.' 'Let your obedience be prompt, respectful and cheerful. Freely open your feelings to them and think of them as a loving father who wants your happiness.'<sup>56</sup>

No less cared for were *friendship* and *brotherliness* among the young pupils: 'Honour and love your companions like brothers ... love one another but beware of scandal.'<sup>57</sup>

With regard to *modesty* it is obvious it was not simply identified with civility and good upbringing but was rather considered to be the entrance way and safeguard of chastity and charity. So, the boys are told it is 'one of the most beautiful attributes of your age.' Recommended first is 'modesty of the eyes; they are the windows through which the devil brings sin into the heart ... ; when the hands are not in use hold them decently, and at night when you can, hold them joined on your chest.' 'Be modest when you speak and never use expressions that can offend charity and decency.' 'Try to form a meek character in yourself, one constantly regulated by the principle of Christian modesty.'<sup>58</sup>

According to the chapter on *Behaviour outside the House*<sup>59</sup> the young man should behave similarly when outside the hostel.<sup>60</sup> This chapter and the preceding one on *Behaviour inside the House* are an interesting reflection of what, according to Don Bosco, the style of a youthful community not yet a full boarding school should be, with boys coming and going to work and school and returning home at different times.

Two brief additions conclude the body of the Regulations. One more archaic, the other more recent, introduced by Don Bosco in the handwritten manuscript and in reference to it. The first item denounces *Three evils to be avoided at all costs*: 1. Swearing, taking God's holy name in vain. 2. Dishonesty. 3. Theft.' The second item mentions *Some things strictly forbidden in the House*: 'Keeping money' and 'any kind of gambling,' 'any game where there is a risk of doing wrong or that might be against modesty.' 'Smoking and chewing tobacco,' 'going out to dinner with family and friends or to buy clothing.'<sup>61</sup>

In the 1877 printed edition, the *Regulations for the Houses* would contain more detailed disciplinary rules but with no change to the basic formulas, nor with any change to the quality of their spiritual content.

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55 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 1 *Del lavoro*, art. 1-6, pp. 22-26.

56 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 3 *Contegno verso i superiori*, art. 1-5, pp. 26-27.

57 *Piano di regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 4 *Contegno verso i compagni*, art. 1-2, p. 27.

58 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 5 *Della modestia*, art. 1, 3-4, 6, pp. 28-29.

59 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. 7, pp. 33-36.

60 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, Chap. VI, pp. 30-33.

61 *Piano di Regolamento...*, pt. II, pp. 33-35.

#### 4. Growth of the Oratory and some sad personal losses

In 1856, Don Bosco had the Pinardi house knocked down and replaced with a wing more homogeneous in style with the parallel wing on the eastern side. It made the whole complex into an inverted U, more rational and roomy, and it became the core unit of the Oratory. It was a two-storey building with a large attic area added which contained single rooms. This responded to the growing needs of the hospice, with workshops and internal classes coming online, so to speak.

On 15 March, Don Bosco sought authorisation from Mayor Giovanni Battista Notta for this construction, finding that there was 'a need to restore the old building attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco, so we can take in a greater number of boys who are abandoned and at risk,' or in other words, 'finish that section of the house between the church and the currently existing house.' In order to economise, he asked the Mayor to allow a partial modification to the plans presented three years earlier: 'to be able to make a vaulted ceiling [parallel joists separated by about 80cms with curved brick vaults in between] in place of the attic rooms in the earlier construction plan,' this is to save money, the lack of which could hinder carrying out the desired work which we really are in need of.<sup>62</sup> It was a solution that would cost him dearly.

Later, he also thought of building along the Giardiniera road which ran through the property between the entrance to the Oratory and the Church of St Francis de Sales: two classrooms for an elementary day school to take 150 pupils. This opened at the beginning of 1857: 'all this' he wrote to Duchess Constanza Laval di Montmorency on 12 August 1856 'with the sole aim of winning souls for Jesus Christ especially in these times when the devil is making so many efforts to drag them to perdition.'<sup>63</sup>

The Oratory was partly overcrowded, 'So,' Don Bosco wrote to a priest who was thinking of staying at the Oratory to help him 'until the beginning of August, it is not possible to offer you a room that could be considered good enough for a friend.' As the first way of helping he suggested he 'take up assistance and the accounts for workshops in the house and see to the good behaviour of the boys with their respective employers in the city.'<sup>64</sup> It was a small section of the Oratory, hospice and hostel with the 'workshop' as the only building where the initial activities like tailoring, shoe-making, bookbinding and carpentry were taking place. On 22 August, however, an accident caused the attic area to collapse, built as it was to economise on costs.<sup>65</sup> This slowed completion of the work but also increased costs, hence the need for extra monies which Don Bosco went looking for by sending out two circulars. In the first of these he announced the decision to open a day school for out-of-school boys from the developing population around Valdocco. He also sent a copy to the Minister for the Interior, Urbano Rattazzi, who immediately allocated 1,000 lire followed by a further 1,000 a day later 'to demonstrate in a particular way the interest the Royal Government takes in the growth of the Pious Institute for boys at Valdocco opened and so well run by the Rev. Fr John Bosco.'<sup>66</sup>

At the beginning of October, the three floors [two, plus the attic] of the new building were complete, including the attic area with small individual rooms. They sought to eliminate the dampness by keeping braziers burning night and day to ensure it could be quickly occupied. Bit by bit in November it was filled with new boys, arriving at a total of 120.

At the same time, some sad bereavements, especially for Don Bosco affected everyone at the Oratory. Especially painful for Don Bosco was his mother's death. Then on 13 July 1856, his great benefactor, Dr Francesco Vallauri, died. He was a surgeon. Don Bosco had asked Pope Gregory

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62 Em I 285.

63 Em I 297.

64 To Fr Stefano Peseo, 15 July 1856, Em I 293.

65 Cf. Letter to the Mayor on 15 March 1856, quoted a few lines above, Em I 285.

66 To Don Bosco, 4 October 1856, MB V 534; earlier one on 3 October 1856, MB V 533.

XVI for an indulgence *in articulo mortis* for him.<sup>67</sup> The doctor appeared among the donors for construction of the Church of St Frances de Sales, and on 10 June 1852, he was the prior at celebrations for the blessing of the Church.<sup>68</sup> He then allowed himself to be involved in the 1854 Lottery and was president of the Commission for the 1855 one.<sup>69</sup> On 11 September, Don Bosco celebrated a solemn Mass of suffrage in the Church of St Francis de Sales. De Vallauri was remembered in the inscription above the entrance as 'prior emeritus of the St Aloysius Sodality, outstanding benefactor of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.'<sup>70</sup> His wife and children, Fr Peter (1829–1900), and Teresa (1831–79), were very close and lifelong friends of Don Bosco's and generous to his works. Fr Francesco Paolo Rossi (1828–56) died on 5 November. He was director of the St Aloysius oratory from 1852. From 1847 to 1851 he was a friend and fellow student of theology with St Leonard Murialdo who was the same age. Murialdo succeeded him in 1857 as director of the St Aloysius oratory. The long article about him in *L'Armonia* compared him to Don Bosco for his gifts of mind and heart, his 'concern for young people at risk' and their spiritual and corporal well-being as well as his complete disinterestedness: 'He put aside any thought of high or honourable office, any thought of temporal interest and by dedicating himself constantly to the exercise of charity to his neighbour, poor youth especially, he showed every kindness, spent every effort, every breath to win souls for God. He was a benefactor and true father.'<sup>71</sup>

But the bereavement that most wounded Don Bosco's heart was the death of kind, strong Mamma Margaret Occhiena, the widow Bosco (1788–1856). She died following a strong attack of pneumonia. Despite the kind efforts of the Oratory doctor, Dr Celso Bellingeri, at 3.a.m. on 25 November she left her beloved John, his elder brother Joseph who stayed with her to the end, and the many adopted children at the Oratory for whom she had cared for ten years.<sup>72</sup> Don Bosco wrote to Duchess Costanza Laval de Montmorency on 31 December: 'The unhappy events that have occurred in this house are the reason I have not replied to your gracious and devout letter which out of your goodness you deigned to send me following the death of my dear mother.' He thanked her and assured her of his special prayers.

Perhaps the wishes he expressed for her and for himself were an echo of the painful loss he was feeling. They were thoughts of faith and hope in a future life that he would be praying for: 'May you be able to accomplish his most holy and divine will in everything you do. And as late as possible, please God, may you complete your mortal existence in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and be with them forever in heaven ... May I, too, fulfil God's holy will now and in the new year we are about to begin and for the rest of the time the Lord, in his mercy wishes to leave me in this world.' He concluded saying: 'I take pleasure in letting you know that our boys are in excellent health. My aunt and brother are feeling better.'<sup>73</sup> His aunt, Giovanna Maria Occhiena known as Marianna, Margaret's older sister by three years, remained at the Oratory to help Don Bosco and died on 22 June 1857.<sup>74</sup> Instead, his brother, Joseph died on 12 December 1862, on the verge of turning 50.

Don Bosco's mother's death, other than some brief information in the *Salesian Bulletin* in 1883, rounded out by Fr Lemoyne in 1886, had highlighted the strong bond between his mother and

67 To Gregory XVI, April 1845, Em I 56.

68 To Bishop L Moreno, 10 June 1852, Em I 160.

69 To the Superintendent of Finance, 27 January 1854, and 22 March 1855, Em I 215-216 and 251..

70 *Funzione funebre*, "L'Armonia", Sunday, 14 September 1856, p. 861.

71 *Necrologia del T. Francesco Rossi*, "L'Armonia", 20 November 1856, pp. 1095-1096, OE XXXVIII 36-37; cf, also Chap. 11, § 4.

72 Cf. BS 7 (1883), no. 5, May, pp. 82-83; G. B. LEMOYNE, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco...*, pp. 176-185.

73 Em I 311.

74 Cf. D. OCCHIENA - L. CANDELO, *La vita di mamma Margherita a Capriglio*. Castelnuovo Don Bosco (Asti), ISBS 1993, pp. 30-31.

himself, the primary relationship which had shaped the basic traits of his personality; a balanced, lucid woman, clear and warm in her affection, she had been able to carry out the role of both mother and father for her two sons, a role that John was then able to express in a mission and style of action which, without any play on words, can be described as a paternally maternal one. The first part of the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* is a fine and shining testimony to her.<sup>75</sup>

Building development at the Oratory gained new impetus in the new decade. On 16 July 1860, Don Bosco bought buildings and land from the Filippi brothers for 65,000 lire. These were located 7 metres east of the Oratory: up until when the wall dividing them was knocked down on 12 April. In 1861, the new building was connected to the Oratory by a bridge and earned itself the name 'Sicily'. Along with renovations to the Filippi house, the parallel wing of the Oratory was doubled in size. The bedroom-cum-office area which Don Bosco had lived in since 1853 became an antechamber and waiting room and Don Bosco moved to the adjacent new room with two windows, one looking towards the Filippi house, the other looking south towards the central courtyard.<sup>76</sup>

The possibility of accepting new residents was now much greater by comparison with the already considerable number in 1858–59: it went from 120 to 200 or thereabouts. In the following decade it increased rapidly to 300 then 500/600 and beyond ('around 800' in 1865, including adults).

## 5. Youth groups – 'schools' of faith and charity

It was not just greater regulation but also thanks to the initiative of his young helpers that the educative family at both the Oratory and the Colleges avoided the risks that come with growing too big. His young helpers saw to the growth of sodalities and many other groups. Naturally, they all came under Don Bosco's watchful eye and prospered with the help of his active leadership. Apart from their predominantly devotional aims, these groups contributed, within certain limits to making the boys active collaborators with their educators in their growth to adult freedom.

As we have seen,<sup>77</sup> the St Aloysius Sodality, with its ancient and traditional roots, began in 1847. Over the four year period from 1856–1859, five new groups of a religious and charitable nature were gradually established in the Oratory and the hospice.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, other activity groups were forming such as the *schola cantorum*, the band and a theatre group.

Chronologically, the St Aloysius Sodality was the first of them, but it was also the pattern for all the others for its organisation and spiritual guidelines, even though each group had its distinct purpose.<sup>79</sup>

The Immaculate Conception Sodality arose in 1856, given the number of boys who were students and aspirants to the clerical state: St Dominic Savio (1842–57) was its fervent leader,<sup>80</sup>

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75 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ - M. BORSI, *Solidale nell'educazione. La presenza e l'immagine della donna in don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1992, pp. 91-103, *Realtà e simbolo di una madre. Margherita Occhiena nelle Memorie dell'Oratorio*.

76 Cf. F. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco...*, pp. 98-141.

77 Cf. Chap. 7, § 3.1.

78 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 259-269. Already in the *Giovane provveduto* (Companion of Youth) Don Bosco had reserved some pages for the *Avvertimenti per li giovani ascritti a qualche Congregazione o a qualche Oratorio* (pp. 29-31, OE II 209-211).

79 Cf. in ASC E 452 *Compagnie religiose*. The handwritten regulations for all the sodalities can be found there.

80 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico Allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales con appendice sulle grazie ottenute per sua intercessione per cura del sac. Giovanni Bosco*, Fifth



Giuseppe Bongiovanni (1836–68) brought it greater maturity, along with his outstanding piety, but also a literary capacity helpful in writing up the Regulations,<sup>81</sup> and Giuseppe Rocchietti (1834–76). Along with these three founding members, some others appeared on the list of members and were also at the first meeting on 9 June. Among them was Michael Rua, who almost always had the role of president and leader in the meetings that followed.<sup>82</sup>

The sodality operated at a particular spiritual level aimed at ensuring its members were under ‘the patronage of the immaculate Virgin Mary ... by dedicating themselves entirely to her service.’ The regulations were largely drawn from the regulations of the St Aloysius Sodality, highlighting the basic features of what would be described a century later as the youthful spirituality Don Bosco had given shape to, though this is a somewhat reductionist view of it.’ It required the complete involvement of its members in the life of the community. This meant ‘strictly observing the rules of the house,’ ‘edifying companions by correcting them charitably and encouraging them to do good by words but more so by example, and by keeping busy at all times.’ Also spelt out was a sure principle of practical asceticism by linking charity with obedience and chastity: ‘Charity leads us to perfection, but only through obedience and chastity can we acquire the state that brings us very close to God.’

Some detailed articles followed, confirming prescriptions which attempted to reconcile freedom with conformity: ‘1. As our primary rule, therefore we will adopt perfect obedience to our superiors to whom we submit with unlimited confidence. 2. Let fulfilment of our duties be our first and special concern ... 3. Let mutual love unite us; we will love our brothers without distinction and advise them kindly when they show they need correction ... We will try to avoid even the least disagreement among us by putting up with annoyances and making efforts to maintain perfect harmony among ourselves, a unity of affection and feelings.’ Any special practices of piety were excluded but members were encouraged to improve the common ones: ‘Approaching the sacraments;’ ‘we will join in devotion to the holy rosary;’ We will endeavour to let our superiors know about anything of importance happening among us to guarantee our activities by submitting to their judgement concerning these.’<sup>83</sup>

The Blessed Sacrament Sodality was established in 1857 and its first director was the fervent young cleric Joseph Bongiovanni. It was of an essentially devotional nature.<sup>84</sup> A natural offshoot was the Altar Servers Club set up in 1858 by ‘the older and more exemplary boys’ in the sodality and those especially devoted to ensuring the decorum of the liturgical celebrations.

The last of the sodalities, the St Joseph’s Sodality, was established among the trade boys in 1859 by cleric John Bonetti. In addition to the devotional elements and mutual assistance in case of illness, it added a notable commitment to fidelity regarding the community’s lifestyle as indicated in the regulations for the house. Members ended up becoming allies of the superiors in accomplishing the educational aims of the institution: they proposed to ‘become ever better’ and to ‘lead [their] companions on the path to virtue through word and good example.’ They committed themselves to ‘avoiding everything’ that could ‘lead to scandal,’ ‘avoiding bad companions like the plague and being careful not to indulge in obscene conversations.’ They promised to be ‘charitable to [their] companions, easily forgiving any offence,’ and to ‘show great love for work and fulfilment of their duties, obeying their superiors in everything.’ They promised to ‘observe the rules of the

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expanded edition, Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1878, pp. 78-79, no. 1.

81 Cf. *Memorie biografiche di salesiani defunti* collected and published by Fr G. B. Francesca. San Benigno Canavese, Scuola tipografica salesiana 1903, pp. 9-60, especially, pp. 25-26

82 Cf. minutes of some sessions in 1856, among the twenty indicated, drawn up by Giuseppe Bongiovanni [11 pp.], ASC E 452; cf. some in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 480-481.

83 Original Regulations with Don Bosco’s handwritten signature, fol. 1r-5r, ASC E 452.

84 Regulations, handwritten ms of Don Bosco (1857) [2 p.], ASC E 452.

house exactly, never showing signs of disapproval at what the superiors 'had commanded.'<sup>85</sup>

Prior to this flourishing of group initiatives, the Mutual Aid Society merged in 1855 with the newly begun St Vincent de Paul Conference annexed to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.<sup>86</sup> This was recognised by the General Council in Paris on 11 May 1856, until the 'annexation' was withdrawn under the presidency of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences in Turin, led by G. B. Ferrante (1869-71).<sup>87</sup> In the early years its activity, also copied by the St Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories, was somewhat limited, consisting mainly of 'assisting the boys in the church and in the oratory.' But it did not lack charitable and supportive activity of a certain importance.<sup>88</sup> One gains the impression that the spirit and activities were close to those established by the regulations for a *Society of St Vincent de Paul for young men involved in arts, trades, and business*, which was the final item in the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) issue for February 1855: A good rule for preserving health. The society was 'a work exclusively of charity and morals' (art. 1). It could split into various autonomous sections with a 'supervisor or director general' priest or layman 'voted in by the oldest section in the city or suburb or by representatives of all the sections' (art. 3 and 4). Only young men from 16 to 26 years of age could enrol. When they completed their 40<sup>th</sup> year 'they become honorary members and counsellors for serious matters.' There could be 'some very young aspirants' who could be 'accepted in their fifteenth year of age' (art. 5). Members were bound to temperance and abstinence from alcoholic drinks (art. 7). Taken for granted was the obligation of Sunday as a day of rest and approaching the sacraments at least five times a year (art. 8 and 9). Each member was bound to contribute one or two *soldi* a month 'to help boys in need,' 'preferably those from the suburb or local area.' (art. 10). Members of the Society would also have carried out spiritual works of charity, bringing boys who needed it to the practices of piety and encouraging them to virtue (art. 11). Also foreseen for members were 'honest amusements in common' (art. 12) and spiritual gatherings organised monthly or every two months (art. 13).<sup>89</sup>

## 6. Lotteries in 1857 and 1862

While mainly taken up with the educational and spiritual guidance of the boys, Don Bosco could not interrupt the essential search for benefactors and charity. He approached the Prefects of Turin province, the City Mayors, Finance Superintendents, bankers like Gonella and Cotta, members of the nobility like the Fassati, Galleani d'Agliano, Ricci des Ferres families, and among the clergy, Canons Gastaldi (Turin) and De Gaudenzi (Vercelli), priests like Antonio Rosmini and others from the Institute of Charity, charitable bodies like the *MendicITÀ Istruita* or the Royal Work of Schools for the Poor. He stressed the urgency of 'giving hungry youngsters something to eat' and paying the relentless 'bill from the baker,'<sup>90</sup> the need to help 'so many boys who are poor and at risk.'<sup>91</sup>

Writing to the Mayor of Turin to draw his attention to the social value of the Oratory initiatives he said: 'I have the best of good will to do good for youth most at risk in this city and especially in this

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85 Regulations, handwritten copy [5 p.], ASC E 452.

86 Cf. M. CESTE, *Testimoni della carità. Le conferenze di San Vincenzo a Torino, 100 anni di storia*, Vol. I. *L'Ottocento*, Cantalupa (Turin) 2003, vol. I, p. 350.

87 Cf. F. MOTTO, *Le conferenze "annesse" di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli negli oratori di don Bosco. Ruolo storico di un'esperienza educativa*, in J. M. PRELLEZO, *L'impegno dell'educare...*, pp. 472-476.

88 Cf. F. MOTTO, *Le conferenze "annesse" di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli...*, in J. M. PRELLEZO (ed.), *L'impegno dell'educare...*, pp. 474-485.

89 *La buona regola di vita per conservare la sanità. Conversazioni popolari* [to the reader - P.S. B] Part II, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De Agostini 1855, pp. 240-244.

90 To Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, 7 May 1856, Em I 288; to Duchess C. Laval de Montmorency, 12 August 1856, Em I 297; to Can. P. De Gaudenzi, 8 October 1856, Em I 306.

91 Circular, 1 October 1856, Em I 305

area but I need you to help me with financial support.<sup>92</sup> 'The strictures imposed by the current year' and needs of 'poor and abandoned boys' were presented in November 1855 to the Minister for War, General Giacomo Durando for 'a donation of some clothing items which are of no further use to the royal troops either because of size or because they are worn through.'<sup>93</sup> He addressed a similar request on 30 September 1856, to his successor, General Alfonso Lamarmora: 'I am not asking for valuable items: any items of clothing, socks, shirts especially, blankets sheets however worn or patched, will be accepted by me with the greatest gratitude. I will see that every rag helps cover the children of the poor.'<sup>94</sup> It was a generous resource he did not fail to draw from often in the future and always with positive results.

Naturally, the by now classic means he had recourse to was the lottery. The lotteries in 1857 and 1862 are similar in their basic motivation but different for the profits sought in proportion to the growing financial needs.

The 'Catalogues' or Lists' largely copied the 1852 scheme: *Invitation to a lottery of items – Draft regulations for the lottery – Members of the Commission* with a list of male and female *Promoters* following. There were more objectives: mention was made of the three oratories but developments and needs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales were especially stressed, with particular reference to the house attached and the increase in residents – 150 in 1857, 570 in 1862. The list of people involved in the organisation had grown from one lottery to the other. The 1857 lottery had a Commission of 20 members plus 200 male and 141 female promoters.<sup>95</sup> The 1862 one had a Commission of 22 members, and there were 326 male and 208 female promoters.<sup>96</sup>

The 1857 *Invitation* presented the reasons moving the Commission to decide on the lottery: 'The charity of the Gospel ... where the glory of God and the benefit to our neighbour require it, does not hesitate to overcome its reluctance and reach out to charitable individuals.' These same motives that led Don Bosco to open 'the three boys' oratories on the three main sides' of Turin, attracting more than three thousand boys with various costly initiatives: religious functions, recreation and gymnastics, classes in reading, writing, singing and playing [instruments] and catechism. Unemployed boys are found an employer and they are given the uninterrupted assistance 'that is worthy of a good father.' The Valdocco oratory, besides, had to sustain 'night and day classes' and especially a house attached to the Oratory which took in orphaned, poor and abandoned boys – 'more than a hundred and fifty in number,' providing whatever they needed 'to be good Christians and upright tradesmen.' Once again the invitation reminded readers of the cholera, which had forced costly extensions to be added to the premises. The example of 'fellow citizens' and 'charitable individuals in the provinces' who had been active in supporting the initiative, would certainly have encouraged many to contribute 'by sending items which will serve as prizes, and by buying tickets.' Convinced that 'by taking part in this work of charity, you are providing for a public and private utility,' 'blessed by God and man.'<sup>97</sup>

The same works and their respective needs reappeared in the *Invitation* to the 1862 lottery. In this one the hospice was indicated as having 'boys of no ordinary intelligence who lack the material resources to progress in their studies.' 'Most of them will become teachers, others will go into commerce and those with a vocation are set on the path to the clerical state. With the increased

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92 To Lawyer G.B. Nolta, Mayor of Turin from 1852 to 1861, 12 December 1857, Em I 337.

93 Em I 268-269.

94 Em I 303; to same recipient, 14 October 1858, Em I 362-363.

95 *Catalogo degli oggetti posti in lotteria a favore dei giovani dei tre oratorii di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco, di S. Luigi a Porta Nuova, del Santo Angelo Custode in Vanchiglia*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1857 [15 pp.], pp. 7-15, OE IX 9-17.

96 *Elenco degli oggetti posti in lotteria a favore dei giovani dei tre Oratori di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco, di S. Luigi a Porta Nuova e dell'Angelo Custode in Vanchiglia*, Turin, tip. di G. Speirani e figli 1862 [26 pp.], pp. 7-26, OE XIV 203-222.

97 *Catalogo degli oggetti posti in lotteria...*, pp. 1-4, OE IX 3-6.

range of activities the residents, students and trade boys, were no longer only from Turin but came 'in increasing numbers' from surrounding cities and towns.' Of the 570 living at the house only 50 were from Turin. So it was also necessary to increase the number of 'charitable individuals' living outside Turin.<sup>98</sup> The number of bodies and the quality of the individuals appealed to in both lotteries and involved in them, was varied and high: private individuals, clergy and laity, civic and religious authorities were contacted for simple information or more frequently with a precise request for help. Many letters were sent, other than to King Emmanuel II and the Royal family, to the Minister for the Interior, Grace and Justice, War, to parliamentarians and senators, asking not only for various authorisations or to facilitate something but also for donations of money and clothes, or to buy lottery tickets.<sup>99</sup>

Outstanding among them all was Urbano Rattazzi who was generous in his support and financial assistance. We have three letters addressed to him from Don Bosco in 1862,<sup>100</sup> Others are documented – replies from the Minister or the Ministry, with frequent allotments of grants or payment of boarding fees for boys who had been recommended and accepted.<sup>101</sup> On 21 March 1862, Don Bosco wrote to Rattazzi who by then had become Prime Minister: 'I take advantage of this occasion to express my pleasure that you are the Prime Minister. You have always been charitable towards poor boys and I hope this continues.'<sup>102</sup> Perhaps he was not fully aware of, or for good reason was not interested in the ambiguities and duplicity the eclectic Minister came from. He had permitted growth of the wave of democracy galvanised by the adventurous Garibaldi, including his final adventure under the banner of 'Rome or Death!' which was finally blocked at Aspromonte on 29 August, leading to the inevitable resignation of the precarious Ministry of the Day. (3 March – 29 November , 1862).<sup>103</sup>

Both lotteries were very successful. Though excellent, the financial outcome was not the principal one; it was surpassed by the moral and publicity success. The draw for the first lottery took place on 6 July 1857 and for the second, on 30 September 1862. 'Perhaps that was the moment of greatest success, gaining the widest, most numerous consensus for the work of the oratories in Turin and Piedmont.'<sup>104</sup>

This was confirmed. Don Bosco's lotteries stood apart from others in Turin and Piedmont for their extensive impact, the number of donations, the high rate of male and female participation, and for their success.<sup>105</sup>

## **7. Dominic Savio's spiritual growth while with Don Bosco**

The *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* (The Life of Dominic Savio) is the edifying recollection of the life of a boy who embodied a fulfilling adolescent Christian holiness which was within the group of others who were determined and courageous enough. It is different from the two lives that came after it, those of Michael Magone and Francis Besucco, where the narrative is idealised (especially in the former) with the intention of drawing a model of life from them which was appropriate for the average type of boy.

The *Life of St Dominic Savio* (1842–57) is above all the story of a real and holy life in Don

98 *Elenco degli oggetti...*, pp. 1-4, OE XIV 197-200.

99 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 97-100 and 101-104.

100 Em I 487-488, 492-493, 527-528.

101 Cf. letters from 1854 to 1867, Em I 218, 228, 281, 309, 327, 393, 396, 398, 497, 506, 507, 518, 539; Em II 353, 416, 643.

102 Em I 488.

103 G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, Vol. V. Milan, Feltrinelli 1968, pp. 179-196.

104 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 100 and 104.

105 Cf. L. BORELLO, *Lotti di beneficenza in Piemonte a metà dell'Ottocento*, "Studi Piemontesi" 19 (1990) no. 2, November, pp. 451-453.

Bosco's terms. So much so that he soon recommended him to the boys and others as someone to call on, to receive graces. He even dared speak calmly and naturally of his holiness by ecclesiastical authority. 'What I can assure you of' he confided to his collaborators, according to a chronicle entry in '1862' 'is that we will have boys from the house raised to the honours of the altar. If Dominic Savio continue to work miracles thus, I have no doubt, if I am still alive and can push his cause, that holy Mother Church will allow his cult, at least for the Oratory.'<sup>106</sup>

In 1876, when Don Bosco wanted to remind Salesians and boys of his favourite virtues, the essential condition for success of the Congregation, and the boys themselves, he made Dominic Savio their model and teacher. A celestial being, 'as beautiful as an angel' visited him, spoke with him with the authority of someone who felt he was a spokesman for God's will: 'You are about to receive serious orders from the Lord,' he said with authority 'and woe to you if you do not carry them out.' He even admonished Don Bosco, saying that if he had 'had the keen faith that all the ministers of the King of Kings should have' the boys who got to heaven, thanks to the Oratories would have been 'a hundred thousand more.' And, explaining the simple symbolism of the flowers making up the bunch in his hand, he offered a lesson on the spiritual life to ensure 'the kingdom of heaven' for all his 'boys of any age and circumstance.' 'The rose is charity, the violet humility, the lily chastity, the sunflower obedience, the perpetua perseverance, the ivy mortification, the ear of wheat Holy Communion the gentian, penance.'<sup>107</sup>

The *Life* as it was experienced and described is also, strictly speaking, an autobiography of Don Bosco, reflecting his spirituality as he practised and taught it. The pupil's spiritual adventure is also Don Bosco's story as a priest and educator in his role as guide to the 'Story of a soul,' according to a mindset shaped over the course of priestly, theological and experiential formation. The two paths are intertwined. 'it seems to me you are good material' Don Bosco tells Dominic, who asks him if he will accept him at the Oratory in Valdocco. The boy immediately sets up the roles for the new event in their lives: 'So I am the material: you will be the tailor. Then take me with you and make a beautiful garment for the Lord.'<sup>108</sup>

However, Don Bosco had immediately grasped that another tailor had already cut the cloth and drawn the outline of the garment; the Spirit of Jesus, followed up by his parents and their fear of God, and by zealous priests. 'I saw in him a soul completely in accord with the Spirit of the Lord' he says 'and I was not a little amazed when I considered the work divine grace had already achieved in that young heart.'<sup>109</sup>

When presenting the life of Michael Magone to his 'dear boys' he contrasted the child at risk in Michael's case with Savio: 'In Dominic Savio's life you observed his inner virtue.'<sup>110</sup> In fact, Dominic Savio did not belong to the category nor social setting of poor and abandoned youth at risk and of risk, the primary target of Don Bosco's apostolate. Dominic had grown up in an exceptional family, exceptional not for its social origins but for its deep and essential Catholic Faith, its firm sense of morality and intense hard work reinforced in these habits by the spiritual world of the parish. No wonder the twelve-year-old Dominic was a pure, disciplined, hard-working, loving boy in love with God and prayer. It is no mere casual fact that the author spends seven chapters describing his childhood (1842–54), stressing his character, his early virtuous behaviour, good conduct, First

106 G. BONETTI, *Annali III* 1862 1863, pp. 53-54.

107 Cf. text drawn from handwritten manuscript of Don Bosco's in C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 40-43; in MB XIII 586-596 there is a much expanded version.

108 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 35, OE XI 185. There is a small bibliography which emphasises the tailor-material combination; G. FAVINI, *La stoffa e il sarto. Il beato Domenico Savio presentato agli educatori*, Colle Don Bosco (Asti), Libreria Dottrina Cristiana [1950], 58 p.; L. CASTANO e al., *Domenico Savio. Alunno santo di maestro santo*. Milan, Scuola Grafica Salesiana 1955, 64 pp.

109 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, *ibid.*

110 *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*. Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1861, p. 4, OE XIII 158

Communion, attending school in Morialdo, Castelnuovo d'Asti and Moriondo, the meeting on the first Sunday of October 1854 with the one who would be his Director after his teacher, Fr Cugliero, had presented him to Don Bosco some months earlier as 'a pupil worthy of particular consideration for his intelligence and piety.' He added: 'It would be difficult to find someone who surpassed him in talent and virtue.'<sup>111</sup> It is significant that already in the first meeting the teenager replied to the question 'When you have finished studying Latin, what would you want to do?' by saying: 'If the Lord grants me such a grace I would earnestly want to embrace the clerical state.'<sup>112</sup>

When he entered Don Bosco's house in a youthful setting imbued with pure humanity and intense spirituality, his life's journey became more decisive and fluent.<sup>113</sup> He had already practised love of neighbour in the early stages of his life at home, in obedience to his parents and in active brotherly love in a large family and with his schoolmates. This was further advanced at the Oratory in the program of active charity which Don Bosco pointed out to the teenager as the essence and foundation for 'becoming a saint.'<sup>114</sup> 'The first thing advised for becoming a saint,' the biographer writes 'was to work at winning souls over to God; there is no holier thing in the world than cooperating in the good of souls for whose salvation Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his precious blood.'<sup>115</sup>

This active charity was shown especially to his companions, not just the exemplary ones, thanks to a solid spiritual friendship, but also the recalcitrant and difficult one by dint of his acknowledged and attractive moral superiority. Given his strength of virtue, Don Bosco did not recommend avoidance, as he did for others, but presented him with an active task to do there and then, as was the case for example of the nine-year-old swearer whom he kindly took in hand. His cheerful temperament and innate loveliness helped. 'His cheerful manner,' Don Bosco goes on to say 'and lively character also endeared him to boys who were less given to piety in such a way that everyone was able to deal with him and took his advice he offered from time to time in good part.'<sup>116</sup> He was one of the most zealous members of 'a kind of society' which some boys had formed 'to help with the more unruly types among their companions; and if they had a competition among these boys to see who got a prize' he questioned only the unruly ones,' keeping the 'small prize' just for one of them.<sup>117</sup>

He extended this charity in a novel way to infidels, heretics, Protestants, with special concern for England. His biographer writes that, 'by preference he read the lives of Saints who had worked especially for the salvation of souls. He gladly spoke of missionaries who laboured so much in distant countries for the good of souls ... I often heard him exclaim: 'How many souls there are waiting for our help in England. Oh, if I had the strength and virtue I would want to go there immediately and win them all for the Lord through preaching and good example.'<sup>118</sup> He could have been arguing this notion from Fr Lorenzo Gastaldi, future Archbishop of Turin, at the time a missionary of the Institute of Charity in England. During Gastaldi's two visits back to Italy in 1856, 1857,<sup>119</sup> he had been at the Oratory and spoken there about the religious situation in England, or it

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111 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., pp. 11-37, OE XI 161-187.

112 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., p. 36, OE XI 186. On Dominic before he comes to the Oratory cf. F. M. TINIVELLA, *Domenico Savio al suo entrare nell'Oratorio*, "Salesianum" 12 (1950) 248-255.

113 There is an excellent bibliography on his journey of growth with Don Bosco: A. CAVIGLIA, "Savio Domenico e don Bosco". Studio, 610 p.; M. CASOTTI, *Un alunno e un maestro*, "Salesianum" 12 (1950) 256-267; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II...*, pp. 206-211 (*Domenico Savio, l'ideale realizzato*).

114 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., pp. 50-51, OE XI 200-201.

115 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., p. 53, OE XI 203.

116 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., pp. 47-48, OE XI 207-208.

117 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., p. 59, OE XI 209.

118 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., p. 54, OE XI 204.

119 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*..., Vol. I, pp. 110-111.

could have been from Don Bosco who repeated these ideas in his evening talks to the boys and the educators.

As we have seen, this charity then took the shape of fervent involvement in 1856 as co-founder with Joseph Bongiovanni (the latter a 20-year-old, Dominic just 14) of the Immaculate Conception Sodality. Its statutes contained a complete program of spiritual pedagogy in perfect harmony with the regulations for the students of the house.<sup>120</sup>

Dominic offered all the qualities which, in Don Bosco's thinking, characterised the good and edifying young man called to a special vocation and, perhaps in the founder-to-be's still informal imagination to candidacy in his hypothetical future Congregation, however it might be established. So, good manners when speaking with companions, a spirit of prayer, approaching the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, devotion to the Mother of God, a spirit of penance wisely tempered by his master,<sup>121</sup> spiritual friendship based on 'the readiness to embrace the clerical state with the real desire of becoming a saint,' patience during illness, and confident approach to death.<sup>122</sup>

The 'extraordinary' was already the ordinary, according to Don Bosco: 'The keenness of his faith, his firm hope and ardent charity and perseverance in doing good deeds until his last breath.'<sup>123</sup> But presenting 'special graces and some uncommon deeds' he considered were very much kin to 'deeds recorded in the Bible and the lives of the Saints.' Certain moments of rapture before the Blessed Sacrament, conversing *tete-a-tete* with God, telling him of his unconditional undying love for him – according to Don Bosco these pointed clearly to a life of mysticism. 'His innocence of life, love of God, his desire for heavenly things had brought Dominic's mind to such a state that we could say he was habitually absorbed in God' to such an extent that he sometimes needed to abandon recreation and recollect himself in solitude: 'The usual distractions assail one' he told his master 'and it seems to me that paradise opens up above my head.'<sup>124</sup>

In Dominic Savio and his friends and imitators, Don Bosco found confirmation of the goodness of his work as an educator, and of his Regulations: not simple tools for good discipline but a complete code of Christian living which he integrated with practical existence, It was what the *Giovane Provveduto* (Companion of Youth) called 'a method of Christian life,' the way to true happiness in the triple city: civic, ecclesial and heavenly. It was the crowning of the extraordinarily rich decade of a thirty five to forty-year-old's life marked by the most dynamic and mature vitality.

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120 G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, Chap. XVI *La Compagnia dell'Immacolata Concezione*, pp. 75-83, OE XI 225-233.

121 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 72-75, OE XI 222-225.

122 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 57-106, OE XI 207-256.

123 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 93, OE XI 243.

124 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 97, OE XI 249.

## Chapter 11

### A NEW KIND OF PRIEST AND LAY PERSON FOR NEW TIMES AND PROBLEMS (1858–62)

- 1853 August: *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo* (Contemporary facts presented in dialogue form) (L.C.)
- 1854 *Introduction to the Piano di regolamento dell'Oratorio* (Draft regulations of the Oratory);  
*Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (Historical outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales)
- 1860 November–December: *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso* (Life of Fr Joseph Cafasso) (L.C.)
- 1861 September: *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magome Michele* (Biographical outline of the youth Michael Magone) (L.C.)
- 1862 *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (Historical outlines on the Oratory of St Francis de Sales)
- 1864 July – August: *Il pastorello delle Alpi...Besucco Francesco* (The shepherd boy of the Alps... Francis Besucco) (L.C.)
- 1866 December: *Valentino o la vocazione impedita* (Valentino, or the vocation obstructed) (L.C.)
- 1868 February: *Severino ossia avventura di un giovane alpigiano* (Severino or the adventures of a young alpine lad) (L.C.)

By the end of the 1850s one could say that the essential outline of Don Bosco's image was well drawn, the image of the priest for poor and abandoned young people, the educator, the man who renewed the oratory concept, founded the hostel for working boys and students which soon became a hospice and boarding section for trade and academic students. Integrated with this image was the figure of the Catholic priest, pastor of souls, doing everything he could through preaching and popular missions, looking for various ways to reach people through the press as a writer and publisher where he could not reach them *viva voce*. He was a man who went looking for charity and organised successful lotteries. Parallel with all this we could consider the basic features of his educative and pastoral system to have taken shape in its application to prevention, welfare and education.

Nevertheless, there were activities focused mainly within the context of the Turin Archdiocese where Don Bosco was incardinated as a priest in every sense – legally, practically, psychologically. But also in the context of the city as capital of the Piedmont region and the Savoy Kingdom. He felt he was a citizen in sentiment, thought and action. However this did not mean he felt obliged to share the idea of the State wanted by politicians.

Don Bosco's new story as founder opened much broader horizons and occupied mental and



real spaces with much more extensive borders. Before we venture into this, it seems appropriate to spend a while drawing up a quick balance of the journey thus far, already marked by relative completeness of achievements and biographical experience.

## 1. The new face of the young, new initiatives

Experience and reflection come together in a text of exceptional clarity and maturity of thought: a classic, not so much compiled, as coming straight from the author's mind, heart, and creative imagination. This was the Introduction to the already noted *Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, written around 1854. It was both a statement and program, and though archived as a text it became history in reality. Spelt out in it were all the fundamental themes of his vocational awareness: Youth in the Church and in society, the oratory as a home suited to young people whom the Church had to take under its wing, looking for and bringing the necessary workers together, ends congruent with means to achieve them.

He took his cue from John's Gospel: '*Ut filios Dei, qui errant disperse congregaret in unum.* John Chap. 2. v. 52'<sup>1</sup> These words, which summed up the universal mission of the 'Divine Saviour', seemed to the author to be able to be 'applied literally to the youth of our day.' They are the hope of society, he noted, and 'not naturally perverse.' Indeed, 'once parental neglect, idleness, mixing with bad companions have been removed,' this latter problem being something that occurs especially 'on weekends', it was easy 'to instil' in them 'the principles of order, good behaviour, respect, and religion.' He then said that if should happen that these were the boys who were already 'harmed' they were so 'more through [their] thoughtlessness than out of pure malice.' The major problem was finding someone 'to look after them, nurture them, guide them to virtue, keep them away from vice.'<sup>2</sup>

For Don Bosco, it seemed absolutely essential to intervene educationally and with other support for these young people to mature. These were indispensable forms of mediation to begin to make them ready for and achieve skills such as respect for order, morality, relationships, and religion.

On the basis of his experience, Don Bosco was gradually coming to better understand these basic data as equally applicable to 'bricklayer's rouseabouts,' the target group of the Catechism classes he had inherited from Cafasso, or the boys he met 'when frequenting the prisons in Turin,' or again, for the many who for social and financial reasons found themselves lost in the big city and exposed to many dangers: at risk because they were poor and abandoned, 'at risk themselves and of risk to others.'<sup>3</sup> Despite their limiting circumstances in prison which, instead of improving them made them worse, their native readiness to improve remained.

Therefore, if for now they found themselves in detention or in the unfortunate situation of abandonment, that had occurred, 'more from lack of education than ill will' and only the proper educational assistance could restore them to happiness they so yearned for. He went on to say that, 'it has been noted that as they were gradually led to sense their dignity as human beings and that it is reasonable and a duty to earn their living through honest effort and not by theft, in short as soon as the moral and religious principle found echo in their minds, they felt a peace of heart which

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1 Caiphas, the High Priest, said, 'Don't you realise that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, instead of having the whole nation destroyed?' The evangelist comments: 'He did not say this of his own accord; rather as he was High Priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people, and not only for them but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God! (Jn. 11, 50-56).

2 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales...*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 34-35.

3 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 39.

they could not explain but which made them want to be better.’<sup>4</sup>

We note a difference in the notion of poor and abandoned youth between the *Cenno storico* or Historical outline of 1853/54 and the *Cenni storici* or Historical outlines of 1862. The basic consideration in the former, which to a degree is anthropological and theological, is broken down in the latter into a phenomenological view of different categories of boys. This diagnosis obviously refers to those Don Bosco met in and around his oratories. In fact, the early forms of the oratory saw a rather informal, heterogeneous flow of boys who were needy or sought catechetical instruction and regular religious practice, as well as boys who were morally and religiously uneducated and need to be ‘enticed’ by recreation and various amusements. What prevails in Don Bosco’s recollection of these boys is his insistence on their economic and social poverty and abandonment.

During the 1850s, a shift took place in both the reality and the concepts with the advent of the boarding section and a new preventive procedure. Don Bosco radically excluded the correctional style of boarding school from the possible types available to him. He held to prevention understood in an unambiguous sense: directed not so much at re-educating delinquents as at nurturing and educating the greater number of boys, normal ones or boys at risk, in order to lower the threat of moral and social ‘correction’ as it was understood and practised at the time: recovery, therapy for those who deviated from the norm of appropriate institutions set up along the lines he had seen at the *Generala* or, for its psychological approach, at the little Hospital of St Philomena.

We can see from his letters, especially beginning with the 1860s, that Don Bosco continued to accept at Valdocco, generally among the trade and working boys, young people sent along by public bodies either as a normal process or, in cases of natural disasters like epidemics, earthquakes etc. For the student section instead, he generally adopted more rigid criteria both in terms of acceptance and for the time they spent at the Oratory. He himself offered the justification for this, signalling a change in admission conditions for the house. It was also opened to ‘boys who are not abandoned nor completely poor,’ who wanted ‘to pursue regular scientific [academic] courses,’ and who showed a well-founded hope of being ‘an honourable and successful Christian in an academic career.’<sup>5</sup> This announced an important shift underway in his educational choices. He added another work to the primary one which would have a long history, and is still flourishing and productive in many parts of the world: the college or boarding school, centres and schools for young students or apprentices seeking a better cultural and professional/vocational formation.

Then came the years when the pied piper figure or leader of young rascals became irrevocably the Director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, as he then signed himself until his death. From the hubbub of noisy little rascals at the Oratory as they enjoyed themselves in light-hearted fun and where he himself was a ‘rascal’,<sup>6</sup> the scene shifted to the more contained cheerfulness of the young college boys. The ‘*birichino*’ also had a brief lexical history which came to an end in 1854. The term appeared for the first time in 1849 in a letter to Fr Borel: the sender signed off as ‘*Aff.mo amico Bosco Gio. capo de’ biric.*’<sup>7</sup> (Your affectionate friend John Bosco, leader of the rascals). He reappeared as the ‘*cap dei birichini*’ in letters to individuals of particular confidence from 1850 to 1854: Fr Gilardi<sup>8</sup> the Rector of the Diocesan Seminary, Canon Vogliotti,<sup>9</sup> Fr Abbondioli, the parish

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4 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 61

5 [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 76-77

6 Cf. letters to Fr Gilardi and Fr Fradelizio from the Institute of Charity, 15 and 18 January, 29 August 1853 Em I 120, 121, 204; to Canon De Gaudenzi, 7 April 1853 and 14 November 1854, Em I 194, 236.

7 Letter of 20 September 1849, Em I 88

8 Letter of 13 July 1850 and 9 May 1854, Em I 105 and 227.

9 Letter of 3 December 1850, Em I 117.

priest of Sassi,<sup>10</sup> Bishop Moreno, Bishop of Ivrea,<sup>11</sup> Canon De Gandenzi.<sup>12</sup> The game continued in a few exceptional cases.

## 2. A home for young people: aims, methods, life

In the *Introduction* to the *Draft Regulations*, Don Bosco dared venture into a kind of oratorian ecclesiology. Young people, he reckoned were open to educational guidance; the difficulty lay 'in finding a way of bringing them together, being able to talk to them, teach them morals.' As he put it, 'this was the mission of the Son of God.' The Church continued it and over the centuries was able 'to move with the times and adapt to the different characters of human beings.' In modern times it worked through the oratories or 'certain gatherings where the youth are amused with pleasant and honest recreation after having attended the ceremonies in Church.'<sup>13</sup>

A free man, once again he invited people to a renewal of the way the Church cared for young people, and where the oratory was concerned he innovated with respect to the tradition. He was thinking of young people who found themselves in a world of mobility and uprootedness, and who were for various reasons disaffected, no longer enamoured of the Church and alienated from its structures, practices, concerns. Static, rigid, parish-focused pastoral activity did not work for them, so he thought of mobile, flexible initiations and structures that the boys felt they belonged to, a house that was all their own. The term 'oratory' could be extended in this sense to all the places or institutions which were able to respond to the varied circumstances of young people with the broadest range of approaches: objectives, procedures, methods and means, but above all, trustworthy adults – 'fathers, brothers, friends – in an atmosphere permeated by 'reason, religion, loving-kindness.'<sup>14</sup>

The image of the oratory as a house or place of encounter for young people and where they could realise their vocation to genuine happiness, can be found many times and under different guises in the writings of the early Don Bosco. Amongst Giuseppina's friends (she was the main character in the *Conversion of a Waldensian Woman*), happiness came from a model and religious conscience at peace with God and also translates into a very human, spontaneous and pure form of cheerfulness. It was there too, in the inseparable pairing of practical religiosity and pleasant recreation in the *Regulations* for the day attendees at the Oratory. This combination could only attract the young Waldensian woman who saw her Catholic friends experiencing all this and found approval from their good parish priest, 'a holy man' who was an experienced and prudent counsellor. The priest, who is on Don Bosco's wavelength, agrees like him with the girls when they approach him, happily shouting 'today is a feast day and we don't work. We have already been to Catechism, benediction and now that night is drawing on, let's have a little fun.' He tells them: 'I like it when you are having fun ... there is a time for everything: a time to pray, a time to jump around. Just see that your fun is honest fun and that no one introduces bad talk,' 'Go off and have fun then, and don't forget that the Lord is with you everywhere,' He also offered a very simple religious interpretation for Giuseppina's sadness; 'Only Catholics can have true peace of heart because only in the Catholic Religion are there true means for gaining the Lord's grace and blessing on human beings. There is the necessary help for not falling into sin and the appropriate remedies for remitting sins when we unfortunately happen to commit them.'<sup>15</sup>

Along with compatible human moments of joy, religion was also the source of harmony and

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10 Letter of February 1851, and 4 April 1854, Em I 122 and 225.

11 Letter of 10 June 1852, Em I 161.

12 Letter of 22 June 1853, and 14 November 1854, Em I 200 and 236.

13 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 35-36.

14 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 35-36

15 G. BOSCO, *Conversione di una valdese...*, pp. 15-17, OE V 272-275.

happiness for Peter, the main character in *The power of a good upbringing* (1855), following the father's return to full participation in the domestic scene after earlier spending most of his time at the pub. 'Despite their poverty,' the director of the Oratory testifies, 'joy came into the family because they were all practising their religion, the only source of true happiness ... They all attended the ceremonies in church and after the sermon and benediction, the father and his children went for a walk, and in the winter they spent their evenings hours with the family and sometimes the father came here with his beloved Peter to spend the evening in pleasant and honest recreation, attending performances, comedies or similar that used take place in our Oratory on weekends in winter.'<sup>16</sup> 'Know that here we make holiness consist in being very cheerful' Dominic Savio told his friend Cammilo Gacio.<sup>17</sup>

For Don Bosco, the Catholic Religion was a true and living proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel, the gift of a concrete experience of all-embracing salvation.

The newly arrived Michael Magone experienced the Valdocco Oratory as a home of fruitful and well-founded cheerfulness.<sup>18</sup> But it soon became cheerfulness veiled in sadness for him because he did not have 'peace of heart' nor 'a tranquil conscience'<sup>19</sup> This blockage he had was dissolved thanks to a liberating confession followed by a notable change in his behaviour and a tangible increase in his enjoyment at recreation. 'In just a few minutes, every side of wide courtyard in the house felt Magone's pounding feet' his biographer smugly records. 'There was no game he was not the winner of. But as soon as the bell went for study, class, rest, dining room, church, he stopped everything and ran off to do his duties. It was wonderful to see someone who was the soul of recreation and kept everything moving, as if he was being driven by a machine, turning up first whenever duty called.'<sup>20</sup>

For young Francis Besucco, the entire educational project was clearly spelt out and reduced to 'just three things,' 'cheerfulness, study, piety. This is the grand plan which, if you practise it, can make you live happily and do your soul much good.'<sup>21</sup> This was vividly represented especially in the chapter on *Cheerfulness*: 'By tempering recreation with moral or knowledgeable sayings, our Besucco soon became a model of study and piety.'<sup>22</sup>

Four years later, in perfect oratorian style, the fifteen-year-old main character of *Severino, or the adventures of a young alpine lad* and the impact their home for young people had on him, was presented as a story of the early Oratory times. The author, Don Bosco, intentionally described what it was that immediately impressed the new arrival: 'In this Oratory each one satisfies his religious duties, then goes out to enjoy himself in pleasant recreation ... There is jumping, running, games of bocce, darts, tiles, stilts, singing, playing piano, laughing joking and a thousand other amusements.'

Years later, the main character told his attentive listeners: "When I arrived on Sunday at the place I had longed for so much I was amazed. I did not want to ask anyone because I was ecstatic, marvelling like someone who finds himself in a new world full of curious things, he wanted but not known until now."<sup>23</sup> In Severino's case, too, confession shrewdly suggested by the director, fulfilled

16 G. BOSCO, *La forza della buona educazione...*, pp. 46-47, OE VI 320-321.

17 G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 86, OE XI 236.

18 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 15-16, OE XIII 169-170.

19 G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 16, OE XIII 170.

20 G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 16-24, 29, 32, 33, OE XIII 170-178, 183, 186, 187.

21 G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero Vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentiera...* Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1864, pp. 90-91, OE XV 332-333.

22 G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 93, OE XV 335; he demonstrates this in the chapters that follow: *Studio e diligenza, La confessione, La santa Comunione, Venerazione al SS. Sacramento, Spirito di preghiera*, pp. 94-119, OE XV 336-361

23 G. BOSCO, *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpiano raccontate da lui medesimo ed*

the long-desired happiness.<sup>24</sup>

News reports on celebrations published by *L'Armonia* brought to life the originality of a place where young people who lacked so much could experience such a varied and congenial experiences both human and divine, serious and playful, individually and in groups in an intensely family-like and friendly setting. This atmosphere of affection lifted them out of the feeling of being lost and lonely in a huge city.

The celebrations in question were held in the context of St Aloysius' feast day on 29 June 1851. Many boys went to the sacraments and Confirmation was administered. 'Nothing was lacking in a solemnity celebrated by solidly Christian youth' the newspaper reported. 'Music of youthful voices, instruments, dialogue performances and the like with well-prepared but simple stage props, an aerostatic globe, some fireworks with fire rockets brought a delightful day to a close. Cheerfulness, joy, serenity were etched on the faces of the crowd of boys who regretfully had to leave their happy time together. This was the celebration of a family of more than 1,500 boys hanging from the lips of their beloved father among fervent and joyful hurrahs.'<sup>25</sup>

It is unlikely that Don Bosco wrote the article; it was not his style, but it captured precisely the way he thought and what he was doing.

### 3. An appropriately differentiated pedagogy of the possible

A place for and of young people, the oratory nevertheless provided for the strong, directive and promotional presence of adults, clergy and laity. Since this was not an age for self-government, self-management. So, Don Bosco was concerned with giving the adult workers rules, as was the tradition of the day, so 'unity of spirit and conformity of discipline' could be ensured among them and thanks to them. Seen this way, the *Regulations* he proposed could seem too rigid to allow for a free and differentiated explosion of initiative and youthful energy and even the creativity of their educators. The *Regulations* were indeed a reflection, sign of an era, mentality, a culture.

Just as it was in the actual experiences themselves, so can we glimpse in one of Don Bosco's writing some intuition into the needs for differentiation in the way boys should be seen, and the consequent diversified and to some extent individualised interventions. At the end of an unrepeatable period in his life and almost as if to fix in his memory an experience to which there was no return, Don Bosco attempted to sum up the first twenty years of his youth work in the 1862 *Cenni storici* or Historical outlines. The *Cenni* could seem surprising for a man who had followed up events by encapsulating them in a strong set of regulations. But the fact that he had ended up with institutions now stabilised in their varying forms – the festive (weekend) and daily oratories on the one hand, and the hospice-cum-boarding school on the other – did not mean he had forgotten the different groups or classes of boys coming to them year after year. He had started with the most precarious groups – migrant boys, especially seasonal ones, and former correctional inmates – and had evolved over time, interpreting his customary 'poor and abandoned,' 'at risk and of risk' in ever broader and more flexible ways. Therefore, almost as if to correct the impression of rigidity which his regulations and already established institutions could lead to, he put forward the possibility of more variegated and flexible educational and supportive interventions.

Don Bosco identified three categories of Oratory residents in the *Cenni storici*: Disruptive, distracted and good. The *good*: these posed no special problems in his view; normal rules were

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*esposte dal sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*, Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, pp. 36-39, OE XX 36-39.

24 G. BOSCO, *Severino...*, pp. 42-45, OE XX 42-45; cf. B. DECANQ, "Severino". *Studio dell'opuscolo con particolare attenzione al "primo oratorio"*, RSS 11 (1992) 221-318.

25 "L'Armonia", 4 July 1851, OE XXXVIII 17.

sufficient for their correct handling, along with the usual educative measures. But these were not enough for the disruptive, unruly ones in the sense he understood these words in the language of the time. The *disruptive* types were not simply ‘rascals’ or ‘urchins’ who were slightly more than problematic. They were young people without respect for social and ethical norms, rebelling against any form of discipline, good-for-nothings without scruple. A softer version of real delinquents they were, nevertheless, excessively lively boys, undisciplined, impatient with order and rules, rather rebellious, impudent. The *distractive*, dissipated boys too, as thus described, while being less than disruptive, were more than mere rascals or urchins. So, with regard to these two categories, he foresaw notable differences in achievable objectives, expectations, interventions. The *distracted* ones ‘that is, those who habitually wandered about, doing little work’ could be led to ‘success with skill, assistance, instruction and by keeping them busy.’ Of course this would not produce the perfect Christian but probably the good citizen, honest worker, a morally and civilly responsible adult and, perhaps a passable Sunday mass-goer or at least on major feast days. But the *disruptive* ones meant ‘a lot of work ahead.’ It was inevitable that a rather minimalist goal be proposed ‘to win them over,’ as far as possible ‘to get them to have a little bit of taste for work.’ Other short or longer term results were not over-looked: ‘1. That they don’t become worse; 2. Many can be led to make sensible choices and so earn their bread honestly; 3. Those who seem to be refractory while at school ‘in due course find room for the principles they have acquired and which later produce results.’ There was a place for a pedagogy of hope also reinforced by the tangible results achieved; many could be placed ‘with good employees from whom they could learn a trade.’ Many others who had run away from home would return ‘more docile and obedient.’ ‘Not a few would become domestics ‘with upright families.’<sup>26</sup>

Don Bosco was no maximalist. He did not toss religious terms around carelessly, such as radicalness, perfection, sanctity. As a realistic apostle of young people at risk and of risk, he knew how to adjust ends and educational pathways to the readiness of individuals to improve. It was already a good result if a disruptive boy did not end up in prison or, if released, did not return there. Similarly, it was a good result if an urchin did not become disruptive and a disruptive boy did not become a delinquent. It was more than an appreciable result if love of life, a spontaneous ability to fit into society, a taste for providing for self and family could be instilled in all of them. In the average number of cases, though, more courageous goals could be attempted toward a more refined morality and an essential religious sense, with an ongoing commitment to live in the state of grace which was diligently preserved or quickly regained. They could even think of courageous ascent up the mount of beatitudes to higher altitudes, including to the peak itself.

Similar considerations could apply proportionately to the classification of young people introduced in the *General Articles* of the *Regulations for the houses* in 1877. These spoke of ‘different characters: good, ordinary, difficult, or bad.’ We should bear in mind, however, that the language here concerned young people in the colleges or academic students and hospices, or trade students already selected to a degree. Differentiation in managing these ones came down to degrees of vigilance involved in educational assistance.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4. A new priest for the young in the Church and society**

Don Bosco did not write a personal ‘story of a soul’ or ‘journey of the soul.’ There is a fragment of such in the already mentioned *Introduction* to the 1865 *Draft Regulations*. But when he was writing in these of his irrevocable dedication to the young, he was also writing a portrait of the new priest for them as a father, brother and friend.<sup>28</sup> Theory became lived experience and the model he

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26 [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 78-79.

27 Cf. Chap 25, § 4.

28 [G.BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 38: cf. Chap. 8, §

presented as an exemplar was his encounter with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of St Francis de Sales church.

This encounter represents a beginning not so much in time but as a way for the priest to encounter young people as he plays the adult role of succouring, benefiting, saving the young man concerned. He sets himself clearly apart from the adult 'sacristy cleric' who is distrustful of and contemptuous of a poor, shabby youngster who does not know how to serve mass and dares put foot inside a place reserved for others familiar with the sacred. With a few essential words the young priest distances himself from the domineering sacristan who had cut the boy off with the classic 'and what does it matter to you?' cancelling that out by referring to him as a 'young man.' 'It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak to him.' Once the young fugitive is back the dialogue becomes a fully empathetic involvement inspired by loving-kindness.

'My good friend. What's your name?' 'Where are you from?' 'Is your father alive?' 'And your mother?' The boy is really a symbol. He is an orphan, sixteen years old, does not know how to read or write, has not yet made his first holy communion and is ashamed to go to catechism class. The contact has been established and not fleetingly so: 'You'll be my friend' the priest says. In reality the boy believes he has found a father, immediately begins his A B C of the catechism and though his 'memory was poor' he succeeds in learning enough to make a good confession and, soon after, his holy communion. This individual's story appears to end, but in reality it is prolonged through other boys who arrive and create the Oratory with Don Bosco.<sup>29</sup> One boy's adventure becomes the story of a priest for and with the young, the story of Don Bosco and those who shared his ideals, ends, methods then and others who would do so in the future.<sup>30</sup>

Very soon his personal experience, he himself, became an admired model for many others to follow, right from the outset. More than proposing a theoretical outline of the new educator of the young, he implicitly proposed himself, as those who had seen his *modus operandi* up close had perceived him, beginning with clergy who willingly lent a hand with his oratory initiatives. And not just a handful. Despite some objections and mistrust from parish priests who believed they were being robbed of the right to personally nurture some members of their flock, Don Bosco was able to freely begin and develop his youth work by involving more than a few prestigious members of the clergy in Turin. It had been easy to convince people that the boys coming to the Oratory were not taken away from anyone, because none of them felt they belonged anywhere except to the priests and oratories they had come exclusively into contact with in a city that felt foreign to them and was unknown to and distrustful of them.<sup>31</sup>

Besides, it did not take long for many of them to recognise that Don Bosco was born to fascinate young people and was an exceptional educator in their regard. In future, the bishops and other clergy (Riccardi di Netro, Gastaldi, Renaldi, Tortone) who agreed with his manner of forming clergy, openly declared their appreciation of his genius as an educator of young people.<sup>32</sup>

For the most part, he had been able to count on the unconditional approval of his energetic but rigid Archbishop Fransoni, who could never have given him a free hand had he not known him as the priest who led the oratories, was bound to his diocese, the Church and the Pope, faithful to every element of Catholic teaching, traditional Christian piety, and immune from suspicion of liberalism.

We have already met Canon Ottavio Moreno, who as clergyman, State official and mediator for

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29 MO (2010) 102-105.

30 Cf. *Appendix*.

31 [G. Bosco], *Cenno storico...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 45.

32 Cf. Chap 15, § 7; 17, §1.

financial support from the King, pleaded Don Bosco's cause as an educator and social worker with the central authorities.<sup>33</sup> In the presentations he made, he ended up drawing a picture of a new priest of social charity, using Don Bosco as his model. He wrote: 'For some years he has been busy instructing and bringing together boys who are abandoned or disruptive and wander here and there through the districts and streets of the capital, making the display of themselves we all are aware of and are horrified by, with sad consequences corroborated by what I see and experience from boys of this kind when they are unfortunately arrested and taken to prisons.' 'He does everything he can,' although lacking in 'sufficient means for the necessary expenditure,' therefore 'he trusts in Christian charity and in the Government's charity too' since Government was no less interested in the problem.<sup>34</sup>

The special nature of the new educator and his activity was also remarked on by the Catholic Press. The most authoritative of them was *L'Armonia* which had been following Don Bosco from the early few months and where appreciation and admiration for him had not diminished. Indeed it had grown through the 1850s. The head of the oratories was a 'zealous priest' who was 'renewing the example of Vincent de Paul and Jerome Emiliani' in Turin. It went on to say: 'He is striving to lift all those youngsters out of the dangers of the streets. Left to their own devices they spend Sundays uselessly if not badly. He brings them together in a sheltered place to instruct them in religious truths and in what is needed for social life, and amuses them with honest pastimes on those days.'<sup>35</sup> In 1851, *L'Armonia* wrote of how it was 'the zeal and charity Fr John Bosco was dedicating to the instruction and education of young people from the lower classes of the people was well known to everyone. These young people were, in general, left to their own devices as far as education is concerned.' 'How many crimes the charity of this devout priest must be preventing.'<sup>36</sup>

Praise was then heaped on the work of conversion of adult and youthful Protestants to Catholicism and the activity of writing popular books. These were the efforts of 'that excellent priest Don Bosco who was working so actively through his works and writings for the benefit of the popular class,' and 'often reaping the results of his zeal in the heretical field too.'<sup>37</sup> The paper referred to an occasion when the sacrament of Confirmation was conferred on a large group of boys at the oratories: 'it was a consolation, then, to see that holy man Don Bosco, his face suffused with gospel simplicity, constantly busy, keeping such a large group in order and despite it all, maintaining his calm and kindness in the midst of all this effort. Then his worthy companion, Fr Alasonatti, also very zealous and with him some members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, were also intent on seeing to the success of the solemn ceremony. And then various De La Salle Brothers were watching over the boys they had brought along. These were all things that reassured one that the Catholic Faith was being maintained in Piedmont despite all the protestant assaults.'<sup>38</sup>

So to sum up, there were no lack of tributes heaped upon Don Bosco, the new kind of priest, 'tireless and very zealous,'<sup>39</sup> 'an excellent director,' 'excellent priest,' 'so meritorious for what he does for Christian youth.'<sup>40</sup>

An unwitting self-portrait of the new priest of charity also emerged from the splendid death

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33 Cf. A. GIRAUDO, "*Sacra Real Maestà*"..., pp. 267-314; cf. Chap. 8, § 4 and 5

34 A. GIRAUDO, "*Sacra Real Maestà*"..., pp. 302-303; cf. again, pp. 308-310.

35 "*L'Armonia*", 26 July 1850, OE XXXVIII 15.

36 "*L'Armonia*", 10 August 1854, OE XXXVIII 26-27.

37 "*L'Armonia*", 27 August 1855, OE XXVIII 29.

38 "*L'Armonia*", 1 June 1856, OE XXVIII 34.

39 "*L'Armonia*", 21 September 1858, OE XXXVIII 48.

40 "*L'Armonia*", 8 October 1858 and 26 February 1859, OE XXXVIII 49, 51.



notice written about Fr Paolo Francesco Rossi after his premature death.<sup>41</sup> 'He was a true model of virtue and Christian charity,' 'as benefactor and true father.' From childhood he had displayed all the traits of the future priest of the oratory, 'sensitive to others' pains and afflictions, he presents a placid and calm face, love and kindness.' He was warm, respectful, obliging and cheerful with everyone.' He was admired for 'his character solid piety and a real passion for study.' As the director of the St Aloysius oratory 'his zeal had no limits. Sermons, catechism lessons, instruction, confession, advice, correction, all were done for the boys of the oratory. At one moment he was seen running around looking for an employer to place an unemployed boy; at another he was encouraging an employer to be patient, or a young worker to be diligent; at yet another he was bringing hidden supplies of bread, flour, clothing, shoes, items of every kind; everything he did was to bring comfort and improve the lot of his neighbour, and lessen the sad consequences which immature youth often allow themselves to be dragged into. In short, he was all things to all people to win everyone to Christ,'<sup>42</sup> which also meant winning them over to ourselves, rediscovering themselves, realising their full humanity.

Don Bosco was a living portrait of the priest-educator and philanthropist dedicated to abandoned, at-risk youth through preventive action which was personal, supportive, social, in order to preserve them from the risk of delinquency and, hopefully, to recover from this if they had fallen into it. His typically ecclesiastical and moral culture, lacking in sociological, legal and pedagogical understanding, did not permit him to identify with the many secular scholars, philanthropists and secular educators involved in the 18th and 19th centuries in research into and study of the causes and remedies for abandonment and the dangers youth were subjected to in times of social and political revolution. Nevertheless, he was close to them for his strong moral and even more so his religious tenor. He equalled if not surpassed them for the sharpness of his perception, sharing of needs, and his unlimited and tenacious practical involvement.

Elsewhere, for example, we have noted Cesare Beccaria (1738–94), Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto (1790–1850), Joseph-Marie Degérando (1772–1842).<sup>43</sup> Generally, Don Bosco stopped at just noting and describing certain problematic aspects of the youth situation. But to balance that, he saw more profoundly, from a Catholic perspective, what the religious and moral causes were. Above all, he prepared and proposed a much broader range of approaches, institutions and methods, to help resolve these issues. There is ample documentation in evidence of this, especially confirmed by a variety of situations and settings before an even broader audience in the last active period of his life.<sup>44</sup>

## 5. Sketches of priests for new times

In the 1850s, Don Bosco also made an effort to tell the story of priests, real or idealised, who were close everyone, young and old, and who were a living representation of the Salesian and Vincentian ideal of the 'affective and effective love' that had already been traced out in the second half of the 1840s.<sup>45</sup>

Two versions have been found in a booklet he possibly wrote or perhaps simply reworked, or even merely presented and published, entitled *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo* (Contemporary facts presented in dialogue form).<sup>46</sup> He recommended it *to the reader*, addressing himself in particular to educators by nature and calling, or in other words 'fathers and mothers of

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41 Cf. Chap. 10, § 4.

42 "L'Armonia", 20 November 1856, OE XXXVIII 36-37.

43 Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, pp. 30-41.

44 Cf. Chap. 22, § 6 ff.; 30, § 3.

45 Cf. Chap. 7, § 4.

46 Turin, P. De-Agostini 1853, 48 pp., OE V 51-98.

families.<sup>47</sup> In the face of anti-Catholic spite and the tortuous sermons of the Protestants, what shone out here was the persuasive word of the Catholic priest. 'Here' he tells his friend Felix who had been freed from 'Protestant snares,' 'everything changed: the easy friendly, tranquil and clear way all my doubts were resolved, soon let me know there was something in Catholicism that one does not find in Protestantism.'<sup>48</sup> In the dialogue that followed, an unnamed sick individual who is refused confession by the Protestant minister, attacking it as a 'fable' invented by priests', proposes to send his mother to call his former confessor: 'He always liked me' he explains 'and gave me excellent advice; he is a prudent person and will know how to fix up my soul's troubles.'<sup>49</sup>

More marked still is the figure of the priest who tries to rescue Luigi, a young man from a believing family, who was exemplary until he was 18, then according to his 'crucified mother' 'became so badly behaved,' 'insolent, disobedient, rebellious, stole from home and began reading an almanac that contained the quintessence of whatever could be said against our holy religion.' The priest consoled her, inviting her to send her son to him under whatever pretext 'I do not believe your son has become an evil-doer in such a short time ... If I speak to him, I hope I can return him better thoughts, because he used to like me a lot, and having always taken pleasure in listening to me he won't want not to obey me this time.'<sup>50</sup>

The encounter then gives way to a game of question and answer called *The kindly welcome*. Whoever the author may be in fact be, it is easy enough to glimpse here the kind of priest Don Bosco dreams of. The priest is interested in the young man's 'health' and asks 'an important little service of him,' 'an affair in complete confidence,' asking him why he has not come to see him for the last six months. Faced with some elusive replies he reminds him of the essential issue: 'Luigi ... I have been the master of your heart and soul for ten years and now you want to reject something your eternal salvation depends on? ... Where have you gone to?'

Since the boy sees that the priest is treating him 'with the same kindness as he did before' Luigi confesses that he 'joined a workers society' which was decidedly anticlerical, and had abandoned his religious practice, also began stealing from home, then squandered his stolen goods 'by gambling.' From this frank discussion comes a promise to be faithful in the future: 'I would have come to speak to you on several occasions, but I was afraid I would be scolded. But now I can see you still like me, therefore I promise I will never let matters go again.' And finally, he says, 'Father was the master of my heart and soul for ten years, Now I am making him master of my heart and soul again, but for the rest of my life, and I hope I can breathe my last in his arms.'<sup>51</sup>

The priest whom the main character in *La forza della buona educazione* (The power of a good upbringing) has to deal with is also a man of charity, preparing him for his First Holy Communion. Peter, who 'could have run the risk of being dressed only in a simple almost shabby suit' was instead 'dressed in clothes the priest had charitably found him.'<sup>52</sup>

The portrait of the priest in his twin capacity (man of God and man of charity of the most concrete and human kind) which is always to be found in Don Bosco, is described at length in the two addresses he gave after the death of his teacher and spiritual director, Fr Joseph Cafasso. Both essential aspects are intentionally and distinctly recalled in the central part of the first address: *A public and private priestly life*, a title which was already most eloquent. His *private priestly* life provides a traditional image of the holy priest: mortification, penance, abstinence, prayer, fasting? He was 'always ready to welcome, console, advise, hear confession, 'always

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47 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, p. 3, OE V 53.

48 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, p. 19, OE V 69.

49 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, pp. 24-25, 28, OE V 74-75, 78.

50 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, pp. 34-37, OE V 84-87.

51 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei...*, pp. 38-45, OE V 88-95.

52 G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione...*, pp. 24-25, 31, OE VI 298-299, 305.

looking calm, kind in word, never letting slip any word or action which might show any sign of impatience,' 'always friendly, kind. He never allowed anyone to leave without being spiritually and materially comforted.' 'He was no mere humanist but did everything out of charity.'<sup>53</sup>

Don Bosco gave precedence, in his description of the *public priestly life*, to his 'public virtues. Evidence of these was above all his pastoral charity, that is, all the ways he preached to the people' (and clergy) in 'public and private conferences.' His many works of charity were associated with these, especially, 'the concern he has for poor youngsters. Among other things Don Bosco recalls 'the first catechist of this oratory of ours was Fr Cafasso and he was its constant promoter and benefactor in life and still now will be after his death.' Then follows a list of others he benefited: prisoners, priest, and lay people, rich and poor.' In his debt are people with knowledge, those with the means to acquire it, people who have employment, are happy at home, people with a trade and are indebted to him for the bread they eat.<sup>54</sup> And then the doubtful, the afflicted, the dying, those condemned to death.' In short, Cafasso had been 'a great benefactor of humanity.'<sup>55</sup>

He expressed these outstanding traits of humanity especially through loving-kindness. So, Don Bosco shows him to be a priest and confessor in the way he welcomed 'all kinds of penitents but especially youngsters.' He helped them 'to present matters of conscience ... correcting them with kindness.' He would lead them to test the validity of earlier confessions, reflecting on their state of conscience 'especially seven to ten or twelve years ago.' 'He showed great prudence and reserve' in the necessary questioning' of matters regarding the holy virtue of modesty.'<sup>56</sup>

Then there is the director and educator who takes in Valentine, the main character in the story which bears his name. The opening of this story, almost a novel, is a fascinating one. Valentino is resigned to entering a Catholic boarding school which will guarantee he can tackle his studies seriously. The boy is like a little Lord Fauntleroy from the distant 19th century: 'New clothes, elegantly fashioned, a feather in his cap, cane in hand, a shiny chain at his breast, hair neatly parted.'<sup>57</sup> We see the new kind of priest, Don Bosco, in the guise of the director; 'At the sight of a boy in such a pose, the director considered it was not the right moment for talking to him about religion, but spoke only of outings, races, gymnastics, stage, singing, playing instruments. These were things that made the vain young man's blood boil just hearing them.'<sup>58</sup>

It was taken for granted that the boy would be won over. The director soon became the boy's confessor and spiritual father, to the point where his vocation to the clerical state began to blossom but which his father did everything to hinder, even entrusting his son to a man who could corrupt him.<sup>59</sup> The result is prison, but the letter the inmate writes to his spiritual father is, once again, a celebration of the priest who is a good pastor. When the young man has served his sentence he will entrust himself to the priest's 'fatherly advice' to guide him for the rest of his life.<sup>60</sup>

This was not the image of the priest Don Bosco found in the *Promessi Sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni. Other than saying this at public gatherings and in private, he wrote of it in his description of the great writer following his death on 22 May 1873 and which he included in the next edition of the *Storia d'Italia*. He dedicated considerable space to the famous Lombard's journey from no

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53 G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...*, pp. 25-27, OE XII 375-377; two chapters follow, representing the image of the holy priest: *Vita mortificata di don Caffasso e Sua santa morte...*, pp. 29-34, 34-45, OE XX 379-384, 384-395.

54 G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...*, pp. 18-24, OE XII 368-374.

55 G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...*, pp. 44-45, OE XII 394-395.

56 G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 27-28, OE XIII 181-182.

57 G. BOSCO, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita. Episodio contemporaneo*, Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di s. Franc. di Sales 1866, p. 20, OE XVII 198.

58 G. BOSCO, *Valentino...*, p. 20, OE XVII 198.

59 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Valentino...*, pp. 35-43, OE XVII 213-221.

60 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Valentino...*, pp. 45-51, OE XVII 223-229.

religion to militant faith, particularly as displayed in the small works on *Morale Cattolica* and *Inni sacri*. He recognised that *Promessi Sposi* assured the author 'a great name in posterity' but the 'esteem' he held in the book did not prevent him from 'being strongly opposed' to the portrait of Fr Abbondio and Geltrude. 'Manzoni, who wanted to give Italy a book which was truly moral and inspired by Catholic sentiment,' he said 'could certainly have offered us better characters.' 'So after having learned from his early years and with his parents, to respect his parish priest, a young man would necessarily receive a bad impression in mind and heart from reading this.'<sup>61</sup>

## 6. Priestly formator for dioceses and oratories

On a few but significant occasions Archbishop Fransoni was able to offer positive testimony from his exile in Lyons on Don Bosco as a zealous priest and also a trustworthy one for forming his future pastors of souls. In fact, in his estimation the apostle of Youth in Turin was no intellectual with old royalist ideas or the more innovative recent ones. He was guided in his activity by principles solidly anchored in the Church's sure tradition. It was love for the Church which urged and guided him in his work with boys, also with an eye to likely vocations for the Church. The formation he gave was inspired by a healthy combination of a life of piety and charitable commitment, and importantly it included ascetic as well as cultural, general and specific formation.

Signs of trust from the rather rigid prelate were not lacking. He even made some exceptional concessions for the young men being accompanied by Don Bosco on their journey to priesthood. In fact, from 1849, Don Bosco had sought to set some of his boys on the path to such studies: Giacomo Bellia, Felice Reviglio, Giuseppe Buzzetti, Carlo Gastini. After a two year *Latinitas* (Grammar) course, they donned the clerical habit on 2 February 1851. But different destinies lay ahead for them. The first two became priests in the archdiocese, the third ended up with a physical disability which precluded him from the priesthood and he stayed at the Oratory as a 'coadjutor,' first in the work and spirit and then in 1877, by formal religious profession as a Salesian. Gastino took up bookbinding and left the Oratory in May 1856 but only for somewhere to live. He remained attached to the place for the rest of his life, was a popular poet, actor, band leader, and promoter of the early past pupils organisation.<sup>62</sup>

Don Bosco was obviously not someone to give up, and he rebuilt his original core group with new members, who together with Rua and Cagliari soon became very faithful contributors to everything he was undertaking: Angelo Savio, Giovanni Battista Francesia, Giovanni Bonetti, Francesco Cerruti, Carlo Ghivarello put on the soutane on 2 November, 1851, John Baptist Francesia on 22 June 1852, Michael Rua, who took up permanent residence at the Oratory on 24 September 1852, received his soutane in the Rosary chapel at the Becchi, along with Joseph Rocchietti, on 3 October. But already on 5 June, Don Bosco had brought 13 boys together, including those already mentioned, except for Rocchietti. They promised individually to say 'the seven joys of Our Lady' every Sunday of the year. More cogent was the promise of 'a trial practical exercise of charity to their neighbour' possibly to be sealed by vow, which was done with Don Bosco by the four most trustworthy of the boys, Artiglia, Cagliari, Rocchietti, Rua on 26 January 1854.<sup>63</sup>

Dominic Savio arrived at the Oratory in October and clearly had a clerical vocation as did his

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61 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù...* Turin, tip. e libr. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1877, pp. 484-487, OE XXXVII 484-487.

62 The Oratory was clearly constantly in the thoughts and words of his family too, if the first oratory member of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Turin and the first president of the Sisters' Past Pupils Association' was indeed his own daughter Felicity (cf. G. LOPARCO, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice nella società italiana (1900-1922). Percorsi e problemi di ricerca*, Rome, LAS 2002, p. 664).

63 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 262-263.

friend Massaglia, and later also Michael Magone, who was accepted at the Oratory in 1857.

On 23 March 1855, cleric Rua privately professed his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience before Don Bosco. From 14–23 July 1856, some clerics were accompanied by Don Bosco at a retreat at St Ignatius, Lanzo: these were Rua, Rocchietti, Giuseppe Bongiovanni, Pettiva, Momo. In September and November 1857, John Bonetti and Celestine Durando put on the soutane. These two, with Frs Rua and Cagliero, would be among the first Superiors of the Salesian Society which took shape on 18 December 1859.

In 1857, the archbishop entrusted a Professor Ramello to Don Bosco's care to help him get over his liberal thinking, in the Archbishop's view of things.<sup>64</sup> Don Bosco took him in and gave him a job teaching Italian and Latin literature to a beginner's class.<sup>65</sup> While maintaining a certain rigidity in granting some favours following two successive requests by Don Bosco, the Archbishop sent a letter to the Pro-vicar of the Archdiocese granting cleric Francesia a dispensation 'from attending classes at the seminary for the remaining months' of the school year.<sup>66</sup> Some months later he wrote to his Vicar saying he was sorry he could not accede to requests for similar dispensations for other clerics but added, with reference to Don Bosco: 'I am sorry to disappoint him because he does so much good, but I don't want to do something wrong myself just to give him what he wants.'<sup>67</sup>

It was not the last word ... In a following letter, after consulting with 'a cleric I respect very much' he accepted the verdict in favour of the clerics, seeking a compromise with his conscience: 'Comparing the disadvantage to the clerics' studies to the truly greater advantage for this most excellent establishment, he believes it would be good to grant D. Bosco the favour he has requested,' The Archbishop agreed with him but entrusted the Vicar General, Canon Fissore, with the task of telling Don Bosco: 'I would like you to call on Don Bosco and tell him that he will receive a letter from me in which I say I am ignoring the fact that the clerics concerned are not attending classes, without actually granting them positive permission.' In fact he was granting it!<sup>68</sup>

It was over this period that what would eventually become the Society of St Francis de Sales was in silent gestation. This was the beginning, though just the dawning, of the history of Don Bosco the founder.

## 7. Militant Laity at a time of Religious Controversy

At the *Information process* for Don Bosco's beatification and canonisation, Fr Giovanni Turchi, a pupil at the Oratory in 1860, the year after the house search (26 May) explained the police intervention as being for three motives, the third of which is not fully in accord with historical truth: 'His great and enlightened attachment to the Holy See,' the fact that in Turin he had been seen as the one defending 'the Roman See's interests.' And finally, that *he had become the leader of the Catholic lay movement in Turin.*<sup>69</sup>

To be truthful, it is probable that more than any other priest in Turin, Don Bosco had by then contacted and mobilised many Catholic lay forces on behalf of his charitable initiatives. But we should not forget that others in Turin were also working in similar activities with considerable involvement of clergy and laity: it is sufficient to recall Frs Giovanni Cocchi, Roberto Murialdo, Borsarelli, Berizzi, Leonard Murialdo's predecessor running the Artigianelli College, and Leonard

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64 To Canon C. Fissore, 7 June 1857, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., p. 177.

65 Cf. Chap. 7, § 2.3.

66 To Canon C. Fissore, 11 February 1858, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., pp. 200-201

67 To Canon C. Fissore, 27 October 1858, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., p. 237.

68 To the Vicar General C. Fissore, 3 November 1858, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., pp. 238-39.

69 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus*... deposition on 7 October 1895, fol. 2763v.

Murialdo himself.<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, Don Bosco had taken two kinds of action for the benefit of the laity through the spoken and written word: defending and preventively 'advising' and protecting them from indifference, secularism, heresy; and secondly, especially for the benefit of young people and ordinary folk, bringing together or otherwise engaging people willing to help with good initiatives: by collaborating in activities at the oratories, ensuring their financial support, taking part in lotteries, subscribing to the *Letture Cattoliche* and helping disseminate them.<sup>71</sup>

Both kinds of action explicitly or implicitly led him to think in new ways about the presence and involvement of the Catholic laity in the civil and Church community. Now is the time for action, he was saying through his own being and doing: direct, incisive, qualified action of increased spiritual and cultural competence. This was his belief and message, and it was also one which flourished through his writing throughout the decade. To understand this, it would seem advisable, if not essential, to at least point to some expressions of this message.

### 7.1 Acting with fitting cultural preparation and faith upfront

In difficult times, the Catholic was being called on to adopt a new mindset and availability not required before.

Cultural changes were relevant from the point of view of traditional Faith: in *Risorgimento* Italy, these changes were inevitably bound up with the political events taking place. There was implicit reference to the harm resulting from abuse of press freedom in Don Bosco's letter to the Secretary of State of the Holy See in 1852, when the launching of the *Letture Cattoliche* was imminent. 'A flood of perverse books and newspapers has us fear that a sad future lies ahead: the most obscene and anti-religious books are being sold in public and are on offer everywhere by vendors shouting in the piazzas. May God show us great mercy so that at least our inexperienced youth may be preserved from the poisonous evil of irreligiosity.'<sup>72</sup>

As we have seen, identical dangers were worrying the believer who was the main character of the *Cattolico istruito* (The well-informed Catholic).<sup>73</sup> Don Bosco was no less anxious when presenting 'fathers and others of families' with his booklet *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo* (Contemporary facts presented in dialogue form): he hoped that the 'historical facts' he had seen or heard might 'serve as a guide for work and as a preventative in the critical circumstances immature, youth find themselves in in these terrible times.'<sup>74</sup>

The *Galantuomo pel 1861* [*Galantuomo* = gentleman] also sounded the alarm on 'two diseases' with 'frightening consequences' indeed, very frightening.' 'Indifference in religious matters and the progress being made by Protestantism.'<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Don Bosco reassured the Pope of the commitment of clergy and laity: 'Up till now our clergy are standing firm courageously.' 'The faithful are fervent but every day a good number go from lukewarmness to apathetic indifference, which is the bigger disease of Catholicism in our towns and cities. But timid ones are chasing away their fear and showing their courage whenever there is a need to demonstrate that they are Christians.'<sup>76</sup>

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70 Cf. Chap. 2, § 5.

71 Cf. Chap 8, § 6 and 7; cap. 9, preface and § 2.

72 To Cardinal G. Antonelli, 30 November 1852, Em I 175-176.

73 G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito*..., preface, p. 3, OE IV 197.

74 [G. Bosco], *Fatti contemporanei*..., To the reader, p. 3, OE V 53.

75 *Il Galantuomo e le sue profezie. Almanacco piemontese-lombardo pel 1861*, Anno VII. Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di s. Franc. di Sales 1860, p. 4, OE XII 500.

76 To Pius IX, 10 March 1861, Em I 441.

As the author of catechetical and apologetic literature, it was clear to him that the responsible Catholic militant above all needed a solid cultural preparation like the one described in the *Cattolico istruito*: for self-defence and to clarify apostolic objectives. In essence, these were two fundamental qualities required of the culturally equipped practising catholic: firstly a very steady faith in the fact that the true religion was only to be found in the Catholic Church and that it was in this Church that one found the good things to be communicated to people who were alienated, people at risk and lost, in order to win them back, strengthen them, reconvert them. Secondly, frank availability to real commitment to religious practice and charitable apostolic activity in all its possible forms, with a prevalence of works of spiritual mercy.<sup>77</sup>

Isidoro congratulates Roberto the lawyer, who accepts the task of arguing with the Protestant minister because, 'among all his legal studies' he has not forgotten his religious culture and in particular his 'knowledge of the Bible and Church history.' Then comes the emphatic: 'You are a lawyer, but you are also a Catholic Christian; the Protestants know, the whole world knows, that lawyers know how to deal with people's questions and when the lawyer is carrying out his role, he knows how to properly defend his religion.'<sup>78</sup>

Giuliano is a worker who switched from Protestantism to Catholicism after a serious comparison of the two lots of teachings. He argues clearly against the objections of Catholics suffering from indifference ('all religions are good, so long as they are observed') until his opposition agrees: 'There is only one God, one faith, one baptism, so there must be only one religion.' 'It is precisely because of this,' Giuliano confesses 'that I made every effort to know what the true religion was: and I came to see clearly that only the Catholic one can be the true one. I embraced it twenty-five years ago: the more I study it the more I find truth there.'<sup>79</sup>

Also, Pietro 'had read and studies as much as was necessary for a Christian ... but he did not feel sufficiently instructed to be able to rebut the distortions being presented by his friends who were invited to a party: therefore he gladly accepted the powerful assistance of his parish priest.'<sup>80</sup>

## 7.2 Coordinator of the faith

Theological studies at the seminary did not revolutionise the view of the faith that John Bosco had assimilated so well within family, parish and his four years of schooling in Chieri, but he did come away from it confirmed in reasoned and systematic forms of Catholic teaching which traditional catechisms and catechesis he attended in his older adolescence had already given him in a logical and deliberate order. This was the level, then, that he found himself at in his popular and youth apostolate. His written material between 1845 and 1858 are an expression of this, enriched by contact with sources he used when putting them together.

His narrative and historical catechesis is actually a better kind of documentation for understanding the fundamental concepts of his personal catholic religiosity and of what he passed on to the boys and ordinary people. We can find a significant summary of this in the unpublished *Breve catechismo dei fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino* (Short catechism for children, in use in the diocese of Turin), which he wrote in 1855.

What results from this is an unvaried expository approach, where it is easy enough to identify the dominant topics: God, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh and our Redeemer, the Catholic Church and inseparable from it the pope, as guarantees of the faithful, complete

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77 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862)*, RSS 14 (1995) 270.

78 [G. BOSCO], *Dramma. Una disputa...*, pp. 31-32, OE V 131-132.

79 G. BOSCO, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei...*, pp. 11-16, OE V 379-384.

80 G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. 8, 11-13, OE VI 152, 155-157.

transmission of Divine Revelation or God's word, the Sacraments with special focus on Baptism, Penance, Eucharist; Mary Immaculate, observance of the Commandments based on the virtues of faith, hope and charity as part of the solid body of moral virtue.

Further illustration of this, other than this in the *Cattolico istruito* (The well-informed Catholic), 1854, in reference to Revelation, the Church and the Pope, are two of Don Bosco's most mature writings as a diocesan priest: *La chiave del paradiso* (The key to Paradise 1856) and *Il mese di Maggio* (The month of May 1858).<sup>81</sup> Although not particularly thematised, faith in the Trinity is placed firmly among the two 'principle mysteries of the Faith.' The Holy Spirit is there too, catechetically, in relation to the mystery of the Incarnation, Pentecost, the sacrament of Confirmation, the infallibility of the Church and the popes, correct discernment of a choice of vocation. But neither the Trinity nor the Holy Spirit stand out among the truths which are expressly declared as being the prime movers of pastoral action and spiritual life.<sup>82</sup> Just the same, they are well present, such as in the Church's daily life, in written and oral proposals, in prayer, along with the omnipresent sign of the Cross 'the mark of the Christian,' and the recurring private and liturgical recital of the *Gloria* and *Credo*, fundamentally a profession of trinitarian faith. Baptism was administered 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and sacramental absolution imparted similarly. The extraordinary range of blessings were trinitarian and also the final prayers for the faithful who had passed to eternal life.

All the evidence is there that *God* has revealed himself to the 'chosen people' before and after Christ, the axis around whom Don Bosco's universe revolved and within whom he lived and moved and who was the core of his proclamation: 'A personal God, our greatest good, who satisfies the thirst which creatures cannot satisfy because man has been made for God.'<sup>83</sup> Don Bosco had already assimilated the distinctive features of this belief as a child and from his study of the diocesan catechism, further reflected in the unpublished *Breve catechismo*. 'God is the most perfect spirit, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth,' 'He sees everything, including our thoughts.' 'He rewards the good and punishes the bad ... He is omnipotent, merciful and faithful.' 'He gives us forgiveness for our sins, the grace to live and die well, and paradise.' So he is not a static God who only sees, judges and rewards. Most of all, we achieve nothing 'without God giving [us] the strength to do it.' He is a God of life, 'a God of infinite goodness,' therefore worthy of 'being loved above all else' and the reason why we love our neighbour as ourselves. We repent of our sins because of the good things wasted and the punishment we deserve but above all because we have offended 'so good and so great God.'<sup>84</sup>

Our main attitude before God, who is revealed in creation and mysteriously in the wonderful work of redemption, can only be one of Faith, for which we 'bow our will' to assent to religious truths called mysteries. Faith is 'completely based on God's word which is eternal, unchanging, and never varies in any way.'<sup>85</sup>

But these traits of God, and faith in him, drawn from Don Bosco's essential theological and catechetical perspectives, are enriched by more concrete and personal emphases in his daily activity. God is the Providence who has entrusted young people to his care: he is the Father to whom we pray in trust to obtain temporal and spiritual graces, especially the grace of doing his will in all things and to whom, whatever the case, we entrust ourselves with and obedient and prompt

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81 G. BOSCO, *La chiave del paradiso*..., pp. 5-20, 29-43, OE VIII 5-20, 29-43; Id., *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 33-47, OE X 327-341.

82 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II*..., pp. 116-117.

83 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II*..., p. 117; cf. J. SCHEPENS, *Human nature in the educational outlook of St. John Bosco*, RSS 8 (1988) 265-270, 285-287.

84 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo per fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino" di don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1979, pp. 27-33, 56-57; G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., p. 73, OE X 367.

85 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 48-50, OE X 342-343.



*Deo gratias, Deo gratias et semper Deo gratias.*<sup>86</sup> We ask him especially to obtain the greatest grace of working for his glory and the salvation of souls and of retaining out holy fear of him in view of our final perseverance.<sup>87</sup> We praise him for success of good work and we nurture the certain hope that his munificence will greatly reward the good done for the poor, especially the young.<sup>88</sup>

*Jesus Christ* is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world promised to 'our first parents,' the Liberator who freed humankind 'from the power of the devil, that is, from sin and death,' the Redeemer through whose mediation humankind can return to God's grace and 'regain the lost right to eternal life.'<sup>89</sup> 'It is an incomprehensible mystery to the human mind' Don Bosco notes 'which demonstrates the value of our soul and God's great goodness to us,'<sup>90</sup> but also 'the most important dogma on which our holy religion is based,' whose ultimate aim is charity: 'loving and adoring God alone,' extending the same love to all people, including enemies.<sup>91</sup> However, in Don Bosco's thinking as the 'young people's priest,' the Son Of God who 'became man to save all men, nevertheless showed many signs of special kindness to children' and their humility and simplicity pointed out the conditions for everyone to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was the most sublime example of these virtues dealing in a familiar way with people who were excluded and welcoming sinners with kindness.<sup>92</sup>

It was natural that from this perspective the Solemnity of Christmas would be celebrated with particular splendour and that the Child Jesus would be very much part of Don Bosco's Christmas greetings, spoken and written.<sup>93</sup> 'Make everyone friends of Jesus Christ' was the task he assigned to the boys' assistants.<sup>94</sup>

The relationship between God and the *Church* was of capital importance for Don Bosco. Christ is the founder.<sup>95</sup> The one, true, Catholic Church 'has one worship, one faith only, one morality only, one government only,' 'whose head is the Roman Pontiff whom all obey as a loving father.' A hierarchical society, the Church is also a communion: 'All Christianity lives with one heart and soul and is truly one family with the most beautiful harmony under the governance of one father,'<sup>96</sup> with the pope having an absolutely central and transcendent role in it.<sup>97</sup>

The Catholic Church is the only definitive and legitimate custodian of 'Divine Revelation' already given to Adam and Eve and kept faithfully by 'the Jewish nation' in the 'Holy Bible.'<sup>98</sup> Following in the Apostles' footsteps, the mandate to proclaim the Word revealed to all peoples was entrusted by Christ to his infallible magisterium.<sup>99</sup> It is necessary 'that there be other lesser ministers dependent

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86 Cf. for example letters in 1852 and 1853 to clergy and lay friends, Em I 156-157, 169, 183, 193, 211, 217; to Pius IX, 13 April 1860, Em I 401.

87 Cf. letters to A. Romini, 24 February 1854, Em I 219; to Canon P.G. Gaudenzi, 27 June 1854, Em I 228; to P. Galleani d'Agliano, 14 August 1855, Em I 264; to Bishop G. Negri, 30 January 1857, Em I 315-316; to cleric M. Rua, 26 July 1858, Em I 355; to Cardinal M. Viale Preta, 15 July 1859, Em I 380-381.

88 To Fr. G.B. Pagini, 13 June 1856, and 30 November 1858, Em I 291 and 366; circular on 20 July 1857, Em I 320.

89 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, p. 13, OE VI 6 1; ID., *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 15.

90 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 195.

91 G. BOSCO *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 28-30, OE X 322-324; ID., *Storia sacra...*, 1853, p. 145.

92 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, 1847, pp. 173-175, OE 1173-175.

93 Cf. for example letters to Canon L. Gastaldi, 11 December 1852, Em I 180; to Marchioness M. Fassati, 22 December 1855, Em I 278; to A. Fettù di Camburzano, 26 December 1860, Em I 428-429.

94 To cleric John Cagliero, 23 July 1856, Em I 294.

95 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 55, OE X 349; cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo...*, p. 76.

96 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. 1, tratten. IV, pp. 95-96, OE IV 289-290; tratten. IX, p. 7, OE IV 313.

97 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, pp. 58-61, 68-69, OE VI 106-109, 116-117; ID., *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 140-14 1, OE X 334-335.

98 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. I, tratten. III, pp. 21-22, OE IV 215-216; pt. II, tratten. II and III, pp. 84-87 and 85-94, OE IV 278-281 and 282-288.

99 Cf. G. BOSCO, *La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana*, pp. 4, 9, 11, OE IV 124, 129, 131; ID., *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. II e III, pp. 84-87 and 88-94, OE IV 278-281, 282-288.

on the pope, who promote teaching and holiness in men by preaching the Word of God and administering the Holy Sacraments.’<sup>100</sup> From this flows the pressing appeal to people to heed them: ‘So we are obedient to the voice of the sacred ministers, like sheep must listen to the voice of their shepherd. God has given us teachers in religious knowledge, so we go to them and not to worldly teachers to learn this. God has given them to us as a guide on our way to heaven, so let us follow them in their teachings ... let us gladly go to hear them preaching, teaching, giving catechism classes, explaining the Gospel. Let us follow the advice they give us when we approach the sacraments and when they instruct us, so we can receive them worthily; let us listen to their voice as if they came from Christ himself.’<sup>101</sup>

The *laity*, however, being a constitutive and dynamic part of the Church, are not only receivers but also heralds of the Word and of faith, as credible witnesses of Christian life, ministers of charity, promoters of Catholic social action, loving ‘God by the work of their hands and the sweat of their brow,’ rendering ‘simple love of *affection* for God,’ ‘*effective* love,’<sup>102</sup> without forgetting to help the poor by ‘copious alms.’<sup>103</sup> If educated and prepared, they can also be proclaimers of the Word in many ways including catechesis, as Don Bosco tried out in the work of the oratories, and valid defenders of the faith with regard to lukewarm or indifferent brethren, or non-Catholics or non-believers.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, for Don Bosco, the Church was above all holy and a generator of *holiness*; ‘Holy, because her founder who is Jesus Christ is the source of all holiness; no one can be holy outside this Church since the true teaching of Jesus Christ is taught only in it. Only in his Church are his faith, his law practised, and the sacraments he instituted administered.’<sup>105</sup> It is in these sacraments that ‘God is goodness, wisdom and mercy are made manifest,’ communicating his saving grace to mankind.’ The Church is their guardian and dispenser. The first and most fundamental of these is *Baptism* by which ‘we are welcomed into the bosom of Holy Mother church, cease to be slaves of the devil and are made children of God and hence heirs to Paradise.’<sup>106</sup> *Confirmation* gives us the Holy Spirit, the fullness of his gifts ... And makes us perfect Christians.’<sup>107</sup>

However, Don Bosco’s emphasises Penance and Eucharist in word and writing in his pastoral ministry. They are essential for recovering and revitalising the state of grace and source of and nourishment for a keen faith and fervent, active charity. In context of lukewarmness and disaffection as well as of opposition, especially for older adults, Don Bosco never tired of proposing the doctrine of *Penance* with its theological, historical and pastoral arguments<sup>108</sup> He habitually insisted on the conditions for its validity and fruitfulness; a careful examination of conscience, completely sincere confession (In this he followed a prudent and responsible view of confessing all one’s sins, ‘certain as certain, doubtful as doubtful, as we understand them to be.’<sup>109</sup> Sorrow for the sins we have committed, a resolve not to commit them again as verification of the genuineness of our repentance – *ex fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos*.<sup>110</sup>

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100 G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. II, tratten. VIII, p. 4, OE IV 3 10.

101 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 46, OE X 340.

102 [G. BOSCO], *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà...*, pp. 40-41, OE III 254-255.

103 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 167-168, OE X 461-462.

104 Cf. Chap. 7, § 8 e 9, § 3.

105 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 34-35, OE X 328-329; cf. ID., *La chiave del paradiso...*, pp. 10-11, OE VIII 10-11; ID., *Maniera facile...*, pp. 58-59, OE VI 58-59.

106 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 55-56, OE X 349-350; ID., *La chiave del paradiso...*, p. 15, OE VIII 15; ID., *Maniera facile...*, p. 15, OE VIII 15; Chap 9, § 5

107 G. BOSCO, *La chiave del paradiso...*, pp. 15-16, OE VIII 15-16; ID., *Il mese di maggio...* p. 56, OE X 350.

108 Cf. *Dialogo intorno alla sacramental confessione*, in *Galantuomo... pel 1855*, pp. 101-120, OE VI 15-34, and G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della Confessione* (1855), pp. 1- 128, OE VI 145-272.

109 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 57 e 127, OE X 351 and 421.

110 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 127, OE X 421; ID., *La chiave de paradiso...*, pp. OE VIII 57-73.

For the Sacrament of the *Eucharist*, especially in an anti-protestant context, he repeated apologetic arguments based on Scripture and history. This meant a particular emphasis on the real presence of Jesus in the consecrated bread and wine<sup>111</sup> and the prominent devotional value given to the Blessed Sacrament. Naturally dominant were the two major Eucharistic moments, the *Mass* and *Holy Communion*.<sup>112</sup> These were recalled in a particular way through the two poles of the Upper Room and Calvary: the Mass celebrated by the Saviour ‘the first time with his Apostles’ at the Last Supper, then repeated by him on the cross ‘on Mount Calvary.’<sup>113</sup> In much of his written work, lukewarm or barely practising Catholics were warmly reminded of their yearly confession, Easter Communion and observance of the Sunday mass precept.<sup>114</sup> The more fervent ones instead were encouraged to go to communion often, even daily, comforted by the presumed practice of the early Christians.<sup>115</sup>

The sublime figure of *Mary Immaculate* is one of Don Bosco’s two columns (the other is the Eucharist) of personal and ecclesial piety.<sup>116</sup> Here the movement is between the two great poles of the Annunciation and Calvary, Mother of God and through her Son, Mother of humankind, ‘Mother of God’ and we are ‘all adopted children of Mary,’ ‘Mother of the Head’ thus ‘also Mother of us who are the members,’<sup>117</sup> ‘not only the help of Christians but also the support of the Universal Church.’ ‘Our protector in our present life’ and ‘at the moment of our death.’<sup>118</sup> ‘Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, keep me, save my soul’ is the faithful’s daily invocation.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, as an antithesis to the dry and unadorned Protestant form of worship, Don Bosco not only defined religion as that complex of things ‘with which men honour God, both with intellect and heart, in word and deed’ but he showed that the superior greatness and beauty of the Catholic religion as also assured by the splendour of its *outward worship* involving ‘all the body’s senses.’<sup>120</sup> The result was variety in beliefs and devotions – the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Guardian Angel, St Joseph, St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga with Mary and the three saintly protectors of the Salesian Society – and rites, including suffrage for the faithful departed and indulgences.<sup>121</sup>

As a priest of *active charity*, Don Bosco could certainly not restrict himself to illustrating *what*

111 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, pp. 50-51, OE VI 98-99; [ID.], *Vita infelice di un novello apostata*, pp. 18-19, OE V 198-199; ID., *Vita di S. Policarpo vescovo di Smirne e martire e del suo discepolo S. Ireneo vescovo di Lione e martire*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1857, pp. 87-88, OE X 183-184.

112 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 134-138, 138, 139-144, OE X 428-432, 433-438.

113 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 134-135, OE X 428-429.

114 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato...*, pp. 12-13, OE VI 156-157; ID., *Vita de’ sommi pontefici S. Anacleto, S. Evaristo, S. Alessandro*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp.

1857, pp. 25-26, OE IX 469-470; ID., *Vita de’ sommi pontefici S. Aniceto, S. Sotero, S. Eleuterio, S. Vittore e S. Zeffirino*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp., p. 70, OE X 274.

115 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Vita de’ sommi pontefici S. Anacleto...*, pp. 20-21, 25-26, OE IX 464-465, 469-470; ID., *Vita de’ sommi pontefici S. Aniceto...*, p. 70, OE X 274; ID., *Vita e martirio de’ sommi pontefici San Lucio I e S. Stefano I*, Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1860, p. 6 1, OE XII 207; ID., *La pace della Chiesa ossia il pontificato di S. Eusebio e S. Melchiade ultimi martiri delle dieci persecuzioni*, Turin, tip. dell’Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, p. 66, OE XVI 238.

116 Cf. Chap. 14, § 5.3.

117 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 12-16, OE X 306-310.

118 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 169-177, OE X 463-472.

119 G. BOSCO, *La chiave del paradiso...*, p. 43, OE VIII 43; ID., *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 182, OE XII 476.

120 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito...*, pt. 1, tratten. II, pp. 13-18, OE IV 207-212; pt. II, tratten. XI, pp. 26-27, OE IV 332-333; cf. G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, p. 32, OE VI 80; cr. G. BRIOSCHI, *Don Bosco devoto di san Giuseppe*, “Studi Cattolici”, 2003, no. 505, pp. 172-174.

121 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Fatti contemporanei...*, pp. 17-18, OE V 67-68; ID., *Il pontificato di S. Felice primo e di S. Eutichiano papi e martiri*, Turin, tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1862, pp. 56-59, OE XIII 394-397; ID., *Vita di san Martino...*, 1855, pp. 71-82, OE VI 459-470; ID., *Il Giubileo e pratiche devote...*, 1854, pp. 32-47, OE V 510-525; ID., *Due conferenze tra due ministri protestanti ed un prete cattolico intorno al purgatorio e intorno ai suffragi dei defunti con appendice sulle liturgie*, Turin, tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1857, pp. 19-136, OE IX 19-136.

*Christianity is and who the Christian is*, but never ceased reminding readers, listeners, by word and through his life, that it was not enough ‘to recognise the truths of religion without practising its precepts.’<sup>122</sup> It is an unavoidable part of what he calls the *Teaching of the Gospel*, including ‘everything needed to believe and act and be saved.’<sup>123</sup> There is frequent reference to St James (2: 17-26) especially when he is in anti-protestant mode, and even before that to the Gospel (Mt 7:21-27); faith without works is dead.<sup>124</sup>

Situated within it all is the ‘fear of God’ he so much insisted on, meaning homage, honour, respect, obeying his commandments, but never apart from love. The good Christian has learned since childhood that mercy and justice are connected for God: ‘God watches our good actions to reward them and watches our bad actions equally to punish them.’ ‘You cannot say a word, move a foot, hand or eye without God seeing you, and, what is more, without God giving you the strength to act.’<sup>125</sup>

The faithful individual also knows that the most necessary virtue for the Christian to be saved are faith, hope and charity.<sup>126</sup> These are not the only ones: Jesus Christ gave the example of all the virtues and mainly charity, patience and zeal for his Father’s glory.<sup>127</sup> Regular effort is required to bring the ‘important ... unique ... irreparable affair’ to a good conclusion ... the Salvation of the soul.<sup>128</sup> Aspiration to temporal and eternal happiness, paradise, and serious commitment to them are interdependent. Jesus Christ ‘announces a happy and everlasting life, that is, heaven, but this happiness is earned through our efforts, by practising virtue, avoiding vice.’<sup>129</sup> ‘Our true promised land is heaven,’<sup>130</sup> ‘seeing God.’ In heaven ‘he consoles the blessed with his loving gaze and pours a sea of delights into their heart.’<sup>131</sup>

## 8. The lay person in social and political life

Any discussion of Don Bosco’s ideas concerning the laity in the family community is likely to be an abundant one. These ideas already emerge from the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, where they are autobiographical in tone. They are enriched by other elements distributed across the main biographies and similar accounts especially. The human and Christian nature of the main character in the *La Forza della buona educazione* (The power of a good upbringing) is shaped by his loving and concerned mother before the priest is involved. In Valentino’s case, the death of his ‘wise mother’ lies behind his misadventures near and far. Father, mother and parish priest are Francis Besucco’s first real educators, while the frivolous nature of Severino’s mother impacts negatively on him, especially since he had lost an exceptional father at such a difficult age for him: his father was hard-working, a believer, an educator of his children, enterprising, honest, austere, respected and finally, ‘one of the most well-off and qualified citizens,’ ‘twice elected mayor of the town.’<sup>132</sup>

Adult responsibility in many forms of social life had increased. Life in society had been affected by new ferment, the clash between Restoration and Revolution. We have already seen Don Bosco’s view of society in his writings from the 1850s. It was rooted in the thinking of the *ancien*

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122 [G. BOSCO], *Dramma. Una disputa...*, 1853, p. 66, OE V 166.

123 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, pp. 47-49, OE VI 95-97.

124 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 51-52, OE X 345-346; ID., *Maniera facile...*, p. 63, OE VI 111.

125 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 107 e 73, OE X 401 and 367.

126 P. BRAIDO, *L’inedito “Breve catechismo...”*, p. 62.

127 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, p. 49, OE VI 97.

128 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 81-84, OE X 375-378.

129 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 30, OE X 324; cf. The consideration on the previous nature of time, *ibid.*, pp. 63-70, OE X 339-364.

130 G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, p. 30, OE VI 78

131 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 161, OE X 455.

132 G. BOSCO, *Severino...*, pp. 5-17, OE XX 5-17.

*régime* or the way to a cautious evolution towards a modest democratic sensitivity.<sup>133</sup> These ideas lay behind the limitations and opportunities of his tireless begging for help. As we have seen, Don Bosco's Catholic could not love revolutions, all of which he condemned in the *Storia d'Italia*, beginning with the Gracchi, right up to the French 'persecution'.<sup>134</sup> Revolutionary and irreligious spirit were one and the same thing.<sup>135</sup>

In an unequal society, charity was called on to re-establish a certain equality between the children of God and brothers in Christ without touching the underlying inequality. The rich could become relatively richer (though this is risky) by dint of their partial sharing in wealth. It was a way of conforming, with some modifications to the Christian society we find in apostolic communities as the narrator recalls them, and is the way for the 'new faithful to be of one heart and soul,' because the rich shared their wealth with the needy.<sup>136</sup> Pope Leo the Great had once turned economic inequality into a wise and provident divine plan by which rich and poor were complementary. The rich person is rich so he can be in a position to help the poor, this way finding mercy and forgiveness for his sins; and the poor person is such so he can win the crown of patience.<sup>137</sup> He was echoing St Robert Bellarmine; 'God wants rich and poor in the world ... so that mercy and patience may reign among men.' 'If everyone were rich or all were poor, there would be no mutual dependence in the world,' thus no social order and charity.<sup>138</sup>

### 8.1 The dignity and tasks of those who govern

If Jesus Christ brought holy teaching for those who govern and those who are governed, then according to Don Bosco, both these groups had to live their respective circumstances with extreme religious and moral commitment. He reminds rulers (and anyone in a position of superiority, public and administrative roles) of an unbreakable rule; 'The thinking of anyone who administers public matters must be this: think of what directs everything with rectitude, justice, and not only of accumulating wealth for oneself.'<sup>139</sup>

We have seen that this idea runs through all of the *Storia d'Italia*, until it reaches the point of recognising the opportunity in the confessional state for those governing to promote the people's happiness through a perfect alliance of morality, religion, competence and political good fortune. For the benefit of its young readers, the book presented a gallery of individuals, cities and states that had experienced well-being under such rulers and administrators: religious, therefore moral, and promoters of cultural, civic and economic progress. Numa Pompilio was an early example, a 'just and kind' ruler. On the one hand he inculcated and promoted productive primary activity – agriculture, craftsmanship, commerce; and on the other hand he established 'days for celebration each month when the people had to stop work to get involved with religious matters.'<sup>140</sup>

On the contrary, Marius and Silla were 'men of great wealth, but lacked religion to temper their ferocity.'<sup>141</sup> Listed from the Christian era for their intentional inclusion of religion, 'the support of the

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133 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, Rome, PAS 1982, pp. 10-11.

134 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 20-21, 33-34, 42-43, 80, 84-86, 88, 265, 370, 411, 428, 455-456, 476-480, OE VII (numbering is the same).

135 Cf. Chap. 9, § 4.

136 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, p. 34, OE I 192; G. BOSCO, *Vita di S. Paolo apostolo...*, pp. 75-76, OE IX 241-242.

137 Cf. M. PRATESI, *Introduzione a LEONE M., I sermoni quaresimali e sulle collette*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane 1999, pp. 22-26, with bibliography on the teaching of the Fathers

138 R. BELLARMINO, *Opera postuma*, vol. I, Romae, PUG 1942, pp. 226.

139 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 40, OE VII 40.

140 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 26, OE VII 26.

141 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 88, OE VII 88.

emperors' and 'happiness for the people,' were Emperors Alexander Severus<sup>142</sup> and Gratian: the latter 'saw that only the Catholic Religion was recognised as the State Religion. <sup>143</sup> By contrast, Theodoricus' cruelty demonstrated that 'a king without the true religion does not have morality either.'<sup>144</sup> Among other religious, moral, courageous and capable rulers he listed Totila, King of the Goths,<sup>145</sup> and Charles the Great, the perfect ideal of the Christian monarch.<sup>146</sup>

For Don Bosco, intemperance is the mortal enemy of moral life and the ability of those responsible for public life to govern. It is the cause of physical and mental weakness. <sup>147</sup> Famous victims of this were Anthony, <sup>148</sup> Hannibal, <sup>149</sup> and Alboino.<sup>150</sup>

Undoubtedly, the virtue of justice is more essential for the ruler, expressed through rigorous respect for law, consistency, rectitude, magnanimity. According to the image of the ruler of public matters handed down through biblical and classical history, he should be more of a father than a boss, and fear of him should be tempered by love. Don Bosco states: 'As a father governs his family' so the king, prince or other wielder of power governs his people.<sup>151</sup> He offers a long list of emperors, king, lords and other more general types of leaders.<sup>152</sup> When introducing banker, Marco Gonella, to kindly Canon Edoardo Rosaz in Susa, at whose college his benefactor and friend presented himself as a candidate for elections on 15 and 18 November 1857, he assured him: 'It would certainly be difficult to find someone better, given his firm stance, religion, independence and charity.'<sup>153</sup>

## 8.2 The duties of the working class in society

It was clear for Don Bosco that social prosperity at the practical level was due to rulers who were able promoters and coordinators of hard work among the people, this latter comprising farmers, tradesmen, labourers, business people who worked with the leadership class in their concern for the public good.

The reviewers of Don Bosco's *Storia sacra* (Bible history) had stressed the central place work played in it.<sup>154</sup> 'The bird is born to fly, man to work,' says Job as reported by Don Bosco in one of his books.<sup>155</sup> This was man's sweaty task after original sin. The 1847 edition of the *Storia sacra* says of Adam and Eve: 'From the outset he was placed in an earthly paradise, a delightful place where fruits of all kind abounded and grew without any need to cultivate them.'<sup>156</sup> He corrected this in the second edition in 1853: 'To teach us that we must avoid idleness, he had also ordered Adam to work, but just for pleasure, without distressing efforts.'<sup>157</sup> Afterwards, work became a necessity, a duty, a punishment, and idleness was an occasion of sin as happened to David.<sup>158</sup> After sin, virtuous hard work, often a source of wealth which is also a blessing from God, was the

142 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 131, OE VII 131.

143 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 154-155, OE VII 154-155.

144 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 189, OE VII 189.

145 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 192-193, OE VII 192-193.

146 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 219, 221, 222, OE VII 219, 221, 222.

147 G. BOSCO, *Storia Sacra...*, 1853, p. 113.

148 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 26, OE VII 26.

149 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 71, OE VII 71.

150 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 199, OE VII 199.

151 The expression is applied to Cosimo de' Medici (G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 346, OE VII 346).

152 Cf. P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, 1997, pp. 273-276 (Love and fear in the educative process).

153 Letter of 1 November 1857, Em I 335-336.

154 Reviewed by Fr M. G. [Michele Garelli, 1806-1867], in "L'Educatore" 4 (1848) 542.

155 *Massime morali ricavate dalla Sacra Scrittura*, in G. BOSCO, *Maniera facile...*, p. 91, OE VI 139.

156 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, p. 14, OE III 14.

157 G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...* 1853, p. 13.

158 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, p. 86, OE III 86.

characteristic of all the Patriarchs of the Old Testament and the Saints of the New.<sup>159</sup>

An essential outline of the holiness of the lay Catholic of humble origins was offered by Don Bosco in the introduction, probably his, to the *Vita di santa Zita serva e di sant'Isidoro contadino* (Life of St Zita the servant girl and St Isidoro the peasant farmer). To become a saint, he wrote, we don't need time for lengthy prayers, or 'to be rich, so we can give large amounts of alms,' nor do we need to have culture 'so we can understand, study and reason.' '*We need to want to be [a saint].*' 'Workers, farmers, craftsmen, merchants and servants and young people are sanctified, each in the state proper to him' by their fidelity to God's service and by fulfilling the duties of their state.<sup>160</sup>

Similar 'advice' for *women of service* (domestics) was offered in the *Porta Teco Cristiano* (The Christian's handbook).<sup>161</sup> He also dedicated pages full of sympathy for Giotto and Antonia Canova, both of humble origins, who became great and famous through hard work and tenacity.<sup>162</sup>

Don Bosco pointed to another example of working life in his portrait of the enterprising businessman in the life of convert Giuseppa: 'Her good behaviour, love for work, special aptitude for managing business matters enabled her to pursue an honest living and still have something left to give alms. By careful use of time she found the opportunity to practise the holy Catholic Religion, observing its practices as a model for all Christians for her virtue, zeal and charity.'<sup>163</sup>

## 9. Lay men and women for the young

According to Don Bosco, who was an educator of the young by natural genius and vocation, a radical reformation of society required a vigorous educative and rehabilitative effort which in turn demanded an audacious moral and religious renewal. For this to happen, people who could work in their field were needed along with other suitable and generous ones to sustain them. Hence from the outset there was a pressing indeed essential need to appeal to public and private bodies, communities and individuals, for grants, alms to support his youth work.

Throughout his life Don Bosco never tired of emphasising that almsgiving was not aimed exclusively at the personal benefit of young people nor even only at their eternal salvation, as important as these things were. What he was pursuing was also an openly stated social objective (of interest because of public and private benefit) and to achieve it everyone, believer or unbeliever would need to cooperate. The hopes for a prosperous future for civil and religious society lay in the proper education of its youth, he insisted. This is why, as we have seen, he did not hesitate to send lottery tickets to Ministers, Senators, Members of Parliament (Deputies) of all political and ideological persuasions. It was a way of challenging them on their own ground. How could they refuse to cooperate in a work aimed at the public good which they were or had declared themselves promoters of by profession? This target group understood this and there were many favourable responses, including from men not known for their clerical sympathies.<sup>164</sup>

By 1858, Don Bosco was presenting the kind of thinking on almsgiving that inspired him for the

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159 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Storia sacra...*, pp. 22, 26, 31, 33, 39, 41, 49, 53-54, 164 (Jesus in Nazareth), OE I 180, 184, 189, 191, 197, 199, 207, 211-212, 322; ID., *Vita di S. Giuseppe sposo di Maria SS. e padre putativo di G. Cristo...* Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1867, pp. 9, 12, 13, 26-27, 64 (Jesus the apprentice), 71, 72, OE XVII 289, 292, 293, 306-307; ID., *Vita di S. Pietro Principe degli apostoli...*, 1856, p. 13, OE VIII 305; ID., *Vita di S. Paolo apostolo...*, pp. 5-6, 63, OE IX 171-172, 229.

160 [G. BOSCO], *Vita di santa Zita e di sant'Isidoro contadino*, Turin, tip. dir. da P. De-Agostini 1853, pp. 6-8, OE V 176-178.

161 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Porta Teco Cristiano...*, pp. 65-66, OE XI 65-66.

162 G. BOSCO, *La storia d'Italia...*, pp. 294, 470-471, OE VII 294, 470-471.

163 G. BOSCO, *Conversione di una valdese...*, pp. 99-100, OE V 357-358.

164 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 99-100.

rest of his life. A summary of it may be found in the meditation bearing the significant title, *Un mezzo per assicurarsi il Paradiso* (A way of ensuring heaven for oneself) which he placed toward the end of the *mese de maggio*. It was there that he laid out the main points of his demanding position, which not a few people considered to be a rigorist one by comparison with the current moral thinking. Above all else, almsgiving was 'any work of mercy done for one's neighbour out of love for God' and therefore a source of salvation.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, the range of potential activity was huge: in essence it mostly coincided with 'corporal and spiritual works of mercy,' something Don Bosco had already learned from the catechism in his childhood: 'Abandoned youngsters to be taken in, instructed, hosted in your home if possible or at least taken to some place where they can learn about life and salvation.' 'Sinners to be warned, the doubtful to be advised, the afflicted to be consoled, disputes to be settled, injuries to be forgiven,' Praying for the living and the dead, 'burning bad books, spreading good books,' speaking 'honourably of the Catholic Religion.'<sup>166</sup>

It was from this perspective, in the text that followed, that he justified a meditation inviting the reader to imitate Mary who performed an act of mercy visiting and serving Elizabeth, and who was proactive at the wedding feast in Cana by helping the married couple. The Virgin Mary was lavish with graces and blessings 'for people who 'had done acts of mercy for their neighbour' 'by their advice, works, prayers, alms or in any other way.'<sup>167</sup> Especially binding and demanding in Don Bosco's interpretation was the Gospel precept 'of giving what you have left over to the poor;' it was a question of one's eternal salvation. 'Therefore' he concluded 'I am telling you that things you have acquired and the increase in your wealth from year to year are this surplus: the little extra touches of items in your meals, at table, are superfluous; carpets, clothing which could be useful for people who are hungry, thirsty, naked. Also superfluous are luxuries like travel, theatre, balls and other amusements where it could be said that they are using up what is the patrimony of the poor.'<sup>168</sup>

The reward promised by the Saviour would not be lacking, 'a hundredfold in the present life and the reward of eternal life.' Essentially then, giving to the poor was 'giving a loan on a hundred to one basis in this present life with God reserving the full return in the next.'<sup>169</sup>

This latter thought was habitually instilled into benefactors of Don Bosco's works including a literal interpretation of the hundredfold of which Matthew and Luke speak, in temporal terms,<sup>170</sup> 'Here is the reason why we see so many families giving copious alms everywhere, and going from wealth to greater wealth, from prosperity to greater prosperity. God gives us the reason: Give (to the poor) and you will receive: *date et dabitur vobis*. You will be given a hundredfold in this present life and eternal life in the next: *Centuplum accipiet in hac vita et vitam aeternam possidebit*.'<sup>171</sup> Some had stated that they were personally convinced of this through direct experience, as Don Bosco wrote in his final *Memorie*, quoting the testimony of Marquis Fassati and banker *Commendatore Cotta*,<sup>172</sup>

It is obvious that among the militant Catholic laity we include in a special way the collaborators in the work of the oratories, the night and weekend classes, members of the Lottery Commissions and people who promoted them, correspondents for the *Letture Cattoliche* and subscribers.

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165 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 164-169, OE X 458-463.

166 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 164-167, OE X 458-461.

167 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 168-169, OE X 462-463.

168 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 166, OE X 459-460.

169 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 167, OE X 461.

170 Mt. 19:29; Lk. 18: 29-30.

171 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 167-168, OE X 461-462.

172 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 93.



## 10. Point of arrival: a multi-dimensional Don Bosco

By the end of the decade, Don Bosco was already emerging as a figure with an extraordinary range of characteristics.

We would certainly want to place Don Bosco the innovator at the forefront. This is the full-time priest for young people, the man of action, enterprising and courageous. He was an innovator particularly for the way he had inherited and then adapted ways of encountering and assisting young people. There is no doubt he was strongly rooted in the constituted civic and ecclesial order, in Catholic orthodoxy and was approved of and supported by an archbishop of adamant fidelity to the tradition. But as well as this, he was also a priest firmly anchored in his world, grasping what the new problems were and meeting them with very personal approaches and methods.

He was a priest completely dedicated to this new task: passionate, forgetful of self, disregarding of his financial security and health. As a priest who was both humble and strong, he made himself poor and went around begging for poor and abandoned boys. From a much broader perspective he was a priest of charity with a preference for the popular rank and file but open to every kind of saving intervention for anyone without discrimination, inclusive of the nobility, the wealthy, political and administrative authority. Salvation was a need and a possibility for them too: charity (and robust almsgiving was by no means a secondary form of this) was one way to achieve it. Don Bosco's apostolate among the young cannot be separated from his apostolate among the rich and powerful, from the earliest years.

For those who knew of his work, Don Bosco was a clerical proclaimer of a Christian message whose principles were 'the glory of God and the salvation of souls.' As the instrument for this he offered the resources of grace and a variety of human initiatives: oratories, schools, hospices, churches, buildings, books, preaching and the means for sustaining them all.

He was a man of creativity and imagination, but at the same time a realist, a practical man who could foresee, calculate and ponder the risks and possibilities. This is why the undoubted focus of his personal and institutional commitment to the poor and abandoned young people did not lock him in to the little world of his Oratory on the periphery and the other lesser things it gave rise to. Indeed, out of objective necessity and inner impulse he projected it into connected and additional initiatives and brought it into an even broader network of understandings and relationships with the civil and ecclesiastical world. These in turn created activities and references which could not be ignored and which were demanding of him: writing and publishing books and pamphlets, various approaches to preservation of the Faith, preaching, distributing the *Letture Cattoliche*, involving the wider public in the lotteries. Hence the inevitable multiple requests for authorisation, the search for promoters and supporters, the establishing of an ever widening circle of benefactors and the uninterrupted personal contact and correspondence with them.

At the same time, Don Bosco could not but rely on the culture he had acquired at school in Chieri, at the seminary and the *Convitto*, at times locking him within pre-revolutionary (1848) mental schemes. The result was a certain narrowness of theological concepts, moral questions, regulations, which seem to contradict the abundant imagination and flexibility demanded by the boys he was attending to. In general, and by good fortune, action outdid theory. His true greatness could by now be glimpsed in his concrete planning and doing, enlightened by faith and reason. Yet neither of these two poles, according to circumstances, can be overlooked when reconstructing his life story.

It was pretty much inevitable that the multiplicity of interests and perspectives would gradually and prudently lead him to integrate his diocesan priesthood with the consecration of religious vows: he remained faithful, however, to his diocese of origin and all the other dioceses in which he was *de facto* involved on either side of the Atlantic, personally and through the activity of the religious

Institute he gave life to. He would think of the Cooperators similarly, *Salesians* but not just *of the Salesians* – available within the Church, for dioceses, parishes, the widest variety of Catholic and civic initiatives on behalf of the young.

One final trait of Don Bosco's which we have already emphasised on several occasions was his familiarity with the extraordinary, and the ordinary, in the Church and its saints. He showed precocious sensitivity for the invisible. Clearly and especially it was the supernatural that he dwelt in from his baptism: the sacrament of divine adoption through grace enabled him to live daily in faith, hope and charity, constantly nurtured by the Word of God, the sacraments, prayer. At another level, we can locate his inclination to the extraordinary and preternatural, but also the natural, as freely given divine presence through special intervention: predictions, readings of consciences, premonitions. In his brief work *Il divoto dell'angelo custode* (Devotee of the Guardian Angel), at least one of the examples, the one following the third consideration, seems to come from the author's belief that he was witness to and in some way a mediator of a direct experience of the extraordinary. He writes of 'a fact that occurred recently' and the suggestion given to a penitent about to undertake a long journey, to 'recommend himself to his Guardian Angel for a safe journey' and the fact that this person was subsequently miraculously unscathed in a serious road accident.<sup>173</sup>

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173 [G. Bosco], *Il divoto dell'angelo custode...*, pp. 21-23, OE I 107-109.

## Part Three

# Don Bosco Founder for Young People around the World

### Introduction

The first part of Don Bosco's life was fully realised when he achieved his vocation as a diocesan priest dedicated to the apostolate to young people and ordinary folk. He had arrived at this point thanks to educational processes intentional or otherwise, which had helped shape his personality, gradually enriching it with characteristic features.

The first dimension had come to him from what, in the language of his day he called *patria*, meaning his birthplace, family and the context in which the family was rooted with all the experiences offered and assimilated, its traditions, the countryside, farm work, morality, faith.

Other traits came to him from his sixteenth year onward: his school culture, especially Latin, rhetoric, which became visible in his sermons but which he also encouraged and had others encourage in the schools, boarding establishments he founded.

During his priestly formation stage, the culture he assimilated at the seminary, the *Convitto* in Turin, further enriched him, as well as his choice of personal reading in specific subjects and for specific ends.

Yet another dimension came from practice, his contact with the city, highlighting for him the economic, social, cultural, moral and religious needs of the weaker generation thrust into it – young people flooding into the city in search of work, the unemployed, and the abandoned. Then came the oratory and its development as an open, flexible institution of early intervention, with hints of a more adequate institution in the 'house attached,' the hospice, aimed at a more radical solution to problems and responding to the expectations of youth who needed to be assured of a future in the midst of such a range of cultural, professional, social, moral and religious changes happening around them.

### 1. Radical shifts as the 1860s approach

Over the end of the 1850s and early 1860s we begin to see two relatively new dimensions of Don Bosco's personality and life story emerge. They signalled his definitive direction in life. The first of these was the historically essential continuation and perfecting of his earlier experiences of welfare work and education by choosing one form of these that would become fundamental and widespread. While the oratory was a valid approach it was not a perfect institution, structurally and financially fragile as it was. Expenses there certainly were but income was much less assured. More to the point, it was at least partly inadequate as a measure of total prevention for young people who were most abandoned and at risk. As he had himself anticipated in the *Cenni storici*, the phenomenon which Pietro Stella has nicely encapsulated as 'collegialisation' was historically inevitable. It was foreseeable from the early years when the oratory had become a Sunday and night school, a 'desk' for placement and follow-up for work arrangements for the unemployed, a gathering place for the poorest and most abandoned. It then had to necessarily develop into

hospices, 'colleges' [boarding schools], hostels for academic and trade students, technical-vocational and agricultural schools. This change meant integration, the broadening of supportive activity and range of educational offerings, a whole gamut of practical versions of the preventive system already experienced in a fruitful way in the early oratory, and which had also flourished in his early writings.

The other shift, radical in its outcome even if gradually so, was something happening within this evolution. Experience was about to demonstrate that voluntary staff did not guarantee stability, continuity, homogeneous activity at a time when the world of young people was becoming an even more complex one, and abandonment and poverty even more widespread and multifaceted. This meant a radical rethink regarding the problem of his workforce, their spiritual and legal status, and how they were organised. It finally led Don Bosco to choose a religious society alongside other forms of association.

Hence another decisive and completely new period in his life opened up. Now associated with the cares and expansion of his youth and popular works were the concerns and processes involved in stabilising structures of support and leadership: the Society of St Francis de Sales, the FMA Institute, and the Salesian Cooperator Union. Contemporaneously, 1875 saw his final great initiative, the missionary one, so new and unforeseen that it had not even been mentioned in the officially approved Constitutions in 1874. What followed quickly was the universal application of educational methods and the so-called Salesian spirit, giving life to a global, operational and spiritual movement. It is clear that reconstructing Don Bosco's biography now becomes more complicated and requires considerable effort to avoid losing sight of any of its significant aspects. Obviously the task of reconciling diachronic and synchronic points of view remain, along with the care needed to take as unified an approach as possible to recalling the various events.

This complex of events can be divided into three distinct sections falling into the years 1859–69, 1869–82, and 1882–88. Other than the establishment of youth institutions outside Turin, the first of these periods saw the difficult path leading to papal approval of the Society of St Francis de Sales and the beginning of what one could call 'the era of Mary Help of Christians.'

The period of greatest intensity of activity and animation followed, where Don Bosco was at the height of his physical strength and creative enterprise, yet was held back at times by misunderstanding and painful, sometimes even dramatic episodes. It peaked with the internationalisation of his works. In the third period we have the final years of his life, a time of consolidation, tenacious contact with a wider range of supporters and benefactors, and finally recollection and withdrawal, silence and patient waiting for the end.

## **2. Sources and historiography**

The patrimony of documentation we can draw on and work with regarding this historical period has grown enormously. It was a time when Don Bosco was more intensely involved in drawing up official and unofficial documents relating to his youth works and supportive institutions. There was a much increased band of witnesses, a multiplication of reports and recollections recording his words and deeds at the time as well as recalling past events, and his correspondence was much more voluminous.

More than posing a problem of selection, the issue is one of the historical value of such testimonies, not just their merit as examples. The real life story was a complex one, but no less complex because the narrated version and whoever writes about Don Bosco has to deal with this.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Cf. *General Introduction*, § 3.

## 2.1. Don Bosco's own testimony

With regard to the historical quality of documents going back to Don Bosco himself, it seems the right moment to offer at least four sets of considerations on four aspects: 1) Their intrinsic relationship with the notion of history inspiring the author. 2) The purposes he pursued in drawing them up, given the concrete circumstances and their target readership, clerical or lay, believer or non-believer. 3) The animation and formation intentions he established for members of his religious family. 4) The objectives and methods he had established for the education of young people.<sup>2</sup>

It seems important to bear in mind, above all, the concept of history common to so many of the written items aimed at providing information on the origin and development of his works, be they youth works or those of his Congregation, to which Don Bosco gives titles such as *Cenno storico* (Historical outline), *Cenni storici* (Historical outlines), *Breve notizia* (Brief note), *Memorie* (Memoirs), *'Cose da notarsi'* (things to be noted). It is the same concept he had assimilated from his secular and religious wider reading from which he drew material for his history texts on the Bible, Church, Italy. As we have seen,<sup>3</sup> these depend on ideas spelt out by Bossuet in his famous *Discurs sur l'histoire universelle*: written history must reflect what really happened, which is the history of God and man, grace and sin, mercy and judgement, choice and rejection. From the perspective of the theologian and the believing historians, God's providential activity is promised to the Church in particular and this latter is guaranteed indefectibly and infallibly. Christ is always with his Church and his activity is especially visible in the most difficult times: the persecutions in the Roman Empire, the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, current harassments, some more obvious than others.

Speaking of 16th century reforms, Don Bosco noted that: 'It was by God's special disposition and providence that at a time when heretics were attempting to destroy the Church, teams of religious, holy teachers arose who helped the Church flourish once more around the world through many glorious events: Theatines, Capuchins, Jesuits ...' <sup>4</sup> This is the Don Bosco who does not surrender to difficulties, legitimate though they may be, created by prejudiced politicians or lying officials (or those he considered as such). This is the 'Don Bosco' who predicts the future, reads consciences, has dreams of premonition and has his own homely manner of appropriating ideas from Lattanzio's *De mortibus persecutorum*. He feels immersed in the 'sacred', the 'supernatural' understood as God's constant presence visibly and tangibly at work in history; ordinary and not so ordinary Providence as found in the Bible and which Don Bosco then extends occasionally through summary reference to it in his narrative works: the *Storia sacra*, the *Vite dei papi* of the first three centuries, the *Storia ecclesiastica* and the *Storia d'Italia*.

To this basic historical perspective we can then add his particular penchant for the extraordinary that could lead him to give easy credit to private revelation. These could then lead to predictions of imminent disasters or certain preservation from it, of persecutions or 'triumphs', as happened when writing to Pius IX in the 1860s.<sup>5</sup> We see this, for example, in 1855 on the occasion of debate on the 'law on convents.'<sup>6</sup>

The same mentality was obvious when, on 12 June 1859, he sent Count Crotti di Costigliole the

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2 Cf. regarding the validity and use of Don Bosco's published, printed output, P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 229-248 (*Don Bosco scrittore ed editore*); R. FARINA, *Leggere don Bosco oggi. Note e suggestioni metodologiche*, in P. BROCARDI (ed.), *La formazione permanente interpella gli Istituti religiosi*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1976, pp. 349-404.

3 Cf. Chap. 5, § 5.

4 G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica...*, p. 297, OE I 455.

5 There are some discerning and enlightening pages on Don Bosco's religious mentality regarding the various expressions of the extraordinary, in *Storia e salvezza*, P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II...*, pp. 59-73.

6 Cf. Letter of 7 June 1855 to Fr D. Rademacher, Em I 257; see Chap. 10, § 1.

'famous prophecy of the nun from Taggia in its original' and assured him that: 'Things noted there are being fulfilled each day; if all of them are fulfilled we face a sad future.'<sup>7</sup>

Of great interest is his own testimony from an evening conversation on 2 February 1876, regarding the 'history of the Congregation' and the extraordinary deeds accompanying it from its origins. Of no less interest is the implicit faith of the chroniclers who are no mere secondary source of biographies of Don Bosco. 'Other Congregations or Religious Orders' he confided [in his Salesians] 'began with some inspiration, vision, some supernatural deed which gave impetus to their foundation and reassured it. But in most cases, things ceased with one or just a handful of these deeds. But here, instead, things have gone ahead very differently. We could say that there is nothing we have not previously known about; the Congregation has taken no step without being advised by some supernatural event. There is no alteration or improvement or expansion that has not been preceded by a command from the Lord ... For example, we have been able to write down first all the things we have then seen happen.'<sup>8</sup>

No less relevant for writing history – for young people and people in general – was the influence of the pedagogical objective explicitly proposed by the author, where he interprets the classic concept of *historia magistra vitae* in its strictest sense. When reconstructed, it not only *is* but *must be* written that way. He spelt out his criterion clearly in a letter to historian Michele Amari, who had told him 'there were things that were not true' in the *Storia d'Italia*. 'Speaking to a knowledgeable person' Don Bosco replied 'I can say that by "*not true*" you mean the manner in which we understand them, because *as for the historical truth* I have been scrupulous in following the most respected ancient and modern authors. Then I consider the manner of understanding things, or the spirit of history, and I will tell you that among the various books printed under my name I list the *Storia sacra*, *Storia ecclesiastica* and the *Storia d'Italia* ... *My aim*, and everyone can see this in every chapter, [is] to instil moral ideas and lead the young reader to a consideration of the divine Law which obliges every human being to observe human law ...'<sup>9</sup> Perhaps a doubt still remains: individual facts, by hypothesis are objective, but will the history taken as a whole be objective given his aim, which implies selection for a particular end, rewritten with the concern of making it more clearly effective educationally?

A second set of considerations concerns the critical problem posed by the historical elements Don Bosco incorporates into documents he sent officially to one or other authority to provide information. There are many of these, in the first instance those relating to the Salesian Society especially during the different stages of its approval – 1864, 1869, and 1874. We can group these with requests for authorisation or concessions, his defence and counter-accusations, during quite a number of disputes, his 'presentations' and clarifications provided for civil or Church offices or departments.

Hence, it does not seem to be rash to issue a warning that the writer has a general tendency to guide and adjust factual data and other content to assist his end purpose. As well as exaggerating real circumstances and statistics, he does not hesitate to manage dates, origins, developments and history when he needs to, out of a concern to demonstrate that what he wants approved has distant origins, is presented with a consistency proven by its vitality over time, and is trustworthy. Classic cases are the beginning of the Oratory, the Society of St Francis de Sales, the Cooperators Union.<sup>10</sup>

It is similarly the case for what, from 1858 onward, Don Bosco said and passed on to his

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7 Em I 378-379.

8 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, pp. 40-42.

9 Letter of May-June 1863, Em I 585. Emphasis is ours.

10 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel «Cenno storico» del 1873/1874*, RSS 6 (1987) 256-260; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco*. Bologna, Il Mulino 2001, pp. 109-111

collaborators to keep them informed and to encourage them in Salesian life. At this level, too, the pedagogical motive is often interwoven with what he considered to be supernatural or clearly providential, especially where the origins of things are concerned, for example, that they came into existence on the Feast of the Assumption; his dream at 9 years of age, his early studies, the encounter with Bartholomew Garelli and the beginning of the Oratory, and premonitions concerning the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

Also along these lines are ideas, beliefs, and feelings in documentation regarding his educational activity, true and properly speaking, on behalf of young people. These materials pose serious problems of reading and interpretation both with regard to Don Bosco's mindset and his concrete system of educating at Valdocco.

It seems we need to keep the theological framework as such, or even the simpler catechetical scheme within which we locate matters, quite distinct from the debatable persuasion of popular religiosity concerning the miraculous, or deeds recorded as being of heavenly origin by chroniclers who were especially sensitive to this possibility and whose views were accepted by interpreters who showed them deference and fellow-feeling. We could sometimes even hypothesise a Don Bosco who was overly assailed by the state of his boys' consciences, by the risk of their being damned in the absence of sacramental confession, the nightmare of precise accounts in examining conscience, the integrity and sincerity of confession, worrying about the risk of sacrilegious confessions, the sense of sin, the inevitability of death understood as guardian or safeguard for the state of grace.

This is the Don Bosco of the warning dreams, the yearly *strennas* or New Year greetings, with predictions as to who would die (and confirmation of these was anticipated, analysed, verified by his enchanted 'sons') then translated into fear, with occasional meditations, reflections, and '*fioretti*' on the state of the soul and God's judgement. Thoughts of his own death seem to be associated with this over 1861-62: 'I am already old and will soon go to the grave to present myself to the Lord with empty hands' he exclaimed on 10 February 1861.<sup>11</sup> On 12 May he said: 'I do not think of death, but do everything as if it were the last thing in my life.'<sup>12</sup> He added the belief, which he expressed often from 12 February onward, that in the past (and it was still the case) he had been the victim of diabolical harassment, instead of this being understood as the extreme tension resulting from overwork and worry.<sup>13</sup>

The chronicler established a strong connection between those confidences and the fact that at the time Don Bosco 'was preparing' or rather got someone else to prepare 'an issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* with the title "The Powers of Darkness".<sup>14</sup> In September, a booklet appeared entitled, *The powers of darkness or dogmatic and moral observations on evil spirits and cursed men, followed by a report on a diabolical possession which occurred in the Val della Tovre in 1858*.<sup>15</sup> The author, at Don Bosco's invitation, was a Capuchin, Carlo Filippo da Poirino, who based himself on information provided by eye witnesses – both priests and faithful. Prayers, celebration of Masses, blessings, were all conducted by the Provost of the town, Fr Guglielmo Burzio, who died at 47 years of age on 14 December 1861. Don Bosco was not the author of the report and the Capuchin priest did not perform the exorcisms.<sup>16</sup>

Again, in reference to the early months of 1862, some interesting information is found in

11 Cf. G. BONETTI, *Annali I 1860 1861*, pp. 2, 12-13.

12 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863*, p. 51.

13 Cf. G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, pp. 19-21, 27-28, 34-35, 46-47.

14 G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, p. 21.

15 Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1862, 128 pp.

16 Inaccurate information is provided in the article by L. BORELLO, *Maggio 1850: due indemoniati nel Santuario della Consolata a Torino*, «Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino» 86 (1988), pp. 274-275 and nos 9-10.

Bonetti's chronicles: 'Over these days he is often talking about the miseries of this life and the beauty of paradise; he says he wants to get there quickly and get beyond his own poor self, that he no longer had the strength to do what he has to do and wants to do etc. We are really afraid he will soon be leaving us. May God save us from this misfortune.'<sup>17</sup>

With regard to educational indications, it is obvious that information from commentators and chroniclers needs to be placed within the broader chronological and institutional framework of the limited and selected experiences at Valdocco in particular years. In order to have an overall view of Don Bosco's pedagogy, we should not overlook many other contemporary recollections and should try to harmonise them: the 'Lives' of the three exemplary boys, the letter to Fr Rua at the end of October 1863, which would become the classic *Ricordi confidenziali* or *Confidential Reminders*, the *Cenni storici* etc. It is not a legitimate approach to be outlining the whole on the basis of special phenomena extrapolated from normal everyday life and described as if they were high points. Nevertheless it is true that after recording many somewhat anxious predictions concerning the insistence on death as a topic, Fr Lemoyne records the goodnight on 16 March 1865, saying that Don Bosco concluded with a partial justification. It was an implicit admission that his words were causing some real pain for some of his young listeners: 'When I come here announcing that another person has to die, please tell me if some are scared and are writing to their families asking them to take them out of the Oratory because D. Bosco is always saying someone has to die ... But to anyone who is so afraid of death I say this: my sons, do your duty, do not get involved in filthy talk, approach the sacraments, don't be a glutton and death will hold no fears for you.'<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2. Testimonies of Salesian Chroniclers

The witnesses who are authors of chronicles, memoirs, annals, are almost all Don Bosco's former pupils. The only commentator (his future historian and annals writer) who does not belong to that group of boys is the priest from Genoa, John Baptist Lemoyne (1839–1916). He was twenty five when he came to the Oratory midway through October 1864. He immediately demonstrated his predisposition to a conservative if not reactionary culture. He was immediately captivated by Don Bosco and was gifted with a capacity to idealise things, equalling and surpassing that of the men who had lived with the founder since they were teenagers.<sup>19</sup>

These too, though to different degrees, had similar mindsets and sensitivities, from John Bonetti and Dominic Ruffino over the period from 1856–65 to Don Bosco's secretary, Fr Joachim Berto and Michael Rua in the late 1860s and beyond, the novice master Guilio Barberis, Caesare Chiala and Joseph Lazzerio in the 1870s, and Fr Lemoyne in the 1880s, and finally the young theology student, then priest, Charles Viglietti from 1884–88. They all seemed to collect, record then pass on things in a way inspired by the intentions expressed by members of the 'society' or 'commission' set up in March 1861 with a view to ascertaining, then passing on to prosperity, information relating to Don Bosco's life, not only at the time but also from earlier years. Of course, they were only sharing ideas and states of mind that Don Bosco himself thought and communicated regarding the same matters. Stella has said, 'The decade from 1853–63 is the one where we find most of his initiatives in embryonic form or fully brought to maturity. Even the early concern for the Salesian Congregation is there ... the fact that the Oratory was the subject of particular divine favours was by then beginning to be well known, accepted or debated. It was spoken of outside Piedmont too, including by anticlerical newspapers. Don Bosco shared responsibility for this because it was something he was convinced of. These matters encouraged Don Bosco's first collaborators in

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17 G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, pp. 47-48

18 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 16 March 1865, p. 118.

19 Cf. P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne attraverso 20 lettere a don Michele Rua*, RSS 7 (1988) 92-114.



Valdocco not to let the marvellous things they had witnessed be forgotten.<sup>20</sup>

The motives for which the commission was established are interesting. They are specified in Fr Ruffino's *Cronaca* as he detailed its first steps: 'The greatest and luminous gifts resplendent in D. Bosco, the extraordinary things he has achieved and that we admire in him every day, his unique way of leading young people along the difficult path of virtue, the grand plans he displays for the future – these things show us something of the supernatural in him and presage more glorious days ahead for him and the Oratory. It imposes a strict duty of gratitude on us, an obligation to prevent anything pertaining to D. Bosco from falling into oblivion, and to do whatever is in our power to preserve record of them so that one day such luminous deeds may enlighten the world for the benefit of the young. This is the aim of the commission we have set up.'<sup>21</sup>

This aspect of the marvellous seems to have had most impact in polarising the attention of the commission's members in the collection and selection of information and conversion of it into chronicles and annals. As a result, information is scarce or entirely absent on the ordinary life of the Oratory, on Don Bosco's administration and ordinary management, his relationships with civic and ecclesiastical authorities and on his everyday life in general.

We note the common longing for the extraordinary over 1860–87: predictions, dreams, reading consciences. Page after page is given to recording predictions and checking their fulfilment, attempting in subsequent editing to balance the relatively small number of deaths predicted with the higher number of actual deaths. Sometimes we hear dreams referred to as visions: even Lemoyne sees them as obviously such from the opening pages of the *cronaca* he began a few days after coming to the Oratory.

This is far from the judgement which the learned and prudent teacher of Moral Theology, Auxiliary Bishop of Turin, Giovanni Battista Bertagna (1828-1905), put to the Diocesan Information Process for Don Bosco's beatification and canonisation. Bertagna came from the same area as Don Bosco dId.<sup>22</sup> After admitting that he had gone along once to one of the boys' gatherings 'in the sacristy of the Church of St Francis of Assisi, which had begun in 1843' his view of the extraordinary was put in the following terms: 'I have often heard that the Servant of God made prophecies, that he read the hearts of the people, that he made hidden things manifest. I have never heard a strong argument for believing these things to be true. D. Bosco was gifted with a very keen intellect, however uncultured it seemed to be. Furthermore he was fully informed of matters in the house and of the characters and habits of the boys and those who dealt with him, so it is no wonder that he could actually foresee certain things which others could not and which many of them, might have thought of as real prophecies. However, I believe it is true that D. Bosco had the supernatural gift of healing the sick. I heard it from him himself when we were on retreat at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius near Lanzo on one occasion. He told me so he could receive advice whether or not to continue blessing the sick with holy pictures of Mary Help of Christians and the Saviour. He said there were rumours going around, because of the many recoveries that had occurred which smacked of the miraculous, following the blessings he had given. I believe that D. Bosco was telling the truth. For good or ill I advised D. Bosco to continue with his blessings.'<sup>23</sup>

Fr Leonard Murialdo, Rector of the Artigianelli College for some twenty years, went to France for some thermal treatment and wrote to the man who eventually succeeded him as leader of his

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20 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 117-118.

21 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863 1864. Le doti grandi e luminose*, p. 1.

22 Noted in the quoted *Repertorio domestico*: "Cleric Bertagna came to D. Bosco on 2 November 1847. Monthly boarding fee fr. 50. He stayed until the Immaculate Conception" (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 563).

23 To Fr Giulio Costantino, 18 July 1886, S. LEONARDO MURIALDO *Epistolario*, ed. A. Marengo, Vol. III. Turin, Libr. Editrice Murialdana 1971, p. 170.

Congregation: 'I am reading the life of Don Bosco in French [by d'Espiney] because they are amazed here that I am not up to date with Don Bosco's grey dog, and remarkable things like that.'<sup>24</sup>

From a different perspective (and we need to add in the dreams we will discuss next) was the kind of in-house hagiography often full of emotion, particularly sensitive to Don Bosco's charm and the aura of the extraordinary that went with it, and his growing social impact. But it was all with very little understanding of the wider civil, political, social, and ecclesial historical contexts within which the ordinary household events at the Oratory were taking place. As for any evaluation at the doctrinal level, it seems preference should be given to those who attempt, from a faith perspective, to locate the real or supposed numinous elements of Don Bosco's life within the workings of grace and its wonders (infused theological and moral virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit) available to every baptised member of the faithful whatever his or her vocation, rather than venturing into theological reflection based on a problematic mixture of the supernatural and the extraordinary.<sup>25</sup>

Presentations of a 'revealed' or 'nocturnal' Don Bosco are dubious. On the basis of arbitrary, artificially selective documentation with lots of gaps in it, such presentations focus on an assumed 'enigmatic' or 'mysterious' side of his life, taken as an historically separate issue. They exaggerate its consistency and significance. The approach ends up being fraudulent and unconsciously shared and encouraged by credulous disciples.<sup>26</sup> It seems more essential than ever to accept the criterion for historiography spelt out by a serious scholar of Don Bosco's real texts and contexts: 'While it is legitimate to want to highlight particular implications of Don Bosco's rich personality, it remains essential to do this in strict relationship with the overall perspective and basic conviction of his life.'<sup>27</sup> He was no shaman, nor visionary nor dreamer in the way he worked in practice and managed educational matters. In the overall picture, the things that dominate, without argument, are his peasant shrewdness, wise realism, controlled sense of daring, intuitive enterprise, solid faith, resplendent and ardent love. There is no lack of documentation for these things, beginning with the thousands of letters which are an autobiography.

### 3. Dreams

Don Bosco was a born storyteller and an avid creator of dialogues. He invented them and gave them their form and content. He even described himself as a 'poet' where things and words were concerned. 'You are a musician, I am a poet by profession' he wrote to Fr Cagliero in Argentina in the summer of 1876, in reference to plans that had not been realised for India and Australia.<sup>28</sup>

Dialogue was often a pedagogical, didactic expedient, but it did reflect a mindset which sought to represent concrete and doable things through images more than by expressing them as concepts. He even dared use the dialogue form in a document sent to the cardinals and prelates involved in the approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society, in order to offer them its

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24 To Fr Giulio Costantino, 18 July 1886, S. LEONARDO MURIALDO *Epistolario*, ed. A. Marengo, Vol. III. Turin, Libr. Editrice Murialdana 1971, p. 170.

25 Cf. as well C. PERA, *I doni dello Spirito Santo nell'anima del b. Giovanni Bosco*, E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*. Turin, SEI 1929, 223 pp., extended in the 1947 edition, *Colle Don Bosco*, Libreria della Dottrina Cristiana, 393 pp., Chapters XVI *Dono del consiglio*, pp. 282-302, XVII *Sogni, visioni, estasi e miracoli*, pp. 303-326, XVIII *Dono di orazione*, pp. 327-349: however, it needs updated and more thorough historical and theological references.

26 Cf. For example, M. L. STRANIERO, *Don Bosco rivelato*. Milan, Camunia 1987, 199 pp. However, it is to be hoped that the author's provocations can encourage a historiographical development that among other things can assist in not confusing the supernatural with what is possibly preternatural, or with the parapsychological or even sheer imagination of the chief character and his followers.

27 A. GIRAUDDO, *Don Bosco travisato*, "Studi Cattolici", no. 316, June 1987, p. 371.

28 E III 53-55.

‘somewhat different basis from already existing Congregations.’<sup>29</sup> With just an average theological, moral, historical, hagiographical and catechetical culture behind him, Don Bosco did not venture into constructing definitions, theoretical frameworks and systems. He preferred history and narrative. This is why he found it easy to write and invent biographical, novel-like accounts, and composed and staged dialogues and dramas. And in moral, religious and catechetical communications he found the usual didactic forms inadequate, since they were limited to communicating ideas or doctrines or the bare truth. What resulted was his free abandonment to fantasy, parable, simile, dreams and visions. This was the scene he was at home with and not a little inventive with, also because he had some uncommon skills: magician, dreamer, sensitive to the occult but also, we believe, by God’s free gift he was an enlightened individual who was reassured by special assistance from on high.

At the beginning of 1862, he gave the boys at the Oratory an individual *strenna* each and told them it came from Our Lady, but the texts could easily have been his own work, so obvious and common-place were they, although naturally inspired by his deep devotion to Mary.

Don Bosco often encouraged his listeners not to place special credence in his dreams, if we leave aside the ones in his final years which he recounted with a degree of solemnity and emotion to members of the Superior Chapter. These were really about him and belonged to a particular period in his life.<sup>30</sup> His thinking seems to be more generally summed up in the important recommendation he made to Bishop Cagliero in 1885, when someone at Valdocco liked sending new and old texts of dreams to South America. Lemoyne himself, sometimes a fervent supporter of the identity of the dreams and visions and their supernatural origins, emphasised their pedagogical aspect above all: ‘So, explaining various dreams to the boys, which we will speak about in due course, he chose what could be of most use to them, this being the intention of the one inspiring those mysterious revelations.’<sup>31</sup> Further on, having recorded the dream of the snake and the rope, he commented: ‘These dreams essentially represent the reality of life, and through D. Bosco’s words they manifest the intimate state of one, even a hundred communities where not a few wretched things can be found amid some wonderful virtue.’<sup>32</sup>

Don Bosco was especially interested in the emotional impact and the effectiveness of the dreams for the boys’ moral reform, and the vigilance of the Salesians. This is why they were never intended for the public but reserved for residents at the Oratory or one of the colleges, and for members of the Salesian Society.

On 31 December 1860, after telling the dream whose main characters were Joseph Cafasso, Silvio Pellico, Count Cays, he explained: ‘This was the dream, so now let each one interpret it as he wishes, but always give it the weight a dream deserves. However, if there is something that could be of use to our souls then take it. But I would not like anyone to go off telling this dream outside. I am telling you because you are my sons, but I don’t want you telling it to others.’<sup>33</sup>

This recommendation was conveyed by various chronicles in various circumstances. Ruffino, for example: ‘Let what is said here not be propagated outside but spoken of among us. Not that someone commits a sin by telling it outside but it is better that it stay among us. So speak about it, laugh and joke about it among ourselves, do what you want and speak about it only with individuals whom you think it is okay to speak with.’<sup>34</sup> Ruffino again: ‘Give this dream the

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29 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 10-17, OE XXV 240-247.

30 Cf. Chap. 34, § 6.

31 MB VI 879.

32 MB VII 243.

33 MB VII 243. G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 68.

34 D. RUFFINO *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863*, p. 2.

importance you want. What I am telling you is that if you place full trust in it, don't do your soul any harm. This is why I am recommending that these matters not be spoken of outside the Oratory. I am telling you everything, right down to my faults, but I want it all kept inside.'<sup>35</sup> Provera: 'let no one write or speak about what I tell you, outside. Speak among yourselves, laugh, do what you want, but among yourselves.'<sup>36</sup> And Lemoyne: 'The things I am telling you, I hope are not spoken about outside the Oratory. Speak of them among yourselves as much as you want, but keep them among yourselves.'<sup>37</sup>

They can be useful material for a more complete picture, or rather, for confirming features of Don Bosco's mentality, his spiritual outlook and his pedagogy. Their context, of course, is consistent with other expressions and ways he communicated his thinking – sermons, conferences, the goodnights, written material and emotional implications of the context. The dream context did not add any new ideas to Don Bosco's pastoral, educative, ascetic and spiritual viewpoints, but it did invest them with events, images, transformations wrapped up in mystery, producing particular echoes in the individual and collective psychology of his listeners. What a renowned German-speaking pedagogue has written does not reflect the reality: 'Here we reach a point which offers the most important key for understanding John Bosco's pedagogy. In Don Bosco's life the great decisions were determined by inspirations, visions or dreams whose religious origins one can absolutely have no doubt about.'<sup>38</sup>

The undoubted relevance of the dreams needs to be sought elsewhere in their pedagogical and pastoral worth: the objectives for which they were told, the effectiveness of the narrator, including expectations, how they were heard, noted down, commented on. It is natural that together with his sermons, and reading consciences, they ended up finding particular resonance in the boys' psychology and for Don Bosco's astonished collaborators. He must have exercised exceptional fascination over the boys, arousing especially strong impressions: of wonder, admiration, emotion, fear, as well as some questions and anxious expectation to follow. Be it positive or negative, the mystery surrounding the dreams, the belief (but by whom? How much?) that they were of supernatural origin, the colourful manner of their telling, their strong moral connotations of approval or condemnation, could only have had a cathartic and formative impact.

What is clear is the benefit that can be drawn from using them to gain a richer, more realistic critical history of Don Bosco's ideas, even if we hold back from taking any position regarding their presumed extraordinary nature: between myth and logos there is no solution of continuity. Pietro Stella has this insightful observation to make about the relationship between dreams and Marian spirituality: 'The dreams are a characteristic source of devotion for the Oratory and Don Bosco's circle of immediate helpers: ... shepherdess, guide, queen, mother, the Lady of the Dreams is one of the elements which characterises devotion to Our Lady at the Oratory. Don Bosco's conviction becomes everyone's conviction, boys and Salesians. Don Bosco and his works were especially protected by the Blessed Virgin; nothing took place without the palpable proof that the Virgin Mary had intervened to suggest solution, smooth difficulties or protect from diabolical snares. The Marian dreams contributed to a collective persuasion that Mary's devotees were the subject of special graces: the dreams were an assurance that everyone, each one living with Don Bosco, was a part of this special charism.'<sup>39</sup>

Whoever is familiar with the Catholic theology of Revelation and Grace knows that none of it has any need for dreams as proof, but simply of an open, firm faith.

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35 D. RUFFINO, [*Cronaca*]. 1861 1862 1863 1864. *Le doti grandi e luminose...*, 14 April 1862, p. 37.

36 F. PROVERA, *Cronaca*, 22 August 1862, p. 4

37 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 16 gennaio 1865 p. 76.

38 F. PÖGGELER, *Pädagogische Visionen und Reflexionen*. Bad Heilbrunn, J. Klinkhardt 1965, p. 85.

39 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia delle religiosità cattolica II...*, p. 153.

While Don Bosco was narrating his dreams, a young theologian, M.J. Scheeben (1835–88) was writing *Le Meraviglie della grazia divina* (The wonders of divine grace). But in Turin, the narrator was acting as an educator and is remembered as such in his reality and historical significance.<sup>40</sup>

Naturally, when writing a history of Don Bosco, such history is not fully expressed within the confines of these discussions. The Don Bosco of history is much more, and almost all of it lies elsewhere. This is Don Bosco the radiant figure, the doer, the builder, in intense and increasing relationships with civil and religious society, always moving toward the expansion and consolidation of his youth and popular initiatives, working tenaciously at planting and enabling his Religious Institutes, and the works and branches associated with them. It is a difficult but necessary and fascinating task to see and understand him in the totality of his existence.

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40 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia delle religiosità cattolica II...*, p. 153.

## Section one

# FIRST DECADE AS A FOUNDER (1859–70)

### Founder

Don Bosco could never have imagined the expansion of his original Oratory experience into colleges and hospices, even less so outside Turin, had he not begun to think about and then realise his plans for a stable organisation of workers. How would he have guaranteed continuity and unity in the management and methods of new and different institutions if it was already difficult to ensure this for the three oratories in Turin? Even his publishing and writing activities raised similar issues, especially *Letture Cattoliche*, where he was already committed to a greater degree of promotion in Piedmont, Liguria, Florence and Rome.

Once the Church of Mary Help of Christians was built beside the Oratory, and once it became the mother church of other similar institutions, Mary Help of Christians was certainly also thought of as the natural inspiration for and protector of the new Religious Society, even before the Institute which took its name from her was founded. It is a set of inspirations, ideas, works, and institutions beginning with a biographical unity to be kept constantly in mind, despite the inevitable analytical reconstruction of the various existentially interwoven events.

After years of slow gestation, the decisive moment for the Salesian Society's coming into being could be thought of as Don Bosco's Roman sojourn in 1858, even though the very first time it came together occurred in December 1859 (Chapter 12). Preceding this was the attention given to the development of the very early college structures and problems relating to this (Chapter 13). Linked with these matters were initiatives to give the Society of St Francis de Sales its first canonical legitimacy, the genesis of devotion to Mary Help of Christians its great protector, and the building of the church by that name, as well as the extension of relationships beyond the region (Chapter 14), and the broadening of activities within his youth institutions beyond Piedmont as far as Rome.

This all implied a work of spiritual and educational leadership and animation and a broadening of cultural and publishing initiatives bound up with some bitter moments connected with the *Letture Cattoliche* (Chapter 15). Finally, in the second half of the decade, two major events occurred, following two lengthy procedures whose paths crossed – papal approval of the Salesian Society (Chapter 16) and growth in devotion to Mary Help of Christians, potentially a universal devotion, with its attractive focus and driving force located in the church consecrated to her in June 1868 (Chapter 17).

## Chapter 12

### Genoa and Rome – Prelude to Change (1858–61)

- 1857      May: Clarifying matters with Urbano Rattazzi;  
            Meeting with Fr Francesco Montebruno in Genoa and Turin.
- 1858      18 February: Departure for Genoa and Rome with cleric Rua.  
            21: arrival in Rome, guest of Count Rodolfo De Maistre and family;  
            23: discussion with Cardinal Gaude;  
            4 March: request for consultation with Fr Pagani;  
            9: At Cardinal Gaude's – papal audience;  
            13: letter from Marquis Gustavo di Cavour;  
            21 or 23: papal audience (semi-public?);  
            6 April: papal audience – leave-taking;  
            9: request for audience with Cardinal Antonelli;  
            14–16: departs Rome, arrives Turin;  
            12 June: letter from Cardinal Antonelli to Bishop Tortone regarding Franson case;  
            14: Don Bosco's letter to Pius IX;  
            7 July; negative reaction from Cardinal Antonelli;  
            4 August: Don Bosco ready to work with Camillo Cavour.
- 1859      18 December: first nucleus of the Salesian Society;  
            Autumn: takes over management of junior seminary at Giaveno.
- 1862      Autumn: Giaveno commitment ends.

The busy 1850s ended with an event of major significance: the encounter with the Catholic, ecclesiastical and secular world of Rome and the decisive meeting with Pius IX and Secretary of State, Cardinal Antonelli, not without some passing repercussions in Turin.

A man of many dimensions, Don Bosco headed off to the Eternal City in 1858 with more than one end in mind, though one end dominated. Given his enthusiasm for Church history, his involvement in catechesis including what he had said and written about the history of the popes, and given his love for the Church and its head, Don Bosco had long desired to be in live contact with Rome. For him, in the first instance, it was a pilgrimage. But given the development of initiatives on behalf of poor and abandoned boys, was there also an opportunity here to become known and to widen the circle of benefactors, supporters, and friends? He could also have wanted to get to know other oratories at the centre of Christianity as well as night schools, hospices, St

Vincent de Paul conferences, possibly even making a contribution from his own experience. Then, we add the need to extend awareness and dissemination of the *Letture Cattoliche* and the organisation needed for them to be available in another State (and what a State!), solving problems relating to postal services and severe censorship.

But one complex, bold purpose was what moved him above all others: 'The need to meet the Pope in person and receive his suggestions and encouragement for the work undertaken for the salvation of the young in Turin,'<sup>1</sup> and the possible establishment of some kind of association or congregation of clerics and lay people which would guarantee stability for the oratory initiative. This was not limited to festive oratories, but also included the hospice, which was even more demanding in terms of the necessary consistency of its personnel. During the pilgrimage he added one further, partly unforeseen motivation to all the others: mediation (others had failed) to provide a new Pastor for the Church in Turin, thus putting an end to the overly protracted absence in practice of a pastor, due to Archbishop Fransoni's exile in Lyons. Don Bosco, at 42 years of age was at the height of his manhood, full of energy and ideas. The impact of the Roman world could not have come at a better time. He found accommodation at Quattro Fontane in Via del Quirinale 49, with Count Rodolfo de Maistre (1789–1866, son of the renowned Joseph de Maistre. He was the father of Maria (1821–1905) who from 1847 became the wife of Marquis Domenico Fassati (1804–78), both Don Bosco's benefactors from the very beginning. The de Maistre's were a family with unshakeable faith in the Pope. Carlo Saverio (1832–97) the host's son, was the one who often accompanied Don Bosco around the city. After a few days, cleric Rua found hospitality with the Rosminians in Via Alessandrina, not far from the Via del Quirinale. Don Bosco carried with him a letter to those in charge of the St Vincent de Paul Conference in Rome from Count Cais, who was already a great protector and friend in Turin. Cardinal Francesco Gaude (1809–60), a member of various Roman congregations, was a Dominican from Chieri. Don Bosco had also corresponded on a number of occasions with Cardinal Antonelli, who had already appraised Pius IX of his existence and had, on a number of occasions, obtained spiritual favours for him and for the oratories.

A good deal of information on the Roman sojourn can be drawn from the diary kept almost entirely by cleric Rua, but always as if it were his superior who was writing.<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco explained in a letter to Fr Alasonatti why he was looking after it himself or having it written up by the one accompanying him: 'We have already seen a thousand things which we are keeping daily note of so that anyone who wants to can read it when we return.'<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Fr Montebruno's work in Genoa

The first stage of the journey brought the two travellers to Genoa where they were put up at the Dominican monastery adjacent to the Church of La Madonna del Castello (Our Lady of the Castle). The priest there was Fr Cottolengo, brother of St Joseph Cottolengo, the founder of the Little House of Divine Providence. Waiting for them at the stations. However, was Fr Montebruno's cousin with some boys. The diarist, who spent a few lines describing the place they were staying, wrote: 'They very kindly made us welcome, and taking our luggage, brought us to the *Artigianelli* work (trade boys) which is a home similar to our own oratory.'<sup>4</sup>

Fr Francesco Montebruno (1831–95) had begun work in 1857. Somewhere during 1856 or 1857 he had probably met Don Bosco in Genoa and Turin. The idea soon arose, and was made more

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1 F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli nel 1858*, RSS 5 (1986) 6.

2 Cf. *Viaggio a Roma 1858* [75 p.], ASC 118 *Viaggi*.

3 Letter of 7 March 1858, Em I 340.

4 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 4.



explicit in the subsequent months and years, of joining the two institutes. In a letter on 12 October 1864, Fr Montebruno called Don Bosco his 'father'.<sup>5</sup> There is earlier documentation. Twenty days after his stay in Genoa, Don Bosco asked for and obtained by rescript from Pius IX the faculty of a 'Private Oratory' so that 'the Sunday Mass precept and communion could be fulfilled' at the shelter in Turin at Valdocco, and for the other one to be known as the *Artigianelli*, a work run by Fr Francesco Montebruno.<sup>6</sup> Already in the first manuscript of the Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation, the second preface entitled *Origins of this Congregation*, ended with an indication of other institutions looking after 'poor and abandoned' boys beside the Oratory in Turin: 'This is also happening in Genoa at the Artigianelli work, where the Director is Fr Francesco Montebruno ... and also in the city of Alessandria where for now their care is entrusted to cleric Angelo Savio ...' Reference to Fr Montebruno returns in a note to article 5 of Chapter 3 of the Constitutions on *The purpose of this Society*, in a manuscript which was a carbon copy of a 'copy made in 1861.' '(1) Fr Francesco Montebruno, a member of this Society [?] opened a house known as the Artigianelli Work, opened in 1855 [sic] in Genoa. There are about a hundred boys living there and hundreds more come on Sundays.'<sup>7</sup> The text survives in its Latin version in manuscripts leading up to the printed edition in 1867, but was no longer included in that one.<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, the two priests were not in agreement on some points, especially the mentality, culture and greater disciplinary tolerance in the Genoese institute, and Montebruno's decisive involvement, beginning in November 1863, in setting up and managing the *Annali Cattolici* magazine. The name changed to *Rivista Universale* in 1866, supported by a group led by M. P. Salvago and M. Da Passano, inspired by the 'Catholics with the Pope, liberal with the Constitution' movement.

Religiously and politically opposed to this were intransigent groups unconditionally faithful to the Pope, including *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the *Osservatore Cattolico*, *L'Unità Cattolica* and also Bishop Magnasco.<sup>9</sup> It was certainly the pedagogical and political motivation which led the young Fr Lemoyne in October 1864 to cease his collaboration with Fr Montebruno and opt for Don Bosco.<sup>10</sup> He was against the novelties of his time. It was not long afterward that the idea of merging the two youth works in Genoa and Turin also fell through.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Encountering 'Holy Rome'

Don Bosco's passion and insatiable curiosity regarding the history of the early Church were what moved him as author of the *Storia ecclesiastica* and the lives of the popes from the first three centuries, to explore all the places within reach in the Rome of the popes and martyrs. Guiding these visits were members of the De Maistre family, or Roman priests and religious who took the visitors everywhere. Only rain stopped or slowed them down. The diary frequently indulges in extensive historical, archaeological, hagiographical notes and occasional apologetic ones, as if the diarist himself was recounting these things *viva voce*.

22 February, after a stop at the Gesù, was taken up with a visit to the Pantheon and the square in front. The following day was very full: as well as Cardinal Gaude at S. Maria Sopre Minerva and with Marquis Patrizi near St Louis (French church) they made a detailed visit to St Peters in

5 Cf. S. SCIACCALUGA, *Il grande Amico d'un Santo*, in "Nuovo Cittadino", 10 March 1938.

6 To Pius IX, March 1858, Em I 342.

7 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 28-29 and 68.

8 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 32 and 76.

9 Cf. O. CONFESSORE, *La "Rivista Universale". Chiesa e società civile dagli "Annali Cattolici" alla "Rassegna Nazionale"*, in *Spiritualità e azione del laicato cattolico italiano*, Vol. I. Padua, Antenore 1969, pp. 141-176.

10 Cf. P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 92-94.

11 Cf. Chap. 13, § 3.3.

Chains. 24 February was dedicated to St Mary Major's. 25 February saw a wealth of visits to holy places: S. Pudenziana, St Praxed, St John Lateran, the Obelisk, the Holy Steps. The 26th was dedicated to St Peter's, with an extremely detailed description betraying the pilgrim's papal faith.<sup>12</sup> This visit was completed a week later, 3 March, preceded by a walk to Castel Sant'Angelo. The exploration was a careful one, including the underground sections.<sup>13</sup> The Cupola visit was guided by Count Carlo de Maistre on Monday 8 March, and completed with a visit to the Vatican Museum.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, as we will indicate further on, the two pilgrims had been to the Tata Giovanni Hospice and, on Sunday 28, with Cardinal Antonelli. On 1 March they went from Our Lady of Victory in Trastevere to St Michael's hospice. On the way back they were able to see the Campidoglio, the Aracoeli, the Tarpeian rock and adjacent pagan temples. On 2 March they were at the Mamertine prison. On 3 March they visited St Peter's in the morning and in the afternoon St Andrews with the Jesuit Novitiate house and the Quirinale nearby. On 4 March they headed for the south of the city to visit the Holy Cross of Jerusalem where they were warmly welcomed by the Cistercian Abbot, a Piedmontese, who opened up their valuable library to them. On 10 March it was the turn for the western side of Rome, on the Gianicola: the basilica and catacombs of St Pancratius, managed by the discalced Carmelites, St Peter's in Montorio, the Ponte Sisto. Carmelite Father Giacinto came over to where they were staying to pick them up, then guided them on their visit, described in great detail, then brought them home. 12 March was dedicated to St Andrew's of the Valley where Don Bosco celebrated Mass, then the S. Gregorio al Celio basilica, St John's and St Paul's basilica run by the Passionists ('founded by a Piedmontese' the diarist noted) where they were guided by Fr Andrea from Genoa. On the way back they saw the arches of Constantinople and Titus and St Lawrence in Lucina. On the 13th they were received by Archbishop Alessandro (1795–1876) of the noble Asinari di S. Marzano family in Turin, titular Archbishop of Ephesus and Chief Custodian of the Vatican Library. He promised to put them in contact with renowned archaeologist Giovanni Battista De Rossi (1822–1894).

Visits were interrupted from 15–20 March. The Pope, who passed his wishes on through Archbishop de Merode, wanted Don Bosco to preach the retreat to inmates at the prison near Diocletian's Baths.

There are no diary entries for the rest of the time except for the week from Sunday 21 to Saturday 27, just a simple list of visits, sacred and secular, or other things done each day. The pilgrims went from one end of the city to the other: Our Lady of the Way, Trajan's Forum and adjacent sites, Sts Cosmas and Damian (21 March), St Paul Outside the Walls and St Paul's at Tre Fontane (22 March), Titus' and Constantine's arches once again, the Colosseum (23 March), St Clement's and the Quattro Coronati, St John's at Porta Latina, the Via Appia (24 March), St Stephen's Rotondo, S. Maria in Navicella (26 March). On 27 March, the vigil of Palm Sunday, the two went on pilgrimage with the De Maistre family to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Good Counsel at Genazzano, 40 kilometres from Rome and less than 10 kilometres from Palestrina, main city of the suburbicarian diocese by the same name. They were welcome with great deference by the Augustinians or Hermits of St Augustine who had a monastery there. It was late at night when they returned, and the following day they were admitted to St Peter's where among many others, they received their palms from the hands of His Holiness.

### **3. Meetings in Rome: getting to know and becoming known**

Don Bosco considerably extended his circle of acquaintances in Rome. Above all he had a very

<sup>12</sup> Eight dense foolscap pages of the chronicle are dedicated to it.

<sup>13</sup> A further six dense pages.

<sup>14</sup> Five chronicle pages.

emotional and personal meeting with Pius IX which was decisive for the history to follow. No less key were meetings with important cardinals: Giacomo Antonelli, Secretary of State, Costantino Patrizi, Vicar of the Holy See, the elderly Antonio Tosti (1776–1866) former Minister for Finance of the Papal States and Libraries of the Holy Roman Church, Francesco Gaude, and Pietro Marini, former Governor of Rome, these last two dying soon afterwards, in 1860 and 1863 respectively; prelates to the Curia, Archbishop Francesco Daverio de Merode, *Majordomo* and very close counsellor of Pius IX, Edwardo Borromeo of the papal household (made cardinal in 1868), the aristocratic Alessadro Asinari di San Marzano from Turin; religious of various orders and Congregations, especially priests managing *Civiltà Cattolica*, among whom Fr Bresciani whom he had already met in Turin and Fr Marchi.

Having met up by chance on 23 February, Fr Bresciani invited the two pilgrims to come to *Civiltà Cattolica*, which was then at Borgo Nuovo in the Vatican.<sup>15</sup> They went there on 8 March after visiting Archbishop Borromeo and then going to Piazza Scossacavalli. They experienced 'real pleasure in seeing that the main supporters of this publication are Piedmontese.'<sup>16</sup> On March 11 they paid a visit to Mons Pacca, Domestic Prelate of His Holiness who would become a cardinal in 1877.<sup>17</sup>

There were also meeting with lay men and women of society's upper echelons, among them Polish Princes Poocka related to the Sobieskis and women whom he met at Mass on Sunday 7 March, and at S. Maria del Popolo. The two men were brought there in a carriage belonging to Filippo Canoni Focardi, owner of two shops selling religious items in Via Condotti 24 and the Piazza di Torre Sanguigna 4. The Canon Focardi family kept up a friendly relationship with Don Bosco for many years. He replied with advice they asked for, asked them to pass on greetings to clerical friends and also asked them to look after donations for the 1865–67 lottery.<sup>18</sup> After mass there was breakfast with the Potocka household. The diary records: 'The rest of the day was spent visiting some devout individuals. We were edified by their behaviour and their words.'<sup>19</sup>

Don Bosco met Belgian nobleman Archbishop Francesco Saverio de Merode on 14 March when the prelate asked him, in the Pope's name, to preach the retreat to inmates of the prison at the Diocletian Baths. Some few notes of this event are provided on the second last page of the diary.<sup>20</sup>

The De Maistres were probably the go-between for Don Bosco's meetings with other members of the Roman nobility, also facilitated by Count Cays who had given Don Bosco a letter from Marquis Giovanni Patrizi (1788–1876). He was president of the Roman St Nicholas St Vincent de Paul Conference at the Church of St Nicholas da Tolentino not far from the Piazza Barberini. On 23 February, the last day of Carnevale, the diarist noted; 'After midday we visited Marquis Giovanni Patrizi, nephew of the cardinal by that name, who lives in Piazza S. Luigi dei Francesi. We handed over a letter to Count Cays; then we had a lengthy discussion on the St Vincent [de Paul] Society in Rome. This gentleman is president of the most active of them. We learned from him that there are fifteen conference: they have all the finances....It consoled us much to see that members are also extending their concern to patronage of abandoned youngsters.'<sup>21</sup>

Don Bosco was able to get to know other clergy and lay people in visits which interested him as

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15 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 16.

16 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 55.

17 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 65.

18 To young G. Canori Focardi, 22 February 1862, Em I 484; to F. Canori Focardi, 30 December 1864 Em II 96; around 12 May 1866, Em II 237; to Cav. F. Oreglia, 31 May 1866 and December 1867, Em II 251 and 459; to C. Canton, 3 October 1871, Em III 377.

19 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 49-51.

20 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 73.

21 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 15-16.

a priest educator among the young and ordinary people: visiting the Tat Giovanni and St Michael's at Ripa hospices, popular schools and festive oratories, the newly established youth conferences attached to the St Vincent de Paul Conferences. There were also meetings focused on the *Letture Cattoliche*. These contacts had particular impact on the future.

The morning of 27 February was a wet one and was 'spent mostly writing.' In the afternoon, after going to the Vicariate to obtain the *Celebret* from Rome, the two travellers visited the Tata Giovanni Hospice in Via di Sant'Anne de' Falegnami, 'under the protection of St Francis de Sales and the Assumption.' The diarist describes its origins, purpose, the boys, its' lifestyle. 'Residents have increased to around a hundred and fifty.... We see here a real copy of our own house. Hour of rising, going to bed, dormitories, assistance, a saint as protector for each room, even the same saints make us feel we are in our own house.'<sup>22</sup>

On the afternoon of 1 March they had their first contact with the largest youth welfare institution in the capital, the St Michael Hospice in Lipo on the other side of the Tiber. Count Rodolfo Se Maistre accompanied them. There they had a 'gracious audience with Cardinal Tosti' who refounded the Institution and was its Visitor.<sup>23</sup> The cardinal had certainly read the page Don Bosco dedicated to him in the *Storia d'Italia*. Don Bosco had highlighted the Cardinal's proud reply to Council members who had gone to congratulate him for not following Pius IX to Gaeta: 'If I remained here it was out of obedience to and love for the Holy Father who did not want me to abandon this establishment which gives shelter to so many unfortunate boys. Of course, I am Roman and you are not. I will stay here in Rome without being afraid....'<sup>24</sup>

The cardinal invited them to make a longer visit on 6 March. Don Bosco and Rua went there with the De family. After 'a sumptuous breakfast' the president of the Hospice took them on a detailed visit of the Institute, stressing 'the boys' work.' 'Since the boys had one to lunch at twelve thirty' the visitors 'said goodbye.'<sup>25</sup> In a letter to Fr Alasonatti on 7 March Don Bosco wrote: 'Cardinal Tosti... came and visited us and invited us to see the St Michael's Hospice which is very similar to our house and which he is the Rector. We went there this morning. After giving us *dejeune* he took us on a two hour tour of this huge Hospice which looks after more than eight hundred individuals of whom three hundred are boys.'<sup>26</sup> Undoubtedly Don Bosco was able to learn about and appreciate aspects of life in a boarding institution which enriched his experience as an educator. Over the days of *Carnevale* between January and February, an operetta by L. Farnese, *L'Ultimo giorno di Gerusalemme* had been staged on a number of occasions at St Michael's. A commentator noted that 'it was directed with so much love and a good outcome by His Eminence Cardinal Tost.' The music was led by Maestro Ludovico Lucchesi, director of the school of singing at the Hospice and singers were from the same school.<sup>27</sup>

On the afternoon of March 1, additional benefits came from an instructive visit to a *School of Charity* and a *St Vincent de Paul Conference*. They were taken to both by Duke Scipione Salviati (1823–84), an eminent figure among militant laity and from 1874 on of the main figures in the Work of the Congresses. He was president of that body from 1878–84. Sensitive to social issues, he had already appeared in the January 1845 issue of *L'Artigianello* along with Bishop Pietro Marini in the magazine's list of 'Protectors and Contributors',<sup>28</sup> and immediately after Rome's capture had founded the *Societa Primaria Romana per gli interessi Cattolici* (Principal Roman Society for

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22 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 29-30.

23 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 32-33.

24 G. Bosco, *La storia d'Italia...*, p. 500, OE VII 500.

25 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 46-47.

26 Em I 340.

27 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 9 (1858) I 488.

28 Cf. Chap. 2, § 54.

catholic interests).<sup>29</sup>The school of charity was 'supported by Conferences in Rome,' 'in a place known as S. Maria de'Monti.' 'When we entered the school it seemed like we were among our boys at the oratory' the diarist noted with amazement. His impressions were even more positive because the Grammar, meaning Latin teacher' was absent. It really was a people's school. 'Such schools of charity must be essentially aimed at removing boys from the dangers of the streets, teaching them the truths of the Faith without making them tackle studies incompatible with their situation' it was explained. This was not their last contact with works of charity. 'At a quarter past four Marquis Patrizi, the cardinal Vicar's nephew, was waiting for us to take us to a St Vincent de Paul Conference he was the president of. It went under the name of St Nicholas.' 'I was very satisfied' Don Bosco stated. 'After a courteous welcome by members they said they wanted me to address them. I did so, encouraging them to zealously promote the spirit of the Conference but to take up patronage of poor and abandoned youngsters as a special work. They promised they would do all this. And having told then about our attached Conferences [junior ones] they welcomed this report enthusiastically and invited me to visit their night schools to try to choose some young men and introduce similar conferences in Rome.'<sup>30</sup>

It was not just a flash in the pan. Further on, in reference to Saturday 13 March, the diary tells us: 'Today at twelve thirty a conference was held at the home of Marquis Patrizi regarding the way to establish attached Conferences. All the suggestions offered regarding this were accepted and noted down. There is a keen desire to establish them in Rome.'

The same day there was also a meeting with a Piedmontese priest residing in Rome to involve him in the distribution of the *Lettue Cattoliche*. 'Towards two o'clock we went to see Fr Botaudi who lives at Ponte Sisto. He is from Nizza Piemonte. We took much pleasure in speaking with him because he is a very zealous individual in everything concerning the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We organised some matters regarding the *Letture Cattoliche* and what was needed for the future. He was very willing to help.'<sup>31</sup>

Monday, 8 March, after the visit to St Peter's Cupola, Rua returned home for lunch. Don Bosco continued on: 'I stayed alone with Mr Carlo De Maistre who had accompanied s that day. We had something to eat then went to visit the Majordomo of His Holiness, Archbishop Borromeo. He made us very welcome and after speaking about Piedmont at some length and his hometown Milan, he took down my name, Carlo's and Rua's to include us in the list of people wanting to receive their palm from the Holy Father on Palm Sunday.'<sup>32</sup> The heading in the diary for March 27 read: 'Tickets for the palms' and this ticket allowed the two visitors to be present at the solemn rite the following day.<sup>33</sup> On their return to the Palazzo De Maistre, the pilgrims found a ticket for a private Papal audience the following day. The diary entry for Sunday 14 March referred to other visits to Roman oratories. Don Bosco saw both the good and the bad in them: lack of due time given to religious ceremonies, limited to mornings only, and a separation of the religious and recreational elements where they took place at some distance from one another.

'Today, Sunday' the diarist notes, 'we said mass at home then went to visit a boys' oratory which Marquis Patrizi knew about. The church where the boys gather is called S. Maria della Quercia....We entered the church and went to the very large sacristy and were very happy to see around forty boys there. To look at, in their behaviour their liveliness, they seemed much like the little rascals in our own oratory. Their religious functions all took place in the morning. Mass, Confession for those who were prepared, catechism and a short instruction is what these consisted of. There are two priests, one hearing confessions, the other assisting. Members of the St Vincent

29 Cf. Chap. 2, § 3.

30 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 38.

31 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 70.

32 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 54.

33 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 75.

de Paul Society teach catechism and lead the practices of piety....After midday the boys go to another oratory S. Giovanni de Fiorentino, but there they only have recreation, no religious ceremonies in church....If there could be a cleric who could mix with them he could also do so much good for, their souls, for which the need seems to be great.'

More positive, though with some reservation was the impression received from another oratory which he visited with Marquis Patreizi on the other side of the Tiber which they crossed by boat. It was an oratory for older boys known as the Assumption Oratory. 'We liked this one better,' the diarist noted. 'It had a spacious park area set up for all kinds of amusements, a nearby church, young adults, singing, liturgical ceremonies, all reminded us of our Oratory of St Francis de Sales. We took great pleasure in seeing the Director of the oratory, Fr Biondi, giving instructions and questioning the better prepared boys like we often do with ours.' The reservations reflect a mentality based on Turin which was less appreciated and accepting of different Roman circumstances: 'Here too is something: no morning functions, no Benediction, only around eighty boys while the premises would be able to hold up to four hundred.'<sup>34</sup>

On 22 March the diarist noted: 'Visit to the Cardinal Vicar,' Constantino Patrizi. It is easy to appreciate that among the main objectives here was distribution of the *Letture Cattoliche*. The results were prompt. At the beginning of the September issue dedicated to *Guiding youth*, by Claudio Arvisenet, the 'worthy correspondents and kind readers' were presented with the text of the *Circular of His Eminence the Cardinal Vicar sent out by order of His Holiness to bishops and archbishops in the Papal States promoting the Catholic Readings*. It was dated 'Rome May, 2, 1858.'<sup>35</sup> Finally, the Reading in the diary for 23 March indicated a 'Conference for the Letture Cattoliche,' certainly another organisational meeting.<sup>36</sup>

It is possible that during March Don Bosco had something to do with a news item that appeared in subsequent months in *Civiltà Cattolica*, given his attention to Roman events. It could have a connection with the presumed raising up of a boy through Don Bosco's prayer or rather, as he told it. 'On 16 March' the Jesuit Roman Magazine reported 'the Church of the Palazzo Massimo alle colonne celebrated the anniversary of the miracle performed by St Philip Neri with the raising up of Paolo de Mossimi. His Holiness turned up there unannounced in the afternoon.' The Sanctuary, the magazine said, 'was visited throughout the day by Roman nobility and all manner of individuals.'<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Turning point at the feet of Peter's Successor

We cannot be entirely sure about everything about the main purpose which brought Don Bosco to Rome, viz., the beginning of the path that would lead to the foundation of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

We can offer conjecture rather than certainty regarding the essential aspects: the results Don Bosco hoped to obtain, the preparation he made, the possible existence of a prior written text of the Constitution or Regulation, what Pius IX and Don Bosco said to one another at the first audience on 9 March, the actual number of audiences, the relationship between this (or these?) audience(s) and the first available text of the Constitutions. In the most authoritative recent

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34 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 71-72.

35 *La guida della gioventù nelle vie della salute. Opera di Claudio Arvisenet...* Translated from the French. Turin, Tip. di G. B. Paravia e comp. 1858, pp. I-VIII. The presentation circular is in Em I 359-360; Chap. 8, § 7.

36 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 75.

37 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 9 (1858) II 103; cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Autour de six loggia attribués à don Bosco...*, RSS 10 (1991) 47-52.

reconstructions agreement, disagreement, certainty, doubt are all present.<sup>38</sup>

Undoubtedly, by going to Rome Don Bosco intended to obtain at least agreement and encouragement from the Pope for establishing some kind of association of collaborators which would guarantee stability for the work of the oratories, the existing hospice which was a forerunner of other similar institutions, and other initiatives including the *Letture Cattoliche* which were very important to him.

He did not need particular urgent requests in order to consolidate the youth institutions. He had learned from the difficulties that had arisen over time in achieving unity of purpose, action, method among collaborators who were willing and zealous but of different mindsets, regularity and who were also tied up in other roles. This had led to a crises for the oratories in the early 1850s. Questions on the future of the work of the oratories posed by Franson, Rattazzi, Pius IX, reinforced solid convictions and were highlighted by Don Bosco himself as he arrived at what was to be a radical turning point in his life. As for how he would organise his helpers into appropriately structured associations, it is entirely reasonable to believe he had a number of ideas about this: a simple association of clergy and laity, a society of members bound to their superior with promises or private vows, a diocesan Religious Congregation or one of pontifical right. It is probable that Don Bosco intended receiving suggestions from the Pope, or encouragement for the last named of those options. The reassurance given by Rattazzi in a discussion in May 1857<sup>39</sup> concerning the possibility and legitimacy of founding religious groups different from the ones affected by the 'law on convents' in 1855<sup>40</sup> was not new. The Minister had been a sincere admirer and benefactor of the Oratory and its director for three years. On the other hand he and Cavour had also made public statement of a reassuring nature concerning possible new 'associate members.'<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, as we will see in the following chapters, Don Bosco would continue to be suspicious and extremely cautious. He would take some preventive steps: avoiding traditional religious terminology, not publicising institutes as novitiates or religious study centres, insisting on the civil nature of his communities never tied to legal recognition, and insisting, too, on members 'civil rights.'

From the succession of probable or certain Roman meetings relating to the Congregation it seems reasonable to exclude Don Bosco arriving in Rome with a Constitutional text for a Religious Congregation. Instead what is certain is that the dominant idea was to make existing works very clear: the oratories, hospice (or hospices if we include the Artigianelli in Genoa), popular catechetical and anti-protestant press, the *Letture Cattoliche*. Presumably Don Bosco thought it would be inevitable that the problem of a support Congregation would arise from discussions of these works<sup>42</sup> and preferred to wait for the Pope to make an explicit invitation to set something up, some religious grouping he probably already had in mind.<sup>43</sup>

When Don Bosco was recalling the 1858 audience in the *Cenno storico* in 1873–74, and with things already in place by then, he made the question explicit and the solution suggested by the Pope even more circumstantial.<sup>44</sup>

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38 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 142-145; F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli...*, pp. 6-9; F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 495-508.

39 Cf. MB V 696-697.

40 Cf. Chap. 1, § 6.

41 Cf. Chap. 10, § 1.

42 According to the historiography we find in the *Memorie Biografiche*, again in the meeting with the Pope Don Bosco would have heard the question already put to him by Rattazzi and Archbishop Franson: what measures was he intending to take to ensure the survival of his oratory work after he died?

43 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 143-145.

44 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 5-7, OE XXV, 235-237 (*The Holy Father's thoughts regarding the Pious Society*).

It is significant that before arriving at the Vatican to see Pius IX Don Bosco had two meetings involving information and clarification with Cardinals Francesco Gaude and Giacomo Antonelli, and had given the Superior General of the Rosminians, Fr Giovanni Battista Pagani (1806–60) a set of regulations to examine which related to a hypothetical religious association.<sup>45</sup>

After going to S.Maria sopra Minarva on 22 February, which was unsuccessful because the Cardinal was absent, the two pilgrims returned there on the 23rd. 'I had two audiences with Cardinal Gaude' Don Bosco wrote to Fr Alasonatti.<sup>46</sup> They were 'welcomed by the Cardinal with great kindness.' He gave them 'a private audience for about an hour and a half' asking them, among other things, about the oratories.<sup>47</sup> In the late afternoon of Sunday, 28 February, Don Bosco had a very cordial lengthy audience with cardinal Antonelli. As he had done earlier for Cardinal Gaude and would do later for the Pope he presented Cardinal Antonelli with a gift of a bound copy of the *Letture Cattoliche*.

Before 1858 his letters to Pius IX were mostly petitions for indulgences and spiritual favours. Those instead addressed to Cardinal Antonelli were richer, more personal and specific: he informed him of the situation at the oratories and about Protestant propaganda in Turin, or sent along a free copy of the *Storia d'Italia* for himself and the Pope.<sup>48</sup> So it was natural that the welcome would be 'more than courteous' and the audience of nearly two hours a very cordial one. Among other things the Cardinal 'was very pleased to talk about the *Catholic Readings*, the *History of Italy*, the festive oratories, the young people in the house and the various types we had there.' Don Bosco notes: 'He finished by saying that he had spoken to the Holy Father about me and would arrange an audience with him.'<sup>49</sup> He told Fr Alasonatti: 'he said he had already spoken with the Pope of my arrival and would arrange a private audience.'<sup>50</sup>

The brief letter to the Rosminian Superior General was dated 4 March, but the diary is silent about it. It was very important for its content and the reference to Cardinal Gaude. He asked Fr Giovanni Battista Pagani; 'I need a kind favour from you, that you read thoroughly the brief plan for a Religious Congregation. I was only counting on sharing the idea verbally but Cardinal Gaude advised me to bring it along in writing. So over these days I have recalled what I can of how we have done things at the Oratory house.'<sup>51</sup> No trace of the contents of this 'brief plan' have remained but since it is a 'plan for a religious Congregation'(a generic term but probably evolving in the direction of a precise canonical meaning) being put to the judgement of the Superior of a religious Institute, it probably could have been a summary of the *Draft Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* with its introduction and prevalence of elements concerning personnel involved in the educational assistance of the boys.<sup>52</sup>

We have seen the range of meanings given to the term 'religious congregation' as used by Don Bosco. In a letter to Pius IX on 28 August 1850. He applied it especially to the 'Congregation under the title and protection of St Francis de Sales,' including all the personnel at the Oratory, or the Oratory as a whole, boys included.<sup>53</sup>

The Rome diary noted for 9 March: 'This was the great day for the papal audience; but first I

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45 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 504-507.

46 Letter of 7 March, Em I 340.

47 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 15.

48 Cf. Letter of 28 August 1850, 30 November 1852, 31 May 1853, 7 September 1856, Em I 109-111, 176-178, 197-198, 301.

49 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 30-31.

50 Letter of 7 March, Em I 340.

51 Em I 339.

52 Cf. F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli...*, pp. 6-7, note 8; F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, p. 504.

53 Cf. Chap. 6, § 5.2 and 10, § 2.



needed to speak with Cardinal Gaude.’ Perhaps it was a meeting aimed at some final clarification of the most important ideas he would need to address in the audience. Then he went with cleric Rua to the audience set for 11.a.m.

The two pilgrims were admitted after an hour and a half wait. Don Bosco dealt with the topics dearest to him and which were suited to drawing the Pope’s attention to his initiatives for young people and ordinary folk. To the question ‘What do you do?’ he replied: ‘I am busy instructing youth, and with the *Letture Cattoliche*,’ something the Pope considered to be ‘useful at any time but very necessary today.’ At some point Don Bosco gave him a gift of the collected *Letture Cattoliche*, the binding having been done by his own boys. When the Pope considered the audience to be at an end, Don Bosco asked him if he would allow him to speak ‘of something in particular.’ When Rua left the discussion would have continued on what was being done in the Turin Oratories, what they were doing for the boys and for the *Letture Cattoliche*. ‘Soon,’ Don Bosco added laconically in the diary ‘we got on to particular matters.’ Then he noted: ‘Finally, after he had given me various pieces of advice, I asked for his blessing on all the individuals concerning us.’ He records the formula used: ‘*Benedictio Dei omnipotentis Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super te, super socium tuum, super tuos et super omnia opera tua, et maneat nunc et semper et semper et semper.*’<sup>54</sup>

Discussion on the hypothetical Congregation could go no further than positive encouragement to think about it and experiment with it to ensure it was fully religious, dedicated to god and neighbour, made stable through vows and was close-knit around the Pope and its superior. These were ideas responding perfectly to Don Bosco’s mentality and expectations, a resolute and executive form of governance.

It would not make sense to Don Bosco to have given the Pope a text to read and examine at this audience.<sup>55</sup> All up the audience lasted little more than half an hour, a brief but intense time. Don Bosco noted: ‘The Holy Father was very quick in understanding the questions and prompt in giving responses, so we were able to deal with matters in five minutes that other would need more than an hour for.’<sup>56</sup>

Among all the texts relating to the audience in 1858 and written years later by Don Bosco, gradually enlarging on what the Pope had said to him,<sup>57</sup> the official petition of 12 February 1864 chronologically close to the event, seems less distant from the reality. It was a request for the Pope to approve the Constitutions. ‘In 1858,’ he reminded him ‘when I had the good fortune to be able to present myself to Your Holiness so you could understand the efforts made by heresy and unbelief to establish themselves among the people and especially poor and immature youth, you showed pleasure at the notion of the flock of Jesus Christ that is most at risk. Your Holiness deigned to off the basics for it and I have done what I could to follow that in this draft of a rule.’<sup>58</sup>

An indication that Don Bosco may have been taking on the mindset of a potential religious formator might be the letter he sent from Rome to cleric Giovanni Battista Anfossi who would profess as a Salesian in the 1862–65 period. ‘Who knows what will become of Anfossi?’ he wrote to him. ‘Undoubtedly he will always have done his part. So *perge* [courage!]. But remember that

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54 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, pp. 56-60.

55 What we find in MB V 880-881 would appear to be without a basis in fact. The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was responsible for such matters. Pius IX would often refer Don Bosco to them in the future.

56 *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, p. 60.

57 The reference is in particular to the *Cenno storico della Società di san Francesco di Sales 1873/1874* and the introduction *Ai soci salesiani* delle Costituzioni. The amplification process began with a handwritten memoir *Il regnante Pio IX a favore di questa Società* del 1863/64: ASC A2230202; MB VII 622-623.

58 Em II 37.

*Dominus promisit coronam vigilantibus, and that non sunt condignae passiones heuus temporis ad futuram gloriam quae revelabitur in nobis.*'<sup>59</sup>

The discussion with the Pope on Sunday, 21 March, (or Tuesday 23rd) which Fr Lemoyne writes of could possibly have taken place as a quick exchange of ideas during a semi-public audience.<sup>60</sup> It could have been made necessary by the delicate letter of Marquis Cavour's on 13 March about a problem we will come back to shortly. It would seem unlikely that Don Bosco would have waited for the audience on 1 April to hand it to the Pope. In the late afternoon that day, however, the farewell meeting took place. He wrote of this to Fr Alasonatti on 7 April: 'Yesterday I had an audience with the Holy Father and he treated me with the kindness that would leave any good man feeling emotional. He granted whatever I asked for, so there is also something for you.'<sup>61</sup> St Leonard Murialdo, who was admitted along with cleric Rua, also gave testimony of it. They were allowed in 'through D. Bosco's work.' He said: 'I was testimony at that audience to the familiarity with which D. Bosco was so kindly treated by the Pope.'<sup>62</sup> He had already made mention of it in a letter of 5 May 1858 to cleric Celestino Durnado, who was working with him on Sundays at the St Aloysius oratory: 'Greet the boys at the oratory for me,' he wrote from Loreto 'as well as Rua and especially Don Bosco, whose debt I am in for the most wonderful thing I experienced on my journey, that is, for being admitted to an audience with the Holy Father.'<sup>63</sup>

The following day Don Bosco forwarded a range of different requests to the Pope for indulgences for people looking after hymn singing, or the singers themselves, especially during May, and for one to be applied *in articulo*, Colonel Giacinti Rovasenda and Count Carlo Days.<sup>64</sup>

They gave up on their planned long and difficult route home via Loreto, Ancona, Venice and Milan, and on 14 April left for Turin via the sea route once more from Civitavecchia to Genoa, arriving at the Oratory on the 16th.

## **5. Relationships with Rome change and something new comes about in Turin**

The lengthy time in Rome and the audiences with Pius IX very soon bore fruit. The first result was the notable change in Roman addresses of Don Bosco's correspondence and contacts. While he maintained good relationships with Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli, following the visit to Rome his letter went by preference to Pius IX and years later there were more personal meetings with him. He felt even closer to him, not only out of ecclesiological conviction but also because he felt temperamentally and spiritually in harmony with him.

Don Bosco had also won the admiration and protection in Rome of the perceptive and devout Cardinal Pietro Marini (1794–1863). On return to Turin Don Bosco asked him for solutions to some liturgical matters, at the same time sending him copies of his books as a gift. Replying on 27 July 1858 the Cardinal said he had been struck by the 'outstanding qualities' of the priest from Turin, whom he had 'had time to admire' in Rome, with an impression 'not so much in the memory as in the heart.' 'It is a real pleasure for me, he went on 'to recall you often, not only with people close to me but with others too because I would like everyone to know about zealous and virtuous priests. You will find here my answer to the various matters you presented in your letter.... Feel free to use

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59 Letter of 18 March 1858, Em I 343: "It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns" (Lk 12:43); "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18); cf. Also letter of 18 March 1858 to cleric G. Turchi, Em I 343; to young G. Garbarino, 8 April 1858, Em I 347.

60 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 143-145.

61 Em I 346.

62 Cf. A. CASTELLANI, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo...*, Vol. I, pp. 447-448.

63 S. LEONARDO MURIALDO *Epistolario*, ed. A. Marengo, Vol. I. Rome, Libreria Editrice Murialdana 1970, p. 31.

64 Em I 344-345.

me whenever it might be of value.’<sup>65</sup>

Don Bosco did not forget this and in 1860 he turned to the Cardinal then Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, to obtain a dispensation from age for Rua’s priestly ordination. The Cardinal replied on 20 April with the attached rescript of the dispensation.<sup>66</sup> He had to wait longer, instead, for the *regio placet*. Rua was ordained on 29 July.

The second result of the Roman sojourn was felt at the end of 1859. It was surrounded by extreme reserve and prepared for circumspectly but with determination. It involved a well-disciplined small group of residents at the Oratory in Valdoco. In fact it was Pius IX’s encouragement that led Don Bosco to give serious content and form to the Congregation he was thinking about. Given that he was a diocesan priest he had to draw on founders of Religious Congregations and their respective Constitutions and principles for drawing up the *Regolamenti della Societa di San Francesco di Sales* or Rule/Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales, the first draft of which was done over 1858 and 1859.<sup>67</sup> The text obviously had been preceded and accompanied by the silent, methodical construction of the reality the Rule referred to. It was followed, finally, by the event that was the birth of the Society, at 9 p.m. on 18 December 1859.

Some documentation remains of the gradual preparations aimed at forming the convinced Christian in his boys and in the clerics, ecclesiastical spirit and zeal for the salvation of souls. Renouncing dreams of a personal career and exclusive dedication to the youth apostolate took shape in the reality of community life as it was live at the Oratory, and in cautious reflection on the Christian and religious virtues of chastity and obedience. Twenty one year-old John Bonetti left an exercise book of summaries of sermons and conferences Don Bosco gave between October 1858 and the end of 1859 with ulterior motives. One that stands out at the beginning is a sermon on chastity or purity and an instruction on obedience.<sup>68</sup> Not long after there was a conference given the clerics late in the evening on an exemplary life. Don Bosco began: ‘Now you can say that our school year has begun. Therefore I very much want to begin as we did last year by spending a little time with you at least once a week. The best time for us is this time after prayers.’<sup>69</sup> It was consistent with what he said in 1858: ‘Exemplariness, always remembering that I am *lumen Christi*.’<sup>70</sup>

So the evening meeting on the day after the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 1859 was no surprise for the boys closest to him. When they assembled, Don Bosco explained in summary form the significance of a religious society with special bonds, dedicated to the mission to youth. He then gave an invitation, should they intend to join, to begin a period of trial at the next most important meeting on 18 December, which would be to elect members of the executive group. We have the minutes of that meeting, drawn up in the diligent hand of the former elementary school teacher and only priest in the group other than Don Bosco, Fr Victor Alasonatti ‘prefect acting as “secretary.”’

‘In the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty nine on the eighteenth of December in this Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Don Bosco’s room at 9 in the evening the following came together: Father Vittorio, Alasonatti, clerics Angelo Savio, Deacon, Michael Rua, subdeacon, John Cagliero..... Those who were there unanimously asked Don Bosco, ‘the initiator and promoter’ ‘to accept the role of Major Superior.’ Don Bosco accepted, reserving the right to choose his Prefect or Vicar in the person of Fr Alasonatti. Elected for the two roles of Spiritual Director and Treasurer

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65 MB V 928-929.

66 Cf. Em I 401.

67 Cf. Chap. 14.

68 Cf. G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, pp. 1-7, 10-17.

69 G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 17.

70 G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 35.

[Economo] were, respectively, Michael Rua and Angelo Savio. Three councillors were added: John Cagliero, John Bonetti and Charles Ghivarello. The minutes were authenticated by Don Bosco's and Fr Alasonetti's signatures.<sup>71</sup> Don Bosco's *strenna* for the clerics on 31 December 1859 for the new year must have had special meaning for the 'ascritti' or 'enrolled members' as they were called for several decades ('novices' in today's language); 'He reminded them they had been sold to Heaven, therefore they should not think further of this world but all their efforts should be to seek the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. He recommended that we should help one another save our souls firstly by good example, good advice, and consider ourselves fortunate if we can prevent a companion from committing even a single venial sin, give out good books to read. He summed it up by recalling what a saint had said: "*divinorum divinissimum est cooperari in salute animarium.*"<sup>72</sup>

A month later on 2 February 1860 the 'Society's Chapter gathered in the Rector's room' to admit 'young Joseph Rossi' to the trial period, the first coadjutor or Salesian lay member to be enrolled but not the first to be professed.<sup>73</sup> During 1860 other men were enrolled in the Society at other meetings; clerics Peter Capra, Paul Albera, John Garino, Momo Gabriele, Dominic Ruffino, Francis Vaschetti, and Edward Donato.<sup>74</sup> The letter of 11 (or 13) June 1860 presenting the text of the Constitutions to Archbishop Fransoni was signed by 26 members among whom was second coadjutor, Joseph Gaia.<sup>75</sup>

Don Bosco had cultivated the nursery well! Some early defections (before professing vows) did not obscure the fact that from the beginning some of the most important names in the congregation appeared, including Don Bosco's first two successors as Rector Major: Bl. Michael Rua and Fr Paul Albera. On 21 May 1861 the first 'extern' Salesian was accepted, Fr Giovanni Ciattino (1823–80) from Asti diocese, parish priest at Marengo. He later joined the Vincentians.<sup>76</sup>

## 6. Turin Archdiocese, the Archbishop and the Holy See

A further follow-up to the Roman sojourn was the significant episode in ecclesiastical politics which Don Bosco allowed himself to be involved in out of pastoral concern for his own diocese. We recall the audience given him by Cardinal Antonelli on February 28. We do not know if they touched on the problematic situation of the Turin Archdiocese due to Fransoni's exile in Lyon. One could imagine that Don Bosco gave the Pope the letter he had received a few days earlier from Marquis Guscavo di Cavour at the audience on 21 or 23 March. It proposed elevating Fransoni to the cardinalate and giving him a coadjutor archbishop with right of succession. However it would certainly have been a topic Don Bosco discussed at the audience he had requested of the Secretary of State in a note on 9 April. Relating to a second letter from Turin: 'I have received a letter from Turin' he wrote 'which I would like to pass on to your Eminence before leaving Rome. If you could give me a moment for an audience I would see it as a very special favour.'<sup>77</sup> The audience was certainly granted.

Don Bosco was invited to speak of the same matter at an audience granted him by Pius IX, but

71 *Verbali di Capitoli - Adunanze Capitolo Superiore*, ASC D 868, pp. 1-3. To the names of those listed Pietro Stella adds Coadjutor Giuseppe Gaia, 35 years of age (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 296), but it does not appear in the Minutes or in MB VI 335.

72 G. BONETTI, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 63.

73 *Verbali di Capitoli...*, p. 4.

74 *Verbali di Capitoli...*, pp. 5-6.

75 Cf. *Cost. SDB (Motto)*, pp. 26 and 258 (manuscript with handwritten signatures): another letter that followed (January-February 1862) had 31 signatures adding to earlier ones a priest and a deacon, two clerics and a famous Coadjutor, Cav. Federico Oreglia di S. Stefano (Em I 632).

76 *Verbali di Capitoli...*, pp. 6-7.

77 Em I 348.

he had already left Rome. In the first letter thanking Pius IX for everything received while in Rome, he wrote: 'One thing I regretted very much after leaving Rome was that I did not have any further opportunity to present myself to Your Holiness just when you deigned to admit me to an audience. I believe it may have been about our Archbishop. However that may be, I continue to recommend the deplorable state of this diocese to Your Holiness's paternal kindness. I can say to Your Holiness what the faithful in Lyon once said to St Eleutheros, your worthy predecessor: 'Holy Father, give our Church peace and provide for our needs.' We are not at a time of open and bloody persecution, yet evil is quietly and terribly spreading. The good, who are still very numerous, thanks be to God, are groaning and do not know what to do. The bad ones are growing bolder by the day. There is a growing number of weaker ones and they are swelling the ranks daily of people led astray. If, tragically, heresy should legally come to power I fear frightful defections even involving people in the diocese. Forgive me Your Holiness; I am saying this in the Lord. I do not know if the notion put forward by Mr di Cavour could have some semblance of good in it in Your Holiness's opinion. If one were talking about establishing a principle, I would place no trust in it; but in dealing with a particular instance one could hope for some result, especially if he still shows the same desires. At any rate, to avoid ills that, would certainly be difficult to recover from, Your Holiness does need to provide for the diocese's needs somehow. I am speaking in the Lord.'<sup>78</sup>

He wrote a few words to Camillo di Cavour who was just back from drawing up the Plombieres Peace Accord (22 July 1858); 'I pluck up the courage to recommend to you that among the many and serious affairs you have to attend to you do not forget whatever regards this poor diocese of ours. I am ready to do whatever I am able to for my country and my religion.'<sup>79</sup>

Don Bosco made brief reference to the matter in a letter to Pius IX in February 1859: 'Things in this diocese of ours are even more at a standstill; evil is growing. If he is sincere, Cavour shows good will but he is surrounded by sad individuals who are pulling him in all directions. Only this morning he told me he wants to present other candidates for vacant dioceses.' And concluding in tones of the religious superior he wrote: 'I, my boys, clerics and priests pray daily' for your Holiness.<sup>80</sup>

Cavour's 'goodwill' was flexible within the framework of his wanting to modernise ecclesiastical politics based on his famous 'free church in a free state' principle. The Vatican's will was to bring about a rethinking of Piedmontese policy and bring about a new concordat by revolving 'the Fransoni case.' This clash at the level of principle could only result in a stalemate. 'Rome proposes agreement on an auxiliary with right of succession for Turin. Cavour wants a new Archbishop with ordinary jurisdiction. Rome wants Fransoni to return to his see and then resign freely and with dignity. Cavour is not opposed to his return but on the express condition, guaranteed by the Holy See, that he returns in order to resign forthwith. Rome will sacrifice Fransoni if it is compensated by the settling of other grievances' and 'a new concordat.' Cavour 'does not even want to hear about it.'<sup>81</sup>

This unresolved drama gives us a clear picture of Don Bosco as a diocesan priest with sincere affection for his diocese. He feels deeply for the anxiety experienced by Catholics in Turin and Piedmont. He is a priest who yearns for the salvation of souls, which is the fundamental criterion of his ecclesiastical politics. It was a very pragmatic criterion in the face of one of the dramatic consequences which, in his opinion, could not be sacrificed to the real or assumed principle as

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78 Letter of 14 June 1858, Em I 352. We have emphasised the words that show up Don Bosco's "Realpolitik" where salvation was concerned.

79 Letter of 4 August 1858, Em I 357.

80 Em I 368.

81 P. PIRRI, *Pio IX e Vittorio Emanuele II dal loro carteggio privato*, Vol II/1. Rome, PUG 1951, p. 15; F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour ed Antonelli...*, p. 12. The whole essay (pp. 3-20) clarifies and documents the event.

claimed by the Secretary of State and Bishop Tortone.<sup>82</sup>

Proof of this primacy of *salus animarum* in Don Bosco's conscience were also, some items of Roman correspondence at the time. His correspondence with Marquis Patrizi demonstrates how much he wanted to keep alive their common initiative of the *Letture Cattoliche*. This could be seen in a letter from Turin on 22 May 1858. 'Fr Murialdo [Leonard], my colleague, shared with me that he was at the B.V. della Quercia conference and that he found it well run. *Deo gratias*. Courage. Recommend the same thing to Frs Biondi and Catini. When you are next with the boys in the attached conference, greet them warmly for me in the Lord and tell them my boys here have great affection for them. They are praying for them and encourage them to remain firm and persevering. I continue to recommend the *Letture Catholice* to you....please greet and thank all the good gentlemen, who have taken these booklets under their wings.'<sup>83</sup>

He returned to the question of the *Letture Cattoliche* and attached conference in his letter on 8 August 1858.<sup>84</sup> In a further letter on 18 August 1862 he provided information then asked: 'Our attached conferences are running happily in the midst of difficulties. The results are very satisfying. Is the Rome conference still functioning?'<sup>85</sup> On 20 June 1863 (by error or the letter was not sent until 24 October) he wrote about progress of the oratories and Protestant propaganda in Turin, concluding: 'Many priests and clerics Cavaliere Oreglia, Count Cays, Marquis Fassati join me in offering their warm greetings.'<sup>86</sup>

## 7. The Oratory for the diocese: the seminary at Giaveno

Don Bosco's partial involvement from 1860 to 1862 in a work outside the city was something he took on to help the junior seminary at Giaveno, a town of some 10,000 inhabitants 37 kilometres from Turin. This clerical formator institute formerly in the service of the San Michele Abbey at Chiusa and incorporated into the Turin Archdiocese at the beginning of the 1800s was experiencing a fall in vocations and pupils, there being only twenty in 1859. The Rector of the Seminary in Turin, Canon Alessandro Vogliotti, asked Don Bosco, in the name of the Archdiocese, to accept the running of it. Don Bosco could not refuse an act of solidarity with the seminary he had belonged to and which he wanted to maintain good relationships with just as he was about to give shape to the Salesian Society. However, given some delays, on 5 June 1866 he explained to Vogliotti: 'I will await a response from Giaveno before dealing with Cavour.'<sup>87</sup>

As we will see, accepting it meant refusing another offer to manage a municipal college for a town in the Province. More difficult was the question of whether the junior seminary at Giaveno could become a municipal college, Negotiations became tortuous when Archbishop Fransoni wrote to the Vicar General, Canon Fissore, from Lyons on 15 July: 'Tell him [Canon Vogliotti] that regarding the seminary at Giaveno where, as far as I can see, difficulties are increasing, I shall let him do what he can.'<sup>88</sup>

Some days later Don Bosco told Vogliotti that he thought financial support from the local Council was insufficient. Therefore he proposed another plan *ad experimentum* for a year: 'to try to run a seminary only for boys aspiring to the clerical state. By refusing negotiations with the aforementioned Council we can be completely free to choose teachers, limiting ourselves to a few

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82 See documents in appendix to cited essay by F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli...*, pp. 16-20.

83 Em I 349.

84 Em I 357-358.

85 Em I 515.

86 Em I 586.

87 Letter of 5 June 1860, Em I 405.

88 Cf. L. FRANSONI *Epistolario...*, p. 295.

qualified ones.<sup>89</sup>

The Rector for the first scholastic year was Fr Giovanni Grassino (1821–1902), one of the priests who had helped Don Bosco in the three Turin Oratories.<sup>90</sup> Some clerics from the Oratory were also assigned there, Francesco Vaschetti, (1839–1916), Giovanni Bogero (1840– 66), and Giuseppe Bongiovanni (1836–68). Don Bosco was involved directly or indirectly through his collaborators: setting up and organising materials, sending boys, the educational and scholastic arrangements. He visited at the beginning of the year and on some other rare occasions. Careful not to interfere in the activity of the local Rector and canon Vogliotti's overview. The latter did not look kindly on the seminary being too bound up with Valdocco. Obviously the work was felt to be a diocesan one and could be less accepted as months went on if there was interference from a priest doing things his own way in the youth apostolate and establishing a Religious Society.

In the new 1860–61 school year a new rector, Canon Innocenzo Arduino, was appointed almost severing the two strict a link between the Rector and Don Bosco. Arduino had formerly been Professor of Theology at the Seminary in Chieri. Don Bosco's position was weakened, including for the approach to formation he had introduced. The diocesan superiors felt it did not fully conform to traditional regulations inspired by St Charles Borromeo. The Disagreement was over two points especially: the principle of constant loving presence and familiarity between the pupils and their young teachers, especially in free time, and the presumed overload of piety and the moralistic approach in teaching, the general tenor of life, considered to 'Jesuitical'.

Despite the considerable increase in numbers of seminarians Don Bosco thought it appropriate to clear the field of his presence, which had now become an obstacle. He indicated his intentions by letter to Canon Vogliotti on September 3, 1861, leaving him completely free to choose personnel for the new school year. What followed was that Francesco Vaschetti was incardinated into the diocesan clergy while Bongiovanni and Boggera came back to the Oratory. In the letter to Vagliotti, however, his relinquishing control included him feeling it was his duty to express his own opinion on the judgements that had been passed on the pedagogical approach he had introduced into the junior seminary.

'I can only at the very least offer a humble observation on the reason given me yesterday as to why there is one thing you do not want said regarding the Oratory's involvement with the Seminary at Giaveno, that the staff are like Jesuits and the teaching is Jesuitical. Do not be blindsided by this because good and bad alike are convinced that such words sound like a guarantee of morality. In fact, consider what the Seminary at Gioveno was last year and what it is now.... And do not think for a moment that I have ambitions of getting involved with things at Giaveno. No, because I have enough to do here in Turin in every sense. I earnestly want to see you continue the progress so well begun at Giaveno.'<sup>91</sup>

Don Bosco let the Archbishop know of the situation that had been created in a letter on October 15. We have the addressee's confirmation but the letter itself has not been found as yet. A week later the reply, almost confidential in tone, came from Lyons. The Archbishop expressed consolation at hearing of the flourishing state of the three oratories Don Bosco informed him about. He said he fully shared his concerns about the intense Protestant propaganda, and his suffering, not so much due to 'apostasy of adults' already de facto separated from the Catholic Church, but because of the 'painful perversion of the youngsters' who are growing up 'Protestants without noticing it' then forming 'other families that are equally Protestant.' He also felt 'disgusted' at hearing what Don Bosco told him about the Seminary at Giaveno. Unfortunately he felt it was impossible for him to intervene and gave the reason why. 'The previous year' he confessed 'when

89 Letter of 18 July 1860, Em I 413.

90 Cf. Letter to the Schools for the Poor, on 20 February 1850, Em I 96.

91 Em I 458-459.

it did not seem possible to keep the Seminary going I did not know what to suggest. I ended by replying that they should do what they could and I would leave it to their judgement. It often happens that I find myself in a similar difficult situation and after indicating how I saw things, I did not inform myself further of what happened. Not being able to be in charge myself and having to leave others to make decisions my readiness to help is compromised.<sup>92</sup>

The situation became more embarrassing and retreat inevitable with the Archbishop's death on 26 March 1862 and the election as Capitular Vicar of Canon Giuseppe Zappata, collegial theologian of the University and Provost of the Metropolitan Chapter. He was more inclined to protect the natural diocesan character of the reborn seminary. Don Bosco was soon able to become involved with another college – cum – junior seminary all his own at Mirabello Montferrato, in a diocese that believed it was providential and supported it in various ways.

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92 Letter to Don Bosco on 23 October 1861, ASC A 1412406; MB VI 1042-1043. "Tell him [Canon Vogliotti] that regarding the seminary at Giaveno where, as far as I can see, difficulties are increasing, I shall let him do what he can." (Letter of Archbishop Fransoni to the Vicar General, Celestino Fissore, 15 July 1860, L. FRANSONI *Epistolario...*, p. 295).



## Chapter 13

### Early Developments of the College System (1859–69)

- 1859      13 November: Gabrio Casati's law on schooling in Italy;  
            18 December : First core group of the Salesian Society.
- 1860      Recent extensions to the Oratory;  
            26 May: the Oratory is searched;  
            9 June: school inspection.
- 1862      Third grand public lottery;  
            4 December: request for approval of secondary classes at the Oratory as a *ginnasio privato* or private secondary school;  
            21 December: approval granted.
- 1863      End of October: San Carlo college opens in Mirabello Monferrato.
- 1864      Autumn: St Philip Neri College opens in Lanzo Torinese.
- 1865      Rejection of Fr Francesco Montebruno's Artigianelli College as an institution to be linked with the Oratory;  
            Defence of a cleric reported by a disruptive student for presumed disciplinary misdemeanours.
- 1866      February: unsuccessful request to the ministry of Education for the Valdocco school to be regarded as an *istituto paterno* or home school.

Don Bosco's new phase of educational activity took place in a context where the Italian political scene had been revolutionised and the Church in Turin and Piedmont was in an unstable situation.<sup>1</sup>

Legislation in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was being extended to all its annexed regions, under protest and rebellion, towards the south which was indiscriminately regarded as being bandit country.<sup>2</sup>

The law bringing about a general reorganisation of the school system, proposed by Minister Gabrio Casati and approved by royal decree on 13 November 1859, had immediate repercussions at Valdocco in 1860.<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the early 1860s, Don Bosco and his work also had to deal with Ministers and officials coming from other parts of Italy, not just the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. Some of these came from regions which earlier belonged to the Papal States. To varying degrees new names now became familiar, like Luigi Carlo Farini, Minister for the Interior with Cavour and then Prime Minister in 1862–63, Terenzo Mamiani, Bettino Ricasoli, Prime Minister after Cavour (1861–62), Francesco de Sanctis, Michele Amari, Ubaldino Peruzzi, Marco Minghetti,

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1 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7 and § 9

2 Cf. Chap. 1, § 9

3 Cf. Chap. 1, § 8 and Chap. 2, § 3.

who was Minister for the Interior for a few months in 1860 with Bettino Ricasoli, then Prime Minister (1863–63) following Farini's serious illness then resignation on 23 March 1863.

Members of the Society Don Bosco established on 18 December 1859, found themselves in a situation similar to all other nascent Congregations, though one that was particular to the Turin Archdiocese. They continued to be subject to their respective ordinaries regarding clerical formation, seminary studies and admission to Holy Orders. Religious vows remained private ones until the decree of approval on 23 July 1864 [technically, the Decree of Collaudation] with which the Congregation of Bishops and regulars 'praised and commended' the Salesian Society as a Congregation of simple vows under the governance of its founder, Superior General for life.<sup>14</sup>

In the time between the assembling of the first groups belonging to the Society of St Francis de Sales in December 1859, and papal approval in 1869, the situation in the Archdiocese of Turin was a variable one in terms of Don Bosco's expectations. The Archbishop wanted to keep a firm hold on government of the Archdiocese from Lyon, but he could not have immediate and continuous personal rapport with it. He was assisted by an indecisive Vicar General, Canon Filippo Ravina, but Archbishop Fransoni's preferred partner was the Pro-vicar who had already held that office for some years, Canon Celestino Fissore (1814–88), a sympathiser and benefactor of the Oratory from the beginning. On Ravina's death on 4 February 1858, he succeeded him as Vicar General. Following the Archbishop's death on 2 March 1862, Canon Fissore, a man of strong character, was not elected as Capitular Vicar; the experienced and moderate Canon Giuseppe Zappata (1796–1883) was chosen instead. He was more acceptable to the Government. He remained in office until the Bishop of Savona, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro, was transferred to Turin; Riccardi di Netro wanted him as his Vicar General. When the Archbishop died, he was again elected Capitular Vicar (1870–71) and again appointed Vicar General by Archbishop Gastaldi. He resigned for health reasons in 1882.

The situation where, from 1859–62, the diocese was governed by an archbishop in exile and from 1862–67 by a capitular vicar only, probably gave Don Bosco greater freedom to set up his religious Society and encouraged his growing tendency to go straight to the Pope for matters pertaining to this. However it could also have meant less support from some, and a degree of uncertainty of reference for major issues in the life of the oratories and the incipient Religious Society. Other than what has been said about Giaveno, there was a question of seminary studies for clerics during the long tenancy of Canon Alessandro Vogliotti (1884–71) as Rector of the Seminary and questions, too, regarding ordinations, diocesan approval of the Congregation, mediation with Rome during the lengthy period the archdiocese was governed by vicar generals.

## **1. Valdocco**

It was obvious that Don Bosco's greater and more immediate concerns were primarily with the Oratory at Valdocco which, due to chronological precedence, size and prestige, was on the way to becoming the mother house of his work for youth and his Religious Congregation. It was the Oratory in its own right, archetype and centre from which sprung new kinds of works, which would end up taking priority in Don Bosco's educational activity: academic and technical-vocational schools, preferably organised within colleges [boarding] or hospices, to which the festive and daily oratory could be attached.

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4 *Cost. SDB (Motto)* 231.

### 1.1 Valdocco – centre of achievement and inspiration

Don Bosco attended to daily concerns and developed his educational ideas through direct experience in the ever more populated and varied little kingdom of Valdocco. The most pressing concern was building expansion, the primary condition for developing more room for his charitable activity. Essential details have already been provided. In the early 1860s, other than the planned extension to existing buildings, some minor, single-storey constructions were added – reception area, classrooms and workshops, all later re-designed and replaced: for example, a covered walkway just recently built was closed in and adapted to a printers' workshop. Together with the metal workshop opened in 1862, it completed the classic range of workshops in Salesian hospices. The Church of Mary Help of Christians, built in 1864–68, was in an area on the south side, beyond the existing building complex. Some further reorganisation took place after 1869, bringing the Oratory to its maximum development while Don Bosco was still alive.

Other than the boys, residents by choice, from 1860-64 seminarians from Piedmontese dioceses were also accommodated, since for a variety of reasons they were temporarily without their own seminary. The most regular group came from Asti diocese, under the Capitular Vicar, Vitaliano Sossi. Don Bosco maintained good personal relations with him through correspondence as well, regarding these vocations, their formation and the financial matters involving these clerics as guests at Valdocco.<sup>5</sup> Other correspondence refers to young men from other dioceses who wanted to become Religious or stay with Don Bosco. From Saluzzo there were names such as Giovanni Garino, Costanza Rinaudo, Luigi Chiapale, and Domenico Belmonte.<sup>6</sup>

Don Bosco's letters provide varying numbers of boys accepted, how many people worked there, how many were resident, but we can discover approximately what the growth of the whole community was. Between 1859 and 1867, numbers gradually increased from 300 to 400, 500, 700, then to in excess of 800. 'The number of boys in the house is approaching five hundred,' he wrote to a parish priest on 9 November 1860.<sup>7</sup> He wrote to Pius IX in autumn 1859 regarding a total of 300 'given shelter' at the Oratory, classifying them into three categories. 'Many clergy working with me in the sacred ministry,' 'fifty or so clerics' 'around two hundred, boys studying to join the ranks of the clergy,' yet he said nothing about working boys or trade students.<sup>8</sup>

Numbers increased constantly after that: 'The number is 570 without counting those coming in from outside.'<sup>9</sup> 'Numbers have gone past 600 in this house.'<sup>10</sup> 'There are seven hundred living in the house; of these, five hundred and fifty aspire to the clerical state,' a clear hyperbole.<sup>11</sup> 'Our house has increased in number; there are seven hundred in residence, and two hundred day students coming to classes while no fewer than three thousand attend the oratories on Sundays.'<sup>12</sup> Finally, he told lay Salesian *Cavaliere* Oreglia di S. Stefano, in Rome looking for money: 'Everything is going well in the house now; perfect health, excellent appetite. Numbers more than 800.'<sup>13</sup>

Altogether, one gains the impression of cramped room for a manifestly large and mixed

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5 Cf. letter to the Capitular Vicar A. Vitaliano Sossi (Bishop Artico had died in Rome on 21 December 1859): certified, September 16 November 1860; existing, 25 October 1861, 30 March and 4 May 1863, Em I 421, 427; 463-464, 566-367, 576.

6 Cf. letter to Bishop G. A. Gianotti, bishop of Saluzzo, 11 October 1858, 18 November 1861, 22 October 1862, 25 September 1863, Em I 361-362, 468, 532, 603-604; to Bishop L. Moreno, bishop of Ivrea, 30 December 1860, Em I 429

7 Em I 426.

8 Letter of 9 November 1859, Em I 386-387.

9 Letter of 9 November 1859, Em I 386-387.

10 Letter of 9 November 1859, Em I 386-387.

11 To Pius IX, 13 February 1863, Em I 553.

12 To Duchess Melzi Sardi, 24 February 1863, Em I 556.

13 Letter of 18 November 1867, Em II 451.

population. Inspections by health officials were certainly not arbitrary or done to persecute. Following one of these, carried out by the Municipal Health Commission, some strong remarks came from the City Health Inspector's office: 'Filth in rooms used as studies and dormitories,' 'rubbish, dung and other matter on the ground in the inner courtyards and around the kitchen and refectory; latrine walls smelly and in a bad state. Muck piled up in the rooms used for study and as bed rooms,' even five pigs were found in a ground floor location, which were, 'a constant source of unpleasant odours.' Reminded again of these matters after a second inspection, Don Bosco argued each complaint point by point, noting in his own hand brief denials on points in the second letter. Warned that according to current regulations it was absolutely prohibited to keep pigs either in the locations indicated or in an appropriate pen, he noted: 'No law prohibits this,' perhaps believing that Valdocco was outside the city limits. To the statement: 'The Commission of course saw the pigs with their own eyes scratching around for food in the small courtyard' he reacted curtly: 'That is not true.'<sup>14</sup>

For him, necessity and need were above any law, more so in his view (not without foundation) that the inspections were the result of 'hostile news' spread by newspapers under the influence of the strongly anti-clerical *Gazzetta del popolo*. In a letter to his friend Marquis Domenico Fassati, he commented: 'You will have heard from some newspapers that other than visits the Lord makes through people in the house, there are also enemies who bother us from the outside. Just imagine! Borella and Bottero were asked by the City Council to come and visit our house to establish the state of our hygiene and morality. Two great models they are!'<sup>15</sup> They were both doctors with close ties to the *Gazzetta*, Giovanni Battista Bottero was close to the *Gazzetta's* founder no less, Felice Govean, and Alessandro Borella was one of its most regular collaborators.'<sup>16</sup>

Don Bosco did not hesitate to reply to the 'ill-informed' and 'calumniators' as *L'Unità Cattolica* described them, with a good degree of flippancy of his own. He was supported by the most authoritative of the Catholic papers which provided reassuring information: 'We have already visited the establishment many times and we have never noticed any of these items of filth,' an observation confirmed by a new visit. 'As for numbers,' the reporter continued 'it is true that they are large, ordinarily around eight hundred, but the premises seem to us to be adequate.' He praised 'D. Bosco's foresight:' when hearing of the cholera in nearby towns, at the end of July 'he relocated a large number of residents elsewhere from eight hundred to what is now around three hundred.'<sup>17</sup> The 'now' naturally, was the normal summer holiday period.

## 1.2 Looking for charity

These were trifles, however, compared with the need to provide for such a large family. Don Bosco did not slacken his ceaseless begging efforts. To get a more concrete idea, approximate though it may be, of the amounts spent, requested, offered, collected, it could be useful to try to look at today's equivalents for the average value of the lira in the decades 1961-70, 1871-80, 1881-90 compared with the euro (2003). Re-evaluation coefficients periodically collected and published are helpful in this regard.

1 lira in 1861-70 = 7,621.95 lire in 2003= 3.944 euro.

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14 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 152-153.

15 Cf. G. BRACCO, *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO (Ed.), *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 152-153. To March. D. Fassati, 29 August 1865, Em II 159.

16 F. DELLA PERUTA, *Il giornalismo dal 1847 all'Unità*, in A. GALANTE GARRONE - F. DELLA PERUTA, *La stampa italiana del Risorgimento...*, pp. 348-349.

17 *Don Bosco e l'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 201, Wednesday 30 August 1865, pp. 844-845, OE XXXVIII 70-71.

1 lira in 1871–80 = 6,312.58 lire in 2003 = 3.26 euro.

1 lira in 1881–90 = 6,890.50 lire in 2003 = 3.55 euro.<sup>18</sup>

However, to make the costs of Don Bosco's various initiatives and the generosity and sacrifices of the more faithful, but also occasional donors, even more tangible to readers in real time, it is preferable to indicate equivalents between the lira then and the euro today, 2003, for each year.

To a degree, they reflect the variation of financial circumstances in the Kingdom of Italy: the generally strong lira in a country marked by poverty for many sectors of society, further aggravated by strong fiscal pressure at times, which impacted on the weaker classes most of all. 'It did not even leave my hand; I immediately passed it onto the baker. *Deo gratias*,' Don Bosco wrote on 30 August 1856, to his first great benefactor, the aristocratic Maria De Maistre, supported by her husband, Marquis Domenico Fassati, thanking her for the donation of a 500 lire note. At the same time, he said he was ready to receive ten year old Azelia in the afternoon. It seems that at some stage he became her spiritual director.<sup>19</sup>

Bread and the baker were Don Bosco's principal nightmare, a daily reality and also a symbol of everything needed to continue an increasingly complex work which had no financial foundation or fixed income behind it. For the urgent payment of 'three thousand francs to the baker,' [11,864 euros] he turned to the Marquis on 18 April 1863: 'It is really all about giving hungry boys something to eat' he explained adding: 'During the day I will come to your place and you will give me what the Lord and the Blessed Virgin inspire your heart to give.'<sup>20</sup> 'I will come by this evening and you can call it board or largesse, but for us it is always charity received with gratitude to pay for the bread eaten by our poor boys,' he wrote once more to the Marchioness.<sup>21</sup> On another occasion, he discussed the possibility with her that her husband, instead of 'alms', might grant a loan of 400 lire [1,581 euro] which he would pay back with proceeds from the lottery being run at that stage,<sup>22</sup> perhaps with money from the tickets the two had acquired: the Marquis was a member of the Commission.

Not only support for the lottery but bread once again was the reason for thanks given to Countess Carlotta and Count Fererico Callori who were very generous supporters of all of Don Bosco's initiatives from the 1850s. 'How many times, Countess, our group armed with bread recalls the wonderful days we spent at Vignale!' he reminded her on return from one of the happy autumn walks with the boys.<sup>23</sup>

Don Bosco's enterprise seemed to invade every space, even sometimes ending in indiscretion as humorously documented on at least one occasion by a letter to one of his faithful benefactors and friends, Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres: he had sent regular books of tickets to him and his wife: 'The wig was for me and I am happy that you kept the tickets on behalf of our poor boys. Lady Baroness sent her tickets back to us. Now think about this: if I find myself in dire need I will once again turn to her charity, and because of her kindness she will not know how to refuse me. So, she will send me money without me giving her more lottery tickets. Attached to this letter are

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18 For the Italian monetary situation prior to 2002, see Table 22.12 of the *Annuario Statistico Italiano 2000* (ISTAT, Rome 2003). At the bottom of the Table we see how to convert lire into euro (1 euro = 1936.27 lire). Only by virtue of the law on 24 August 1862 did the Italian lira (name comes from Charles the Great's *libra*) of 100 cents evolve from the various lire existing in the states prior to unification.

19 Letter "Da casa" of 30 August 1856, Em I 298; the same tone is in the first letter we know was sent to her on 22 December 1855 (Em I 278), thanking her for "the bread that out of her charity" she had provided.

20 To March. D. Fassati, 18 April 1863, Em I 573-574.

21 To March M. Fassati, 22 December 1863, Em I 625.

22 To March. M. Fassati, 26 March 1862, Em I 490.

23 To Count C. Callori, 4 November 1862, Em I 536.

tickets for Lottery No. ... Oh, how brazen I am! Has the recent gift of a wig been forgotten? Forgive the jest. God bless you and your good wife and know that I will be forever grateful.<sup>24</sup>

But everything could be forgiven this 'poor beggar', as he described himself; not a penny remained in his hands. The asker and giver were both an outpouring of charity. Anyone wanting to more deeply explore the educator's loving kindness, which Don Bosco spoke and wrote about, cannot stop at the emotional aspects but needs to understand his loving kindness in its entirety, as the young who benefited from it experienced it, above all as the real love of a tenacious and humble beggar and of the affectionate and generous almsgivers.

Don Bosco's begging was accompanied by every legitimate and possible trick of the trade. Among these, as we have seen and will see again, over and above his very careful administration of funds, his struggle against waste, the real poverty he practised and had others practise, was the lottery. The 1865–67 lottery saw the most involvement, yet it was the hardest to pursue, given the negative economic effects of the 1866 war. It began well, though, and had excellent promoters. 'Our lottery has begun very well... We already have approval for a considerable number of tickets' he told Marquis Fassati.<sup>25</sup> It would be impossible to note all the personal appeals, public and private, in Turin and Rome, the many individual and circular letters,<sup>26</sup> all the efforts over a two year period. It was the usual, inevitable Calvary but this time covering a broader area: achieving agreement among Commission members, finding promoters, collecting items, distributing and getting others to distribute tickets by selling them in books or singly as he did personally on his second trip to Rome. He did not only ask Pius IX for his 'holy blessing' but also asked him to send 'some gift to put at the head of the catalogue of items.' He even attributed the initiative of the lottery itself to the Pope: 'I have decided to try out the means that Your Holiness suggested to me through a benefactor of ours. That is, the idea of a lottery.'<sup>27</sup> He did not fail to publicise it with the usual bundle of propaganda, after mentioning the papal offer of 500 lire [2,046 euro] for building the church: 'When he knew it had been started and that we lacked the means to continue, he advised a lottery and encouraged me to put it into practice by sending along some items first of all which you will see in the catalogue to be published later.'<sup>28</sup>

The second edition in 1866 highlighted the extent of mobilisation of individuals involved in running the lottery: 32 Commission members, 364 male and 231 female promoters. Commission members were substantially based in Turin and Piedmont. But promoters came from Genoa, Milan, Florence, as well. In Rome there were Filippo Canori Focardi and two Piedmontese, Bishops Manacorda and Pietro Marietti. The only princess among the promoters was Maria Odescalchi.<sup>29</sup>

He had many reasons for asking for money, as he explained in the request for authorisation for the lottery: paying rent, financing expenditure and debts for building, and especially 'giving bread to around eight hundred poor boys' and 'completing the building of a new church,' the Church of Mary Help of Christians.<sup>30</sup>

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24 Letter of 5 September 1862, Em I 522-523.

25 Letter of 4 June 1865, Em II 140; Cf. *Lotteria d'oggetti posta sotto la protezione delle loro Altezze Reali Il Principe Amedeo di Savoia duca d'Aosta... Il principe Eugenio di Carignano. La principessa Maria Elisabetta di Sassonia duchessa di Genova. Il principe Tommaso di Savoia duca di Genova. La principessa Maria Teresa. A favore degli Oratori maschili di Valdocco, di Porta Nuova e di Vanchiglia in Torino e per l'ultimazione di una chiesa in Valdocco*. Torino, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, OE XVI 247-252.

26 Cf. in 1865, Em II 130-131; in 1866, Em II 236-237, 295-296; in 1867, 327-328, 337-338.

27 Letter of 30 April 1865, Em II 128.

28 *Lotteria d'oggetti posta sotto la protezione delle loro Altezze Reali...* Torino, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, p. 3, no. 1, OE XVI 249.

29 *Elenco degli oggetti graziosamente donati a beneficio degli oratorii di s. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco, di s. Luigi a Porta nuova, dell'Angelo Custode in Vanchiglia e per la costruzione della Chiesa dedicata a Maria Ausiliatrice*. Torino, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1866, 23 pp., OE XVII 1-23.

30 To the Prefect of Turin, 15 May 1865, Em II 136.

## 2. A search and legal school inspections

At the beginning of the decade, Don Bosco's Oratory was subjected to a police search, followed two weeks later by a school inspection carried out for reasons and in a manner he suspected to be of a political nature. However, the way he reconstructed both events helped shape the dramatic and exaggerated accounts we find in later Salesian historiography. Of course, by immediately exaggerating things it reflected a memory where Don Bosco speaks indiscriminately of 'persecutions,'<sup>31</sup> perhaps under pressure from the immediate events and a particular moment in history.<sup>32</sup>

On 1 January 1876, Don Bosco revealed to his followers: 'I have also written these things down for you, but separately; I have written up two exercise books and in writing all this down have been able to recall all the details.'<sup>33</sup>

The two events had different purposes. The first was a true and proper search aimed at checking possible links Don Bosco might have had with enemies of the political arrangements, people considered opposed to the revolution underway since the 1850s and which peaked in 1859–60, by stripping away most of the Papal States. The man ultimately behind the search was the Minister for the Interior from March to October 1860, Luigi Carlo Farini. The school inspection instead, on 9 June, had the Minister for Public Instruction, Terenzio Mamiani, as its point of reference.

### 2.1 The search on 26 May 1860

In his memoirs on the event, *Le perquisizioni* (Searches) Don Bosco highlighted real or assumed abuse of power. His *Fine di alcuni nostri perquisitori* (what some of our searches were looking for)<sup>34</sup> was more sombre, and encumbered by the automatic application of his inveterate theological belief in the connection between guilt and punishment. But, ultimately, he drew favourable results from the events, seeing them as an opportunity for positive contact with higher representatives of power and allowing some 'outsiders' to get to know a work they knew little about.

In reality, the search was a reaction to the most resolute and frank political positions Don Bosco had ever taken. Their 'political' value, though, was softened if one bears in mind that only one of these positions was made public, and preceded the plebiscites on 11 and 12 March 1860, formally ratifying the annexation of provinces taken from the Papal States. They were annexed to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia [which became the Kingdom of Italy on the 14th].<sup>35</sup>

On 9 November 1859, Don Bosco had sent a letter to the Pontiff, using a plural which involved 'most of the clergy and almost all parish priests, and I could say most lay people.' He declared openly: 'We vigorously disapprove of what our Government has done or has had done in the Romagna; and though it was not possible to prevent this evil, we have always disapproved verbally

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31 A conspicuously enhanced version was given by Fr Giovanni Bonetti in the *Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, published in instalments in the "Bollettino Salesiano" 8 (1884) no. 1, January, pp. 9-15; no. 3, March, pp. 43-49; 9 (1885) no. 1, January, pp. 7-12; 10 (1886) n. 2, February, pp. 16-22; no. 8, August, pp. 88-94.

32 Cf. P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su "Le perquisizioni"*, RSS 8 (1989) 111-200. Presented there in critical edition is the text of Don Bosco's decidedly biased report. To understand his particular mindset, the final pages help clarify things. They bear the eloquent title: *Fine di alcuni nostri perquisitori* (Ibid., pp. 188-192).

33 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3B, p. 47.

34 P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 188-192.

35 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

and in writing of what was being done.’ Then switching to first person, he took on a prophetic tone; ‘But Holy Father, I must not hide from you that the storm is not yet over. I fear a Government based on revolution. I fear the daily lessening of numbers of good Catholics. I fear a great number of enemies of order taking refuge among us or swelling the ranks of rebels in the Romagna. I fear them, and may God keep this curse far from us, that Your Holiness may yet be further harassed and perhaps persecuted in who knows what way.’<sup>36</sup>

‘As for the enemies of order,’ Don Bosco clearly shared the uneasiness felt in Turin and other cities in the Kingdom which had been aroused by the huge influx of people since 1849 coming from or expelled from States ruled by restored absolute regimes. They were considered to be bearers of revolutionary disturbance and exploiters of undeserved privileges of the liberal or democratically aligned political class.<sup>37</sup>

In a Brief on 7 January 1860, Pius IX thanked Don Bosco for the ‘filial attachment’ he had shown ‘in the great mess that Italy is in, the disturbance in public affairs and rebellion by some provinces of our temporal domain.’ ‘This rebellion, as is well known by everyone,’ the Pontiff continued ‘has been provoked by instigation and machinations from outside, fomented and supported in all kinds of ways.’ Don Bosco had this printed by Paravia Press, and distributed the Latin text and its Italian translation in a 42 x 30.3 cm. manifesto, republishing it in the April Issue of the *Letture Cattoliche* in Italian and Latin.<sup>38</sup> *L’Armonia* offered the Italian text on 28 April 1860. Further on, on 13 April 1860, Don Bosco sent the Pope the names of boys who wanted ‘to offer their donation or rather their cent for St Peter’s Pence,’ an amount that reached him through the management of *L’Armonia*. He told the Pontiff that his boys wanted, in the first instance, to give ‘a sign of gratitude and veneration ... but so sad were the times, that in order not to have ourselves pointlessly compromised, we have had to limit ourselves to praying in the corner of our homes and churches.’ He did admit that while ‘things still continue to be violent,’ the boys were still going out openly ‘encouraging subscriptions so they could offer their donation.’ He informed him of the religious situation in Piedmont, offering clear political opinions, vague prophecies, reasons for hope; ‘We are in a most disastrous time. Up till now the Piedmontese clergy have remained steady in the Faith but now we have threats, promises, bribes, and the bad example of clergy from the *annexed* areas makes us fear what is to come. Some of the clergy in some dioceses have given public indication of their support for the current political situation. Some religious bodies have celebrated the *famous annexation*. The plan is not only to invade the Romagna but all other provinces of the Holy See, Naples, Sicily etc. ... Therefore, Holy Father, if we consider the state of things based on human aid, we have to say we are approaching an era of destruction of the Faith, an era of blood for whoever defends it. Nevertheless, Holy Father, be happy in the Lord. The Blessed and Immaculate Virgin is preparing a great triumph for the Church from heaven. We will shortly see this triumph. It is true that it will be preceded by a terrible catastrophe of evils but these will be cut short by God. We pray that the reign of sin will end and that God’s holy will be done in all things.’ He then promised to go to Rome again as soon as possible to meet the Pope ‘before my days end.’<sup>39</sup>

The Pope’s reply came a month later. He was comforted by the ‘fidelity, piety, and devotion’ of Don Bosco, the boys, and by their ‘acute sorrow and mourning caused by the wicked and sacrilegious aggression perpetuated on our temporal domain and against the Apostolic See by men who are waging a fierce war against the Catholic Church and its See, and who do not hesitate

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36 Em I 386-387.

37 Cf. G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell’Italia moderna*, Vol. IV. Milano, Feltrinelli 1964, pp. 216-217; N. NADA, *Gli emigranti meridionali a Torino nel “decennio di preparazione”*, in “Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino” 91 (1993) 48-69.

38 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Vita e martirio de’ sommi pontefici San Lucio I...*, pp. IV-XV, OE XII 150-161.

39 Em I 400-401.



to trample on all human and divine rights.’ His sentiments and those of the boys, he said, ‘had provided me not a little relief among so much bitterness.’ He wished strongly for them to continue to ask God in prayer to turn away so many serious calamities from the Church and see that it be covered in glory and triumph everywhere.<sup>40</sup>

Then, Cardinal Cosimo Corsi, Archbishop of Pisa, arrived in Turin on 22 May, where he had been put under house arrest by the Government.<sup>41</sup> Don Bosco spent two hours with him, during which the Cardinal spoke of his arrest and his journey, promising at the end to visit the Oratory.<sup>42</sup>

One should not be surprised that at a time of sudden political transition and the delicate position the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was in both nationally and internationally, leaders would not trust the ‘reactionary party’ and the clergy, seeing them as a potential factor of instability, if not open or under-hand subversion in connivance with Rome. Don Bosco was no exception. There was enough there for them to want to search his rooms and those of other people who were so clearly attached to Rome.

The search warrant, signed by the Police Commissioner, was carried out on Saturday afternoon, 26 May 1860, the vigil of Pentecost, and from the initial formalities until the conclusion, took several hours. Three days later *L’Armonia* published the official report with a presentation couched in Irredentist tones.<sup>43</sup> The most compromising documents were noted: letters to and from Rome. Other search warrants were issued and carried out in June at the residences of Canon Ortalda and Fr Cafasso. The latter died on the 23.<sup>44</sup>

Count Federico Sclopis di Salerano (1798–1878), a reputable jurist and Piedmontese politician and fervent Catholic, open to liberal ideas, noted in his Secret Diary on 27 May 1860: ‘Over these days, using judicial authority the police have carried out searches in the homes of Don Bosco and Canon Ortalda, but all absolutely without result. These are deliberate harassments or signs of puerile concerns.’<sup>45</sup> The end result was that no further action was taken; no criminal evidence was found.

On 12 June, following the school inspection on 9 June, which Don Bosco saw as a second search, he wrote to Farini and the Minister for Public Instruction Mamiani. The two letters contained identical content on the political aspects of the problem. For both, he emphasised his activity in Turin ‘for twenty years’ assuring them: ‘I have never got myself into politics ... for all this time I have always gone along with the Government. I have never said, nor done, nor insinuated anything that might be in opposition to Government legislation.’<sup>46</sup> He considered this to have clarified his position and that of the Oratory, following the principle of absolute political neutrality, fidelity to the monarchy and the constituted authority as attested to by twenty years of charitable activity in Turin on behalf of poor and abandoned youth.

The letter to Farini had a good outcome. He called him to the Ministry on the 13th. The talk they had, according to the chronicler, ended with reassuring words: ‘Carry on calmly; just avoid anything political and keep doing good for the boys.’ These were the words Domenico Ruffini wrote in the chronicle over these days, naturally based on Don Bosco’s reports back home.<sup>47</sup>

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40 Cf. letter Em I 400-401.orig. of 21 May 1860, ASC A 14440701.

41 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

42 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, pp. 7-8.

43 *Perquisizione nell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, “L’Armonia”, Tuesday 29 May 1860, OE XXXVIII 53-54.

44 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 12.

45 F. SCLOPIS DI SALERANO, *Diario segreto (1859-1878)*, ed. P. Pietro Pirri, S.I. Torino, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria 1959, p. 248.

46 Cf. letter of 12 June 1860, Em I 407-408, 408-410.

47 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, pp. 12-14, in P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 196-197.

Don Bosco embellished the account when later recalling events for his Salesians, suggesting a hypothetical conversation with the Minister's Secretary General, Guido Borromeo (not Silvio Spaventa), some different details in the conversation with Farini, and a cordial farewell from the Minister for the Interior: 'Go home, Don Bosco, carry on with the children calmly and the Government will be grateful ... Then taking both my hands and shaking them he said: "We will be friends in the future and you will also pray for us."<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 First school inspection and a visit from the cardinal

Don Bosco's memoirs on the search was followed by another entitled *Altre perquisizioni* (other searches). In reality, these were normal and legitimate school inspections, but from Don Bosco's version it would seem that the visitors' attention was addressed to the content, patriotic or otherwise, of the curriculum, rather than the credentials teachers required by law. From the letter he sent off to Terenzio Mamiani, though, we can see that the credentials were also an issue. Of course, among conditions for opening 'Private establishments for Secondary Instruction' were the following: 'That individuals to whom teaching is entrusted have the respective pre-requisite as required by this law in order to aspire to teach in a public secondary school or its equivalent.' 'That the establishment be open at all times to the authorities who have the task of ordinary inspection of secondary schools, as also to individuals the Minister may delegate for this purpose.'<sup>49</sup>

The five secondary classes Don Bosco had gradually opened up at the Oratory from 1855–56 to 1859–60, fell under three successive sets of legislation: Bon Compagni (October 1848), Lanza (June 1857), Casati (November 1859).<sup>50</sup> He had to be up to the mark for this final one, dealing with Ministers for Public Instruction with well-known centralist tendencies, with the exception of Mamiani and Berti.<sup>51</sup> From 1860–67 Ministers were; Terenzio Mamiani (21 January 1860–22 March 1861), Francesco de Sanctis (22 March 1861–3 March 1862), Pasquale S. Mancini (2–31 March 1862), Carlo Matteucci (31 March–8 December, 1862) Michele Amari (8 December 1862–27 September 1864), Giuseppe Natoli (27 September 1864–31 December 1865), Domenico Berti (31 December 1865–17 February 1867), Cesare Correnti (17 February 10 April 1867), Michele Coppino (10 April–27 October 1867).

The first and best documented inspection took place on 9 June 1860. It was carried out on the basis of precise matters of law concerning supervision over private teaching by the Ministry of Public Instruction 'to safeguard morality, hygiene, and public order in State institutions.' (art. 3). Art. 5 also established that the Minister, through his officials or delegates, had to keep an eye on 'schools and institutes of private instruction and education' and in cases where they were not 'in conformity with the law' he could declare they be closed even 'before the opinion of the Superior Council.' According to the *Regolamento* passed on 23 December 1859, conformity to the law concerned the recognised qualifications of teachers, how 'studies were going,' the 'maintenance of discipline in class,' the state of morality in State institutions and the curriculum as indicated at the time the school has opened.<sup>52</sup>

In his letter to Mamiani on 12 June 1860, as well as the political motive, Don Bosco touched on the strictly scholastic issue in reference to the inspection, which he called 'a search through classrooms, the dormitory, dining room equipment, entrances and exits, provision supporting this work.' We note a degree of ambiguity, however, in how the school was set up as 'a private

48 P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 164-173.

49 Tit III, capo VIII, art. 246,1 and 3.

50 Cf. Chap. 1, § 8.

51 Cf. G. TALAMO, *La scuola dalla legge Casati alla inchiesta del 1864*. Milan, Giuffrè 1960.

52 Cf. P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 122-123.

establishment of secondary instruction.’ According to him, his *ginnasio privato* or private secondary school, belonged to a *House of Charity* and though in general terms he admitted the need for teachers with proper credentials, a range of considerations of an historical, moral and economic nature suggested more tolerance and latitude on the part of the school authorities in terms of their cultural and teaching competence.

In his letter of defence, before dealing with the scholastic issues, Don Bosco began with a clear statement: ‘My school has never been legally approved because it is a charity school.’ He began by shuffling the cards, drawing into the mix around his secondary classes other matters completely outside the ambit of the Casati law: Sunday, night and technical classes. He then continued from this perspective: ‘The Superintendents, Inspectors and Ministers for Public Instruction (who were never interested in non-secondary schools) were informed and gave tacit approval by visiting personally, being present during exams, as often was the case with *Cavaliere Baricco*, Inspector Nigra, *Cavaliere Aporti* and others.’ He also attached a letter from Minister Lanza, of 29 April 1851, encouraging ‘the work of the Oratories and schools’ that was taking place. He also said that at the same time he had taken steps to see to the correct legal solution; ‘It is time that the Casati law subjects teaching to certain formalities which I have already initiated with the Minister who was and still is an outstanding benefactor of ours. And I will certainly have done these things prior to the beginning of the 1860–61 school year, *when application of the law’s article 379 comes into force.*’

He concluded with comments more akin to emotional blackmail and hardly likely to work with a Minister who was also a philosopher: ‘If, after reading the above, Your Excellency considers making some decision in this regard, I will have no difficulty in submitting. I simply and humbly beg of you to do so privately, like a father who wants things done in the best way possible, but not with threats which could cause irreparable harm to the work.’<sup>53</sup> He took a similar approach in years to follow.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco did not bother about any assumed political-ecclesiastical collusion and went ahead with evangelical freedom. At the end of May, Cardinal Corsi’s secretary visited the Oratory accompanied by Bishop Tortono and on 4 June, the clerics at the Oratory visited the Cardinal.<sup>54</sup>

On 14 July, a week before leaving to return to Pisa, Cardinal Corsi kept his promise to visit the Oratory. For Don Bosco, his boys and helpers, it was a time of strong emotions and lasting bonds. He appeared as someone who had been persecuted for the Faith, a courageous herald of freedom of conscience, enemy of any form of political exploitation of religion. He celebrated an early morning Mass (6.30 a.m.) assisted by Canons Ortalda and Allasio [Guglielmo Alasia, in fact] and gave a brief homily before communion. After breakfast, according to the chronicler, ‘since a throne had been set up under the portico he sat there and was pleased to listen to music and poetry by Francesia and Bongiovanni and some prose read by Rua to finish, asking him to remember us and protect us at the Holy See.’ The Cardinal promised to do so.

Don Bosco got three boys to offer the Cardinal a complete collection of the *Letture Cattoliche* and one of them asked him to make them known in his diocese. The Cardinal then made a detailed visit of the whole house, blessing the kitchen in particular, saying ‘May the Lord provide abundantly for everyone,’ He departed at 10.30 a.m. ‘amid cries of “Long live Pius IX and Cardinal Cosimo Corsi.”’<sup>55</sup>

In a letter to the Cardinal’s secretary in the early months of 1861, Don Bosco assured him of the ‘lasting memory of his tender fatherliness’ after his visit to the Oratory, promising him: ‘At any rate,

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53 Em I 408-410.

54 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, pp. 10 and 11.

55 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell’oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, pp. 16-18.

if there is still enough time to go to Tuscany without a passport [before an improbable restoration of the Grand Duchy?] I have in mind to make a trip to Pisa.<sup>56</sup>

Don Bosco also had the opportunity to establish cordial and profitable relations with Cardinal Filippo De Angelis (1792–1877), Archbishop of Fermo, also forced into lengthy house arrest in Turin from the end of September 1860 to the beginning of December 1866.<sup>57</sup> During his stay in Turin (as we will indicate) the Cardinal was also involved in reviewing the Salesian Constitutions.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.3 Inspections, defence, compromise

During the 1861–62 school year, Don Bosco had no unwanted attention from the Ministry of Public Instruction. He received only one circular, on 28 March 1862, with which the Superintendent of Studies, Matteo Muratori (1810–93), asked for the return of some forms with information concerning both teaching personnel directly involved or helping out at the school, and the number of pupils and auditors for each class, and where funds for each were coming from.’ From the detailed response given we see that teachers did not have the required credentials but that there was a promise to meet the requirements of the law.<sup>59</sup>

In 1862–63, Don Bosco did take an important step, a contradictory one in a way, in the management of his secondary school. Carlo Matteucci, a scientist, was Minister for Public Instruction in the Rattazzi Cabinet (31 March–8 December 1862) for the first part of that school year. He was succeeded in the Farini-Minghetti Ministry (8 December 1862–24 March 1863) by historian Michele Amari. Collaborating in the Ministry was Francesco Selmi who in December became Superintendent of Studies in Turin, where he remained until July 1864. He was a very demanding official in requiring proper credentials of teachers, but tolerant and flexible in allowing reasonable time for teachers to complete their qualifications. On 4 December 1862, Don Bosco sent him a formal request for ‘regular approval’ of his secondary classes as a ‘private institute according to article 246 of the law on Public Instruction’ in which ‘teaching’ would ‘follow the curriculum and government requirements in conformity with the previously cited article since,’ he assured him ‘this is already being done.’ He also presented a list of teachers. For the last four on the list – Anfossi, Durando, Cerruti, Francesia – he asked ‘temporary approval’ for a period to be established ‘to present these or others, but all with the qualifications required by the law.’ He noted that ‘For some time now the purpose of this house has been that these secondary classes are a kind of junior seminary’ for boys who are intelligent and virtuous but ‘lack or have few resources’ to pursue their studies.<sup>60</sup> The Superintendent courteously advised Don Bosco that he was delegating Dr Vigna ‘to visit the premises’ for secondary classes for which approval was being requested.<sup>61</sup> In his memoirs on the searches, Don Bosco concluded a colourful dialogue with the Superintendent in these words: ‘The decree for our classes was as follows ... ’ [The rest is missing]. It was dated 21 December.<sup>62</sup>

For the subsequent request to present a statistical picture of the Oratory, Don Bosco introduced some interesting notes: the name he gave the institute was a deliberately double-barrelled if not even ambiguous one: *a refuge or junior secondary school known as the Oratory of St Francis de*

56 Letter to Fr Donnino Donnini, Em I 631.

57 On Card. De Angelis, cf. DBI XXXIII (1987) 277–280. One-sided in secular terms is the book by G. LETI, *Fermo e il cardinale Filippo de Angelis*. Rome, Soc. Ed. Dante Alighieri 1902, pp. 231–238.

58 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to the Vic. Gen. C. Fissore, 9 March 1861, Em I 631 and to the Capitular Vic. G. Zappata, 24 March 1863, Em I 562.

59 Cf. *Documenti* VIII 98; MB VII 305.

60 Letter of 4 December 1862, Em I 542.

61 *Documenti* VIII 101.

62 Cf. P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 177.

*Sales in Valdocco*. He explained: 'It is not a government school, nor is it at the same level as government schools, but was provisionally approved by the Superintendent of Studies by decree in December 1862.' He stated that the books used were 'those indicated for Government curricula.' He gave information on the yearly curriculum and the daily timetable for lessons, on teachers and their qualifications, the number of pupils in each class.<sup>63</sup>

Don Bosco was fitting in, then, with the *ginnasio privato* classification, though with reservations, because he was also a 'Refuge' or 'House of charity.' But he also wanted to arrive at the point of having legally qualified teachers so he could gain recognition from the Public Instruction Ministers and Superintendents of Studies currently in office.<sup>64</sup> He requested time to prepare them, appealing to the fact that they were offering their services for free and as an act of charity.

He wrote to the Superintendent: 'Please consider the charitable purpose of these classes. Their only purpose is to benefit poor boys who are intelligent and well-behaved but who lack or almost completely lack the financial resources to develop the intelligence Divine Providence has given them.'<sup>65</sup> It was also socially useful work, freely offering the possibility of culturally uplifting gifted youngsters from the lower classes who could not attend public secondary schools. Perhaps this, too, was one reason why the Superintendent of Studies, Francesco Selmi, former Rector of the University of Modena, maintained good, even warm relationships with the Oratory after his first encounter with it. He seemed to have had a good understanding of its particular nature and situation.<sup>66</sup>

During Selmi's term of office (he remained in Turin until summer 1864 and was replaced by Vincenzo Garelli [1818–78], a sincere admirer of Don Bosco's educative work) there was a ministerial inspection at the Oratory as there was for all secondary schools in Italy. This was carried out at Valdocco over the last ten days of April 1863 by Prof. Luigi Ferri. The head of the local division of the Ministry was Luigi Stefano Gatti.

'There has been a government official here for two days visiting and examining our classes and pupils.' Don Bosco announced in a postscript to a letter to Countess Carlotta Callori on the 26th.<sup>67</sup> Among the complaints was the lack of conformity of studies and spirit 'with current government institutions' which according to the critics, was also revealed by the *Storia d'Italia*. Don Bosco seized the opportunity to obtain an audience with both the Minister for the Interior, Ubaldino Peruzzi, and the Minister for Public Instruction, Michele Amari. He explained his ideas in a letter to both of them.

The notes of these we still have. He stated that when writing history he was politically loyal and his pedagogical approach and historical skills were correct. To the accusation that the *Storia d'Italia* was not 'according to the desired spirit' he presented facts, not theories, to Peruzzi: the book was not a school text-book; it was written at the invitation of the Minister for Public Instruction' [?] who had given a donation of 300 francs in exchange for a free first copy. After the events of 1860–62, appropriate adjustments had been made, as could be seen in the fourth edition.' 'The squares, streets, prisons, hospitals,' he had worked in for 23 years were the best testimony to his clean record. This gave him reason to ask the Minister for moral support and aid since his work, he wrote, 'was aimed only at preventing abandoned youngsters from populating the prisons and so

63 Cf. document in MB VII 856-858.

64 Cf. letter to M. Amari, 7 March 1863, Em I 558-560; again he quoted the letter of Minister G. LANZA of 29 April 1857, no. 1585; to the rector of the University of Turin, E. Ricotti, 14 April 1863, Em I 572; to F. Selmi, 13 July 1863, Em I 588-590; P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 125-127.

65 A F. Selmi, October 1863, Em I 609-610.

66 Cf. P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 173-178.

67 Em I 575; Cf. MB VII 244-255.

that those released from them do not return.’ All this was ‘completely in the interests of the Government.’<sup>68</sup>

In his letter to Michele Amari, instead, he set out to defend his book, distinguishing between the ‘historical truth’ of ‘things’ told in it and ‘the manner of understanding them,’ or ‘the spirit of history’ which had an educational purpose for him.<sup>69</sup> He assured him that ‘this way of understanding history’ had always earned him ‘only words of encouragement.’<sup>70</sup>

In September, Don Bosco made a dramatic announcement to Marchioness Fassati, perhaps connected with the request for a list of teachers for the coming year: ‘The devil has declared open war on the Oratory and I have been threatened with closure unless I am right up to the mark according to the spirit of the Government.’<sup>71</sup> But this time the Government did not succeed in wrecking things.

The final act in matters affecting the school in the 1860s concluded with a letter in February 1866 to Minister Domenico Berti (1820–97), renowned militant pedagogue and champion of popular education who was adverse to the centralism of the Casati law.<sup>72</sup> He was the Minister for Public Instruction in the second Lamarmora Ministry and the second Ricasoli Ministry from 31 December to 17 February 1867.<sup>73</sup> Don Bosco made a correction to the line he had followed up till then, a prelude to what would be his declared position until the end of the 1870s. From a *ginnasio privato* attached to a house of charity, he shifted decisively to the idea of a *scuola paterna* or home school. He wrote to Minister Domenico Berti about his twenty-five years of involvement in the oratories with their attached schools. Continuing to emphasise the times, and history, and mixing together night, Sunday, technical and secondary classes, he also assured him that ‘the secondary classes [of the Oratory] were always considered in the past to be works of zeal and charity, so the Minister for Public Instruction had often recommended and encouraged them.’ He cited the letter of 29 April 1857, in which Minister Lanza ‘was happy to indicate ... *that the Ministry wanted to contribute in every way that was in its power so our classes could best develop.*’ The Royal Superintendent of Studies had ‘supported them for more than twenty years without worrying if the teacher had credentials or not. Only ‘in recent years ‘ he said, remaining silent about his deliberate acquiescence, ‘had the Royal Superintendent, though in a very kindly way, and by considering this establishment only as a public secondary boarding school, sought to subject these classes to all the rules and regulations under which Government Colleges are run and governed.’ Following this explanation he made three precise requests: ‘1. In consideration of Article 251 of the law on public instruction ... 2. In particular the article ... which exempts individuals teaching poor children in elementary or technical schools and doing so *gratis, from the need to prove their suitability* 3. Considering what Your Excellency stated openly in Parliament when you said you wanted to do everything possible to facilitate freedom of teaching, I am asking Your Excellency to consider the director of this establishment as the father of the boys who reside there, the one who truly provides for everything they need in life, materially and morally. Teaching is entirely free and offered to poor boys who have no other means of pursuing it. It would be of huge material and moral benefit if secondary instruction could be freely offered these boys according to their abilities and needs. Therefore, let it be granted that Fr John Bosco, Director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, assisted by charitable individuals, can provide secondary instruction to the poor boys residing at

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68 To U. Peruzzi, May-June 1863, Em I 583-584. We know that up to the third edition of the *Storia d'Italia* (1861) Don Bosco, clearly out of political prudence, ended his account with a chapter on the *Guerra del 1859 ossia la conquista della Lombardia* and went no further: Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

69 Cf. *Introduction* to part three, § 2.1.

70 Cf. letter of May-June 1863, Em I 584-585.

71 Letter of 3 September 1863, Em I 599.

72 Cf. Chap. 1, § 8.

73 Cf. v. *Berti, Domenico*, DBI IX 511-514.

the said establishment, in conformity with the above-mentioned article, that is, let them be exempted from the need to prove their suitability to the school authority.' 'As has been happening for more than twenty-three years.' [He added by way of a footnote].<sup>74</sup>

By letter on 26 February 1866, the Mayor of Turin, Filippo Galvagno (1801–64), supported the request, of the 'worthy Director of the pious institute' asking the Minister 'to continue the custom as it had been up till now of not forcing him to have officially certified teachers for secondary teaching.'<sup>75</sup> Berti authorised the Superintendent to allow current teachers to continue with their teaching for that year, but the following year Don Bosco would need to abide by the law, entrusting classes to qualified teachers.

At the end of July, Dr Baricco, Inspector of Studies for the province, asked for information on teachers, curricula, number of pupils in individual classes.<sup>76</sup> In 1869, publishing the huge work entitled *Torino descritta*, the author (Baricco) spoke of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in two different contexts, and of the four kinds and degrees of instruction imparted there. 'Rather than calling it an Institute of instruction and education,' he wrote of the Oratory 'it should be called an Institute of charity because the pupils pay minimal board and most of them are kept for free.' As for the various types of instruction, he explained: 'It must be one of the most distinguished establishments of popular and charitable instruction in Turin. In fact it includes: 1. A boarding house for aspirants to the clerical state. 2. A boarding house for boys attending to secondary studies. 3. A boarding house for trade and working boys. 4. A Sunday and night school. 5. A weekday night school. 6. A (weekday) day school ... The Secondary students attend classes internally (Cf. p. 708).' Sentiments of religion and duty' he observed 'inform this great family of boys. The Director is loved, obeyed and respected as a father.'<sup>77</sup>

Don Bosco did manage to get some of his teachers on the path to proper qualification.<sup>78</sup> The first of his pupils to attend regular university courses did so in 1864–66: Giovanni Anfossi who was a diocesan priest at the time, Giovanni Battista Francesia, Francesco Cerruti, Celestino Durando. Others followed them in subsequent years, gaining degrees in arts and theology.

As a letter to cleric Cagliari shows, Don Bosco had a clear interest in music too: 'I would also like you to do piano and organ, but since the school of method is almost fully in accordance with philosophical studies which you are doing, and also because it is only a matter of a couple of months, I want you to choose method, putting whatever other time you can into the piano – you can make up what you lack in that after the exams.'<sup>79</sup>

But those who had their degrees were often soon involved in other tasks and their classes entrusted to more or less regular replacement staff, counting on the tolerance of officials who might be flexible with a man they respected and admired. Among other things, some Ministers, especially the Minister for the Interior, were interested in the Oratory, often entrusting it with boys in need of support and education.

In the oft-quoted memoirs on *Perquisizioni*, Don Bosco perhaps ended up not doing full justice to a political class made up generally of moderate liberals who were ultimately quite tolerant. When the Left came to power, the battle for schools became much more difficult.<sup>80</sup> But Don Bosco's

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74 Letter of February 1866, Em II 203-204.

75 Cf. *L'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales ospizio di beneficenza. Esposizione del Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*, Appendice N. 4. Turin, tip. Salesiana 1879, pp. 38-39, OE XXXI 294-295.

76 Em II 281-282.

77 P. BARICCO, *Torino descritta*. Torino, tip. G. B. Paravia e comp. 1869, pp. 708 and 812-813.

78 Cf. For example, letter to the Minister for Public Instruction C. Matteucci, 11 November 1862, Em I 537-538.

79 Letter of 23 July 1856, Em I 294.

80 Cf. Chap. 28, § 1.

writing was a typical product of the style he adopted, where he was writing for the ordinary people and also putting together a sample of well-chosen and reliable stratagems when dealing with politicians who were not lacking in shrewdness. Less appropriate might be his stereotype of the enemy destined to an inglorious fate. The final pages [of *Perquisizioni*] on how Gatti and Farini ended up, are painful, and hardly compatible with Don Bosco's so-called modernity. Apart from his intentions, they were overlaid with a mentality of a God who metes out justice. His theological and spiritual formation had not succeeded in removing the religious notion of retribution already present in his personal awareness of the indissoluble connection between guilt and punishment.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, or so Don Bosco thought, who could defend the smallest of the small, the young he had a predilection for, if not the just and merciful Father? In the historical reality though, Farini was a much more complex and positive figure, both as a professional and able politician, first in Rome in the Papal States then in Turin during the transition from the Kingdom of Sardinia to the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>82</sup>

Along with the introductory page written last of all, other pages toward the end, prior to those dealing with punishment of his presumed persecutors, are especially instructive. They make up the most insightful and valid section of the entire memoir. Don Bosco suggests in the introduction that he is not writing lengthy memoranda about difficult cases but in order to speak directly; 'to people of highest authority;' to them and not 'to their underlings.' In general, then, he noted that when one must tackle problems 'with secular individuals' one must, 'only briefly touch on religious motives and by preference highlight the honesty of actions and individuals, and of works which the world calls philanthropy but which our holy religion calls charity.'<sup>83</sup> Finally, as the essence of the entire memoir, he refers to rules of behaviour, a typical feature of his way of relating to the civil and secular worlds, Don Bosco spells out a principle which became almost an official manifesto for Salesian behaviour in the 24th session of the First Salesian General Chapter in 1877.<sup>84</sup> 'All civil, fiscal [judicial] authorities of public security, City Council, education, were convinced that despite our difficult position, despite the sadness of the times, we remained firmly Catholic and there was nothing we taught that could in the least damage or run contrary to government legislation. Because we have always had the firm desire to give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's, our conscience is clear.'

From this came the practical rule of not supporting what he described as 'the radical change of our times' with the shift from complete freedom for charitable activity by religious bodies, to the governing authorities' claims of 'regulating everything under the law.' 'The principle, constantly observed among us, of not being mixed up in politics, of being neither for nor against, has been found to be most beneficial.'<sup>85</sup>

In reality, from references to political events in Dominic Ruffino's and John Bonetti's chronicles, we gain the distinct impression that conservative thinking unfavourable to the new order was circulating at the Oratory and especially in Don Bosco's conversations. This reflects precisely what he wrote to the Pope as we have seen earlier.

The school battle in 1878–81 would be much tougher, the contenders more determined, and Don Bosco's and his collaborators' behaviour quite different from what he advised in the memoir written in another context and in times by then well in the past.

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81 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* II..., pp. 65-66, 72, 94, 9799.

82 Cf. N. RAPONI, v. *Farini, Luigi Carlo*, DBI XLV 31-42.

83 P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 143-144.

84 Cf. Chap. 25, § 7.

85 P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 187-188.



### 3. First branches spread out from Valdocco (1860–64)

In one of the many letters with which Don Bosco loved to keep Pius IX informed of the development of his works, he offered a survey of the boys in the first three colleges in 1866: St Francis de Sales in Turin, St Charles in Mirabello Monferrato, St Philip Neri in Lanzo. 'The boys residing in the three different houses' he wrote, 'come to one thousand two hundred, of whom around a hundred take on the clerical habit each year, and for the most part go to the seminaries in their respective dioceses. Those who have the spirit stay and become part of the Society of St Francis de Sales. At the moment there are one hundred and ten of these.'<sup>86</sup>

This simple numeric indication makes explicit the intentions which drove him to develop the colleges: the Christian formation of the student class, with the concrete possibility of cultivating vocations for the Church and Religious Life, selecting and promoting members for his own Religious Society.

To all of them was offered the possibility of secondary studies which were culturally and morally reliable. This was agreed on in the text of the 'Regulations for the college and boarding house of St. Philip Neri at Lanzo' founded in 1864. It became part of the regulations for St Charles College, opened in Mirabello Monferrato the year before. 'The purpose of this college' it read, 'is the moral, literary and civic education of youth who aspire to a career in study. Moral education will be given through teaching the principles and maxims of our own Holy Catholic Religion. Literary or scientific education extends to elementary and secondary classes. Such teaching will be imparted following the government curricula for public instruction.'<sup>87</sup> The same wording is found in a 'plan to re-open the Cavour college and boarding house' in July 1865, which we will address further on.

Pietro Stella notes: 'Don Bosco offered no alternative: either the poorest boys in oratories on the periphery, or youth in colleges and boarding houses. In the decade from 1859–69, in real terms he had more than one reason for moving in the direction of seminaries and colleges which could be a seedbed for clerics and Salesians, in addition to forming 'upright citizens and good Christians.'<sup>88</sup>

#### 3.1 Mirabello Monferrato

While he was taking on uncertain responsibilities for the regeneration of the seminary at Giaveno, Don Bosco was predisposed to seizing the right moment for setting up a work of his own at Mirabello Monferrato in the province of Alessandria and diocese of Casale.<sup>89</sup>

He was able to count on having land and a modest building offered free by Giovanni Battista Provera, father of Francesco, who came to Valdocco in 1858 and was a member of the first group to profess their vows in the Society of St Francis de Sales on 14 May.

When the foundation of the new, larger building had been laid (the contractor was Giosuè Buzzetti, younger brother of Carlo and Guisepe) Don Bosco also entertained the idea of involving the town council which had been able to send elementary, and eventually secondary students, to the College. This was the thinking behind the request for consultation and mediation he forwarded in December 1862 to a lawyer from Casale Monferrato whom he knew was trusted by the town's mayor. <sup>90</sup>He also set about gathering benefactors, obtaining the concrete involvement of the very

86 Letter of 25 January 1866, Em II 201.

87 *Piano di regolamento pel collegio-convitto di S. Filippo Neri di Lanzo*, ms all. With corrections by Don Bosco, ASC D 4820401.

88 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 126.

89 Cf. L. DEAMBROGIO, *Le passeggiate autunnali di D. Bosco per i colli monferrini*. Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Istituto Salesiano "Bernardi Semeria" 1975, *Periodo V - Piccolo Seminario di San Carlo (1863)* (pp. 449-463), with a useful appendix of documents (pp. 490-516), among which the decree establishing the "Piccolo seminario" of the diocesan Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana (p. 507).

90 To Lawyer L. Massa, 19 December 1862, Em I 544-545.

generous Countess Carlotta and Count Federico Callori, whose noble family name came from Vignale, ten kilometres from Mirabello.<sup>91</sup> Thus a few days later, he was able to decisively reject the heavy conditions imposed by the municipal authorities with whom, nevertheless, he sought to maintain cordial relations. 'In any event,' he wrote 'I count a lot on their moral support, even more than their charity, assuring them that the only purpose of this college is to do material and academic good for whomsoever we can, but especially for young people who want to study.'<sup>92</sup>

With the help of the Bishop of Casale, Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana, the institute was established as a diocesan junior seminary and was presented as such to parish priests, potential users and, though not without opposition and intense negotiations, to the Superintendent of Studies in the province.<sup>93</sup>

The composition of the group which began there on 13 October 1863, reveals Don Bosco's daring, his trust in his young pupils, his farsightedness. The Rector, Michael Rua, at 26 years of age the only priest,<sup>94</sup> could count on a staff who were mostly very young, still simple clerics: the prefect or vicar and administrator, Fr Francis Provera who was about to turn 27, and would be ordained a priest at the end of 1864; John Bonetti, catechist or spiritual director, 25 years old, and also to be ordained in 1864, succeeded Rua as the Rector of the college in 1865; Francis Cerutti, 19 years old, would be ordained priest in 1866; Paul Albera, 18 years old, would be ordained in 1868, and Francis Dalmazzo, 18 years old, would be ordained priest in 1868, though only professing vows in 1869. Soon added were several young clerics, two of whom were 17 years old and had taken triennial vows: F. Cuffia and D. Belmonte, in July 1864, A. Nasi at the beginning of 1866, F. Alessio in September 1869. In general, they were more mature than their age suggests, as would be shown by so many of them who shouldered responsibilities early and successfully in Salesian works, first as rectors then in more demanding and higher roles.

The problems of establishing and regulating the teaching in three elementary and five secondary classes, the overall educational and administrative activity, was resolved brilliantly thanks to the compact nature of the group, made fully cohesive under the years of Fr Michael Rua at the helm. At the end of October, early November, Don Bosco sent him two letters by way of guidance. The first, which accompanied 'another small caravan' of boarders from Valdocco in Turin, was brief and practical, expressing trust and 'freedom': 'Excellent that you have a chapel; that was my first wish. In matters of this nature carry on as it seems best to you in the Lord.' He sent his best wishes for the Feast of All Saints: 'May all the Saints in heaven make saints of everyone living now and in the future at that house.'<sup>95</sup>

The second letter gave the new Rector guidelines for spiritual life for himself and his team, rules of government, pedagogical tips. These were collected together, following a brief preface, under several headings: *For Yourself, With the Teachers, With the assistants and dormitory monitors, With domestic staff, With the students, With outsiders*.<sup>96</sup> Reviewed and added to in 1870–71, the letter evolved into a brief document known as the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors*. Even today it has become one of the principal sources of Don Bosco's spirituality as founder and educator for heads of religious and educative communities.<sup>97</sup>

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91 To Count C. Callori, 5 May 1863, Em I 576.

92 To the Council secretary G. D. Provera, 15 May 1863, Em I 578-579.

93 Cf. From the beginning, letter to Bishop L. Calabiana, 25 January 1864, Em II 30-31 and to Fr M. Rua, 5 February 1864, Em II 34-35. letter of 28 October 1863, Em I 612-613.

94 His mother, Giovanna Maria Ferrero, who worked in the Valdocco Oratory when she was widowed, followed her to Mirabello, a valid collaborator in domestic work.

95 Letter of 28 October 1863, Em I 612-613.

96 Cf. Em I 613-617.

97 Cf. F. MOTTO, *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di don Bosco*, RSS 3 (1984) 125-166; see Chap. 24, § 1.4.

The college opened with 90 boys and soon peaked, given that at the commencement of the second scholastic year, Don Bosco told the Rector: 'When you have reached 150 close enrolments.'<sup>98</sup> They could have taken more but a later influx of boarders for the 1870–71 school year led to the work transferring to Borgo S. Martino.<sup>99</sup>

From the acceptance conditions published some years later we could argue that boys from middle-class families were able to come to Mirabello. There were two fee levels, of 24 and 32 lire [93 and 123 euros] a month, plus 20 lire [77 euros] a year, paid in advance for bedding, including mattresses, haircuts, ink, lighting and heating, while 'expenses for washing, ironing, mending clothes, and shoes were to be borne by the families.' This would have been a somewhat demanding financial burden for families at the lower end of the scale. Summer and autumn holidays were stipulated after five years, (from 1868) as being 'a month from 15 September – 15 October.' Prior to that they were given the first fifteen days of August and fifteen days prior to the beginning of the new scholastic year.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.2 Lanzo Torinese

In 1864, the new Religious Society had around 65 members including the postulants or '*ascritti*'. Professed members (still in temporary vows) were somewhere around forty in number, ten of them priests. Various clerics had not yet taken vows. But for Don Bosco, an organism, be it individual or a community, was alive if it was growing and expanding in work. In a certain sense, while it was true that *operari sequitur esse*, it was no less the case that *esse sequitur operari*. This was even more certainly the case the more the request to work for the good of youth and the greater glory of God became urgent.

This is what led Don Bosco, in 1864, to become involved in a second college, outside Turin at Lanzo, 32 kilometres from the capital. When the work began it involved the zeal of the parish priest, Blessed Federico Albert (1820–76), all the municipal authorities and Don Bosco's immediate willingness.<sup>101</sup> The municipality had 2,300 inhabitants and its centre was at the crossroads of a network of valleys and their hamlets, all a potential watershed from which to draw a considerable number of pupils for a secondary school. The area was well known to Don Bosco because, as we have already indicated, he went there every summer from 1842 to the Sanctuary of St Ignatius (950m. above sea level) for his retreat, led by Frs Guala, Cafasso and Golzio.

After several decades of relative prosperity, the college had suffered a disconcerting decrease in pupil numbers, so much so that it was closed in 1857. Fr Albert, parish priest at Lanzo since 1852, was not at peace until he had convinced Don Bosco to re-establish it. He had found in his educator friend an enterprising man ready to act rather than wait for offers of places for his activities on behalf of youth, and who was mindful, among other things, of the help he had given to the retreat at the Oratory in 1847. Once he had secured Don Bosco's availability, the negotiations with the City Council were quick. At its session on 23 May, the Council drew up a draft contract

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98 To Fr M. Rua, 17 October 1864, Em II 82.

99 Cf. Chap. 18, § 1.3.

100 Arrangements were published in an appendix to fasc. 9 (Sept.) of the "Letture cattoliche" 1868, OE XX 457-461.

101 Cf. On the context and various events, *Saggio di corografia statistica e storica delle valli di Lanzo* by Luigi Clavarino. Turin, tip. della Gazzetta del popolo 1867, 304 pp.; *Il santuario di sant'Ignazio di Loiola presso Lanzo Torinese* descritto da un sacerdote di Torino. Torino, P. Marietti 1878, 90 pp.; *Don Bosco a Lanzo Torinese. Il collegio salesiano S. Filippo Neri* and an appendix with documents in the monthly "Echi di vita collegiale. Supplemento dedicato alla beatificazione di D. Bosco, 2-9 June 1929", pp. 29-35, 110-112.

which Don Bosco said he would accept with 'some minor modifications.'<sup>102</sup>

The Council met again on 30 June 'to decide on the proposal forwarded' by Don Bosco, who was present for the discussion. 'Animated by philanthropic sentiments which would benefit young students in Lanzo and surrounding towns' the discussion aimed at re-opening 'the old college and school according to the plan he [Don Bosco] had presented.' Financial terms were then determined including the *minervale* or yearly student tax, and costs relating to managing studies and teaching; 'For the two years of Rhetoric, the maximum may not exceed thirty six lire [146 euros] and for Grammar classes, thirty lire [122 euros]. The maximum for elementary classes is fixed at fifteen lire [61 euros].' 'By means of the above Fr Bosco will provide three different teachers for elementary classes, all with qualifications, and will also provide suitable teachers in the required number for the five secondary classes.' 'Instruction for the three elementary classes and the secondary classes will be carried out according to the discipline and curriculum established by the Ministry of Public Instruction.' 'All pupils must abide by the discipline and timetable set for each class.' 'For whatever is needed for good morality and religious instruction, the municipality will refer to the prudence of Fr Bosco and the vicar forane of the town.'<sup>103</sup>

The Provincial Deputation approved of the decision and the agreement on 15 July 1864. Fifteen days later, Don Bosco sent the Superintendent of Studies in Turin the request to open elementary classes and the college [=the boarding section], attaching names of teaching and administration staff to the request, a list which was mostly fictitious in order to meet legal obligations.<sup>104</sup> The Superintendent, who was a realist and an understanding type, signed the authorisation on 14 September.

Apart from the very young Rector, twenty-four year-old devout Dominic Ruffino, and eighteen year old and not yet professed James Costamagna, a future missionary bishop, the most efficient core of the staff who arrived in October for an early November opening was made up of individuals with notable life experience, even though only one of them was professed. The prefect was Fr Francis Provera who would be ordained priest in December that year. Teachers were Francis Bodrato, a forty-one-year-old widower and elementary school teacher who would eventually become the first Salesian Provincial in South America; twenty-one-year-old Joseph Fagnano, former Garibaldino and future Prefect Apostolic of Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego; twenty-four-year-old Nicolantonio Cibrario; twenty-eight-year-old Anthony Sala, former director of the family spinning mill and future Economist General; twenty-three-year-old Peter Guidazio, who had come to the Oratory two years earlier, a former carpenter whom Don Bosco had re-directed to study – years later he would be the founder and organiser of the Salesian work in Sicily. This was a team of workers putting brain and brawn to the task. The day after they arrived they immediately had to display their abilities in fixing up the old and decrepit building. The City Council had to be asked to fulfil its part of the agreement, not without some tense moments.<sup>105</sup>

It was not so easy to launch the secondary classes: they arrived at their full complement in 1868-69 when the upper secondary (Fourth and Fifth Year) classes were opened.<sup>106</sup> Up to that point the boarding numbers arrived at a maximum of 124 after just 40 the year before.<sup>107</sup> On 16 July 1865, came the unexpected sad premature death, following a severe attack of pneumonia, of

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102 To mayor P. Tessiore, 4 June 1864, Em II 56.

103 Cf. *Convenzione tra D. Bosco e il Comune di Lanzo. Verbale del Consiglio Comunale - 30 June 1864*, with earlier projects, ASC F 465; the minutes with the text of the agreement is also found in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 428-430. Annual school fees, then, were around 146, 122 and 61 euro.

104 A F. Selmi, 3 August 1864, Em II 64-65.

105 Cf. Letter to Fr D. Ruffino, 3 February 1865, Em II 105; to the mayor, 29 April 1865, Em II 127.

106 Cf. Letter to the Superintendent of Turin, V. Garelli, 19 September 1868, Em II 570-571.

107 A V. Garelli, 28 September 1868, Em II 575.

the young Rector Fr Ruffino (1840–65). During the long interregnum which began in April in practical terms, the community organised itself very compactly. When Fr Provera went to Mirabello temporarily for health reasons, where he remained as Prefect until 1869, Don Bosco, who knew and valued his close helpers, entrusted the community to Bodrato and Sala, the two oldest and most experienced, though they were still clerics and had not made their profession.<sup>108</sup> For all of September and part of October, Fr John Baptist Lemoyne functioned as Superior. He was with Fr Victor Alasonatti through his painful illness. The latter died on the night of 7 October.<sup>109</sup> On 10 November, Fr Lemoyne was the first Salesian to profess perpetual vows. He was followed on the 15th by the first group who had taken temporary vows in 1862: Rua, Cagliero, Francesia, Bonetti. Bonetti was immediately sent to Lanzo as Rector,<sup>110</sup> but a week later for health reasons was made Rector at Mirabello, the role that Fr Lemoyne had been due to play, but ended up replacing him at Lanzo where he remained until 1877.

On 24 June 1866, on the day Don Bosco was celebrating his name day, a young representative from the sodalities and Fr Lemoyne turned up at Valdocco. Lemoyne was the official poet for the occasion, also in years to come. The Rector had arrived 'with an offering of money for the new church' and a large packet of 'compositions that various classes, individuals, assistants, teachers and the Prefect' had sent to honour the man in question. In his letter of thanks, Don Bosco confessed he had read them through without interruption other than when he had to stop 'because frequently moved to tears.' He recommended love, obedience, trust in the Rector and concluded with a threefold 'Hip, Hip Hooray' for Fr Lemoyne and the other superiors, and for all his 'dear boys at Lanzo.'<sup>111</sup>

In summer 1868, Don Bosco sought to have the secondary school placed on a par with the State schools,<sup>112</sup> but the request was not successful. Two following requests to the City Council to allow him the use of the building for forty years, and a commitment to extend the rooms at their expense were also unsuccessful. He wanted to address the increasing number of pupils and have 'an appropriate site for the two year Rhetoric classes and first elementary.'<sup>113</sup> He had to look for another solution.<sup>114</sup>

In educational terms, the Institute at Lanzo, like the one at Mirabello, was a photocopy of the Oratory, though more focused on the boarding school nature of the place than the student community at Valdocco. The first Rector left some notes on College [boarding] life in an exercise book of comments entitled *Book of experience 1865*, following on from the *Book of experience 1864* drawn up at Valdocco. He sought to reproduce at Lanzo what he had experienced at the Oratory and had seen practised in the college run by Fr Rua. 'At Mirabello' he had noted in the *Book of experience 1864*, and pleased that the Oratory, the model house, was now a school: 'Fr Rua does as D. Bosco does here. Always surrounded by boys, partly so, it seems, because he is always telling some interesting story. At the beginning of the year he recommended to teachers that they not demand too much, do not immediately resort to telling boys off, but put up with plenty. He also played games with the boys after lunch and was always in their midst, surrounded by many of them, singing and happy at recreation. Teachers are also sitting at the table in the study.' The pupils 'all go off for walks together in twos and there are about 90 of them, two assistants and a teacher showing the way. They go into the surrounding districts and are often invited into one or

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108 Cf. Letter to Fr F. Provera, 8 August 1865, Em II 154.

109 Cf. letter to Fr G. B. Lemoyne, 19 September 1865, Em II 166.

110 Cf. Letter to the Capit. Vic. G. Zappata, 7 November 1865, Em II 181.

111 To the boys at Lanzo College, 25 June 1866, Em II 263; another letter-strenna was sent to them on 31 December 1868, Em II 617-618.

112 Cf. letter to a town councillor at Lanzo, 28 August 1868, Em II 561-562; to the Superintendent in Turin, V. Garelli, 28 September 1868, Em II 575-576.

113 To mayor G. Droetti, 2 April and 12 May 1869, Em III 69-70, 89.

114 Cf. Chap. 18, § 1.7.

other home to eat and drink. But Fr Rua does not allow any of them to accept, because for all of them to go would be too much, and for just some to go would cause offence. On feast days, Fr Rua preaches in the morning and explains bible history. He preaches in the evening and explains theological virtues.' 'It should be noted that in the evenings, when he is advising them about something, he always does so jokingly and cheerfully. At Mirabello the boys sing every evening in the choir. A cleric reads from the pulpit during May.'<sup>115</sup>

### 3.3 Plans drawn up and brief fulfilment.

Before and after the two flourishing colleges opened there was no lack of other plans and proposals which for various reasons did not come to fulfilment. In 1862, Don Bosco entered 'into negotiations with the Dogliani (Cuneo) City Council to take over the running of the local college and classes. In order to conclude negotiations they lacked a signed agreement and the consent of the bishop of Mondovì diocese, his protector and friend, Giovanni Tommaso Ghilardi. The energetic Dominican did not give his consent, fearing a loss of vocations in his junior seminary.'<sup>116</sup>

Similar to the Lanzo agreement was a draft one drawn up with the Cavour Council (Turin), prepared by Don Bosco hopefully for a college to be opened in the 1865–66 school year 'with the sole aim of promoting the moral and academic good of young students' of the locality.'<sup>117</sup> Prof. (Fr) Amedeo Peyron from the town had insisted on it. Don Bosco had also thought of a possible Rector, a priest from Carmagnola, Fr Angelo Cantù (1839–69), teacher of mathematics at the Senior High School in Savona, and contacted him by letter on 17 June 1865.'<sup>118</sup> But inadequate contribution by the City Council (8,000 lire as against the 10,000 requested [33,032 euros versus 41,353 euros]) and disagreement over other financial responsibilities, soon led to failure in negotiations.

Merely considered but not even planned was the proposal for a college at Occimiano, a medium-sized village three kilometres from Mirabello. Its foundation was encouraged by Marquis Da Pasano and local priests. The Marquis was offering premises known as the *Convent*. Rather than being a branch of the college at Mirabello it could have been an alternative, but it seems Don Bosco had not even begun the paperwork with the Council.'<sup>119</sup>

In 1865 he also rejected taking on the Artiganelli Institute in Genoa, run by Fr Francesco Montebruno. He informally forewarned Fr Giuseppe Frassinetti of this in May 1865 when the latter asked him to set up his oratory work in Genoa. Don Bosco replied, 'I have dreamed of this for a long time and it seemed that matters were fully agreed upon with Fr Montebruno, but the conclusion was that we have seen we cannot join a charitable institute specified by the Rule [his own] with one that is governed paternally, yes, but in its own style and without assured funds.' He suggested that among the basic conditions, any work of his should not be 'in competition with Fr Bruno's and, if it were possible, whatever was done had to be 'one with him.'<sup>120</sup> This hypothetical suggestion was equivalent to saying that this particular project was almost certainly unrealisable.

A letter in 1867 to his friend and benefactor, banker Marco Gonella,<sup>121</sup> documents the hypothesis of a college at Chieri with senior and lower secondary, technical and elementary classes. It was in Chieri, from 1831–35, that Don Bosco had completed his Grammar schooling.

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115 D. RUFFINO, *Libro di esperienza 1864...*, pp. 65-66.

116 Cf. M. F. MELLANO, *Don Bosco e i vescovi di Mondovì (1842-1897)*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 476-477; MB VII 146-150.

117 Cf. Text of Cavour's draft agreement with City, ASC A 2200114; MB VIII 157.

118 Em II 143-144.

119 Cf. MB VIII 158-160.

120 To Fr G. Frassinetti, 2 May 1865, Em II 132.

121 He would certainly have also been sent the letter of 3 and 20 April 1867, Em II 347-348 and 357-358

After outlining his moderate financial requests he concluded: 'Of course you are aware of my good will and wherever good will and hard work can achieve something for the glory of God, I will be there with all my strength.'<sup>122</sup> But it seems that things went no further from this point.

Instead, Don Bosco was able to use a site at Trofarello, 12 kilometres from Turin, from 1865–69. It was a farmhouse with a huge water tank, cellars, and a number of other buildings left him as a legacy by Fr G. A. Franco who died at 49 years of age on 30 October 1864. He intended to sell it, initially, with the hope of realising the considerable sum of 24,000 lire [99,248 euros], but the buyers had to withdraw their offer and Don Bosco thought of a better use. Until autumn 1869, it was used for Salesian retreats, which usually took place over two sessions between August and September, or both in September, as a significant occasion in the religious and community growth of the Congregation.<sup>123</sup> With the increase in members, the site became inadequate and was replaced by the college at Lanzo. Money from the eventual sale of Trofarello was providential for building a new and larger place at Lanzo.

#### **4. Ministries, public entities, boys and the Oratory.**

Even prior to the searches or inspections, Don Bosco was engaged in a range of relations with public authorities, especially through requests for grants, approvals for buildings, authorisation relating to lotteries, invitations to particular celebrations. The search on 26 May, and the inspection on 9 June, ended up gaining him increased 'respect in public opinion.'<sup>124</sup> Most of all, there was an increase on the part of public authorities, in requests to place boys in need of shelter and technical-vocational or personal formation at the Oratory. These became especially relevant in the period 1860–65. They slowed, but not entirely, as a result of the Agreement between Italy and France on 15 September 1864, and the law passed on 11 December, when Florence became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>125</sup> This meant that in 1865 the central State institutions moved there from Turin: the Royal House, Ministries, Parliament, Senate and central administration bodies. Don Bosco was exemplary in practising what he was instilling in his Salesians – the way of dealing with public authorities and 'secular individuals', aware that his religiously inspired work of education and welfare also had a visible social and philanthropic relevance.

In 1865, the Minister for War, Alfonso Lamarmora, recommended he accept two boys. In a postscript to a letter requesting footwear and used military clothing, Don Bosco assured him: 'The two boys, Berardi and Litardi, recommended by your charity, continue to reside in this house and both are learning a trade.'<sup>126</sup>

Another recommendation to take a boy came to him on 4 February 1860, from the Minister for the Interior. Cavour had been Prime Minister since 21 January.<sup>127</sup> This Ministry recommended or entrusted numerous boys to Don Bosco from 1860 until September 1864, during Luigi Carlo Farina's term of office,<sup>128</sup> followed by Marco Minghetti,<sup>129</sup> Bettino Ricasoli,<sup>130</sup> Ubaldino Peruzzi<sup>131</sup>

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122 To banker M. Gonella, 20 May 1867, Em II 369-370.

123 Many letters of Don Bosco refer to the house and to the retreat sent in July 1865 and September 1870, Em II 148, 234-235, 271, 278, 292, 413, 433-434, 531, 568, 569; Em III 108, 126, 140, 245, 251.

124 Cf. P. BRAIDO - F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda...*, RSS 8 (1989) 188.

125 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

126 Letter of 14 October 1858, Em I 362-363.

127 Em I 396.

128 Cf. MB VI 553 (21 May 1860, with a subsidy of 100 lire, around 380 euro), 574575, 641-643, 669, 687, 1073-1074; Em I 403-405, 411-413, 414, 420, 425.

129 MB VI 774-775, 1075; records a number of them signed by the secretary to the Minister G. Borromeo, MB VI 1077-1079.

130 Em I 469, 475, 481; MB VII 106-107, 893-894.

131 Em I 545-546, 555, 564, 569, 583-584, 587, 596-597, 625-626, 627-628; MB VII 439-441, 897, 898-904.

and Secretary General Silvio Spaventa.<sup>132</sup> Without fail they sent an appropriate grant or paid the monthly boarding fee. Don Bosco had also asked Minister Peruzzi to intervene with his colleague in the Public Instruction Ministry, Michele Amari, on behalf of the Oratory school, but without success.<sup>133</sup>

Some examples will make it clear how Don Bosco and his Oratory were considered important. The Ministry 'warmly' recommended acceptance of a young man for two years, saying it would 'offer a one-off' grant of 60 lire,' asking on the same date that another 'poor orphan' boy 'be taken in immediately despite being under-age.' Don Bosco opposed this latter request.<sup>134</sup>

By letter on 1 August 1860, a young man who had 'lost his father' was recommended 'to the merciful charity of Father Bosco,' asking him 'to grant free admission to the pious institute of St Francis de Sales at Valdocco.'<sup>135</sup> Three months later it was the turn of another boy 'whose father had died and who belongs to a poor family in this capital.'<sup>136</sup> Just five days later the fourteen-year-old son of 'Pietro' was recommended. The Minister said that 'Pietro does not have sufficient means to support him, his sick wife and family, and besides it was urgent that the lad be removed from idleness and be put to work in some business.'<sup>137</sup>

On 12 December 'the experienced philanthropy of Father Bosco' was called on to help a fourteen-year-old who had lost his mother and whose father had been auditor for the Royal Lottery. The Ministry guaranteed that the boy had 'good moral and personal qualities,' and was worthy of consideration, and agreed it was 'ready to pay the required sum of L. 100 [386 euros] as a one-off grant.'<sup>138</sup> Don Bosco replied on 3 January 1861, to this and another letter from 28 December, asking for the contribution to be doubled: 'I am prepared to accept both of them but the current financial circumstances of the house oblige me to determine the cost at two hundred francs for each resident. I am very willing but find myself in a difficult situation.'<sup>139</sup> On 19 January he announced he had accepted both and had 'placed them so they could learn mechanics as a trade.'<sup>140</sup> Then on 2 February 1861, he indicated that he had accepted a boy recommended on 29 June earlier, adding tactfully: "Should his Excellency, the Minister, wish in this regard to offer some charitable grant, it would help provide bread for our poor residents who would be most grateful."<sup>141</sup>

On 22 March he indicated he would accept another boy recommended on 18 March, putting the acceptance off for the moment, however, 'while waiting to complete repairs currently underway.'<sup>142</sup> On 27 April the Secretary General of the Ministry, Count Guido Borromeo (1818–90), communicated that the Ministry was setting aside funds to be distributed to pious institutes in the capital and that 400 lire had been assigned to Don Bosco's institute.<sup>143</sup> On 27 and 28 June respectively, two other boys were recommended, the first 9 years of age who had lost both his parents, the other 11, whose father 'could not work due to illness.' Don Bosco replied in the affirmative on 3 July, even though neither of the two had turned 12: 'It is true that the first is four years under the desired age, but the favours I have often received from the War Ministry who have made this request lead me to suggest that I will find a way to fit him into arrangements with the other boarders.' And for the other 'although he too is a year under-age, given the seriousness of

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132 Em I 604-605; Em II 66-67.

133 Cf. letter of 7 March 1863, Em I 558.

134 Letter of 25 June 1860, MB VI 641-643; Cf. Em I 404-405 and 411.

135 Letter of 25 June 1860, MB VI 641-643; Cf. Em I 404-405 and 411. MB VI 1073, Em I 420.

136 Letter of 26 October 1860, MB VI 1074, Em I 425.

137 Letter of 31 October 1860, MB VI 1074, Em I 425.

138 MB VI 1075; with further recommendation of 28 December, MB VI 1076.

139 Em I 432.

140 Em I 434.

141 Em I 437: His Excellency was Catholic liberal, Marco Minghetti

142 MB VI 1077, Em I 443.

143 MB VI 896.



the need I will accept him too.’<sup>144</sup>

Of interest are the psychological notes in the letter announcing acceptance of the two boys, which he wrote on 5 August 1861: the eleven-year-old ‘entered on the 28th day of July this year and was put into the mechanics trade as well as night school.’ The second boy ‘entered on the first of this current month, August, but because he lacks religious and scientific instruction [=illiterate!] he will attend school for some time, meanwhile studying whatever trade could be compatible with his age and inclination. I note only that he shows himself to be a good and intelligent boy and could easily have very soon become an [in] famous street urchin.’<sup>145</sup>

A fourteen-year-old was recommended on 6 August. This boy’s father had died; he had married the widow of a certain Realini, who had been condemned to death. Thinking the boy might be the child of the condemned man, he initially replied in the negative, stating that the boy would ‘certainly be subjected to mockery and gossip among his companions.’ He added: ‘While the others are also a bit wild and abandoned, they will accept him so long as he does not bring something that might cause them to be frightened or despise him.’<sup>146</sup> Once his doubt was clarified, Don Bosco wrote on 1 September 1861, saying he would take the boy, using the opportunity to ask for a donation to finish much ‘work on the two workshops and dormitories’ which had to be done due to the ‘increased acceptance of boys who need to be taken in urgently.’ He asked Borromeo to intercede with the Minister for one or two possibilities: ‘help with a large donation or a loan of fr. 5,000 [19,315 euro] to be paid back by taking other boys the Minister might want to direct to this house.’<sup>147</sup>

By letter on 21 November, he communicated that ‘Caretti was placed in a night school for each night of the week at his appropriate level of education. Up till now he shows good signs of succeeding.’<sup>148</sup> In accepting one boy, ‘given the exceptional needs of the house’ he recommended himself to the kindness of those making the request, the Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, asking, ‘for some kind of donation’ but concluded: ‘I ask this only as a request, not as an exclusive condition.’<sup>149</sup> On 9 August 1865, and in this spirit, he offered the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza, a hundred potential places for boys orphaned by the cholera raging through Italy.<sup>150</sup>

In 1867 he reminded Urbano Rattazzi, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance *ad interim*, following the resignation of Minister Ferrara, that he had made a grant of 600 lire [2,455 euro] in 1866 to cover a tax to be paid by the college at Mirabello Monferrato. He then asked him to do the same for the next instalment in the second half of the same year.<sup>151</sup> Rattazzi saw that Don Bosco was sent an amount of 600 lire to compensate for his predecessor’s refusal to grant exemption.<sup>152</sup> Rattazzi had reaffirmed his trust in Don Bosco some months prior when the latter had asked him to pay board for a boy entrusted to him by the Ministry for the Interior.<sup>153</sup>

Naturally, Don Bosco also received recommendations from friends and benefactors. Of interest in his reply to an anonymous bishop friend: ‘Your Lordship, one cannot say no to such interest, even more so when the recommendation comes with the *quibus bene sonantibus* which, though this does not drive houses of charity, is nevertheless most appropriate given the times we are in.

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144 Em I 450.

145 Em I 454-455.

146 Letter of 9 August, Em I 455; MB VI 1079.

147 Em I 457-458.

148 Em I 469.

149 Letter of 14 February 1865, Em II 108-109.

150 Em II 155. On the cholera, Cf. Chap. 8, § 8.

151 Letter of 5 August 1867, Em II 416.

152 Cf. Letter to Minister F. Ferrara of 7 June 1867, Em II 384-385.

153 To , 10 April 1867, Em II 353,

Send along the boy you have recommended, whenever; I would just ask, if you can, to provide him with his personal belongings and he will soon be put to a trade according to his strength and inclination. I trust he will be healthy and not have any outward disability.<sup>154</sup>

He also sent requests to Victor Emmanuel for donations.<sup>155</sup> And without fail, at least once a year in winter, a letter also went off to the Minister for War at the time to obtain 'some items of clothing, blankets, sheets, shirts, tunics, jackets, trousers, shoes, however much worn or torn.' 'Everything will be mended and used to clothe the poorest children of the people.' 'These same rags, sewn up and patched, are marvellous for clothing'<sup>156</sup> these poor boys who are in need of everything.

There was no lack of private individuals, sometimes including women from the aristocracy, who showed exceptional sensitivity by mending clothing for residents at the poor Oratory house. 'I cannot come and visit you as I would like to' he wrote to Countess Enrichette Bosco Riccardi 'but I am coming in the person of Jesus Christ hidden beneath these rags, and I recommend them out of your charity. It is wretched material in material terms but I hope it will be treasure for eternity for you.'<sup>157</sup> 'I have done as you wrote to me,' he assured another noble woman 'that is, not to send you a bundle of rags but to wait until you can tackle them more calmly on your return to Turin.'<sup>158</sup>

It should be noted, finally, that the number of boys accepted on someone's word could bring some unwelcome surprises. In the difficult cases where an individual could not be tolerated in such a mixed community packed into very little space, Don Bosco foresaw and also implemented the extreme measure of expulsion. But the usual daily disciplinary and behaviour issues were resolved through normal pedagogical responses.

We also know of one educational incident that became a legal case. Don Bosco wrote a defence of the case for the Chief City Magistrate in Turin, who had received a complaint concerning cleric Giuseppe Mazzarello (1832–68), accused of excessive disciplinary measures used in the bookbinding workshop, and in particular on one Carlo Boglietti. Don Bosco wrote a courageous legal-pedagogical pleading which ended up turning the defence into an accusation.

On the basis of 'article 650 of the penal code,' his careful argument began, 'the City Magistrates Court has chosen to introduce the idea of the *'Casa paterna'* into the family and domestic regime.' He saw the Oratory as being equivalent to this [i.e. *'in loco parentis'*]. Parents, and whoever takes their place, could no longer correct their child nor prevent insolence and insubordination,' with 'serious harm to public and private morality.' 'Besides' he continued 'in order to restrain certain boys, most of whom were sent by Government authorities, we had permission to use whatever means we considered appropriate, and in extreme cases to send for the arm of the law, as we have done on more than one occasion.' Boglietti 'was often warned in a fatherly way but to no avail.' 'He showed not only that he was incorrigible but he insulted, threatened and swore at his assistant cleric Mazzarello in front of his classmates' causing Mazzarello to fall ill. Ultimately 'he fled from the house without saying anything to his superiors.' 'Meanwhile his schoolmates continued the disruption, and some of them had to be expelled from the place; others, sadly had to be handed over to the authorities who put them in prison.'

Like a good lawyer, Don Bosco then went on to make demands of the Chief Magistrate regarding the individual making the allegation, whom he had now 'convicted'. Faced with a disruptive young man who insults and threatens his superiors, 'it would seem that the public

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154 Letter of 18 July 1861, Em I 451.

155 Letters of October 1861 and February 1862 on behalf of poor clerics, Em I 461-462, 476.

156 Letters of autumn 1860, Em I 423; of 30 September 1861, Em I 460-461; of 26 September 1863, Em I 605-606; for autumn 1862, see Em I 539-540; for 20 October 1864, Em II 84-85; for 17 September 1867, Em II 428-429.

157 Letter of 16 May 1866, Em II 240.

158 Letter of 14 August 1867, Em II 417.

authorities should assist private authority and not vice versa.' If they wanted to understand the matter further, Don Bosco concluded, pointing to consequences, harm caused, compensation, they could by all means pursue the case but on the condition that Boglietti 'introduce someone into the case able to meet the costs that could eventuate and that he accept responsibility for the serious consequences that could perhaps result.' He made application for compensation for the harm done to the assistant's health and to ensure that neither Boglietti nor a certain Caneparo 'his relative or adviser' never entered the Oratory again 'to repeat the acts of insubordination and scandals already caused.'<sup>159</sup> In January 1868, Don Bosco wrote to *Cavaliere* Oreglia: "Our dear cleric Mazzarello died at Lanzo on the 22nd. He is one of the most beautiful flowers in our garden, whom God wished to transplant to Paradise."<sup>160</sup>

He wrote to Carlo Canton, head of Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about a difficult sixteen-year-old boy from Florence. It was the beginning of a valuable friendship: 'We will do what we can for young Pucci and although there have been good reasons for sending him back to his mother, at your intercession we will show further patience and await further reason, which we will endeavour to avoid.'<sup>161</sup> 'He is a young man whose behaviour is really poor but we will do what we can,' he had already written of Pucci to Bishop Limberti.<sup>162</sup> In October the boy returned to Florence.

In order to accept another difficult boy at Valdocco, he dictated precise conditions to Fr Provera: 'I am ready to take him so long as he promises me: 1. Not to give scandal to his companions in word or deed. 2. At least, not scandal concerning modesty or I will be obliged to send him home immediately.'<sup>163</sup>

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159 Letter of 18 April 1865, Em II 120-122.

160 Em II 489.

161 Letter of 28 August 1868, Em II 562-563.

162 Letter of 8 July 1868, Em II 548-549.

163 Letter of 5 October 1868, Em II 586.

## Chapter 14

# GENESIS OF THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES BENEATH THE SCEPTRE OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS (1858–65)

- 1858      Our Lady as *Auxilium Christianorum* in the *Mese di Maggio*
- 1862      March: Our Lady Help of Christians – miracle at Spoleto;  
26 March: Archbishop Luigi Fransoni dies in Lyons;  
14 May: first members profess vows;  
30 May: the two columns: *Auxilium Christianorum* and the Eucharist.
- 1863      1 February: first circular for construction of the Church of Mary Help of  
Christians;  
13 February: Pius IX informed;  
10 March: to Pius IX – the columns of the Church, the Eucharist and Our Lady;  
End of May: first excavation for the foundation of the Church of Mary Help of  
Christians.
- 1864      Spring: excavations completed.  
*Breve notizia della Societa di S. Francesco di Sales;*  
23 July: ‘decretum laudis’ for the Salesian Society.
- 1865      23 April; beginning of the Vegezzi mission at the Holy See regarding vacant  
Italian dioceses;  
27 April: laying of the foundation stone of the Church of Mary Help of  
Christians;  
October: Don Bosco’s trip to Lombardy and Veneto;  
December: trip to Pisa and Florence.

With the genesis of the Salesian Society, we are witnessing not just the advent of a new Religious Congregation but also a new place for Don Bosco in the Church and civil society. In the twists and turns of history during the period 1859–64, especially within the institution that was taking shape, he assumed the new roles of founder, formator of religious, and a man enveloped in the miraculous. During those same years he was led to reinterpreting the past by projecting it into the future in terms of himself and the nascent Society of St Francis de Sales.

More than anything else, this required a real and proper cultural re-qualification, the need to gain specific, legal, organisational, diplomatic understandings, the need to internalise a specific spirituality in order to give it structure and communicate it. Gradually the diocesan priest became a religious and a teacher and shaper of a community of consecrated individuals.

This was the context for the beginning of the difficult process that would lead to full canonical recognition of the Society: from the first objective, the '*decretum laudis*' in 1864, to papal approval in 1869, approval of the Constitutions in 1874, the 'privileges' that followed in June 1884, after the setback in 1875–76. There was no lack of labour pains in these steps and at crucial moments the Society would inevitably and providentially be forced to take on more productive binding features which it could not easily adjust to in the immediate circumstances.

This chapter will deal with the first part of that journey from 1858–64, to be followed immediately by another dedicated to its spiritual and pedagogical foundation. Yet another chapter will see Don Bosco's growing awareness of religious values highlighted at the same time, and their transmission to members of the Society during initial and ongoing formation. The two foundational aspects, the legal-organisational and the spiritual, will be dealt with later when looking at Don Bosco's contribution to the foundation of the FMA Institute<sup>1</sup> and as the exclusive player in founding the Salesian Cooperators.<sup>2</sup>

## **1. Requests and players in the field**

In a letter dated 27 August 1872, Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi encouraged Don Bosco to resume procedures seeking approval of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales. But he had introduced none of the most important requests into the constitutional text which the Roman Curia had made on several occasions. In its final session on 31 March 1874, the Congregation of Cardinals decided it was possible 'to petition the Holy Father for approval of the proposed Constitutions' but only in their 'amended and expanded' version. Don Bosco had to be made to accept all the points he had tenaciously refused to accept for ten years. We can suppose that if what had been requested, which was perfectly in agreement with current norms and praxis, had been acted on earlier, approval would have come in 1869 or even 1868, as also approval of the Society, saving some painful conflicts and precious energy.

It was in the order of things that the matter would be resolved as we know it was, but it was also inevitable that the process of arriving there would be so difficult, bearing in mind the convictions of the people involved along the way, beginning with Turin in the 1850s and 60s.

It is obvious that up to the limited recognition of 1864, the group who made up the society of common life on 18 December 1859, under Don Bosco's leadership, and who professed their first private vows of poverty, chastity, obedience on 14 March 1862 were subject to the jurisdiction of their respective diocesan Ordinaries regarding ecclesiastical studies, exams for admission to Orders, dimissorial letters for presenting ordinands to the ordaining Bishop. Don Bosco was their superior only for what concerned the internal regime of the institutions the members, lived and worked in, for discipline, religious and moral conduct, duties of work and apostolate compatible with *clerics*, given their duty to study and prepare for life in the Church, crowned by Holy Orders.

In the proceedings relating to both the approval of the Society and its Constitutions and the gradual gaining of particular faculties, at least four applications had to be managed.

In the first instance to the Pope, whom Don Bosco often liked to appeal to directly. The first personal contacts with Pius IX and other contacts by letter which followed, could have created the impression in the new founder that the Pontiff was especially benevolent in his regard. He nurtured this relationship and did everything he could to preserve it and bolster it, considering Pius IX as a privileged counterpart in matters concerning his Religious Society, to the point where he declared him to be its founder and promoter. The Pope was generous in granting him spiritual favours and,

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1 Cf. Chap. 19.

2 Cf. Chap. 22.

on various occasions, important faculties that others sought to have excluded from the Constitutions. Nevertheless, regarding the most important, demanding and definitive acts, the Pope followed canonical practice and saw that personal requests and procedures then followed the normal course by calling on the institutional assistance of the Roman Congregations and Curial offices.

Groups and individuals in the Roman Curia had to be the normal points of reference for Don Bosco's procedures relating to the foundation and stabilisation of the Society of St Francis de Sales, and often, the controversies connected with them or running parallel with them.

In the first place, it was the Congregations of Bishops and Regulars that was involved and, in cases of conflict with bishops, the Congregation of Cardinals. The three Prefects of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars during Don Bosco's efforts to gain approval were Cardinal Angelo Quaglia (1863–72), Andrea Bizzari (1873–77; Secretary of the Congregation from 1854–63), Innocenzo Ferrieri (1876–87; Pro-prefect for the first year). In immediate contact with the applicant would have been Secretaries of the Congregation, Stanislao Svegliati (1863–1871), Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi (1871–75), Angelo Bianchi (1877–79), Giovanni Battista Agnozzi (1880–81), Ignazio Masotti (1882–86), who subsequently became cardinals, except for Svegliati and Agnozzi.

Beforehand, understandably there were the bishops and diocesan curias with their different positions regarding both the procedures and decisions of the Roman Congregations and Religious Institutes, especially ones just starting out. Within this framework, their position could seem less defined in relation to institutes of pontifical right. These institutes gained particular faculties directly from the Pontiff or through the Roman Congregations. On the other hand, the bishops could not slacken in their sense of responsibility and vigilance over matters regarding not only the internal regime of the new communities but studies and clerical formation of members aiming at the priesthood, the stability or otherwise of the religious bond of perpetual vows in the case of ordinands, and the canonical correctness of procedures for presenting candidates to the ordaining bishop.

Depending on their various temperaments, theological and ecclesiological beliefs and legal formation in Canon Law, certain bishops could maintain that particular concessions to Religious Institutes were detrimental to their inalienable rights and responsibilities, or they could find that certain procedures tended to bypass their legitimate episcopal authority. It should be remembered that Don Bosco had to deal with diocesan Ordinaries who were particularly prepared and demanding, had a university education, and theological and legal preparation which made them less favourable to direct and privileged relationships between the Roman authorities and Religious Institutes. This kind of mentality was shared by the Capitular Vicar of Turin, Giuseppe Zappata (1862–67), Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro (1867–70) and his successor Lorenzo Gasaldi (1871–83).

Don Bosco was moving in this kind of world with a somewhat jejeune theological, legal and doctrinal preparation, without being able to or even wanting to rely on systematic and constant consultation with competent, secure experts. For the most part, for some of the issues he considered non-negotiable, he did not show himself easily inclined to accept indications coming to him from authorities and kindly individuals, or by qualified individuals holding responsible positions in the Roman offices themselves. Among other things, as we have seen, his ecclesiological thinking saw limited room for bishops to act within, and supported a position whereby papal primacy in jurisdiction and teaching played the major role. This meant, for example, giving broad interpretation in his favour to certain concessions or statements made *vive voce* by Pius IX.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Cf. Chap. 9, § 2.

At the juridical level, therefore, Don Bosco believed he could sometime respond with a degree of flexibility to the final-sounding ‘*animadversiones*’ or binding observations he was presented with. Practical difficulties – management of works, use of youthful staff in them – sometimes led him to minimise what was asked of him, and to oppose arguments in inadequate ways even unconsciously, by offering simple pretexts regarding essential points such as the need for a regular novitiate, organising philosophical and theological studies in appropriate centres, referring to the diocesan authority regarding admissions to Holy Orders, the inadmissibility of introducing very sensitive concessions into the Constitutions, such as the faculty to issue dismissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*.

Don Bosco was often reminded of the hard reality in this mix of responsibilities and competencies. Along his laborious journey he had to deal with a Congregation of Bishops and Regulars at a real juridical and formal level, and this Congregation was profoundly renewed by comparison with the earlier decades of the century. By bringing two groups together, Bishops and Regulars, the Congregation had become more effective: it safeguarded the primary pastoral and disciplinary responsibility of the bishops in their respective dioceses within the Church’s structure, in relation to papal primacy of jurisdiction and teaching and exempt and non-exempt Religious Institutes. The practice that was gradually codified by the Secretary, then Prefect of the Congregation, Andrea Bizzari, provided a lead in this.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Lack of diocesan approval of the Salesian Society

In view of possibly founding a Religious Society, Don Bosco could not or did not want to bring together a significant core group of his adult helpers chosen from among those working in the three oratories. The only adult initially won over to the cause was Fr Vittorio Alasonatti (1812–65) in 1854, an elementary school teacher (1835–54) whom Don Bosco got to know during the summer retreats at St Ignatius, Lanzo. He was followed a little later, in November 1860, by a layman, *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano (1830–1912), in October 1864, by widower Francesco Bodrato (1823–80) and the priest from Genoa, Giovanni Battista Lemoyne (1839–1916). As a voluntary helper at the Artigianelli College founded and run by Fr Montebruno in Genoa, Lemoyne had to distance himself more and more from educational thinking and practice that he felt to be excessively tolerant. For his part, Montebruno thought that with boys coming from precarious social and moral circumstances, one had to proceed with very gradual, loose objectives and procedures. He replied to the rigid young priest’s criticism with: ‘The important thing is to correct some bad inclination or prevent it from developing ... *salvare quod perierat* ... so have faith, and be ready to fight evil while you have to deal with our kind of children of Adam.’<sup>5</sup> Concerned that ‘he had heard nothing more’ from him, Montebruno wrote to him again, but by then Fr Lemoyne had made a choice for a man and an educational system more akin to his own mindset and educational sensitivity.

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4 Cf. *Collectanea in usum Secretariae Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium cura A. Bizzari archiepiscopi Philippensis secretarii edita*. Romae, ex typ. rev. Camerae Apostolicae 1863, XXX-942 p. (II ed. 1885, XL-881 p.). Of particular importance is the first *Appendix*, containing the *Methodus quae a Sacra Congregatione Episcoporum et Regularium servatur in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium ab A. Bizzari archiepiscopo Philippensi secretario exposita*, pp. 828-829 with various examples drawn from the process of approval of various institutes (pp. 829-861). On the privileged form of approval of Rosmini’s Institute of Charity and of the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin, cf. *Collectanea*, pp. 90-91 and pp. 474-479.

Regarding the *iter* described by the *Methodus a summary and text can be found in Cost. SDB* (Motto) 16 and 228. The edition published by Francesco Motto is basic for following the editorial evolution of the Salesian constitutional texts up to the publication of the Latin text (1874) and the Italian (1875).

5 Cf. P. BRAIDO – R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 99, no. 11.

At any rate, in order to manage his works, oratories, boarding facilities, Don Bosco was forced to make use of a growing number of young students of philosophy and theology who were at the same time attending courses at the diocesan seminary in Turin. This is why, from the late 1850s, he inevitably had to ask the Archbishop or the Rector of the seminary for exceptions to attendance at classes, or for unlikely adjustments to the scheduled timetable for classes.

Fransoni was rigid but, as we have seen, showed he could also be sometimes particularly benevolent. The problem became more complicated and serious in subsequent years: first with the Capitular Vicar Zappata, and the Rector of the Seminary, Vogliotti, then with Archbishop Riccardi di Netro and ultimately with Archbishop Gastaldi.

When it was a question of the Congregation being approved, Gastaldi was firm in his desire to see that the Constitutions expressed the obligation of having the spiritual and cultural formation of candidates for the priesthood enrolled in the new Religious Society well organised in appropriate settings and with an appropriate curriculum.

## 2.1 The text of the Constitutions

Since he had no personal experience of life in a Religious Institute with its own Constitutions, in order to write the Constitution of the Salesian Society Don Bosco had to have recourse to Rules that he himself had never practised. A clear dependence on constitutional texts of various institutes of consecrated life was already evident in the first draft of the *Rule of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*, written up in cleric Michael Rua's beautiful handwriting in 1858–59. It was a simple scheme. The rules were preceded by a preface and brief introduction on the *Origin of the Congregation*. Then followed chapters which were the Constitutions true and proper, with some obvious gaps: the *Purpose* and *Form* of the Congregation, the vows of *Obedience*, *Poverty and Chastity*, *Internal Government* focused on the Rector, the *Other Superiors*, *Admissions*. This was the basic framework, but we already find some elements which unambiguously reflected the thinking of the new founder on the position the new Religious Society, a genuine event in the Church, intended to take to establish itself in a civil society by now strongly marked by the 'liberal revolution' which began across Europe with all the 1848 subversive movements, and which had established itself irreversibly in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and then rapidly spread to the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>6</sup>

From analysis of the Chapter headings, we can identify the sources from which Don Bosco drew, sometimes even noted by him at the end of the chapters or articles in successive manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> Without a shadow of doubt, these sources were the *Costituzioni della Congregazione dei chierici secolari delle scuole di carità* (Constitutions of the Schools of charity) written by the Cavanis brothers, approved by the Patriarch of Venice in 1819 and by Gregory XVI in 1836, canonically erected in 1838; the *Regole dell'Istituto della Carità* (Rule of the Institute of Charity) founded by Antonio Rosmini in 1828, approved along with the Rule on 20 December 1838, and immediately granted exemption from the jurisdiction of diocesan Ordinaries with the faculty for the Superior to issue dimissorial letters for ordination; the *Costituzioni della congregazione degli*

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6 Cf. P. STELLA, *Le costituzioni salesiane fino al 1888*, in J. AUBRY et al., *Fedeltà e rinnovamento. Studi sulle costituzioni salesiane*. Rome, LAS 1974, pp. 15-54.

7 Cf. F. MOTTO, *Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii. Fonti letterarie dei capitoli "Scopo, Forma, Voto di obbedienza povertà e castità"*, RSS 2 (1983) 341-384. This extensive research was preceded by a study on the articles' sources concerning the superior of the local community, based primarily on the chapter dedicated to the vow of obedience: F. MOTTO, *La figura del superiore salesiano nelle costituzioni della società di S. Francesco di Sales del 1860*, RSS 2 (1983) 3-53: pages 6 to 23 are dedicated to the problem of the sources.



*Oblati della Beata Maria Vergine* (Constitutions of the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin) approved along with the Institute in September 1826 and a few days later granted all the privileges, indulgences, exemptions and faculties of the Redemptorists; the *Costituzioni della Congregazione del Santissimo Redentore* (Constitutions of the Redemptorists) from which most of the articles on the three vows were taken; the *Costituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù* (the Jesuit Constitutions) from which Don Bosco took the formula for profession of vows; the *Regola ovvero Costituzioni della Congregazione della Missione* (the Vincentian Rule or Constitutions) and the *Regola dei Chierici Regolari Somaschi* (the Somaschi Rule).

The approval of the Rosminian and Oblate Constitutions, plus the granting of exemptions and the faculty for dimissorials, gave Don Bosco cause to insist on a similar request for his own Society without taking into account the stricter approach taken by Rome in the second half of the century. This was one of the main causes for the suffering he went through in his efforts to gain approval, and it was the cause of the delay.

One should also bear in mind that Don Bosco also referred to some of these Institutes, especially the Redemptorists, Jesuits and Vincentians, in order to acquire the specific culture of consecrated life and how to pass it on to his Salesian men and women.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 An incomplete stage

Having arrived at a sufficiently developed constitutional text in 1860, Don Bosco tried for diocesan approval, while not missing any opportunity to maintain valuable relations with the Pope himself.

We have already mentioned the group of signatories to the letter sent to Archbishop Fransoni in Lyon on 11 June 1860. With a view to diocesan approval the letter included a 'humble request to read the attached draft Rule' with complete freedom 'to alter, subtract, add, or correct.' This was an approach Don Bosco also loved to make clear in the future, too, in similar circumstances, although in practice he was not always so willing to accept changes. One idea stood out in the letter which would not go unobserved later by the Roman Consultors, and that was the clear statement that the Members of the Society were not to be involved in any kind of political activity: 'We have written some rules in the guise of a Religious Society which exclude anything relating to politics and aim solely at sanctifying its members, especially through practising charity toward one's neighbour.'<sup>9</sup>

By comparison with the first draft, the text, as well as some minor modifications to it, had added some articles to the existing chapters, and some new chapters. The chapter on admissions went from four to twelve articles. There were four new chapters; Practices of Piety, Dress, Formula of the Vows, External members. The text went from 58 to 86 articles.

In his reply on 7 July, the archbishop assured Don Bosco he had read the text, and indicated his intention to seek consultation from people more competent than himself in understanding 'everything regarding community life.'<sup>10</sup> He confirmed this intention by letter on 15 July 1860, to the Vicar General, Celestino Fissore, which contained a range of matters. In a bulky 'sheaf of papers' sent to the Curia in Turin, the Canon would also have found 'a plan for a Rule for Don Bosco's work on which,' the archbishop wrote, 'I have only a simple observation to make on ... no. 2 on the vow of chastity. The words 'whoever is believed to be insecure etc.' seem to me to be too clear cut, too final. It seems to me it should be modified by saying: "Whoever has shown by experience that he does not give a foundation for hoping that he can preserve this virtue with divine assistance ... in deed etc." or some similar rephrasing. Of course, before approving it I would like it to be

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8 Cf. Chap. 24, § 5.

9 Em I 406.

10 Archbishop's letter is published in MB VI 632-633.

examined by someone with more experience in community, for example Fr Durando and others.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Fissore did what was requested, passing on the manuscript to the experienced and prestigious Superior of the Vincentians in Turin, Marc'Antonio Durando.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had also sent a copy of the Constitution to Cardinal Gaude, who was unwell at the time but replied on 14 October that he would personally examine them later or get others to look at them.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately he died on 14 December 1862. He could have been a valuable friend and adviser.

Matters did seem to be going well, however, as we can see from the two letters from the Archbishop, one to the Vicar General, the other to Don Bosco. In the first, dated 21 August, he reminded him, 'If there are observations on Don Bosco's draft Rule please let me know, and whenever he would like the decree of approval to be signed by me, I will need to have it back. The opportunity will come early in October with the return of the collegial group to Lyons.'<sup>13</sup> On 12 September, replying to a letter from Don Bosco in July or August,<sup>14</sup> he wrote that 'with regard to the Rule' he was awaiting 'response from Turin, since,' he explained courteously 'as I think I told you, I have submitted it to the examination of clerics with community experience, experience of course I do not have, except for a little. If you then have any observations on the changes they make, you can feel free to let me know.'<sup>15</sup>

The letter to the Vicar General on 3 November, also showed that he was well disposed toward Don Bosco's Institute. The Archbishop offered a positive view of the formation of clerics, present and future, who were working at the oratories, and wanted other bishops in Piedmont to share his view. 'Regarding the young men with Don Bosco,' he wrote, 'if the Turin diocese is ready to incorporate them to serve the Institute, it seems to me that the other dioceses could do the same. Don Bosco's Institute is not only for one diocese but for all, even though the only existing house is in Turin.'<sup>16</sup>

The individuals consulted were not as condescending. Two letters from Franson in 1861 highlight complications, some difficult ones, stemming from Durando's observations.<sup>17</sup> In March 1861, Don Bosco expressed the hope that the Archbishop's Vicar General might 'have a few moments to take a look at and then decide on the Rule' of the Society.' He assured him that for any modification to the text he had taken account of observations by the Archbishop, Durando, Cardinal De Angelis. He was now awaiting diocesan approval to put it into practice, then 'have it approved by Rome.'<sup>18</sup> But he had not been particularly inclined to accept the observations, as we see if we check the changes made in successive manuscripts or, even more so if we simply read the letter his archbishop wrote him on 23 October 1861. Archbishop Franson showed extreme benevolence where the work of the oratories was concerned, but as for the 'Society of St Francis de Sales', he confessed that as far away as he was, he could not but take note of the difficulties that had arisen; 'About the Society of St Francis de Sales, I have been told that since important observations have been made, like for example, *who it is the Society depends on*, the Rules have been returned to you [Don Bosco] to adjust and finalise them. It seems that you had made some

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11 L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., pp. 294-295.

12 Cf. letter in MB VI 726.

13 Letter of 21 August 1860, L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., p. 296.

14 Cf. Em I 420

15 MB VI 723. To the Vicar General C. Fissore, 11 November 1860, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., p. 301.

16 To the Vicar General C. Fissore, 11 November 1860, in L. FRANSONI *Epistolario*..., p. 301.

17 They do not appear identifiable in those published in MB VI 723-725, later, used by the Archbishop Riccardi in the "Observations" sent to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, 1 March 1868: Cf. *Cost. SDB (Motto)*. They contain reference to an important and contested addition to the 1st article of the chapter on the *Purpose* of the Society – "and also the education of young clergy" – introduced into the text between 1862 and 1864; Cf. *Cost. SDB (Motto)* 29 and 72.

18 To Can. C. Fissore, 9 March 1861, Em I 631.

concessions after I was told this, but that there were still some considerable defects. Since it is a question of prudence I ask you to take account of it and I will act as soon as I can.<sup>19</sup>

But the prelate's health was declining. Frasoni died on 26 March 1862, without being able to sign the decree of diocesan approval of an Institute he looked on with some sympathy. For many reasons this was a hiatus for Don Bosco. However, he prepared himself to tackle the road that led directly to Rome. It was a difficult decision. Without prior approval from the Ordinary of the Institute's mother house, he was exposed to major difficulties. Furthermore, he had never ceased, nor would he have omitted it, to let the Pope know about the Society in its birth pangs. His letter to Pius IX over these years are in fact a masterpiece of diplomacy intended to keep him informed from time to time of the Congregation's situation, presented as increasingly inseparable from the work of the oratories, aimed at guaranteeing its continuity, stability and expansion.

He made brief reference to it in a letter in February 1859. It was more direct regarding his concern at the situation of the diocese, but he assured the Pontiff of the prayers of the new apostolic group he was forming: 'I, my boys, my clerics, and priests pray daily that God may give Your Holiness health and grace, and grant you a long time yet for the good of the Church.'<sup>20</sup>

There was more explicit reference still to his collaborators, who were constantly supportive of the youth works, in letters that followed. In a letter of 9 November 1859, in which he deplored the sad religious situation in the Turin diocese – 'Our Archbishop in exile,' 'the Protestants,' 'freedom of the press and teaching' – he assured him that he and his men ('we', he writes) were doing everything possible 'to lessen the consequences of evil.' This was why, he continued, anticipating the times, 'we are united in a kind of society especially of clerics. We do what we can to spread good books, good newspapers; we preach, give retreats, triduums and novenas and catechism classes, all with the aim of instilling the basics of our Catholic religion, and respect for the supreme leader of Christianity.'<sup>21</sup>

The same activities already appeared in the Constitutions among the purposes of the new Congregation. We see them in a letter of 13 April 1860: 'Religion is at war, legally vilified, we cannot defend it other than with small and popular printed materials, classes, catechism lessons ... My priests, clerics, students and working boys all kneel with me before Your Holiness ...'<sup>22</sup>

Don Bosco wrote a gloomy picture once more in a letter on 13 February 1863, partially redeemed by 'five' flourishing oratories populated by thousands of boys who were fervently praying for the Holy Father. To conclude, he asked the Pope to impart his 'holy blessing on a numerous group of priests, clerics, lay people and boys.'<sup>23</sup>

### **3. Toward the 'decretum laudis' (1862–64)**

At the end of the 'trial period', an implicit novitiate which began on 18 December 1859, the group of enrolled members, a few of whom had left but others of whom had joined to make it 23 in all, professed their vows for the first time on 14 May 1862. There were 4 priests (Don Bosco, Alasonatti, Rua, Savio), two coadjutors (Gaia, Oreglio di S. Stefano), 17 clerics.

Don Bosco continued to specify and add to the text of the Constitutions, leaving the main points intact. There were some inevitable additions, three chapters in particular: *Religious Government of the Society*, *Election of the Rector Major*, and one *Concerning particular houses*. The number of

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19 To Can. C. Fissore, 9 March 1861, Em I 631.

20 Em I 368.

21 Em I 386-387

22 Em I 401.

23 Em I 553-554.

articles increased from 86 to 107.

According to Don Bosco, the conditions had been created for asking Rome for approval of the Society, and its Constitutions. He would very soon become aware how narrow and difficult the road had become. He did not know this in March 1863, when he first called on the Capitular Vicar, Canon Giuseppe Zappata, for the Turin diocese's approval of the 'plan' for the Congregation. He indicated in his request the earlier interventions of the deceased Archbishop and his Vicar General Fissore, and the opinion of the many who had been asked for it, 'individuals considered to be capable and intelligent in such matters,' Bishop Manzini the Bishop of Cuneo, Cardinal De Angelis, 'others, and other ones still.' He said he had taken 'valuable account' of the 'reflections' he had received, always with the intention of 'carrying out the advice often given me by our late beloved Archbishop [Fransoni] and putting into practice a suggestion, indeed a plan for the Society proposed and sketched out by His Holiness, the reigning Pius IX.'

He went on to say that in drawing up the text, reinforcing their value, 'for many things I have followed other Societies with a similar aim as this one and already approved by the Church. For example, the Rule of the Cavanis Institute in Venice, the Institute of Charity, the Somaschi Institute and the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin.' He emphasised its authoritativeness by referring to 'the great and varied Gospel harvest' blossoming thanks to the oratories, and which would soon increase with the opening of the 'new house' at Mirabello Monferrato.

He also fiddled with dates, and this played a part in lending prestige to the maturity of the project, sent to Fransoni in 1858, and not (as in fact was the case) in 1860 along with experimentation with the 'rules' ... 'over fifteen years' [from 1848/49!].<sup>24</sup> He wrote more realistically instead to Cardinal Antonelli on 12 February: 'The rule was written has been put into practice for about six years by members who want to make up this Society.'<sup>25</sup>

Two features of the new Institute which he highlighted are of considerable interest: 'My purpose is to establish a Society where all individuals retain all their civil rights before Government authorities and are a real moral body or religious society before the Church.'<sup>26</sup>

We do not know the response from the Capitular Vicar, but we should consider that it was a negative one. According to canonical practice it would seem that the Capitular Vicar's ordinary faculties allowed him to give approvals reserved to the bishop.

To support the request for Rome's approval, Don Bosco asked for and obtained a number of letters of recommendation from prelates who looked kindly upon his enterprise. These were the bishops of Cuneo, (Manzini, a discalced Carmelite), Acqui (Contratto, a Capuchin), Susa (Odone), Mondovì (Ghilardi, a Dominican), Casale Monferrato (Calabiana).<sup>27</sup> He also insisted that the Provicar General in Turin<sup>28</sup> speak on his behalf with the Capitular Vicar, Canon Giuseppe Zappata, who sent him a recommendation on 11 February 1864, on the eve of the day he forwarded the complete dossier to Rome.

On 12 February, Don Bosco entrusted a parcel addressed to Cardinal Antonelli, to a trustworthy individual departing for Rome, asking him 'to consign the Rule with its related pages ... Into the Venerable hands of His Holiness.'<sup>29</sup> It contained a petition to Pius IX, the text of the Constitutions, the letter of recommendation from bishops, a page with *Things to be noted about the Constitution of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, another page with a brief summary of the meeting with the

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24 To Can. G. Zappata, 24 March 1863, Em I 562-563.

25 Letter of 12 February 1864, Em II 36.

26 To Can. G. Zappata, 24 March 1863, Em I 562.

27 The texts are recorded in MB VII 565 and 887-890.

28 To Can. A. Vogliotti, 6 and 26 January 10 February 1864, Em II 29, 32. 35.

29 Letter to Card. G. Antonelli, 12 February 1864, Em II 36-37.

Pope in 1858 entitled *The reigning Pius IX in favour of the Society*, and finally, information on the growth of the oratories, the position of the diocesan authority regarding them and the request for approval of the Society in the diocese for now only 'recommended' by the Capitular Vicar.<sup>30</sup>

He went back, in his petition, to the 1858 audience when the Pope 'welcomed the idea of a Society that would take particular care of this portion of Jesus Christ's flock most at risk [poor and immature youth] and 'drew up the basis' for it, including in the 'draft Rule' for which he was seeking approval. The Pope, too, said he was very much available to offer corrections and modifications: 'I am asking for corrections more than approval of these draft Constitutions. Therefore Your Holiness, or whoever you deign to depute, may correct, add, take out anything you consider to be for the greater glory of God. I will not make any observations on these, indeed, while I offer to provide whatever explanation is considered necessary or appropriate, I feel very much indebted to anyone who helps me improve the statutes of this Society to make them stable and in conformity, as far as possible, with the principles of our holy Catholic religion.'<sup>31</sup> What follows throws light on the limitations of such an unconditional and pragmatic trust.

From the *Things to be noted* ... two points emerged that would accompany Don Bosco throughout his repeated requests for approval and faculties. Above all, he was establishing strict continuity, even identification, between the oratories, the youthful and adult helpers or 'congregations' [those working in the oratories, or the oratories themselves] and the Salesian Society. 'If we consider it for what it is,' he stated 'its purpose is the continuation of what we have been doing for some twenty years in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. So we can say that what we are doing here is turning the discipline practised until now in these boys' oratories in the city, with the Oratory of St Francis de Sales at the centre of them, into an ordered set of Constitutions, following the advice of the Supreme Leader of the Church.'<sup>32</sup>

It has been documented elsewhere (already indicated<sup>33</sup>) how this strategy or tactic, clearly not a way to manage history, led Don Bosco and a number of biographers and scholars with him, to assign widely varying dates to the origin of the Salesian Society, finally preferring two: 8 December 1841, at an emotional level, and from an assumed legal point of view, 31 March 1852. Even Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro, either unknowingly or badly informed, subscribed to this latter date. He had been Archbishop of Turin for just a few months.<sup>34</sup> The same date appears in the *Esposizione alla S. Sede* (Report to the Holy See) in 1878: 'In 1852 the Archbishop of Turin approved the Institute, granting Fr John Bosco by *motu proprio* all the necessary and appropriate faculties and making him Superior and head of the Work of the Oratories.'<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, Don Bosco insisted on showing the potential and real inter-diocesan nature of his works and the Congregation behind them, deducing from this the need for the Superior General's full jurisdiction over it, especially with regard to the clerics. So it was inevitable that he refer to the Institute of Charity and the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary who, in the 1820s and 1830s, had gained both approval of their Institute, and of the Constitutions and gained privileges, including the faculty to issue dismissorial letters for their ordinands.<sup>36</sup>

At the end of July, the text of the decree from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars

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30 Cf. Complete documentation in *Documenti IX* 36-40; de *Il regnante Pio IX a favore di questa Società*, signed note by Don Bosco in ASC A 2230202.

31 Letter of 12 February 1864, Em II 37-38.

32 Cf. *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 229.

33 Cf. *Introduction* to Part Three, § 2.1.

34 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno storico"...*, RSS 6 (1987) 256-260.

35 *Esposizione alla S. Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel March of 1878*. S. Pier d'Arena, tip. Salesiana 1879, p. 4, OE XXXI 240.

36 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 229; Cf. Also the cited letter to the Capitular Vicar Can. Zappata, of 24 March 1863, Em I 562.

arrived, signed on the 23rd by the Prefect, Cardinal Angelo Svegliati. It contained what Pius IX had approved at the audience granted the Pro-secretary on 1 July. From its opening lines it gave substance to the idea that the beginning of the Oratory in 1841 and the beginning of the Salesian Society were contemporaneous events: 'From here began the pious Society which takes its name from St Francis de Sales and is made up of priests, clerics and laymen.' 'As well as their own sanctification' they had as their 'principal aim,' to provide for the spiritual and temporal good of adolescents, especially poor ones. His Holiness 'praises and commends this Society in the most favourable way as a Congregation of simple vows under the governance of a Superior General except for the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries according to the sacred canons and Apostolic Constitution,' 'putting the approval of the Constitution off to a more appropriate time.' He also granted the faculty for the Rector Major to remain in office for life.<sup>37</sup>

The '*animadversiones*' or observations on the Constitutions which the Pro-secretary attached with the decree, were neither few in number nor secondary in nature. They reflected observations drawn up by the Consultor, Fr Angelo Savini, a Carmelite of the Strict Observance. The following ones stood out among the ones Don Bosco found less agreeable: it would be prudent to remove the prohibition on members being involved in politics; it was not appropriate to grant the Superior General the faculty of issuing members with dimissorial letters for ordination; in order to found new houses or take on the running of seminaries it would be necessary in each instance to have recourse to the Holy See; no approval was possible for outside individuals ('externs') to be enrolled in the Society by means of so-called affiliation; every three years, the Rector Major must give the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars a report on the material state and the personnel, discipline and administration of the Institute. He was also reminded of the practice by which Congregations of priests presented their Constitutions in Latin.

By letter on 25 August, Don Bosco thanked Pius IX and Cardinal Quaglia, assuring them again that he would 'see to putting into practice' the 'observations' and would send back the modified text of the Constitutions 'so that' the Pope might deign to complete 'a work begun under his holy auspices.'<sup>38</sup>

But he was not so accommodating in practice; Very soon, Don Bosco drew up a document *Supra animadversiones in Constitutiones* which contrasted the needs and peculiarities of his Society with the observations made.<sup>39</sup> It is not improbable that in drawing up his response to Carmelite Father Angelo Savini's observations, Don Bosco was assisted by 'Reformed' Carmelite Bishop Manzini, the Bishop of Cuneo, who had seen the Constitutions. When the Bishop died prematurely on 21 March 1865, Don Bosco spoke about him that evening to the Valdocco Community as 'one of the most affectionate benefactors' of the Oratory, 'a true friend of his,' he said 'who was, we could say, like a father to me.' 'Every time I was unsure of how to do something' he continued 'everything I needed advice in, I turned to him either in writing or by going personally to Cuneo, and he helped me, advised me with truly prudent opinions.'<sup>40</sup> Just one month earlier, Don Bosco had been his guest for some days so he could complete 'lots of business' and correspondence without being disturbed.<sup>41</sup> It would not be an act of imagination to believe that the bishop, who had been the Prior General of the Order before becoming a bishop, had helped Don Bosco, given his own competence and experience of consecrated life.

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37 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 231.

38 Em II 69 and 71: the "holy auspices" of the Pope were matched by the "benevolent auspices" of the Cardinal.

39 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 232-234.

40 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, pp. 123-124.

41 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865, good night* of 24 February 1865, pp. 105-106.

#### 4. Spiritual features of the new Religious Society

Together with the legal and organisational aspect of founding the Salesian Society, Don Bosco did not fail to engage in initiatives regarding its *spiritual foundation*, with completely original features. In fact the context of the religious formation of the Salesians did not differ from the youthful educational world they were working within and were part of. The student side of Valdocco was a hospice, college, junior seminary, novitiate, postnovitiate, educative and religious community all at the one time. This is why there were certain times and places for special practices of piety and others given over to meetings and conferences. But what was absolutely prevalent was the Salesian's constant presence among the boys and the sharing of all expressions of material and spiritual life with them.

A symbol of growth and gradual consolidation might well be the date of Michael Rua's priestly ordination on 29 July 1860, and his first Mass celebrated on 5 August. There was an encouraging influx of postulants who then 'enrolled' (a term generally synonymous with a novitiate) in the young Congregation. Nineteen individuals, including Don Bosco, had taken part in its foundation on 18 December; twenty three professed their first vows on 14 May, 1862; a further 86 followed them between 1862 and 1870, bringing the total number of professed to 109. There were also two 'extern' members: Fr Domenico Pestarino and Fr Giovanni Ciattino, parish priest of Mareto (Asti) who later joined the Vincentians. The former, from Mornese, was helping his parish priest and was a spiritual director of the Daughters of the Immaculate, who in 1872 became the nucleus of religious women in the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.<sup>42</sup>

October 1864 gave Don Bosco the gift of two exceptional collaborators in Frances Bodrata and Fr John Baptist Lemoyne, but this was soon followed by anguishing events for the Society and its Superior. There was illness, death and one tragic side-lining. Dominic Ruffino and Victor Alasonatti died on 16 July 1865, and 7 October 1865, respectively. And over the same period Fr Bartolomeo Fusero, the young Spiritual Director of the Society, was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, where he died on 17 December 1878. On the day following the end of the octave of the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, 17 June 1868, the death occurred of the fervent twenty-six-year-old Fr Giuseppe Bongiovanni.

There were disappointments, hopes, with the transfer to the diocese of young priests like Fr Giovanni Battista Anfossi in 1864, and Fr Giovanni Boggera in 1866, and the loss of clerics of great value like Alessandro Fabre and Costanzo Rinaudo in 1866.

The *Elenco Generale* (General listing) of the Society of St Francis de Sales for 1870 offered the following totals: 61 professed, of whom 28 were perpetuals and 33 triennials, and 42 novices. In a handwritten report on the religious and moral state of the Society of St Francis de Sales at the beginning of 1870, Don Bosco gave a total of 114 members ('124' is a *lapsus*) made up of 62 professed, 40 novices and 12 postulants.<sup>43</sup>

##### 4.1 Religious and Salesian features of the Constitutions

Don Bosco had gained a specific 'religious' culture already in the process of drawing up the Constitutions. His recourse to outside sources did not prevent him from conferring content and inspiration on them required by the particular youthful and popular quality of the mission the Society was dedicated to.

The vows and consecration, while having a strong and evangelical imprint, took on a particular

42 Cf. P. STELLA, *I Salesiani* nel volume *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 295-325 and 523-525.

43 *Stato religioso-materiale...*, p. 7, ASC A 2230209.

nature in the way they related to the mission: religious obedience sought to be compatible with civil liberties, real poverty had to be reconciled with radical ownership of goods, the detachment of chastity was specialised in that it meant unconditional dedication to the youth apostolate which was effective and affective, expansive yet controlled.

The mission was described in the first article of the Constitutions on the *Purpose of the Society*.<sup>44</sup> In the first draft it was made to consist of 'striv[ing] for perfection *through the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Saviour*.' This was gradually specified: 'striv[ing] for perfection *through the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Saviour especially in charity toward poor young people*' (1860/61), 'the Christian perfection of its members; every kind of work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, on behalf of young people, especially if they are poor; and also the education of young seminarians' (1862/1864), 'ut socii simul ad perfectionem Christianam nitentes, *quaequae charitatis opera tum spirtualia, tum corporalia erga adolescents, praesertim, si paupers [pauperiores, 1874] sint exerceant.*" (1867).<sup>44</sup> This letter was the definitive text.<sup>45</sup>

Given the ultimate purpose, the description of the Salesian Religious emerged as one who was dedicated to works of charity on behalf of youth. From this came the commitment to acquiring 'inner and outward virtues,' 'knowledge' and congruent skills,<sup>46</sup> a readiness to 'suffer heat, cold, thirst, hunger, hardship and contempt if need be' if and to the extent that they contributed to 'promoting the glory of God and the good of souls.'<sup>47</sup> Also foreseen was the effect the 'active life' proper to the Society dedicated to practical charity could impose on the number of 'practices in common' there could be.<sup>48</sup>

It was in this light that the religious vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity were understood and practised. Obedience came first: especially to the Rector Major, who in the early drafts of the chapter on the *Internal governance of the Society*, concentrated all power in himself: he was there for life, proposed the admission or otherwise of postulants, assigned each one his tasks in the spiritual and temporal arena (art. 2), convened the Chapter and rectors of houses each year in order to get to know and provide for the needs of the Society (art. 6), interpreted the Rule (Chap. 7),<sup>49</sup> decided on the opening of individual houses and appointed their rector,<sup>50</sup> could dispense from established practices of piety.<sup>51</sup> In summary, it prescribed the Rector Major as the head of the Society made for action and the more it was united around and focused on the Superior, the more it would be free of external bonds either within or outside the Church. It saw itself as hopefully exempt.

It is true that in the Chapter on the *Form of the Society* it was said that, 'all the members [*congregati*] lead a 'common life bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and simple vows,' which united them so they made up 'one heart and one soul' (art.1). But the Chapter *On the vow of obedience* stated that the Religious must obey like the Divine Saviour, who came not 'to do his own will but the will of his heavenly Father' (art 1. ); that the vow obliged one to be involved 'only in things which each one's superior' judged to be 'for the greater glory of God, the welfare of our own soul and of neighbor, in accordance with the rules of this society (art 2); that obedience assured members 'we are doing God's will,' therefore 'Let each one be submissive to his superior and look

44 " It is the purpose of the Salesian Society that its members, *while striving together* for Christian perfection, undertake every kind of work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, toward young people, especially if poor", "if poorer" in the draft that followed.

45 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 72-73.

46 *Scopo*, art. 2, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 72.

47 *Accettazione*, art. 12, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 178.

48 *Pratiche di pietà*, art. 1; Cf. For content articles 2-6, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 182, 184.

49 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 120, 126.

50 *Delle case particolari*, art. 1 and 7, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 156 and 162.

51 *Pratiche di pietà*, art. 7, 9, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 186.



to him in all things as to a loving father; let him obey him unreservedly, promptly, cheerfully, and humbly, as the person who in that command expresses the very will of God' (art. 4); and again, let 'everyone' have 'great confidence in his superior' and keep 'no secret of the heart from him.' Let him 'openly manifest his conscience to him whenever' he believes it would be 'for the greater glory of God and the good of his own soul.' (art. 6)<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, the vow of *Poverty* functioned with a Congregation which existed for the 'poor,' 'poor and abandoned,' 'abandoned youth' <sup>53</sup> which had no stable foundations that could guarantee their ability to function. The freely offered works of the Salesians were supported by charity, any possible fees families were able to pay, and by private and public bodies. The vow of poverty, therefore, was a communal one above all; it allowed for radical ownership of goods but excluded from this was their personal administration and any personal earnings from these goods; everything had to flow back to the community.<sup>54</sup> There was an essential nexus between poverty and common life, indeed common life related directly to the practice of poverty: 'The essence of the vow of poverty [as practiced] in our congregation lies essentially in being detached from all earthly goods. This we will try to achieve by [leading] the common life regarding food and clothing, and by not keeping anything for one's own use without the superior's special permission.'<sup>55</sup>

The link between dedication to the young and the virtue and vow of *chastity* was especially strong, something even the austere Archbishop Fransoni found rigid: 'Whoever deals with abandoned youth' said the six concise articles making up the Chapter 'must certainly endeavour to enrich himself with every virtue. But the angelic virtue, the virtue dearer than any other to the child of God, the virtue of chastity, must be nurtured to an outstanding degree.' (art.1) 'Whoever does not have a well-founded hope, with divine assistance, of preserving the virtue of purity in word, deed, and thought, should not enrol in this Congregation because he would be exposed to danger at every step.' (art. 2) Words, even indifferent glances are sometimes interpreted badly by youngsters who have already been the victim of human passions. Hence the [need for] the greater caution in speaking or dealing with youngsters of any age or condition even in the most casual matters.' (art.3) Avoidance and caution were also prescribed where women and lay people were concerned (art. 4 and 5) through use of 'effective means for guarding the virtue,' (art.6) identical to the ones proposed to the boys.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4.2 Internal arrangements of the new Religious Society.

The early chronicles offer interesting data concerning the specific religious formation Don Bosco gave especially to potential or actual members of the Society. This was added to the main overall and experiential formation they internalised through being with their Superior, with the boys they were looking after and the seminarians (young clerics). Essentially, the world they lived in helped form them.

On 11 June, Dominic Ruffino recorded a solemn mission statement beneath the collective signature on the text of the Constitutions sent to Archbishop Fransoni: 'We make a promise that if, by misfortune due to the sadness of our times, we cannot take vows, each of us, wherever he may be, even if separated, and as long as there is still one of us, will make the effort to promote this Society, even though there may be only two, and will always observe its rules as far as is possible.'<sup>57</sup> Then at the conclusion of the first profession on 14 May 1862, among the words of Don

52 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 92, 94, 96.

53 *Scopo di questa Società*, art. 1, 3, 4, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 72, 74.

54 *Forma della Società*, art. 1-2 e 6, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 82 and 86.

55 *Del voto di povertà*, art. 1 (1864-1874), *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 100.

56 *Del voto di castità*, art. 1-6, *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 108, 110.

57 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, pp. 14-15.

Bosco addressed to the group were some which described the Society in the light of its purpose and activity: 'Who knows,' he said 'but the Lord may want to make use of this Society of ours to do much good in his Church ... Some intent on preaching and instructing ordinary people, others educating abandoned boys, some teaching in school, some others writing and disseminating good books and all this in support of the dignity of the Roman Pontiff, the ministers of the Church. How much good can be done!'<sup>58</sup>

It was around the nucleus that the features of a special kind of consecrated individual developed. The basis of the way they operated was made up of a communal, fraternal and also hierarchical form of life and action. This was emphasised in a conference on 10 January 1864. The chronicler wrote: 'D. Bosco read an article on the purpose of the Society, then spoke to us very nicely about the bond of charity that must unite the confreres. He drew a comparison with Ezekiel's chariot (Ez. 1:10) pulled by an eagle and an ox, deducing from this that the one with the slow temperament has to stir himself up a bit [but Don Bosco did not appear to ask the eagle to act like an ox!]. He spoke of the charity required of those who command and those who obey.'<sup>59</sup>

*Discipline and observance* of the rules had a key function. 'Let nothing new be introduced into the house,' he insisted on 6 September 1860 'even if one sees that something else would be better, it does not matter, let us leave what is better and keep to what is simply good, so long as he is avoiding novelty we do no violence to the rules of the house.'<sup>60</sup> All this was instilled and to be practised in function of the *purpose*, that is, *charity to our neighbour and especially the young*. 'See that whoever has dealings with us' he exhorted them on 27 April 1861, 'goes away satisfied, that each time we speak with someone we gain a friend, because we have to try to increase the number of friends and lessen the number of enemies; we must do good to everyone ... With regard to the boys, we should be charitable by always being kind; they should never say to us: so and so is strict and harsh. No, this must not be said of us. If we need to tell someone off, let us take him aside. Let us make him see his error, his shame, the damage and how he offends God, because by doing so any other way he will lower his head at our harsh words, will tremble, but will always try to avoid us and will draw little profit from the occasion.'<sup>61</sup>

We glimpse some identifying features here of the religious and pedagogical approach used by Salesian religious which were already proper to Don Bosco, an apostle among the young, and his co-members and collaborators, priests or diocesan clerics like him.

## 5. The beginning of the era of Mary Help of Christians

The Church and Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians in Turin,<sup>62</sup> from whence began the contemporary devotional movement in honour of Our Lady venerated under that title, did not have its origin in any extraordinary deed, apparition, miracle of healing or miraculously flowing spring. What lay at its origins was Don Bosco's piety, intuition and energy as a priest and educator and religious founder profoundly convinced of the importance of the *Auxilium Christianorum* in times that were disastrous for the Church and no less difficult for the steadiness of faith of its members. It was able to be an outstanding resource for the spiritual life of both the boys and their educators.<sup>63</sup>

58 G. BONETTI, *Annali III 1862-1863*, pp. 4-6.

59 G. BONETTI, *Annali III 1862-1863*, pp. 13-14.

60 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N° 1° 1860*, p. 24.

61 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863*, p. 26.

62 Cf. F. GIRAUDI, *Il Santuario di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice chiesa madre dei salesiani di don Bosco*. Turin, SEI 1948; A. RODINÒ, *Il Santuario Basilica di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1964; L. BORELLO, *L'Ausiliatrice dall'Italia al mondo*. Turin, Edizioni CM 1988.

63 For some elements, cf. P. BROCARD, *Ragioni che determinarono Don Bosco nella scelta del titolo "Auxilium Christianorum"*, in *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano*, Lyon, 10-11 September 1968, "Colloqui di vita salesiana, 1". Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1969, pp. 33-53 and 54-56.

It was already the significance of devotion to Mary Immaculate, *Help of Christians* which in essence Don Bosco explicitly proposed in the *Il mese di maggio*,<sup>64</sup> as we have seen, and other writings around that time. He ended the life of Pope and Martyr St Callistus I by recommending 'recourse to She who is the help of Christians,' 'Mother of God. The great Virgin Mary.'<sup>65</sup> 'Mary is not only the help of Christians but also the support of the Universal Church,' he guaranteed Mamma Marietta, the attentive teacher of her daughter Angeline, encouraging her to pray to the Mediatrix of graces.<sup>66</sup>

### 5.1 Early indicators

The first document to make public the intention of building a Church in Turin dedicated to the one who would later be known as 'Don Bosco's Madonna'<sup>67</sup> was a circular on 1 February 1863. This new place of worship was needed for a heavily populated area 'with more than twenty thousand inhabitants with no church or chapel.'<sup>68</sup> Don Bosco mentioned this in a letter to Pius IX on 13 February, when he said: 'In the city of Turin alone, four churches are under construction for parishes, one of which is the Church of *Mary Help of Christians*.'<sup>69</sup> Thanking Cardinal Antonelli for the donation of 500 lire sent in the Pope's name he wrote on 26 March: 'Works for the new church are about to commence.'<sup>70</sup>

But it was merely a wish at that stage.

The building came from the need indicated in the circular, a need for 'enough room for adults of the neighbourhood, which could be erected as a parish when the Ecclesiastical Superior decides it is appropriate.' But no less pressing was the need for a church large enough for the growing number of boys at the Oratory, since the Church of St Francis de Sales was no longer adequate.<sup>71</sup>

There was more than one reason for the choice of name, as it was in a quite precise historical context. Certainly, there were no lack of historical precedents for tracing its roots back through history. As a church history writer, Don Bosco was aware of all this and other more recent historical facts regarding Napoleon Bonaparte and Pius VII, recalled in *Il mese de maggio*.<sup>72</sup> His initiative should not have stood out too much given that it was common to hear of 'the feast of the Virgin Mother of God invoked under the glorious title of *Auxilium Christianorum*,' celebrated by wish of Pius VII 'to commemorate his fortunate return to Rome and the peace once more bestowed on the Church after the fierce persecution it had undergone.'<sup>73</sup> Nor can we also exclude the intention of giving the nascent Society of St Francis de Sales a Patroness with a title that had been somewhat limited up to that point.

The immediate reason was the spreading of the news in March 1862 about an ancient picture in a ruined church near Spoleto, from which Our Lady had spoken to a five-year-old child, and before which a peasant farmer, while praying, had regained his health. These things immediately attracted

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64 Cf. Chap. 9, § 5.

65 G. Bosco, *Vita del sommo pontefice S. Callisto I*, p. 62, OE XI 134.

66 [G. Bosco], *Angelina o la buona fanciulla...*, pp. 87-88, OE XIII 35-36.

67 The title of the book by a Salesian especially tied to the founder, G. B. LEMOYNE, *La Madonna di Don Bosco ossia Relazione di alcune grazie concesse da Maria SS. Ausiliatrice ai suoi divoti*. "Letture Cattoliche" a. XXXIX, n° 5 (461). Turin, Libr. Salesiana 1891, VIII-147 p.

68 Em I 550.

69 Em I 553.

70 Em I 565.

71 Em I 550.

72 Cf. Chap. 9, § 5.

73 *Solenne triduo alla Vergine SS. Aiuto dei Cristiani (24 May)*, "La Civiltà Cattolica" 11 (1860), Vol. II 734-735.

a crowd of devotees to the picture of the Virgin. Giovanni Battista Arnaldi, Archbishop of Spoleto, sent a report of all this to *L'Armonia*, which the paper published on 27 May. He gave the picture of Our Lady the official name of Help of Christians or *Auxilium Christianorum*, which he thought was 'the most appropriate under all the circumstances' in relation to the disastrous times the Church was enduring in its Head.

In September, the prelate launched the idea of a large church to be built on the Fratta plains. Turin was among the first cities to find out about this and responded with real fervour and enthusiasm.<sup>74</sup> The church in Spoleto, moreover, ended up being called the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Star, even if, in reports published from 1862–67, Archbishop Arnaldi always spoke of *Help of Christians* or *Auxilium Christianorum*.

Pius IX took considerable interest in the miraculous events and the church under construction since 1862. Archbishop Arnaldi wrote: 'Catholics do not dissociate Pius IX's cause from Mary's cause, from the cause of the Pontiff who defined her as such.'<sup>75</sup>

We are certain, then, that when Don Bosco decided to build his church in Turin, Marian spirituality of the time, which 'under pressure of political events and renewed persecution of the Church, was already strongly oriented toward devotion to Our Lady Help of Christians, *Patrone et Salus populi christiani*, drawing its overwhelming impetus from the Spoleto apparitions.' 'The more alert and most forward-looking saw a new way in the "Marian devotion of the time", for redemption and salvation open to God's cause, and they followed through on it thoughtfully. Among them was Don Bosco.'<sup>76</sup> It is significant that most of Archbishop Arnaldi's report is incorporated in the pamphlet on the *Meraviglie della Madre di Dio invocate sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice* (the marvels of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians) which Don Bosco wrote in 1868.

## 5.2 The Church in the early 1860s

In his unconditional support for the Pope at the time of the annexations, Don Bosco very soon began to promise 'a great triumph' for the Church prepared in heaven by the 'Holy and Immaculate Virgin.'<sup>77</sup> Sad events were predicted for the coming years, but again he foretold improbable triumphs: 'The thing that most afflicts the soul is the disasters awaiting the Universal Church.' 'A young man who has shown clear signs of special enlightenment from the Lord for some years has often said: "How many are the tribulations that will bring sorrow to the fatherly heart of Pius IX. The Immaculate Virgin hands the Holy Father a large bunch of roses, but he must hold them in the part where the thorns are sharpest." Another individual is of the opinion that unless the Lord alters his plans Your Holiness will once more have to leave Rome. Yet amid all this evil there will be great good, since whole peoples are coming to venerate Her ... In short, there are fearful events approaching of the kind perhaps never before heard of in the history of nations; but Your Holiness will see the most glorious triumph when, after bloody conflicts, you will once more be the tranquil possessor of your States and welcomed by the love of your people, blessed by kings and nations.'<sup>78</sup>

Similar statements and predictions are found in a letter at the end of that year in which he wanted to present the Pope with, 'the true state of things relating to religion' in Italy regarding three

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74 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* II..., pp. 163-167.

75 Cf. P. BROCARDO, *L'"Ausiliatrice di Spoleto" e Don Bosco*, in *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice. Relazioni commemorative dell'anno mariano 1954*. Turin, SEI 1955, pp. 248-249.

76 P. BROCARDO, *L'"Ausiliatrice di Spoleto" e Don Bosco...*, pp. 251 and 263. To Pius IX, 10 March 1861, Em I 441.

77 Letter of 13 April 1860, Em I 401.

78 To Pius IX, 10 March 1861, Em I 441.

areas: *Protestants, Catholics, Oratories*. In the first case he denounced their 'indefensible' proselytism. With regard to the second group, he highlighted their unity and activity in 'defending, propagating the principles of our holy religion,' pointing to just a few dissident priests, but 'outside Piedmont.' He praised the growth of the oratories 'not only in Turin but also in cities and towns around the province.' Yet not all was good cheer. 'We find ourselves in terrible conflict. The angel of darkness is on the loose; the world is in his power and he does everything he can to ruin true believers. We fight and are happy to give of our all, to suffer everything for the Lord's holy cause.' He concluded by assuring him 'in the name of many clergy and many fervent lay people' of an offer to his Holiness of 'work, life and possessions' and prayers, so that the Lord might act 'as soon as possible to bring peace to our land for the good of the people and religion.'<sup>79</sup>

Finally, in February, before news of the construction of a church to *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*, he provided less than consoling information: 'Great efforts' are being made 'in our cities and towns' in matters concerning religion and the sacred ministries' 'due to the usual lavish donations from Protestants,' 'because of threats from and even oppression by authority,' 'because of the betrayal' by not a few of those who had been 'placed on guard over the Lord's House,' because of 'the lack of Catholic instruction of our youth in elementary and secondary schools,' and because of 'bad newspapers and books' which continue to be 'printed and distributed in great numbers.' Just the same, opposing all this was the growth of respect and veneration for the Pope, the unity of bishops including those exiled or imprisoned, and of the clergy; the vitality of the oratories.<sup>80</sup>

### 5.3 *Two anchors 'hanging from the columns'*

The letter to Pius IX of 13 February 1863, ended with the foreshadowing of one of the most characteristic aspects of devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians – the inseparable link it had with Eucharistic worship. 'Your Holiness' Don Bosco wrote 'supports the uplifting idea that God has inspired in you, by proclaiming wherever you can that worship of the Blessed sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, are the two anchors of salvation for our poor humankind.'<sup>81</sup>

He made similar reference, predicting 'painful events' in a letter on 10 March. 'Holy Mother Church,' he foretold 'must again suffer and be afflicted by the torments of its ungrateful children. Here among us we are redoubling our prayers, and our hope rests in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in Mary Immaculate. I hope Divine Providence will prolong Your Holiness' days and that after these storms you will see quiet days and peace for the Church.'<sup>82</sup>

Battles, places of refuge and victories under this twofold standard had already been presented in imaginative form in the evening talk on 30 May 1862 to five hundred listeners at the Oratory. He had begun by handing out some timely and detailed punishments for some boys who on the previous day, the Feast of the Ascension, 'had left the Oratory without permission ... climbing over the walls.' He went on: 'I will tell you a story, a kind of parable. Pay attention if you want to understand it ... Imagine you are at the seashore and that the only land you can see is what is beneath your feet. On the ocean you can see an infinite number of ships, all with sharp iron prows which pierce everything they chase. Some of these ships are loaded with weapons: canons, rifles, while others are filled with books and combustible material and all of them are crowded around a very large ship, trying to ram it, set it on fire, and to cause every damage possible to it. Then imagine that in the middle of the ocean beyond, you can see two very tall columns: on one is a

79 To Pius IX, 27 December 1861, Em I 472-473.

80 Letter of 13 February 1863, Em I 552-553.

81 Em I 553-554.

82 To Pius IX, 10 March 1863, Em I 561.

statue of the Immaculate Virgin and beneath, the inscription: *Auxilium Christianorum*. On the other, higher still and larger, is a large Host attached to the column and beneath it the words: *Salus Credentium*. At the base of each column then, are many chains hanging down with anchors the boats can attach themselves to. The largest boat is guided by the Pope and all his efforts are directed to bringing it between the two columns. But as I said, the other boats are doing everything to ram it and wreck it, some with weapons, with their prow, or by setting fire to it with books, papers, but in vain. They were wasting all their efforts, every weapon and material used broke up and sank. It occasionally happened that the cannons made a deep hole here and there in the side of the ship but a breath that came from the two columns was enough to fix all the damage and holes, and the ship sailed on once again.

‘Along the way the Pope fell once then got up, fell again and died. As soon as he died, another took his place immediately and led the ship as far as the two columns. When it arrived there he tied it with one anchor to the column with the consecrated Host and with the other to the column on which the Immaculate Conception stood. Then there was a great disturbance on the water. All the boats that up till then had been fighting against the papal ship separated and fled and smashed into each other; some sank and tries to sink the others. Those at a distance held back prudently.

‘With the wrecked ships sunk beneath the waves, survivors rowed vigorously one at a time toward the large ship. When they reached there they attached themselves to the anchors hanging from the two column and remained there in perfect calm.’

The narrator followed the story with an explanation which he asked Fr Rua to offer. Rua replied simply: ‘It seems to me that the Pope’s ship is the Church ... Those defending the Church are the good people who love the Holy See, the others are its enemies.’ Don Bosco approved of this and added: ‘The enemy ships are persecutions against the Church. What we have seen up till now is almost nothing.’<sup>83</sup>

A third of the reminders Don Bosco gave to the boys at the college in Mirabella on 30 December 1863, were on ‘Devotion and frequent recourse to Our Lady.’ He commented: ‘Believe me, dear boys, I think I am not overstating things by saying that frequent communion is a huge column on which one pole of the world rests; devotion to Our Lady is the other column supporting the other pole.’<sup>84</sup>

#### 5.4 From the discussion to build until the laying of the foundation stone.

Don Bosco’s intention to build a new and large church was not initially a risky one, even though it soon became so, due to the financial consequences of the Kingdom’s capital transferring from Turin to Florence, followed by the war of independence in 1866. He survived the crisis through tenacity, by organising a lottery and by hammering away with public and private appeals, plus the inexhaustible ability to involve people especially in Turin, Florence and Rome.

Already in May 1863, purchase of land and wood for the footings led to an expenditure of L. 4000 [ Ca. 15,819 euro]. Work was contracted out to the very faithful Carlo Buzzetti from Valtellina, brother of Giuseppe, who was resident at the Oratory, and Giosuè, also a building contractor.

The excavation work began over summer and autumn and were completed in spring 1864. Also begun was the transportation of twenty thousand quintals of stone from Borgone di Susa. Don Bosco had managed to obtain free transport from the Director General of Railways, Bartolomeo

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83 Letter of 5 June 1862 by Cesare Chiala (1837-1876), later a Salesian, to Cav. Federico Oreglia di S. Stefano, ASC A 0050401; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* II..., pp. 547-554.

84 Em I 629

Bona.<sup>85</sup>

More than a year prior to presenting the City Council with plans to have a building permit, Don Bosco was pressuring the Mayor personally and by letter, also asking him for financial support for the building works.<sup>86</sup> He received a negative response to this, justified by the fact that the Council agreed in principle 'only for the building of parish churches.' His efforts were to no avail.<sup>87</sup> The plan, by architect Antonio Spezia, was presented in February,<sup>88</sup> and approved on 27 May after a series of modifications imposed by the Embellishments Commission. The council issued the permit on 2 June 1864.

In March, Don Bosco had a circular printed and distributed throughout northern and central Italy, attaching subscription forms to it. At the top, to the right and left in Latin and Italian were the invocations: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* and *Tu nos ab hoste protege et mortis hora suscipe*. The text was a recommendation to 'devotees of Mary.' 'I say devotees of Mary,' he explained, 'because it is precisely in honour of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus Christ under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum* or help of Christians that this sacred building will rise.'<sup>89</sup>

A former parish priest, retired for health reasons, made an interesting proposal: 'If Mr Pievano Agliani had vouchers or capital available, would he give it away to build this church? If Mr Pievano Agliani were happy to receive the interest for the rest of his life, would he allow such an obligation to cease after his death (as late as God could want)?'<sup>90</sup>

In a new circular in September 1864, addressed to the wider faithful, Don Bosco provided the dimensions of the church which was smaller than it currently is as a result of considerable extensions made in the 1930s: 'A well-deserving engineer has already provided the plan in the form of a Latin cross. The internal area is 1,000 square metres. The total cost is calculated as approximately two hundred thousand francs' [813,263 euro]. 'Excavations are complete and work has quickly started on the foundations, hoping to arrive at floor level by the end of the year.' 'Work should take three years so long as there are no further delays.'<sup>91</sup>

*L'Unità Cattolica* made a great deal of the *charity of Pius IX for construction of the Valdocco Church*.<sup>92</sup> While commencing a huge campaign on the topic in May: Italy united in devotion to Mary. 'We would like to dedicate this month to Mary, and while we are caught up in the lies, violence and blood of another kind of unity, we would like to speak of the true and sweet unity of Italy, in its praise and love for the great Mother of God.'<sup>93</sup> The proposal was to commence a novena on 15 May of *Prayers to preserve our Holy Father Pius IX* to end on 24 May, the day Pius IX wanted dedicated to the *Virgin Auxilium Christianorum*.<sup>94</sup>

When sending a packet of circulars on 'printed invitations' to a benefactor, Don Bosco for the first time touched on the question of contributing to building Mary's 'house' on earth in order to

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85 Cf. letter of January 1864, Em II 33. In July of 1865 he asked a similar favour again, with a positive outcome (Cf. Em II 629).

86 To March. E. Luserna di Rorà, 25 and 26 May 1863, Em I 580 and 581-582. On relations with the Turin City Council in connection with construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians, Giuseppe Bracco offers first-hand information in his essay *Don Bosco e le istituzioni*, in G. BRACCO, *Torino e don Bosco*, Vol. I..., pp. 142-144; Vol. III *Documenti*, nos VII-XII, plans and projects.

87 To March. E. Luserna di Rorà, 24 December 1863, Em I 627.

88 To the mayor of Turin, before 1 March 1864, Em II 40.

89 Circ. March 1864, Em II 41-42.

90 To Fr G. Agliani (1805-1871), 26 July 1864, Em II 63-64.

91 Circ. September 1864, Em II 72-73. Il "benemerito ingegnere" Spezia, in fact, had stated in writing that he was renouncing any honorarium.

92 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 156, Sunday 1 May 1864, p. 659; and again on Saturday 4 February 1865: both texts in OE XXXVIII 68-69.

93 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 161, Sunday 8 May 1864, p. 681.

94 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 161, Sunday 8 May 1864, p. 681.

deserve a 'place' or 'room in heaven. He wrote: 'I am sending them to you to distribute so you can make use of them to bring Her house in this world to successful completion, certain that She will repay you generously in due course by preparing a beautiful place for you and your family in Paradise.'<sup>95</sup>

He urgently asked a retired Provost for 2,000 lire [8,270 euro] either 'as alms' or 'as a loan', adding: 'I hope the holy Virgin will not fail to prepare a beautiful room for you in heaven because you have helped to build her a house on earth.'<sup>96</sup>

Asking a lady from Florence to help Marchioness Villarios to distribute lottery tickets to support the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, he promised: 'She will never fail to prepare a large mansion in heaven for those who help build a house for her on earth.'<sup>97</sup> He also assured Count Francesco di Viancino of 'a beautiful room for you and your family in heaven near the Mother of God.'<sup>98</sup> He used an identical image in a letter to the generous Marchioness Fassati. After referring to the state of works 'well on the way' but slowing 'for lack of funds' right at the 'best time for work' he proposed a loan with heavenly value: 'If you can make a loan to Our Lady, this is the best time to do so, and I believe you would gain interest far beyond the legal 5%.'<sup>99</sup> With regard to interest rates, at the beginning of 1865 he recommended that Fr Dominic Pestarino find a loan of 5,000 lire [20,677 euro], since getting a loan in Turin was not convenient due to 'exorbitant interest rates.'<sup>100</sup>

On 24 April 1865, Don Bosco sent out invitations with the 'order of events' for the laying of the foundation stone of the church to take place in the early afternoon of the 27th: 'His Royal Highness Prince Amedeo will lay the first slab of mortar.' His Lordship the Bishop of Casale will do the religious function.'<sup>101</sup> The rite was celebrated with extraordinary solemnity also because Don Bosco made it an event of considerable religious and political significance. Present were the son of Victor Emmanuel II, Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, the Mayor Marquis Emanuele Luserna di Rorà, the Prefect, Count Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano. The Bishop of Casale, Luigi Nazari di Calabiana, was indisposed and was replaced by the Bishop of Susa, Giovanni Odone.

The Oratory band greeted the Duke of Aosta with the Royal March. The event took place on a platform supported by the completed underground vaults of the church among multi-coloured decorations. There was an improvised wooden altar with the national flag behind, and the Savoy Coat of Arms.<sup>102</sup> Newspapers in Turin reported the festivities and Don Bosco also wrote up the event on several occasions.<sup>103</sup>

## 6. Marginal involvement in the Veggezi Mission

It was right at that time (22 April to be precise) that Turin Deputy [member of parliament] Francesco Saverio Veggezi (1805–88) who was one of the Promoters for the 1865–67 lottery,

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95 To Countess P. Crotti di Costigliole, 8 September 1864, Em II 75.

96 To Fr S. Brossa (1808-1877), letter of 17 July 1865, Em II 149.

97 Letter of 6 March 1866, Em II 214.

98 To Count F. Viancino, 30 March 1866, Em II 220.

99 Letter of February 1865, Em II 104.

100 Letter undated but at the beginning of 1865, Em II 104, Em II 123

101 Em II 123.

102 Fr Lemoyne dedicated considerable space to a description of the unusual setup in his *Cronaca 1864-1865*, pp. 144-146.

103 [G. Bosco], *Rimembranza della funzione per la pietra angolare della chiesa sacrata a Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino-Valdocco il giorno 27 aprile 1865*. Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1865, 16 pp.; *Chiesa dedicata a Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino-Valdocco e Rimembranza della funzione per la pietra angolare a Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino-Valdocco*, in *Il Galantuomo. Almanacco per l'anno 1866*. Anno XIII. Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales



received instructions from the Italian Government that would eventually take him to Rome to resolve the thorny issue of the many vacant Italian dioceses: 108 in all, of which 24 were archdioceses. Many bishops had been alienated from their diocese, others had been forced to retire, those named in the Consistory of 21 December 1863, from Marche, Umbria and Romagna dioceses were unable to enter them because they were asked to refuse to take the oath to the Italian State from the moment they formally became bishops in 'dioceses belonging to the Papal States.' The Holy See dearly wanted to give these negotiations exclusively religious ends, avoiding any semblance of giving in to political and territorial questions.

There is no explicit documentation concerning direct intervention by Don Bosco in the brief negotiations begun in April and interrupted at the end of June, with no result except for some agreement on bishops removed from Sees or who had not been given permission to enter theirs.<sup>104</sup>

But the testimony of Fr Lemoyne, who was still residing with his Superior at the Valdocco Oratory,<sup>105</sup> and various other items, suggest in favour of his involvement, however slight, with Pius IX and the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza. The latter, deeply convinced of the opportunity for an agreement, thought the required oath was 'antiquated' and stood out from many of his colleagues who for different reasons and with varying levels of animosity persevered in their traditional jurisdictionalism [separation of Church and State, but with the State dominant]. The oath, required by the State but rejected by the Vatican, was the reef on which the precarious negotiations foundered.<sup>106</sup>

At any rate, Don Bosco's pastoral enthusiasm and devotion to the Church and the Pope were certainly involved, and he saw the good of Italy as being inseparable from these. He felt deep anguish at the fact that near him in Piedmont, nine Sees were vacant and of the eleven dioceses in Sardinia eight were vacant and the Archbishop of Cagliari had been in exile since 1850.

In a letter telling the Pope about the laying of the foundation stone for the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, he did not omit to mention the matter giving Pius IX so much sorrow: 'We continue, Holy Father, to say special prayers in common, morning and evening, that God will assist you and as best as possible solve the chaos that becomes even more disastrous every time there is a delay. I mean the return of bishops [to their Sees] and appointments [of new ones]. Everyone is agitated thinking what the Holy Father will do, but they all soon feel consoled. However things are done, if the Pope is behind it, it will always be well done and approved of by all the faithful.'<sup>107</sup>

We do not exclude the possibility that similar sentiments substantially favourable to the negotiations could have been expressed to the Pope, especially through his young bishop friend, Emiliano Manacorda (1833–1909) who was close to Pius IX and became Bishop of Fossano in 1871. They are expressions which could justify the claim of one scholar of the relationships between the Holy See and the Italian State from 1861–65. In reference to the Vegezzi mission he speaks of Pius IX 'influenced by suggestions from Don Bosco.'<sup>108</sup>

He would be part of similar negotiations during his stay in Rome from January to March 1867 on the occasion of the Tonello mission.<sup>109</sup>

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104 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1851-1866)*..., p. 82.

105 Cf. MB VIII 62-69.

106 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti in Italia dal 1858 alla morte di Pio IX (1878)*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 262-274.

107 Letter of 30 April 1865, Em II 129.

108 R. MORI, *La questione Romana (1861-1865)*. Florence, Le Monnier 1963, p. 320.

109 Cf. Chap. 15, § 3.

## 7. Journeys within Piedmont and beyond: Milan, Venice, Florence

The early 1860s saw Don Bosco travelling more frequently by stage-coach, gig, and train. In Piedmont these were quick, brief visits, but in nearby regions they were longer. He reached further afield, especially under pressure from the construction of the new church. The most important cities he went to were Milan and Venice. Until the peace treaty on 3 October 1866, Venice was still under the dominion of the Hapsburgs. He also travelled to Genoa, Pisa, and Florence, which was Italy's capital from June 1865. And then, once again he went to Rome.

The trip to Milan and Venice took place in mid-October 1865. The important stage was to Lonigo (Vincenza), where he was the guest of Count Tommaso Mocenigo Soranzo.<sup>110</sup> 'I went to Lonigo' he wrote to Marquis Patrizi in Rome, 'and I spoke much of you in the Soranzo household where you were just a while ago. What a good and holy family! I even went to Milan and stopped over some hours to see Duke Scotti and Duchess Melzi, but both had already left for Rome.'<sup>111</sup>

In Venice he was the guest of Fr Giuseppe Apollonio. He was fascinated by the city. Writing to Fr Rua he said: 'How many things I have to tell you about the lakes, the gondolas, Fr Apollonio etc!'<sup>112</sup> 'There was no other news, but his friendship with the priest remained a steady one. In the future he became a Salesian Cooperator and from 1879 Bishop of Adria-Rovigo. In 1882 Don Bosco did not fail to write a warm letter to him when he was transferred to Treviso, the diocese where the arrival of the Salesians to run the agricultural school at Mogliano Veneto was imminent.'<sup>113</sup>

On 7 February 1866, Don Bosco announced to Giuseppe Guenzati, whom he had come to know at St Aloysius' Oratory along with Giuseppe Pedraglio in 1850: 'Tomorrow at 11? I will be in Milan.'<sup>114</sup> Shortly afterwards he returned there with a quick visit to Monza and Cremona.<sup>115</sup> He went back to Milan between September and October, meeting Countess Luigia Barbò and Duchess Barbara Melzi d'Eril who had been in contact with him for some time.<sup>116</sup> He made a further trip to Milan at the end of October 1866,<sup>117</sup> stopping on his return at Casale.<sup>118</sup> We also know of two stops in Milan again in 1867, the first from 9–11 February as guest of Archbishop Calabiana,<sup>119</sup> the second in mid-October.<sup>120</sup>

In November 1865, Don Bosco sent a Salesian Coadjutor, the aristocratic *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano, to Florence and then Rome as a *missus ad omnia*, to distribute the *Letture Cattoliche*, take lottery tickets, collect donations for 'completion of a church we have great need of' and to keep up a variety of contacts with the ecclesiastical and secular world.<sup>121</sup>

Oreglia was the herald preceding his Superior. Don Bosco arrived not long after. Toward the end of the year, he reached Tuscany, setting foot for the first time in Pisa and Florence. It was both urgent and necessary to create broader opportunities for support, friends, sources of charity,

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110 Cf. letter To Fr M. Rua, 14 October 1865, Em II 173.

111 Letter of 23 October 1865, Em II 176.

112 Letter written between 15 and 19 October 1865, Em II 175.

113 To Bishop G. Apollonio, 30 September 1882, E IV 175; Cf. Chap. 30, § 1.1.

114 Em II 208.

115 Cf. letter to Cav. F. Oreglia, 8 March 1866, Em II 215.

116 Cf. letter to Countess L. Barbò, 26 August 1866, Em II 288.

117 Cf. letter to Countess L. Barbò, 9 October 1866, Em II 303.

118 Em II 496

119 Letter to Fr F. Provera, end of October 1867, Em II 448. He returned to Rome on 25 November, staying 3 days: cf. M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 343-344.

120 Letter to Countess L. Barbò, 3 October 1868, Em II 581; cf. letter to Countess M. Caccia Dominioni, 3 October 1868, Em II 581-582.

121 To Cav. F. Oreglia di S. Stefano, 10 November 1865, Em II 182.

especially after the Italian political epicentre had shifted to the Tuscan capital. He sent Fr Rua a beautiful letter–cum–commentary on the stopover in Pisa, where he was guest of Cardinal Corsi whom he had come to know when the prelate was in Turin in 1860.<sup>122</sup> There were fragments of information concerning his visit to Florence and the journey there both prior to and after it. There, he was the guest of Archbishop Gioacchino Limberti (1821–74), consecrated by Pius IX in Florence on 23 August 1857, during a visit to the Papal States. Limberti was an enlightened pastor, politically moderate and conciliatory. In 1860, Don Bosco had already sought information from him, on St Lawrence the martyr and the church dedicated to him in Florence,<sup>123</sup> and he kept up a respectful and friendly correspondence. In June 1865, presenting a Ministerial official to him, he wrote, ‘I have a real desire to see you again in person and I hope it will not be long before I can satisfy it.’<sup>124</sup> In following letters he tried to specify the date with Oratorian Fr Giulo Metti (1816–74):<sup>125</sup> ‘In the first half of the coming November’ he predicted initially.<sup>126</sup> ‘From the twelfth to the eighteenth I hope to make my trip to Florence’ he wrote on 6 November.<sup>127</sup> A delay of ‘some days and at most some weeks’ he thought on 12 November.<sup>128</sup> A letter to Carmelite Sister Teresa Angelica of the Divine Love revealed his uncertainty of the ‘if’ and ‘when’ of this trip.<sup>129</sup> ‘The week after the feast of the Immaculate Conception’ he told Countess Virginia Cambrey, a benefactor from Florence, on 3 December.<sup>130</sup> On 15 December, when he was already in Florence, he told her of some delay on the following day: from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. at S. Domenico or S. Marco with the Dominicans (where Fr Domenico Nerda was, a fervent propagandist for the *‘Letture Cattoliche’*) at 3(?) in the afternoon at the Uguiccioni house and at the Sisters of Charity school.<sup>131</sup> On the 21, close to his departure from Turin he thanked Marquis Angelo Nobili Vitelleschi for the visit, asking him to distribute lottery tickets.<sup>132</sup>

On his return, going through Prato, where he visited the Magnolfi orphanage with Fr Giustino Campolmi, Archbishop Limberti’s secretary and like him a native of Prato. Back at the Oratory he wrote a warm letter of thanks to the Archbishop and Fr Metti. He thanked the Archbishop for his generous hospitality, kindness and manifest charity, and expressed admiration for ‘the exemplariness of the clergy and the piety of the Florentines.’<sup>133</sup> He invited Fr Metti who later accepted, to possibly help with the *Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>134</sup>

One extraordinary and lasting conquest in Florence was the Uguiccioni family. We see this from a letter to Countess Girolama (1813–89) on 22 January, full of sincere affection and spiritual advice. He expressed the ‘holy impression’ left him by ‘the piety, charity and courtesy of the people in Florence’ and especially her family and her husband, thanking ‘God who deigned to inspire so much courage, faith and steadiness in our Catholic Religion.’<sup>135</sup> He made a similar evaluation of Senator Giuseppe Cataldi from Genoa, where he proposed going as soon as possible: ‘So much more heartfelt’ he said ‘because I know that he is a fervent Catholic, which for me is the dearest

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122 Cf. letter to Fr M. Rua, 13 December 1865, Em II 189.

123 Letter of 31 March 1860, Em I 399.

124 To Bishop G. Limberti, 20 June 1865, Em II 144-145.

125 Cf. A. CISTELLINI, *Don Bosco e il P. Metti di Firenze*, “L’Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri” (Rome) 25 (1968) 52-86.

126 To Fr G. Metti, 5 October 1865, Em II 172.

127 To Fr G. Metti, 6 November 1865, Em II 180.

128 To Fr. G. Metti, 12 November 1865, Em II 172.

129 Letter of 22 November 1865, Em II 185.

130 Letter of 3 December 1865, Em II 186.

131 Letter of 15 December 1865, Em II 190.

132 Letter of 21 December 1866, Em II 191-192.

133 Letter of 27 December 1865, Em II 193.

134 Letter of 13 January 1866, Em II 196.

135 Letter of 22 January 1866, Em II 199. On 3 February 1866 he told the Rector of the seminary in Florence that he had sent books “adapted for youth” and recommended in particular that he spread the *Letture Cattoliche* (letter to Can. B. Checucci, 3 February 1866, Em II 207).

thing in the world.<sup>136</sup>

In Genoa, as in Milan,<sup>137</sup> Venice, Florence and then Rome, Don Bosco moved easily in the lay and the ecclesiastical world of unshakeable Catholic Faith, and love for the Pope, allergic to any political and social transformation seen as revolution or subversion. Above all, though, he demonstrated a serene and reassuring spirituality described in its essential features in the earlier cited letter to Uguccioni: '1) Do not trouble yourself over conscience matters: everything is okay. 2) Have a keen faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and when you are in need of some grace, ask with certainty of faith that you will obtain it. 3) Pray for poor Don Bosco that while he tells others what to do he does not overlook matters regarding his own salvation. Be assured as a humble priest of Jesus Christ I ask heaven to give health, grace and happy days, to you, your family, your children's families, and may God give them all the true wealth which is *the holy fear of God*.'<sup>138</sup>

As a sideline to his quick trip to Florence via Pisa, it is worth going back to a question connected with the failed Vegezzi mission, and a further problematic involvement on Don Bosco's part: 'Could there not also have been a political and religious import of Don Bosco's trip to Florence before Christmas, guest as he was with Cardinal Corsi?'<sup>139</sup> There are no reasons for resolving that question positively. He would no longer have found the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza, there. Since the end of August 1865, Lanza had withdrawn from the Government, annoyed among other things 'by the way the Government had allowed the Vegezzi mission to fail.'<sup>140</sup> From 14 December, his successor was Turin Deputy Desiderato Chiaves (1825–95), close to the Centre-Left at the time and a former editor of *Il Fischietto*, a notoriously anticlerical satirical magazine. His ministerial adventure, renewed in the second Lamarmora Cabinet on 31 December, ended up with the crisis on 20 June 1866, which opened the way for the second Ricasoli Ministry (20 June 1866–10 April 1867). Would he have been a partner Don Bosco could trust in problems of ecclesiastical politics?

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136 Letter to M. Fantini, canon of the Metropolitan Archdiocese, Genoa, 11 April 1866, Em II 225.

137 Among correspondents from Milan in the '60s were C. Rivolta Guenzati, 26 December 1867, Em II 466; Duchesses M. Melzi d'Eril and E. Sardi Melzi d'Eril, January and 12 April 1868, Em II 468 and 523; Duke T. Gallarati Scotti, 26 February 1864 and 19 March 1868, Em II 39 and 514; Countess M. Caccia Dominiononi, 4 April 1868, Em II 520.

138 To Countess G. Uguccioni, 22 January 1866, Em II 200.

139 F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 276.

140 Cf. G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell'Italia moderna...*, Vol. V, pp. 284-285.

## Chapter 15

# THE TORTUOUS PATH TO PONTIFICAL APPROVAL OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY (1864–69)

- 1862 Controversy with Bishop Moreno regarding ownership of the *Letture Cattoliche*
- 1865 28 February: request for faculty to issue dimissorials denied;  
30 March: premature request to Pius IX for approval of the Salesian Society.
- 1866 December: Trip to Florence.
- 1867 7 January: departure for Rome. Remains until 26 February;  
Petitions the Pope for full approval of the Salesian Society;  
January–February: *Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo colla vita del medesimo*;  
Involvement in the Tonello mission;  
First printed text of the Constitutions (Latin);  
April: censorship of the *Centenario di S. Pietro*;  
October: end of controversy over ownership of *Letture Cattoliche*.
- 1868 19 January: approval of the Salesian Society by the Bishop of Casale;  
9 June: Consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians;  
2 October: Roman denial of approval of the Salesian Society and its Constitutions.
- 1869 8 January: departing for Rome and third stay there from 15 January – 2 March;  
1 March: decree of approval of the Society of St Francis de Sales;  
September: final series of Salesian retreats at Trofarello.

The 1864 *decretum laudis*, necessarily limited in comparison to Don Bosco's not so realistic expectations, had arrived without personal contact with the main Roman players: the Pope and the heads of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

With this decree in hand, signifying the birth and experimental status of the Society of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco immediately set about achieving his dream of a more ambitious goal: the rapid approval of the Society and its Constitutions, including faculties of exemption and the right of dimissorial letters.

Achieving this meant two stays in Rome and those, understandably, involved other tasks.

### 1. In defence of freedom for his mission and failure to meet all canonical requests (1864–66)

The way ahead immediately became difficult and tortuous, partly because of a decree of disinformation concerning the real juridical status of the Congregation following the decree on 23

July 1864 and the gradual nature of the objective which could realistically be achieved. Inclined to give the decree a broad interpretation, Don Bosco insisted on making requests which were incompatible with current canonical practice and norms. He did this within a network of relationships that could be both encouraging and frustrating. These included the intensely nurtured kindness of Pius IX, pointers from individuals of trust but also some who questioned his approach, the fixed points of those responsible for the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the reservations of diocesan authorities in Turin.

Given his commitment to fulfilling a broad and urgent mission, the salvation of the young, Don Bosco saw that it was shared, admired, encouraged and supported by them all: Pope, bishops, priests, Civil and political authorities, benefactors. So he could only wonder at the resistance, formalities hindering and harnessing a young and dynamic institution which sought to dedicate itself to that mission and needed the faculties and concessions granted some decades previously to other Institutes close to his. As a result he reacted to these obstructions at the level of the local and universal Church.

On 28 February 1865, he formally asked the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Angelo Quaglia, to grant the faculty of issuing his ordinands with their respective dimissorial letter *ad quemcumque episcopum*. Stretching the terms of the *decretum laudis* which appointed him 'Moderator generalis', he based his request 'on the doubt' as he wrote 'that the said faculty was not implied in the above-mentioned decree that constituted him *ad instar Ordinarii*,' a term that was not in the document.<sup>1</sup> On the back of the petition which was returned to him, along with the official seal of the Congregation, he found the sharp reply: '20 March 1865. This is not expedient and the petitioner knows the Institute is subject to the jurisdiction of Ordinaries following the requirements of the Sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions, as indicated in the decree of 3 July 1864.'<sup>2</sup>

Don Bosco yielded. But on 30 March 1865 he reacted by petitioning the Pope for pontifical approval of the Salesian Society. Referring to the decree of commendation (*Decretum Laudis*) he stated, unperturbed: 'Thirteen observations were attached to the decree. I have read them carefully and put them into practice, and as far as it seemed possible, have included them in the Constitutions.' It should be noted that in the Latin text of the Constitutions he would print for the first time in 1867, no change appeared in the articles regarding dimissorials, acquiring and alienating the Society's goods, founding individual houses and accepting clerics from the seminaries.<sup>3</sup> However, he asked Pope Pius IX in approving the Salesian Society, to improve a work that he himself had been the '*suasor et impulsor*' of – the promoter and persuader of.<sup>4</sup>

A month later he renewed his request, but diplomatically. In the text of the letter, prefaced with praise of Marquis Fassati who delivered it, he also provided some information before referring to the earlier request on 30 March; the introduction of civil marriage in Italy, the laying of the foundation stone for the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, the disastrous delay in the matter of the episcopal appointments and return to their Sees. He followed this with assurance of increased prayer for the peace of the Church and the glory of Pius IX's pontificate. In the central part of the letter he was precise and pointed: 'Last March I sent the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, accommodating the observations that had been given me. I recommend it all to the paternal kindness of Your Holiness which I have so often experienced. The number of members has already passed one hundred. Seven houses have been opened thus far, the rules and discipline are observed as far as can be humanly

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1 Em II 112.

2 Latin text reported in MB VIII 51.

3 Cf. *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*. Augustae Taurinorum, ex typis Asc. Sales. 1867, OE XVIII 267-301.

4 To Pius IX, 30 March 1865, Em II 119.

desired.<sup>5</sup>

Already the previous summer, Don Bosco had written to the Pope about 'More than a hundred members' and 'four houses and five different oratories.'<sup>6</sup> Things were obviously not proceeding at full steam if, in July, in response to a letter from Dominican Fr Tosa (1812–91), he had to assure him: 'I have followed your advice and the norms you have kindly suggested to me.'<sup>7</sup> Which ones? Were they relevant? It seems not if the situation still remained blocked. In January 1866, informing the Holy Father about the oratories and the Salesian Society, he stated once more: 'The expectation of all the members, of course, is that the Holy See will give definitive approval of the Constitutions when and in the manner Your Holiness deems to be for the greater glory of God and the greater benefit of souls.'<sup>8</sup> At the same time he was making moves in Turin with the intention of obtaining a range of things for his clerics – as well as financial aid he was seeking to adjust exam dates, gain exemption from classes, and give them a more direct route to priestly ordination. His clerics were indispensable collaborators in the Oratory and at Lanzo and were actual or potential members of the Society, some attending, others not attending courses at the Seminary, providing assistance in the different works and teaching catechism in the boys' oratories around the city. A number of letters to the Rector of the Seminary and the Pro-vicar of the diocese, Canon Alessandro Vogliotti,<sup>9</sup> and the Capitular Vicar, Canon Giuseppe Zappata<sup>10</sup> document this. Don Bosco even asked the latter if he could organise philosophy and theology courses at the Oratory, attaching the curriculum and a list of teachers, and Salesians, except for Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi.<sup>11</sup> The letter of request received a blanket 'no'.<sup>12</sup> Don Bosco replied to the sender saying that 'this stark refusal' had caused him 'not a little pain', and renewed his request at least for the students of philosophy.<sup>13</sup> He was allowed to run a course at the Oratory for these.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. To Florence and Rome for a range of purposes

In December 1866, after a number of hesitations, Don Bosco decided first on a quick trip to Florence then in January on a more demanding one to Rome.

He announced his trip to Florence by letter on 8 December, to two noblewomen who were especially close to his charitable work. The first was addressed to Countess Virginia Cambrey Digny: 'I am sharing with your honourable self that God willing, my planned trip to Florence will take place on Monday Morning [10 December] arriving by train at 7.55. I will stay with the Archbishop, who has already shown me so much kindness. If you know someone who is ill and would like me to visit them I will plan for this and gladly do so.'<sup>15</sup>

'Please God on Monday morning I will be in Florence where I hope to be able to reply in person to your letter' he told Countess Girolama Uguccioni.<sup>16</sup>

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5 To Pius IX, 30 April 1865, Em II 129.

6 To Pius IX, 25 August 1864, Em II 69.

7 Letter of 21 July 1865, Em II 151.

8 To Pius IX, 25 January 1866, Em II 202.

9 Letter of 31 January, 7 August, 3 September 1865, Em II 103, 153, 161; 16, 26, 29 June and 6 September 1866, Em II 261, 264, 266 and 293; halfway through June, 3 November, 7 December 1867, Em II 390, 449, 457; 22 May 1868, Em II 533.

10 Letter of 8 February 1865, Em II 107; 12 June and 27 August 1866, Em II 257-258 and 289-291.

11 To Can. G. Zappata, 27 August 1866, Em II 289-291; To Can. Vogliotti, 6 September 1866, Em II 293-294

12 Can. A. Vogliotti to Don Bosco, 3 September 1866, MB VIII 457.

13 To Can. A. Vogliotti, 6 September 1866, Em II 293-294.

14 Cf. MB VIII 458.

15 Letter of 8 December 1866, Em II 315.

16 To Countess Girolama Uguccioni, 8 December 1866, Em II 316.

Dated from Florence on the 17th and 18th were two letters addressed respectively to Cambrey Digny and Mother Galeffi in Tor de' Specchi, Rome. He wrote to the former: 'I am leaving and perhaps cannot see you again in person,' encouraging her to continue with her plans for the chapel in honour of St Anne in the Church of Mary Help of Christians.<sup>17</sup>

He reassured the other, probably in reference to some religious house worried about the 7 July 1866 legislation on confiscation of ecclesiastical goods.<sup>18</sup> His 'do not fear anything, pray and hope' became a positive wish, too, for the congregation of Benedictine Oblate nuns at Tor de' Specchi who were saved from the repressive measures extended to include Rome, in 1873, by declaring themselves to be lay women.<sup>19</sup>

Don Bosco stayed in Florence from Tuesday the 11th until Friday the 18th. His agenda included visits to various Ministers to obtain grants or tax exemptions. We see names of families, religious communities he intended visiting: the Gerinis, Bardis, Gondis; the St John of God Brothers and the Dominicans (Fr Verde was there); women such as Saccardi, Bonamici, Ficciati, Brocchi. He would also have wanted a meeting with Prime Minister Bettino Ricasoli on matters of common interest to the Italian State and the Holy See.<sup>20</sup> Don Bosco left on Wednesday morning the 19th and informed Fr Bonetti from Bologna: 'I am writing to you from Bologna where I am stopping over for a few hours; this evening I will be at Guastalla [with his bishop friend Rota] and in Turin tomorrow evening.'<sup>21</sup>

There were many reasons convincing him to go to Rome. The main one was to personally unblock negotiations aimed at papal approval of the Salesian Society and its Constitutions. But it was also vital for him to sound out and activate charitable opportunities and stir up the world of charity, gain consensus in favour of his youth works, the Church of Mary Help of Christians, the lottery, the *Letture Cattoliche*. He left Turin on 7 January, accompanied by Fr Francesca, as he had agreed when writing to Fr Giuseppe Frassinetti: 'I have decided to go [to Rome] in the first days of the year because I have things to do with the Congregations.' 'I am letting you know that my departure is fixed for the seventh of January.'<sup>22</sup>

In Rome, Don Bosco was guest at the home of Count Giovanni Vimercati, whose house overlooked the square in front of St Peter in Chains. The Count was unwell, anxious and devout to the point of scrupulosity.

Some very intense weeks of work awaited Don Bosco. Fr Francesca described these a little less than forty years later in a work entitled: *Due mesi con Don Bosco. Memorie* (Two months with Don Bosco in Rome. Memoirs).<sup>23</sup>

He certainly made contact with aristocratic families who firmly backed the Pope: gentry like the Vitelleschi, Calderari, Villarios families, Duke Salvati, Duke Scotti, Prince Ruspoli, the Falconieri family, Count and Countess Bentivoglio (Annibale and Anna), the Aldobrandini family, Count and Countess Antonelli Falchi.

A letter written some months later to his confidant, *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di S. Stefano is enlightening as to other priorities in Roman relationships: 'For sure, during my stay in Rome I was not able to satisfy all my tasks.' He pointed in particular to *Cavaliere* Befani, the printer, Mr Fattori and *Cavaliere* Pasquali. Further on he mentioned: 'You would know that I needed to avoid certain

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17 Em II 316

18 To Mother Maddalena Galeffi, 18 December 1866, Em II 317.

19 Cf. C. M. FIORENTINO, *Chiesa e Stato a Roma negli anni della Destra storica...*, pp. 265-268.

20 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di Don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 280-281: l'Autore accoglie le testimonianze di don Lemoyne, MB VIII 281, n. 64.

21 Em II 318; he wrote this also to Fr Rua, Em II 319.

22 Letter of 27 December 1866, Em II 321.

23 Turin, Libreria Salesiana 1904, 281 pp.



individuals and visit others who are good Catholics with our spirit and ready to help us. People such as Fr Ambrogio, Abbot of the Antonioni at Piazza S. Pietro in Vincoli, the Filippine nuns of the Sacred Heart, all three of their monasteries at Torre de' Specchi, the Procurator General of the De La Salle Brothers, *Cavaliere* Giacinto Marietti, Bishop Manacorda, *Commendatore* Angelini, Mr Nicoletti, the manager of the Bertinelli Brothers Bank, *Cavaliere* Giuseppe Bertinelli, a lawyer (Via del Corso, 38 but living at no. 2), his brother the Canon of S. Eustachio and his brothers, the De Maistre household, Marquis Serluppi, Count and Countess Antonelli, Bishop Fratejacci, the auditor for the Cardinal Vicar, the Father General of the Dominicans. I have dealt with these and others related to them and have done what I could. Get in touch with them and you will see what compassion and effort they will make to help us. I would add Fr Lorenzo, the Superior of the Camaldesi to this, Bertinelli's brother. All those we have been in touch with before, and others, many of whose address I do not know.<sup>24</sup>

The sale of lottery tickets, one of his objectives there, was a particular busy part of his Roman sojourn. Fr Francesca asked that they be sent to Turin for them to be rapidly sold off.<sup>25</sup> Don Bosco himself often took them around. There was no time to lose; the draw was set for 1 April.<sup>26</sup> He also had a warm encounter, and their friendship was a lasting one, with Scolopian Father Alessandro Checcucci, the Rector of the Nazarene College, whom he already knew of and he met his young pupils.<sup>27</sup> He even sent him 400 lottery tickets, 'the proceeds of which will go to supporting the poor youngsters Divine Providence has entrusted to me, and to continuing work on the church dedicated to the august Mother of the Saviour.'<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, he reassured Fr Rua that he was constantly thinking about Valdocco: 'Business here is going well. I hope I can write a letter to our dear boys tomorrow. Continue to pray for your D. Bosco, who is concerned for you all.'<sup>29</sup>

On 18 January, Don Bosco visited the Jesuit College at Mondragone near Frascati with Fr Francesca, Fr De Lorenzi and Baron Cappelletti.<sup>30</sup> Two letters document his presence at the Camaldolesi Hermitage above Frascati on 8 and 9 February, and an invitation to supper on the evening of 11 February at the residence of Prince Orazio Falconieri di Carpegna.<sup>31</sup>

He wrote a cordial and grateful letter to Count Annibale Bentivoglio promising to visit and seeking to reassure his young wife: 'Meanwhile let me tell you that the Lord wants her to take courage and be cheerful; she should not think of death until she is as old as Methuselah (969 years), after which I will allow her to think of it.'<sup>32</sup>

Again from Rome he sent out a circular on 26 February bearing the address and date: 'Turin, 1 March 1867,' telling his benefactors of the blessings and indulgences gained on their behalf at the audience granted him by the Pope on 12 February.<sup>33</sup> Later, back in Turin he continued to send lottery tickets to Rome to highly placed individuals he had met and made acquaintance with while there.<sup>34</sup>

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24 Letter of 21 May 1867, Em II 372-373.

25 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, p. 115.

26 Cf. Circular of 20 January 1867, Em II 327-328.

27 Cf. Letter of 5 February 1867, Em II 329-330.

28 Letter of 7 February 1867, Em II 332.

29 Letter of 5 February 1867, Em II 330-331.

30 Cf. BS 49 (1925), no. 9 September, p. 211.

31 Letter to the Prince of 8 and 11 February 1867, Em II 333 e 334.

32 Letter to the Count, 16 February 1867, Em II 336. Young Countess Lucini Bentivoglio died in April 1868.

33 Em II 337-338. Further on he communicated this especially and also to Fr Giovanni Tomatis, Letter of 29 March 1867, Em II 345.

34 Cf. Letter to Duke Rodolfo Boncompagni Ludovisi, 29 March 1867, Em II 344, indicating possible collaborators.

He also held audiences in Rome for many individuals in need of help and visited many sick people at home. Hence the emergence of his reputation as a 'miracle worker' and 'saint' as the Roman correspondent for Florence's *L'Opinione* wrote in less than sympathetic tones on 2 February.<sup>35</sup> In reality, as we shall see in the next chapter,<sup>36</sup> Our Lady of Graces, Help of Christians in illnesses of body and spirit, in danger and misfortune, material straits and moral issues, in the needs of individuals and families, was a notion which received an impetus on Don Bosco's part and was an undeniable ecclesiological and social side of his devotion to Mary Help of Christians. It tended to play a large part in the broad circle of individuals he dealt with who were affected by illness or other woes.

### 3. An interlude of ecclesiastical politics

After meeting with Ricasoli in Florence, Don Bosco became part of the new stage of negotiations in Rome on vacant episcopal Sees. These negotiations were sought by Pius IX and supported by Victor Emmanuel in a letter of 6 December 1866. Many Sees had been filled thanks to Government provision on 22 October and 6 November.<sup>37</sup> Fully in accordance with Ricasoli's plans and mindset, the negotiations began with the quick arrival in Rome on 10 December, unannounced, of Michelangelo Tonello, Councillor of State.<sup>38</sup> It began with promising meetings with the Pope and Cardinal Antonelli. Don Bosco dwelt on the matter both with the Pope and his Secretary of State and with Tonello. Prime Minister Bettino Ricasoli telegraphed Tonello saying: 'See that you discuss this with Don Bosco.' Ricasoli himself encouraged progress in the discussions. From 17 February to 24 March he was the *ad interim* Minister for Grace and Justice. A moderate liberal, he considered that in a regime of a 'free Church in a free State' there should be no swearing of an oath by the bishops nor an *exequatur* for the non-financial side of the appointments to episcopal sees, while firmly maintaining the right of the Italian State, as the representative of the people, to present the Holy See with the names of individuals to be raised to the episcopate. Above all, he had a 'sincere and decided willingness to bring an end to the rupture between the State and the Church,'<sup>39</sup> while also safeguarding a certain role for the people in the appointment of their pastors. In fact, he located the negotiations within a much broader plan to solve the Roman question and, more immediately, reconciliation with the Church and the Italian episcopate. However, along with the abrogation of old jurisdictionalist principles that implied the contribution of ecclesiastical goods which were considered to be at least partly the goods of the Italian people, being reclaimed for State finances.

With this in mind, on 17 January the Minister for Finances, Antonio Scialoja, in complete agreement with the Prime Minister, presented the House with draft legislation on *The freedom of the Church and the liquidation of ecclesiastical assets* which in its second part bore the title *Ecclesiastical assets to be divided between Church and State*.<sup>40</sup> It gained the consent of moderate liberals, liberal Catholics and some clergy circles. Don Bosco too, was 'uncertain whether or not to approve of the plan' and whether 'to ask Rome for instructions concerning it.'<sup>41</sup> The Vatican's *non*

35 Cit. by F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, p. 285, no. 79: also reported is much more caustic correspondence from the *Gazzetta del popolo*, which drew from the *Corriere delle Marche* and the *Perseveranza* in Milan.

36 Cf. Chap. 16, § 2.

37 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

38 On Michelangelo Tonello's mission between the end of 1866 and 1867, Cf. R. MORI, *Il tramonto del potere temporale 1866-1870*. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 1967, pp. 54-61, 77-80; F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 276-299.

39 R. MORI, *Il tramonto del potere temporale...*, p. 58.

40 Cf. R. MORI, *Il tramonto del potere temporale...*, pp. 62-77; G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell'Italia moderna...*, Vol. V, pp. 314-319.

41 Cf. R. MORI, *Il tramonto del potere temporale...*, p. 73, n. 20.

*possumus*, and the fact that most of the episcopate aligned themselves with that, blocked the attempt at rapprochement and effectively backed the tough reaction to the draft legislation by the Centre-Left and Left. On 11 February there was a motion of no-confidence in the Government. The King allowed the Government to remain in office, but then dissolved both Houses, thus opening the way for elections on 10 March.

Meanwhile, during negotiations on vacant sees, Tonello presented various lists of candidates acceptable to the Government. Pius IX had been asking for and obtaining information for some time from Cardinals and trustworthy residential bishops regarding potential candidates. Names for bishops in Piedmont were also presented or suggested to Cardinal Antonelli and the Pope himself by Don Bosco, obviously not the only person consulted, nor the only player in a matter that concerned all of Italy.<sup>42</sup> In essence, there was ultimately a list of names of bishops to be transferred, and candidates to be raised to the episcopate, and already in the Consistory held on 22 February the Pope provided for 17 dioceses, followed by a further 17 in the 27 March Consistory. Among them for Piedmont were Carlo Savio for Asti, Lorenzo Gastaldi for Saluzzo, Eugenio Galletti for Alba, Andrea Formica for Cuneo, and the Bishop of Savona, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro was transferred to Turin.<sup>43</sup>

By letter to Cardinal Antonelli on 4 April, Don Bosco pleaded for the appointment of a bishop for Fossano diocese in the name of the diocese and its City Council.<sup>44</sup> The following day he raised the matter again, also suggesting that the position of Bishop Balma, a former missionary to India residing in Turin since 1857, be taken into consideration. He wrote of the pleasure of some dioceses at the recent appointment of their bishops.<sup>45</sup>

Again in June, Don Bosco consoled the Pope by informing him 'how recently appointed bishops' had been received 'in their respective dioceses with real signs of respect and veneration,' seeing in this a sign of the strongly rooted 'Catholic spirit in our towns and cities when they are free to express the religious sentiments in their hearts.'<sup>46</sup> But by that time, Tonello's mission had been already completed three months earlier and Italian politics had moved irreversibly away from any agreed solutions to the Roman question, also claiming the right of the State to the *Regio placet* and the *exequatur*.<sup>47</sup>

We see Don Bosco involved once more in this story of the *exequatur* in the early 1870s, inspired by an ecclesiastical '*realpolitik*', more than by any rigid defence of principles. While still leaving serious and urgent pastoral problems unsolved, his approach led to deeper understanding of the separation of Church and State in Italy.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. Two incidents

In the 1860s, however, Don Bosco's activity encountered two particular episodes that left him somewhat disoriented. The first began without warning in May 1862 and concerned the ownership of *Letture Cattoliche*. It dragged on until the end of autumn 1867. On the other hand, his concerns at a threatened censorship of one of his books, one of a series, lasted just a few months over the same year.

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42 Cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1867-1878)...*, pp. 9-11, 581-582; F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 283-299.

43 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 288-295.

44 Em II 348

45 Em II 349-350.

46 To Pius IX, 26 June 1867, Em II 397.

47 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

48 Cf. Chap. 18, § 7.

This dispute over ownership and management of the *Letture Cattoliche* set Don Bosco in opposition to Bishop Luigi Moreno of Ivrea (1800–78). The cause was Don Bosco's unilateral decision to have the booklets printed at the new Oratory Press. The bishop thought it was an arbitrary decision and, given his shared role in the initiative behind the *Letture* and his shared ownership process, he expressed his disapproval in no mean terms through the Vicar General.

One cannot argue against the fact that the idea and realisation of the project had been made possible by the agreed commitment of both Bishop Moreno and Don Bosco. The former was at least equally co-author of the project with Don Bosco and had given authority, moral support and considerable financial backing as well as providing a priest to work as secretary. There is no lack of persuasive documentation concerning this.<sup>49</sup> It was no less the case that Don Bosco had lent all the energy of his religious and educational convictions and his boundless activity to launching the initiative and keeping it going tenaciously year after year, publicising and promoting it.<sup>50</sup>

The version Don Bosco presents in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* suggests an absolutely minimal and partial role for Bishop Moreno. At Archbishop Fransoni's suggestion, still exiled in Lyons, Bishop Moreno only later began helping with the publication 'through his censor and with his authority' following the presumed refusal of the Turin curia to give the *nullaosta*.<sup>51</sup> This was a decidedly different claim to what Don Bosco wrote to the Cardinal Archbishop of Ferrara in the earlier cited letter of 19 December 1853.<sup>52</sup>

Struck with 'sadness', Don Bosco sent Fr Valinotti, whom Moreno had delegated as administrative secretary of the *Letture*, a firm explanation of the matter. More than reflecting the origins, the letter reflected beliefs rooted in a decade of involvement and unsparing energy. 'I have never thought' he stated, 'that the *Letture Cattoliche* might be anyone else's property. I made up the schedule, began printing it, have helped, and corrected it most diligently; every booklet was written by me or adapted by me for style and language. I have always been responsible for how many were printed. I made journeys, wrote letters and had others written to propagate it. Public opinion and the Holy Father himself in three letters he sent me, considered me to be the author of the *Letture Cattoliche*. I have always decided how much has to be done and have left it to others, dependent on me (which however was overlooked) to see to dispatch and accounting.'<sup>53</sup>

A year went by after this decisive stance, and needing to defend himself on another front, Don Bosco seemed to switch the cards on the table. The Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Francesco Selmi, had let him know that among other things, certain publications of his were passing on teachings adverse to the current political order. He quoted the *Storia d'Italia and Letture Cattoliche*. Don Bosco's defence of the latter was somewhat surprising: 'The *Letture Catholice* cannot be called anti-political since politics are never mentioned in them. If there might be some things that do not seem exact, it can be put down to a poor historian who does what he can to write the truth and often cannot satisfy the readers, or because things are not to his liking, or because he drew on sources not adequately purified. But in this I submit to what I have told you verbally. Note, of course, that I am a simple collaborator of the *Letture Cattoliche*. The office is in Turin, the management is made up of other individuals. All I do in that regard is the printing, which helps provide our poor boys with work.'<sup>54</sup> What would Bishop Moreno have thought of this self-defence? Don Bosco's self-assured freedom to act never ceases to amaze.

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49 Cf. Chap. 18, § 7 and letters reported in MB IV 527-529 and 538.

50 Cf. Bibliography in Chap. 8, § 7; for the oldest Salesian reconstruction, cf. MB VII 150-154, 628-633; VIII 374-393.

51 Cf. MO (2010) 179-182.

52 Cf. Chap. 8, § 7.

53 Letter of 10 May 1862, Em I 496.

54 Letter of 13 July 1863, Em I 589.

As for the ownership question, mediation agreed on by the two contenders, in the person of the experienced and impartial Count Cays, led to a verdict favourable to Don Bosco. On 22 May 1866, he wrote to *Cavaliere Oreglia*: 'Mary Help of Christians continues to bless us. Among other blessings is the one achieved today in settling the question of the *Letture Cattoliche*. It is true that we have had to make serious sacrifices, but now the *Letture* are finally ours.'<sup>55</sup>

In summer 1866, the dispute shifted to the financial aspects: paying Bishop Moreno for handing over the title of ownership and settling the debt with Paravia Press. Count Cays continued his patient role as arbiter, succeeding in overcoming obstacles of both substance and form.<sup>56</sup> In a letter to Bishop Moreno on 3 April 1867, he recalled what had already been agreed and explained what was still lacking: the bishop's signature. On 15 April, though with understandable reluctance, the bishop provided this by letter, admitting that he had never been concerned with accounts and accountability regarding the *Letture Cattoliche*, entrusting it to the Vicar General, Canon Pinoli, and Fr Valinotti. But he did not hide the fact that he felt cheated for the umpteenth time. 'I founded *L'Istruttore*' he wrote 'and it was taken from me. I had *Il Piemonte* bought and it was taken over by others. I thought up and organised the *Biblioteca ecclesiastica* and it collapsed. It no longer exists. I founded and ran *L'Armonia* and it was killed off. Unfortunately I am a bishop, so I kept quiet.'<sup>57</sup>

On 9 May, Don Bosco was able to tell *Cavaliere Oreglia*: 'The *Letture Cattoliche* matter has finally been settled in the way indicated and that was on the first day of May.'<sup>58</sup> In October, Fr Valinotti gave Don Bosco the books and paperwork regarding the *Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>59</sup>

In a letter to Bishop Moreno in April 1868, in which he asked for a letter of support for his request for approval of the Salesian Society, Don Bosco introduced himself by begging the prelate to 'forget for a moment some past disagreements caused by material matters.'<sup>60</sup> The bishop would not have considered it was material issues that were at stake, that is for certain. He had been offended and that would not change. He answered neither that letter nor others from Don Bosco that followed.<sup>61</sup>

One case came to an end and another began. On 9 May 1867, Don Bosco informed *Cavaliere Oreglia*, who was in Rome, of another unforeseen incident but a morally more embarrassing one. He dramatised the event and immediately gave it a new level of importance. 'They have tried to put me on the Index for the *Centenario di S. Pietro*.'<sup>62</sup> In actual fact, the Congregation responsible for the Index limited itself to asking for a new edition of the book with some corrections. But there were a number of reasons why the case seemed more serious to Don Bosco. It was not a provincial issue but the deliberate warning and debate that followed, emanating from Rome close to the Pope in his Curia, that bothered him. Furthermore it was communicated to him officially by letter on 29 April 1867, sent by the Secretary of the Congregation, Dominican Fr Angelo Vincenzo Modena (1807–70) to the new Archbishop of Turin, Riccardi di Netro, even before he had made his solemn entrance to the Archdiocese.<sup>63</sup>

The serious and excessive procedure affected Don Bosco from every angle: his credibility as a writer, trustworthiness as publisher and propagandist of the *Letture Cattoliche* and even more his

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55 Em II 244.

56 Cf. Letter of Don Bosco to Count C. Cays, 25 May, 8 and 11 August 1866, Em II 246247, 282-283 and 286.

57 Cf. Letter to Count C. Cays, 15 April 1867, MB VIII 389-392.

58 Em II 366.

59 MB VIII 392-393. On the final legal and financial balance cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 366-368.

60 To Bishop L. Moreno, 15 April 1868, Em II 527.

61 Letters to Bishop L. Moreno of 15 April, 28 May 11 November 1868, Em II 527-528, 538, 598.

62 Em II 366.

63 Cf. next § 5.

prestige as founder and superior of a new religious Congregation.<sup>64</sup> Jealous of his irreproachableness and honour, Don Bosco viewed the event with particular concern, perhaps connected with a disproportionate tenacity in holding to his own opinions, even when the censorship was rapidly becoming a more serious matter.

The item in contention was a 224 page booklet which came out in the *Letture Cattoliche* in January-February 1867. Its title was *The Centenary of St Peter the Apostle and the life of the Prince of the Apostles, and a triduum in preparation for the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul*. In the letter to the Archbishop, Fr Modena communicated the decision taken by the Congregation of cardinals. On 9 April 1867 that he should 'request the author to prepare a new printed edition of the booklet, the preface to which will advise readers that the author has retracted whatever was revealed worthy of censure as seen in the sheet (received by the Archbishop) attached to the letter.' Further on he added: 'I also take this opportunity to warn you that other complaints have come in over these days concerning a periodical publication that comes out under the name *Letture Cattoliche*. Though not manifest errors, at least some words or stories have been found which instead of edifying the public could cause ridicule and mockery in a century where criticism is abused to discredit religion, especially in ascetic and mystical works.'<sup>65</sup>

Don Bosco told *Cavaliere* Oreglia that he had already heard of this in Rome and that 'an individual who was a great friend had given him the principal reason for it,' or in other words he found out in Rome from someone 'very familiar with the Jesuits.' At any rate, he entrusted the cause and its documentation to Oreglia's Jesuit brother, Fr Giuseppe, from the *Civiltà Cattolica*.<sup>66</sup> He wrote to the Secretary of the Congregation of the Index expressing his unconditional submission 'as a Catholic priest, director of works of public charity and as a writer of some little 'items regarding religion.'<sup>67</sup> At the same time he attached some 'clarifications' which were a point-by-point defence of the contested points.<sup>68</sup>

In further letters he continued to make use of *Cavaliere* Oreglia as go-between for his brother Fr Giuseppe, who worked with practised ability and wisdom.<sup>69</sup> Don Bosco also involved the Bishop of Mondovì. Dominican Bishop Ghilardi, in the problem. As also in matters relating to the approval of the Salesian Society, asking him to protect him in Rome, including in this dispute regarding the Index. 'I have received a letter,' he told him 'in which I have been assured that the Holy Father regretted that this matter has been taken so far, while thousands of impious books more or less full of errors regarding religion are on the loose everywhere without anyone bothering to put them on the Index.'<sup>70</sup> 'I cannot find any reason' he wrote some days later, offering Cardinal De Angelis some classics 'why they have been so strict with me, while thousands of bad books are printed which nobody bothers to put on the Index. I have not spared any expense or effort to check my sources and keep to Roman authors with Roman approval.'<sup>71</sup>

Regarding the cause in progress he wrote to the Pope on 26 June 1867, expressing 'deep regret' that certain words 'printed in the booklet' had been 'understood by some people in a way unintended nor ever imagined,' promising that in the new edition he would modify 'without limitation anything in the sense indicated by the Sacred Congregation of the Index.'<sup>72</sup>

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64 F. MOTTO provides a detailed reconstruction of events in "*Il Centenario di S. Pietro*" denunciato alla S. Congregazione dell'Indice. *La memoria difensiva di don Bosco*, RSS 15 (1996) 55-99.

65 F. MOTTO, "*Il Centenario di S. Pietro*"..., p. 85.

66 Em II 366.

67 To Fr. A. V. Modena, 21 May 1867, Em II 370.

68 To Fr. A. V. Modena (1807-1870), 21 May 1867, Em II 370; il testo degli "schiarimenti" in F. MOTTO, "*Il Centenario di S. Pietro*"..., pp. 86-94.

69 Letter of 21 and 30 May; 2, 11, 22 June 1867, Em II 372 and 378, 382, 389, 395.

70 Letter of 1 June 1867, Em II 381.

71 Letter of 18 June 1867, Em II 392-393.

72 Letter to Pius IX, 26 June 1867, Em II 398; he had announced its progress to Cav. Oreglia already on 11

Requests were more moderate in two notes from the Secretary of the Congregation obtained through the mediation of Fr Oreglia and Bishop Ghilardi. Well-circumstantiated indications were given initially: 'To be suppressed: what is said about the Governor of Antioch (baptised Theophilus) regarding St Peter. Keep more strictly to St Luke's account where he speaks of St Peter being freed from prison by an angel. It seems gratuitous to claim that St Peter raised a dead man whom Simon the Magician had worked on to no avail. For what is said on p. 217 it could give rise to the suspicion that the violation of every divine commandment is the transgression of an article of faith. On p. 192 the following sentence should be removed: 'Furthermore, I consider it good to offer in passing here some advice to all those who attempt to write or speak on this topic [St Peter coming to Rome], not to consider it a dogmatic and religious point, and this as much for Catholics as for Protestants.'<sup>73</sup>

The corrections requested were softened on 25 July in both tone and number: 'On p.2 17 it is essential to correct the serious error contained in the sentence beginning: 'Our faith must be entire ... ' and which conclude with: 'he (i.e. who commits mortal sin) transgresses an article of faith that makes him guilty of all the others.' On p. 192 it would be best to suppress the entire appendix which is superfluous in an ascetic work of this kind, but if you wish to keep it correct the line that is erroneous and repugnant to the healthy critic and good religious sense, that is, that Peter's coming to Rome is a fact that lies outside faith and is a matter for free discussion.'<sup>74</sup>

Corrected as asked, the book was re-published under different titles in Turin and Rome as we also see from a letter to Cavaliere Oreglia: 'See if the printing of our *Centenary of St Peter* has been done and send me a copy.'<sup>75</sup> In Rome it appeared with an abbreviated version of the earlier title *Il Centenario di san Pietro apostolo colla vita del medesimo principe degli apostoli*;<sup>76</sup> in Turin it came out in April 1868 modified as: *Vita di san Pietro principe degli apostoli ed un triduo in preparazione alla festa dei santi apostoli Pietro e Paolo*.<sup>77</sup>

Don Bosco concluded the event with a gesture of wise foresight. He sent the Archbishop of Turin an official letter in which he summed up the case, and a 'copy of the new edition' of the book to be kept in the Turin Curia's archives along with the letter and opinion of the Roman Consultor 'as a document [showing] the carrying out of the advice received and the complete and total submission by the poor author.'<sup>78</sup> His honour emerged undamaged from the unpleasant episode, documented for the present and future in the short and the long time.

## 5. Aiming at approval of the Salesian Society (1867–68)

Don Bosco's main commitment in Rome, nevertheless, even if less publicised, was to reset the process for approval of the Society, which he would then continue from Turin without success through 1867 and 1868. There are few Roman letters of his regarding the problems of the Congregation, but there are official and unofficial documents which provide good information on the process of negotiations during and following his Roman sojourn.

As soon as he arrived in Rome, Don Bosco sent Pius IX, whom he still called the 'promoter and persuader' of the Salesian Society, a petition in Latin addressed from Turin on 7 January 1867

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June, Em II 389.

73 MB VIII 819-820.

74 MB VIII 886.

75 Letter of 3 January 1868, Em II 474.

76 Rome, Stabilimento tipogr. di G. Aurelj 1867, 175 p'. The roman edition did not have the appendix on St Peter's arrival in Rome and the triduum in honour of Sts Peter and Paul.

77 Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1867, XVI-223 p. Still included is the appendix of St Peter's arrival in Rome, but without the censured text: Cf. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Pietro...*, p. 191, OE XVIII 253.

78 Bishop A. Riccardi di Netro, 28 December 1868, Em II 614.

asking for full approval of his 'Apostolic Society' and its Constitutions. He insisted on two articles in particular, the first of which would remain an inseparable stumbling block!!! '1. That the Superior General can issue dimissorial letters for members who have professed the prescribed vows in the Society. 2. That members may be admitted to minor and major Orders *titulo mensae communis*.'<sup>79</sup> Obviously, there were private papal audiences on 22 and 19 January and again on 5 February. He visited the Jesuits at *Civiltà Cattolica* and the Scolopians at Nazarene College, had meetings with cardinals, clergy who could enlighten and support him, dealt with the Prefect and Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Quaglia and Bishop Svegliati, who insisted on the validity of the 1864 *animadversiones*.

Back in Turin at the beginning of March, he did not leave his high protectors in Rome in peace. In Don Bosco's opinion, the more urgent problem was to follow up on and gain the faculty of issuing dimissorials. On the 'Constitutions in general there are no difficulties,' he wrote to Cardinal Antonelli on 20 March, attaching a copy of the '*decretum laudis*'. But they were against including the faculty for dimissorials. And yet, he noted, it was 'very difficult if not impossible' to get them from the bishop where the candidates came from 'because we have individuals who belong to areas and kingdoms far away, and sometimes we don't even know which bishop they belong to' (a statement verging on the absurd!). 'That being the case, I recommend you continue being a father to us. All I want is a religious society compatible with the times, which promotes the glory of God and the good of youth at risk.'<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, he also asked the Cardinal Vicar of His Holiness, Costantino Patrizi, to intervene, attaching to his letter the pages he had written *Super animadversiones in Constitutiones*. Patrizi wrote back saying he had spoken to Cardinal Quaglia, confirming the opposition of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to giving the privilege of dimissorials to an Institute that had simply been 'praised' but not yet approved. Patrizi himself found this refusal 'very reasonable.'<sup>81</sup> In his reply, Don Bosco simply tackled the problem of the Society's approval, grasping at barely adequate reasons. He argued recklessly that the letters of commendation from bishops amounted to diocesan approval. On the other hand, he thought that approval by the Ordinary in Turin would mean as a consequence that 'the Congregation would be quickly recognised as a moral body and thus subject to civil authority. It would not be so with papal approval.'<sup>82</sup> On 28 March, the Capitular Vicar issued a letter of recommendation with much praise for Don Bosco, a priest who had shown 'ever new signs of piety, zeal and solicitude' for his youth institutions, but no reference to the Salesian Society and what it was asking for in Rome.<sup>83</sup>

The letter sent him from Bishop Giuseppe Berardi a skilled diplomat, on 8 April 1867 was not encouraging. Don Bosco had turned to him, as he did to Antonelli, by letter on 20 March.<sup>84</sup> Noting the problems that had arisen, the prelate offered a polite reprimand: "Since you have honoured me by making me part of your plans, had you thought it appropriate to make use of my subordinate advice on earlier occasions, things might have gone differently.' He went on to say that by this stage nothing else could be done other than to await the opinion of the new Archbishop of Turin and the judgement to be formulated by the 'plenary meeting of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars as recently prescribed by the Holy Father.'<sup>85</sup> Nor was he encouraged by other ways suggested to him by Bishop Giovanni Battista Fratejacci, a true Roman, who had sided

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79 To Pius IX, 7 January 1867, Em II 324. The first part of the petition partly echoed the one on 30 March 1865.

80 Letter of 20 March 1867, Em II 341; Cf. Mention also in the letter of 5 April 1867, Em II 350.

81 To Don Bosco, 29 March 1867, MB VIII 735-736.

82 To Card. C. Patrizi, beginning of April, Em II 346.

83 Reported in MB VIII, 735.

84 Cf. Em II 640. Bishop Giuseppe Berardi (1810-1878), as Undersecretary of the Secretary of State (1861-1868), was the right-hand man of Card. Antonelli: he was made Cardinal on 13 April 1868.

85 The letter is reported in MB VIII 736-737.



unreservedly with Don Bosco in following developments in the process relating to the Salesian Society. As auditor for the Cardinal Vicar Patrizi, in a letter on 11 April 1867 he aligned himself with his superior's position. What he did do was to advise Don Bosco of the mentality abroad among the episcopate concerning the Church, and the function Religious Institutes had within it. According to Roman practice, the prelate informed him, the privilege of issuing dimissorials was only given some years after pontifical approval of a Religious Congregation. For all the rest it would depend on the benevolence of the new Archbishop, Riccardi di Netro, possibly with help from his newly appointed successor in Savona, Bishop Cerruti, a friend of Fratejacci's and sympathetic to Don Bosco and his Institute. He also suggested waiting, before taking any other steps, for the arrival in Rome of Cardinals De Angelis and Orsi who would be able to influence Pius IX favourably. He then went on to say: 'Meanwhile I will await samples copies of nos. 12, 15 of the Constitutions [clearly the printed Latin Constitutions] as I have already indicated, to distribute them to the Cardinals who make up the Sacred Congregation. Copies of the *animadversiones* and responses to them should be added to these.' He informed him too, that two other Congregations of simple vows whose Constitutions had not yet been formally approved by the Holy See, had been 'granted the indult that could be extended and renewed bit by bit.' These were priestly Congregations, the *Pallotines* ('*decretum laudis*' in 1835, approved 1904) and the Polish Congregation, the priests of the Resurrection ('*decretum laudis*' in 1860, approved 1888).<sup>86</sup>

In June, excusing himself for a delay in responding which was beyond his control, Cardinal Antonelli referred to what his under-secretary, Bishop Berardi, had already written and then offered suggestions: 'The matter is still under examination by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and at the moment I cannot tell you more than what others have told you. Of course, you can be sure of the commitment you asked of me to call special attention to your remarks on the point your letter and corresponding papers refer to.'<sup>87</sup>

Don Bosco entrusted the two matters most concerning him to the good offices of Bishop Ghilardi, who was in Rome. He did this by letter on 1 June: one matter in passing, the censorship of the *Centenario di S. Pietro* noted earlier, and a more substantial one, the complete and definitive approval of the Salesian Society. For a positive resolution of the two problems he suggested links and consultations with Fr Giuseppe Oreglia of *Civiltà Cattolica* and Bishop Fratejacci.<sup>88</sup> On 18 June he also asked for special support in Rome from the Archbishop of Fermo, Cardinal De Angelis.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, in a letter to Pius IX delivered by Frs Savio and Cagliero who were representing the Salesian Society at the festivities for the Centenary of St Peter, he made 'bold to respectfully renew the spirit ... to give approval to the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales' with 'corrections, variations and additions' considered appropriate.<sup>90</sup>

Further information provided to Don Bosco by Fratejacci in a long letter on 19 July 1867 would have aroused both hope and fear. The Roman prelates assured him he had pleaded his cause for the approval of the Salesian Society with Bishops Ghilardi and Cerruti, the Cardinal Vicar, Cardinal Consolini, and 'with various prelates I know and many clergy with influence.' He had also spent an hour with Cardinal De Angelis who had 'the greatest respect,' 'warmest affection ... and great appreciation' for Don Bosco. However, regarding dimissorials, he considered it was 'pointless to talk about them.' He explained that 'the Holy Father is against it, Cardinal Quaglia and Bishop Svegliati likewise, and in all likelihood indeed certainly the response from the Sacred Congregation will be *negative*.' He explained the serious reasons for it, among which the tensions between, Religious Orders and bishops. He then stated he was in agreement with Cardinal De Angelis in

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86 The letter is reported in MB VIII 736-737.

87 Letter of 4 June 1867, cit. in MB VIII 766.

88 Em II 381

89 Letter of 18 June 1867, Em II 393-392.

90 Letter of 26 June 1867, Em II 398.

offering alternatives, chief of which being either 'to now seek *quomodocumque* an approval of the new Society of St Francis de Sales, even without the privilege of concerning ordinands' or 'to in fact withdraw the application for approval and resubmit it *ex integro* to the coming Ecumenical Council.' Finally he asked Don Bosco for an indication of how to proceed while for the moment believing it best not to take any steps with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He had not distributed copies of the Rule nor could he do so without further indication from him. He noted: 'We cannot go fast in these kinds of matters. Instead what is needed is the greatest consideration and prudence to avoid failure.'<sup>91</sup>

Don Bosco's tenacity was resolute and he continued to prepare documents with a view to obtaining everything from the Holy See: approval of the Society and the Constitutions, including the article which foresaw the faculty of dimissorials being given to the Superior. The text of the Constitutions published in Latin in previous months in obedience to the final '*animadversio*' of the Consultor and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was not so different in substance from the one he had prepared in 1864. The article on members' dealing with politics had been shelved, the Chapter on 'Externs' was relegated to an appendix and changes were introduced on the basis of minor requests. No changes instead were made to articles on dimissorials, acquisition and alienation of goods of the Society, foundation of individual houses and ecclesiastical seminaries. Don Bosco did not foresee other '*animadversiones*' which would be during the process on key topics like the novitiate and ecclesiastical studies.

He did not imagine that further problems would also arise in Turin when, on 22 February 1867 it was decided that Bishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro (1808-70), who had been Bishop of Savona and Noli from 1842, would transfer to Turin. The new Archbishop made his solemn entrance on 26 May. Don Bosco would find him less malleable on matters of episcopal jurisdiction and the autonomy of his as yet informal Institute than he could have imagined. The formation received at the theological faculty of the University had shaped the learned prelate in a very precise ecclesiology which made him a decisive opponent of the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council.

In order to gain the new Archbishop's support for the Roman process already underway Don Bosco had prepared a *Memorandum for the arrival of Archbishop Riccardi*. This summary document explained three points: the structure and aims of the *Society of St Francis de Sales*, its *origins* starting from 1841, 1846 and 1854 continuing when he went to Rom in 1858 and the *decretum laudis* of 1864, then the *current* status. 'In June this year' he informed him, persisting with the well-established illusion 'a new petition was presented to the Holy Father along with the Rule of the Society altered according to the observations of the Congregation of Bishop and Regulars. Definitive approval of the Society was requested, or at least the temporary faculty to have men ordained under the *titulo vitae communis*. The Holy Father and the Congregation itself were not opposed but did not seem ready to agree to the second favour because it is not the custom to grant such a faculty before a Society is definitively approved. It would appear that the Holy Father and the very reverend members of the much praised Congregation are very much inclined to arrive at a regular approval. The Society approved in this sense could bring with it both the faculty of the dimissorials and being able to ordain *titulo mensae communis*. The general thinking was to await the arrival of the new Archbishop of Turin where the main House is.'<sup>92</sup>

The letter of recommendation, conditional though it may have been, came some months later. Meanwhile, already by September the Archbishop was exercising his right to overview studies undertaken by candidates for the priesthood, a right which the '*decretum laudis*' in no way

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91 The letter is reported in MB VIII 878-881.

92 Cf. Handwritten text of Don Bosco's with numerous corrections and variants in ASC A 2230202; printed in MB VIII 809-811.

impinged on where clerics of the Salesian Society were concerned. He let Don Bosco know in a brief letter of his decisions regarding study procedures for clerics at the Oratory. He appeared to ignore the memorandum sent him and his decree prescinded from any previous exchange of ideas with him on the actual situation of the work of the oratories. 'Where my diocesan clerics are concerned, I will no longer allow them to teach classes or give private lessons, look after dormitories or be prefects. This measure also extended to other boarding establishments, is to encourage and help the clerics in their studies so they can attend classes and tutorials. I have also decided that only those in the Seminary will take Holy Orders. This measure may seem a bit harsh to you but it will be to the advantage of the Church and your community. I have been concerned to notify you of what has been presented above in good time so you have time to provide for your needs and also for the benefit of your clerics.'<sup>93</sup>

To some extent these measures could not seem real. They were incomprehensible to Don Bosco and left him confused, forcing him to redouble his efforts to achieve the hoped for papal approval of the Society. He was always convinced, mistakenly, that this would shelter it from inappropriate interference by local ecclesiastical authority. He thought that Bishop Berardi had encouraged this idea as he wrote to Cardinal Filippo De Angelis, confiding in him over the many issues now assailing him: 'If I send my clerics to the Seminary, what will become of the spirit and discipline of the Society? Where will I find more than a hundred catechists for that many classes for the boys? Who would spend five years at the Seminary and then be willing to shutter himself within the Oratory?' Then bearing in mind certain leanings of less papal-minded professors he asked: 'Can I in conscience send these clerics to school at the Seminary? No, it seems to me. They have gone there till now but with fear that we might completely ruin the spirit of our own Society.' In an attached sheet he did not hold back on criticism of the Archbishop, who had reintroduced seminary professors excluded by Archbishop Fransoni.<sup>94</sup> A month later he partly adjusted his viewpoint. 'It seems that things are going better for us; the Church History professor was given a warning and has totally changed his approach.' Above all, he felt encouraged to insist on bringing forward the request for the approval of the Salesian Society, supporting it, as Bishop Berardi and Cardinal De Angelis had advised 'with the greatest number of authoritative recommendations you can get.'<sup>95</sup>

## 6. Failed establishments at Vigna Pia, Rome

During his sojourn in Rome Don Bosco was given hope, though conditional, of involving his Society in an already existing work especially dear to Pius IX. He had flirted with the idea and given it real consideration until objective difficulties and especially thoughts from someone who knew the circumstances better dissuaded him from concluding negotiations. Contacts had been made through initiative of Duke Scipioni Salviati Borghese, whom he had already come to know in 1858. What was on offer was the educational management of the agricultural school at Vigna Pia two miles past Porta Portuence in the vicinity of St Paul's Basilica. It was a place for young orphans either entrusted by benefactors or sent there by the police.<sup>96</sup> The farm had been founded on 8 December 1850 with 'special financing' from the Pope 'in view of the Christian education and job preparation of boys who were orphaned or left to their own devices through the culpable neglect of their parents.' Chief management of the institution was entrusted to a 'Deputation' appointed by the Cardinal Vicar and approved by the Pope. In its early years the immediate management of the

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93 The letter, dated 11 September, is reported in MB VIII 944-945. according to ancient practice, studies in the Seminary had begun in early November.

94 Letter of 9 January 1868, Em II 479-480.

95 To Card. F. De Angelis, 9 February 1868, Em II 496.

96 Cf. Information on the farm in Carlo Luigi MORICHINI, *Degli istituti di carità per la sussistenza e l'educazione dei poveri e dei prigionieri in Roma. Libri tre*. Edizione novissima. Rome, Stabilimento tipografico camerale 1870, pp. 535-542.

institution was carried out by lay religious from the Belgian Institute of St Joseph.<sup>97</sup>

Negotiations went ahead very slowly, with both uncertainty and hope, as we can see from a number of letters. 'Have you spoken with Duke Salviati? And about Vigna Pia? Don Bosco asked *Cavaliere* Oreglia on 18 November 1867.<sup>98</sup> 'See if you can send me the project with observations on Vigna,' he insisted at the beginning of the year 'and we will see what can be done.'<sup>99</sup> Some days later he wrote: 'I have received the observations on the Vigna Pia project; there is neither or a conclusion nor a proposal here. We will study it and then we will see.'<sup>100</sup> Not long after, however, he announced that they were probably nearing a positive solution: 'I have written to Duke Salviati regarding Vigna Pia; I believe they will accept; it will be good for us. Go and make a visit, listen carefully and write to me. *Deo gratias.*'<sup>101</sup>

*Cavaliere* Oreglia was not keen on accepting the farm, both for its location and the state of the buildings. His Jesuit brother, too, Fr Giuseppe had doubts, and wrote to Fr Francesia about them: 'Firstly, my fear is not about jealousy or envy. These things come along with everything, good or bad.' 'The nature of the Vigna Pia work is such that it will not arouse much envy. The site is far from the city, the climate not very healthy. It is all rather poor.' 'It is neither glorious nor comfortable as a work but humble, harsh, difficult. The place is in the countryside and that area is not so healthy. It will be like being in a desert; not in Rome but beyond any habitation. Valdocco is a palace by comparison.<sup>102</sup> Running the place would also have been strongly conditional by the Deputation which had overall responsibility.<sup>103</sup> Don Bosco gave up on the idea. Finally on 1 August 1868, Pius IX entrusted the farm to the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy founded at Malines by Canon Victor Scheppers. Among other things, they had a good intermediary between themselves and the Pope in Belgian Bishop Xavier de Merode. On one of his trips through the centre and south of Italy in 1872, visiting his educational institutes, St Leonard Murialdo formed positive judgements on the place and those running it. 'There are a hundred boys,' 'it is well managed,' he wrote on 26 May to his close collaborator, Fr Eugenio Riffo.<sup>104</sup> It could also be interesting to pick up on some notes on Don Bosco that Murialdo put in a letter a few days later from Naples, where he was staying with Ludovicco da Casoria. 'In Naples alone' he noted in amazement 'he [da Casoria] has twelve houses or colleges or hospitals: he is a more marvellous man than D. Bosco. (The Pope, by the way, asked after D. Bosco and Canon Anglesio.)'<sup>105</sup>

## 7. Don Bosco in the view of local Ordinaries: a mixture of approval and reservation

Caught up in legal and formal procedures, Don Bosco found himself more at ease requesting diocesan ordinaries for letters of commendation to support his requests to the Congregation of Bishops and regulars. The broad range of consensus gives us a measure of his capacity for friendly relations. Above all it confirms the sense that he and his work had already acquired a reputation and credibility in many parts of Italy. Just the same, there was no lack of reservation and reserve on the part of nearby bishops and this had some immediate negative consequences.

To obtain the greatest number of commendations, he sent a good number of diocesan

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97 Cf. Note of Pius IX to Card. Costantino Patrizi, Vicar General, 22 Feb. 1856, in *Atti del Sommo Pontefice Pio IX...*, Part II, Vol. II. Rome tip. delle Belle Arti 1857, pp. 305-306.

98 Em II 452.

99 Letter of 3 January 1868, Em II 475.

100 Letter of 21 January 1868, Em II 487

101 Letter of 11 February 1868, Em II 498.

102 Cf. Em II 499, lin. 17; and in MB IX 114-115, letter from Fr G. Oreglia to Fr G. B. Francesia on 18 March 1868.

103 Cf. draft project reported in MB VIII 606-607.

104 S. LEONARDO MURIALDO *Epistolario...*, vol. I, pp. 258-259.

105 To Fr E. Reffo, 4 June 1872, S. LEONARDO MURIALDO *Epistolario...*, vol. I, p. 263.

ordinaries his *Cenno storico intorno alla società di San Francesco di Sales* (Historical outline of the Society of St Francis de Sales).<sup>106</sup> Already in 1867 he had had responses from Giacomo Jans, Bishop of Aosta (20 June),<sup>107</sup> Lorenzo Gastardi, Saluzzo (11 July),<sup>108</sup> Antonio Coli, Alessandria (7 September).<sup>109</sup> Others, many of them, came to him or were sent directly to Rome during 1868.

At the beginning of 1868, his friend Bishop Pietro Maria Ferrè (1815-86), transferred from Pavia diocese to Casale Monferrato on 27 March 1867, granted him an outstanding favour. He issued not only a letter of commendation but also gave him diocesan approval of the Society and its Constitutions. This event followed a rapid exchange of courtesies. A few weeks before Ferrè had entered his new diocese, Don Bosco replied to a polite letter from the bishop encouraging him in carrying out his episcopal mission and expressing the hope he could soon 'be able to come to Casale and find some free time to talk over some matters he could not easily confide to paper.' Using the opportunity to talk about the house at Mirabello and the Society of St Francis de Sales he added: 'I am attaching a copy of the Rule so you can know its aim, spirit and so in due time you might be able to offer some of the fatherly advice you judge best in the Lord.'<sup>110</sup>

Less than two months later, in agreement with the bishop, he sent him a formal request for diocesan approval of the Congregation: 'Herewith, my Lord, the humble request members of the Society of St Francis de Sales are making with a view of gaining diocesan approval of their Society whenever you consider it will be for the greater glory of God. I simply note here that the decree [the 1864 *decretum laudis*] a copy of which is attached, was issued on the basis of rules subsequently printed according to the copy I believe I sent you. According to this, you have a guideline for establishing the clauses with which you intend to welcome this guest into your home, where it is already temporarily living. If needs be I can make a trip to Casale whenever.'<sup>111</sup>

On 12 January 1868 he came back to the topic: 'Very many sincere thanks for your fatherly arrangements on behalf of our Society. As you have wished I have made a draft of what you could say on behalf of our Constitutions if you decide to come to a definitive diocesan approval as has been the case earlier for the Oblates of St Charles, then the Oblates of Mary. As for the question of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, I believe it may be sufficiently circumscribed and explained in chapters 8 and 12. Should you feel something needs altering, do so *quomodo in Domino melius judicaveris*. I hope that by offering this approval you will have a seedbed of priests you can freely make use of.'<sup>112</sup>

The decree, issued on 13 January 1868, was drawn up in the terms Don Bosco suggested: 'By this decree we commend the Society which takes its name from Saint Francis de Sales, and we approve of it as a Diocesan Congregation following the Constitutions presented to us. Furthermore, since the aforementioned decree [the '*decretum laudis*'] has legally established the Superior General of the Society, we are gladly disposed to grant him all the faculties and privileges that seem necessary and opportune for promoting the greater glory of God and the good of the Society.' Faculties and privileges were granted by decree on 4 April.<sup>113</sup>

He asked the Archbishop of Genoa, Andrea Chavez, by personal letter for the commendation

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106 Cf. Texts with various destinations in ASC A 2230203: minute of the text and signed by Don Bosco; ms allograph signed by Bishop Ferrè; printed with final references to Casale diocese, in MB IX 61-64; copy for Bishop Riccardi with attached handwritten manuscript by Don Bosco.

107 MB VIII 846-847

108 MB VIII 876-877.

109 MB VIII 933-934

110 Letter of 28 September 1867, Em II 437-438

111 Letter of 19 December 1867, Em II 461.

112 Letter of 12 January 1868, Em II 484.

113 The text of the decrees of approval of the Society on 13 January and for granting faculties, on 4 April 1868, is reported in *Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii...*, pp. 9-13, OE XVIII 579-583.

and attached the *Cenno storico*. These were delivered to Genoa by Genoese Fr Lemoyne. He wrote: 'Here are two parcels for you. One is for Canon Fantini. In it there are letters aimed at obtaining a letter of commendation from the Archbishop for our Society.'<sup>114</sup>

In response to a letter from Don Bosco, the Archbishop of Pisa, Cardinal Cosimo Corsi,<sup>115</sup> indicated he was ready to issue a commendation,<sup>116</sup> which he sent directly to Rome. The Capitular Vicar of Acqui, Francesco Cavalleri, had his arrive on February 28, 1868.<sup>117</sup> At Don Bosco's request<sup>118</sup> Cardinal Antonio Antonucci, Archbishop of Ancona, sent an expansive letter of commendation on 6 March 1868.<sup>119</sup> Many others closely followed during 1868 from bishops Carlo Savio Asti (4 March),<sup>120</sup> Felice Cantimorri Parma (9 April),<sup>121</sup> Giacomo Filippo Gentile, Novara (12 April),<sup>122</sup> Carlo Macchi, Reggio Emilia (14 April)<sup>123</sup> Giovanni Ghilardi, Mondovì 9 April 15)<sup>124</sup> Antonio Colli, Alessandria (17 April),<sup>125</sup> Giulio Arrigoni, Lucca (24 April)<sup>126</sup> at Don Bosco's request,<sup>127</sup> Cardinal Filippo De Angelis, Fermo (26 April)<sup>128</sup> after repeated requests,<sup>129</sup> the Capitular Vicar of Susa, Giuseppe Sciandra (28 April)<sup>130</sup> Bishop Rota, Guastalla (29 April ),<sup>131</sup> Raffaello Biale, Albenga (2 May),<sup>132</sup> the Capitular Vicar of Vigevano Vincenzo Capelli on request of 29 May<sup>133</sup> and later, Bishop Galletti, Alba (20 October).<sup>134</sup>

Don Bosco also asked for letters of commendation on two occasions from Bishop Moreno, Ivrea<sup>135</sup> and Bishop Cugini, Modena.<sup>136</sup> The former did not interrupt his deliberate silence, while the latter excused himself for not being able to give one, having no direct acquaintance with Don Bosco's work.

Archbishop Riccardi di Netro issued a conditional commendation, and Bishop Lorenzo Renaldi, Bishop of Pinerolo, aligned with Riccardi, refused to give one, offering his reasons. These two positions were a prelude to the decision of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars approving the Salesian Society but not the Constitutions. Archbishop Riccardi wrote that he praised the Congregation for the end 'it proposed, and seeing the good it does mainly in gathering and teaching so many boys God's holy law, boys who would otherwise be abandoned and at risk of pursuing the road to perdition.' He said he had seen 'the decrees from his predecessor, Archbishop Fransoni' relating to 'the Society when it was only proposing to catechise boys on Sundays and bring them together to set them up in some skill or trade' and the words with which

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114 Letter of 29 January 1868, Em II 492-493.

115 Cf. Letter of 9 February 1868, Em II 496-497.

116 Letter to Don Bosco of 20 February 1868, MB IX 78.

117 MB IX 91-92.

118 Letter to Card. Antonucci, 10 February 1868, Em II 646.

119 MB IX 93-94.

120 He had asked the bishop to let two of his clerics stay in the Congregation, since they wanted it (Letter of 19 Dec. 1867, Em II 462-463). The bishop, grateful for what Don Bosco had done and was doing for the clerics of the diocese, replied positively and added his commendation (texts in MB IX 92-93).

121 MB IX 142-143

122 MB IX 143-144.

123 MB IX 144-145

124 MB IX 145-146.

125 MB IX 146-147.

126 MB IX 148-149.

127 Em II 646.

128 MB IX 148-149.

129 Letter of 9 February and 9 March 1868, Em II 496 e 510.

130 MB IX 150.

131 MB IX 151-152.

132 MB IX 152-153.

133 Em II 539.

134 MB IX 418-419.

135 Letter of 15 April and 28 May 1868, Em II 527 and 538.

136 Letter of 2 March and of 29 May 1868, Em II 503-504 and 540.

the Holy Father, in 1864, 'gave it almost the beginning of approval,' 'recognising it as a Congregation with simple vows under the jurisdiction of the diocesan ordinaries, delaying the approval of the Constitutions then presented until a more appropriate moment.' He approved what had been 'intended by other bishops and his predecessor, then said: 'Once the Constitution which form the basis of the Society today and proposed by Don Bosco, Superior General, have been examined and corrected, we ask the Holy See to consider approving them and thus provide definitive and stable existence on the Church's part to the above-mentioned Congregation in the manner and form which seems best to the Holy See.'<sup>137</sup> He further explained his request in a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars: '1. My approval refers to the Society only when it proposes the aim of gathering and catechising the boys and setting them on the path to some skill or trade. 2. In asking for its erection as a Religious Congregation, I subordinate this request to a wise revision and correction of the Constitutions to be carried out by the Holy See. 3. On a separate sheet he listed his observations formulated on the basis of remarks provided by 'an experienced and learned man who is respected and appreciated by all.' This was Fr Marc Antonio Durando, Visitor of the Vincentians. 4. Finally he asked the Congregation 'that before giving any approval it would see fit to charge some devout, learned, experienced individual involved in the education of the young to come on site and examine things and report on them.'<sup>138</sup>

The chief observations, except the first and suggestions included following it, could only have found agreement from those responsible for the Roman congregation: 1. Eliminate 'the aim which it seems to have by preferences of educating young clergy.' 2. Specify the religious nature and legal status of the 'laymen' in the Society. 3. Describe 'what studies the laymen should do and which ones clerics should do,' curriculum, how long, where, how, involvement or otherwise in other occupations. 4. Give plenty of thought to what was said about 'clerics and priests owning patrimony or simple benefices,' or who keeps them 'even after vows.' It could cause 'serious harm to dioceses.' 5. 'Clerics not belonging to the Society should depend exclusively on their Ordinary.' 'Young men aspiring to the ecclesiastical ministry should be referred to their respective bishops as soon as they take the cassock.' 6. Clerics of the Congregation should also see to their ecclesiastical patrimony so that if they leave or are sent away they are not a burden to the bishop. 7. It is not clear how the training year prior to admission to the Congregation [the novitiate] will take place for clerics perhaps 'mixed in not only with lay members but boys with whom the members are living today.' 'The college in Turin is already chaotic at this stage, mixing trade students with academic ones, lay people, clerics and priests.' Detailed notes then followed on individual articles.<sup>139</sup>

The position of the Bishop of Pinerolo, Turin, born Bishop Lorenzo Renaldi (1808–73) was substantially the same. He made it his duty to explain his refusal of a commendation in a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He unconditionally praised Don Bosco's tireless work on behalf of poor and abandoned boys. But he gave a 'clearly contrary opinion' 'regarding the education and instruction of clerics' and 'the way his House was made up;' 'a seminary for priests' of the diocese was a matter he maintained belonged exclusively to the bishops.<sup>140</sup>

The Bishop of Saluzzo, Lorenzo Gastaldi, lined up on the opposite side in his letter of commendations to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He was lavish in his praise of Don Bosco's institute, saying that he had 'full understanding' since he had seen it 'being born and growing.' In the main house in Turin and in the oratories opened and run from there the institute presented 'literally the dame spectacle of piety the oratories opened up by St Philip in

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137 Letter of 7 March 1868, reported in MB IX 95-96.

138 Letter of 14 March 1868, reported in MB IX 96-97.

139 The texts are reported in *Cost. SDB* (Motto), pp. 236-237.

140 Letter of 6 June 1868, in MB IX 235-237.

Rome showed' a sign of God's superabundant blessing. He immediately added: 'This blessing also comes from vocations to the clerical state that have arisen there.' This would not have been possible had Don Bosco not 'formed a Society of clerics and priests' totally dedicated to such works. The writer 'sees this Society being formed and growing, sees this in its Rule and sees it in the result. He sees that by observing this Rule it maintains the spirit of obedience, submission, humility, piety, concord, peace and charity. He had always found in the members making up this Society that they were like one heart and soul.' He could only, therefore, 'see that this Society and its Rule' be 'approved by His Holiness and erected as a Religious Order suggesting that when it was such it would be of great benefit to souls, the clergy, the Church in general but especially the young who need excellent educators today. There is a need for Religious Orders to look after them with the spirit of charity, discretion, patience with which the Society established and run by Fr John Bosco looked after them for many years.'<sup>141</sup>

This was the testimony of Gastaldi the idealist, man of integrity which would be demonstrated in future too, wanting the 'primitive congregation' loved and sustained and faultless.

### **8. A 'no' to broader institutional freedom (June – December 1868)**

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had a composite document printed for bishops and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the already mentioned *Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii et nonnulla decreta ad earnderm spectantia*.<sup>142</sup> It contained Franson's decree of 31 March 1852, a brief outline of the origins and developments of the Congregation, the '*decretum laudis*' of 1864, the two decrees from the Bishop of Casale 13 January and 14 April, a schematic summary of the current state of the Society (four houses in Turin, Lanzo, Mirabello, Trofarello, about a hundred members), the commendations from Cardinal Antonucci, Corsi, De Angelis. All that was lacking was the much desired apostolic approval.

At the beginning of June 1868, Don Bosco wrote to the Archbishop of Fermo to ask him for his thoughts on the timeliness, Rome's or otherwise, of insisting on requesting approval of the Society and the Constitutions ('after 28 years of trial' he stated with his usual elasticity of time back to 1841). 'For a good future' he assured him 'we have all the dioceses we are in rapport with ready to benefit us and they leave their clerics fully at our disposal because we give them a hundred percent in return.'<sup>143</sup>

On the 10<sup>th</sup> he drew up the official request to the Pope in Latin for approval of the Society, listing the reasons urging him to present it, first of which was 'that this Society has been around for twenty eight years.' If it was not thought possible to give approval, he asked that it at least be granted that clerical members could have 'the faculty to be admitted to Orders by the Bishop of Casale,' then to avoid being caught up in the current canon law he added 'although they belong to another diocese.'<sup>144</sup>

But the opinion formulated by Bishop Gaetano Tortone (1814–91) regarding certain aspects of clerical formation in vogue at the Oratory was bound to aggravate Don Bosco's situation in Rome. Tortone was a confidant of the Holy See in Turin. Following one of Archbishop Riccardi's 'observations', the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Bishop Stanislao Svegliati, in a letter on 20 July 1868 had asked Bishop Tortone to provide 'exact information about the running of the Institute under discussion, especially regarding studies and the ecclesiastical education of clerics who were part of the Institute.'<sup>145</sup> In his 6 August report, the irreproachable

141 Letter of 25 May 1868, cit. in MB IX 237-239.

142 Cf. Chap. 8, § 4.

143 Letter of 2 June 1868, Em II 541-542

144 Petition to Pius IX, 10 June 1868, Em II 545.

145 Letter reported in MB IX 366-367.



subalpine cleric so trusted by the Vatican bestowed ample praise on 'the huge amount of good' Don Bosco was doing for the young, but 'it seems the same cannot be said for the results of studies and the ecclesiastical spirit of the clerics who have banded together in the aforementioned Institute.' He criticised their mediocre performance in study and especially the 'great difficulty in being able to instil a true ecclesiastical spirit in them and the principle of good education so necessary for priests.' He went on: 'The continuous contact the clerics have with other young laymen in the institute, the over-familiarity they have with one another, in my poor opinion are not appropriate for forming good clergy. I happen to visit the institute often during recreation and I confess that I have always gained a poor impression seeing the clerics mixing with the other boys who are learning trades as tailors, carpenters, shoemakers etc, running, playing, jumping, acting the fool, some with little decorum, others with little or no respect.' And since the Secretary had also mentioned the problem of dimissorials, he took the liberty of expressing his own thoughts on this: 'Should Don Bosco be granted such it would give a very unpleasant impression of the clergy, especially the Chapter here in the city, a zealous and devout member of which has wisely been appointed by the Archbishop as Prefect and Director of the clergy in this city. I might also mention the serious harm that would occur if these same individuals were removed from the Ordinary's authority.'<sup>146</sup>

On 7 August, Don Bosco brought Fr Giuseppe Oreglia up to date with the difficulty of obtaining the faculty for dimissorials. According to information received from Cardinal Berardi, the bishops who had given commendations 'when queried by Rome, all responded negatively on this point, without exception.' With the thought of obtaining dimissorials annually for a specific number, he asked Fr Giuseppe to meet with Cardinal Berardi to learn what were the next steps to take. His six questions were a faithful reflection of Don Bosco's devious diplomacy, especially the following: '1. If the bishops who opposed approval of our Rule were the ones from the Province of Turin who did not provide a letter of commendation, or were they the ones who did not provide it and sent it to the Holy See as per the norm, i.e. *whether or not I have to follow their advice or act contrary to what they tell me to ensure I am doing what they want.*' 2. If, things as they are, there is still something that can be done and whether support from the Cardinal Vicar Cardinals Guidi and Consolini could help in this case, or could you recommend others.' '6. It seems that it may be the case that I make a trip to Rome to have certifications that might smooth over many apparent difficulties?'<sup>147</sup>

Fr Giuseppe replied that he had questioned a confrere who was a consultor with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He had advised that Don Bosco not speak directly to Cardinal Berardi and suggested instead that he write personally to the Cardinal to obtain the faculty of dimissorials for a specific period or number directly by rescript from the Holy Father. If the concession was granted it would be communicated to Don Bosco by letter using the canonical formula *ex audentia SS diei etc. concessit etc.* 'This rescript' Fr Oreglia explained 'is easily obtained from the Holy Father and can be reconfirmed year after year. It will serve as a *titolo latente* for the regular approval of the Congregation. He repeated an idea that Don Bosco heard many times and in many places but without success: 'Note that the Congregation first grants approval then the faculty of dimissorials and never grants dimissorials other than by papal dispensation; if this dispensation is requested through Cardinal Berardi or some other acceptable person it will be given, but the Congregation would strongly oppose it if it were to go through their hands.'<sup>148</sup> For his part, Cardinal Patrizi let him know he had personally intervened with the Pope on the same issue with the inevitable negative response. He explained: 'From the Holy Father's reply I can see that the favour asked for has run into difficulties because of bishops who do not feel inclined to agree to ordinations of their clerics without observing what the Sacred Canons

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146 Letter of 6 August 1868, MB IX 367-369.

147 Letter to Fr G. Oreglia, 7 August 1868, Em II 556-557. Italics ours.

148 Letter of 16 August 1868, reported in MB IX 373.

prescribe. In fact this is the ongoing practice of the Holy See which only allows such ordinations when the Regular Institute to which the candidates belong has been approved and confirmed in the proper ways and been recognised as an Order and Congregation of Regulars.<sup>149</sup>

Don Bosco gave himself no rest over a matter so dear to him. He did not follow the procedure suggested to him by Fr Oreglia's confrere and on September turned personally to the Pope. In expectation of the approval of the Society and its Constitutions he asked '*ad decennium vel ad aliud tempus*' for the twin faculties of seeing directly to the formation of his own clerics and presenting them for Holy Orders to the bishop in whose diocese the respective house was.<sup>150</sup>

The procedure which had begun on 20 June reached its conclusion. The consultor, Carmelite Fr Angelo Savini, formulated an entirely negative view on 22 September 1868: the most important modifications as requested in 1864 had not been introduced into the Constitutions; the Institute 'had been in existence for only a few years' and was limited in its spread.<sup>151</sup> It was inevitable that in the report to the Pope on the procedure underway, the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishop and Regulars, Bishop Stanislao Svegliati, would make these observations and conclusions of the consultor his own, leaning towards the negative. It would be up to 'the enlightened wisdom' of His Holiness to grant the extraordinary faculties requested: the issuing of dimissorials and ordination of members *titulo mensae communis*.<sup>152</sup>

The Pontiff decided that the matter should be taken to the plenary Congregation but a negative opinion was taken for granted. Bishop Svegliati passed this on to Don Bosco by letter on 2 October, emphasising the need to substantially modify the Constitutions on two points: dimissorials and studies done by clerics. He offered two observations which, deep down, were both kindly and hopeful: 'Other matters can be approved with minor modifications although desirably all the observations made earlier should be included in the aforementioned Constitutions. I cannot conclude this letter without briefly noting that the same bishops who were opposed to the articles relating to clerics were high in their praise for your zeal in everything else and heaped praise on the Institute.'<sup>153</sup>

On 5 October, Don Bosco informed Fr Oreglia of the obvious negative results of all the steps taken, putting some additional questions to him: Do you think it is a good idea to see that someone around the Holy Father, given the opportunity, might speak with him about it, like Bishop Ricci, or do we just let things develop in God's sight and meanwhile next winter make a trip to Rome? Would it be better to try another approach so long as the Holy Father is not against it?<sup>154</sup>

According to Don Bosco it was only right that the procedure should and could continue, possibly by aiming at more realistic objectives. Halfway through November he got busy with a prior activity which would make the following steps easier. It was worth a try: he did not lack courage and frustrations did not leave him depressed. Taking advantage of a meeting of bishops from the ecclesiastical province of Turin convened by Archbishop Riccardi, he sent each member a copy of *Brevis notitia* and tried to obtain a collective commendation from the meeting. In his letter of request, he recalled the events regarding the oratories, illustrating reasons for and the early developments of the Society responsible for them, the encouragements he had had from Archbishop Fransoni and the Pope, pointing to difficulties in getting 'definitive approval of the Constitutions,' not on Rome's part but because of some bishops in the ecclesiastical province of Turin. He specified in particular the legal problems bothering him and his wish to safeguard the

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149 Letter of 30 August 1868, cit. in MB IX 374.

150 Petition of 20 September 1868, Em II 572-573.

151 The text is reported in MB IX 376-378.

152 Cit. in MB IX 375.

153 Letter of 2 October 1868, MB IX 378-379

154 Letter to Fr G. Oreglia, 5 October 1868, Em II 584.

needs of an inter-diocesan Congregation in its members and works, 'respecting the jurisdiction of the bishops,' a Congregation assured in its future by the seriousness of studies, and as for those who left the Congregation he recognised the absolute freedom of bishops to incardinate them or not in their diocese.<sup>155</sup> The request was read out in the assembly. Given contrasting positions, the Archbishop decided not to take further account of it.

### 9. 'Yes' to conditional freedom (1 March 1869)

Among the options he put forward to Fr Oreglia on 5 October 1868, Don Bosco chose the second: 'Next winter make a trip to Rome.'<sup>156</sup> He let Bishop Ghilardi know beforehand on 19 December 1868. He expressed the intention of limiting himself to a single essential request: 'I have thought of going back to Bishop Sveglietti's letter, of course, and letting the Sacred Congregation put whatever wording in its decree makes the existence of the Congregation possible while respecting the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries.'<sup>157</sup>

On 7 January 1869, on the eve of his departure, Fr Rua wrote as chronicler: 'Don Bosco once again brought all the boys together in the study and said goodbye to us, since he was about to go to Rome. He told us he had very important matters to deal with that would be of great value for the Oratory and that we could help him with our prayers.'<sup>158</sup> The following day, Don Bosco began his journey to Rome via Florence, 'strictly incognito and alone' as he had told Pietro Marietti beforehand who was going to put him up.<sup>159</sup> As we will try to interpret further on, the 'strictly incognito and alone' could also have had a more hidden meaning than just the reservedness needed for procedures leading to approval of the Salesian Society. He stayed in the temporary capital of the Kingdom until 14 January, as a guest of Archbishop Limberti. As he often did when travelling on complicated railway sectors (only in the final years would the Terontola – Chiusi sector come into operation) he arrived in Rome early on the morning of the 15th.

Arriving before him was a letter from Bishop Gastaldi to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. It praised everything about Don Bosco and his works: the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, the oratories in Turin, the colleges outside Turin, the formation of clerics and priests belonging to his Society. In conclusion it was 'fully necessary' that this be made stable by full approval and granting 'the favours and exemptions needed by every Religious Society.'<sup>160</sup>

Don Bosco filled in the first week with private visits and visiting institutes, finally arriving at the Jesuit College at Modragone near Frascati. We do not have much information on what happened at the various papal audiences and in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Fr Rua had very little to say in the chronicle, especially on the days following the approval, even though occasional exaggerations reflected Don Bosco's euphoria in Rome and following his return to Turin. One exemption to this was some of the triumphal information in a letter sent to Fr Rua on 26 February.<sup>161</sup> The recipient copied it almost literally into his chronicle: 'He wrote to us in another letter that the Society of St Francis de Sales had been approved; that he had obtained the faculty of ordaining *titulo mensae communis*, the faculty of dimissorials attached not to the individual but to the Congregation. He had bought a house on the Quirinale at the cost of 50,000 Lira to found a studentate there and this at the suggestion of the Holy See.'<sup>162</sup>

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155 Letter halfway through November 1868, Em II 601-603.

156 Em II 584.

157 Letter of 19 December 1868, Em II 608-609

158 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989), pp. 353-354

159 To Pietro Marietti, 1 January 1869, Em III 35.

160 Letter of 8 January 1869, in MB IX 479.

161 Em III 60.

162 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 354-358.

The two papal audiences on 23 January and 7 February had certainly touched on procedures underway for approval of the Congregation, the question of dimissorials, the autonomy of ecclesiastical studies at Valdocco, a possible Roman Site for a work of Don Bosco near the Church of S. Cajo known as the Barberine, with attached monastery. This idea began with great hopes but very soon came unstuck.<sup>163</sup>

On the more important question of the approval of the Salesian Society, letters to Fr Rua wavered between fears, expectations, hopes, certainties. 'A great difficulty to overcome.'<sup>164</sup> 'The holiday [Carnevale and Lent] have interrupted matters.'<sup>165</sup> 'Holidays around Carnevale have interrupted my business; Friday (12th) everything will be in movement. Serious difficulties have arisen in everything but we can say that everything has been smoothed over with results going far beyond expectations.'<sup>166</sup>

The audience on 23 January, to which he had brought the donation from his boys,<sup>167</sup> was followed the same day by a meeting with the Secretary of State. 'This evening I have to see Cardinal Antonelli at six' he wrote to Baron Cappelletti who was waiting for him at his house.<sup>168</sup> Other than requesting the Cardinal's support for the hoped for approvals they could also have spoken of the matter still open between the Italian Government and the Vatican on episcopal appointments.<sup>169</sup>

A few days later, concerning differences between the Oratory and the diocesan Seminary regarding studies and clerical formation of Don Bosco's clerics, Fr Margotti sent a somewhat ambiguous report to the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 29 January 1869. They had asked for it. The editor of *L'Unità Cattolica* praised the combination of 'profound piety' and 'solid doctrine' guaranteed by the 'ecclesiastical instruction' 'most commendable from all points of view' given at the Oratory. He said, however, that, he was against the 'principle of independence.' In view of this he proposed a clear agreement between Don Bosco and the Archbishop.<sup>170</sup>

On 19 February the Special Congregation of Cardinals gave a favourable opinion on approving the Society of St Francis de Sales. The Supreme Pontiff ratified it and on 1 March 1869 the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued the decree. Approval of the Constitutions was deferred, conditional on acceptance of old and newer requests which had not been acted on. In compensation for this, a much desired decision was added to the decree: 'His Holiness benevolently acknowledging the requests of Father Don Bosco, grants him as Superior General of the Pious Congregation the faculty, valid only for the next ten years, of issuing Dimissorial Letters for reception of the tonsure and minor and major Orders to his students who have been accepted in a college or boarding house of the Congregation before their fourteenth year or who will be so accepted in the future and who have in time enrolled in the said Pious Congregation or will do so in the future.'<sup>171</sup> The tenacious struggle for dimissorials had borne good fruit, partial though it was and *ad tempus*.

Don Bosco left Rome towards midnight on 2 March and arrived in Florence toward 9 a.m. on the

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163 Letter to Pius IX, 12 and 24 February 1869, Em III 49-50, 58-59; to Card P. de Silvestri, 21 July 1869, Em III 112-114.

164 Letter of 24 January 1869, Em III 44

165 Letter beginning of February 1869, Em III 47.

166 Letter from Morlupo, 3 February 1869, Em III 48.

167 To Pius IX, 23 January 1869, Em III 43.

168 Letter of 23 January 1869, Em III 42.

169 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 299-302.

170 The letter is reported in MB IX 498-499.

171 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 239-240.

3rd. He left there at 11.40 p.m. on the 4th and arrived in Turin on the evening of the 5th.

On 6 March, Fr Rua wrote in his chronicle: 'Don Bosco presented our Archbishop with the decree of approval of the Congregation or Society of St Francis with a letter of accompaniment sent from Rome.' He gave a brief summary of the contents of the decree. The feast of St Francis de Sales was celebrated with great solemnity on Sunday 7 March. The prior was Count Francesco Viacino, St Leonard Murialdo presided at the sung mass and gave the panegyric on the Saint and in the afternoon Bishop Balma gave benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. In the evening Don Bosco gathered members of the Society and referred to the days in Rome, speaking of graces and miracles worked through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, helping to convince Svegliati and Antonelli. On the 10th or the 11th he gave a further conference, this time on obedience.<sup>172</sup> Over the two days that followed he brought the Superior Chapter together to verify and specify the list of Society members. On the 10<sup>th</sup> he spoke to all Salesian confreres once more urging and encouraging them to 'obedience, not only to the highest Superior but also to lesser ones.'<sup>173</sup>

The attempt by the King's Procurator to submit the decree of approval to the *exequatur* was misplaced. The Roman pronouncement was entirely within the religious ambit and had no plausible link to any kind of civil recognition.<sup>174</sup> Tenacious jurisdictionalism of the Pasquale Stanislao Mancini kind did not submit to the dictates of the subversive 7 July 1866 laws on religious corporations and the right free citizens had to association.

## 10. Behind the scenes in Florence and Rome

A letter of Don Bosco's on 2 November 1868, and notes by Fr Rua, a trustworthy chronicler and Don Bosco's most realistic and closest collaborator, tell us about Don Bosco's ministerial relationships in Florence in connection with the earlier mentioned 'ecclesiastical politics'. The letter was addressed to his friend and benefactor *Cavaliere* Carlo Canton, head of section at the Foreign Affairs Ministry; he asked him to see that a 'sealed letter of thanks' went to General Luigi Federico Menabrea (1809–96) who was Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs from 27 October. He told him: 'There is a confidential matter in it and perhaps he will ask you to pass on a reply to me if it is the case. Do not mention this.'<sup>175</sup> At the same time, Fr Rua wrote in his chronicle: 'November. D. Bosco received an invitation from Minister Manabrea to come to Florence for important business.'<sup>176</sup> On 1 January 1869, he noted: 'D. Bosco received a gift of two deer skins from His Majesty the King shortly after having received another invitation from him to go to Florence.'<sup>177</sup> It is worth recalling that Menabrea was Prime Minister by will of the Sovereign, a Catholic very much devoted to his King and the House of Savoy. He had been the King's Aide-de-camp. Under the 8 January date, the chronicler had summed up information as far as the early days of March: 'He left for Florence where he stayed eight days and then left for Rome. He remained in Florence because of the invitations from the Sovereign, and although up till now we have no precise information on what he did there, it seems he had special discussions with high-ranking individuals. On arrival in Rome, apparently he lived a hidden life there in order to be freer and have more time to attend to his affairs. He wrote to us from there to say he had gone there to achieve one thing and had achieved ten. During the time he stayed in the city, word spread of a new set of appointments of bishops.'<sup>178</sup> The chronicle makes no further mention of political issues.

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172 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 356-358. Strangely on 1 March he noted: "Approval of the Society for ten years" (Ibid., p. 355).

173 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 357-358; MB IX 598-600.

174 Cf. Letters of 8, 10, 13, 16 June and 8 October 1869, Em III 95-96, 99; MB IX 656-663.

175 Em II 591-592.

176 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 351.

177 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 352

178 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 354.

During the week's stay in Florence from 8–14 January, Don Bosco certainly met with Canton and Menabrea. We gather this from a letter on 10 January 1869 from Dominican Fr Verda to *Cavaliere* Oreglia. Canton and *Cavaliere* Uguccioni had met him on arrival at Florence station. The following day, Fr Verda went to look for Don Bosco at the Archbishop's palace where he was a guest, but did not find him. He had gone out alone. He hoped to find him at Canton's place but he was not there either. Instead he ran into Don Bosco in the courtyard of the building where Canton had his apartment. 'You cannot imagine his surprise when he saw me' Fr Verda said. 'I took him by the hand and led him to Canton [to the Minister] and he arranged some matter. Then I went with him to Fr Giulio [Metti], and he brought him back to speak with Manabrea.'

The following day he went to lunch at Canton's place with Don Bosco. He continued: 'Canton offered to take Don Bosco to various places,' 'he is well, and cheerful, and is visiting various Ministries.'<sup>179</sup>

Obviously, Don Bosco's visits to palaces of the powerful would have been primarily, though not solely to do with beginning or renewing acquaintances and protection from politicians who succeeded one another in the frequent ministerial crises, and to arouse interest in and financial support for his charitable works, especially the Oratory in Turin. He was often entrusted with boys from needy families. At the Finance Ministry he found Cambrey Digny's husband. He could have spoken to the Prime Minister of problems posed by the ever-burning Roman question and the remaining issues in the problems of vacant sees. During this period, though, there were no Consistories appointing bishops for dioceses in the Kingdom of Italy. On the other hand, the Menabrea ministries, which were fragile, had defections and were supported by fractional elements of various groups. They were focusing almost exclusively on financial recovery. Discussions on the search for a *modus vivendi* with the Holy See were, in the mind of the majority of parliamentarians, more a device to keep at bay the pressing requests from France in expectation of the no longer remote definitive solution to the problem of Rome and what was left of the Papal States.<sup>180</sup>

In this context we need to account for the secretive Don Bosco who loves being 'incognito' and 'alone', likes preparing surprises for friend and foe alike. Certainly the most important surprise was political approval of the Salesian Society. His secretiveness was not a unique case; it was a constant style of action and life, more than one might think. Publicity was something he kept for the necessary mobilisation of individuals and means on behalf of his *opus maius*, the young people to be taken in, saved, and encouraged.

## 11. Spiritual basis of the Salesian Society

An important stage in Don Bosco's activity as a formator becomes clearer from 1865/66–69 when the Salesians were able to use the house at Trofarello for retreats, usually offered in two sessions over August and September. But prime importance goes to a few but fundamental circulars, almost like mini-encyclicals he sent Salesian religious between 1867–69.

The first was on 9 June 1867. In view of the desired imminent approval of the Salesian Society (though it did not happen then), he offered a focused, basic catechesis on the precise aim of belonging to an Institute of Consecrated Life: 'The sanctification of its members.' He taught that whoever enters does not do so to ensure a comfortable life nor even to do something useful for the

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<sup>179</sup> The letter is reported in MB IX 482–483.

<sup>180</sup> For reconstruction of the facts and possible hypotheses on motivations, cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 299–302.

Institute itself. Religious Life is a life completely in reference to God, 'the head, master, rewarder:' therefore 'each one must enrol in the Society out of love for Him; it is out of love for Him that he must work, obey, abandon whatever he possesses in the world to be able to tell the Saviour at the end of his life that we have chosen him as model: *ecce nos reliquimus Omnia et secuti sumus te.*' The ultimate aim, then, is 'to do true good, true spiritual and eternal good for oneself.' This implies, he insisted, that one abandon everything to become a disciple of the Saviour, follow him 'in prayer, penitence' and especially take up 'the cross of our daily tribulations.' One follows him 'until death and if necessary, even death on the cross.' He insisted with his 'religious inasmuch as they are Salesian Religious' that 'this is what someone does in our Society when he wears himself out in the sacred ministry, in teaching or some other priestly exercise until death, even a violent one in prison, exile, by the sword, water or fire; to the point where having suffered or died with Jesus Christ on earth, he can go and enjoy him in heaven.'

From this, Don Bosco drew the idea of unconditional availability – 'a soul joyful and ready' – for any job: 'teaching, study, work, preaching, confessions, in church, outside the church,' unbounded trust in superiors and fraternal solidarity between the individuals in every community.<sup>181</sup>

'My dear sons' he exhorted them finally, 'have trust in your superiors; they must render strict account to God of your works, therefore they study what you are capable of, your tendencies, and arrange things in a way that is compatible with your strengths, but always in a way they feel will be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. Oh! If our brothers enter the Society with these dispositions, our houses will certainly become a true earthly paradise. Peace and harmony will reign among the individuals of every family and charity will be the daily clothing of the one who commands. Obedience and respect will come before each of the steps, works, even the thoughts of the Superiors.'<sup>182</sup>

A second circular was issued at the end of April 1868. It was about, 'unity of spirit and unity of administration.' The first of these was understood as 'a firm, constant acceptance, like it or not, of what the superior judges to be for the greater glory of God' inspired by the charity St Paul speaks of in his first Letter to the Corinthians, Chap. 13. This was to be nurtured by 'piety' and its practices: 'Meditation, prayer, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, spiritual reading', Mass, frequent communion and confession.

Don Bosco could not refrain from recalling the religious topic dearest to him, obedience, which bound superiors and subjects together in mutual responsibility: the superior 'always tries to interpret, practise, and recommend observance of the rules among his confreres.' The confreres will 'do for their neighbour everything the Superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.' 'Unity of administration (meaning 'unity of government', real community life) was guaranteed by strict observance of the vow and virtue of poverty and common life in the use of goods: 'Let there be one purse, just as there must be one only will.'<sup>183</sup>

The question of community compactness became more pressing after approval of the Congregation. As he explained in a conference on 10 or 11 March 1869, this was guaranteed by the Superior, who was called to foster real solidarity in thinking, willing, feeling and working. 'We have chosen to live *in unum*' he clarified. What does it mean to live *in unum*? Here it is in a few words: we must first of all live *in unum* as a body ... Secondly there must be unity of spirit ... Finally there must be unity of obedience.'<sup>184</sup>

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181 Circ. 7 June 1867, Em II 305-307. To Fr Bonetti, the new Rector at Mirabello, on 20 November he had written: "Repeat the things that were said here; but note especially that no one is moved by interests or temporal reasons but only to make a complete offering of himself to God" (Em II 184).

182 Circ. of 7 June 1867, Em II 387.

183 Circular of end of April 1868, Em II 529-531.

184 Cf. F. MOTTO, *La figura del superiore salesiano...*, RSS 2 (1983) 38.

The role of the religious superior also occupied central place in the circular he wrote and sent from Montemagno when with the Marquis and Marchioness Fassati, on 15 August 1869. The rapport between superior and subjects was based on the assumption that in the new Congregation of pontifical right obedience should be experienced in a very special atmosphere. It was based on the 'confidence' found in Art. 6 of Chap. 5 of the Constitutions *De Voto obedientiae*: the member 'will have great confidence in the superior and will not keep any secret of the heart from him.' Don Bosco drew 'two practical consequences' from this: 1. The obligation of the Rector to hold two conferences monthly for the confreres, one on the Constitutions and the other with practical moral content. 2. The obligation of the confrere to present himself to the Rector once a month to tell him 'what he judges to be for the good of his soul, and if he has some doubts about observance of the rules he will tell him, asking for what advice seems to him to be most appropriate for his spiritual and temporal benefit.' In conclusion, for further enrichment and understanding he referred them to other circulars and conferences and to the retreat about to take place at Trofarello.<sup>185</sup>

During the retreat at the house he had inherited, 15 kilometres from Turin, Don Bosco reserved the so-called *Instructions* to himself, leaving the *Meditations* on 'eternal truths' to others, Salesian or Diocesan. He had an opportunity in the *Instructions* to touch on the main points of 'Salesian religious' life. We have summaries and outlines relating to 1866, 1867 and, more consistent still, from 1869.<sup>186</sup>

In September 1869, he drew up an extremely practical set of talks on topics including and adding to ones already offered in the circulars: historical information on the Congregation, the advantage of being a Congregation (2 Instructions), the vows and obedience, obedience to the superiors the vow of poverty, detachment from relatives, chastity and positive ways of preserving it. Put together they amount to some extent to being the first systematic presentation of Don Bosco's on the fundamentals of Salesian religious life.

From the plan of the instructions it is evident he had read *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo* and the *Opuscoli sullo stato religioso* by Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787)<sup>187</sup> and the *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù religiose*, the third volume of the work by the same name by Jesuit Fr Alphonso Rodriguez (1537–1616). The sources were from two Religious from two different Congregations but were equally demanding. The preacher did not soften them, determined to create the conviction in the spirit of those who yesterday had been his boys, that consecration called them to a much higher lifestyle and a more demanding one by living God's love for one's neighbour, especially the young.

The first instruction was completely dedicated to *historical information*: a rapid overview on the events of the Oratory and the Congregation from the beginning in 1841 up till the decree of approval on 1 March 1869. Dealing with what is called 'Salesianity' today, Don Bosco did not rely on concepts. He told the story, presented facts and experiences which in themselves led to meanings and practical orientation. In essence he almost visually presented the gradual emergence through the history of the Oratory of 'the need for a Congregation' which arrived after critical and difficult moments at the '*decretum laudis*' in 1864 and pontifical approval in 1869.

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185 Circ. of 15 August 1869, Em III 125-126.

186 Regarding the Salesian Gioachino Berto, who would have been ordained priest in March 1870, three manuscripts have been preserved, entitled: *Agosto 1866. Ricordi di D. Bosco negli Esercizi spirituali di Trofarello* (ASC A 0250103) ed *Esercizi dei preti e chierici. Truffarello 1° agosto 1867. D. Bona e D. Bosco pred.*, quad. di 78 pp., ASC A 0250103; *Esercizi di Truffarello 1869*: instructions given by Don Bosco, a notebook with 29 pages, ms of Fr Berto, ASC A 0250110 copied by someone else; *Esercizi di Trofarello*, ms of Don Bosco, seven foolscap sheets (14 pages) with "outlines and drafts" (as Gioachino Berto writes on the manuscript), ASC A 2250604, Don Bosco's text is reproduced with minor variations in MB IX 985-993.

187 Cf. E. VALENTINI, *Sant'Alfonso negli insegnamenti di Don Bosco*, in his essay *Don Bosco e Sant'Alfonso*. Pagani (Salerno), Casa Editrice "Sant'Alfonso" 1972, pp. 37-43.



The two instructions that followed were borrowed in their entirety from St Alphonsus who, following the line of St Bernard's address *De bono Religionis* in *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo*, presented the *advantages* [temporal and spiritual] of *whoever lives in a Congregation: vivit purius, cadit rarius, surgit velocius, incedit cautius, irroratur frequentius, quiescit securius, moritur confidentus, purgatur citius, remeneratur copiosus*. The same considerations, with additional information, would become a lengthy commentary in the Introduction to the Italian Constitutions in 1875: *Ai soci salesiani* (To the Salesian Confreres).<sup>188</sup>

In the fourth and fifth instruction, after a simple note on the vows in general, Don Bosco dealt more extensively with *Obedience* as an all-encompassing and total virtue and *Obedience to the superiors*, a rigorous commentary on art.4, Chap. 5 of the Constitutions: *On the vow of obedience*.

Drawn from the *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù religiose*, his talk on *Poverty* went hand in hand with the following instructions on detachment from *Relatives*. Both made insistent reference to the Divine Saviour, the letters of St Paul, the example of the Saints. There was no yielding to laxity. Without actually using the words, Don Bosco sided clearly with 'the radical nature of the Gospel.' It was the Gospel '*sine glossa*' of St Francis of Assisi, and also his. As for detachment from relatives, this was modelled on that of Abraham (Gn 12:1): 'Leave your country, your relatives, your father's home,' and Melchizedek: 'There is no record of Melchizedek's father or his mother, or any of his ancestors,' (Heb 7:3) inspired by Jesus' well-known words: 'Whoever comes to me cannot by my disciple unless he loves me more than his father and his mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and his sisters, and himself as well. (Lk 14:26)<sup>189</sup>

Two instructions were on the 'angelic and heavenly virtue' chastity, 'necessary for everyone but especially for the one who dedicates himself to the good of the young.' With eminently practical sense the preacher illustrated the negative and the positive means of preserving it. The reflections and detailed cautionary proposals to Salesian religious faithfully reflected what he had learned of moral casuistry in his time at the Ecclesiastical College, enriched by experience and the anxieties of being a Rector and confessor in a mixed community of young people. His detailed insistence on situations and facts was not built out of a void, but the reality in the Oratory, other houses or the wider context. Don Bosco was not naive.

Faced with youthful fragility in the area of 'morality', educators needed to be especially reminded of their demanding responsibilities. Chastity, he said, is 'necessary for everyone but especially for the one who dedicates himself to the good of the young. It is a great virtue,' but it must be entrusted to the most delicate and detailed cautions. He made a meticulous collection of these: 'Negative means of preserving this virtue. Avoid occasions. Close the windows: eyes.' 'Ears; close the door: avoid talking with worldly people, with people of the opposite sex.' 'With the most attractive children – great caution in putting your hands on them. No special friends. Whoever gives himself to God flees the world. Avoid gambling, dinner parties. Great self-respect.'<sup>190</sup>

Notes left behind by cleric Giochino Berti (ordained priest the following year on the Feast of the Annunciation, and a scrupulous penitent, secretary to Don Bosco) suggests that the preacher went into even greater detail. There is the omnipresent notion of 'avoidance'. While needing to remain among the boys one also needed to avoid: especially 'avoid things that could be occasions for bad thoughts. Let us see that we never look a person of the opposite sex fully in the eye. If we have to go and teach catechism to boys and girls, be careful not to stare at them. Avoid amusements with people of the opposite sex, never stare at them, never touch them with your hand or allow yourself to be touched by someone of the opposite sex. It is allowable with your mother but not with others, not even your sister, other relatives etc. If you have to deal with people of the opposite sex out of

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188 Cf. Chap. 24, § 5 and Chap. 25, § 4.

189 G. Bosco, *Esercizi di Truffarello 1869*, ms, ASC A 0250110, pp. 1-9.

190 G. Bosco, *Esercizi di Trofarello...*, pp. 9-10.

pure necessity, do so as briefly as you can and see that you never go for walks with people of the opposite sex, not with Religious Sisters or cousins and do not touch others with your hands. In order to be not looking away, if you have to deal with them, give an indifferent glance but then look aside, here, there. Do not walk with your mother unless around home in order not to give scandal. Also avoid lay people including those not of the opposite sex. In dealing with boys, never allow an action or word with them that could give them bad thoughts, and never lay a hand on them or walk hand in hand with them, or with arms around their shoulders. Also avoid glances, overly affectionate words and never deal with them alone in the dormitory so as not to cause envy in others and carnal feelings in the boy. Because at times, under the pretext of wanting to do good, it is easy, even with a good handshake, to cause carnal affection in the one who offers and receives it. Use ways of dealing with people or expressions that do not arouse over-sensitive emotions.’<sup>191</sup>

These were not just the flights of fancy of a Master. It was culture and temperament. But behind it all was the conviction that his listeners should not ignore the principles he had assimilated in catechism and theology he had never forgotten. He wanted them to know the means offered them by their Catholic Faith. He illustrated some of the basics of this in the instruction given on *positive* approaches. His listeners would have already heard these suggestions many times, and the boys, too, would have heard some of them: ‘1. Ordinary prayers, meditation, visit to Blessed Sacrament, breviary and Mass well celebrated or served, brief prayerful thoughts, medals, crucifixes etc., special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. 2. Avoiding idleness, having various things to do. 3. Frequent confession, confessing painful issues including doubts. There was need for a guide. Frequent communion, the food for strength. 4. Keeping an eye on little things ... Position, clothing, walking, sitting, sleeping, jokes, etc.’<sup>192</sup>

Finally, the retreats of 1869 ended with a brighter projection beyond just the moral area, one which spoke of Grace, the world of the Spirit who was an infinitely more trustworthy partner. The *Conclusion* on the Saturday was dedicated to three theological virtues: faith, hope, charity involving God and our neighbour. With a note on observations of the Constitutions and the vows: ‘Jealous custody and observance of the rules and especially the vows. They (vows) are always the three guardians of virtues protecting us from risks to our souls.’ Above all he highlighted charity: ‘*Qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet*’ he reminded them, ‘and if God is with us we can do everything: *Omnia possum in eo qui confortat* (St Paul). Charity toward God: the only one worthy of being loved and served, true remunerator of very little thing we do. Charity towards the Superiors, confreres, the young, who ask us for spiritual bread, *Filii petierunt panem* etc.’<sup>193</sup>

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191 G. BERTO, *Esercizi spirituali di Truffarello 1869*, pp. 40-44.

192 G. BOSCO, *Esercizi di Trofarello...*, pp. 10-11.

193 G. Bosco, *Esercizi di Trofarello...*, p. 13.

## BIRTH OF A POPULAR\_RELIGIOUS AND ECCLESIAL CENTRE (1865–69)

- 1866      23 September: ceremony of the laying of the final brick on the cupola of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.
- 1868      May: *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocate sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice* (LC)  
9 June: consecration followed by an octave of ceremonies;  
November–December: *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (LC)
- 1869      *Associazione de' devoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*  
November: the Archbishop upset by the priestly ordination of Giuseppe Cagliero.
- 1870      20 January: Don Bosco leaves for Rome;  
24 January – 22 February: fourth extended visit to Rome.
- 1872      5 August: first clothing and profession of vows in the FMA Institute.
- 1875      Birth of the *Work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the clerical state*.

Parallel to 23 July 1864 '*decretum laudis*', the laying of the foundation stone for the church of 'Don Bosco's Madonna' and later 'Madonna' of the Salesian Society followed on 27 April 1865. The initiatives and efforts involved in achieving the '*decretum laudis*' were also linked to the building of the church. The two points of arrival were also similar: the consecration of the church on 9 June 1868, and pontifical approval of the Salesian Society on 1 March 1869. The ecclesial significance of both events seems to have been symbolised by Don Bosco's extended visit to Rome from 24 January to 22 February 1870, relatively close to the exceptional event of Vatican I and the Church's missionary appeal. Obviously, Don Bosco continued to be concerned about financial support for both his ordinary and extraordinary initiatives ... By now he was established as an educator, founder, champion of good press, apostle of Marian spirituality, builder and, inseparable from all these, a tireless beggar involved among other things in seeing the difficult work of running a lottery come to a successful outcome.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Progress in building the Church of Mary Help of Christians

The succession of letters from Don Bosco asking for aid could be a film script for the growth of Our Lady's 'house on earth'. On 4 June 1865, Don Bosco wrote to Marquis Domenico Fassati: 'The Church of Mary Help of Christians is already two metres above floor level and work is proceeding rapidly ... Our Lottery is well underway. His Highness Prince Amedeo [soon to be temporary King of Spain], Prince Eugenio, the Duchess of Genoa, Prince Tommaso and Princess Margherita [the future Queen, wife of cousin Umberto I] have included themselves as principal promoters. We

<sup>1</sup> *Il Galantuomo*, December 1865, for 1866, already quoted, published the *Piano Regolamento* (Draft Regulations) OE XVI 491-492.

already have approval for a considerable number of tickets. As soon as the Lottery for the Deaf and Dumb is over [ca. 7<sup>th</sup>] we will immediately see to their distribution.<sup>2</sup>

On 5 July, he gave *Cavaliere* Zaverio Provana di Collegno a list of materials from which he could choose, trusting in his generosity, each block costing ('do not be frightened' he reassured him) 'around four thousand francs [16,541 euro], perhaps a few hundred less:' tiles, batons for supporting them, crossbeams for supporting the batons, beams for supporting everything. Payment was an assurance of a 'beautiful place to live in heaven' for him and his sons, Emanuele and Luigi, so long as he helped 'complete her [the Madonna's] house on earth.'<sup>3</sup>

Over the following months he continued to provide good news on construction progress. 'Our Church is going ahead and a part of the wall has already reached roof height' he told Marquis Domenico Fassati on 29 August.<sup>4</sup> 'The Church is at the roof stage and I need to put the roof on' he told Count Cays in September, assuring him of prayers for his daughter-in-law and her newborn child. For the roofing, Count Cays invited him to follow the approach 'of begging for materials' suggested by *Cavaliere* Zaverio Provana di Collegno, instead of 'begging for money.'<sup>5</sup>

On 3 February 1866, he predicted optimistically to Marchioness Fassati: 'Work continues on the church and it seems probable we can celebrate the first Mass there on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.'<sup>6</sup>

He gave good thought to the opening of a letter addressed to the Mayor to ask for the Via Cottolengo to be adjusted (a request which was granted): 'Last year when His Royal Highness Prince Amedeo, along with the Mayor who helped him, laid the foundation stone of the new church, the request was made as to whether Via Cottolengo, which runs right in front of the building, could be straightened?'<sup>7</sup> He put to Countess Callori the problem of the statue of Mary Help of Christians in a similarly subtle way. He beat around the bush, touching on different topics, among which wishing her a 'happy alleluia' for Easter, just around the corner. Then he almost incidentally interrupted his thought with: 'I forget one thing: the statue of Our Lady to put on the cupola of the new church.' It was about four metres tall, and the cost was more than predicted at twelve thousand lire, of which eight thousand lire [49,111/ 32,741 euro] had already been assured by another lady. He did not intend to 'bind' Countess Callori 'to the remainder' unless Our Lady 'had made it snow with '*marenghini*' [silver coins] in her cash box.'<sup>8</sup>

He wrote to *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia on 21 May about the forty bricklayers now reduced, 'to eight for want of money to pay them with' due to 'such calamitous times' (war with Austria was imminent, 14 June – 26 July 1866). He hoped that 'God will send down some peace on his Christian people as soon as possible and that subjects can band together around their Sovereign and busy themselves more tranquilly with the salvation of their souls.'<sup>9</sup>

Work went ahead, focusing on the cupola: 'It is rising higher day by day' he told the Bishop of Novena, Bishop Gentile, at the end of May.<sup>10</sup> It is at a good stage, but for lack of money work is only proceeding on a few parts' he wrote to Countess Uguccioni in July.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in a circular on 21 September, he invited people to be there on Sunday 23rd when the final brick would be laid on

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2 Em II 139-140.

3 Em II 146.

4 Em II 159.

5 Letter of 11 September 1864, Em II 164.

6 Em II 208.

7 To the Mayor of Turin, 26 February 1866, ...

8 Letter of 31 March 1866, Em II 211-212.

9 Em II 241-242.

10 Letter of 24 May 1877, Em II 245

11 Letter of 20 July 1866, Em II 275

the cupola.<sup>12</sup>

Don Bosco believed the work would finish soon. On 13 April 1867, he turned to Silvio Pellico's sister Giuseppina, who lived in Chieri: if Mary Help of Christians continued to 'grant her heavenly favours to whoever helps with this sacred building,' he wrote 'I believe we will be inside this year for the ceremonies.'<sup>13</sup> The same belief was expressed in a circular on 15 April in which he passed on the list of the many lottery winners.<sup>14</sup>

But walls and a cupola did not yet make a church. Don Bosco still needed to complete or fit out the chapel, altars, balustrades, confessionals. He needed to buy bells, pews, vestments, purchase paintings and have other paintings and decorative work done. In a circular on 24 May, he referred in particular to the chapel dedicated to the 'Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,'<sup>15</sup> a devotion which often appeared in Don Bosco's letters. From one receipt it appears that the Count and Countess di Viancino donated a thousand lire; a further five hundred was offered by the Countess for a bell.<sup>16</sup> He wrote on various occasions during 1867 that work was proceeding 'with speed and to our greatest satisfaction.'<sup>17</sup> The church was going 'marvellously.'<sup>18</sup>

There was an interesting reflection offered in the next letter on 22 June to the same individual: 'Once I am back in Turin,' he told *Cavaliere* Oreglia 'we really need to make you procurator general for areas of financial dispute because priests are out of place working as procurators.'<sup>19</sup> Despite the thin stream of donations, even though there was an improvement later on he stated he was 'full of trust in two things: that this work would be finished and that next spring' the opening would take place.<sup>20</sup> He told *Cavaliere* Oreglia on 18 November of further progress on the internal structure and furnishings: 'In the new church: statue of Our Lady gilded; main altar finished and put in place; flooring commenced.' 'The altar [St Anne's chapel] from Count Bentivoglio is in Genoa.' 'Mrs Mercurelli writes that she has accepted to do the smallest bell, the fr. 1,000 one in honour of Mary Help of Christians.'<sup>21</sup>

He told *Cavaliere* Oreglia there were still things to do or to be bought; especially people to ask, assuring them 'of the continuation of Our Lady's special protection; Princess Odescalchi for 500 *scudi* for the altar, Countess Calderari to complete the floor,' and for a, 'note' on work to be 'restarted with benefactors,' Mr Focardi, 'the Polish Princess [Potocka?] very well known to Fr De Lorenzi, Mr Conti, Serlupi, Cavalletti, Antonelli, Sora etc. etc.,' Mother Galeffi for 'a small' balustrade.'<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Tireless begging and thanks for support

During the Diocesan information process for introducing Don Bosco's cause of beatification and canonisation, the earlier mentioned Bishop Giovanni Bertagna attested: 'Then if I look at some features of his life, for example the tenacity he sometimes showed in achieving his aim, I believe I saw something very human about it. So, at first glance, sometimes he might have appeared somewhat importunate, a bit over-zealous in asking for alms, going beyond good etiquette, even to the point of being facile in promising mansions in heaven for those who gave them and letting

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12 Em II 295-296.

13 Em II 355.

14 Em II 356.

15 Em II 375-374. He also indicated this days later in a letter to Mother M. Galeffi, Em II 377.

16 To Count and Countess Viancino. 1 October 1867, Em II 438-439

17 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 2 June 1869, Em II 382.

18 To Cav F. Oreglia, 11 June 1867, Em II 389.

19 Em II 395.

20 To Countess G. Uguccioni, 25 September 1867, Em II 434.

21 Em II 451.

22 To Cav F. Oreglia, 7 and mid-December 1867, Em II 456 and 458-459.

people feel that nothing would go well with them if they denied him. Likewise, sometimes he seemed over reluctant to abandon his own opinion, even though I could not agree with it.<sup>23</sup>

But in the considerable range of Don Bosco's personal relationships and correspondence, we find his insistent assurance of God's blessings through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. The grace of all graces, naturally, was to live in grace, salvation in this life and eternal happiness, the 'loan' assured in the hereafter, a home in paradise, 'a beautiful crown in heaven.'<sup>24</sup> But other graces, too, were certainly not undervalued, graces he indicated generically or even very specifically. One of the more timely desired and requested graces was preservation from cholera which was the scourge of various regions between 1865–67. Extraordinary, 'miraculous' interventions, were also promised for those who had performed certain practices of piety or made some donations. Don Bosco highlighted this latter aspect when exercising his priestly mission with regard to the Church of Mary Help of Christians, and in letters to his special envoy in Rome and Florence, *Cavaliere* Oreglia, and to many who made requests of him.

He suggested a set of prayers for the recovery of a 'sick girl' which, with some variants, was his regular suggestion: 'For the whole month of June let us daily say three *Our Fathers, Hail Marys* and *Glory bes* to the most Blessed Sacrament; three *Hail Holy Queens* to Mary with the 'invocation *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*' He also suggested a possible donation to contribute to the 'building of a church we have started here to the great Mother of God under the title Mary Help of Christians.'<sup>25</sup>

The connection between prayer, donation, and graces was expressed in increasingly convincing and certain terms, naturally on condition that what was asked for was not 'contrary to God's greater glory.' Three typical conditions were indicated to obtain a spiritual grace to 'move the heart of the person'; 1. Daily recital of 'three *Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory bes* to the Blessed Sacrament with three *Hail Holy Queens* to Mary help of Christians.' 2. Daily communion for the Oratory boys. 3. 'Some donations for the Church of Mary Help of Christians' if the grace was received.<sup>26</sup> He praised the initiative of Fr Pestarino who set out to promote a 'collection of wine' among farmers at Mornese, so long as he insisted that 'nothing was being done out of love for Don Bosco but only out of love for Mary Help of Christians' so she might bless and protect the fruits of the land, and 'in honour of St Joseph' to obtain 'from God the gift of health in life and that he might assist us at the hour of death.' He finally assured them that whatever was collected would 'all be used for work on the new church.'<sup>27</sup>

In the considerable correspondence he had with *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di S. Stefano, we also see some echoes of people who disputed this proclaimed connection between prayer, donations and graces. In a letter in May 1867, Don Bosco tried to specify his thinking and how things had gone during his recent stay in Rome. 'You always say that I have never boasted of extraordinary things. I have always said the Mary Help of Christians has granted and continues to grant extraordinary graces to those who have helped in some way with the building of this church. I have always said, and I say once more now, the donation is to be made when the grace is received, not before. Moreover it is not possible to keep everyone happy even with the best of good will. I should of course assure them, and I said this often to Marchioness Villarios, that seeing myself besieged by so many different people, in the time I was in Rome I said special prayers that God would not grant anything so sensational as to set people talking about poor Don Bosco, and I

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23 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus...*, fol. 246v.

24 To Marquis G. Patrizi, 12 November 1863, Em I 618.

25 To Countess L. Barbò, 30 May 1866, Em II 250.

26 To Countess B. Pasetti Villani, 18 September 1867, Em II 429-430.

27 To Fr D. Pestarini, 4 October 1867, Em II 440; cf. for the following letters to Pestarino on 3 and 25 December, Em II 453-454, 464-465: in this he pointed to miracles achieved through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians.

believe God heard our prayers.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the doubts indicated, he did not stop making reassuring promises, especially regarding the cholera which had once more raged through the Italian peninsula from Lombardi to Sicily following the 1854–56 epidemic. The alarm was sounded early in 1865 by cases in Marseilles, Genoa and Naples. The epidemic continued to spread through a number of Italian provinces in 1865–66 resulting in more than 20,000 deaths. It also spread in Rome between May and the first half of July 1867 and in August struck Albano in a particularly virulent way, resulting in the death of well-known civil and clerical personalities living there or staying there over the holiday season: among these the widow of Ferdinand II, former King of Naples, and three days later Cardinal Lodovico Altieri, Bishop of Albano, who had taken up residence in his See at the outbreak of the disease.<sup>29</sup> There were also victims at the Scolopian Narazene College since the summer residence was in Albano.<sup>30</sup> On 15 August, as we know, the law confiscating ecclesiastical assets was promulgated and the Garibaldini were massing at the borders of the Papal States, though later (3 November) they were stopped at Mentana.<sup>31</sup>

Imperturbable as ever, Don Bosco had no hesitation in reassuring benefactors in Rome, Florence, Milan Genoa and Lucca: ‘Do not be disturbed. For now you have nothing to fear neither regarding public calm of the person of the Holy Father,’ he wrote to Countess Anna Bentivoglio. ‘Nor should you fear anything concerning cholera. For all those who keep with the building of the church of Mary Help of Christians, no one will be a victim of this deadly disease.’<sup>32</sup>

Similarly categorical was his promise to another Roman noble woman who had sent a donation: ‘As for the cholera, have no fear; go to Rome, stay in Frascati, you have nothing to fear. None of these who help with the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco will fall victim to the deadly disease so long as they place their trust in her.’<sup>33</sup>

He also reassured the Duchess of Sora with regard to the Black Death that had appeared in Rome: ‘None of those who have played a part in building the church in honour of Mary Help of Christians will be victim of these illnesses so long as they place their trust in Her.’<sup>34</sup> He was also reassuring with Countess Uguccioni: ‘You, your husband, and your family should have no fear of the cholera that is spreading through Italy. All I recommend is real trust in Mary help of Christians.’<sup>35</sup>

He showed how decisive he was by giving the Countesses Cambray Digny in Florence and Barbò in Milan the task of spreading the same message. He wrote to Cambray Digny regarding St Anne’s altar: ‘You need to do everything you can to be focus people; tell anyone who helps that they are guaranteed preservation from cholera on the one condition that what they do is done for love of and trust in Mary’.<sup>36</sup> He told Countess Barbò: ‘Tell all those who have helped with our church they should have no fear of the cholera. They can even go and serve in the hospitals so long as they have faith in Mary, Help of Christians and no ill will befall them.’<sup>37</sup> Identical guarantees were also given to the anxious Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini: ‘It seems the cholera wants to make itself felt in Genoa; you and your family can remain calm, the Blessed Virgin will protect them so

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28 Letter of 21 May 1867 Em II 372-373. There was a similar discussion in the booklet the following year on *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (pp. 95-97, OE XXI 97-99).

29 Cf. “La Civiltà Cattolica” 18 (1867), Vol. III 609-620.

30 Cf. Don Bosco’s letter to Scolopian Fr A. Checcucci, 23 and 26 September 1867, Em II 432 and 434-436

31 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

32 Letter of 30 September 1866, Em II 302.

33 To Baroness L. Cappelletti, 22 October 1866, Em II 305.

34 Letter of 30 July 1867, Em II 410.

35 Letter of 27 July, Em II 408.

36 To Countess V. Cambray Digny, August 1867, Em II 412.

37 To Countess, L. Barbò, 3 August 1867, Em II 414.

long as they trust in her.<sup>138</sup>

When he sent Mrs Carolina Rivolta Guenzati in Milan a list of items still lacking he promised her: 'If you give me a hand, by the beginning of next May we will consecrate the new church to divine worship and you will certainly have a powerful antidote against the cholera and other misfortunes.'<sup>39</sup> There was an interesting note, a question to Don Bosco, which the recipient attached to the back of the page: '29 December/question/ to enthuse donors I ask you to reply to me as soon as possible if you will authorise me to use the sentence you wrote for me in your recent letter to me, that they will have a powerful antidote against the cholera and other misfortunes, and if that is applicable to donors who give in whatever other way to help a work like completing the church and ornaments to honour Mary the Virgin Help of Christians.'<sup>40</sup>

The same request, the result of disagreement by a number of priests, was addressed to Don Bosco by Elisabetta Covoni from Florence on 7 January 1866.<sup>41</sup> The affirmative reply given to those enquiring was confirmed in the reply to an unknown noblewoman: 'When you speak to Christian individuals tell them that whoever helps with this work of charity has a powerful antidote against the cholera and against other misfortunes threatening us this year so long as what they do is done for love of Mary, and with trust in Mary.'<sup>42</sup> He had made a similar promise the day before to the parish priest of S. Leonardo's in Lucca, Fr Raffaello Cianetti, inviting him to find people who would take on one of the works indicated in a note enclosed with the letter: 'Note that Mary is a generous payer and donors would have a powerful antidote against the cholera and other misfortunes.'<sup>43</sup> A similar idea was the 'Mary Help of Christians Embassy' he provided for people in Rome who had helped 'with the church.' 'Mary Help of Christians is generous, and among the payments they will have a powerful antidote against cholera.'<sup>44</sup>

The same thing went for all possible 'extraordinary graces.' We can consider what Don Bosco wrote to *Cavaliere* Oreglia on 4 May 1866, to be a summary along these lines. Oreglia was shuttling between Florence and Rome: 'We are going ahead with the church with begging for funds that Mary alone is doing. I will give you an indication of this. Last week we were able to collect two thousand francs, [8,185 euro] but it was all Our Lady's work. He confirmed it by quoting some cases involving the Director of the hospital at Cherasco, Count Pollone, Duchess Melzi from Milan, and 'donations for similar reasons' which came from Chieri, Asti, Cuneo, Saluzzo, Milan, Monza, and Venice. He added, 'When you suggest to someone that they recommend themselves to Mary, through a novena, be careful of three things: 1. Put no trust in human virtues; faith in God. 2. The request relies fully on Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the source of Grace, goodness and blessing. It relies on the power of Mary whom God wishes to glorify on earth through this church. 3. But the condition in every instance is *fiat voluntas tua* and whether or not it is good for the soul who is being prayed for.'<sup>45</sup> He wrote to him about another miraculous recovery on 21 May: again 'Mary Help of Christians has made a good collection,'<sup>46</sup> and wrote of 'alms' in gratitude for resolution of a 'very complicated dispute' referred to by letter on 22 May.<sup>47</sup> 'Mary will not permit any of the disasters you could be afraid of' he told Countess Uguccioni, who was worried about her

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38 Letter of 24 August 1867, Em II 422; on various occasions he offered him spiritual advice, encouraging him to overcome scruples and anxiety, in letters on August 24, in September, October 30, December 30, 1867, Em II 422, 423-424, 447, 467.

39 Letter of 26 December 1867, Em II 466.

40 Cf. Em II 466, editor's comment, line 17.

41 Letter found in MB VIII 459.

42 Letter of 3 January 1868, Em II 471.

43 Letter of 2 January 1868, Em II 470.

44 To Mother M. Galeffi, 3 January 1868, Em II 473-474.

45 Letter of 14 May 1866, Em II 238-239.

46 Em II 242.

47 Em II 244.



grandchildren, threatened by serious illness.<sup>48</sup>

Very typical was another letter he wrote to in December 1867 to *Cavaliere* Oreglia. It swung between prophecy, an account of graces and the need for money. 'Whoever is afraid for this city,' he reassured him without hesitation 'tell them that they are wrong; tell them all clearly that there is no need for fear of this kind. Just pray. The Provost, Vicar Forane of Castelnuovo d'Asti prayed to Mary Help of Christians with the usual promise. He recovered immediately from very serious, complete deafness. A gentleman from Savigliano told me the same thing. Both made a grateful donation. Here we are doing what we can; mice cannot play beneath the cat's paw ... With regard to Princess Odescalchi, I believe she has already given you four hundred *scudi*, and a hundred to me when I was in Rome. If you want you can put these last amounts toward the altar [St Peter's chapel] which is about to be completed, leaving just 500 *scudi*.'<sup>49</sup>

Further on he gave *Cavaliere* Oreglia new information on donations from Roman benefactors: 'We have received fr.1,600 from Count De Maistre and another fr.1,087 from Fr Verda that the charity of the Romans sent for this house through your dear self ... Now it remains for us to thank these charitable donors for whom we will not fail to pray ... especially that Mary Help of Christians will keep the scourge of sickness many fear this year far from their families.'<sup>50</sup>

He was still hoping for Roman charity in a letter that followed, adding news of a donation of 1,000 francs given by a gentleman who 'a month ago came here on crutches' and who 'attributes his complete recovery to Mary Help of Christians to whom he had prayed with the usual prayers, promising to do something for the church. These 1,000 francs will help keep Busca quiet tomorrow. As you know he is the main provider of stone for the church.'<sup>51</sup>

Expenses, work, prayers, graces again filled a letter on 3 March 1868, a sign of frenetic activity. 'I am happy to hear the good news you make me hope for. I am engulfed by expenses, have many debts to pay off, all the work to be undertaken. So do what you can, but pray with faith. I believe it is the right time for whoever wants graces from Mary! We see it every day, one more moving, than the other, and this way we move ahead.'<sup>52</sup> He renewed his appeal to Oreglia, now a committed traveller, for charitable people in Florence: 'When you come from Rome, see if you can stay at least a couple of days in Florence to visit the Archbishop, Digny, Marchioness Nerli, Uguccioni, Fr Bianchi etc. who are awaiting you. I will see to things from here. Perhaps they will make some donations ... the price of bread is really causing us problems ... We have huge expenses for the church; ... but here Our Lady continues to grant graces to our donors with the utmost abundance, and thus we can continue.'<sup>53</sup>

Reports on graces and miracles are also found in the chronicles from 1867–68 written by Don Bosco's young secretary at the time, Gioachino Berto: *Notizie 1867 (News 1867) and Arrisi-Ricordi: - Notizie miracolose (Notices – Reminders – News of Miracles)*. In another he recorded Don Bosco's statement on 3 July 1867: 'The church went ahead completely by means of graces worked by Mary Help of Christians.'<sup>54</sup>

### 3. The solemn consecration and spread of interest

The objective was finally in the offing: on 25 March 1868, Don Bosco told *Cavaliere* Oreglia that

48 Letter of 2 May 1867, Em II 364.

49 Letter of 7 December 1867, Em II 456.

50 Letter of 13 January 1868, Em II 485.

51 Letter of 29 January 1868, Em II 494.

52 To Cav F. Oreglia, 3 March 1868, Em II 505.

53 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 10 April 1868, Em II 522.

54 G. BERTO, *Raccolta di detti, fatti e sogni di D. Bosco...*, p. 13.

the consecration of the church and octave to follow would be in the first fortnight in June.<sup>55</sup> We have letters of invitation to Bishop Ferrè, the Bishop of Casale Monferrato<sup>56</sup> and of thanks for his quick 'agreement to accept two preaching engagements for 9 and 10 June next.'<sup>57</sup>

The pamphlet *Rimembranza di una Solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Recollection of a solemnity in honour of Mary Help of Christians)<sup>58</sup> is filled with details on the entire cycle of festivities. Don Bosco wanted to make it an event of considerable religious and popular impact but also something very educational for the boys in his colleges and above all at the Oratory. It showed 'a constant movement of things and peoples ... Priests, clerics, youngsters from the junior seminary at Mirabello and the college at Lanzo all came to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, making up a kind of army with their companions in Turin. Thus the establishment hosted around a thousand two hundred boys of all kinds. Many of them played a role singing, playing an instrument, serving, performing in academies and they were all anxious, I would say even impatient to carry out their part as zealously as they could.'<sup>59</sup>

The consecration took place at 5.30 a.m. The Archbishop did it with Pontifical Solemn Mass during which a new mass by Maestro Giovanni De Vecchi was performed. At 5.30 p.m. there were Vespers with the singing of a spectacular antiphon set to music by Cagliari, the *Sancta Maria succurre miseris* with three choirs: one on the sanctuary with 150 voices including tenors and basses representing the Church Militant, another in the Cupola with around 200 sopranos and contraltos as the angels or Church Triumphant, and the third with around 100 tenors and basses in the choir loft symbolising the Church Suffering. In the church, packed beyond belief, Bishop Ferrè gave a wonderful, eloquent talk on the majesty of outward worship<sup>60</sup>.

Among the collectors at the church door were also Baron Bianco di Barbania and Count Francesco Viancino.<sup>61</sup> The reporter from *L'Unità Cattolica* commented: 'There was nothing lacking in the church opened yesterday and it was all as grand as the idea behind it and the charity that built it.'<sup>62</sup>

The *Rimembranza* dedicated a chapter to the dinners: food and drink with the best assorted Piedmontese wines and delicacies of every kind: mortadella, cold cuts, cheeses, chocolate, sugar, kiffer, brioches, bran, bread, and biscuits.' These had been offered by donors known and unknown from Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy and Emilia. A Turin pastry-cook supplied confectionery and sweets of all kinds free of charge throughout the octave.<sup>63</sup>

Each day of the octave was marked by three main religious celebrations: Morning Prayer, the Rosary and Mass with a brief sermon on the Eucharist, then at 10.00 a.m. Solemn Pontifical Mass with polyphonic music. At 5 p.m. Pontifical Vespers with a sermon by a bishop – Bishop Ferrè on the first day.<sup>64</sup>

Bishop Ghilardi of Mondovì was the most active in the various ceremonies, followed in this regard by Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo, a renowned speaker, and Bishop Galletti of Alba, both great admirers and friends of Don Bosco.

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55 Em II 515.

56 Letter of 24 May 1868, Em II 535.

57 Letter of 27 May 1868, Em II 537.

58 Pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco, Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868, 172 p., OE XXI 2-174.

59 G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità*..., pp. 22-23, OE XXI 24-25.

60 Cf. G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità*..., pp. 24-29, OE XXI 26-31.

61 Cf. Letter to Viancino on 6 June 1868, Em II 543.

62 "L'Unità Cattolica", No. 137, Thursday, 11 June 1868, OE XXI 36-37.

63 G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità*..., pp. 34-35, OE XXI 36-37.

64 The two talks are found in the final part of the *Rimembranza* OE XXI 101-122, 122-154.

Thursday 11th, the solemnity of *Corpus Domini*, there was additionally an Academy at 4.00 p.m. in honour of Mary Help of Christians, and distribution of prizes to boys from the three colleges. Vespers was moved to 6 p.m. On Saturday the 13th Bishop Gastaldi preached at the Pontifical Vespers led by Bishop Ghilardi: 'He began by expressing his astonishment at seeing the new church erected to the great Mother of God where earlier there had only been an empty paddock. Then he gave a brief history of the festive oratories and the house at Valdocco which he had seen begin and grow under his very eyes. Then, developing the purpose of the oratories and the attached house, he spoke of the necessity of giving youth religious education, an education they could only find in the Catholic Church.'<sup>65</sup>

On the final day, Wednesday the 17th, there was a *Celebration for Deceased Benefactors* at 7.00 a.m. with Mass and a sermon by Bishop Galletti, concluding with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Accounts of religious celebrations in the *Rimembranza* were interwoven each day with accounts of graces received and donations made as a result. Whole chapters were also dedicated to reports on extraordinary graces.

There were also academies, gymnastics, music and drama by way of entertainment during the octave. One of these was a performance of the Latin comedy *Fasmatonices*.

At the end of the booklet Don Bosco addressed benefactors to thank them personally. He also included those who had received graces from Mary help of Christians and invited them to express their thanks 'by telling others about the graces obtained by promoting our Mother in some way.'<sup>66</sup> He did not fail to give a serious warning about keeping any promises made: 'Prayers, mortifications, confessions, communions, and works of charity.' '*Displicet*, the Holy Spirit says, *displicet enim Deo infidelis et stulta promissio*; God is displeased with the foolish and unfaithful promise. It has often been the case that failure to keep promises hinders fulfilment of the desired grace and sometimes the favour already obtained is then revoked.' He mentioned the case of two couples who, having obtained the grace of an heir, forgot to carry out what they had obliged themselves to do: 'God wanted to show how displeased he was with this unfaithful promise. Both children died within the first twelve months.' He also warned of the possible difference between the grace asked for and the grace received; 'It is good to note that God grants graces asked for to varying degrees.'<sup>67</sup>

In his own chronicle of events, Fr Rua records the constant flow of people to the new church even after the opening festivities were over: 'Afterwards there was a considerable flow of people coming to visit the new church and asking Mary Help of Christians for graces. One could say that not a day went by without many letters arriving from people far away recommending themselves to Mary especially through Don Bosco's prayers and those of his boys; and we could also say that not a day went by without receiving other letters of gratitude for graces received. And again a great number of people came for the Forty Hours devotion that was held in mid-July, preached by the seraphic Bishop Galletti of Alba.'<sup>68</sup>

Almost three months after the consecration, Don Bosco sent a circular to benefactors noting the June celebrations and promising to send them the *Rimembranza* pamphlet, presenting the new church which was complete only 'in a material way' 'like a beggar needing to be clothed and fed.' It needed to be furnished and adorned with everything needed for celebrating Masses, teaching

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65 G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità...*, pp. 61-61, OE XXI 63-64.

66 Cf. G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità...*, Chap. XXVII Una parola ai benemeriti Oblatori and Chap. XXVIII A quelli che hanno ottenuto grazie da Maria Ausiliatrice, pp. 92-94 and 95-97, OE XXI 94-96 and 97-99.

67 G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità...*, pp. 95-97, OE XXI 97-99.

68 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 349.

catechism, preaching and the like.<sup>69</sup>

Immediately after the festivities another work was published called *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocate sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians), signed by Don Bosco and compiled by him with items prepared by Giulo Barberis, Giovanni Battista Francesia, Gioacchino Berto and Giuseppe Bongiovanni. There was a brief history of devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the recently constructed church, and a few pages with the ritual prayers for the consecration, and a report of five graces obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians.<sup>70</sup>

There was a much larger item ideally connected with these two and aimed at making known miraculous deeds which followed the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco published this seven years later. It met objection from Archbishop Gastaldi two years after being reprinted: *Maria Ausiliatrice col racconta di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consacrazione della chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino* (Mary Help of Christians with accounts of some graces obtained in the first seven years after the consecration of the Church dedicated to Her in Turin), by Father John Bosco.<sup>71</sup>

There was an interesting Preface to a supplementary work which came out in proximity to the re-publication of the work. He speaks in it of the growing number of people coming to the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, drawing one particular prediction from this: this flow of people having recourse to Mary as *Auxilium Christianorum* is increasing daily among the faithful and gives us cause to say that the time will come when every good Christian will boast of professing devotion to Mary Help of Christians along with devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>72</sup> Don Bosco would then pass this identification onto the Salesian Cooperators: the time will come when being a good Christian will be equivalent to be a Salesian Cooperator.

#### 4. An attractive centre of prayer, graces and donations

'Once the solemnity and octave of the consecration of the new church was over' he wrote, 'the news was given to the Supreme Pontiff as an outstanding benefactor, enclosing some commemorative medals with the letter.' The Pope replied by letter on 23 September, establishing a link between the solemn rites in Turin and the protection of Mary Help of Christians on the Church under attack by the impious: 'We are of the opinion that this has not occurred without divine approval, meaning that while the impious have renewed their terrible war against the Catholic Church our heavenly Patroness has been celebrated with new honours under the title HELP OF CHRISTIANS. Under her protection, we can trust that protected by Divine Providence we will be freed from the evils surrounding us and will triumph unscathed over our enemies.'<sup>73</sup>

Don Bosco's impact on devotion to Mary Help of Christians and his ability to spread it has already been noted. The origins of the devotion were linked with the Spoleto event but Don Bosco's part in it developed differently. As happened at Spoleto, Don Bosco publicised graces indicated by the faithful and in Turin too the Sanctuary became a goal of pilgrimage and a place

69 Circular, September 7, 1868, Em II 565.

70 *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Raccolte dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco. Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1868, 184 pp., "Lecture Cattoliche" a. XXVI, no. 11 and 12, OE XX 192-376.

71 Turin, tip. e libr. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1875, 320 p., "Lecture Cattoliche" a. XXIII, no. 5, OE XXVI 304-624. reprinted in 1877; cf. Chap. 25, § 7.

72 G. BOSCO, *La nuvoletta del Carmelo ossia la divozione a Maria Ausiliatrice premiata di nuove grazie...* S. Pier d'Arena, tip. e libr. di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli 1877, p. 5, OE XXVIII 453.

73 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Rimembranza di una solennità...*, pp. 7-11, OE XXI 9-13.

where grateful members of the faithful could display their *ex-voto* plaques. The month of May was celebrated with renewed solemnity there and the novena and feast of the Help of Christians saw an increase in the number of devotees coming from all sides. But beyond all of that, the Church of Mary Help of Christians was gradually becoming a centre of the world-wide dissemination of the devotion under this name, especially from 1875 onward when it was the setting for farewell ceremonies for Salesians, then from 1877 also the daughters of Mary Help of Christians departing for the missions. Lorenzo's huge painting became known all around the world, providing a sense of security, strength and victory in battles for the Faith.<sup>74</sup>

The Sanctuary, finally, continued to be a centre of graces which Don Bosco spoke and wrote about in letters from June 1869 to December 1872 and in the years that followed. After God's name, the name of Mary is the most frequent in these letters, at the heart of his usual mixture of requests, exhortations charity, sometimes in an apparent 'give and it will be given to you' combination, but elevated to the realm of faith and conformity with God's will. 'Mary is powerful and rich and will certainly not allow herself to be beaten in generosity by those devoted to her' he wrote to a young cleric who had passed on a donation from a 'pious individual.'<sup>75</sup>

It is obvious that the Virgin Mary appears in these letters as the Mediatrix of graces temporal and spiritual; sometimes explicitly associated with her Son as she was also invited to her Son in letters Don Bosco wrote requesting monies and thanking people, and in the final paragraph; 'This is the question I put to you out of love for the Lord and in the name of Mary Help of Christians.'<sup>76</sup> There are about a hundred of these letters surviving from these years, in which Don Bosco assured his benefactors of his own prayers, the prayers of the Salesian and their boys, ordinary and extraordinary prayers at special solemnities either in the church or at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, inviting his correspondents to join them.<sup>77</sup>

But he insisted that it was essential not to forget their promises. He reminded Emma Brancadoro from Fermo of this. He was happy to hear she had delivered the child she had so much wanted. The Countess, of course, would not need to be reminded to be generously prepared to help him meet a very heavy debt.<sup>78</sup> The next letter in fact began with the words expressing his great pleasure: 'I praise God who has granted your wealth and a very great grace: detachment from wealth.' 'Your sacrifice is generous and it is precisely these deprivations which deserve God's special graces.'<sup>79</sup> 'God has already granted many graces to those who promise a donation for the continued work on the church here dedicated to Mary Help of Christians' he assured one benefactor<sup>80</sup> 'By adding works to faith [alms, donations] we are sure to be heard.' 'May the Blessed Virgin give you a worthy reward' he told another.<sup>81</sup>

Don Bosco suggested certainty, 'unless the grace is in fact contrary to Heaven's will' and sometimes he spoke of 'hope alone, but whoever hopes in God is never disappointed.'<sup>82</sup> While thanking Duke Tommaso Gallarati Scotti for his considerable donation of 200 lire [763 euro], he assured him of daily prayers 'at the altar of Mary Help of Christians' that the Lord would generously reward' him including an abundant harvest of [silk] cocoons, while hoping for a tenth of this! But

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74 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II...*, pp. 170-175

75 To Cleric B. Giuganino, 2 January 1869, Em III 36.

76 To Cav. E. Ferrero Lamarmora, 4 August, Em III 119.

77 Cf. Em III 101, 105, 106, 109, 110, 116, 120, 121, 127, 133, 136, 137, 143, 147, 156, 163, 173, 192, 194, 196, 199, 206, 209, 212, 226, 231, 233, 252, 260, 265-266, 271, 272, 273, 274, 276, 277, 284, 289, 294, 317, 327, 328, 329, 330, 333, 336, 338, 346, 348, 356, 357, 359, 365, 376, 378, 386, 388, 389, 394, 399, 402, 403, 409, 414-415, 435, 436 445, 451, 457, 458, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 470, 475, 496.

78 To Countess E. Brancadero, 14 November, Em III 385-386.

79 To Countess E. Brancadero, 2 December, Em III 388.

80 To Mrs R. Grecco, 14 April, Em III 71.

81 To Mrs. M. Cataldi Spinola, 5 July Em III 109.

82 To Mrs. C. Gambaro Cataldi, 5 July, Em III 110.

Don Bosco also said that he was 'resigned' to a different result: 'If God in His immense kindness should decide to change the land into diamonds and instead of temporal things grant spiritual blessings, in this case too I would bless the Lord's holy hand.'<sup>83</sup> In a later letter in gratitude for a very generous offer of 800 lire [3,053 euro], he assured the Duke of prayers for several intentions: 'for some spiritual graces' the Duke felt he was 'in need of' so that 'God's mercy 'might bless his 'family' and 'everyone' might grow 'in the holy fear of God.' Hoping 'in the same goodness of the Lord' he concluded by wishing 'that the produce of your fields will be saved from divine scourge in the future and that hail storms would no longer ruin crops that might preferably be called an income for the poor than Your Excellency's income.'<sup>84</sup>

To determine Don Bosco's mentality, perhaps it helps to note that the hundredfold which the Synoptic Gospels speak of seems to be something he took rather literally, beyond any eschatological interpretation by Matthew, and sometimes also the uncertain interpretation referring to the present by Mark and Luke.<sup>85</sup> He would often use expressions with benefactors such as 'May God grant you all a hundredfold for the charity you have given me;' 'May God grant you as much as you are doing for these poor boys, then, the Blessed Virgin for her part will repay you all;'<sup>86</sup> 'there being the promise of a hundredfold in this life;'<sup>87</sup> 'I will see that your work brings a hundredfold *coram Deo et coram hominibus*;<sup>88</sup> 'May God grant you the hundredfold promised in the Gospel; a hundredfold of spiritual and temporal blessings.'<sup>89</sup> 'Generous acts' 'certainly cannot be overlooked by God the Saviour in the Gospel even in this present life.'<sup>90</sup>

The reward for donations, however, was seen mainly in terms of the higher gifts: 'May the Lord who is rich in grace bless you and grant you steady health, long years of happy life with the precious gift of persevering in doing good.'<sup>91</sup> 'I thank you' he wrote to a noblewoman in Milan 'and I pray that God will grant you a hundredfold especially in peace of heart, an abundance of graces, perseverance in doing good, and glory in heaven.'<sup>92</sup>

## **5. The Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians (Mary Help of Christians Association today)**

A born organiser, Don Bosco did not leave veneration of Mary as Help of Christians to spontaneous devotion alone. He gave it stability through an Association that took its name from her. Immediate witnesses saw in this institution one of the initiatives dearest to him and the one that had the greatest impact after the two Religious Congregations and the Cooperators Association.<sup>93</sup>

Don Bosco himself outlined its origins in the brief work he called the *Associazione de' Divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice canonicamente eretta nella chiesa a Lei dedicate in Torino con ragguaglio storico su questo titolo* (Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians canonically erected in

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83 Letter of 10 May 1869, Em III 88.

84 To Duke T. Gallarati Scotti, 24 June, Em III 100-101.

85 Cf. Mt 19: 29; Mk 10: 30; Lk 18: 30.

86 To Mother M. Galeffi, 20 February, and 25 March, Em III 56 and 67.

87 To Mother E. Babin, 21 September, Em III 136.

88 To Countess C. Callori, 15 May, Em III 208.

89 To Baron Fr Ricci des Ferres, 23 June, Em III 221.

90 To Countess E. Brancadoro, 2 December, Em III 388.

91 To Mrs G. De Camilli, 1 March Em III 404.

92 Letter of 24 May, Em III 435.

93 Cf. Testimonies of Fr Giochino Berto and Bishop John Cagliero at the canonical process of beatification and canonisation: S. C. SS. Rituum, *Positio super Introd. Causae, Summarium* (Romae 1907), p. 384s and 412.

the church dedicated to her in Turin, with historical information on this title) by Father John Bosco.<sup>94</sup> Following his presentation *To the Reader*, a few brief chapters recall the history of the word '*Ausiliatrice*' (Helper) from the Bible to the Battle of Lepanto (1571), to the liberation of Vienna in 1683 and finally to the institution of the feast by Pius VII in 1814.<sup>95</sup>

Some brief pages were dedicated to *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians in Munich and Turin* and the spiritual favours granted by Pius IX to the Sanctuary in Turin.<sup>96</sup> Then followed documents relating to canonical approval of the Association. The first was in April 1869, Don Bosco's *Petition* to the Archbishop of Turin 'for canonical approval of the Association.' He asked him 'to take the pious project into kind consideration' and examine its statutes, and with his customary boundless availability to 'add, subtract, change' what he thought was appropriate 'with any sentences you decide are most appropriate for promoting the glories of the august Queen of heaven and the good of souls.'<sup>97</sup>

Archbishop's Riccardi's approval on 18 April was kind and generous and in keeping with the Brief of 16 March with which Pius IX had granted the new association a wide range of indulgences valid for ten years.<sup>98</sup>

The last part of the booklet contained the text of the statute, a lengthy series of prayers and devotional practices, indicating the indulgences attached to them; a brief catechesis *On Indulgences* in general and the decree of 22 May 1868, with which Pius IX granted a plenary indulgence to everyone who 'religiously' visited 'the Church in Turin dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin Mary under the title of Mary Help of Christians on the titular feast of that church or on one of the nine days leading up to it.'<sup>99</sup>

As was his custom when presenting important documents, Don Bosco attributed the origin of the Association to 'repeated demands' from 'everywhere and from people of all ages and circumstances during and after the construction and consecration of the church. He was thinking of members 'united in the same spirit of prayer and devotion who have honoured the great Mother of the Saviour invoked under the beautiful title "Help of Christians".'<sup>100</sup>

In this case too, Don Bosco was quick to draw up statutes, and while they were no masterpiece of doctrinal and legal comprehensiveness, they stood out for their immediacy and practicality. Again we find the strict connection he usually kept between devotion to Our Lady and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament (the Eucharist). The contents were divided into three chapters, the first without a heading: purpose and means, spiritual advantages, admittance. Enrolment was open to everyone, with no special conditions (Admittance, art. 1-3).<sup>101</sup>

The following aims were proposed to members: zeal in increasing piety, spirituality, worship; 'promoting the glories of the divine Mother of the Saviour' (art.1); 'spreading devotion to the Blessed Virgin and veneration of the Blessed Sacrament' (art. 2); acting 'in word through advice, works and authority, promoting decorum and devotion through novenas, feasts and solemnities throughout the year in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Sacrament' (art. 3); encouraging 'distribution of good books, holy pictures, medals, cards; taking part in processions and encouraging others likewise, in honour of Our Blessed Lady and the Blessed Sacrament; frequent communion, attending mas, accompanying Viaticum' (art. 4); taking 'the greatest care of

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94 Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales 1869, 96 p., OE XXI 339-434.

95 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 3-24, OE XXI 341-362.

96 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 24-31, OE XXI 362-369.

97 To Archbishop Riccardi di Netro, Em III 74.

98 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 32-47, OE XXI 370-385.

99 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 48-95, OE XXI 386-433.

100 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., p. 3, OE XXI 341.

101 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 54-55, OE XXI 392-393.

oneself and regarding others' 'dependent on us to prevent blasphemy and any kind of language contrary to religion, and as far as it is within our power, to remove any obstacle which might prevent people from keeping Sundays and holy days of obligation holy' (art.5).

The means were focused on an intense life of personal piety: 'going to confession or communion every fortnight or once a month and attending daily Mass so long as the obligation of one's state allow this' (art. 6); brief prayers were suggested for the simple faithful for morning and evenings, and priests were asked to include an intention in their Mass for all members of the Pious Association. 'These prayers will serve as a bond uniting all members in one heart and soul as they render due honour to Jesus hidden in the Eucharist and to his august Mother, and participate in all the works of piety carried out by each member' (art.7)<sup>102</sup> The eight articles under the heading Spiritual advantages also saw abundantly to the spiritual growth of members in a 'communion of all their good works.'<sup>103</sup>

Don Bosco succeeded in having the Association made an Arch-confraternity so it could spread further. This gave it the faculty of aggregating other like groups to itself, either already existing ones or others yet to be established. Pius IX granted this in his brief *Sodalitia Fidelium* on 5 April 1870, limiting the faculty of aggregation, however, to the Archdiocese of Turin. By a later Brief *Expositum Nobis* on 2 March 1877, this faculty was extended to all dioceses in Piedmont. After Don Bosco's death, Leo XIII, first with his Brief *Admotae Nobis preces* on 25 June 1889, granted the faculty of aggregation to all similar associations 'established or to be established in any church or public oratory belonging to the Salesian Society wherever they may be found, then with the Brief *Cum Multa* on 19 January 1894, he conferred on the Rector Major of the Salesians and his successors 'in perpetuo' the faculty of being able to 'validly and licitly erect other associations by this name anywhere there are houses and churches of the Congregation. These associations may then be aggregated to the aforementioned Archconfraternity.' Two years later, in the Brief *Sodalitas* on 25 February 1896, he granted the Rector Major and his successors the faculty of 'aggregating other associations with the same aim and approach in whatever church or diocese they are canonically erected to the same Archconfraternity which exists in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.' Finally the Sacred Congregation of Religious, by rescript on 31 July 1913, granted the privilege whereby the Rector Major could canonically erect ADMA in houses belonging to the FMA Institute and aggregate them to the Primary Association in Turin.<sup>104</sup>

## 6. Feast day for the people on 24 May at Valdocco

Devotion to Mary Help of Christians found strong resonance among the boys at the Valdocco Oratory too. Other than the solemn celebration on her feast on 24 May in other colleges and oratories, the celebration at Valdocco was extra-special. They would join in with the crowds of pilgrims in a grand popular celebration, even though, as the years went by, the superiors responsible for discipline believed it necessary to gradually reduce areas of movement and freedom. This was the price to be paid for the growth of collegialisation of the Oratory and the prevention that went with it.

Instructive in this regard is the material offered in the already cited work by J. M. Prellezso, *Valdocco nell' ottocento tra reale e ideale* which reveals interesting features of life at the Oratory as it emerges from meetings of superiors and educational staff. Almost every year they referred to the problem of the novena and feast day of Mary Help of Christians which needed to be prepared for

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102 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 48-50, OE XXI 386-388

103 G. BOSCO, *Associazione de' divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 50-53, OE XXI 388-391.

104 Cf. A. STICKLER, *L'Associazione dei Divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in. *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 301-304.



or critically examined so as to eliminate abuses or introduce improvements for the coming year. The minutes of these meetings highlighted provisions made, cautions, progress which demonstrated the careful attention and presence of Don Bosco – more a moral than a physical presence, but he never exempted himself from his responsibility as ‘Rector’ and was regularly informed by Fr Rua of the decisions made, reserving for himself the right of the final word on how they would be carried out.

At the Chapter session on 24 April 1869, in preparation for the first solemn celebration of Mary Help of Christians after the church’s consecration, they decided to celebrate Mary’s month with a more solemn ceremony at 7.30 in the evening. Don Bosco approved this and saw that the traditional spiritual reading would be replaced by a short sermon.<sup>105</sup> At other sessions in May they spoke of the novena and decided on all the people responsible for preparing what was needed for each day and how it would be managed: welcoming guests, the buffet, stage for theatrical performances, fireworks, a sack race, gymnastics display.<sup>106</sup>

On 25 May the minutes tell us: “We went over the feast day and found it went off very well and to everyone’s satisfaction. There were just a few observations that might help us as a norm for other similar celebrations.’ It was decided to switch the celebration for the month of May from 23 April to 24 May and to change some games for the feast; ‘put a priest or cleric in charge of discipline among the musicians, singers and instrumentalists,’ and check the sale of wine and see that there is a more orderly distribution of beer; mark out some areas reserved for boarders in a better way, and the areas available for visitors.<sup>107</sup>

Similar problems were dealt with at the meeting on 18 May 1873. They decided on who was responsible for various services ‘in church, at recreation, the fair, buffet, refectories etc.,’ took up the problem of ‘separate’ areas for boys and the people, and established clearer barriers; for the same ‘preventive’ need, the ‘absolute ban’ on the boys going to the buffet for visitors was renewed.<sup>108</sup> Again in 1873 there was a reference to the following list of problems recorded elsewhere: ‘Feast of Mary Help of Christians. Place to sleep, daily food, provisions, Tickets for meals [internal, for the boys]. One person to see to discipline among musicians, singers and instrumentalists. What to do over those days with boys from the houses? Where to put the boys in church? Recommendation that they don’t eat too much. A priest or cleric to attend the fair.’<sup>109</sup>

Distribution of personnel and notices for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians’ were the subject of discussions and decisions also in proximity to 24 May in 1875.<sup>110</sup> The minutes of Chapter meetings on 19, 20, 21 May were detailed. They headed in the direction of increased control over the boys kept in separate courtyards ‘from visitors’ by a ‘fence’ and set up ‘a buffet exclusively for the boys.’ Then followed a long list of tasks and responsibilities for each person – in the church and the choir lofts; taking visitors to breakfast; assistants for musicians in church, and study; assistants at the fair which would have 8 long trestle tables with people to look after each one; those in charge of the two buffets, one for visitors and the other for boarders; a cafe in the Prefect’s area for important visitors with four individuals to serve them; kitchens and refectories for visitors, clerics, musicians, other special services.<sup>111</sup>

The number of people needed to manage things done, serve, increased each year. The list of things to be done and people to do them for 1876, drawn up over many meetings in May, offered a

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105 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 155.

106 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, pp. 155-156.

107 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, pp. 177-178.

108 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 184.

109 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, pp. 199-200.

110 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 155.

111 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, pp. 202-206.

good insight into the numbers attending the celebration which more and more people were coming to: 6,000 'notices' to be sent out, all kinds of services; helpers needed for the 'sacristy prefect'; someone needed to register Masses, donations subscriptions; assistants were needed for the choirs; 'someone to be with visiting priests to take them to meals'; 'collectors' at the central doors and side doors, at least six central and four side people changing every two hours; 'assistants at the fair,' two 'superintendents, Rossi (for the stores) and Barale (for the bookshop)' with around fourteen helpers chosen 'from among the most trustworthy of the academic and trade students;' assistants and helpers at meals for visitors, for the clerics' table, solemn lunch in the library, lunch for the musicians; six or seven helpers for the visitors' buffet and similarly for the boarders; people to set up lighting at the end of each day.<sup>112</sup> On the 22nd, again dealing with the same feast day, Chapter members also planned the use of the churchyard in front of the entrance where ten or twelve tables would be set up to sell various items 'and see that it didn't turn into a circus.'<sup>113</sup>

At following meetings they took into consideration the religious side in particular, for the festivities. At the meeting in 1877 they praised the piety of the trade boys since many more of them than the students went to communion during the novena. Regarding celebrations on the 24th: 'Rossini's Mass was sung. It was well appreciated by people who knew this sort of thing and the two fugues in particular were applauded'. At Vespers, the hymns *Saepe dum Christi* [Battle of Lepanto], *Tantum ergo*, written by Fr Cagliero, were sung.' All went well. Collection in church was around 1,000 lire [3,155 euro]. Many visitors from distant places. 45 guests between those from our colleges and other visitors accommodated in the house. During the novena Don Bosco had a good number of people to bless in the sacristy each morning. The sacristy was full on the morning of the 24th and 25th.' On the 25th there was the traditional 'memorial service for deceased members of the Arch-confraternity. Although a weekday, all the faithful came to Mass, as they would on Sundays, perhaps even more.'<sup>114</sup>

May 1878 recalled for posterity the 'huge number of people' who attended both the novena and the feast day. At the Pontifical Mass at 10.00 a.m. the Bishop of Novara, Bishop Eula, presided and 'the Mass in 6 parts by Fr Cagliero, known as the Mass of St Cecilia, was sung: around 200 between boys and adults. Vespers too were celebrated by the same bishop. After Vespers the antiphon *Sancta Maria* in three choirs was sung though this year they were not separated but all together in the choir loft.' 'With all of this and the church packed with people, the ceremony was impressive.' An interesting note follows highlighting for the first time hoe devotion to Mary Help of Christians had spread out from Turin; 'During the vigil this year we began to see the number from outside [Turin]. Whole pilgrimages came from Lombardy and Novara to do their own devotions.'<sup>115</sup>

Beginning with 1879 two conferences were given to Salesian Cooperators in Turin close to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. Only 40 came to the first of these on 20 May but 200 female cooperators turned up for theirs on the 23rd. On the 24th 'the weather was terrible, pouring rain all day, nevertheless the church was always full of people.'<sup>116</sup>

The simple remark on the solemnity in 1886 was: 'See description for the feast day for previous years; none of them surpassed the good result achieved this year.'<sup>117</sup>

This era of Mary Help of Christians continued through devotion which included prayers of intercession and entrustment, and uninterrupted thanksgiving. Actual and classic documentation of this can be found in the countless *ex-voto* plaques and silver hearts offered. Unfortunately, but for

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112 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 115-118.

113 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 214-215.

114 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 55-56.

115 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 66.

116 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 79.

117 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 93.

fifteen or so of these, they were destroyed during extensions to the church carried out over 1935-38.<sup>118</sup> But a further testimony of great ecclesial significance was what Don Bosco gave the Virgin Help of Christians when he put an initiative under her motherly protection in 1875, one that was very dear to him: the *Work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the clerical state*.<sup>119</sup>

## 7. Popular religious sentiment and liturgical piety

Accepting the definition of the 19th Century as a '*gnadenloses Jahrhundert*' a century full of material energy but poor in spirituality, Benedictine Burkhard Neunheuser writes: 'The Church can also find itself in this, a Church trying to find its way in currents worthy of admiration though in the final analysis ones that do not lead to truly resolute results. In France there is the wonderful work of men like De Maistre, Chateaubriand, Lammenais, Montalembert, Lacordaire, Ozanam etc.; in England, Oxford [Movement], Newman; in Germany Görres, Tübingen with J. A. Möhler; in Italy, the Popes, Manzoni, Rosmini, the Roman School, Don Bosco and other saints of Turin etc. It is in the context of these tendencies that the general situation of Christian piety must be reviewed. There is great holiness, many efforts were made. All this, however, is focused rather on the increase of many 'devotions' and, as a consequence, they are partial views of the mystery of salvation, and a somewhat 'passive' liturgical situation.'<sup>120</sup>

From what we have up till now, and with particular reference to the real and symbolic summit achieved by the feats celebrated within and around the Church of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco's relationship with the 'liturgical restoration' of his day was more complex. We certainly do not see him as a formal part of the Italian liturgical movement in the 19th Century, or involved in learned contributions to sacred music. But this man whose formation belonged to the *ancien régime*, intended to be a *contemporary* for the people and poor and abandoned boys, adapting himself as much as possible to their mentality and sensibilities in word and deed, speech and writing. And since he firmly believed that religion was the ultimate foundation of any educational system, he felt that it became an effective factor in growth and salvation on condition that it was not separate from their lived experience. Therefore, in his own way he did everything he could so that private and public displays of Catholic piety, be they liturgical or devotional, entered into the sensitivities, hearts and spirit of individuals and groups in various ways: no separation then, but participation, and the greater involvement of mind, emotions, and practical involvement too.

Frequent confession, frequent communion, daily Mass are the pillars supporting an educational building.' Here was Don Bosco's basis. A clear corollary flowed from it: 'Never annoy, or oblige young people to go to the sacraments but make it easy for them to gain profit from them. So at retreats, triduums, novenas, in preaching and catechism classes, highlight the beauty, greatness, holiness of the Religion which offers such easy means, such useful means for civil society, for peace of heart, salvation of one's soul as the sacraments are. In this way the boys are spontaneously involved in these practices of piety and come to them willingly.'<sup>121</sup>

The sacred liturgy, made up of ceremonies, hymns, music, was woven in with the liturgy of work and leisure: 'Give them plenty of opportunity to run, jump, and make as much noise as they want. Gymnastics, music, recitals, theatre, and walks are all effective ways of obtaining discipline and

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118 Cf, Essay by L. BORELLO, *Gli ex-voto per il santuario dell'Ausiliatrice in Torino* "Studi Piemontesi" 22 (1993) no. 1, March, pp. 119-125.

119 Cf. Chap. 20, § 2.

120 B. NEUNHEUSER, *Storia della liturgia attraverso le epoche culturali*. Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche 1983, pp. 131-132.

121 *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in *Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare. Scopo del medesimo esposto dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco con appendice sul sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1877, pp. 54, 56, OE XXVIII 432, 434

they help with morality and health.<sup>1122</sup>

It was an all-embracing phenomenon celebrated within a community where the pupils once more found family which they had lost or perhaps never had or had been alienated from. This seems evident in really notable ways, though not exclusively so, in the main feasts in the Salesian version of the liturgical cycle: The Immaculate Conception, Christmas, St Francis de Sales, Lent, St Joseph, Holy Week, Easter, Mary Help of Christians, Pentecost, St Aloysius Gonzaga, Don Bosco's name day on the feast of St John the Baptist whom he had adopted as patron, Sts Peter and Paul, and the Assumption.<sup>123</sup>

Already in 1846, Marchioness Giulia di Barolo thanked Don Bosco for introducing 'hymn singing, plain chant, music, arithmetic, and also the metric system' into her institutes.<sup>124</sup> Piety in its main liturgical expressions – Mass, Vespers, the Office of Our Lady, benediction – and in paraliturgical forms was given great care in the Oratories and colleges Don Bosco was founding. 'In the morning [Sundays, feast days], the *Regolamento per gli esterni* (Regulations for day boys) prescribed, 'the Office of Our Lady will be sung in common except for Hymns, Readings, the *Te Deum* and *Benedictus*, sung according to the rules for Gregorian Chant. On solemn feast days everything will be sung in Gregorian chant. Vespers will be sung in the evening.'<sup>125</sup> 'For major solemnities,' according to the *Regolamento per le case* (Regulations for the houses) 'where possible there will be vocal music in the choir loft; on ordinary feasts there will be Gregorian chant with organ of harmonium.'<sup>126</sup>

It should not be forgotten that during his first sojourn in Rome, 'in a keen desire to promote spiritual canticles and praises in honour of God, the Virgin, the Saints, among Christian people' Don Bosco asked Pius IX for various indulgences (and immediately obtained it by rescript) for whoever sang or freely taught others to sing 'hymns' approved by the ecclesiastical authority, in public or private.<sup>127</sup>

From this and other information it seems that we can correctly call the kinds of piety practised and instilled by Don Bosco 'liturgical.' 'Even though it was coloured by devotional elements it was a piety fundamentally inspired by liturgical celebrations.'<sup>128</sup> Fr Peter Ricaldone found clear proof of Don Bosco's 'liturgical spirit' in the following: his intense Eucharistic piety, setting up the altar boys group (*Piccolo Clero*), the care he took with music and Gregorian chant, his presentation in *the Giovane provveduto* (The companion of Youth) of a *different way of assisting* [taking part rather than just being there] *fruitfully at Holy Mass* and 'worthy approaching' the Sacraments of Penance and Communion,<sup>129</sup> his concern for the decorum of places of worship, his encouragement of

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122 *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, p. 54, OE XXVIII 432.

123 Cf. with some additions, F. DESRAMAUT, *La festa salesiana ai tempi di don Bosco*, in C. SEMERARO (ed), *La festa nell'esperienza giovanile del mondo salesiano*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1988, pp. 79-99.

124 MO (2010) 126-127.

125 *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*, pt. I, Chap. XI, art. 5. Turin, tip. Salesiana 1877, p. 22, OE XXIX 52; cf. also pt. II, Chap. VI (Pratiche religiose), p. 36, OE XXIX 66

126 *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, pt. I, Chap. III, art. 14. Turin, tip. Salesiana 1877, p. 27, OE XXIX 123.

127 Cf. Petition, 7 April, Em I 344; rescript in G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 187-188, OE X 481-482.

128 Cf. A. CUVA, *La pietà liturgica di don Bosco*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988) 51-74 (Citation from p.71) Id., *La formazione liturgica dei salesiani di don Bosco dalle origini fino al 1959*. Rassegna documentaria, RSS 16 (1997) 393-412.; for Don Bosco's time, pp.394-397; along the same lines, with different interesting notations, F. RAINOLDI, *Sentieri della musica sacra. Dall'Ottocento al Concilio Vaticano II. Documentazione su ideologie e prassi*. Rome, Edizioni Liturgiche 1996, pp. 64-245. He also recalls Fr Rua's circular on 1 November 1890, in which the successor of Don Bosco wrote of the Church's Chant' and in particular of 'Gregorian Chant' as practised and encouraged by the Founder (cf. *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*. Turin, tip. S.A.I.D. Buona Stampa 1910, pp. 50-52).

129 G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto...*, 1847, pp. 84-92, OE II 264-272 e 93-103, OE II 273-283.

awareness and the dignified performance of ceremonies, studying how to make festive celebrations splendid, attractive and edifying.<sup>130</sup>

To achieve this aim, he and his collaborators also made a constant effort to foster choral music, establishing youth choirs who received specific good training and so were able to produce quality music. Right from the outset at the Oratory, room was given to a special *music class* which very soon became part of the *night school*. We should also recall his flourishing publishing efforts in this sector.

In conclusion, it seems plausible to maintain that Don Bosco, though not having theoretical notions or having reflected on matters in any elaborate fashion, gave a notable contribution to smoothing the way for the reformation of sacred music in Italy in the 19th Century.<sup>131</sup>

## 8. An ordination bordering on disobedience

The happy completion of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, the abundant flourishing of Marian spirituality that flowed from it, then the joy of receiving approval for his Religious Society were all disturbed toward the end of 1869 by a serious incident with Archbishop Riccardi de Netro.

Despite not having yet made his profession, Deacon Giuseppe Cagliari (1847-74) who came to the Oratory in 1859, asked the Archbishop if he could be ordained. Obviously he was asked if he should be regarded as a diocesan or as a member of the Salesian Society. Cagliari declared his option in a letter to the Archbishop – as a Salesian,<sup>132</sup> and professed his vows on 12 November. The following day he was appointed [?] to the house at Mirabello and ordained on the 14th at Casale by Bishop Pietro Ferrè. In a letter to Don Bosco, Archbishop Riccardi said that it was to his 'greatest surprise' that he had found out about the ordination that had taken place, and stated that it was illicit and, in fact, unjustifiable. Cagliari's Superior should have addressed the dimissorial letters to him, since he was in the diocese and due to hold ordinations in the same month, November. He issued a warning that Don Bosco, Cagliari and the Bishop of Casale had incurred canonical penalties pronounced by Clement VIII and Benedict XIV.<sup>133</sup> The infraction was indeed a serious one.

Don Bosco sought to justify himself, adding some drama in a way that was offensive, objectively speaking. The Archbishop dug in over the matter, especially as Don Bosco went further in exploring subtle legal interpretations. However, he ended up asking for the Archbishop's 'kind forgiveness,' assuring him that in the future he would faithfully abide by the Archbishop's 'will.' This was naively put, since in reality it meant carrying out objective canonical prescriptions over and above any 'will.'<sup>134</sup> The same day, 28 November, Archbishop Riccardi left for Rome to take part in the Ecumenical Council. From Rome he wrote a letter that was firm and serious in tone, stating that it was not enough to ask forgiveness from him: he needed to appeal 'to the Holy See for the appropriate absolution' for his three errors, i.e. from the censures laid down in Canon Law. He very correctly pointed out: 'I do not deny that you could send Cagliari to Mirabello, but only with the letters requested by the Sacred Canons and not before having recourse to my Curia for dispensation from age.' Sending him to Mirabello to be ordained the following day outside his own

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130 Cf. P. RICALDONE, *La visita canonica alle case salesiane*, "Atti del Capitolo Superiore", 20 (1939), no. 94, July-August, p. 157; ID., *La pietà: vita di pietà, l'Eucaristia, il Sacro Cuore*. Colle Don Bosco (Asti), Libreria Dottrina Cristiana 1955, pp. 409-410. J.SCHEPPENS dedicates penetrating reflections to the *Giovane provveduto* as 'a fair effort to help participation, in the climate of the times, in the Church's spiritual and liturgical life, // "Giovane provveduto" di don Bosco: manuale di religiosità popolare?', in C. SEMERARO (ed), *Religiosità popolare a misura dei giovani*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1987, pp. 138-152.

131 Cf. J. GREGUR, *Don Bosco und das "Movimento Ceciliano"*, RSS 16 (1997) 265-306.

132 Letter of 6 November, 1889, found in MB IX 751

133 Letter of Archbishop, 26 November 1869. MB IX 752-753.

134 Letter of 28 November, Em III 159-161.

archdiocese, was a contravention of Church law. 'It made a fool of the bishop' he said 'taking a cleric *in fraudem legis* who had been subject to him up until a few days earlier, even more so since ordinations in the diocese were only a week later. It is also true that he was sent *in fraudem legis* because immediately after the ordination he returned to Turin.' To avoid any possible wrong ideas and fears that might be held against him at Valdocco, he said, he had the greatest respect for the freedom of choice of those who wished to belong to the Salesian Society. 'I do not know what your students have to fear' he asked, 'since any of my requests were addressed to them only to find out who wanted to remain subject to the Archbishop or not, without having said a word which might suggest I wanted to take away from the Congregation those who wanted to be part of it.' He continued nobly; 'Furthermore, I repeat that I am not writing only to complain, but so that you can have something to present for the absolution from censures incurred. As for me, I am very happy to forgive everything and I hope that in the future there will be no new unfortunate occasions.'<sup>135</sup> He had done his duty in conscience as a responsible and correct prelate. It was up to others to do their part.

Don Bosco asked Canon Celestino Fissore for guidance.<sup>136</sup> We do not know the upshot of the painful incident, brought up again in 1881 by Archbishop Gastaldi in the context of the Roman process relating to Fr Bonetti's suspension.<sup>137</sup>

Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi di Netro took part in the Council but his health was precarious. Aligned with those contrary to the notion of papal infallibility, he found support from bishops like Losana, Moreno, Renaldi, Montixi, Sola (Nice). He left Rome in the first half of April. He died in Turin on 16 November 1870.

## **9. In Rome, breathing in its ecumenical spirit and thinking of his boys**

Don Bosco, too, headed for Rome and, in some respects, toward the Council. Fortified by pontifical approval of the Congregation and his growing familiarity with the Roman civil and ecclesiastical world which he had gained from his long stays in January-March 1867, then in 1869, he thought it useful to be there, clarifying the opportunities *in situ* as they arose.

The Bull *Aeterni Patris*, 29 June 1868, decided that the Council would open on 8 December. Don Bosco had taken into consideration the possibility of participating as the Superior General of a Religious Congregation of pontifical right. With this in mind, he had asked for 'clarification' from the Secretary of the Council, Archbishop Joseph Fessler. 'I would not like to be absent from anything that could bring honour to the Holy See,' he assured him 'nor would I like to say anything in something I should not get mixed up in.'<sup>138</sup> Obviously the reply was negative. Participation was reserved to Superiors of Religious Orders with solemn vows.<sup>139</sup>

Had the response been in the affirmative, the Council would certainly have found in Don Bosco one of the keenest supporters of both the idea of a single small catechism for the whole Church and the definition of infallibility of the Roman Pontiff understood in its most absolute terms. Two of his recent books published in February and August 1869 in the *Letture Cattoliche*, written with the full collaboration of Fr Bonetti, presented a radical view of the primacy of the Magisterium and jurisdiction – 'the highest authority, fullness of power over all the Church' – emerging from his

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<sup>135</sup> Letter of 8 December, found in MB IX 755-756.

<sup>136</sup> Letter of 18 December, Em III 162.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Chap. 28, § 6

<sup>138</sup> Letter of 22 November, Em III 153.

<sup>139</sup> The words of the rescript, following the text of the 22 November letter, are reproduced in the *Attid el Consiglio generale della Società salesiana di san Giovanni Bosco* 66 (1985 )July-September, no. 214 p. 56.

apologetic writings back in the 1850s. In the February booklet he wrote: 'All the jurisdiction of the bishops comes immediately from the Pope along with the faculty of exercising their episcopal ministry.'<sup>140</sup> He is the vice-regent of God on earth for everything concerning the glory of God and the eternal salvation of souls.'<sup>141</sup> In the August edition he similarly resolved historical problems relating to infallibility and traditional objections to it. He assured his objector [a fictional one who easily surrendered]: 'But from progress in science, from the patience of learned people, the truth then was clearly highlighted, and today, whoever asserts the contrary shows he is either ignorant or malicious.' [in bad faith].<sup>142</sup>

As a counterpoint to these catechetical certainties (somewhat exaggerated by Fr Bonetti's verbose style) were Don Bosco's concerns as expressed in his dreams and imagination regarding the precarious historical situation of the Pope as the Sovereign of the Papal States under threat from the determination of Italian politicians to see Rome proclaimed capital of the Kingdom of Italy, and by France's wavering efforts and willingness to offer protection. Ideas, fears, and anxieties combined in his apocalyptic and multi-thematic dream on 5 January 1870, on the destruction of Paris, but also on the Pope and the Council. They had cut off 'the Head of the Hydra of evil.' The dream also included scourges affecting Italy, especially its spiritual and material famine, and Rome, which was destined to pass from its ancient paternal sovereign to a regime of 'terror, fear and desolation.'

These murky predictions, however, were contrasted with the certainty that 'the august Queen of Heaven' was present. 'The Lord's power is in her hands; she disperses her enemies like fog; it is she who clothes the Venerable Old Man once more in his garments of old.' And after 'a violent hurricane, the Great Minister will see his King's bride clothed for the Feast. Across the world a sun will appear brighter than was ever seen from the flames of the Cenacle until today or will be seen until the end of days.'<sup>143</sup>

This 'prophecy' was not 'passed on to the Holy Father on 12 February 1870' as indicated by the title but was probably given to Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi by letter on 29 October 1870. 'The page written here,' Don Bosco explained, sharing its contents 'comes from someone who has displayed supernatural enlightenment on other occasions. I had it with me in Rome this winter. I told the Holy Father some things in passing but I dared not leave the written version behind. Now that in his kindness he has told me to *speak clearly and positively* and *definitely*, I have the courage to pass it on to him.'<sup>144</sup> In 1872, *Civiltà Cattolica*, without indicating the source, included it as part of a commemoration of an apocalyptic tradition focused on impending disasters in the 'Kingdom of France, predestined by God for the defence of Christ's Church' should France turn away from its mission.<sup>145</sup>

Don Bosco left Turin, alone, on 20 January, stopping over in Florence for two days and arriving in Rome on the evening of the 24th. He stayed with Mrs Rosa Mercurelli in the Pedacchia at the foot of the Campidoglio where his friend the Bishop of Fossano, Emiliano Manacorda, was already staying.

One of his final duties was to present and explain the three-yearly report already referred to on the *State of the Pious Salesian Society* to Cardinal Quaglia, the Prefect of the Congregation of

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140 G. BOSCO, *La Chiesa Cattolica e la sua gerarchia*. Turino, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, pp. 73 and 77, OE XXI 257 and 261.

141 G. BOSCO, *La Chiesa cattolica e la sua gerarchia*, p. 80, OE XXI 264.

142 G. BOSCO, *I concili generali e la Chiesa cattolica. Conversazioni tra un parroco e un giovane parochiano*. Turin tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, p. 61, OE XXII 61. Cf. Conversations II and IV on the superiority of the Pope over the Council and on Vat Council I, OE XXII 39-79, 133-166.

143 C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 20-24.

144 Em III 267-268.

145 "La Civiltà Cattolica", fasc. 525, April 1872, pp. 299-300.

Bishops and Regulars.<sup>146</sup> We presume he paid a courtesy visit to his Archbishop, Riccardi di Netro, and Bishop Gastaldi, who was staying at the Vatican. By letter on 27 January, Fr Rua was given the task of sending him ‘100 copies of his booklet *Il curato d’Ars* (The Curé of Ars) and 100 of another called *Dell’autorità del Romano Pontefice* (On the authority of the Roman Pontiff).’ These two books were published some years earlier in the *Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that what Gastaldi had already written in 1863 on the authority of the Pope, and especially his infallibility<sup>148</sup> was a premise fully in keeping with his many and varied interventions at the Vatican Council.<sup>149</sup> No further work of persuasion on Don Bosco’s part was needed. Rather, he was being supportive of his episcopal friend with such a strong temperament, encouraging him to pursue the path he had chosen.<sup>150</sup> On 23 January, Gastaldi had been extremely clear with Cardinal Filippo De Angelis, Council President, telling him of his firm conviction and his availability in defending both the dogma and its definition in the Council Hall. However, the bishop differentiated himself from his priest friend in asking that the Council document establish more calibrated fixed relationships between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Gastaldi proposed to Cardinal De Angelis that the definition of the Pope’s infallibility avoid use of the terms ‘*seorsim, separatim ab episcopis, personaliter, inconsultis episcopis*’ and adopt the essential terminology ‘*ex cathedra, supra universam ecclesiam, anathema*’ for whoever refused assent ‘*vel sola mente*.’ He also expressed the wish that in the schema on the Church regarding bishops, it be explicitly stated that ‘they are judges of matters in the faith together with the Supreme Pontiff’ (or some similar formula), not only in the Ecumenical Council but also when they are in their own dioceses.<sup>151</sup>

In expectation of a papal audience, Don Bosco asked for additional indulgences and an extension of others already granted for the faithful who were members of the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians: these were almost totally accepted.<sup>152</sup>

He concluded a letter to Fr Rua on 27 January thus: ‘I would like the books for the Pope and music for Cardinals Antonelli and Berardi.’<sup>153</sup> A few days later he outlined the spiritual situation of the boys at the Oratory and told Fr Rua: “I have received the books for the Holy Father in good condition. I hope to be able to present them to him very soon.”<sup>154</sup> They were collections of the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) and the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* (Library of Italian Youth) which he presented as a gift to the Pope during the morning audience on 8 February. He made enthusiastic reference to this in his letters the same day to Frs Bonetti and Rua, the following day to Fr Francesia, and on 17 February to Fr Lemoyne: ‘Just now I have come away from the

146 Cf. text of the Conference Don Bosco gave on March 7 at the Oratory, in the appendix to the article by F. DESRAMAUT, *Le récit de l’audience pontificale du 12 février 1870 dans les Memorie biografiche de don Bosco*, RSS 6 (1987) 101-104.

147 *Cenni storici sulla vita del Sacerdote Giovanni Maria Vianney Parroco d’Ars* raccolti dal Sac. Can. Lorenzo Gastaldi, Teologo Collegiato. Turin, tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1863, “Letture Cattoliche”, fasc. 3 and 4, May and June 1863, 192 pp.; *Sull’autorità del Romano Pontefice*. Istruzione catechistica del sacerdote Lorenzo Gastaldi Teologo Collegiato e Canonico Onor. della SS. Trinità, ibid. 1864, “Letture Cattoliche”, fasc. 11 and 12. January and February 1864, 184 pp.

148 L. GASTALDI, *Sull’autorità del Sommo Pontefice...*, pp. 61-93. But already in an open letter from Rugby (England) on October 2, 1858, following Rosmini’s teaching, he considered papal infallibility ‘the next subject of a dogmatic definition’: (cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883...*, Vol. I, pp. 129-130).

149 Cf. Gastaldi’s communication with Cardinal De Angelis, President of the Council, on 23 Jan., 1870, and proposal to Cardinal Patrizi on 19 February in J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* LI 670-671, 676-677.; address on 30 May and subsequent clarificatory interventions on 11 June and 2 July in J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, LII 327-337, 607-617, 1034-1038.

150 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883...*, vol. I, pp. 197-198

151 In J. D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, LI 670 On the whole question of Don Bosco’s relationship with Vatican I, cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco et l’Église au temps de Vatican I*, in “Salesianum” 60 (1998) 505-520

152 Cf. letter to Pius IX, prior to 4 February, Em III 172.

153 Em III 168.

154 Em III 170.



Holy Father, who received me with more kindness than I can describe,' he wrote to Fr Bonetti.<sup>155</sup> To Fr Rua: 'Today I was with the Holy Father. I could not have had a better welcome. I cannot write about everything, but share with members of our own Congregation that we have serious reasons for rejoicing in the Lord. But keep praying; I will tell you everything on my return,'<sup>156</sup> To Fr Francesca (who had been received in audience by the Holy Father during the stay in Rome in 1867) he had more to say: 'Yesterday I was with the Holy Father and you had a good share in this. A very warm welcome. He showed keen satisfaction at the gift of the collection of the *Lett. Catt.* And the *Biblioteca* ... Then there were many serious matters concerning the good of our Congregation that I hesitate to entrust to paper.' He added greetings from people in Rome known to Francesca from 1867: Bishop Manacorda, Countess Isabella Calderari, the Vitelleschis, Mother Galeffi.<sup>157</sup>

On 12 February he repeated the information he had given Fr Rua on 8 February, hoping he had received the letter written hastily on the day of the first audience. Then he said: 'I now add that I had an audience with the Holy Father, who welcomed me with indescribable loving-kindness. He was pleased, talked and laughed and really praised the publication and collections of *Letture Cattoliche* and the *Biblioteca della gioventù Italiana* and encouraged us to continue. There are more things but it is not appropriate to entrust them to paper. I will only say that we have many reasons to be content.' Further on he added: 'Matters concerning our Congregation are going very well. Keep praying.'<sup>158</sup>

In each of the letters there were detailed items of information on indulgences and graces dispensed to Salesians and benefactors by the Pope. He communicated these by circular.<sup>159</sup> He wrote to some people individually. On 8 February he wrote to Marchioness Gondi and Fr Metti. On the 9<sup>th</sup> to Countess C. Callori.<sup>160</sup>

It is natural that at the audience on 8 February, discussion should also lead to the Council and the topic of infallibility, also because in the *Letture Cattoliche* collection he gave the Pope there were booklets relating to the Church, Catholic hierarchy, papal authority and infallibility. The Pope, Don Bosco told the Salesians at a conference on 7 March, 'then put to me some of the main objections in church history to papal infallibility.' Don Bosco had his answers ready, so much so that the Pope asked him: 'Would it not be possible to start a course in Church history which is run in the spirit you have shown in answering these objections which have wormed their way through history?'<sup>161</sup> Time had run out, but matters to talk about had not been exhausted and so the Pope awaited Don Bosco 'at another audience in the evening.' There was no lack of news and concessions. The Pope 'spoke much' of the Salesian Society, informing Don Bosco that in some Council sessions the Bishop of Parma (Capuchin Felice Cantimorri, who died on 28 June on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday) had pointed to it as a modern and flourishing Congregation, and Bishop Ghilardi had been asked to comment on it. The Pope then granted the spiritual favours requested and offered a possible place for the Salesians to set up in Rome, the Church of S. Giovanni della Pigna and its attached building.<sup>162</sup>

Don Bosco indicated his pleasure at this suggestion to the Pope at a semi-public audience on 15 February, after he had visited the small complex. He wrote to Fr Rua on the 16<sup>th</sup>: 'Yesterday I was at an audience with the Holy Father and he gave us a house, but he finds it small and would like to give us a bigger one.' Oddly, at the beginning of the letter he was of another opinion: 'The

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155 To Fr. G. Bonetti, 8 February, Em III 173.

156 To Fr. M. Rua, 8 February, Em III 175.

157 To Fr. G.B. Francesca, 9 February, Em III 178-179.

158 Em III 168.

159 Circular, s. d., Em III 176-177.

160 Em III 174-175 and 177-178.

161 F. DESRAMAUT, *Le récit de l'audience pontificale...*, RSS 6 (1987) 102

162 F. DESRAMAUT, *Le récit de l'audience pontificale...*, RSS 6 (1987) 102-103.

opening of the house with a small but beautiful church could be finalised for next autumn.<sup>163</sup> The following day, he wrote about it as a *fait accompli* to Fr Bonetti: 'In the future, when you come to Rome you will have at your disposal a house with a stupendous little church; The rest in person. Silence and be cheerful.' He wrote similarly to Fr Lemoyne again on the 17th: 'There's a small house for you when you come to Rome and a stupendous little church for celebrating Mass.'<sup>164</sup>

Fr Lozeno Picatti (1814–88), Prior at Malanthero in Canavese, 16 kilometres from Turin, has offered testimony on the semi-public audience held on the 15th. Thanks to Don Bosco he was able to take part in it. 'He stopped for a longer time with Don Bosco' he noted 'and showed everyone – they were all marvelling at it – how dear Don Bosco was to him.' He also stressed 'the respect and devotion Don Bosco enjoyed in Rome from people at every level: from the Pope to 'citizens of every kind and condition.' He also provided information about Don Bosco's sudden departure from the city 'to visit a sick person some fifteen miles out from Rome.'<sup>165</sup>

Don Bosco referred once more to having met 'various bishops who had heard tell' of the Salesian Society 'at the Council' and were asking for a work to be opened in their diocese. The reply could only be in the negative, 'not for want of material means' he noted 'but for lack of personnel.'<sup>166</sup>

It was the final time he was to visit Rome as capital of the Papal States. On 18 July, the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternis*, on the Church, was promulgated by Vatican Council I, proclaiming papal infallibility. On 19 July, France declared war on Prussia. On 5 August, French troops in the Papal States were repatriated. Between 30 August and 2 September, the French army was defeated at Sedan. On 20 September, Italian troops entered Rome, marking the end of the Papal States. By the Apostolic letter *Postquam Dei Munere* on 20 October, Pius IX approved suspension of the Council.

In 1871, Pius IX rejected the 'law of Guarantees' passed by the Italian State on 13 May, making official protest through his Encyclical *Ubi Nos Arcano Dei* on 15 May 1871, and declaring himself to be a 'prisoner in the Vatican.'<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile, on 29 January, France agreed to an armistice with Prussia. Then between 18 March and 28 May came the bloody days of the *Comune*, put down by the Government of Adolphe Thiers, a forerunner of the Third Republic declared on 30 January 1875.<sup>168</sup> On 16 June, Don Bosco wrote to the Superior General of the Faithful Companions, Mother Eudisia Babin, who had sent a conspicuous donation of 600 francs [2,189 euro], asking for a report on what had led to the preservation of the Paris Institute's houses amid the raging revolution. It was preserved 'as a monument to the glories of Mary.' He told her: 'I believe it would be good to note that as soon as the disaster in France began, and evil threatened Paris, our boys began to pray especially at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, and they kept praying until danger had ceased, when they sang a solemn *Te Deum* in thanksgiving.'<sup>169</sup>

Don Bosco was substantially on the margins of this highly dramatic moment for the Church and Europe. Even during his Roman sojourn, his very limited involvement in what was going on in the Council had left him almost completely free to dedicate himself to his primary task: concern for young people in various educative communities, and for the Religious Congregation looking after them, without neglecting a number of financial problems connected with their support. By far the best part of the letter he wrote to Rectors of the Colleges was taken up with the mission to the

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163 Em III 183-184.

164 Em III 185-186.

165 Letter to a friend, 16 February, MB IX 822.

166 F. DESRAMAUT, *Le récit de l'audience pontificale...*, RSS 6 (1987) 104.

167 Cf. Chap. 1, § 10.

168 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9.

169 Em III 337-338.

young. In all of them he spoke of his return date, right up to the last day in January, and the feast of St Francis de Sales to be celebrated on the Sunday following it, and the meeting of Rectors at the Oratory, for the usual meetings or 'conferences.' He said that he was certain the Rectors would ensure that the spiritual joys of these sacred celebrations were combined with other cheerful ceremonies which would certainly be pleasing to the boys: 'a great celebration,'<sup>170</sup> 'a festive dinner,'<sup>171</sup> something at table to set them talking.<sup>172</sup> In fact, he explained, 'I want them all healthy, energetic, happy, and the infirmary closed, the refectory doors wide open.'<sup>173</sup>

He was firmly convinced that for himself and his Salesians this was the proper path to follow for the good of the Church and the regeneration of society: the education of youth with a probable growing yearning to reach out to a more extensive world, preferably into missionary areas looming on the horizon.

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170 To Fr. M. Rua, beginning of February, Em III 170.

171 To Fr. G. Bonetti, 8 February, Em III 173.

172 To Fr. G .B. Francesia, 9 February, Em III 179.

173 To Fr. G. Bonetti, 8 February, Em III 173.

## Chapter 17

### STIMULI FOR PEDAGOGICAL, SPIRITUAL, CULTURAL GROWTH (1861–1871)

- 1861 September: *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele* (LC);
- 1863 October: first group of ideas which became the *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori*;
- 1864 July–August: *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco* (LC);
- 1866 January: *La casa della fortuna* (The House of Fortune), a playscript text by Don Bosco;
- The beginning of the *Selecta ex latinis scriptoribus ad usum scholarum* series;
- December: *Valentino o la vocazione impedita* (LC);
- 1868 February: *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano* (LC);
- 1869 January: beginning of the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana*;
- 20 September: Cav. Federico Oreglia leaves the Oratory;
- 1871 January: the *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori* are distributed to leaders of communities;
- 1875 *Selecta ex christianis latinis scriptoribus*

Beginning with prison visits during his years at the *Convitto*, visits during which Don Bosco had encountered boys who had fallen into the depths of physical and spiritual misfortune, there was an uninterrupted evolutionary process going on in his active interested in 'poor and abandoned' young people.<sup>1</sup> This was accompanied by a similar continuity in the development of his institutions as a response to their growing needs. The 'catechism classes' and wandering oratory had been frequented by a motley assortment of young people, among them a number uprooted from their places of origin and lost in the metropolis. But these were quickly succeeded by structured oratories, across the city in three locations. Finally, in the 1860s, the target group was gradually extended, and saw the advent of more formalised institutions, boarding schools [colleges] and hostels.

The Oratory at Valdocco was the prototype, ending up by focusing on a number of formats where young people could feel at home: the festive or weekend oratory for day boys, Sunday and night schools, the hospice and boarding house for students or working boys who attended private

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1 Cf. Chap. 10, § 1.

schools or workplaces in the city each day for their apprenticeships, and the boardings schools [colleges] for students which were also to some extent a junior seminary, and a seminary properly speaking, for clerics on the way to an ecclesiastical career or religious life. The new youth institutions which arose between 1863 and 1870 copied one or other of these: the college and junior seminary at Mirabello Monferrato, and from 1870 at Borgo S. Martino, and a normal academic (boarding) school at Lanzo and Cherasco which also took in some day boys.

It would be obvious, given this varied world of young people hosted by different kinds of institutions, that Don Bosco's original style of educational 'system', eminently oratory-focused, would need to adapt and find different expressions while preserving identical essential features. Founded essentially on 'being among the young' in 'family-style communities', it necessarily had to respond to the variety of 'faces' they presented according to family origins, cultural levels, psychological and social sensitivities, vocational and work-oriented interests, formation needs.

Although he was not directly responsible for the individual communities, which were entrusted to their respective rectors/directors united in the same spirit but different in temperament and mentality, Don Bosco was, of course, well-informed about these differences and had to bear them in mind, to some extent, in his educational and executive decisions. Furthermore, his social work and animating activity was taking place primarily in the heterogeneous complex at Valdocco, so it was mainly there that he was developing his thinking on youth education, providing greater consistency to, systematising his thinking, and eventually bringing it all together into an organic pedagogical whole which he would call the 'preventive system' in 1877. So he was well aware that any practical translation of the system needed to take account of diversity.

## 1. Don Bosco – a specialist in the education of youth

Those who evaluated his system only on the basis of one or other 'translation', were not fully objective. One thought he could identify the version at Giaveno with a mysterious 'Jesuitical' system. Rather more political was the judgement of the anticlerical *Gazzetta del popolo* in 1860, the most popular newspaper in the Savoy capital. On 31 May 1860, after the police search of the Oratory five days earlier, it pronounced: 'The Administration has gone ahead with a search at the well-known nest of holier-than-thou types in Valdocco where Don Bosco is the director. They say that nothing compromising was found. Wasn't the *Storia d'Italia* by this modern-day Fr Loriquet enough to convince the Administration just how dangerous such a tutor can be?'<sup>2</sup>

But the chronicle writers (and to some extent the author of the Life of Dominic Savio) also had a rather one-sided view. At the beginning of the 1860s, rather than oratory life as such their preference was the internal aspects of The Oratory and mostly with particular attention to its version of the junior seminary. This was the perspective from which they, and others with them, even up to our own times, interpreted and recounted events. The basic concepts regarded all the young residents, but in fact, the expectations, means and measures were aimed more at the student population, with particular attention paid to the ones who aspired to the clergy at the end of their course. There is significant data in this regard indicating those who went from the Oratory to the diocesan seminary in the early 1860s and 70s, even leaving aside those who joined other seminaries outside Turin, or Religious Orders and Congregations. Between 1861 and 1872, the ratio of young men from the Oratory and the total number of aspirants to the clergy at the Turin seminary was approximately as follows: 48 out of 85, 42 out of 71, 44 out of 72, 23 out of 48, 34 out of 58, 26 out of 60, 18 out of 45, 4 out of 51, 14 out of 32, 16 out of 48, 11 out of 42, 10 out

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<sup>2</sup> More irreverent was the nasty criticism referred to by F. MOTTO, *La "Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico": un beffardo commento de "Il Cittadino" di Asti del 1860*, RSS 8 (1989) 369-377.

of 32.<sup>3</sup>

On the contrary, in wider circles, Don Bosco's image was a far richer one over the 1850s and 60s. He did not impress most people primarily and principally as a formator of seminarians – although this dimensions was generally appreciated – but as an exceptional educator of the young.

We can find confirmation of this in the letters of recommendation during 1863 when he was seeking the *decretum laudis* (1864) and in the many more of these in 1868–1869 in support of procedures set in motion for pontifical approval of the Salesian society. As we have seen, certain bishops combined unconditional praise of Don Bosco as an educator of the young, with some reservations regarding his formation of the clergy,<sup>4</sup> but most praised him for both, the former being the more prevalent case. In general, they did so because they were aware of it, and on the basis of direct contact with the Oratory and with other colleagues. Of the five recommendations in 1863–1864, especially positive was the one from Carmelite Clemente Manzini, Bishop of Cuneo. He was joined, on 27 November 1863, by Capuchin Modesto Contratto, the Bishop of Acqui. He wrote a wholly favourable judgement on the 'admirable' Congregation established by the 'excellent priest D. John Bosco, whose principal aim is to educate and instruct poor young people in a Christian way and take into appropriate shelters boys who were lost and abandoned.' He stressed that 'it is regulated by a body of rules or statutes drawn up by the pious founder, showing heavenly wisdom and prudence, and truly adapted to its purpose.'<sup>5</sup> A more personal letter of recommendation came from the Bishop of Susa, Giovanni Antonio Odone. He wrote about the "revered Father John Bosco who has stood out for many years, especially for taking loving, tireless care of poor and immature youth,' and of the Society he established 'with a view to instructing youngsters ignorant of their Catholic religion, drawing them away from vice, attracting them to piety and keeping them on the path of Christian virtue, educating them and, finally, setting them on the path to a job and honest employment and even, if they have a divine call, to the ranks of the clergy.' He considered the Society's Constitutions fully suited to the purpose they had in mind, and noted that there is 'general admiration and satisfaction among people who have heartfelt affection for the Church and for what he does on behalf of youth.' The praise, he said, 'was even more justified because 'many youngsters from our diocese, students and apprentices, have already enjoyed, and others are currently enjoying, the beneficial concern of this excellent society.'<sup>6 7</sup>

There were more recommendations of a more wide-ranging kind in 1868–1869, with the intervention of cardinals and archbishops. Card. Antonio Antonucci, Archbishop of Ancona, was a fine witness. He had been Apostolic Nuncio to Turin up until 1850. He looked upon the rapid growth and expansion of the *Festive oratories* in Turin with admiration and respect, as they were fostered with extraordinary diligence and devotion by Don Bosco. He loved to make frequent visits to them, regarding them as a real ark of salvation. He did not, ultimately, overlook the fact that the Salesian Institute had taken in a number of adolescents orphaned by the recent cholera epidemic that had struck Ancona.

For his part, the Bishop of Asti emphasised that a number of teenagers from his diocese in the past, followed by others currently, had been educated and instructed in trades by the remarkable Don Bosco, and set on the path to joining the ranks of the clergy.<sup>8</sup>

3 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, vol. II *Arcivescovo di Torino*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1988, pp. 391-392; 316 is the calculation for 1855-1880 by A. NICOLA, *Seminario e seminaristi nella Torino dell'Ottocento. Assetto economico ed estrazione sociale del clero*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 2001, p. 35, 38.

4 Cf. Chap. 15, § 7.

5 Cf. text of Bishop C. Manzini on 27 November 1863 in MB VII 565; agreement by Bishop M. Contratto, Bishop of Acqui, on 18 December 1863, MB VII 887.

6 Letter of 2 and 6 March 1868, MB IX 93-94.

7 Letters of 18 December 1863 and 18 January 1864, MB 887-888.

8 Letters from early March.

From his diocese too – said the Bishop of Novara, Filippo Gentile – many boys had been taken in at the Oratory by ‘Dr Bosco’, and he had been like a father to them, ‘getting them to grow in knowledge and virtue and other skills that shape the worthy priest or citizen who does not withdraw from his profession as a Christian, however tough the times may be.’<sup>9</sup>

On the same wavelength, the Bishop of Alessandria, Giacomo Antonio Colli, who had both direct and assumed information, was able to attest to the vast range of charitable initiatives brought into being by Don Bosco, saying that what stood out was the education of the young in knowledge and religion, and of others in trades, as well as his care for the formation of those doing their preparation to join the ranks of the clergy.<sup>10</sup>

Particularly interesting are the recommendations from two intransigent prelates who had had opportunities for significant contact with Don Bosco and his work in Turin. He first was Cardinal Filippo De Angelis, Archbishop of Fermo, bordering Turin, for a good six years, from 1860-1866. ‘Thanks to the testimony of very many clergy and lay people,’ he said, he had been able to see how the Salesian Society ‘established and led by the outstanding Fr John Bosco – under his vigilant discipline, corresponded to the public benefit of religious and civil society through his aim of gathering poor and abandoned boys, and instructing them in religion and in the mechanical and liberal trades.’ Before leaving Turin in 1866 he had, furthermore, visited the Oratory, happy to see ‘the great number of boys educated there, removed from idleness and wretchedness of by prolific charity of the worthy priest who is their leader and supreme director.’ He saw his ‘keen and tireless zeal in helping them grow in piety and intelligence, as also in trades suited to their circumstances, and finally, the uncommon benefit for these boys and the hopes they must have for their future.’<sup>11</sup>

Pietro Rota, Bishop of Guastalla, had profound and moving memories of the hospitality extended him by the Oratory in the six months he was confined to Turin. He stated that he ‘was welcomed gladly by the outstanding Father John Bosco, already well-known throughout Italy.’ There he was able to come to know the original plan for the Congregation he intended to establish and its specific aim of educating the young. He had had the time to admire, in those working at the college in Turin, their ‘piety, self-denial, austere lifestyle, tireless work, obedience to an special love for their superior, their special skill in lovingly encouraging the boys in piety and study, and the boys’ obedience, manner of piety and the excellent benefit they drew from their studies.’ Finally, he did not neglect to point to the special care given to nurturing ecclesiastical vocations.<sup>12</sup> He made a particularly nice gesture in saying that he would let Bishop Eugenio Galletti from Alba, a familiar visitor to Valdocco, know ‘*quae vidimus et audivimus*.’ Galletti, who had very often been able to share in the life of the great institute, described its many activities and the boys involved in them, with their ‘superior and father’ Don Bosco as their point of reference.<sup>13</sup>

This is undoubtedly a biased sample, but the esteem Don Bosco and his Oratory enjoyed in growing measure among clergy and laity, including ‘Government Ministers’,<sup>14</sup> makes us feel certain that many others would have backed the bishops’ recommendations.

## **2. Gradual construction of an educational ‘system’: ends and means**

The growing ‘collegialisation’ of the mother institution at Valdocco, and the advent of other similar educational structures in the 1850s and 60s, led Don Bosco to give a degree of conceptual organisation to guidelines for his way of educating. The few ‘rules’ referring to a single institution,

9 Letter of 12 April 1868, MB IX 143-144.

10 Letter of 17 April 1868, MB IX 146-147.

11 Letter of 26 April 1868, MB IX 149.

12 Letter of 29 April 1868, MB IX 151-152.

13 Letter of 20 October 1868, MB IX 418-419.

14 Cf. Chap. 13, § 4.

the Oratory, (festive oratory and house attached), were no longer an adequate tool for providing motivation and appropriate guidance for his young Salesian educators and their rectors. He did this in the 1860s through some narrative documents which had their more distant origins in the brief *La forza dell'educazione* (The power of a good upbringing) and the more recent and real *Life of Dominic savio*. Other more educationally-focused items followed. Together, and drawing on lived experience, they summed up a multiplicity of ideas and practices that ensured a 'theoretical', theological, catechetical and anthropological consistency for the system, and explained its methodological and operative terms.

The theoretical framework was clear, and common to both young people and adults. They were the 'coordinates' we have spoken of with regard to lay adults.<sup>15</sup> The formative processes were measured against the proximate and more remote ends to be achieved, even though in practical terms they needed to reckon with extremely differentiated youthful circumstances. It was clear what Don Bosco's definitive and ultimate aim was: 'salvation', both earthly and eternal.<sup>16</sup> This most important of his aims was essentially the life of grace, to be recovered, should individuals fall into sin, and in every case to be preserved and to grow in. Primarily, therefore, it was a war against sin in its various forms, one relevant form being the sexual area, which could become a source of unhappiness in life and, more tragically, a prelude to the feared eternal damnation.<sup>17</sup>

This concern for grace could be developed to the highest degree, accepted by boys best prepared for it with a strong inclination to holiness similar and close to that of the canonical saints. So the spiritual journey of Magone and Besucco, as for that of any willing youngster, began with a general confession aimed at a 'root operation' on past confessions, which might have been invalid or sacrilegious, or at least a checkup to see that there was a good state of 'health' on which to realistically and effectively build.

The high point was the exercise of charity, shown by zeal for the salvation of souls, beginning with one's companions, through mutual assistance and good manners. This was the dominant calling for everyone since, as Don Bosco taught, 'The Lord has placed us in the world for others.'<sup>18</sup> At the base or beginning of this was regular personal moral effort carried out under the banner of the fear of God, fed by the constant thought of the Last Things – *memorare novissima tua et in aeternum non peccabis*. In more immediate terms, it was the thought of death, which could occur at any moment, and of judgement with no appeal. More positively, it was the thought of paradise, the longed-for goal of any young Christian who did not want life to be reduced simply to 'fun'.

The serious nature of one's duties, however, instead of reducing room for cheerfulness and joviality, increased it; the result of a conscience free from sin, in harmony with God, self and with 'the superiors'.

The life of grace covered an entire program of life summed up in the three fold motto of cheerfulness, study, piety.<sup>19</sup> This summary was recorded by John Bonetti in May 1862, as one of Don Bosco's habitual ways of speaking: 'D. Bosco usually tells the boys at the Oratory that he wants three things from them. He often repeats what St Philip Neri told his boys: when it is time for it, run, jump, enjoy yourselves as much as you want, but for God's sake do not sin.'<sup>20</sup>

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15 Cf. Chap. 11, § 7.2.

16 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica II...*, pp. 187-204 (*Felicità e salvezza, istanze umane e cristiane*); ID., *Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo*, in *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione nella Chiesa oggi*, Rome, 21-27 January 1973, pp. 158-162 (*Religiosità e spiritualità di D. Bosco*).

17 Cf. J. GUERRA, *El concepto de pecado a la luz de Don Bosco. Análisis de las principales biografías juveniles escritas por el Santo*. Rome, LAS 1987.

18 G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, pp. 48-49.

19 Cf. Chap. 11, § 2.

20 G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, p. 77.



Putting these ideas into practice, however, required constant recourse to the 'means' of grace in practical terms: the Word of God, prayer, sacraments. Highlighted as part of such a difficult journey was the essential activity of accompaniment by educators, and among them, the most important for the problems of the spirit, a regular confessor or often spiritual director, who by the nature of things and in principle was the rector of the educative community.<sup>21</sup>

The classic biographies written by Don Bosco – lives of Dominic Savio, already covered,<sup>22</sup> Michale Magone and Francis Besucco, represented the model, and, to some extent, the reality of the student section of Valdocco's moral and spiritual world. One of the chroniclers provided this information: 'D. Bosco said: there are some boys who are superior in piety to Dominic Savio.'<sup>23</sup>

Boys of the medium to high spiritual level were offered models in the 'Lives' of Magone and Besucco, purified, naturally, of internal elements found at the Oratory to make them more suitable for the world beyond it. Maybe with an eye to the future, the strong idealisation involved could have determined which of these biographies would be employed for elaborating Don Bosco's so-called 'spiritual pedagogy', finding its highest expression in analysis of the Life of Dominic Savio.<sup>24</sup> It should not be forgotten, though, that beyond paying considerable tribute to the hagiographical style of the day, this literature, in reality, reflected the particular situation of the two main characters, both aspirants to the priesthood.

Already a few months after coming to the Oratory, Magone wanted to make 'a vow to become a priest and preserve perpetual chastity.' Don Bosco did not completely disagree, advising him to limit himself 'to a simple promise to embrace the clerical state, so long as there were signs of being called to this at the end of his Latinitas [secondary grammar classes] studies.'<sup>25</sup> Besucco had similar aspirations, and was accepted at the Oratory on the recommendation of the parish priest who hoped 'to make a minister of the Lord our of him,' a worker in his 'vineyard.' Besucco immediately openly declared this to Don Bosco: 'My great desire is to be able to embrace the clerical state.'<sup>26</sup> In regard to these then, meaning these lives as lived and written down, Don Bosco expressed his role as being the spiritual director of candidates to clerical life, hopefully even Salesian life, more than as a priest for the young in general, or boys in a variety of problematic circumstances.<sup>27</sup>

Michael Magone's story seems to end up not being so distant from the image of the average lad, leaving aside the difficult or wayward ones of whom Don Bosco has left no biography or account connected with the real kind. In chapter after chapter, the *Life of Michael Magone* offered the essential stages of what would have had to have been the more common spiritual life of the young: *Difficulties and moral reform* (Chap. 3); *He makes his confession and begins approaching the sacraments* (Chap. 4); *A word to the young [on confession]* (Chap. 5); *His exemplary concern for the practices of piety* (Chap. 6); *Punctuality in duties* (Chap. 7); *His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Chap. 8); *His concern for and practices to preserve the virtue of purity* (Chap. 9); *wonderful traits of charity toward his neighbour* (Chap. 10); *Actions and sayings of Magone's*

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21 The rector of the institute is said to be the ordinary confessor in the youthful and religious community in the *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori* in 1871/1872: cf. F. MOTTO, I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori"..., RSS 3 (1984) 156.

22 Cf. Chap. 10, § 7.

23 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, p. 6.

24 Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *La vita di Besucco Francesco scritta da Don Bosco*, "Salesianum" 10 (1948) 103-113; Id., *Un documento inesplorato. La Vita di Besucco Francesco scritta da Don Bosco e il suo contesto spirituale*, "Salesianum" 10 (1948) 257-287, 641-672; 11 (1949) 122-145, 288-319; Id., *Il "Magone Michele una classica esperienza educativa. Studio*, "Salesianum" 11 (1949) 451-481, 588-614; C. COLLI, *Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco e spirito salesiano. Abbozzo di sintesi*. Rome, LAS 1982.

25 G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 42, OE XIII 196.

26 G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 74, 77, 87, OE XV 316, 319, 329

27 Cf. Chap. 11, § 3.

(Chap. 11); *Preparation for death* (Chap. 13).<sup>28</sup>

The *Life of Francis Besuccio*, who came to the Oratory at the beginning of August 1863, is rather verbose, and much of it is dedicated to his early childhood and upbringing at home and in the mountain parish of Argentera. The few months he spent at the Oratory, the last of his life, were covered by Chapters 16–21, with titles typical of Don Bosco's lexicon: *Lifestyle at the Oratory – First conversation* (Chap. 16); *Cheerfulness* (Chap. 17); *Study and diligence* (Chap. 18); *Confession* (Chap. 19); *Holy Communion* (Chap. 20); *Visit to the Blessed Sacrament* (Chap. 21); *His penances* (Chap. 22); *Particular facts and sayings* (Chap. 23).<sup>29</sup>

### 3. The real youth situation and variety of stimuli for education

If the purpose of cultural and professional formation was to prepare and skill the boys to 'earn their bread by the sweat of their brow,' the moral and religious purpose was to make them ready and suitable for behaving in order to 'earn heaven'. Daily educational activity was aimed at orienting and guiding the boys in this twofold way. It was expressed through constant exhortation, interspersed with prevention, preservation, protection from evil (the worst evil being sin) on the one hand, and on the other, promoting good, benefit from studies, advancing in professional competence, anchoring themselves in virtue, and consolidating, increasing the state of grace.

But in the shift from spelling out ends and ideal programs for concrete educational activity, Don Bosco taught, through example and the guidelines he gave his educators, that we should keep in mind the real world of the young as it is in concrete and diverse circumstances. This emerges clearly from Don Bosco's attitude as an educator toward youngsters at Valdocco, especially in his evening talks or goodnights. Through direct daily experience, he knew that his audience was thoroughly heterogeneous: trade and academic students, among them aspirants to clerical life, and candidates for life as laymen in the world; in the religious and moral sphere, young men of good or ordinary character (all up, the majority of them=, but also a mixture of difficult, indifferent and bad ones, the recalcitrant, lazy, loose-fingered, corrupt, scandalous and incorrigible.

The goodnights given at Valdocco, often recorded in writing, but also a certain number of letters to boys at the Oratory and the colleges at Mirabello and Lanzo, offer valuable material for learning how Don Bosco was not ignorant of the variety of circumstances and ways of dealing with them. His dreams of an educational nature were a characteristic representation of real life. All the different types of boy are found there. His predictions of impending deaths were not made public so much to arouse a yearning for heaven in many 'Dominic Savios', as to instil the salutary fear of damnation in small or greater young sinners. Dreams and predictions point to him as being a concerned and perspicacious reader of consciences in an utterly amazing range of states: the scene of meals spread out over 14 tables in ascending order according to the spiritual levels of the diners, the walk to paradise and those who abandoned him, the ten hills, the flood and the raft, the road to perdition and hell, the monkey strangling a boy or locking his mouth with a padlock – symbols of keeping quiet about a sin in confession – all the different attitudes, spiritual situations and destinies.

'Oh, dear boys, I shudder at the thought. I never believed there could be as many disorderly consciences as there were boys, lying down all covered in sores' was Don Bosco's comment on his dream on Sunday 30 December 1860. Its main characters were Cafasso, Pellico, Cays and, above all, boys called before an authoritative court to present the state of their conscience. 'I assure you I went through terrible days and nights. I praise those who have already thought about

28 G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 16-72, OE XIII 170-226.

29 G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 85-129, OE XV 327-371.

adjusting their conscience, but many others have still not given it a thought; and when saying this, D. Bosco was deeply emotional and shed huge tears.<sup>30</sup> More shocked still were the boys burdened by their guilt, real or induced, having heard what he said, as the chronicler noted in the days that followed: 'Many boys are deep in thought and worried, a few are preparing to make a general confession, many thinking of speaking with D. Bosco, who tells them all very important things about their consciences.' 'The trade boys continue to make a general confession.'

Both the narrator and Don Bosco seem more attentive to the immediate spiritual usefulness of the occasion than to the more hidden psychological effects and the authenticity or lasting nature of the 'conversion'. 'In that dream,' Don Bosco said 'I came to know the state of conscience of all the boys, their current state and, for many of them, also the future ... I gained greater understanding through that dream than I acquired throughout all the time I studied theology.'<sup>31</sup>

The same focus on salvation as the outcome sought in reading consciences and predicting death can be found recorded by Dominic Ruffino over various occasions from 1861-64. 'D. Bosco called a boy to his room, speaking to him thus: "Last night I saw death heading to strike a terrible blow on you, and I immediately ran to stop it, but it turned to me saying: why let someone live who so abuses the Lord's grace?. But then I begged it to leave you and it did."<sup>32</sup> When the community had gathered for their usual evening prayers on 16 June 1864, he revealed worrying situations souls were in: 'This morning you made the exercise for a happy death, and I was happy about that while you were in church, but when you left the church I was no longer so because then I saw some leave with a pig's face, meaning some had not made the exercise for a happy death or had made it badly.'<sup>33</sup>

Predictions of death created some problems, but Don Bosco justified himself. 'So, do you want someone else to die?' was the question he posed on 11 January 1864, two days after Francis Besucco died. 'Now, there is someone who wants to go and finish *Carnevale* in heaven. Some are unhappy that I say these things, so therefore they want me only to say who the individual is so he can prepare himself and rest can remain calm. But no, I would not be doing my duty if I did not say these things. Sometimes I know someone must die but I don't know who it is, while other times I do know who, but it is not appropriate to tell him.'<sup>34</sup> On 4 February, he said once more: 'Once again I should not say it, but I need to do my duty. There are some boys (They are plural in number) who want to go to heaven before Easter.'<sup>35</sup>

The most regular collector of these matters, Lemoyne, records one goodnight which is almost a summary of Don Bosco's thinking about *estote parati* – be prepared, under the symbol of impending death, the grim reaper. 'There are two kinds of death,' he explained 'unexpected and sudden. Unexpected death is when it comes and we are not ready for it; sudden death is when it surprises us but we are ready. Let our death be sudden, but may God preserve us from an unexpected one. My dear boys, if death came along now, would you be prepared? I hope most of you are. Some, unfortunately, are not. They are in mortal sin. If they could only see the ugly mug behind them they would be horrified. I have wanted to warn them for some time and have delayed so far, hoping they would convert, but now I will only wait a few days, then I will warn them. If I

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30 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, pp. 5-6.

31 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, 12 and 15 January 1861, pp. 5-8.

32 D. RUFFINO, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* N° 2 1861, p. 6 (12 January); cf. Also the same chronicle 1861 1862 1863 1864 *Le doti grandi e luminose* (Great and luminous gifts), pp. 7-8 (29 December 1863), 13-14 (9 and 11 January 1864), 15 and 28-29 (4 and 25 February 1864), 53-54 (15 June 1864). There is no less material of the kind in parallel chronicles by John Bonetti and Lemoyne covering the 1864-1865 school year.

33 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*. 1861 1862 1863 1864. *Le doti grandi e luminose*, p. 56.

34 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*. 1861 1862 1863 1864. *Le doti grandi e luminose*, p. 14.

35 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*. 1861 1862 1863 1864. *Le doti grandi e luminose*, p. 15.

wanted to I could point them out one by one, but not in public. Be assured, I will tell each one in private. The devil, my dear boys, is roaming around looking for who he can devour; he comes from behind, taking you by one foot on one occasion, then by the other foot on another, hoping to trip you up, and sometimes he grabs you by both.' Nevertheless, a greater motive for hope lifted their spirits, the presence of a 'beautiful mother, Mary, who takes your hand and supports you so it is impossible for you to fall' he assured them.<sup>36</sup> at a certain point, however, he noticed once more that many were ill at ease and resolved – a resolution he did not keep – to say no more: 'Anyone who had done his duty,' he replied, simplifying matters, would have no reason to be afraid.<sup>37</sup>

The atmosphere of the place, more selective in the student section, was also created by the strong positions taken regarding actions that went well beyond the level of tolerance for a normal community of young people which, as Don Bosco said, should not be taken for a house of correction. Faced with extreme situations, his exhortations could become resolute admonitions, threats to send boys away, expulsions. Indecency, scandal in sexual matters, indications of perversion, repeated theft, lack of application to study by those freely offered the privilege, openly and constantly breaking the disciplinary rules could become intolerable. It is natural that Lemoyne, who disagreed with Montebruno, because he felt he was too liberal in these matters, should record these instances with particular care.<sup>38</sup>

The novena for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was seen as the ideal time for a first skimming off at Valdocco, as Don Bosco used describe it: 'The novenas and triduum are always a sad moment ... the fact is that Our Lady wants the House cleaned up, and in fact, after Christmas almost 20 boys left the House without being sent away.'<sup>39</sup>

The issue of boys leaving the house can also be seen from a number of letters in which Don Bosco speaks of boys being sent 'back home,' even if recommended by friends and benefactors like Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, and Canon De Gaudenzi.<sup>40</sup> He made an exception for the nephew of his great protector, Bishop Ghilardi of Mondovì: 'Before coming here, this young man had contracted certain habits we can call *non expedit*. When he came here he was constantly assisted and could not carry on with this behaviour. Furthermore, some companions of this kind were sent away from the house and he found himself without their support. He then started saying he didn't like this, didn't like that, for one or other reason. At the moment he enjoys good health, but says he feels a little bit sick ... The breathing problem he complains of, if it is true (he doesn't want to be seen by the doctor) I attribute to the above-mentioned habit. I had serious complaints on that score from the assistants, and some of his companions came and complained to me that they had been harassed by him in this regard. Without letting on that I have written to you, if you think you could speak to him about the origin of his physical and moral ills, I would consider it opportune. Of course, we will always do what we can for him.'<sup>41</sup>

It is clear that Don Bosco shared the widespread view which followed on from ancient thinking and was presented from a medical perspective in the 18th century by Dr Simon André Tissot (1728–97) in a book which came out in many Italian editions, including in the 19th century: *L'onanismo ovvero dissertazioni sopra le malattie cagionate dalle polluzioni volontarie* (On the unavoidable illnesses resulting from masturbation). Similar sins 'shortened life,' Don Bosco had

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36 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 2 January 1865, pp. 65-66.

37 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 16 March 1864, p. 118.

38 Cf. G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, from December 1864 to March 1865, pp. 47-48, 55-56, 94-97, 119-122.

39 D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca. 1861 1862 1863*, pp. 53 and 95.

40 Cf. for example, to Can. P. De Gaudenzi, 5 June 1857 and to Baron F. Ricci des Ferres, 5 June 1857 and 3 November 1859, Em I 324 and 385: this was about boys leaving the house secretly by night, or for lack of discipline.

41 Letter of 7 April 1861, Em I 446.

written on the basis of medical testimonies, in his meditation on the 'Sin of dishonesty' in the *Mese di maggio*.<sup>42</sup>

To put a clearer and more effective preventive and protective stamp on the colleges, Don Bosco wrote a circular in April 1868 in which he told the people involved that he had decided to shorten the holidays to just one month, from 15 September to 15 October. He said he had taken this decision after repeated requests from many respectable fathers of families, and after many 'invitations from men experienced in educating youth.'<sup>43</sup>

But this sort of lights and shade (probably exaggerated also by the one-sided attention from the chroniclers) was only one aspect of life at the Oratory and in the colleges. The predominant and habitual side was different: regular work and study, the certainty of living in a protected and serene community, the light touch in expressions of piety; and again, recreation, play, cheerfulness, leisure activities, ritual and occasional celebrations, excursions (the walks) each week, plus the annual outing, *Carnevale*. It was all a sign of positive suggestions for living together as a family, a forerunner of a future fulfilling life: 'Yesterday was 8 January 1865 – *Carnevale* has begun. I, too, would like you to have a happy *Carnevale* ... I want you to add a spiritual one to the bodily one.'<sup>44</sup> It was not just 'Carnival' but cheerfulness that was to be the soul of everything. It was the joy of being in harmony with the loving will of God and with themselves, in diligent fulfilment of duty, and with others, their companions and educators.

This is why, among the salient topics of the goodnights, we find study and ways to make it beneficial, as well as order and discipline, all ways of educating and raising young people. In the more reflective times of the year, especially during retreats in spring, Don Bosco touched on the idea of vocation and ways to identify it. A central issues was who to turn to for advice. Principally, it was one's confessor.<sup>45</sup> Then there was the reminder of the vocation common to everyone – love, charity, the pivot of Don Bosco's educational praxis and proposal.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. 'Distance education' of the young

Don Bosco included similar pedagogical approaches in teaching he entrusted to correspondence with individuals or groups. These were letters he would send to boys in families he was friendly with, and to boarders at the colleges. Whatever their age or circumstance these young people, generally from among the nobility, found themselves offered the same advice and warnings he would give the boys at the college in Valdocco: avoiding bad companions, or reading that might disturb them, attending to their duties, being convinced that 'the greatest treasure is God's grace,' 'the greatest wealth is the holy fear of God';<sup>47</sup> living cheerfully but 'in truth' and with 'a conscience free from sin,' 'avoiding bad friends and making friends with good people.'<sup>48</sup> He also reminded them about remaining steady in faith, approaching 'the sacraments of Confession and Communion,' devotion to Our Lady.<sup>49</sup>

He gave similar advice to nine-year-old who then became the eleven, fourteen, sixteen-year-old Marquis Emanuele Fassati: 'exact obedience' to his parents and superiors, 'being precise in

42 G. BOSCO, *Il mese di maggio*..., pp. 146-147, OE X 440-441.

43 Em II 517-518.

44 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 8 Jan. 1865, p. 67.

45 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca 1864-1865*, 5, 10, 12 Dec. 1864, pp. 38-46

46 G. BONETTI, *Annali II 1861-1862*, pp. 48-49.

47 To the noble nineteen-year-old O. Bosco di Ruffino, 11 August 1859, Em I 381-382; 9 January 1861, Em I 433-434; an eighteen-year-old former Oratory working boy, 29 January 1860 and 15 July 1863, Em I 395 and 590-591.

48 To eighteen-year-old S. Rossetti, 25 July 1860, Em I 415.

49 To young soldier S. Rostagno, 5 September 1860, Em I 422; cf. Also letter of 29 October 1860, Em I 425.

fulfilment of duty,' 'respect all devotional matters,' 'put the confessor's advice into practice,' avoid idleness and friends who were too free and easy; willingly and tenaciously apply himself to study; be vigilant during 'the riskiest but most beautiful time of life' (sixteen).<sup>50</sup>

The 'basics' offered fourteen-year-old Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli from Tortona<sup>51</sup> were the three 'F's: flee idleness, flee certain companions, and frequent the sacraments. Fortnightly or at least monthly confession, and spiritual reading was the advice given twenty-year-old university student Giulio Cesare, son of Count and Countess Federico and Carlotta Callori.<sup>52</sup>

He offered more structured and developed suggestions of the kind to boys collectively in the colleges at the Oratory and at Mirabello and Lanzo. During 1860–64 he sent letters to the boys at the Oratory from where he had gone for retreat at St Ignatius, Lanzo. Rather than suggesting programs to follow, he made reference to problem situations he had noted, writing about them as things he had seen from a distance.<sup>53</sup> 'Don Bosco sees you' might just have been the prompt some boys needed, whether the Rector was there or away. An individual could feel he was constantly 'assisted', or more precisely, supervised, following a literal version of educational prevention. 'I often came to visit the Oratory and found a few good things and a few bad things' he would write. He complained of 'four wolves' roaming among them, snapping at them, and of others wandering freely around hidden parts of the house, and yet others 'going out on Sunday morning, dodging some of the religious ceremonies.' He said he was upset that 'some had gone swimming, avoiding night prayers,' saying: 'Poor boys! How little they think of their souls!' Then he went on: 'I have seen many boys with a snake coiled around them ready to strike at their throats. Some of them were crying, shouting: *Inique egimus*. Others were laughing and singing: *Fecimus hoc, quid accidit nobis?* But meanwhile, their throats were swelling up and they were almost unable to breathe. Then, today, I see the devil causing many calamities through idleness.'

He did not restrict himself to complaining about the wolves' deviousness: 'Perhaps these wild wolves will no longer find themselves at the Oratory' he predicted. 'But if they are still there, I'd like to strip them of the sheepskin they cloak themselves in.'<sup>54</sup>

In 1863, writing from Oropa to the young students, he asked himself: 'Yes, why can't I have my boys here, bring them to Mary's feet, offer them to Her, put them under the power of Her protection and make them all Dominic Savios, other st Aloysiuses?'<sup>55</sup>

From a distance, he also confirmed his knowledge of situations both positive and negative for the boys at the junior seminary at Mirabello, whom he had visited two months earlier after its opening. He concluded with three 'reminders': 'avoid idleness,' 'go to Communion,' 'devotion and frequent recourse to Our Lady.' The second and third of these were the 'two columns' on which both 'poles' of the earth rested. In a postscript referring to some deaths, he reassured them and put them on guard, naming the boy whose death had been foretold but also warning that these things always happened 'in twos'.<sup>56</sup>

There was also a warning letter at the beginning of July 1864, letting them know he would be making a visit, promising again to speak 'in public' of things he knew would please them 'and privately of matters not at all pleasant,' 'a word in the ear to break the horns' of the devil who would

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50 Letter of 8 September 1861, 1 October 1863, 1 June 1866, 14 September 1868, Em I 459-460, 607; Em II 253, 567-568. The young man, probably repressed and depressed, died at twenty-two years of age in May 1874, drowned, perhaps not accidentally, in a lake in Savoy.

51 Letter of 1 June 1866, Em II 252.

52 Letter of 6 September 1867, Em II 426.

53 Letter of 23 July 1861, Em I 452-453.

54 Letter of 21 July 1862, Em I 510-511.

55 Letter of 6 August 1863, Em I 594.

56 Letter of 30 December 1863, Em I 628-630.

like to become master and owner of some boys.' Then he said: 'In the midst of all this, do not worry; I am coming among you as a father and friend and brother. Just give me your heart in my hands for a few moments and we will all be happy ... you will be happy because of the Lord's peace and grace, and I because I will have the greatly desired consolation of seeing you all in friendship with God the Creator.'<sup>57</sup>

He then offered a series of rules for spiritual life and good manners to prepare them to spend the coming holidays happily: by cleaning 'your conscience with the firm resolution to keep it that way until you return.' He asked them to greet their parents, parish priest and any benefactor there might be, in the name of Don Bosco and the other Superiors. He also asked them to keep up their usual 'meditation, Mass, spiritual reading' as at the college, 'along with regular confession and communion.' They were to avoid listening to dirty talk, and imitate St Aloysius, avoid 'bad literature like it was poison for the soul,' and return 'without losing the Lord's grace.' 'Of course,' he concluded 'have a rest, keep cheerful, laugh, sing. Go for walks and do anything else you want to so long as you do not commit sin. Happy holidays, my dear boys, and may you return happy from them.'<sup>58</sup>

He offered an almost identical *strenna* on the final two days of 1868 to the boys at the junior seminary at Mirabello and those at Lanzo, assigning similar tasks to the two rectors, Fr Bonetti and Fr Lemoyne. The *strenna* was: 'For the boys, in word and deed foster frequent communion and devotion to the Blessed Virgin.' He then indicated the topics to be taken up in the coming year when preaching to the boys: '1. Avoid dirty talk and bad literature. 2. Avoid companions who are loose or give bad advice. 3. Avoid idleness and do everything that can contribute to preserving the holy virtue of modesty.'<sup>59</sup>

Similar topics can be found in a letter in February 1870, sent to Fr Rua from Rome. Rua was Vice Rector at the Oratory and, when needed, Don Bosco's spokesman for the boys. 'My thoughts,' it began 'always fly to where my heart is in Jesus Christ: to my dear boys at the Oratory. I want to visit them after each day.' This pointed to his persistent desire for radical prevention and moral therapy, and a demanding spiritual discipline made concrete in a twofold diagnosis of the boys in the house. The first was a decidedly consoling picture: 'A whole group of boys' who went to confession, others who received communion, still 'others who prayed fervently,' 'a good number' who made a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, others who thought 'of D. Bosco, their games, their classmates.' He had seen many good boys, especially a great number 'on whose tongues sat a fragrant rose or a white lily.' But he had also seen, to his great *sorrow*, 'some who had taken on the form of a pig, on whose foreheads was written: *Jumentis insipientibus comparatus est*. And [each] acted according to these inscriptions.' He had also seen 'many of the academic and trade students with a monstrous snake in their mouths which was dribbling filthy saliva and deadly venom' and written on their foreheads was '*corrumpunt bonos mores colloquia prava?*<sup>60</sup>

## 5. An educator and something more besides

Don Bosco was not just a professional educator. In the boys' eyes, without any shadow of a doubt, he was a priest for them all, a 'father, brothers, friend' over and above being a director or rector, administrator or organiser. But he was also seen and admired as a man of a thousand activities involved in an incredible network of social relationships in both the religious and secular world, but always for their material and spiritual good.

57 To the "dear sons at Mirabello", beginning of July 1864, Em II 58-59.

58 To the "dear sons at Mirabello", 26 July 1866, Em II 280-281. He would have given similar "Reminders" in a letter to the boys at Lanzo on 26 July 1867, Em II 407-408.

59 Letter of 30 and 31 December 1868, Em II 616-618.

60 Letter of beginning of February 1870, Em III 169-170.

Depending on the different abilities and responsibilities of his men, Don Bosco set out in the 1860s to form them in such a way that the shift from the spontaneous style of the oratories to the more structured discipline of the colleges did not lead them to be just rectors, or censors, or supervisors. His thinking went especially to the rectors, key players in the disciplinary and educational regime in the communities, therefore effectively the ones who would pass this style on to their staff. Other than living and working together in the field, the [monthly] talk with the Superior was the means laid down by the Constitutions right from the very first draft of article 7 in the chapter on obedience: 'Let everyone have great confidence in the Superior, and let no secret of the heart be kept from him.'<sup>61</sup> We will see further ahead that in the *Confidential Reminders*, he laid down that there be a conference, presumably at least yearly, for teachers, and other helpful meetings for teachers, assistants and dormitory leaders.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.1 Early documents

Don Bosco provided an ideal sketch of the person responsible for the religious educative community, the guide and wise leader of his co-workers, in the letter he sent to the new Rector at Mirabello, Fr Rua, around October, November 1863.<sup>63</sup> It was also unwittingly a self-portrait of the writer, who was responsible for spiritual and material matters at the Oratory and was the intuitive, prudent and loving spiritual guide of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco, as well as the main characters in *Valentino ...* and *Severino ...*. The suggestions of the 'tender father who opens his heart to one of his dearest sons,' Fr Rua, find their centre of gravity in the principle 'study [= make every effort] how to make yourself loved before being feared,' expressed immediately in its corollary 'Let your concerns be entirely directed to the spiritual good, the health and learning of the boys Divine Providence has entrusted to you.' Then followed pointers confirming the features of a completely familial style of governing: attention to the needs of teachers and their moral duties ('Let them avoid particular friendships and partiality among their pupils') to also be extended to the assistants: 'I would tell them all to prevent improper conversations and remove every book, writing, image, picture, *hic scientia est*, anything at all that might put purity, the queen of virtues, at risk.' Another recommendation concerned fatherly presence at recreation: 'Do what you can to move among the boys during all of recreation, and try to offer some kindly word in the ear of the sort you know, as you gradually discover the need. This is the great secret that will make you master of the boys' hearts.' In terms of the boys' growth in responsible freedom, note the interesting comment on a characteristic feature of the sodalities: 'Start up the Immaculate Conception society, but you will only be its promoter, not its director; consider such a thing to be the boys' work.'<sup>64</sup>

Toward the end of the 1860s, the idea grew in Don Bosco of making the original letter he had written to Fr Rua a more extended item aimed at the rectors of existing houses and other houses whose foundation he was working on or was imminent: Alassio, Lanzo Torinese, Varazze, Valsalice.<sup>65</sup> Two sections were added referring to the religious community, while the earlier sections were altered by adding some content. It was called *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori* (Confidential reminders for rectors). Two of them, Frs Lemoyne and Bonetti, received their copy between January and the beginning of February 1871.<sup>66</sup>

There were three new guidelines in the section *With dormitory leaders and assistant*: 'See that they have time and convenience to study, as far as this is compatible with their duties.' 'The most important part of their duties lies in being punctually at the place where the boys are gathering for sleep, school, work, recreation etc.' 'Let it be of common concern to discover pupils who are of risk

61 *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 96; cf. Chap. 14, § 4.1.

62 Cf. F. MOTTO, *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di don Bosco*, RSS 3 (1984) 147-148; Em I 615.

63 Cf. Chap. 13, § 3.1.

64 Em I 613-616.

65 Cf. Chap. 18, § 1

66 Letter of 31 January and 1 February 1871, Em III 297-302.



[to others], and when they are discovered, instil the fact that they be made known to you.'

The section *With the coadjutors and* [omitted, 1863] *service personnel* was expanded, highlighting one of the tasks of Salesian lay members: 'Let a coadjutor of known probity be put in charge of service personnel to keep an eye on their work and their moral behaviour, to see there is no theft, and that they do not engage in improper conversation. Let them be constantly alert in preventing anyone from taking on outside jobs, matters regarding relatives, or other outsiders whoever they may be.'

The section *With the young pupils* [students, 1863] was more than doubled. The statement confirming already established practice was new, though fundamental: 'In our houses, the Rector is the ordinary confessor, so see that you willingly hear each one's confession, but give them the freedom to confess to others if they want to.'<sup>67</sup>

Relationships of service, respect, friendship, courtesy and tact with clergy and laity were requested in the section *With outsiders*. However, work within the educative community had to have absolute preference. 'Never take on tasks or another office that means absence from the place or could impede the tasks entrusted to each one.' Spelt out in terms of more attentive religious discipline were: observance of poverty, avoiding self-interest and vainglory, promotion of common life among Salesian educators. The latter items made up the first of the two final section, *With those in the Society and Commanding*. Given that giving orders felt less in keeping with a family style of community, it was toned down in various ways: 'Never command things beyond the strength of your subordinates,' never give 'repugnant commands,' 'never command anything that might be injurious to health,' 'when commanding,' always use 'charitable, mild words and manner,' and plenty of tact 'in cases where you need to command things which are difficult or repugnant to your subordinates.' 'Be economic in everything' since 'we must love poverty and the companion of poverty' but absolutely 'in such a way that those who are sick lack nothing.'

Don Bosco concluded by saying: 'This is like a testament I am addressing to the rectors of individual houses. If these counsels are put into practice I will die in peace, because I will be sure that our Society will certainly be blessed by the Lord and be even more flourishing in achieving its purpose, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.'<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the 1860s, Don Bosco gave particular emphasis to the approach confessors (rectors and others) should take at a time when a boy is revealing his conscience. He did this through his biographies and other accounts of a biographical nature. On the one hand, he 'earnestly' encouraged the boys to entrust themselves to the confessor with absolute trust and sincerity, assuring them that 'the confessor is a father,' 'a friend of the soul' bound rigorously to secrecy. But with equal passion he begged confessors to 'lovingly welcome every kind of penitent, but especially the young' and to 'enter into confidence' with them, enquiring about the immediate state of their conscience and in relation to past confessions.<sup>69</sup>

In his *Life of Francis Besuccio* the directions were of a more limited kind: he encouraged the boys to 'make an appropriate choice of a regular confessor' and urged confessors to be 'zealous in instilling the idea of frequent confession' and insisting on 'the great value of choosing a confessor,' and giving 'very frequent reminders of the great confessional secret.'<sup>70</sup>

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67 At the end of the list of members for 1875 readers would have found this rule: "For the smooth running of the Congregation, to preserve unity of spirit and to follow the example of other religious institutes, a regular director or confessor is established for those belonging to the Society. In Turin: Fr John, assisted by Fr Michael Rua. In the other houses: the Rector of each of them, assisted by the Prefect etc."  
(*Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1875, p. 14).

68 To Fr G. B. Lemoyne, 31 January 1871, Em III 297-301.

69 *Cenno biografico del giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 24-29, OE XIII 178-183.

70 G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 102-105, OE XV 344-347.

In *Valentino* ... the theory becomes a narration of an ingenious approach to winning the heart and mind of the young man and leading him to the convinced practice of his religion and the sacraments.<sup>71</sup> A devout little ploy on the part of the Oratory Director to attract a young man to confession is described in *Severino* ... And toward the end of this story of an adventurous life as a former Oratory boy, 'the old friend of his soul' was again at the side of his repentant 'son' in a kind and loving way so he could regain peace and serenity through sacramental confession.

## 5.2 Collective ongoing formation for leaders of communities

Over these years, and in an atmosphere of centralised though paternal government, Don Bosco began a typical form of brief, annual rectors' meetings at valdocco. They were profitable for ongoing formation. The initiative was included as an article inserted into the chapter of the Constitutions on the *Internal government of the Society*, sometime between 1862 and 1864: 'The Rector will convene the Chapter [the Superior Council] and rectors of individual houses once a year to get to know and provide for the needs of the Society; to make provisions he decides are appropriate given times, places and individuals.' According to the following article, which was soon attached to it, this assembly could also make decisions proper to a General Chapter which the Constitutions had not yet covered.<sup>72</sup>

The time habitually chosen was the Feast (as celebrated outside) of St Francis de Sales, January 29, or days near that date. Sometimes, on occasions when Don Bosco would be far away from Turin, it was brought forward considerably.<sup>73</sup> Don Bosco was the teacher at these 'conferences', but he encouraged the collective formation of participants in many ways. He let Fr Rua, as his closest collaborator, preside at some of the meetings, and for many issues limited his own role to one of just keeping a check on things in a true non-directive approach. In the 1860s, the number of rectors went from three, not including Fr Pestarino, to four. In any case, the six years from 1865–70 served as a trial run for the subsequent years with a handful more participants, and the increasing variety of issues to be looked at. The general conference of all 'Salesians' at the Oratory (understood in the wider sense of professed, novices and aspirants) took on a particular value. It also had the function of Salesian (clerical and lay) vocation promotion and animation. The two main events of this conference contributed to this: the report each rector made on progress in his work, and Don Bosco's concluding and complementary address. We have scattered documentation only, and of varying quality, for these conferences, poor in the early years then abandoned altogether from 1875.<sup>74</sup>

At the 1865 St Francis de Sales conference, besides Don Bosco, those present were: Fr Rua, Rector at Mirabello Monferrato, Fr Ruffino, Rector of the Lanzo college, and Fr Pestarino, extern Salesian working at Mornese among the Daughters of the Immaculate. Don Bosco indicated his intention of organising a new lottery.<sup>75</sup>

The 1866 conference was held on 4 February, the outside Feast of St Francis de Sales, in the presence of the Salesians at the Oratory. Fr Rua presided, because Don Bosco had gone to Borgo Cornalese (Villastellone, Turin) to be with Count Rodolfo De Maistre, who was dying (22 September 1789–5 February 1866). Fr Pestarino referred to the boys college he was building at Mornese, Fr Bonetti to good and bad things at the junior seminary at Mirabello: the good things were Fr Provera's skill as Prefect and Bursar, attendance at daily spiritual reading of the confreres,

71 G. Bosco, *Valentino...*, Chap. 4 *Nuovo Collegio. Ritorna alla pietà*, (New College. Return to piety), pp. 19-25, OE XVII 197-203.

72 *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 126.

73 Cf. Chap. 24, § 2.

74 Cf. ASC D 577.

75 MB VIII 20.

while the bad thing was the lack of observance of the Rule by some – clerics, who obviously felt offended. Fr Lemoyne spoke of his college at Lanzo and his intention of also opening an oratory for day boys. Fr Rua concluded, recommending *unity in direction, unity of spirit* in charity, *material unity* by avoiding exceptions, *chastity*, particularly in regard to dealing with the boys.<sup>76</sup>

Speakers at the General Conference on 3 March 1867 were Fr Lemoyne and Fr Cerruti representing the Rector at Mirabello, and Fr Pestarino. Don Bosco, who had returned from Rome some hours earlier, expressed the hope that the Congregation would soon be approved, and spoke of the offer of the Roman agricultural school at Vigna Pia, and spiritual favours granted by Pius IX.<sup>77</sup>

In 1868, the Feast of St Francis de Sales was celebrated on 2 February, and Don Bosco held the Salesian or General Conference on the evening of the following day. After the rectors' reports, the chronicle reads: 'D. Bosco approved what was being done at Mornese,' where he had been from 9–13 December; 'he showed his satisfaction at the zeal as explained by the superiors at the seminary at Mirabello,' especially the care taken of the Blessed Sacrament and Immaculate Conception Sodalties. 'Asked for advice on how to correct some of the wayward boys' he suggested the Superior call them aside and 'lovingly express how upset he is at their bad behaviour.' He was also of the opinion that they should start up the Immaculate Conception sodality at Lanzo too. As for the Oratory at Valdocco, he recommended everyone observe 'the rules of the house.' To this end, the Director of Studies should find a way to read out a section of the rules each week to the priests and clerics and young people gathered together. He rejected the proposal that rules for clerics and priests not be made known to the boys. 'Speak clearly where rules are concerned' he said. He also gave information on the decree of approval of the Salesian Society issued by the Bishop of Casale. He recounted the dream of the pergola of roses and their thorns. Finally, as a way of encouraging vocations among the boys, he indicated 'gaining their confidence,' 'their affection,' so it was the task of the Superior 'to inspire that confidence and get to know the various inclinations of their dependants.'<sup>78</sup>

The 1869 St Francis de Sales conference was included along with the Saint's celebration on 7 March, and an address on events in Rome relating to approval of the Salesian Congregation. It was given in the evening to members of the Society.<sup>79</sup>

In 1870, since Don Bosco was absent from the Oratory and in Rome from 20 January to 27 February,<sup>80</sup> the conference took place on 7 March, the day after the external Feast of St Francis de Sales. Don Bosco spoke of his stay in Rome and the proposal to establish a house at S. Giovanni della Pigna, which eventually did not happen, although he optimistically thought of sending someone there in August or October. Already the previous year, he had set aside some money in Papal States currency to purchase it. He spoke of contacts with bishops who wanted Salesians in their dioceses, and informed them of works he wanted to open. 'I also brought some money from Rome,' he said 'which will be useful for the construction works we are about to commence, meaning the portico from here to the church, a square in front of the church, a substantial building at Lanxo, another at Mirabello, and a church at Porta Nuova,' St John the Evangelist. He invited them to seek out new members and to prepare existing ones even better. He instilled in them 'that each one should truly endeavour to be a balanced individual so as to be of greatest value to the boys' souls.' He encouraged them not to crave human praise, but rather rejoice in the Lord's protection, and to make 'greater effort to observe the Rules of the Society and see that they are given the weight they deserve.' Finally, he announced the opening of the house at Alassio at the

<sup>76</sup> *Documenti* X 15-16; MB VIII 296-298.

<sup>77</sup> MB VIII 718-719.

<sup>78</sup> *Documenti* XI 34-36; extended in MB IX 67-70.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Chap. 15, § 9.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Chap. 16, § 9

beginning of the new school year.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. The leader of the community seen from outside: fragments from daily activity

The intense day-to-day activity of Don Bosco within his huge family, emerges above all from the collection of his letters, most of them addressed to people outside. Other than the boys and staff in the colleges, the ever-widening circle of benefactors and supporters would sometimes also become friends and members of the family. How true would his biography be if it were to ignore the endless daily events weaving a rich existence of 'extraordinary wisdom and intelligence, and a heart as expansive as the sand on the seashore?'<sup>82</sup>

Wisdom, intelligence, a large heart: while they were above all outstanding personal gifts, he was also proposing them, as founder and teacher, for imitation by his Salesians, beginning with men invested with administrative responsibilities. He proposed them likewise to their friends and benefactors. He had written to Fr Rua about this, dedicating the final part of his letter to how to deal *With outsiders*, later faithfully reproduced in the *Confidential Reminders*: 'Charity and courtesy' he said had to be 'the well-known characteristics of every rector when relating both to people internally and to outsiders.' In this latter instance 'when it was a matter of material things' he was to seek all agreement possible 'even to some disadvantage,' so long as charity be protected. However, if it was something 'of grave importance' he should 'ask for time to pray and seek advice from some devout and prudent individual.'<sup>83</sup> The letters offer a varied sample of these and similar items to pay attention to.

Letters, usually brief ones, addressed to young Marchioness Azelia Fassati (1846–1921) are particularly spontaneous and delicate. She married Baron Carlo Ricci des Ferres, son of Feliciano, in 1871.<sup>84</sup> Don Bosco sent her a medal, wishing her 'health and grace.'<sup>85</sup> He accepted her and the family's invitation to Montemagno for the Feast of the Assumption.<sup>86</sup> He was pleased with the invitation to the Fassati residence in Turin, and invited her to the theatrical performance at the Epiphany.<sup>87</sup> he said he was ready to receive her mother at Valdocco on Sunday 22 April,<sup>88</sup> he sent her 'a pheasant recently given as a gift,' hoping it would help her 'to gain strength and have a good year all round.'<sup>89</sup> He promised her he would immediately celebrate three Masses she had requested for her intentions and those of 'Maman,' over three consecutive days.<sup>90</sup>

Naturally, quite a few letters were dedicated to finance, such as when he agreed with an elderly benefactor on a loan of 2,000 lire [8,132 euro] to be paid back after a year.<sup>91</sup> All he had to do for the repayment was to go to trusty Fr Rua.<sup>92</sup> He then wrote to Fr Rua, saying: 'If you cannot give it to him would you at least lend it to poor papa?' or otherwise, recommend yourself to 'dear papa Provera?'<sup>93</sup> It was probably a similar difficulty that prevented him from 'the pleasure' on 16 May 1864, of 'enjoying the pleasant company of the respectable family' of Count and Countess Radicati Talice di Passerano, wishing them '*buon appetito* and a good night to all' and assuring them that

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81 *Documenti* XII 15-18; partly summed up in MB IX 833-835.

82 1 Kings 4:29 [= 5:9].

83 Cf. Em I 616. F. MOTTO, *I "Ricordi confidenziali..."*, RSS 3 (1984) 149 and 157.

84 Cf. letter of 14 July 1857, Em I 327.

85 To A. Fassati, 25 March 1864, Em II 45.

86 To A. Fassati, 15 August 1862, 8 and 10 August 1864, Em I 514, Em II 67 and 68.

87 To A. Fassati, 5 January 1865, Em II 100.

88 To A. Fassati, 18 April 1866, Em II 229.

89 To A. Fassati, 2 January 1867, Em II 323.

90 To A. Fassati, 10 August 1868, Em II 558.

91 To Baron F. Ricci des Ferres, May 1864, Em II 48-49.

92 To Baron F. Ricci des Ferres, 28 April 1865, Em II 126.

93 To Fr M. Rua, 11 May 1865, Em II 134.

he would pray for their son, a soldier, about to leave for his assignment.<sup>94</sup>

There was a broad range of people he wrote to over this period: calling down God's blessing on a generous Canon from Turin who helped him 'remove poor boys from danger and lead them, then keep them, on the way to salvation.'<sup>95</sup> In autumn, one of his newly ordained priests who wanted to pursue a doctorate in theology, was invited to continue his work as a teacher – both tasks could be reconciled.<sup>96</sup> There was a renewed request to the Mayor of Turin to extend the city's water network as far as the Oratory.<sup>97</sup> From Mornese he told Marchioness Fassati that he was involved in the classic autumn walk for the boys, the longest yet, heading for Liguria, and excused himself for missing a visit due to 'disturbances going on in the capital,'<sup>98</sup> in reference to riots that broke out in Turin over 20–22 September 1864, following the announcement that the capital was being transferred to Florence.

He gave strict instructions on accounting to Fr Rua, for the boarders at Mirabello. 'Hand them over to their parents if they cannot pay.'<sup>99</sup> A month later, when Fr Bonetti was ill, he drew up a simple rule for his spiritual life, dispensing him from the breviary until Easter, and asking him to have plenty of rest.<sup>100</sup> Quite a few letters were addressed to the Provicar General and the Capitular Vicar of the diocese, to obtain discounts on amounts owed to the Seminary for clerics studying there, or to receive donations or fees for clerics who were living at the Oratory.<sup>101</sup>

'Man proposes and God disposes' he wrote in spring 1865 to a parish priest, regretting he could not keep a commitment to preach, due to 'a stomach ailment,' and the serious illness of his administrative assistant, Fr Alasonatti, who in fact died on 7 October.<sup>102</sup> He was under agonising pressure because of the serious illness of outstanding Salesians, and a chronic lack of money. Needing to pay the fortnightly wage to the 'foreman for the church construction,' he begged a benefactor to give him the promised donation,<sup>103</sup> while informing Fr Rua and Countess Callori (not without a veiled request for help from the latter) of the health situation of some valuable personnel: Fr Bongiovanni, 'in poor shape,' Fr Provera improved, 'Frs Fusero, Ruffino, Alasonatti very sick.'<sup>104</sup> 'At the moment,' he confessed 'you can imagine the expenses, the problems and other troubles weighing on D. Bosco's shoulders. But don't think for a moment that he is beaten; tired, but nothing else.' 'The Lord gives, changes, takes whenever he wishes; may his holy name always be blessed.'<sup>105</sup> a few days earlier, however, he did not forget to dedicate a few humorous verses to the Latin scholar, Prof. Vincenzo Lanfranchi, for his name day.<sup>106</sup>

On 9 August, a date worthy of note in Salesian history, he told Fr Rua he was transferring him back to the Oratory. It would remain his house until his death (1910). 'At the end of next week,' he told him 'I will be coming *si Dominus dederit*, to Mirabello, with a view to bringing you back with me. Fix things up there so that there won't be any problems.'<sup>107</sup> It was the beginning of a sharing of

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94 To Countess M. L. Radicati, 16 May 1864, Em II 50

95 To Can. B. Peyron, 28 May 1864, Em II 51

96 To newly ordained Fr G. Bonetti, on 21 May 1864, 29 September 1864, Em II 78.

97 To Mayor E. Luserna di Rorà, end of September 1864, Em II 79.

98 To March. M. Fassati, 9 October 1864, Em II 81.

99 Letter of 17 October 1864, Em II 82.

100 Letter of November 1864, Em II 86-87.

101 To Can. A. Vogliotti, 1 October 1864 and 31 January 1865, Em II 80 and 103; to Can. G. Zappata, 8 February 1865, Em II 107; to Can. A. Vogliotti, 3 September 1865, Em II 161; to Can. G. Zappata, 12 June 1866, Em II 257; to Can. A. Vogliotti, 16 and 26 June 1866, Em II 261 and 264; to Can. A. Vogliotti, 22 May 1868, Em II 533.

102 To Fr A. Modini, 25 April 1865, Em II 123-124.

103 Letter of 3 July 1865, Em II 145.

104 To Fr M. Rua, luglio 1865, Em II 148.

105 To Countess C. Callori, 24 July 1865, Em II 152.

106 Letter of 19 July 1865, Em II 150.

107 Letter of 9 August 1865, Em II 156.

care for and practical dedication to the common mission to the young, and their not dissimilar spiritual journey that would be an ongoing one. Don Bosco was now able to tackle the small and large, happy and sad everyday events more deftly.

He reserved 11 September 1865 for Count Cays. Greetings on the birth of his grandson, and prayers for the mother's puerperal fever.<sup>108</sup> *Miscens gaudia fletibus* he wrote a few days later when reminding Fr Rua to pay a bill worth 1,000 lire [4,135 euro], which was due.<sup>109</sup> He did not neglect invitations to the 'little theatrical performance' at the beginning of the New Year, which the boys of the house would be giving 'at 6.30 on Sunday evening (7<sup>th</sup>)'<sup>110</sup>

Information he gave *Cavaliere* Oreglia about the house at Valdocco on 14 May 1866, indicate his concerned presence and attention to individuals and things: the printing press was going ahead, Fr Durando was not well, Fr Francesca was filling in for him, Fr Bonetti was temporarily with his family, a number of boys had enlisted in the army, one with the Garibaldini, and others wanted to follow him. Health was good in the house.<sup>111</sup>

He took a decisive stance with regard to a certain Morelli, 'a university student all caught up in democratic ideals' who had protested at the publication of a report in *L'unità Cattolica* of a grace obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians by his father, Giuseppe, former Mayor of Caselle.<sup>112</sup> The report was done without his father's knowledge, he alleged. Morelli's father had a brief notice published in the paper in which he said: 'The item was not my work but someone else's who I will not mention out of charity,' obviously Don Bosco.<sup>113</sup> Don Bosco gave Oreglia a different version of events: Morelli had given 'broad permission' in writing for a possible publication,<sup>114</sup> therefore he was not giving in. On 1 June he told Oreglia he was reprinting the report in the July issue of the *Letture Cattoliche*, which he did.<sup>115</sup> He was convinced that the glory of God and Our Lady were at stake, and more tangibly, his personal probity and credibility. Don Bosco went ahead unperturbed.

On 31 May, he gave *Cavaliere* Oreglia both sad and good news: the death at home of young shoemaker Gili, Fr Durando's return to health and that he had finally received his degree, everyone else's good health.<sup>116</sup> A fortnight later he told him that normal rail traffic had begun again, since it had been reserved for troop movements for some days, and he gave news of boys who had been called to arms once more<sup>117</sup> for the brief, inglorious though profitable war in 1866.<sup>118</sup>

He then gave thought to the autumn walk for about fifty boys, writing to Count Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano for possible accommodation in the town. 'It is true,' he said 'that they would sleep on straw,' but, he said politely, 'it is always a bother and expense for you and your family. If you say Yes, then it's done. Of course, let it all be a compliment and only speak of a visit that D. Bosco will make.'<sup>119</sup>

He was in Rome in the first two weeks of 1867.<sup>120</sup> In his first letter back to the Oratory, he asked

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108 To Count C. Cays, Em II 163-164

109 To Fr M. Rua, 18 September 1865, Em II 165.

110 Ticket-invitation on 5 January 1866, Em II 195.

111 Em II 238-239.

112 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 22 May, Em II 243-244. The report had appeared in the "Unità Cattolica", 1866, N.

101, Sunday 29 April, under the title Viva Maria Ausiliatrice!, p. 519.

113 "L'Unità Cattolica" 1866, N. 116, Friday 18 May, p. 584.

114 Letter of 22 May 1866, Em II 243-244.

115 Em II 254.

116 Letter of 31 May 1866, Em II 251.

117 Letter of 15 June 1866, Em II 258-259.

118 Cf. Chap. 1, § 9.

119 Letter of 26 September 1866, Em II 298.

120 Cf. Chap. 15, § 5.

the librarian, cleric Giulio Barberis, to look for some books on the Waldensians, stamp them with the Oratory stamp, and send them to Fr Perrone.<sup>121</sup> a further two letters were addressed to Fr Rua on the *punctum dolens*, the finances, his speciality. 'Fr Francesia will write to you about matters concerning us. I will speak only of matters concerning you, about money.' The second spoke of amounts to find and be paid to patient creditors: 6,800 lire to the Oratory's doctor, Fr Gribaudo, 2,000 to Buzzetti, the contractor, 4,000 to the 'baker' [27,163, 7,889, 15,978 euro respectively]. He did not stop at money, important though it was; his thoughts and heart were occupied by others. He protested gently: 'But you haven't given me news about boys who have come or left; who is well, sick, alive or dead. See that on Sunday fortnight we can have a wonderful Feast of St Francis de Sales.'<sup>122</sup> Later, he wrote a conscientious and true reference for his contractor friend, Carlo Buzzetti, 'approving of his work and praising his uprightness.'<sup>123</sup>

On 9 May he gave news of his own health to *Cavaliere* Oreglia who was possibly still in Florence.<sup>124</sup> 'My health is good enough except for some dizzy spells that I feel more often.' He wrote of the death of three boys and of a Salesian Coadjutor, predicting others. He also invited him to visit Fr Emidio Ruggieri in Rome, author of one of the *Letture Cattoliche* booklets, warning him: 'He is a devout individual, but you need to butter him up.'<sup>125</sup> Ten days later, he informed him of a visit to the Oratory, much recommended by Rattazzi, of the latter's spouse: 'Princess Solms, Minister Rattazzi's wife, was here today. She visited the whole house and seemed very happy with it. She has promised the moon. Let's see. In June you will hear Piedmontese around all the streets in Rome. A huge crowd is getting ready to go down there.'<sup>126</sup> The visit from true Parisian Maria Letizia Solms Wyse Bonaparte (1833–1902), while pleasant enough, would not have done much for Don Bosco's sympathies toward Florence. She had aroused much dislike and annoyance in the capital.<sup>127</sup>

A letter to *Cavaliere* Oreglia followed shortly afterwards regarding Dr Serafino Biffi (1822–99) from Milan, one of the promoters for the lottery currently underway. He was visiting charitable institutions, and in a book entitled *Riformatori pei giovani*, eventually published in 1902, he presented a substantially objective portrait of the *Istituto Don Bosco* in Turin.<sup>128</sup> 'Dr Biffi from Milan' he told Oreglia 'has just arrived at the Oratory. He was asking about you and sends his greetings, acknowledging you as a friend. This morning, the Bishop of Aosta celebrated Mass, and this evening, the Bishop of Mondovì will bring Mary's month to a close.'<sup>129</sup>

He began a letter to Pietro Marietti, who was providing accommodation for *Cavaliere* Oreglia in Rome, in very gracious language: 'If I was a bird, I would at least like to fly down there and visit you. But right now would not have been the right moment because when your treasure is with you at home, you do not need to worry too much about cheap iron or worm-eaten wood. Just the same, I would also like to enjoy some time with such a noble host. My purpose is to ask you to see that he eats, drinks, sleeps. If you don't keep an eye on him, he will do none of these.'<sup>130</sup>

He was writing *Severino* ..., which came out the following year and asked Fr Rua to send him (Don Bosco was at Bricherasio, staying with the Count of Viancino) 'Casalis' book with the *Luserna*

121 Letter from Rome, 20 January 1867, Em II 326.

122 Letters of 5 and 13 February 1867, Em II 330-331 and 335.

123 Turin, 7 April 1867, Em II 351.

124 To Bishop G. Limberti, 22 April 1867, Em II 362; cf. Letter to Countess G. Uguccioni, 10 May 1867, Em II 368

125 Em II 366.

126 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 21 May 1867, Em II 373.

127 Cf. *Il parlamento italiano*, Vol. I 1861-1865. Milan, Nuova CEI 1988, pp. 331, 338-339;

"La Civiltà Cattolica" 18 (1867) II 495-496.

128 Cf. S. BIFFI, *Riformatori pei giovani*. Milan, U. Hoepli 1902, pp. 117-119.

129 Letter of 30 May 1867, Em II 378.

130 Letter of 21 June 1867, Em II 394.

article.’ He added: ‘I am well and writing letters of thanks and looking for money.’<sup>131</sup> a few days later, he advised Fr Pestarino to reflect before possibly accepting the task of running an institute for aspirants to the priesthood in Genoa being planned by Fr Frassinetti: he asked him to explain the difficulties to him and, before finally concluding matters to ‘make a trip to Turin.’ He added: ‘On 5 August, we will begin the retreat at Trofarello. Come to it. We will pray, talk about it and make our own reflection. When you need courage and good will, we won’t be lacking in that.’<sup>132</sup> ‘I have been able to write a number of letters up till now, but not even a quarter of them,’ he wrote to Fr Rua from Strevi on 20 August 1867.<sup>133</sup> ‘Until now I am hoping for money but we have nothing in our purse’ he wrote weeks later from Cremona.<sup>134</sup>

A few days later, he was quick to express his concern at the cholera drama taking place at Albano in an especially virulent way. He wrote to Scolopian Fr Checchichi: ‘We adore God’s holy will, but we rejoice in the Lord that gold is tested with fire, so after this painful event, some great blessing must touch your college.’<sup>135</sup> He showed greater detachment, in November, calming Fr Eugenio Reffo’s father, who wanted to purchase some building left Don Bosco as a legacy by the parish priest of Scalenghe (1811–66), and which was, of course, contested by the relatives of the man in question: ‘The lawsuit is pending. I have never asked for anything, because I get nothing out of it. For my part, I intend to leave your father free in conscience. Just see to the legal side of things.’<sup>136</sup>

The visit to Mornese referred to earlier, from 9–13 December 1867, though full of material and spiritual benefits, had worsened his state of health, as he shared with Fr Pestarino. ‘My health has been somewhat affected by the upset I went through at Mornese with prolonged bouts of vomiting. I am better now, except for a slight hoarseness that I hope will soon disappear as I come good.’<sup>137</sup> He also wrote to *Cavaliere* oreglia of ‘some battles with health and work’ giving him some less than pleasing news about individuals and finances at the Oratory, and yielding to some dire ‘prophetic’ predictions for 1868: ‘Hunger, thirst, death, and maybe even war will be this year’s program.’<sup>138</sup>

In the new year, he sent congratulations and encouragement to Fr Salvatore Bertini, appointed Rector of St Leonard’s in Lucca, and on the same day he wrote to his curate, Fr Raffaele Cianetti, inviting him to Turin: ‘Times are difficult, but God will not stop being with us.’<sup>139</sup> On 3 January he apologised for not being able to go to dinner at the Bosco di Ruffino home to say goodbye to Ottavio, on the point of leaving, due to ‘the snow we have had and which is still falling thickly.’<sup>140</sup> The list of ‘horribly increasing miseries’ in an especially harsh winter was mentioned in a number of his January letters. ‘Bread is 70 cents [3 euro] a kilo, all up around twelve thousand francs [46,075 euro] a month and we have two months worth to pay. There is half a metres of snow with intense cold, and half the boys in summer clothing.’<sup>141</sup> ‘We have to make every effort to push ahead during these years of severe misery. Last year at this time, bread was 26 cents a kilogram; now it is 50, so instead of five thousand [12,198 euro] a month, Fr Rua has to think of 9 thousand [34,556 euro]. And then at Lanzo and Mirabello, they are losing out on boarding fees and if they try to increase them, the boys are withdrawn. Here, half the boys are still dressed for summer.’<sup>142</sup>

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131 Letter of 31 July 1867, Em II 411.

132 Letter at beginning of August 1867, Em II 413.

133 Em II 421.

134 To Fr M. Rua, 18 September 1867, Em II 430-431.

135 Letter of 23 September 1867, Em II 432.

136 Letter of 16 November 1867, Em II 450.

137 To Fr D. Pestarino, 25 December 1867, Em II 465.

138 Letters in the first half of December 1867 and January 1868, Em II 455, 458, 475.

139 Letter of 2 January 1868, Em II 469. The same date he also congratulated Fr R. Cianetti, for his appointment as curate, Em II 470.

140 To O. Bosco di Ruffino, 3 January 1868, Em II 472.

141 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 3 January 1868, Em II 474-475

142 To Countess C. Callori, 10 January 1868, Em II 482.



In a letter he wrote to *Cavaliere* Oreglia over two days, there was lots of family news with a dismal view of things at the house. 'We have received fr 1600 [6,143 euro] from Count De Maistre, and a further fr 108 from Fr Verda which the charity of the Romans through your very kind efforts has sent for the house. We have immediately paid off the most urgent of our creditors, among whom Avvezana, who supplied paper for the printing press.' Then he continued: 'The cold is very intense here, but we continue on: today it touched 18 degrees [below zero] and despite heat from the stove, the ice in my room did not melt. We have let the boys get up later, and since most are still in summer wear, each one puts on two shirts, a jacket, waistcoat, two pairs of pants, military overcoat; others take blankets from the bed and wrap them over their shoulders throughout the day. They look like they are dressed up in *Carnevale* masks ... Amid so many problems our boys are cheerful and content, and we have not had one in the infirmary for some months. *Deo gratis*.' He finished the letter the next day: 'Today, the 13th it is 21 degrees centigrade [below zero], 60 centimetres of snow, no boys are sick.'<sup>143</sup> 'No one sick at home' he told him eight days later, 'appetites superlative; *grissini* are 80 cents a kilogram. The cold has moderated. We have had around a metre of snow which is now melting.'<sup>144</sup>

A week later he repeated some of this: 'No one sick at home and similarly at Lanzo and Mirabello. The cold is back and this morning it touched fourteen degrees [below]. The doctors say this cold is purifying the air and will bring good health, but meanwhile the number of deaths in Turin has tripled.'<sup>145</sup>

Further on, temperatures rose, but not the level of finances: 'Beautiful weather, the cold has gone, we are in spring and you are still in Rome, but I am not complaining because you are sending us charity ... I am swamped by costs, many debts to pay, all the [building] works need to start up again; do what you can, but pray with faith.' To compensate, he wrote: 'All at home are healthy and wish you well. Do not forget meditation in the morning.'<sup>146</sup> In a letter to Oreglia, about to return from Rome, he also gave some alarming news on the matter of daily supplies: 'The cost of bread is causing us sorrow. Between Lanzo, Mirabello and Turin every month, just for bread it cost fr 12 thousand' [46,000 euro].<sup>147</sup>

He rejoined with Duchess Elisa Sardi Melzi d'Eril that Prince Gonzaga had 'received the holy sacraments.' The 'consoling news' had been passed on to him by his 'good friend Guenzati',<sup>148</sup> for whose wife he had promised prayers in a letter on 21 March 1867, 'for the sick person she had recommended to him.'<sup>149</sup>

In a letter on 13 April, Easter Sunday, to Countess Callori, he attempted to achieve the impossible combination of charity and gratitude: 'I see that I cannot balance the books but at least I will plead for a kind amnesty or indemnity that you will certainly not refuse me at this point.'<sup>150</sup>

In July he accepted the invitation, not the first nor would it be the last, from kindly *Cavaliere* Zaverio Provana di Collegno to go to his place at Cumiana. In turn, he invited him and his two children to the Oratory. The *Cavaliere* refusal, according to Baron Binaco di Barbania, would lead to 'a fine of a hundred Napoleons [around 919 euro] which Don Bosco himself would certainly have gone to claim!'<sup>151</sup>

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143 Letter of 13 January 1868, Em II 485-486.

144 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 21 January 1868, Em II 487-488.

145 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 29 January 1868, Em II 494.

146 Letter of 3 March 1868, Em II 504-505.

147 Letter of 10 April 1868, Em II 522.

148 Letter of 12 April 1868, Em II 523.

149 To R. Guenzati, 21 March 1867, Em II 342.

150 Em II 524. Among other things he told her of the printing of the *Il Cattolico provveduto* (Em II 525), and at the end of the month told her he was sending a copy (letter of 30 April 1868, Em II 528)

151 Letter of 10 July 1868, Em II 550-551.

He also asked if a Council procedure in the Council could be fast-tracked for re-adjusting the road around the Oratory, essential for completion of urgent building work.<sup>152</sup>

On 9 September 1868, having no money, he had to give the Bursar at Mirabello, Fr Provera, a chance to display his generosity: 'You really are generous, but you are sending me bad money because it doesn't last a minute at home. I need a Fr Provera in every house. We are in good health here, though there's no lack of problems. Right at the moment I have the chief of police and the King's Procurator in my room,' perhaps for clarification about one of the residents at the Oratory.<sup>153</sup>

Instead, he dealt with a completely different matter in writing to *Cavaliere* Oreglia: he told him about the two retreat sessions at Trofarello. He also informed him of Fr Rua's slow convalescence – he had come down with very serious peritonitis weeks earlier.<sup>154</sup> He also wrote to the Count of Viancino about Fr Rua's state of health, and that he therefore needed to decline 'the gracious invitation to go and spend some days left of *Carnevale*, meaning some days of rest.'<sup>155</sup>

Later, he sent a special 'representative' to Count Costantino Radicati, delaying his visit, though only for a short time: 'I cannot come in person, so I am sending a hare to represent me. I hope I can reach this little animal when it is in a better state [on the table!]. Enjoy the jest; may God give you everything good.'<sup>156</sup> He told Countess Callori: 'Fr Bonetti will write to Count Callori to have him at Mirabello for a day. If you don't mind having a meal at midday, could you keep him company? That would certainly be in honour of St Charles.'<sup>157</sup> At Christmas he wrote a brief letter of gratitude for the greetings received. He promised prayers for 'the last day of the year,' indicated his imminent 'trip to Rome,' but first 'a day at Casale,' and wrote about Midnight Mass: 'The night was a great celebration. The so-called choirs of angels sang, along with the shepherds. Three masses, the church packed with people, very many communions. *Deo gratias*.'<sup>158</sup>

The daily grind also meant carefully harnessing the money gained through so much effort. Among the various approaches, from 1 January 1869, he attempted to cancel or at least mitigate the efforts of the exorbitant law on milled items [flour], approved following efforts by earlier colleagues in Finance by the Minister, L. G. Cambray Digny, husband of Countess Virginia.<sup>159</sup> Don Bosco hoped to obtain some reduction.<sup>160</sup> On 25 June, he prudently asked the Minister's wife to intercede with her husband, who had possibly 'given [him] some hope in Florence 'of a grant which would more or less correspond to the tax' overall of about 'ten thousand francs,' [38,493 euro] for the 1,250 boys he was looking after.<sup>161</sup> he did receive a grant, which the Countess felt was 'feeble'. The recipient was grateful and calmed the sender: 'In view of the seriousness of our needs, every little bit helps many of them.'<sup>162</sup> When the Menabrea Ministry collapsed in December, the austere Quintino Sella returned to the Finance Ministry as part of the Giovanni Lanza Government on 14 December 1869. Don Bosco fronted Sella, telling him that the mill tax meant an imposition of twelve thousand extra a year on his precarious budget, and manifested the hope of 'at least a partial if not a full remission.' But the 'not too prosperous situation of the Treasury' forced the

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152 To Mayor F. Galvagno, August and end of September 1868, Em II 553-555 e 577-578.

153 Em II 567.

154 Letter of 16 September 1868, Em II 568-569; cf. Also letter to Marchioness Fassati on 18 September 1868, Em II 569-570.

155 Letter of 30 September 1868, Em II 579.

156 Letter of 4 November 1868, Em II 595.

157 Letter of 9 November 1868, Em II 597.

158 Letter of 25 December 1868, Em II 612.

159 On the law on milled items, cf. Chap. I, § 9, p. 45.

160 Cf. Letter to Fr M. Rua, from "Florence, 6 a.m. on 14 January '69", Em III 39.

161 Em III 102.

162 To Countess V. Cambray Digny, 6 August 1869, Em III 121

Minister to reply in the negative on 17 September.<sup>163</sup> Don Bosco was tenacious, and a year later made a further effort to find concrete data for another possible request.<sup>164</sup>

Two interesting half-serious suggestions came from the fertile imagination of this indefatigable beggar. In a postscript to a letter to the elderly *Cavaliere* Edoardo Ferrero Lamarmora (1800–1875), he cheerfully ‘booked’ more than a simple slice of his will: ‘Consider D. Bosco as your grandson and your legacy will be assured. *Sit venia dictis*.’<sup>165</sup> More concrete and immediate was ‘a thought,’ ‘a plan’ suggested to the elderly candle-maker at Lanzo, Biaggio Foeri (1797–1874): ‘A legacy from you when God calls you to paradise,’ he wrote ‘would serve Don Bosco as a guarantee with people ready to give him loans and with others to pay interest.’<sup>166</sup> He repeated the invitation a year later, adding St Augustine’s words, according to which ‘he who saves a soul ensures the salvation of his own soul.’<sup>167</sup>

## 7. Popular culture and the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings)

Of course, in the decade 1859–1869, Don Bosco continued his activity as a writer and editor with great dedication. The greatest concerns were reserved for his favourite *Letture Cattoliche*, with particular attention to their diffusion in the newly annexed regions and which became the Kingdom of Italy. ‘With the extension of the Sardinian Kingdom to Lombardy’ by 1860, *Il Galantuomo* changed its subtitle, becoming ‘Piedmontese-Lombard Almanac for Leap Year 1860’, a subtitle it retained for the next two years. Then came the aseptic subtitle ‘Almanac for 1863’, further updated with the passing of the years and without political intentions to ‘Strenna offered to Italian Catholics. Almanac for the leap year 1864’, ‘National Almanac for the year 1865. Strenna offered to Italian Catholics’, ‘Almanac for the year 1866. Strenna offered to Associates of the Catholic Readings’, which became the final subtitle for the years that followed. From January 1866, the subscription to the Catholic Readings coincided with the calendar year. The new series opened with Don Bosco’s theatrical work, *La casa della fortuna*. A Playscript. For subscribers in 1865, January and February were covered by a single issue on *La bestemmia* (Cursing).

In practice, the fostering of popular and religious culture, pleasant reading, was considered by the Constitutions to be one of the primary ends of the Society of St Francis de Sales. This was intensified by setting up a printing press at Valdocco and the consequent development of the bookshop run by its dynamic director, *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano.

Don Bosco’s publishing activity extended to a range of genres: the continuation of the *Lives of the Popes* (1860–1865), the lives of Fr Cafasso (1860), Magone (1861), Besucco (1864), biographical narratives, *Valentino* (1866), *Severino* (1868), *Angelina* or the little orphan girl of the Appennines (1869), hagiographies on the Martyrs (1861), two beatified Sisters (1862, 1865), St Joseph (1867), St John the Baptist (1868), pleasant readings (1862, 1864, 1868), the first items dedicated to Mary Help of Christians (1868, 1869), as well as the disputed work on the *Centenario di S. Pietro* (Centenary of St Peter)(1867) and the work on the *Concili generali e la Chiesa Cattolica* (General Councils and the Catholic Church) (1869).

Then, from the Oratory of St Francis de Sales Printing Press, from 1864 printed copies of musical compositions by Fr Cagliari appeared, and from 1866, theatrical works by Philipian priest Fr Giulio Metti from Florence.

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163 To Q. Sella, 15 August 1870, Em III 236-237

164 To Fr M. Rua, 13 September 1871, Em III 371.

165 Letter of 7 September 1870, Em III 245

166 Letter of 15 February 1871, Em III 312.

167 Letter of 13 March 1872, Em III 406.

Without a doubt, Don Bosco was the main propagandist for the *Letture Cattoliche*. It involved correspondents and the most varied group of people in so many ways. In Rome, although busy with all the paperwork for the approval of the Salesian Society, collecting money to build the Church of Mary Help of Christians and his youth works, interventions in ecclesiastical politics, looking for a place to set up in Rome, he also carried out the role of beggar and book promoter. There were old and more recent recipients of his exuberant gospel 'knock and it will be opened' approach. He was funded by the patient Countess Carlotta Callori: 'I was even brought booklets of the daily *Des Bons Exemples* that I have already given to one of my priests, to choose what could be adapted for the *Letture Cattoliche*';<sup>168</sup> an anonymous correspondent from Tortona: 'Get a million subscribers for the *Letture Cattoliche*';<sup>169</sup> Fr Canobbio, a Barnabite, from the Charles Albert College at Moncalieri: 'I am pleased to hear that you are looking at ways to disseminate the *Let. catt.* Well done, carry on. It would be very useful if you could also disseminate it throughout Moncalieri where I know there are a lot of irreligious magazines and almost none of them good';<sup>170</sup> Count E. Crotti from Costigliole: 'P. S. I recommend you spread the *Letture Cattoliche*';<sup>171</sup> Fr Giuseppe Frassinetti: 'I received the money order for fr. 454.40 for the first half year of the *Letture Cattoliche*. You will have the number of copies you indicated during this week';<sup>172</sup> the Bishop of Mondovì, Ghilardi, asked to continue 'protection of the *Let. catt.*';<sup>173</sup> the exiled Archbishop of Turin;<sup>174</sup> Provost, Fr Modini: 'P. S. Get some subscribers for the *Letture Cattoliche*';<sup>175</sup> Can. Bernardino Checcucci, Rector of the Seminary in Florence: 'Do what you can to disseminate them';<sup>176</sup> Scolopian Fr Alessandro Checcucci: 'I recommend as much as possible to spread the *Let. Catt.* Among your pupils';<sup>177</sup> Fr Raffaele Cianetti from Lucca: 'Try to increase membership to the *Letture Cattoliche* by ten thousand'; Fr Bertini from Lucca: 'I recommend the *Letture Cattoliche* in a special way; it was all your work in Lucca. Now try to support it; I believe Fr Cianetti will not fail to help you'; and to the latter, once he had become curate, he wrote: 'another thing concerning the *Letture Cattoliche*. Now you are in the sacred ministry it will be easier for you to promote and recommend them';<sup>178</sup> two Salesian rectors: 'Recommend and promote the *lett. catt.*, and in your letters, where it seems good, set up a program.'<sup>179</sup>

Circulars were sent to bishops and capitular vicars on 20 January 1863, perhaps to officially re-establish contact with the hierarchy after the break with Bishop Moreno;<sup>180</sup> on 8 February 1865 to re-establish propaganda;<sup>181</sup> to the secretary of the Bishop of Modena, to suggest setting up a centre to collect subscriptions.<sup>182</sup>

Intensive dissemination was tried in Florence and Tuscany through Scolopian Fr Sforzini<sup>183</sup> and Archbishop Limberti, especially as an anti-Protestant ploy and to benefit the 'lower classes'. Among other things, the Waldensians had moped their Press and Publishing house, Claudiana, to Florence.<sup>184</sup> Dissemination in the Tuscan countryside was recommended to Marchioness

168 Letter of 4 November 1862, Em I 536.

169 Letter of 5 April 1859, Em I 374.

170 Letter of 15 April 1859, Em I 375.

171 Letter of 12 June 1859, Em I 379.

172 Letter of 23 September 1860, Em I 422

173 Letter of 7 April 1861, Em I 446.

174 Letter of 15 October 1861, Em I 462.

175 Letter of 25 April 1865, Em II 124

176 Letter of 3 February 1866, Em II 207; to Cav. F. Oreglia, 3 January 1868, Em II 474

177 Letter of 20 July 1866, Em II 274.

178 Letter of 2 January 1868 to Fr S. Bertini and Fr R. Cianetti, Em II 469-470.

179 To Fr G. Bonetti and Fr G. B. Lemoyne, 7 and 8 January 1868, Em II, 476-477.

180 Em I 548-549.

181 Em II 106-107.

182 To Fr P. Curti, 24 May 1868, Em II 534.

183 Letter of 26 February 1860, Em I 396; 11 March 1860, Em I 398.

184 Letter of 31 March 1860, Em I 399; 21 January and 18 June 1861, Em I 435 and 448-449; 25 March

Elisabetta Seyssel Sommariva<sup>185</sup> and another noble benefactor.<sup>186</sup> 'Spreading the *Letture cattoliche*' in Florence and Rome was recommended especially to *Cavaliere* Oreglia, his legate *ad omnia* in the two capitals.<sup>187</sup>

He told Pius IX himself about them: 'after many upsets, at the moment things are peaceful and allowing me to work freely for my boys and for printing the *Letture Cattoliche*;<sup>188</sup> 'The *Letture Cattoliche* are continuing and the membership has passed twelve thousand, and it seems they are read anxiously. It is fourteen years since they were published and are still being published';<sup>189</sup> he published the Pope's and the Cardinal Vicar's interest in them.<sup>190</sup> 'The *Letture Cattoliche* are produced in fifteen thousand booklets a month; the *Biblioteca dei classici italiani* five thousand', he told the Pope further on.<sup>191</sup>

## 8. In the world of school and culture

The development of secondary schools and their related boarding facilities (colleges), as well as the new curricula introduced in a united Italy, created new needs and offered more room for scholastic and general educational publication, especially in the area of languages and Italian, Latin and Greek literature.<sup>192</sup> In view of this Don Bosco urged his better and more gifted teachers to gain qualifications and prepare school textbooks, commentaries in Latin authors, editions of classical Italian texts, and to compile dictionaries. Thus in 1866, the newly graduated Fr Francesia with his collaborator, Tommaso Vallauri from the University of Turin, became responsible for producing the *Selecta ex latinis scriptoribus in usum scholarum* series. Twenty four titles were produced in the first two years placing the Salesian Press and Publishing House at the level of the other scholastic publishers in Turin, Loescher and Paravia. From 1869, it also accepted work for the final years of secondary school (*liceo*). From 1884, the critical texts and commentaries were further updated, expanding the number of collaborators and users, private and public schools. This activity continued to increase and intensify in the years to follow, and by 1910, seventy five volumes had been produced.<sup>193</sup>

Following this, halfway through the 1870s, Don Bosco asked young Salesian, Fr Giovanni Tamietti, who graduated in 1872, to begin a new series, *Selecta ex christianis latinis scriptoribus in usum scholarum*. This answered the need to combine use of pagan Latin classics with reading Christian authors thought to be in no way inferior to the former in linguistic terms and superior to them in content. Don Bosco was certainly influenced by the widespread and much discussed thinking, coming from France, of Abbé (Fr) J.-J. Gaume (1802–1879), who was very suspicious of the use of the Latin classics in seminaries and Catholic educational institutes. This pugnacious French priest was even dissatisfied by Pius IX's Encyclical *Inter Multiplices*, 21 March 1853, which sought to bring some balance to the strong disagreements in France between bishops and rectors of seminaries.<sup>194</sup> Along the same lines, Don Bosco showed open agreement with the thinking of Fr

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1862, Em I 489.

185 Letter of October 1861, Em I 467.

186 To Countess V. Cambray Digny, 10 August 1865, Em II 157.

187 Letter of 10 November 1865, Em II 182; January 1868, Em II 489.

188 Letter of 10 March 1861, Em I 441.

189 Letter of 25 January 1866, Em II 202

190 Circ. on 25 January 1868, Em II 490-491.

191 Letter of 14 April 1871, Em III 323.

192 Cf. P. ZOLLI, *San Giovanni Bosco e la lingua italiana*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 113-141; G. PROVERBIO, *La scuola di don Bosco e l'insegnamento del latino (1850-1900)*, ibid. pp. 143-185

193 Cf. G. PROVERBIO, *La scuola di don Bosco e l'insegnamento del latino*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 173-178.

194 Cf. *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, par I, vol. I 439-448; D. MOULINET, *Les classiques païens dans les*

Antonio Belasio in his *Della vera scuola per ravvivare la società*.<sup>195</sup> The *Selecta* were intended to contribute to making schools less pagan and more Christian, passing on classicism in two versions.<sup>196</sup> The series began with a school edition, edited by Tamietti, of S. HIERONYMI *De viris illustribus Liber singularis. Vitae s. Pauli eremitaе, s. Hilarionis eremitaе, Malchi monaci et epistolae selectae cum adnotationibus I. Tamietti*. The Series had a foreword signed by Don Bosco, stating that Christian writers in the first centuries after Christ easily matched others in rhetorical skills. And since many Roman pagan writers left much to be desired in terms of their customs, genuine humanity and their thinking about God as provident creator, it was most advantageous for young pupils to be able to have guides that did not betray their faith and provided them with very wise arguments for opposing the perverse precepts of the ancients.<sup>197</sup>

On 3 September 1867 Fr Rua wrote the following in his chronicle: “Saddened at the sight of the immense evil occurring, especially among studious youth, due to their reading of bad literature, he established a plan to set up an association for good books and classics, printing one per month. Today he went to Prof. D. Picco, a devout individual skilled in working with youth and books, to develop this plan with him.”<sup>198</sup> This was the first hint of the series known as the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* (the Library of Italian Youth), which began in January 1869 and ended with booklet 204 in December 1885. A ‘Monthly Publication’, it had ‘as its aim to publish either ancient or modern language texts, that could be more closely of use for educated youth.’ ‘To succeed in this undertaking’ it went on to explain ‘a society of well-known and worthy professors and doctors of literature was established, with a view to: 1. Collecting and publishing the best works in Italian in modern spelling so they can be more easily read and understood by the young reader. 2. Choosing from among them, those which due to the pleasantness of their content and purity of language will better achieve this purpose.’<sup>199</sup> Don Bosco was also a fervent and up-front propagandist for this series, supported by the *L’Unità Cattolica* which gave it extraordinary publicity from the outset and in the years to follow.

Don Bosco’s closest collaborator, Fr Rua, would have made an appreciable contribution to the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana*. In 1869 he published his own edition of Antonio Cesari’s *Novelle*, underlining the purity of its language and trustworthiness of its contents in the face of ‘the trivial, base and unacceptable approaches’ of many other writers. ‘Morality is not offended in them,’ he noted, concluding with the wish: ‘Live happily and studiously.’<sup>200</sup> He offered a profile of Cesari in the edition of *Prose scelte dalle Opere sacre – la Vita di Gesù Cristo e I fatti degli Apostoli* – for the August 1872 booklet: an ordered and consistent selection, with attractive titles and brief explanatory footnotes drawn from a wide range of thinkers.<sup>201</sup> The editor also prepared an edition of this book outside the series – with four reprintings from 1874 to 1898 – under the title: *La vita di N. S. Gesù Cristo dell’abate Cesari prete dell’Oratorio ridotta in compendio dal Prof. Sac. Michele Rua. Alla gioventù cattolica speranza dell’avvenire*. Turin, tip. e libr. dell’Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales

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*collèges catholiques? Le combat de Mgr Gaume*. Paris, Cerf 1995.

195 Letter of 6 November 1873, E IV 176. The volume would also be published by the tip. e libr. Salesiana in 1875

196 Cf. G. PROVERBIO, *La scuola di don Bosco...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 180

197 Cf. S. HIERONYMI *De viris illustribus...*, 1875, pp. 3-4. Don Bosco’s thinking on Latin and classic Christian authors, in a school inspired by faith, would be picked up years later by Fr Francesco Cerruti in two open letters on *Le idee di D. Bosco sulla educazione e sull’insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola*. S. Benigno Canavese, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1886

198 M. RUA, *Cronache*, RSS 8 (1989) 342.

199 *Storia della letteratura italiana... pel cavaliere Giuseppe Maffei compendiata ad uso della gioventù*. Torino, tip. dell’Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, second and third cover page

200 *Novelle di Antonio Cesari*. Turin, tip. dell’Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1869, pp. 3-4. On the “discorsi triviali” see Fr Rua’s manuscript entitled *Antonio Cesari e importanza dello studio dei trecentisti*, FdR 1882 E6.

201 Cf. Repertoire of “Passi scelti”, ms, ASC, FdR 2.882 A9-B10

1874. He also edited two minor classics for the *Biblioteca* in October 1873 and February 1874: the *Viaggio in Terra Santa di Simone Sigoli ed il Fiore di virtù commentati ad uso de' giovani studiosi dal sac. Prof. Michele Rua* and the *Vita del B. Giovanni Colombini composta da Feo Belcari*.<sup>202</sup> Don Bosco could be proud of the Prefect General of his Religious Society, the young man who, since the early 1850s, he had made into an educator of uplifting spirituality, and a good administrator who was also not foreign to more cultural interests.

There was another keen concern Don Bosco had, of both educational and didactic value, for new dictionaries to replace the ones the boys had in hand, ones that were less trustworthy where 'morality' was concerned. To this end, he was able to motivate and encourage two of his Salesians and a professor friend to tackle this demanding undertaking. The first volume to be issued was a Latin-Italian *Lexicon latino-italicum a Coelestino Durando in usum scholarum concinnatum*.<sup>203</sup> In 1876 the Italian-Latin version was issued, *Vocabolario italiano-latino compilato ad uso delle scuole*.<sup>204</sup> In 1882, at Don Bosco's suggestion the two, the 1872 and 1876 editions, were combined in a single, simplified version. Known in Salesian houses as the 'Durando Mandosio'<sup>205</sup> it was aimed especially at lower secondary classes. In 1876, the *Vocabolario italiano-greco pel sacerdote teologo Marco Pechenino*, a teacher at the Royal Cavour High school in Turin, was published.<sup>206</sup> Three years later, the *Nuovo Dizionario della lingua italiana in servizio della gioventù, compilato sulla scorta dei migliori lessicografi dal sac. prof. Francesco Cerruti, dottore in lettere*, was published, with the addition of two lists, one with the most common words and errors, the other with the more elegant Italian sayings and proverbs. Cerruti, Rector at the High School at Alassio, and in total harmony with Don Bosco's thinking, was the one who hit the right key where decent language and morality were concerned. 'In the first instance' he noted 'it is well-known to some that although many fine dictionaries of the Italian language have been compiled this far, there are very few that, from a moral perspective, can be put into the hands of well-bred young people for them to peruse *innoffenso pede* ... Yet, for whoever reflects on this sad *nitimur in vetitum* and is especially aware of the ardent nature and passionate soul of the young who easily betray themselves by outward appearances, they know that we can never be too cautious in these matters. Every writer, in the act of picking up a pen, should meditate seriously on Juvenal's *maxima debetur puero reverentia*.'<sup>207</sup>

For the image that Don Bosco could offer with regard to his and his followers' activities in the field of school and culture, we also need to note the para-scholastic activity, the academies, exhibiting selected compositions in Italian, and the Latin comedies.<sup>208</sup> At Don Bosco's invitation, these latter, written in the elegant Latin of the Latin Comedies, were attended by personalities from the civil and ecclesiastical scene, and by teachers at the university and in public schools around the city. We can recall to mind, on 11 April 1861, the comedy *Minerval* by Jesuit Fr Palumbo, performed again on 23 May; it was then performed again the following year, on 22 June, when it was attended by many 'distinguished literary people.' On 14 May 1864, the *Phasmatonices* or 'Ghostbusters' by Bishop C. M. Rosini, former Bishop of Pozzuoli was performed. On this occasion

202 Turin, tip. e libr. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1873 and 1874.

203 Augustae Taurinorum, ex officina Asceterii salesiani 1872; review in "Civiltà Cattolica", a. XXIV, s. VIII, vol. IX, 1872, p. 581

204 Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1876; review in "Civiltà Cattolica", a. XXVII, s. IX, vol. IX, 1876, pp. 599-600.

205 Roman Jesuit Carlo Mandosio had published a dictionary of the kind at Modena in 1736, republished in Venice in 1751, completely renewed by his Bergamascan confrere Girolamo Tiraboschi (1731-1794); it had further editions in Turin.

206 Turin, tipografia e libreria Salesiana 1876. Review in "Civiltà Cattolica", a. XXVII, vol. III, 1876, p. 78.

207 F. CERRUTI *Nuovo dizionario della lingua italiana*..., Turin, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1886, pp. III-X; cf. IUVENALIS Saturae VIV 44-49.

208 On this topic, cf. G. PROVERBIO, *La scuola di don Bosco*..., in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della letteratura popolare*..., pp. 169-173.

*L'Armonia* praised 'Rev. Don Bosco,' who 'so zealously promotes ... the classics which are in such decline.' It was performed again on 18 May 1865, under its Latin title, *Larvarum victor*. On 27 June 1866, it was *Alearia's* turn. In May, another script by C. M. Rosini, *Deceptores decepti* was performed: present for it were two illustrious Latinists, Tommaso Vallauri and Vincenzo Lanfranchi, with a number of prelates, Lorenzo Gastaldi, Galletti, Formica, Calabiana and teachers from the seminary and high schools around the city. *L'Unità Cattolica*, wrote about another comedy performed on 16 March 1867, indicating the presence of three bishops, Gastaldi from Saluzzo, Galletti from Alba, Formica from Cuneo, as well as 'many teachers from the university, senior and junior high schools,' 'astonished by the way these lively and intelligent youngsters knew who to play their part.'<sup>209</sup> In 1868, the re-performance of the comedy *Phasmatonices* saw the end of the first golden period of Latin recitals at Valdocco. They would take up again in 1876.

### 9. Painful departure of a 'devout and enterprising' collaborator

The first Salesian decade ended with the departure of the one who was known as 'Don Bosco's right hand man' for running the printing press and bookshop at Valdocco, for disseminating the *Letture Cattoliche* and early Salesian printed material, promoting the lotteries in 1862 and 1865–67, extending and giving life to the charitable network in Rome, Florence and Milan.<sup>210</sup> This was *Cavaliere* Federico Oreglia di S. Stefano. He came to the Oratory in 1860, professed temporary vows on 14 May 1862 and perpetual vows on 8 December 1865. Throughout 1869 his desire to be a priest matured, perhaps one he had nurtured for some time, something he wanted to achieve in a stricter Institute, the Society of Jesus. On the other hand, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest a degree of discomfort with his vocation as a Salesian layman, a Brother, a calling that had not yet been fully developed at a conceptual level nor made sufficiently visible at a practical level.

Don Bosco could have had some hint of the crisis from the beginning of 1868, when the *Cavaliere* was in Rome. On 13 January he invited him to come back to Valdocco for the Feast of St Francis di Sales, 'at which' he wrote 'I have the pleasure of seeing our whole family come together.'<sup>211</sup> 'They are always asking about you' he told him again a week later.<sup>212</sup> 'we know nothing about you' he insisted the following day, expressing the hope that he would be in Turin for St Francis de Sales.<sup>213</sup> In a following letter on 29 January he said he agreed with the *Cavaliere*, who felt it was appropriate for him to stay in Rome; but he could not hide some apprehension; in fact the letter ended with some rather special comments, in his writing, addressed to a Salesian: 'Meanwhile, dear *Cavaliere*, be assured that in our house we have the most fraternal affection for you, and since you left for Rome, I have never omitted to recommend your health and the good of your soul every day at Mass, and I will continue to do so, so God may help us to be true friends on earth and companions one day of true happiness in heaven. Do not forget to make your meditation and spiritual reading each day.'<sup>214</sup> An allusion in a letter on 3 March showed more concern: 'Many are saying that you will always be in Rome, but I say no, not always: but they are asking about you all the time.'<sup>215</sup> Finally, after much insistence, he managed to have the *Cavaliere* at the Oratory for the preparations for the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, noting his return on 1 May.<sup>216</sup> Then there was his puzzling letter to the *Cavaliere's* brother, Fr Giuseppe, on 7 August: 'Federico has left for Sardinia; as you know, I know that he arrived there,

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209 "L'Unità Cattolica", 19 March 1867, OE XXXVIII 77.

210 BS 36 (1912) no. 2, February, pp. 62-63.

211 Em II 485

212 Letter of 21 January 1868, Em II 488.

213 Letter after 22 January 1868, Em II 489.

214 To Cav. F. Oreglia, 29 January 1868, Em II 494-495.

215 Em II 505.

216 Cf. letter of 25 March and 3 and 10 April 1868, Em II 515, 518-519, 522.



but nothing else. He arrived unexpectedly just now; he is very well and he greets you.<sup>217</sup> During the first round of retreats at Trofarello, he invited him to come to the second round, beginning 21 September: 'I believe it would be excellent if you could also come here; there are a great many things that need to be discussed, so it would be important for you also to be here. If needs be you could also return to Milan afterwards.'<sup>218</sup> On 5 October, he wrote both to Fr Giuseppe Oreglia and to the *Cavaliere*. 'Your brother Federico is finally in Turin and enjoys excellent health,' he told him.<sup>219</sup> More than suggestive were the final words in his letter to the *Cavaliere*: 'Courage, dear *Cavaliere*' he exhorted him, 'let's keep fighting; we are not alone, God is with us; life is short, the thorns of time are flowers for eternity.'<sup>220</sup>

In the following months the *Cavaliere* followed up on his decision. His departure was dignified and noble. Instead, it was deeply hurtful to Don Bosco who tackled it with great severity. He felt it was a serious defeat for his young Society in the face of public opinion and a likely cause of disorientation within and that others might follow. Don Bosco was certainly unhappy that he had not been able to discuss on a one-on-one basis this vocational switch with someone who ten years earlier had felt freely attracted to staying and working with him, and who, five years later, had bound himself to the Congregation with perpetual vows. He wanted a 'tacit and secret' departure, something the individual concerned did with absolute scrupulosity on 20 September 1869.<sup>221</sup> The *Cavaliere* gave Don Bosco three letters, each with identical content, one for Fr Rua, one for Fr Lazzerio and one for Fr Lemoyne, leaving the Superior completely at liberty to 'give them, keep them or get rid of them.' He wanted no one to infer any negative judgement from his departure from the Society, 'a Congregation' he said 'informed by such kindness that it made every tie and bond so easy and light that it might not have existed.'<sup>222</sup>

A devotee of Don Bosco, who always remained an incomparable model for him, he was always very friendly toward the Salesians. Don Bosco, for his part, kept up good relationships with him and his noble family. In a letter from Turin to one of the *Cavaliere's* brothers, Cardinal Luigi Oreglia, who for some time was in fact the Cardinal Protector of the Salesian Society, he said: 'I have often seen Fr Federico who enjoys good health; the Baron, your brother, was and still is suffering, although he has been somewhat better for some days.'<sup>223</sup> They had often met already for some years, especially in Rome.

## 10. The approaching Missions, and meetings with Daniele Comboni

Don Bosco's sensitivity toward the Missions in the 1870s, as we have seen,<sup>224</sup> had distant roots. The efforts to dissuade him from the foreign missions and put his mission to youth in Turin before them had not extinguished his concern for the fate of people's who had not yet come to Christian faith. Canon Ortalda, whom we have already mentioned, was an active leader in missionary spirit in the subalpine capital.<sup>225</sup> As well as this Canon from Turin, another friend of Don Bosco's active in thinking about and carrying out initiatives in missionary animation was the Bishop of Mondovì, Bishop Ghilardi, who was realising a plan of his own: in 1867 he founded a *National College of secular priests for the Foreign Missions*, and in 1868, it gained a printing press, bought second-hand by *Cavaliere* Oreglia for the Oratory for 8,500 lire [32,636 euro], and immediately sold to the

217 Em II 557.

218 To Cav. F. Oreglia di S. Stefano, 16 September 1868, Em II 568.

219 To Fr. G. Oreglia, 5 October 1868, Em II 585.

220 To Cav. F. Oreglia di S. Stefano, 5 October 1868, Em II 583.

221 Cf. The very noble letter to Don Bosco in MB IX 715-717.

222 Cf. MB IX 710.

223 Letter of 19 June 1879, E III 477.

224 Cf. Chap. 2, § 6; 6, § 3.

225 Cf. Chap. 2, § 6 e 6, § 3.

bishop for 16,000 [61,433 euro].<sup>226</sup> In a pamphlet, *Avvertenze per la conservazione della Fede in Italia*, we read: 'Property for the benefit of the Foreign Mission College at Mondovì.' This national college did not survive the bishop's death, which occurred in 1873.<sup>227</sup>

In 1864, Canon Ortalda was also the go-between for lasting relationships Don Bosco had with St Daniele Comboni (1831–1881).<sup>228</sup> In August, Fr Comboni, who then belonged to Fr Mazza's Institute, went to Turin to collaborate with Can. Ortalda in compiling a list of Italian missionaries working abroad, adding those from the *Tre Venezie*, in order to present it to the Kingdom's Senate so they would not approve the draft law on abolishing exemptions for clerics from military call-up. He was also in contact with Don Bosco about the moral redemption of twenty-five-year-old Sardinian woman Antonietta Manca. She had become one of Victor Emmanuel II's 'favourite girls' in Turin. Comboni was able to count on help from Countess Gloria, whom Don Bosco pointed out to him. The Countess took Manca under her protection and put her up in one of her villas, while waiting for her mother and husband to agree to her return.<sup>229</sup>

For Comboni, Turin was the first stage of a journey he had undertaken to to present his *Plan for the conversion of Nigrizia* in Lyon, Paris, Cologne, London. He came back to Turin at the beginning of December, as a guest at the Oratory, so he could have the first edition of his Plan printed by the Tipografia Falletti. At Valdocco he spoke to the boys, arousing enthusiasm for the missions, and Don Bosco was certainly brought up to date with his mission plans for Central Africa.<sup>230</sup> Don Bosco ended up sharing his thinking and set-up, employing it fruitfully in his future Patagonian project.<sup>231</sup> During his trip to Veneto in October 1865, Don Bosco, a guest of Count and Countess Soranzo in Lonigo, had a visit from Comboni. We know this from a letter the priest from Verona wrote to his bishop on the 29th, Luigi di Canossa (1809–1900). 'D. Bosco, the saint from Turin,' he wrote with boundless admiration 'sent me a telegraph in Venice from Lonigo. He was there for a day with Countess Soranzo. I convinced him to stopover in Verona for half a day to present him to you, certain that this would be of great consolation to you. He looks after 1200 people for free: every year he gives the Church 60 priests, and a number of Missionaries; he is in God's confidence, works miracles, and often knows the most secret thoughts of others. But what does he want? Seeing that he was going to delay by one day, urged also by a telegraph that came directly to me, he left yesterday for Turin.'<sup>232</sup> He saw Don Bosco again in Turin at the beginning of January 1869, as we see from the testimony of Fr Teodoro Dalfi.<sup>233</sup> At the retreat at Trofarello, on 17 September 1869, a 'lengthy letter' to Don Bosco was read out at table from 'missionary Fr Comboni preparing a place in Great Cairo for an institute the Salesians would be setting up in Egypt for the Missions of Africa.'<sup>234</sup>

During his stay in Rome in January-February 1870, it is probable that Don Bosco met him again, this time as the theological expert for the Bishop Verona. Discussion would have also come around to the plan for an institute in Egypt. On 3 July 1870, in a letter to Don Bosco asking him for his collaboration, which he believed would be full of fruit for the future, the intelligent missionary wrote:

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226 Cf. Follow up to the event in Chap. 18, § 3.

227 Cf. C. BONA, *Un secolo di movimento missionario in Piemonte*, in F. N. APPENDINO (Ed.), *Chiesa e società nella II metà del XIX secolo in Piemonte...*, pp. 265-269.

228 On Don Bosco's relationship with St Daniele Comboni, cf. P. CHIOCCHETTA, *San Giovanni Bosco, mons. Daniele Comboni e le iniziative missionarie per l'Africa Centrale (1857-1881)*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988) 171-190.

229 Letter from Fr Comboni to the Bishop of Verona, Luigi Canossa, 14 August 1864, in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 227-229.

230 Cf. D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 232-242: manuscript text of 1864 is reproduced, it preceded the printed edition, pp. 240-272 (1871).

231 Cf. J. BORREGO, *Estrategia misionera de don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 151-152.

232 D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, p. 342.

233 Cf. P. CHIOCCHETTA, *San Giovanni Bosco e mons. D. Comboni...*, pp. 178-181.

234 MB IX 711.

‘Understanding, deep down, your heart and holy intentions, I am putting a question to you’: he asked him to put two or three, or even more priests at his disposal with four or five trade teachers and catechists; once they had arrived and been set up in an Institute in Cairo, he would give them ‘appropriate autonomy’ and would have them prepared so that in time they could run a special mission in ‘Central Nigrizia’, which would be entrusted exclusively to the Bosco Institute from Turin,<sup>235</sup> Don Bosco asked Fr Rua to reply, and he noted: ‘The reply on 14-7-70 was that for now we cannot send anyone, but any young people who might be recommended will be accepted under the most favourable conditions.’<sup>236</sup>

Comboni added a postscript to his letter of 3 July which had the following content: ‘I hope you have received my *Postulatum* to the Council *pro Nigris Africae Centralis*’: he had presented it on 24 June to Vatican Council I, signed by a few dozen of the Council Fathers.<sup>237</sup> The Council’s suspension brought this passionate appeal to nothing.

His relationship with Don Bosco continued. The final meeting took place in Turin, in an atmosphere of great celebration on 24 May 1880, a year before the sudden death of this great missionary bishop. Bishop Comboni celebrated a pontifical Mass and Vespers in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, firing up those present with his warm and resounding words. Around ‘one of the most courageous apostles of our times,’ ‘a martyr of the faith’ – as the *Bollettino Salesiano* wrote – were priests, altar boys, young people, the crowd packing the church. The bishop gave the traditional goodnight in the evening, which became an ardent missionary appeal: Courage, Salesians, prepare yourselves for a great work; one eye on Patagonia, the other on Nigrizia; one hand on the former, the other on the latter.<sup>238</sup>

## 11. Teacher of faith made active through charity

Don Bosco’s decade from 1860–1869 seems to far outweigh the previous one. It is enough to at least list the longer-lasting events: the institutional and pedagogical switch to colleges, the growth and pontifical approval of the Salesian Society, construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians, the impact of Don Bosco’s activity in Italy, given his extraordinary energy and the powerful network of relationships he built up in the civil and ecclesiastical world. It would be up to the decade that followed to complete the work and enrich it with other no less important events: the founding of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society, and the memorable move toward the missions.

But just highlighting facts and works would be insufficient for an adequate understanding of his personality, as it would marginalise what is more important than anything else: his inner being. This was the engine driving both his ordinary daily life and his more spectacular and audacious activity. This is what made for the ‘extraordinary in the ordinary’ in him, as Pius XI described it on several occasions, what was essential in him, and what simplified him in his grand initiatives. The source was always rooted in his original theological faith, although integrated by popular elements such as his belief in the miraculous, to the point where it bordered on the prophetic.<sup>239</sup>

We find in it the questions and answers he had learned in the catechism as a child: ‘Why did

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235 Cf. P. CHIOCCHETTA, *San Giovanni Bosco, mons. Comboni...*, p. 188. The text of the letter is found in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 714-715.

236 Cf. P. CHIOCCHETTA, *San Giovanni Bosco, mons. Comboni...*, p. 188

237 Cf. in D. COMBONI, *Gli scritti...*, pp. 709-712, 713-714, circular to obtain the signature of the Fathers and the text of the *Postulatum*.

238 BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 4-5 e 7. The *Bollettino Salesiano* November 1881 gave a moving necrology.

239 Cf. e.g., further ahead the letters from August to December 1867 to March. Sen. Ignazio Pallavicini

God create us? To know, love and serve him in this life, and then go to enjoy him forever in his heavenly homeland.’ ‘How should we love and serve him in this life? By observing his commandments and directing our actions to his honour and glory.’<sup>240</sup> He had written a modified form of this in his unpublished *Breve catechismo pei fanciulli* in 1855: ‘God created me to know, love and serve him in this life, and through this to enjoy him for ever in his heavenly homeland.’<sup>241</sup> Don Bosco fully shared what any devout priest and every Christian with solid principles would feel: ‘Let us continue to pray; the Lord is with us, so let us not be afraid. Paradise will pay for everything’;<sup>242</sup> ‘Christian life is a life of faith’;<sup>243</sup> to everyone, including the priest, for himself: ‘Pray for poor D. Bosco’ he recommended ‘so that while he gives precepts to others, he does not neglect matters pertaining to his own salvation’; or so that his own ‘poor soul’ might not be missing at the final goal of eternal salvation.<sup>244</sup>

The great initiatives of the decade we have listed were inspired by faith which generated charitable generosity.

Colleges were not a profit-making business, even though, by contrast with the hospices, they were called upon to make a financial contribution to the Congregation: for its general administration, formation of personnel, maintaining property and equipment. His educational management was serious and demanding, aimed not at forming ‘sacristy types’, but openly Christian young men and future soldiers of the Church and in society, even though leaning more toward a clerical and religious vocational choice. The ‘new college’ Valentino was attracted to was no ‘soft’ institution. ‘Piety’ was prominent and no less serious and insistent were disciplinary and moral demands. ‘Say what you like about the various educational systems, but I have not found any other firm basis for education than frequent Confession and Communion’ he said in his life of Beuscco; ‘and I believe that I am not exaggerating if I assert that morality is endangered when these two elements are missing.’<sup>245</sup> We have also seen this in the rapid overview of his letters to boys in the colleges and to their educators.<sup>246</sup>

Faith and charity were the mainstays of the Rule of life of the religious Society he was giving a solid structure and soul to. The first article of the Constitutions on the purpose of the Society of St Francis de Sales and the first heading on the Form of this Society, were clear. This is much more focused than might be seen from the indication that ‘All the members lead the common life bound only by fraternal charity and by the simple vows.’ Don Bosco did not go softly when speaking and writing about the religious vows of the Salesians, about the common life and consecration, even of an heroic kind in the exercise of ‘every kind of work of charity both spiritual and corporal, toward young people, especially if they be poor; and also the education of young seminarians’: and all this ‘to love and serve God.’<sup>247</sup> Personally, in the name of this grand project of faith and love, he was also ready to profess his ‘*Sic Domino placet*’ in the case of the illnesses besieging the nascent

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240 This is the text of the *Breve catechismo*, inserted in the *Compendio della dottrina cristiana ad uso della diocesi di Torino (1786)* by Card. Vittorio Gaetano Costa.

241 P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino" di don Bosco*. Romea, LAS 1979, p. 56.

242 To Roman F. Canori Focardi, 30 December 1864, Em II 96.

243 To Countess M. Caccia Dominioni, 3 October 1868, Em II 582.

244 To Countess G. Uguccioni, 22 January 1866, Em II 200; cf. Also to Countess B. Pasetti Villani, 18 September 1867, Em II 430; to Cav. P. Marietti, 5 May 1869, Em III 84; to Countess L. Viancino, 14 June 1869, Em III 98; to Fr A. Guerra, 6 June 1869, Em III 95; to Duke T. Gallarati Scotti, 24 June 1869, Em III 101, etc.

245 Cf. G. Bosco, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita. Introduzione e testo critico a cura di Mathew Pulingathil*. Rome, LAS 1987, pp. 35-36, 30-45 and pp. 68-77 (text: Chap IV. *Nuovo collegio. Ritorna alla pietà*; Chap. V. *La vocazione*); G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 100, OE XIV 342.

246 Cf. § 3 and 4.

247 *Cost. SDB (Motto) 72 and 82; circulars and instructions from 1867-1869, Chap. 14, § 4.1 and 15, 15, § 11.*

Congregation in important men<sup>248</sup> and in asking a benefactress: 'Pray for this house, with its many blessing son the one hand, and its many crosses on the other. May the Lord's will be done in everything.'<sup>249</sup>

For him, building the church of Mary Help of Christians did not just mean giving a well-populated district a new church which it did not have. It was an attestation of profound devotion to the Virgin Mary which had grown with the advancing of the years into a flourishing tree whose roots were struck deep in the fertile soil of his family origins. As an old man, recalling the day before he left for the seminary, he remembered his mother's exhortation very well: 'If you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary.'<sup>250</sup> The promise, not recorded, found fulfilment far beyond what we could imagine. Construction of the church meant construction of a 'house' for his Mother, and the Mother of his boys and Salesians. Don Bosco showed even more than in the past his great devotion to the Virgin Mother, and Fr Lemoyne was not speaking loosely when he wrote about Don Bosco's Madonna.<sup>251</sup>

He passed on to benefactors the very same spirituality of faith and works through his example and words. He involved the well-to-do, often the aristocratic, inviting them to the service of almsgiving on behalf of the world of the poor, whom he saw as complementary in a stratified social order. During this stage of his life, however, in his relationships with the wealthy, he had not yet gained the casual freedom of thought and speech he had in the final decade, which would lead him to insist with increasing frankness on the duty of almsgiving, almost in terms of social justice as we understand it. In the 1860s, he was simply a priest on the lookout – though the spokesperson and agent of the 'begging' Madonna – perfectly impersonating the nature and social role of the poor: as the one who accepted his situation, asked when in need, gratefully received, gave thanks, including with prayer, to whoever gave him something, made good use of what he was given. He also respected and honoured the wealthy who helped him by giving alms, to fulfil his mission among the young: which was to serve Christ in the poor, contribute to their moral and professional uplifting, to bring about, despite inevitable trials, their common destination, temporal and eternal salvation. He reminded Count Pio Galleani d'Agliano (1816–1889) of this in essential terms, a benefactor who went back at least as far as 1855. He was close to him in his financial difficulties and re-assured him regarding 'things that somewhat disturbed family matters,' and which were hindering the efforts of his old benefactor: 'Do not be concerned, have patience, the Lord will reward your good will just the same.'<sup>252</sup> 'Have courage, Count,' he repeated a few weeks later '*non habemus hic manentem civitatem sed futuram inquirimus*. God will not abandon us; the crosses he sends us are a foretaste needed along the way to Paradise.'<sup>253</sup> In financial straits on one occasion he promised to visit a benefactress to accept any likely free offering: 'You will give me what the Lord and the Blessed Virgin will inspire in your heart' he wrote to her. 'May God bless you and give you all health and grace with a beautiful reward in the home of the blessed.'<sup>254</sup> He gave spiritual advice to the worthy Countess Uguccioni, promising prayers and best wishes: 'Besides, as a humble priest of Jesus Christ I ask for health and grace and happy days for you from heaven, for you family and the families of all your children. May God give them all the true health of the holy fear of God.'<sup>255</sup> His profession and teaching of faith became even more essential faced with particularly sorrowful deaths. On the announcement of the death of Count Luigi Cambray Digny (1843–1869), the older son of Countess Virginia, an army officer, Don Bosco assured her of the

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248 To Fr M. Rua, 11 May 1865, Em II 134-135.

249 To Countess C. Callori, 24 July and 31 August 1865, Em II 152 and 160.

250 Cf. Chap. 5, preface.

251 Cf. Chap. 14, § 5.1.

252 Letter of 28 September 1864, Em II 77.

253 Letter of 20 October and 9 November 1864, Em II 85 and 87.

254 To Marquis D. Fassati, 18 April 1865, Em II 120.

255 Letter of 22 January 1866, Em II 200.

prayers of the pupils at Valdocco, expressing the hope that the young man had 'expired in the grace and mercy of the Lord.' However, he also added a salutary wish: 'May God help us to spend all the days of our life in his grace, and find ourselves in peace with him at the final moments of our life.'<sup>256</sup> He reminded Countess Callori of the spiritual assistance he had provided for her son Giulio Cesare (1847–1870) and, after his death on 5 March, comforted her with extensive information about the Christian sentiments her son had expressed in his final hours, and one powerful sentiment of faith: '*Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit, sic Domino placuit, sic factum est; sit nomen Domini benedictum.*'<sup>257</sup>

Faith, however, did not have to stop at pure resignation. Human effort was associated with it, fed by the hope of eternal happiness, the *unum necessarium*. He reminded Luigia Barbò, who asked for prayers for her daughter affected by a serious eye illness: 'God gave us doctors and we do well to follow their advice'; but he would not fail to pray for her.<sup>258</sup> It is natural that Don Bosco would generally associate the wish for health and earthly prosperity with the request for 'copious blessings from the Blessed Virgin Mary in spiritual and also temporal matters,' as a divine reward for charity.<sup>259</sup>

Spiritual and temporal gifts were also desired and invoked for all his correspondents be they lay or clerical: 'Health and grace,' 'health and copious blessings from heaven,' 'health and the fear of God, along with perseverance in good,' 'long years and a happy life,' 'health and grace for living happily and being saved in eternity,' 'every spiritual and temporal good,' 'long years of happy life and the precious gift of perseverance,' 'health and perseverance in good.'<sup>260</sup>

Everything was for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, the formula which summed up belief, hope and love for God for Don Bosco, since – as he loved to say – '*Divinorum Divinissimum est ad salutem animarum Deo cooperari.*'<sup>261</sup>

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256 Letter of 2 May 1869, Em III 79.

257 To Countess C. Callori, 1 and 6 March 1870, Em III 189-192.

258 Letter of 26 August 1866, Em II 268.

259 Cf. Circular, March 1864, Em II 42.

260 Cf. letters: to Superintendent F. Selmi, June 1864, Em II 55; to Fr G. Agliani, 26 July 1864, Em II 643; to A. Fassati, 8 August 1864, Em II 67; to Countess P. Crotti di Costigliole, 8 September 1864, Em II 76; to Count C. Radicati Talice di Passerano, 2 December 1864, Em II 90; to C. Avetta, 23 December 1864, Em II 94; to Marquis D. Fassati, 4 June 1865, Em II 139; to Marquis A. Nobili Vitelleschi, 21 December 1865, Em II 192; to Cav. T. Gherardi Uguccioni, 28 September 1866, Em II 299; to Countess G. Uguccioni, 10 May 1867, Em II 368; to Count E. De Maistre, 25 June 1867, Em II 396; to March. C. Lepri, 27 June 1867, Em II 400-401; to Cav. F. Oreglia, 10 April 1868, Em II 522; to Duke T. Gallarati Scotti, 1 May 1869, Em III 77; to Cav. G. Brambilla, 3 May 1869, Em III 80.

261 To Marquis A. Gerini, 5 May 1869, Em III 83; cf. Chap. 6, § 3.

## Appendix

# THE PLURAL ORIGINS OF THE ORATORY AND THE YOUTHFUL SYMBOL OF THE FIRST BOYS TO BE PART OF IT

*In Don Bosco's words and writings we meet many real or ideal exemplary figures of boys at his 'oratory' in its various versions: a 'recreation park', a place of festive encounter, a hospice, a college or boarding school. In the various books he wrote we find a relationship between their main characters and the way they are represented in narrative form. We find substantial identity between the real and the ideal, though with some leaning toward the ideal, in the lives of Dominic Savio and Francis Besucco. The link between the reality and the image is less strict in the presentation of the emblematic figure of Michael Magone.*

*More indefinable and indistinct, and oscillating between objectivity and invention seems to be the relationship between reality and its representation in the biographical and instructive accounts whose main characters are Peter, in the Forza della buona educazione, Valentino in Valentino o la vocazione impedita and Severino in Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano. The story of Bartholomew Garelli can be fully traced back to the episode in the Memoirs of the Oratory. Research into records has not yet been able to identify his origins, his life or how it ended. This young man whom Don Bosco met on the Feast of the Immaculate conception seems to symbolise, in an account that came rather late in the piece, all the boys he had met – including those Fr Cafasso had entrusted to him – at different times in his early charitable experiences in Turin. He also intended to emphasise, through Garelli, the special nature of the beginnings of the oratory, its two origin, one earthly the other heavenly, and the oratory itself was a symbol of many ways in which young people could live together, and ultimately of a movement for and of young people without spatial or temporal boundaries. The indeterminate nature of documentation concerning the young man who happened to be in the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi seems to be echoed in the imprecise nature of the account itself. What is rich in significance, though, is the ideal and exemplary nature of this episode for the oratory, the boys who flocked there, and the adults who ran it, thanks especially to the priest who was behind it all. He, though, would defer to a more exalted personage when insisting that the event took place on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

JOHN (St) BOSCO

[1846] Letter to the City Vicar, Marquis Michael Benso di Cavour  
Turin, 113 March 1846 (Em I 66)

“This catechetical program was begun three years ago in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, and because it was the Lord's work the Lord blessed it, and the young people attended in greater number than the place could accommodate. Then, in the year 1844, having taken a job [as chaplain] at the Pious Work of the *Refuge*, I went to live there. But those wonderful youngsters continued to attend at the new place, eager to receive religious instruction. It was at this time that we, the Rev. Dr. [Giovanni] Borelli, Father [Sebastiano] Pacchiotti and myself jointly, presented a petition to His Grace the Archbishop for permission to convert one of our rooms into an oratory, and he authorized us to do so. Here catechism was taught, confessions were heard, and the Holy Mass was celebrated for the above-mentioned young people”.

JOHN (St) BOSCO

[1854] *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*. [pp. 38–39].

“This Oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summertime, the Rev. Fr. [Giuseppe] Caffasso\* used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayers' boys in a little room attached to the sacristy of the aforementioned church. The heavy workload this priest had taken on caused him to interrupt this work, which he loved so much. I took it up towards the end of 1841, and I began by gathering in that same place two young adults who were in grave need of religious instruction. These were joined by others, and during 1842 the number went up to twenty, and sometimes twenty-five.

From these beginnings I learnt two very important truths: first, that in general young people are not bad in themselves but more often than not they become such through contact with evil companions; second, that even these bad youngsters, if separated one from the other, are susceptible to great moral change”.

(\* ) It should be noted that Fr Joseph Cafasso (1811–1860) was alive and active when Don Bosco drew up his *Cenno storico*.

JOHN (St) BOSCO

[1862] *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*. [pp. 60-62].

“The idea of the Oratories came from frequenting the prisons in this city. In these places of spiritual and temporal misery there were many young men in the flower of their youth, alert, good-hearted, well able to be the consolation of their families and an honour to their town; and here they were locked up, discouraged, the opprobrium of society. Carefully considering the reasons for this misfortune one could see that for most of them they were unfortunate more for want of education than out of malice. One could note also that little by little they could be led to appreciate their dignity as human beings, that they could reason, and that they must earn their bread in life through honest effort and not by stealing. In other words as soon as their minds were enlightened by a moral and religious principle they began to feel something good in their hearts which they could not explain but which made them want to be better people. In fact many changed their behaviour while still in the prison, while others when released lived in such a way that they would not end up there again.

So we had confirmation that these young men were unfortunate for want of religious and moral instruction and that these two educational means were ones that together could[266] keep good boys good and lead the unruly ones to make wise judgement when they were released from these places of punishment. As a trial, some appropriate catechetical programs were begun in the prisons around the capital and a little later in the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi. And thus the Sunday gatherings began. Boys released from prison were invited as well as others who we found and collected here and there in the streets and squares and workshops during the week. Moral and religious stories, hymns, small gifts, some games were the lure we used to deal with them on Sundays and other holy days. Throughout 1841 on average around seventy boys attended ... ”

RUFFINO Dominic

[1860] *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, N° 1° 1860*. [p. 28-30] “Origine



dell'Oratorio.

In the year ... D. Bosco found himself at the St Francis *Convitto*. On the day of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception he was putting on his vestment in preparation for celebrating the H. Mass there when a young man of 17 or 18 years of age was waiting in the sacristy to hear the H. Mass. The sacristan asked him if he wanted to serve the Mass; he replied: I don't know how; the sacristan then took a stick and hit him twice over the head shouting at him for being there. D. Bosco saw this: why are you doing that? He asked him – do you know him? – Yes I know him, he is a friend of mine; I knew him the moment I saw him. Come here, the sacristan then said, D. Bosco wants to talk to you. The young man came. D. Bosco asked him if he had already heard Mass. – No, he replied. – Then go and hear it devoutly, and come back after Mass; because I have something for you to do. When Mass was over, the young man came to D. Bosco in the sacristy, who asked him: What is your name? – N N . Can you read? – No – Can you write? – No – Can you sing? – No – Can you whistle? The young man began to laugh. – Oh, so tell me, have you already been admitted to Communion? – No. Well, come here today at such and such a time, and I will instruct you: and so he did, he came for his lesson in the evening, but before beginning they both said a prayer to Mary Immaculate that she would prepare the young man to learn well the things he needed and to see that all the others in need would come with him to learn them. And so it was. In a short space of time the *Convitto* was too small and he went to the Refuge on the day of the Immaculate Conception, then changed to another place on the day of the Immaculate Conception and on that day, years later, he made a decision to build the new church that now exists. On that day years later he planned the various lotteries etc.”

RUFFINO Dominic,  
[1864 ca.] [*Cronaca*] 1861 1862 1863 1864 *Le doti grandi e luminose* [p. 61]

“A priest at the *Convitto* (D. Cavallero from Carmagnola) spoke in conversation about the beginning of the Oratory of St Francis of Assisi as follows: D. Cafasso one day asked a young man to serve his H. Mass. The young man replied that he did not know how, and D. Cafasso had him return later to teach him. Another joined him. But D. Cafasso, unable to keep up this task, entrusted it to D. Bosco to look after: he increased the number of his students.”

LEMOYNE John Baptist  
[1870] *L'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales*, in G. B. LEMOYNE, *Biografia del giovane Mazzarello Giuseppe*. Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales 1870, cap. XIV. [pp. 78-79].

“Before I tell you about when our Joseph came to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, it will not displease the reader if I give a brief outline of the history of this house which he will already have heard spoken of.

Right from 1841 Father John Bosco, seeing how young men, especially working youth needed to be set on the right path for fulfilling their duties as a Christian and being removed from the dangers they usually encounter at weekends, had conceived a very keen desire to dedicate his entire life to the good of youth, founding festive oratories in the most populated centres of the city of Turin.

The example of St Philip Neri in Rome encouraged him and urged him on in this great undertaking. Without any human means, trusting only in Divine Providence, and with the advice of the outstanding D. Cafasso, he set about the work. On Sunday mornings he went around the city and met some young lads playing and invited them to follow him, and he attracted them with little gifts and kindly got them to promise that next Sunday they would come and find him at home. He promised them a small reward if they brought other friends. A good number having gathered, he

thought about a place to instruct them and let them play. But with this the problems began. Having gone to the Refuge, in via Cottolengo, a room there served as a chapel and the public street as a place for recreation ...”

LEMOYNE John Baptist

[1872] *L'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales*, in G. B. LEMOYNE, *Biografia del giovane Mazzarello Giuseppe*, second edition. Turin, tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales 1872, cap. XIV [+] [pp. 65-67].

“Before I tell you about when our Joseph came to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, it will not displease the reader if I give a brief outline of the history of this house which he will already have heard spoken of.

Father John Bosco while frequenting the prisons in Turin, noted with profound regret that certain young men who appeared to be of good character, as soon as they got out of prison were back there again in a short time, but bringing other friends with them. He thought well about the reason for such misfortune with the famous and holy priest Fr Joseph Cafasso and agreed that the main cause was that these young men were abandoned to their own devices at weekends and did not have upright employers during the week. Fr J. Bosco set about this task.

On the day of the Immaculate Conception, 1841, he began to gather some of the more abandoned ones in the church of St Francis of Assisi; others joined them and still more others he invited during the week and who he waited for on Sundays. While he kept them there for catechism classes, hymn singing, pleasant stories and cheered them up with small gifts and pleasant recreation, at the same time he sought every means possible to see that none of his pupils were without an employer during the week. It was a marvellous success. He say that the good remained good and without realising it, the ones at risk were removed from their bad way of living. Since the growing numbers meant the first place was no longer compatible, the Oratory transferred to the nearby Work of the Refuge, where D. Bosco where Don Bosco went as the Director. Here the Oratory saw extraordinary development and about a hundred boys flocked there. But how many trials he had to put up with! ...”

[\*] Except for some slight variation in the new text [Inc. Fr Jon Bosco... had to put up with!] it comes entirely from Don Bosco who took a look at a copy of the item in its first edition, adding, especially in Chapter XIV, two handwritten pages with the altered text; it can be dated, therefore, at sometime in 1871 and 1872. In 1873 he began writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St francis de Sales* with a further version of the beginnings.

JOHN (St) BOSCO

[1873] *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Introduction, notes and critical text, ed. by A. Da Silva Ferreira. Rome, LAS 1991. [Second decade]

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the beginning of the Festive Oratory. [pp. 121-122] But note that the translation below comes from the Salesiana Publishers, New York 2010 edition.

“ ... On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (8 December 1841), I was vesting to celebrate holy Mass at the appointed time. Joseph Comotti, the sacristan, seeing a boy in a corner, asked him to come and serve my Mass.

‘I don't know how,’ he answered, completely embarrassed.

‘Come on,’ repeated the sacristan, ‘I want you to serve Mass.’

'I don't know how,' the boy repeated. 'I've never served Mass.'

'You big blockhead,' said the sacristan, quite furious, 'if you don't know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy?' With that he grabbed a feather duster and hit the poor boy about the head and shoulders.

As the boy beat a hasty retreat, I cried loudly, 'What are you doing? Why are you beating him like that? What's he done?'

'Why is he hanging round the sacristy if he doesn't know how to serve Mass?'

'But you've done wrong.'

'What does it matter to you?'

'It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him.'

'*Tuder! Tuder!*' he began to shout, as he ran after him. Promising him better treatment, he brought the lad back to me. He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received.

'Have you attended Mass yet?' I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.

'No,' he answered.

'Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you.' He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving, I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him cheerfully:

'My good friend, what's your name?'

'My name's Bartholomew Garelli.'

'Where are you from?'

'Asti.'

'Is your father alive?'

'No, my father's dead.'

'And your mother?'

'My mother's dead too.'

'How old are you?'

'I'm sixteen.'

'Can you read and write?'

'I don't know anything.'

'Have you made your first communion?'

'Not yet.'

'Have you ever been to confession?'

'Yes, when I was small.'

'Are you going to catechism classes now?'

'I don't dare.'

'Why?'

'Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don't know anything, so I'm ashamed to go.'

'If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?'

'I'd come very willingly.'

'Would you come willingly to this little room?'

'I'd come willingly enough, provided they don't beat me.'

'Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you'll be my friend and you'll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like us to begin our catechism?'

'Whenever you wish.'

'This evening?'

'Okay.'

'Are you willing right now?'

'Yes, right now, with great pleasure.' I stood up and made the sign of the cross to begin; but my pupil made no response because he did not know how to do it. In that first catechism lesson I taught him to make the sign of the cross. I also taught him to know God the Creator and why he created us. Though Bartholomew's memory was poor, with attentive diligence in a few feast days he learned enough to make a good confession and, soon after, his holy communion.

To this first pupil some others were added.