

STUDIES – 21

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**DON BOSCO
THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIEST
IN THE CENTURY OF FREEDOMS**

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Chapter 19

FOUNDATION OF THE FMA INSTITUTE AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE SDBs (1870–1874)

- 1837 9 May: birth of Mary Domenica Mazzarello
- 1862 6 July: 'did Jesus only redeem boys?'
- 1864 8 October: first encounter with the Daughters of the Immaculate in Mornese'
- 1867 Members transfer to the House of the Immaculate;
December: Don Bosco's conference to members;
24 April: letter to Bl. Enrichetta Dominici asking help to adapt the Salesian Constitutions 'for an Institute of religious women.'
Costituzioni Regole dell'Instituto delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice.
- 1872 23 May: entrance into the college, the final location;
5 August: clothing and religious profession of the first 11 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and clothing for four others;
24 October: letter to Archbishop Gastaldi regarding admission to Orders for Salesian candidates.
- 1873 18 February: Don Bosco's trip to Rome;
22 March: leaves for Turin via Florence, Bologna, Modena;
Summer: the *animadversiones* on the SDB Constitutions.
- 1874 March: Fr John Cagliari, Director General of the FMA Institute;
3/13 April: approval of the SDB Constitutions and rescript granting faculties for dimissorials *ad decennium*;
15 May: death of Fr Pestarino;
15 June: election of M. D. Mazzarello as Superior (Mother) General.
Autumn: local Spiritual Director, Fr James Costamagna;
8 October: the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Borgo S. Martino (AL).

The early 1870s mark two fundamental moments in the story of Don Bosco: the broadening and consolidation of his youth activity extended to the female world through the founding of the FMA Institute, and the gaining of the approval of the Salesian Society's Constitutions. The achievement of these two fundamental results differed both in their dimension and how they were pursued. In the first case, perhaps Don Bosco gained more than he had hoped for, and in the second it was certainly less than he had asked for, with painful consequences for the life of the Congregation which was still incomplete according to him.

1. The FMA Institute: convergence of two distinct experiences

During the years when Don Bosco was giving shape to the Salesian Society, seeing to the Salesian spirit in its first young adherents, including telling them about his dreams, there appeared one special, distant prelude to a similar initiative for girls. He located this as being on the night of 5 July, 1862, reduced to a handful of details: 'I found myself on a broad plain. I saw the Oratory boys running and jumping, happily playing. Then I went for a walk with Marchioness Barolo who said to me: "Leave me just to look after the girls. You can just look after the boys." I replied: "But tell me something: did Jesus just redeem boys and not girls?" She replied: "I know that he redeemed them all." "Then I must see that his blood is not shed in vain for boys and girls."¹

So the possibility of and the need for initiatives on behalf of girls, similar to the ones for boys, was not absent from his purview. This involvement, however, would not have an absolute starting point but would come about thanks to his encountering an already established group of girls who were already dedicated to some extent to a special mission in the service of God and neighbour. While it is not the task of the biographer of Don Bosco to write up the origins and early development of the FMA Institute, it is, nevertheless, his duty to recall the part he played in how it came to be and in its early growth, as its founder. In fact one must certainly take into serious consideration the important basis which this group of young girls offered the foundation. They were its core group, under the direction and leadership of Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1837–81) and their common spiritual father, Father Domenico Pestarino (1817–74). It is likewise essential to explore the historical reasons which made Don Bosco the founder for all intents and purposes² and not just in its formal, legal sense.³ The Institute arose and took shape, in fact, thanks to two distinct but convergent movements. Both were historically essential to its existence and peculiar nature.

Seeing things this way can help reconcile two quite different testimonies offered at the Informative Process stage for Don Bosco's Beatification and canonisation. These were the testimonies of Fr Francis Cerruti and Fr Michael Rua. Neither were quite exact, but this should not create difficulties for the historiographer. They spoke of his involvement in establishing the FMAs. Basically they can be regarded as complementary accounts.

1 G. BONETTI, *Annali III* 1862, pp. 31–32; cf. also D. RUFFINO, *Cronaca*. 1861 1862 1863 1864 *Le doti grandi e luminose*, 5 June [= July] 1862, p. 23.

2 Regarding this complex interaction, cf. P. STELLA, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in ID., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 187–208; M. E. POSADA, *Significato della "validissima cooperatio" di S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello alla fondazione dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in M. E. POSADA (Ed.), *Attuale perché vera. Contributi su S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Rome, LAS 1987, pp. 53–68; P. CAVIGLIÀ, *Il rapporto stabilitosi tra S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello e S. Giovanni Bosco. Studio critico di alcune interpretazioni*, *ibid.*, pp. 69–98; A. DELEIDI, *Don Bosco e Maria Domenica Mazzarello: rapporto storico-spirituale*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 205–216; , *L'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in rapporto a don Bosco...*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 217–229; , *Don Bosco fondatore dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana. Atti del Simposio, Rome-Salesianum (22–26 January 1989)*, Rome, Editrice S.D.B. [1989], pp. 281–303; A. DELEIDI, *Il rapporto tra don Bosco e madre Mazzarello nella fondazione dell'Istituto delle FMA (1862–1876)*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana...*, pp. 305–321; P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita tracce di futuro. Fonti e testimonianze sulla prima comunità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1870–1881)*, Rome, LAS 1996.

3 On these aspects see the problem posed by the Promoter General of the Faith, Salvatore Natucci, in the Apostolic Process of Beatification and Canonisation of Mary Domenica Mazzarello: cf. SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, *Aquen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Dominicae Mazzarello, Primae Antistitae Institutii Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis. Nova Positio super virtutibus*, Rome, Guerra et Belli 1935, pp. 1–2; L. FLORA, *Storia del titolo di "Confondatrice" conferito dalla Chiesa a S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, nel vol. di (Ed.), *Attuale perché vera...*, pp. 39–47; in the process of the Cause, *Factum Concordatum*, undated, containing the *Novissimae Animadversiones* of the Promoter, 27 November 1935 (pp. 5–10) and the *Responsio* degli Avvocati (pp. 2 and 13): in L. FLORA, *Storia del titolo di "Confondatrice"...*, pp. 47–51.

Francis Cerruti referred to what he had heard from Don Bosco himself. When Pius IX asked the latter why he hadn't thought of extending what he was doing for boys to girls as well, he replied that he had already thought of it and indeed wanted the future 'religious association' to be a 'monument which speaks ... of filial gratitude' to Mary Help of Christians.

A 'propitious moment' would come in 1872 [which is clearly chronologically inaccurate] when he met Fr Pestarino and the 'excellent girls who made up the Immaculate Conception Sodality or groups founded and directed by Pestarino himself. They then went on to be called the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians according to the Rule given them by D. Bosco and approved by Bishop Sciandra, the Bishop of Acqui. Don Bosco was really the founder of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.'⁴

Fr Rua's testimony came from personal acquaintance. 'As well as the Salesian Society,' he attested, Don Bosco 'also founded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.' On the death of his mother, Margaret, he saw the opportunity for a Religious Congregation which could take up household duties, 'but no decision was made until Providence clearly opened the way.' The decision was taken when Fr Domenico Pestarino at Mornese in the diocese of Acqui 'began bringing together young women from his birthplace and nurturing their piety,' 'with such good results that he adopted them as his spiritual family.' 'Seeing the good spirit, piety and mutual charity that reigned there,' Don Bosco left Fr Pestarino to guide them, 'but not without lending him some assistance by way of advice and funds.' Then when Fr Pestarino died, 'he sent along one of his priests helped by some good lay confreres to take up the family's spiritual direction. Then this Congregation began to develop like all his works, under the name of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,' 'for the benefit of female youth.'⁵

Fr Rua was emphasising an incontrovertible historical reality. Under the direction of a spiritual father, the Mornese group was not just the raw material which then became an institute of consecrated religious women. In truth, the girls who comprised it with Mary Domenica Mazzarello as their guide were already virtually consecrated women in the world, consecrated to God and neighbour, girls especially, and already prepared to take up a regular and structured form of common life. Their superior, truly a Sister at home and in community, ticked off all the boxes needed for the official title of co-foundress and much more to boot. This was then reinforced by her intense collaboration with Don Bosco to give form and substance to the Institute.

From a formal point of view, Don Bosco was certainly the founder, inasmuch as he fostered their establishment as a true and proper religious community and suggested, rewrote, checked and promulgated suitable Constitutions to guarantee its organisational structure and spirituality. But from a concrete historical perspective, its founding differed from the Salesian Society. The latter began with Don Bosco's boys who had no concept of religious life, some of whom were even allergic to 'becoming a friar' like the young Cagliero. Nevertheless, for the most part they came from good Christian families and with a more or less evident leaning to clerical life. Because they lived with Don Bosco, he gradually led them to want to live and work in a permanent way, in community, with him, to the point of deciding to share his mission and bind themselves by religious vows, thus becoming members of a true and proper society of consecrated men. Instead, the Mornese situation was already a potential expectation of a call which became an offering in real terms when his earlier intention to found something, an intention not yet concrete, began to take shape. Don Bosco himself began to petition for diocesan approval of the Institute, presenting it to Bishop Sciandra of Acqui in the following significant words: 'Your Lordship will know that the zealous Fr Domenico Pestarino of fond memory, began an Institute called the House or College of Mary Help of Christians with the purpose of offering Christian education to poor and abandoned or

4 *Taurinen. Beatificationis et Canonizationis...*, *Positio super virtutibus*, 1920, p. 141.

5 *Taurinen. Beatificationis et Canonizationis...*, *Positio super virtutibus*, 1920, pp. 279–281.

otherwise non-wealthy girls, in order to set them on the path to a moral life, knowledge and religion, under the direction of Sisters called the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.’ He had obviously replaced ‘Mary Immaculate’ with this.⁶

Fr Cerruti’s testimony, while not mentioning what Fr Pestarino offered, refers to Don Bosco nevertheless planning to start a female Congregation, having come across a group prepared by the priest from Mornese, and that this was the foundation stone. Fr Pestarino had met Don Bosco around 1862, and probably in 1863 he was accepted as an ‘extern member’ of the Salesian Society, like Fr Giovanni Ciattino.⁷ From 1865, he was always at the St Francis de Sales Conferences where each rector referred to the work for which he was responsible. So for a number of years he found himself in circumstances where he could assimilate the significant features of Don Bosco’s mentality and spirit, and where he could pass them on, consciously or otherwise, to the Daughters of the Immaculate group at Mornese. Finally, from 1870 he worked explicitly in complete harmony with Don Bosco at Mornese so his and Don Bosco’s projects in Turin could converge on the same objective. In presenting the printed copy of the Constitutions in 1878, Don Bosco did not fail to recommend the soul of Fr Pestarino, ‘the first Director of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians whom the Lord made use of to lay the foundations for this Institute.’⁸

It is obvious that in reconstructing what Don Bosco did for the Institute one cannot avoid at least a rapid overview of the life of the group which, with its superior, ended up being the Institute’s essential core.

2. A community of women vowed to God and neighbour in the world

Behind Mary Domenica Mazzarelli’s personal life and founding abilities, from infancy to adolescence (1831–52), lay her exemplary family and upbringing within the Church pervaded by a sense of God and work, perfected by the early spiritual direction of Fr Pestarino, who set her on a higher path to interior life, the practice of mortification, including outward mortification, and an intense sacramental life. There were three fundamental periods within which this spirituality was further plumbed and which marked her life distinctly. These can be identified as 1852–55, 1860–69, and 1870–71.

The four years from 1852–55 saw her conscious and free involvement in founding, initially secretly and then officially, the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, a group promoted by Angela Maccagno. Angela wrote the first draft of a Rule which they followed in the first two years and which was then revised and given structure by Blessed Giuseppe Frassinetti in 1855, and approved by the diocesan Bishop Modesto Contratto (1798–1867) by decree on 20 May, 1857. Frassinetti published it as an appendix to his *La Monica in casa* (The Nun at home),⁹ indicating its publication in the *Letture Cattoliche*’s September 1860 issue entitled *The Model of poor girl Rosina Pedemonte who died in Genoa aged 20 on 30 January, 1860*.¹⁰ Rosina spent the summer of 1858 at Mornese as a guest of Angela Maccagno, who had earlier been her guest in Genoa in 1857–58 when attending the school of method for qualification as an elementary school teacher. ‘The Rule of the Pious Union became known through this appendix,’ Frassinetti said in

6 Letter of 14 January 1876, E III 11–12.

7 They appear as such among the “Membri della Società di S. Francesco di Sales appartenenti alla casa madre di Turin anno 1865”: cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 296, 318, 524.

8 *Regole o Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società Salesiana*. Turin, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1878, p. 5.

9 Oneglia, Tasso 1859.

10 By Giuseppe Frassinetti, Prior at Santa Sabina in Genoa. Turin, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1860 [VIII–95 p.], p. VI.

1863 'and Piedmont's life showed it was capable of leading all the girls who followed it to perfection.'¹¹

The lifestyle led by Mazzarello and her companions was the beginning of a partial experience of being a 'nun at home'. It was a lifestyle which, unconsciously to begin with, but later consciously, drew its inspiration from the original Ursulines as conceived of and founded by St Angela Merici. Indeed some of its basic elements were already discoverable in Maccagno's first draft. There were three key concepts; An intense ascetic and contemplative interior life, the exercise of charity to one's neighbour, and obedience to their common spiritual guide Fr Domenico Pestarino. The following pointers can be extracted from the first Rule:

'Being united in heart, spirit and will in Jesus Christ 'we confirm and wish to maintain this will and the Pious Union by a vow of Chastity taken for a length of time determined by the Director's advice.' 'We do good for the glory of God and the benefit and good of our neighbour.' 'If any of the Sisters is abandoned by her family or is without their support, she may remain alone with the Director's advice and will join with the other Sisters as indicated by him.' The general aim was indicated thus: 'To cooperate for the glory of God and religion in these terms and always: through good example, by approaching the holy Sacraments; devotion to the passion of O.L.J.C.; tender and special devotion to our most holy Mother the Virgin. Let this be the uniform and the purpose of the Pious Union ...'¹²

Frassenetti dedicated an appendix in his *Vita e istituto di S. Angela Merici* (Life and Institute of St Angela Merici), to the *Pia Unione delle Figlie di Maria SS. Immacolata* (Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate), in which he recalled the Mornese origins of the Union and summed up the characteristics of the Rule he had drawn up.¹³ He began by saying that 'Many girls who cannot or do not want to profess a life in the cloister would more easily give themselves to God if they had a way that made it easier for them to achieve Christian perfection by remaining in the world.' This was what the sodality or group originally conceived by Angela Maccagno in Mornese was aiming at. It was 'her idea' that members 'live happily detached from earthly goods, thus practising true poverty of spirit; that above all they do not follow their own will, and love a more perfect obedience; that they have, besides, the firm resolve to preserve perpetual chastity and stand out for this virtue inasmuch as a poor human creature can, angelically, being prepared also to make this a vow if allowed to by their confessor. In a word, while remaining in the world, these girls aspire to perfection which good Religious aspire to in their cloisters. Beyond this, she wanted them to practise works of mercy, notably by helping and being with the sick at Mornese, and seeing that young girls do not miss out on Christian instruction, promoting works of piety and in general whatever is in the service of God and for the salvation of souls. Finally, it was her intention that they be thought of as real Sisters and not only involved for their mutual spiritual benefit but also to help one another in their temporal needs.' He pointed, finally, to the first five women [amongst whom Mazzarello] who gave official beginnings to the Pious Union on the Sunday following the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1855.¹⁴

Recapping the first ten chapters of the Rule, he explained some of the special features of the original Rule which perfectly encapsulated the tasks of the little group Mary Mazzarello was the leader of. 'In § 3,' he wrote, 'it speaks of their duties' which 'are in general, practising works of spiritual and corporal mercy' including 'seeing that girls neglected by their parents frequent the

11 Cf. G. FRASSINETTI, *Vita e istituto di S. Angela Merici...* Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1863, LC a. XI. fasc. 5, July, p. 119.

12 *Il primo Regolamento delle Figlie dell'Immacolata (abbozzo di Angela Maccagno) – 1853*, in *Cronistoria I*. Rome, Istituto FMA 1874, pp. 321–323.

13 Cf. G. FRASSINETTI, *Vita e istituto di S. Angela Merici...*, pp. 109–138. Frassinetti's rule became the point of reference for countless Unions in the 19th century in Italy.

14 G. FRASSINETTI, *Vita e istituto di S. Angela Merici...*, pp. 109–113.

Sacraments and Christian doctrine' and 'nurturing the spirit of the older girls so they may love holy things and give themselves to a devout life.' In § 7 it speaks of spiritual gatherings the daughters in the Pious Union should hold, to encourage one another in practising works of piety and in their zeal for the salvation of souls.' In § 9 it speaks of the method of living, prescribing especially that they offer themselves completely to God morning and evening, hear Mass each day, be present for vocal and mental prayer, frequent the Sacraments and have true devotion to Our Blessed Lady.' In the end, 'this Pious Union' Frassinetti noted, 'is the same as the Society of St Ursula both in substance and in secondary details,' an ancient institution 'flourishing anew in our midst.'¹⁵

So, effectively in this early period of the Union of the Daughters of the Immaculate, this was the dominant spirituality mediated through Fr Pestarino, already a pupil and friend of Frassinetti, who was also familiar with Mornese. It was a spirituality similar to Cafasso's, Liguorian, positive and with everything that made the spiritual experience at Mornese similar to Don Bosco's and the *Convitto* in Turin.¹⁶ It is significant that at their meeting the Daughters read from St Alphonsus Liguori's *La monaca santa* (The holy nun) and, from 1859, the earlier mentioned *La monaca in casa* by Giuseppe Frassinetti,¹⁷ as well as parts of St Teresa of Avila's life. Except for this latter, they were books that Don Bosco was already using in the late 1860s for the religious formation of the Salesians.¹⁸

During a second stage beginning with her illness in 1860, and an intensified ascetic and educational involvement, Mazzarello in fact began an experience that was much closer to that of Don Bosco's men. Expressions of this were the gradual emphasis on spiritual and apostolic dedication to girls, setting them on the path to employment and providing religious education. There were also some incipient elements of common life for young 'apostles'. Fr Pestarino soon became the mediator between the group of Daughters of Mary Immaculate and Don Bosco. The first personal encounter of the Daughters with the future founder occurred on 8 October, 1864, the year when Mary and Petronilla Mazzarello had increased their detachment from the family, setting up a small community. Angela Maccagno wrote to Fr Frassinetti on 4 December, 1864: 'Know that when D. Bosco came to Mornese, one evening we all met in the church, that is, all the Daughters from the Union, and he told us a number of things. Then at the Director's suggestion I asked him to recommend us to our bishop, because he was going to Acqui, and at the same time I told him that when he went to Rome he might intercede on our behalf with the Holy Father. He replied that he would not fail to do so. He asked us if we had any indulgences and that if we wanted some he would also ask for these since [the Pope] had all the faculties to grant them.'¹⁹ Over these days, and in agreement with Don Bosco, Fr Pestarino began to give shape to a plan that would lead him to building a college for boys. In 1871, at Don Bosco's indication, this immediately metamorphosed into one for girls.

A more precise vocational choice was determined in October 1867, when both teachers and girls transferred to the House of the Immaculate which Fr Pestarino had left them. Mary Mazzarello became the one in charge of it. Meanwhile, the small group of Daughters, supportive of Mazzarello, intensified their activities which grew ever closer to forms of apostolate similar to those of Don Bosco: work as seamstresses dedicated to the professional (employment) formation and Christian education of the girls, the beginnings of a hospice for needy or orphaned girls, preventive activity of an oratorian, religious, catechetical and recreational kind. On Monday 9 December,

15 G. FRASSINETTI, *Vita e istituto di S. Angela Merici...*, pp. 115–117.

16 Cf. M. E. POSADA, *Giuseppe Frassinetti e Maria D. Mazzarello. Rapporto storicospirituale*. Rome, LAS 1986.

17 Oneglia, Tasso 1859.

18 Cf. Chap. 15, § 11.

19 Cit. in G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872–1885)*. Critical texts edited by Sr Cecilia Romero. Rome, LAS 1983, p. 24, no. 15.

1867, Don Bosco arrived in Mornese where he spent some days and where he officially received proceeds from the Mornese community assembled on the 10th, promised for the construction of the Church of Mary help of Christians.²⁰ He also gave a conference to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and on the 13th blessed the new chapel at the college, celebrating Mass there.²¹ He returned to Mornese at Fr Pestarino's invitation on 19 April, 1869, staying there until the 22nd. 'He spoke to the Daughters' the *Cronistoria* [FMA version of the SBD Chronicle] tells us, also referring to a kind of oratory program that Don Bosco would then have sent the young women. We have no trace of it, nor do we know its contents, which is even more problematic since we know that the Daughters of Mary Immaculate already had their *Regulations*.²²

Don Bosco was in Mornese again on 9 May 1870, the second day of the triduum of celebrations for the first Mass in the village of Fr Pestarino's nephew, Fr Giuseppe. He mentioned it to Countess Callori on 15 May, praising the heightened spiritual temper of the village and the daughters' community: 'Your letter reached me in Mornese, which is the earthly paradise of the province of Acqui.'²³

It was probably at this point that the third key moment was beginning to mature, in 1870–71, which led to the important day of the official foundation on 5 August, 1872. The bishop was not in favour of opening a boy's college. Fr Pestarino involved Don Bosco in determining the new direction. We can deduce this from an indication in the letter with which Don Bosco assured Fr Pestarino that he would be in Mornese on 9 May, 1870: 'We will also see what needs to be done about the house and school at Mornese.'²⁴ More explicit, but for the recipient of the letter rather than today's reader of it, was what he wrote to Fr Pestarino on 10 July, inviting him to come to Turin for the Forty Hours Devotion from the 20th to the 30th of the month. 'If you come for that occasion it would give me great pleasure and we will have time to discuss business ... You could come on the 18th, spend the week with us then return to the parish on Saturday if you want. This way I will have some time to tell you things which are best not entrusted to paper.'²⁵ Finally, there was the explicit decision on who the college would be for, agreed with Fr Pestarino at the end of January 1871 when he was in Valdocco for the rector's conferences. On 28 February, he wrote to his nephew Fr Giuseppe: 'I have been in Turin and have decided absolutely on opening the College in a broad sense. Don Bosco had some big ideas and will still need to work on it from what I understand. All that is lacking is the over-all plan. We will back it, but what to do?'²⁶ The Daughters of the Immaculate would not have been left out of nor have been ignorant of these 'big ideas' about opening a college.

3. Don Bosco as founder of the FMA Institute.

It is preferable to stick with the facts which have already been briefly put, but accurately analysed by others, rather than go with particular confidences. Moreover, as Don Bosco's spiritual director had noted in the 1850s, he did not have a tendency to talk openly of plans and thoughts in the making. When he spoke about them they had already happened! Only then would there be a confidant or two – whoever was called on to collaborate, a Salesian or benefactor.

20 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to Fr Pestarino, 4 October, 3 and 25 December 1867, Em II 440–441, 453–454 and 464–465.

21 Cf. MB VIII 1012–1018.

22 Cf. *Cronistoria* I 224–225. 23

23 Em III 208

24 To Fr Pestarino, 2 May 1870, Em III 205.

25 Em III 224.

26 Cit. in P. CAVIGLIA and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 21.

Something similar proves to be the case regarding the beginning of his direct involvement in founding the FMA Institute. His proverbial reserve even precludes absolute certainty about any likely alternative solutions which might have preceded his choice regarding the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

Thus it does not seem that he had ever thought of beginning with the apostolic and educational work established by Mother Luigia Angelica Clarac in Via Pio V, not far from the St Aloysius oratory.²⁷ It is more credible that his awareness of the Clarac initiative, rather than being a 'hypothetical possibility for a foundation,' had served him as 'a strong stimulus for maturing in the ideal notion of a work on behalf of needy girls which was gradually taking shape in the spirit of the Saint.'²⁸

More problematic still seems to be an early but unsuccessful attempt, towards 1860, which the biographer of Blessed Joseph Allamano speaks of: 'When Don Bosco thought about founding the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,' Allemano had said 'the first person he looked at as a first superior was precisely Benedetta Savio. With his in mind he had sent two of his priests to Castelnuovo to persuade her to come to Turin.'²⁹ Advised by Caffaso 'to be a nun at home,' Benedetta Savio (1825–96), an elementary school teacher from 1849–56, then in charge of the Pescarmona children's nursery in her birthplace for almost 50 years, had declined Don Bosco's proposal 'to be co-foundress of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians'³⁰ either of her own accord or she was dissuaded by her family. Despite the authoritative nature of the testimony, some errors and inconsistencies urge one to very much reconsider this information, which seems even more problematic if one considers the decidedly premature date and the 'if we wanted to connect it with the facts in Mornese.'³¹

The cautious and slow process at Mornese seems to be the only reliable one as it gradually took shape in Don Bosco's mind towards 1870, then became a gradually unveiled plan from 1871: to Fr Pestarino perhaps, and openly to an unforeseeable individual, a benefactress of the Oratory.³² Mother Enrichetta Dominici (1829–94), beatified in 1978, was Superior General of the Sisters of St Anne of Providence from 1861. They were founded by Marquis Tancredi and Marchioness Giulia di Barolo. After earlier talking to her, Don Bosco sent her an extremely demanding letter on 24 April, 1871, with a copy of the Constitutions attached. 'I am placing the Rule of our Congregation in your hands so that you can kindly read it and see if it could be adapted to an institute of religious women in the sense that I had the honour of explaining to you when I was with you. You should begin with No. 3 – *Purpose of this institution, the Daughters of the Immaculate* – then subtract or add as you see fit in your wisdom for founding an institute where the daughters will be true religious in the Church's eye, but will also be free citizens in the eyes of civil society. If any chapters or articles of the Rule of St Anne could be adapted, I would be very pleased if you could do so. When you believe it would be good for us to talk about it, let one of our clerics or delivery men know who often go there. This is certainly inconvenient news for you but I believe it

27 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., pp. 189–192.

28 Cf. , *Alle origini di una scelta. Don Bosco, Fondatore di un Istituto religioso femminile*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988), p. 157; M. E. POSADA, *Don Bosco fondatore dell'Istituto...*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana...*, p. 291; M. TREACY, *Mother Marie–Louise–Angélique Clarac and Don Bosco*, "Journal of Salesian Studies" 5 (1994) 1, pp. 152–159.

29 Cf. I. TUBALDO, *Giuseppe Allamano. Il suo tempo. La sua vita. La sua opera*, Vol. I 1851–1891. Turin, Edizioni Missioni Consolata 1982, p. 11.

30 Cf. M. E. POSADA, *Alle origini di una scelta...*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988), pp. 157–159.

31 Cf. M. E. POSADA, *Alle origini di una scelta...*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988), p. 162; ID., *Don Bosco fondatore dell'Istituto...*, in M. MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana...*, p. 292.

32 Cf. letter of Don Bosco 21 September 1869, Em III 137.

will be for the greater glory of God. If we succeed in winning over some souls, you will have played a major part in it.³³

Certain assumptions are explicitly revealed here, be it the intention of founding a Religious Institute for the education of girls, and the plan which had already ripened of beginning with the Union of the Daughters of the Immaculate. Even outlined there is an Institute identical in religious and civil terms to the Society of St Francis de Sales. As we see from a letter Dominici wrote on 4 December 1872 to her spiritual director, Mons. Pellegrino Tofoni, secretary of the Archbishop of Fermo, Cardinal De Angelis, the Superior followed up the request, getting her secretary to write up the Rule – Sr Francesca [her secular name was Caterina] Garelli. Sr Francesca drew ‘much of it’ from the Rule of the Sisters of St Anne.³⁴

According to the testimony given by Fr Paul Albera at the Apostolic Process, a significant development occurred the following month. ‘In May 1870 [actually it was 1872], having called a Chapter meeting, Don Bosco recommended we pray for a month to gain the necessary enlightenment to know whether or not we should occupy ourselves with girls as he was asked to do from time to time. When the month was over, he called the Chapter together once more, asking each one for his opinion. Everyone agreed that we should also do this kind of good, and then he thought of entrusting this work to Fr Pestarino, a secular priest of the diocese of Acqui resident in Mornese. While living in his own home there, he was busy as a director of souls but especially of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary founded on the example of a Congregation established in Genoa by Fr D. Frassinetti who was a very close friend of his ... I can attest to the above through direct knowledge, because I belonged to the Chapter when D. Bosco was talking about this institution.’³⁵

This testimony is a reliable alternative to the minutes of the Superior Chapter meeting of 24 April, 1871, which cannot be found and during which, according to Angelo Amadei, Don Bosco had manifested his intentions of founding the new Institute.³⁶ We know that it is not exactly correct to say that the Union of Daughters in Mornese followed Genoa; the order is clearly the reverse. In one of his *Memoirs* written soon after the facts, Fr Domenico Pestarino wrote almost word for word the decisive moment which led Don Bosco over these months to be the new founder. ‘Towards halfway through June’ 1871, he wrote, Don Bosco ‘explained to D. Pestarino from Mornese at a private conference with him at the oratory in Turin, his desire to give consideration to the Christian education of girls of the ordinary people, and stated that Mornese was the place he knew of best suited for such an Institute. It had a healthy climate, a good religious spirit reigned there, and already for a number of years the Congregation of Daughters under the name of the Immaculate and the new Ursulines had been established there. From among these he could easily choose the ones who were best disposed and called to a life completely in common and away from the world, because they would already have some idea of a more regulated life and spirit of piety. It would be easy to begin the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Through its spirit, example and salutary instruction, it would help nurture older and younger girls, and following the examples of the oratories which Don Bosco himself had established in Turin, and the colleges for boys already to be found in various places, it would, under his guidance and with those few exceptions and adjustments needed for girls, promote good, offer Christian instruction for so many poor girls of the ordinary people.’ Don Bosco had asked Fr Pestarino for his opinion and the latter gave full

33 Em III 325.

34 The letter is found in P. CAVIGLIÀ, and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 60.

35 *Summarium, Substantialia Causae*, p. 68. “Prefect of the day boys” at the Oratory, Fr Albera was elected as a Councillor to the Chapter on 10 December 1869; cf. Chap. 24, § 1.3.

36 MB X 594.

assent on condition that Don Bosco accept 'the management and offer immediate and absolute protection for the scheme.'³⁷

In another, longer *Memoir* written after 5 August, 1872, Fr Pestarino followed up with a report on events, almost identical to the preceding one, with a commentary on what had occurred during Don Bosco's illness at Varazze, and some brief notes on the internal life of the members up until the Institute was formalised in August. During Don Bosco's illness at Varazze 'D. Pestarino went to visit him on a number of occasions.' Particularly important was the visit on the day of the Epiphany, with a group from Mornese. Don Bosco asked the Daughters' spiritual director to bring them together and, following the Constitutions already available to them, he asked that they move to electing the Chapter, meaning the Superior and her assistants.³⁸ In fact, it is probable that Fr Pestarino had already received a *draft Rule* from Don Bosco some months earlier, consisting of the original manuscript of the *Costituzioni Regole dell'Istituto delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Constitutions, Rules of the Institute of MHC). We can share here what the *Cronistoria* says in reference to summer 1871: 'In that same summer, and probably at the *palazzo* of Countess Corsi in Nizza Monferrato, or at Lanzo during the retreat, Don Bosco gave Fr Pestarino the first draft of the Rule he had already told him about, telling him to take a look through it: it is only a kind of outline.'³⁹ Fr Pestarino corrected it and added the title as follows: '1871. 24 May. *Constitutions, Rules of the Institute of the Daughters of the Immaculate and Mary Help of Christians. Under the protection of St Joseph, St Francis de Sales and St Teresa. In 1872, Jan. 29 they began to organise the Chapter.*' We will see the contents further on.

The elections Don Bosco wanted while he was at Varazze, took place on 29 January, the Feast of St Francis de Sales. 'On his return to the village' the writer of the longer *Memoir* continues 'Fr Pestarino carried out what D. Bosco had suggested to him; without telling anyone, he brought those who were living in the house near the church together, and all the others in the village, on the great day of St Francis de Sales:' 'When the *Veni Creator spiritus* had been said, with the Crucifix exposed on a table between two lit candles, the voting took place, there being 27 present, and the votes received were read out by Fr Pestarino to Angela Maccagno, the village teacher and up until then superior of the ones living at home with their families. The election resulted in 21 votes for Mary Mazzarello daughter of Joseph from Valponasca, with Petronilla 3, Felicina 2, Giovannina 1.' Mary Mazzarello stated that she did not feel 'able to manage such a burden.' Fr Pestarino did not want to discuss it until first hearing Don Bosco's opinion. Everyone agreed with the elected one's suggestion 'to leave the choice of the first Superior in D. Bosco's hands.' In the meantime, it was agreed she 'remain first Assistant known as Vicar.' Voting continued, and Petronilla became second Assistant with 19 votes.' Then two other Assistants were elected: 'They appointed Felicina as Novice Mistress and Giovanna [Ferretino] as Bursar, and as Vicar or Vice superior for those from the village, Teacher Maccagno.'⁴⁰

5 August, 1872, was the day of the official beginning, with the first fifteen Daughters of Mary Help of Christians taking the habit and eleven of them professing vows. Diocesan Bishop Giuseppe Maria Sciandra (1808–88) presided. Don Bosco was present but he was tired from the journey to Liguria and not in good health. It seemed he had not wanted to come and had decided to only at the insistence of the bishop who expressly sent his secretary to Valdocco to collect him.

The new Sisters' habits were brown, their heads covered by the broad blue veil of the Daughters of the Immaculate. Four of them received the novices' medal, while the other eleven professed triennial vows and received the crucifix. At the bishop's request, Don Bosco addressed

37 The *Memoria* is mentioned in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 42–44.

38 Second *Memoria* of Fr Pestarino, in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 44–47.

39 *Cronistoria* I 250. Don Bosco arrived at the Corsi's villa on 21 August 1871 and left on the 29th.

40 Second *Memoria* of Fr Pestarino, in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 46–47.

the Sisters briefly. The minutes of the ceremony record its topic: 'The new religious had the consolation of hearing the most important advice in his own words for corresponding to the grace of their vocation in the Religious Institute they had embraced.'⁴¹ Don Bosco returned to Turin at 5 p.m. The next day he went up to St Ignatius above Lanzo for the retreat and some rest. 'It seems my health has improved and here I have been able to get on with a number of matters that have waited some time,' he wrote to Fr Rua on the 12th.⁴² Meanwhile at Mornese, the retreat which began on 31 July, continued until 8 August. The minutes of the clothing and profession ceremony bear this date, so Don Bosco's signature is missing. They were written 'By request of his Lordship Bishop Giuseppe Maria Sciandra,' Don Bosco noted in the margin of the text. It began rather solemnly: 'Already for some time, Very Reverend Fr John Bosco, Founder and Director of many colleges for the Christian education of boys, has wanted to open a house that would be the beginning of an Institute extending equal benefits to girls mainly of the ordinary class, and finally his wish has been satisfied. On the fifth day of the current month ...'⁴³

4. Early shaping of the Institute

Don Bosco's desire to be the founder became more intense and evident from 5 August, 1872, parallel with and tied in with the tangible daily work of practical guidance and religious animation by the Sister Vicar, soon to become the Superior General.

Don Bosco's activity was expressed both through direct personal intervention and guidance passed on through his appointed Director General, at first Fr Pestarino then, following his death, Fr John Cagliero from 1874, or through the Rector of the local Salesian Community. These men interpreted Don Bosco's wishes for the Superior, sisters and pupils. Other guidance came through contact with the diocesan bishop and the district civil administration.

Obviously, all this happened while the superior and religious in the Institute carried out their daily work according to their respective responsibilities and competences. In general terms we will not be dealing with this latter aspect but focusing rather on the part Don Bosco played.

Don Bosco's interest in the Institute was expressed above all in being careful to give it the best possible set of Constitutions. The text known as the *Costituzioni Regole dell'Istituto delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* had as its basis the text drawn up by Sister Francesca Garelli, which struck a mean between the rules of the Sisters of St Anne (overall, these were in the majority) and the rules of the Society of St Francis de Sales. Don Bosco intervened twice, once at the beginning and then further on, to make modifications. Given that Garelli's original has disappeared, it is very difficult to establish the exact extent of the founder's interventions. These would have been the most interesting for our history. What has been attempted is a comparative examination of the FMA draft, that is, the text given Fr Pestarino and reworked by him, the Rule of the St Anne Institute, the Salesian Constitutions of the 1860s and the Regulations of the Daughters of the Immaculate.⁴⁴ Two main, fully reliable conclusions emerge from this: 1) 'there is a real and intrinsic relationship regarding structure and content' among the texts, '*mediated by the Garelli original*'; 2) nevertheless, 'articles of a more elaborate and demanding nature such as "The Purpose of the Institute" dependence on "the Ordinary" of the place, dependence on the "Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales" and new items such as "The Bursar [*economia*] and Novice Mistress" and "Change of the name of the Institute" lead us to believe that there was an intervention of some importance between the *Garelli Original* and the *FMA draft*. The form and content of this

41 *Verbale relativo alla Fondazione dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice eretto in Mornese, Diocesi di Acqui*, in P. CAVIGLIA and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 40.

42 Em III 459.

43 The text is found in P. CAVIGLIA and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 38–41.

44 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 38–48.

intervention lead us to believe it can be attributed to Don Bosco, the founder of the FMA.⁴⁵ Also, it 'seems that Ms A [the FMA draft or Constitutions and Rules] is the one Don Bosco gave to Fr Pestarino' and which the latter readjusted in term of its headings.⁴⁶

Of fundamental importance is the section: 1. *Purpose of the Institute* outlining the religious and with it social and educational nature of the new Institute. What is evident is the imprint of both Mornese and Don Bosco on this. The purpose 'is to attend not only to one's own perfection but to cooperate in the salvation of one's neighbour by giving girls of common folk a moral and religious education.' (art. 1) The Daughters 'will take special care to teach girls in poor villages and towns and to nurture the spirit of young women who desire to lead a spiritual life and achieve Christian perfection while living in the world,' bring them together in 'congregations', thus preparing the best of them for admission to 'the pious union of the Daughters of the Immaculate and Mary Help of Christians.' They would also 'be ready to lend assistance to the poor who are sick and provide their neighbour with whatever other charitable service is consistent with their state.' (art. 2). They may also accept girls from the middle class into their house, but will never teach them subjects and skills which are proper to noble, upper class education. They will make every effort to form them in piety, and everything that can help make them good Christians and good mothers of families.' (art.3). The 'Daughters profess common life in everything: the vows will be taken as three lots of temporary vows over three years; there will be no strict cloister.' (art. 4). Finally, 'all the houses and establishments of the Institute will depend on the central house and will immediately obey that Superior. She can give them their role, move them, employ them in any way she decides best before God, and no one may refuse to obey; nor is it allowable under any pretext whatsoever to refuse any office or role they are chosen for.' (art. 5) However, the Superior's authority was not to be exercised without a higher need or request. In fact, according to the first article under the second heading, *General Arrangements of the Institute*, the Institute 'is in immediate dependence on the Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales, known as the Major Superior. Where he decides to, he can be represented by a priest whom he delegates, his title being Superior or Director of the Sisters. The superior of the house will turn to this director for all her needs and will never undertake anything of importance without his advice, especially in what concerns religion and morality.' Clearly the fifth article is also from Don Bosco: 'When Sisters enter the Institute they do not lose their civil rights even after taking vows, thus they retain ownership of what is theirs, the faculty to bequeath or receive inheritances, legacies and donations; but they cannot administer their goods except within the limits and in the manner desired by the Major Superior.' The eighth heading and section, instead, echoes the spirit of the Sisters of St Anne and the Daughters of the Immaculate: *Principal virtues proposed for study by the novices and to be practised by the professed*. 'Simplicity and virginal modesty, the spirit and strict observance of poverty; patient charity and zeal, not only for the salvation of children but also of older girls. A spirit of prayer through which the Sisters remain perpetually in the presence of God and abandon themselves to his providence. Obedience of will and judgement.' The broad nature of the fourteenth heading leaves a similar impression, but it is not dissimilar in a number of its articles to Don Bosco's ideas and practices: modesty, mutual charity, books for spiritual reading other than the ones indicated by the Superior, the *Imitation of Christ*, Rodriguez, *Monaca Santa* by St Alphonsus, the lives of saints who dedicated themselves especially to the apostolate and the education of the young.⁴⁷

On 3 November, 1872 [or 1874?], Marchioness Maria Fassati wrote to her mother, Azelia de Seyès, widow of Rodolfo De Maistre (and did she hear this from Don Bosco?): 'At Mornese for the last two years, a certain number of young women are being formed to religious life and the

45 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 48–49.

46 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 59.

47 The texts are quoted from the manuscript of the *Costituzioni–Regole* adjusted by Fr Pestarino, kept in Rome in the AGFMA.

bosconian spirit. Don Bosco has given them their Rule which he is studying and improving; then he will build a house for them in *Piazza Maria Ausiliatrice* and they will do for girls what the *boschini* are doing for boys. They will also look after linen at Don Bosco's house.⁴⁸

5. The 'Bosconian spirit' in the founder's activity (August 1872–spring 1874)

The 'Bosconian' or specifically Salesian quality proved to be decisive for the new Institute, especially in the first two years of its existence. Don Bosco was careful to combine fidelity to the religious and apostolic aims of the Union of Daughters of the Immaculate with their precise radical status as women consecrated to God and their apostolic and educational mission according to the spirit of St Francis de Sales, mediated through the founder. Somewhere between the end of 1873 and early 1874, this led to a calm and amicable but nevertheless clear distinction between the nature and structure of the two groups, the New Ursulines and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The educational aim was immediately expressed, throughout 1872–73, by organising an elementary course of various school subjects and practices in the large building built by Fr Pestarino. *L'Unità Cattolica* wrote things up on 1 October, 1873: 'The results over this year are better than was commonly anticipated and the teachers who came from Turin at the beginning of the month to give the pupils their exams gave solemn testimony to this. Bishop Sciandra, Bishop of Acqui, sought to honour the Institute by his presence, examining the pupils in French and assisting in the distribution of prizes. He was feted with poetry, songs and music which were also excellent proof of the progress made by the girls in music.'⁴⁹ On 11 December, 1873, the Delegate for the Castelletto d'Orba school district gave official approval, beginning from the 1873–74 school year, for the girls' boarding school and associated courses.⁵⁰ This came as the result of the request from Emilia Mosca, in charge of the school. She was not yet professed, but it had been made possible through Don Bosco's intervention. He had sent two young teachers to Mornese from Turin, one with a teaching certificate for elementary school and the other with qualifications from the University of Turin for teaching French. She would gain her teacher's certificate in 1874. They were twenty–four year old Angela Jandet from Novara, who arrived on 10 May, 1872, and twenty–year–old Countess Emilia Mosca (1851–1900), who arrived in Mornese on 30 December, 1872. The former was among the first eleven to be professed on 5 August, but withdrew at the beginning of 1875. The latter made her profession on 14 June, 1874. She became the headmistress of the school and boarding section then was Assistant General of the Institute, responsible for schools until her death. They gave a beginning to the fundamental educational and scholastic activity typical of the Institute.⁵¹

At the same time, Don Bosco was taking a no less important step. He made experienced individuals available to the community in formation and to the Superior. They helped the newly consecrated young women establish a regular religious life. In Mother Enrichetta Doninici's earlier mentioned letter, to Mons. Pellegrino Tofoni on 4 December, 1872, she added to what we have already noted: 'Now Don Bosco wants one of us, and in saying one he means two, to go there to Mornese, such is the name of the town where the new Institute has arisen, to set these good

48 Found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 58–59.

49 *Un buon istituto per le ragazze*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 229, Wednesday 1 October 1873, pp. 919–920. The text, drawn up by Don Bosco or Fr Durando, probably refers to a private course with internal examinations, run by Salesians coming from Turin.

50 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ, *La scuola di Mornese (1872–1878). Alle origini di una scelta per la promozione integrale della donna*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 26 (1988), pp. 159–162; P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 95–96.

51 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ, *La scuola di Mornese (1872–1878)...*, pp. 151–186.

religious women on the path to common life and help them put the rules established for them into practice.⁵² In order to familiarise herself with the situation she herself made a personal visit to Mornese, where she was welcomed 'with much warmth and kindness.' She realised the correctness of Don Bosco's request and the opportunity to agree to it. In fact, 'the house under discussion' she wrote to Tofoni on 26 January, 1873, 'was already well under way as a secular institute but as a religious house it lacks much in the way of regularity and the means of preserving it.' On the other hand, 'the ground seems to be well prepared; if diligently cultivated we can hope for good results.'⁵³ She sent Sister Francesca Garelli, the Mother's secretary and her second Assistant General, and Angela Alloa, who had an elementary teacher's upper level certificate. They arrived at the beginning of Lent 1873 (Ash Wednesday was 26 February and Easter was 13 April) and returned to Turin for the Easter ceremonies, returning to Mornese after 15 April, remaining there until September.

One detail highlighted in the biographical sketch of Sr Francesca's life is interesting (1838–96): 'The highly ordered, precise spirit of our dear Mother Francesca, her exact observance in forms of religious behaviour which is religious decorum, and makes her worthy of commendation by people in the world, were such that she was not too much in agreement with the freer and easier understanding in which Don Bosco wished to form his new Sisters.' We could possibly also partly revise Sr Enrichetta Dominici's first impressions of the Mornese Community in this light. The two Institutes owed their origins to very different personalities, and inevitably reflected differences of mentality, method and style. Don Bosco intended to stamp the Institute he founded with its own distinctive spirit, so much so that Sister Francesca said that 'Once the novices had begun to follow the Founder's way of thinking' she very willingly returned to the mother house.⁵⁴

After the two St Anne's sisters had returned to Turin, the widow of lawyer Matteo Blengini, who had been among the benefactors of the early Oratory, arrived in Mornese. She had been sent by Don Bosco as additional help.⁵⁵ In the founder's intentions this outstanding woman, already a spiritual daughter of Fr Cafasso's and raised in a monastery in Turin, would support the hesitant Superior in accepting the burden of office and would help the community's outward religious face, temper its austerity and encourage a certain style of relationship both internally and externally. Since she was somewhat overbearing, she probably did not intend to return to Mornese after going back to Turin for Christmas festivities, but Don Bosco insisted: 'If Madam Blengini has not yet gone to Mornese,' he wrote to Fr Rua from Rome in early January 1874 'tell her not to worry, that things will come right bit by bit. I have already written her about it; a letter is waiting for her there.'⁵⁶ But it would seem that the good woman's not so discreet zeal soon also changed his thinking. In summer she finally withdrew from the incongruous and confusing task.⁵⁷

Don Bosco, however, gave direction and shape to the Institute mainly through direct intervention and personal presence. He was in Mornese at the beginning of July 1873 from where he wrote to Fr Rua with some satisfaction: 'Here we are enjoying an excellent brisk climate, however with plenty of fire for God's love.'⁵⁸ He went back there again in early August while they were having their retreat (which began on 29 July) in preparation for the clothing of the novices and profession of those completing their novitiate. Bishop Sciandra, the diocesan bishop, was a guest there from halfway through July. The preachers were Bishop Andrea Scotton and Jesuit Fr Luigi Portaluri,

52 Found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 60–61.

53 Text found in in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 62–63.

54 *Libro delle Suore defunte*, Vol. II, pp. 86–87, Arch. Sisters of St Anna, cit. By P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 61, n. 6.

55 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 79, 416, 551; Chap. 7, § 1.

56 Em IV 189.

57 Cf. *Cronistoria* I 50–53, 74–75; II 51, 54 and 596.

58 Letter of 3 July 1873, Em IV 125.

whom Don Bosco had expressly asked for. He had also invited a dozen or so women who wanted to be part of the retreat. The founder received the Sisters and postulants, spoke to them in private and was available for confession. He left together with Fr John Cagliero who had come with him, on the evening before the closing of the retreat, in order to go up to St Ignatius above Lanzo. On 5 August, following the concluding sermon of the Sister's retreat, Bishop Sciandra took on the task and honour of the clothing and profession ceremony.

That same month, Don Bosco was busy again on behalf of Mornese, this time on the mission front. He had a curriculum printed for the small girls' boarding school, almost identical to the one for his colleges, and sent it out to parish priests and other priests, accompanied by a circular. He wrote: 'I am taking the liberty of presenting Your Reverences with the curriculum of the girls college set up at Mornese a year ago. You will certainly appreciate that the purpose of this Institute is to raise Christian girls in religion and morality. Therefore I place much hope in your kindness and I respectfully ask you to make this curriculum known and thus gain some pupils for the new house.'⁵⁹ Then there was the earlier mentioned article by *L'Unità Cattolica* on 1 October, concerning the first school year, 1872–73.

The end of 1873 saw the inevitable clarification by Don Bosco of the situation regarding members belonging to the Union of Daughters of the Immaculate, some of whom were already professed in the FMA Institute. We gather this from a letter from Fr Carlo Valle, parish priest, to Bishop Sciandra in Acqui. 'At the invitation of the Sister Director of Don Bosco's Institute' he told him 'the Daughters of the Institute of St Angela Merici went to the Director's residence to hear what she had to tell them. Sister read the members a passage from a letter by the Very Rev. Don Bosco expressing the wish that members of St Angela would join with the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians for the Sunday Conferences, then adding in her own words that it was desirable for the two Institutes to form just a single one and that indeed our indication of submission and belonging to Don Bosco's administration would simply be that of attending the above-mentioned Conferences.' This came as a surprise to the Daughters of St Angela who were 'little prepared to abandon their own rules and subject themselves to D. Bosco's Institute which seemed uniquely adapted to a community [of religious].' A number of them turned to the parish priest for advice. 'In my own view,' the parish priest said wisely 'there is nothing stopping there being two institutes in Mornese and that the Institute of St Angela be promoted and assisted. This would very much help nurture the goodness and devotion of young women who, having been educated in piety, would be more easily prepared to leave the world and take refuge with D. Bosco.' The Bishop's reply was crystal clear: 'I find it appropriate if indeed not essential, to leave the Daughters of the Institute of St Angela Merici in complete freedom in the matter of joining the Institute of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians established there: they may live entirely separate as if the aforesaid Institute did not exist. It seems that D. Bosco's invitation is for now limited to an invitation to the Daughters of St Angela to attend the Sunday Conferences held at the college. This participation is not an identification of the two Institutes, however, also on this point they can have full freedom to adopt the practice or not. Forcing them can be the origin of arguments, scruples, etc, and then we find *nitimur in vetitum*. This is contrary to our own way of seeing things. I will see to appointing the Director General of all the Daughters of St Angela residing in the Diocese.'⁶⁰

The two Institutes, the New Ursulines and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, lived in harmony together, respecting differences of purpose, spirit and structures. It involved the wisdom and refined spirituality of the two leaders, Mary Mazzarello and Angela Maccagno.

59 Circular, undated, but from August 1873, Em IV 154 and *Programma. Casa di Maria Ausiliatrice per educazione femminile in Mornese*. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1873: the text is mentioned in P. CAVIGLIA and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 81–85.

60 The two letters, from 2 and 7 December respectively, are found in P. CAVIGLIA and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 90–94.

In the early weeks of the founder's sojourn in Rome in 1874 for the definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions, there would have been the audience at which the Pope formulated five reminders, all shared if not even suggested or reformulated by Don Bosco, and which he passed on to Mornese: 'Uniformity in food, clothing, permissions, avoiding exceptions, and practice of the Rule!'⁶¹ Unity—uniformity, as we have seen, was also the central theme of one of his first circulars to the Salesians.⁶²

It was certainly Don Bosco, in those same days, who had explicit reference to the Institute included in document no. XV of the *Positio* for approval of the Salesian Constitutions, and the *Summary of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales*. The list of *houses of the Congregation* ended with an indication that could be considered the first presentation of the FMA Institute to Roman ecclesiastical authorities: (16. As an appendix, and dependent on the Salesian Congregation, is the *House of Mary Help of Christians* in Mornese, in the diocese of Acqui, founded with the approval of the Ecclesiastical Authority. The purpose is to do for poor girls what the Salesians do for boys. There are already forty Religious Sisters looking after 200 girls.'⁶³ As confirmation of the solid bond, in the founder's mind, uniting the two Congregations making almost a single, articulated Religious Family, in the second half of March he sent a circular to Mornese similar to the one addressed to the Salesians, asking the 'Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the pupils Divine Providence has entrusted to them' for special prayers to gain approval of the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.⁶⁴

In a letter to his nephew on 17 April, 1874, Fr Pestarino, referring to missing out on meeting Don Bosco at Alessandria, since he had just returned from Rome, confirmed and explained the idea the founder had of legal connections between the FMA Institute and the Salesian Society. Arriving in Turin for the St Francis de Sales Conferences he wrote: 'I found him "in camera" with all the rectors. When we were free we spoke a lot together. He said that the Institute of Mary Help of Christians was embedded within the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.'⁶⁵

Two months later, Don Bosco had to go to Mornese following a sad event. Fr Pestarino died suddenly on 15 May. The funeral was set for the 18th. On the 16th, Fr Francis Bodrato (who was from Mornese) arrived, and on the 17th Fr John Cagliari accompanied by Fr Joseph Lazzerio and Carlo Gastini. Don Bosco went to Mornese in June with Fr John Cagliari some days prior to the month's end. They were welcomed by a party of three – a Sister, a postulant and a pupil from the college. He preached a number of instructions in preparation for the clothing of the future novices and profession of the new Sisters, among whom Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone. On the 15th, after the memorial Mass for Fr Pestarino, with the whole community of professed together, the Sisters proceeded with the election of the Superior General and her Council. Mary Domenica Mazzarello was voted unanimously. Elected as her collaborators were: Sr Petronilla Mazzarello as Vicar, Sr Giovanna Ferrettino as Bursar [*economia*], Sr Felicina Mazzarello, Sr Maria Domenica's sister, as Assistant, and Sr Maria Grosso as Novice Mistress. After a brief *feverino*, the founder announced that his representative or Director General was Fr John Cagliari. As the local Salesian Rector he had already appointed Fr Joseph Cagliari (1847–74) Fr John's cousin. The young priest arrived in Mornese on 23 May. He died prematurely on 4 September.

61 The *Cronistoria* II 61 refers to it without accompanying documentation.

62 Circular towards end of April 1868, Em II 529–531: cf. Chap. 15, § 11.

63 *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari... Torinese sopra l'approvazione delle Costituzioni della Società salesiana. Relatore... Nobili Vitelleschi... Segretario*. Rome, Tipografia Salesiana 1874, p. 46, OE XXV 382.

64 The text is found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 110–111; cf. *Circ. ai salesiani Dilettissimi figli in G. C.*, 16 March 1874, Em IV 255–256.

65 Letter in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 113–114.

The Institute was now launched as an autonomous entity, supported and promoted as well as controlled and watched over. Confirming this was the letter Don Bosco addressed to a benefactor of close confidence, Francesca Pastore from Valenza Po, on 15 June. He wrote that the irreparable loss of Fr Pestarino was compensated for by trust in God and the Institute: 'Let us trust in God, but the great fervour of the professed, the novices and even the pupils gives us good reason for hope.' 'I am involved in this work and with the Lord's help I trust that I can lead it to a regular state.' He added by way of postscript: 'Yesterday there were thirteen for clothing and nine professed.'⁶⁶

During summer and autumn of 1874, a number of events confirmed Don Bosco's active interest in the Institute. In July there was a circular inviting men and women to a retreat at the House of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese.⁶⁷ A little later the diocesan bishop regularised the position of Salesian priests with regard to the priestly ministry carried out in the parish and at the Sister's college.⁶⁸ Two particularly important events occurred over the first ten days of October. On 6 October, 1874, Fr James Costamagna (1846–1921) arrived in Mornese as the local spiritual director and remained there until autumn 1877 when he left for Argentina with the first missionary Sisters. He was also the rector of a small community of Salesians at Mornese made up, in 1874–75, of some young clerics and professed coadjutors and some novices. On 1 May, Don Bosco had asked the Bishop of Acqui if two of the clerics could be admitted to tonsure and minor orders.⁶⁹ They were teaching at the local school.

8 October 1874 became an historic date for the Sisters' community at Mornese. A group of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, accompanied by Fr John Cagliero, began a second community in the Salesian college at Borgo S. Martino where they looked after the kitchen and clothing but were also involved teaching catechism to the girls of the town. They were Felicina Mazzarello, Felicina Arecco, Angiolina Deambrogio, Carlotta Pestarino. At the end of month, Mother Mazzarello accompanied a novice there, Agnese Ricci, and went on with two sisters to Turin where they were to sit for a supplementary exam in Mathematics to gain their elementary teacher's certificate: all three were guests of the St Anne Sisters.

Further confirmation of Don Bosco's thinking on the religious and apostolic closeness of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with the Salesian Society is found in the postscript of a letter he sent a month later to Fr Bonetti from Rome. Fr Bonetti was Rector of the college at Borgo S. Martino. The postscript echoed an audience granted Don Bosco by Pius IX: 'You should also pass on with my greetings, all the spiritual favours. Then the Salesians, our pupils, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians should pass them on to their own families. Such is Pius IX's intention.'⁷⁰ The spiritual goods of one were also the spiritual goods of the other, including their respective families.

6. Approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society (1872–74)

Armed with reckless hope and illusory tenacity, Don Bosco had hoped to gain everything right from the outset of procedures in Rome: approval of the Congregation and its Constitutions and with these, faculties of exemption and dimissorials on which the freedom and facility of his work depended. Instead, he had to resign himself to gaining these things by degrees. Following

66 Em IV 296.

67 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 127–128.

68 Exchange of letters between the Bishop of Acqui and the parish priest of Mornese on 10 and 12 September 1874, found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (Eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 130–133.

69 Letter of 10 May 1875, Em IV 463–464.

70 Letter of 15 March 1875, Em IV 441.

approval of the Society it was then the turn of the Constitutions; after this the so-called 'privileges' were granted.

Apparently, the question of approval of the Constitutions was never touched on over his three stays in Rome in 1871 and 1872. Don Bosco was preparing the solution. His many contacts should have made it more viable. However, while waiting, he did not tire of asking, from time to time, either the Pope directly or through intermediaries,⁷¹ for the granting of the faculty of dimissorials for cases not contemplated by the 1 March 1869 decree. He presented a list of eleven names in a petition to Pius IX prior to 13 August, 1869.⁷² For some of them, Bodrato and Guidazio,⁷³ he had also asked separately. He then followed up with Berto and Barberis.⁷⁴

Finally, at Don Bosco's request, Cardinal Berardi told him on 27 August 1872 that the Pope thought 'there would be no difficulty' for the founder to be able to 'freely put the request' 'through the usual channels' for approval of the Constitutions of the Society.⁷⁵

Don Bosco prepared to submit the dossier by finalising three documents: 1) The partially modified text of the 1867 Constitutions;⁷⁶ 2) A brief note *De regulis Societatis Salesianae aliqua Declaratio*, in which he illustrated and gave reasons for accepting or rejecting the 13 *animadversiones* (objections or at least observations) sent him by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1864, and repeated during procedures for approval of the Society in 1868–69.⁷⁷ In the *Declaratio*, which was a more summary kind of reply to the *animadversiones* than the other document, the *Super animadversiones in Constitutiones*, Don Bosco insisted on defending the essential points of the constitutional text; 3) The information booklet *De Societate S. Francisci Salesii brevis notitia et nonnulla decreta ad eamdem spectantia*.⁷⁸ This was the 1868 text updated by adding the 1 March 1869 decree approving the Salesian Society, plus a summary of the current situation of the *Salesianae Societatis praesens*: 4 oratories and 7 houses.

Don Bosco kept the points he considered essential in the text of the Constitutions, in relation to the specific nature of his religious society and the demands of his ever-increasing youth works in need of assistance and teachers.⁷⁹ Essentially there were four of them: 1) the faculty for the Superior General to issue dimissorial letters for ordination *ad quemcumque episcopum* (to any bishop). In fact he was convinced that the decree of approval of the Congregation on 1 March, 1869, opened the way to including this in the Constitutional text: for candidates who had entered a Salesian house prior to turning 14, the decree itself was enough; Don Bosco felt that so long as he presented a list of candidates⁸⁰ the papal decree was automatically applied to others; 2) exclusion of any canonical references that might appear to make his Institute a conventual one and thus hypothetically falling foul of the 7 July 1866 law of suppression. According to Don Bosco, this would occur if the constitutional text explicitly sanctioned the need for the Holy See's agreement for certain financial operations or for opening new houses and accepting seminarians; 3) the possibility of 'affiliating' 'external members' to the Society. Rules for this were attached as a chapter

71 From among them emerged the skilful and prompt Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi: cf. For example, the Cardinal's letter of 9 June and 15 July 1871, in MB X 669–670.

72 Em III 122–123; cf. Already two years earlier, letter to P. Marietti, 5 May 1869, Em III 84.

73 To Pius IX, May and July 1869, Em III 90 and 111.

74 To Pius IX, August and 8 November 1870, Em III 123, 268–269.

75 Letter of 27 August 1872, in MB X 673.

76 Cf. *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii. Augustae Taurinorum, Ex officina Asceterii Salesiani 1873*, 38 p., OE XXV 35–72.

77 Cf. text in *Cost. SDB (Motto) 248*.

78 Cf. text in OE XXV 103–121.

79 The succession of variations added to the text from 1867 to 1873 (from doc. Ls to doc. Ns) is reconstructed in minute detail in the critical edition edited by Francesco Motto, *Cost. SDB 18–19*, 58–211.

80 Cf. conference to Salesians on the evening of 7 March 1869, MB IX 563–567.

placed as an appendix to the constitutional text. According to him, both the Church and the Society would benefit greatly from the collaboration of such members; 4) omission of the formal requirements of a three yearly report to the Holy See, removing the risk that the civil powers would consider the Society to be a moral entity where its goods might then fall under the control of secular bodies.⁸¹ As for the fact that Don Bosco had put aside the troublesome 13 *animadversiones*, the new Consultor Dominican Father Raimondo Bianchi, after examining the text of the Constitutions in 1873, had starkly noted: 'I was not a little surprised to see that most of them have been omitted or dodged under more or less specious pretexts attached to the petition by the Superior General in something called a *Declaration on the Rules* [the *Declaratio* mentioned earlier].'⁸²

The fight over the '*animadversiones*' also moved into the practical realm for Don Bosco and he was reminded of this, to his bitter surprise, by Turin's Ordinary, Lorenzo Gastaldi. In a letter on 24 October, 1872, the Archbishop stated that he felt 'deep affection for the Congregation' founded by his peer and friend, and that he considered it to be 'a work inspired by God' stating that he was 'very happy to continue to assist it so it could succeed in gaining full approval from the Vicar of Jesus Christ.' However, mindful that good must be done well and that *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defecta*, he was placing taxing conditions on the admission of Salesian candidates to tonsure and minor orders. He claimed it was entirely legitimate, asked for by the Council of Trent and in harmony with the limited faculties granted by the decree of approval of the Society. Presentation to the Ordinary of candidates for tonsure and orders would be conditional on fulfilment of some of their precise obligations: presenting themselves personally to the Archbishop 40 days prior to ordination; producing a signed certificate, which included year of entry at the Oratory and which specified the place and number of years study from grammar school (*Latinitas*, Arts course) through to philosophy and theology, and indicated the year and date of profession or renewal of triennial vows. They would then need to sit for an exam on at least two entire treatises of theology 'which would be selected differently for every ordination' on everything concerning the Order to be received. He added that the Ordinary could also have demanded that Don Bosco's students attend classes at the Seminary, but he was confident that 'the exam would provide such proof of study and profit from the theological disciplines that it would not be necessary to oblige them to observe that requirements.'⁸³

In his reply, written two weeks later with 'embittered heart and worried mind' (at the end of the letter he even confessed: 'I have written almost without knowing what I have written'). Don Bosco showed he was not aware if the Archbishop's directives were in reference so much to particular cases or rather were a program of episcopal governance aimed at normalisation of ecclesiological perspective. The Archbishop could only be amazed at the request Don Bosco then made: 'I am asking you as best I know how, to write to me or tell me or have someone else tell me what has gone wrong between us so we can know how to deal with one another and what limits we need to observe.' The final observation must have disturbed him even more: 'Allow me to be bold by saying that if you continue along these lines you will end up being feared by many and loved by few.'⁸⁴ Supposing that his directives regarding ordinands were something that could have been foreseen, the Archbishop replied the same day, explaining his thinking concerning these conditions as the basis on which he had supported the approval of the Salesian Constitutions in Rome. It was inspired by a precise theology of Church and, as part of that, of Bishops and Religious Institutes

81 *De regulis Societatis salesianae aliqua declaratio*, in *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 248.

82 *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari... sopra l'approvazione della Società Salesiana...* Rome, Tip. Poliglotta della S.C. di Propaganda 1874, p. 28, OE XXV 364: the complete text on pp. 28–36, OE XXV 364–372.

83 Letter of 24 October 1872, in MB X 683–684.

84 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 9 November 1872, Em III 488–489.

and the way they related to each other. Furthermore his requirements were identical to those put forward by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and the conditions *sine qua non* for approval of the Constitutions: setting up a novitiate, the containment within precise limits of 'exemption from the Bishop's authority,' the non-admissibility in the constitutional text of the faculty to issue dimissorials. '*In primis et ante omnia,*' the Archbishop stated 'continuation and flourishing of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales depends on a good Novitiate,' 'this Congregation currently lacks a Novitiate;' 'so I cannot promote [the final and complete] papal approval of this Congregation except on condition that it establishes such a Novitiate.'⁸⁵

Also, while admitting the convenience of exemption for Religious Orders he stated that he was 'opposed to any unnecessary exemptions, especially if harmful as, in my view, is the one that wants to say that the bishop does not diligently examine ordinands. The Council of Trent and the Bishop's Pontifical order the bishop to do this.' It was his 'intention to build up, not destroy, to cooperate in doing good, not in impeding it.' He was, therefore, asking the recipient to examine whether, in his 'complaints' 'there may be something not right' and if he could 'lend a hand to correct it.'⁸⁶

In reply, Don Bosco recalled a discussion he had had with Pius IX on the occasion of the procedures for approval of the Society. During it, the Pope seemed to have legitimised what was being done at the Oratory to form those enrolling in the Congregation. 'If there is no novitiate by that name there is one in fact,' was the gist of his reply. It was unlikely that claims entrusted to *vivae vocis oraculo* would have succeeded with Gastaldi or that they would have convinced him to alter deep-rooted theological, legal and pastoral convictions.⁸⁷ Exactly a month later, as agreed, Don Bosco sent the draft of the *Brevis notitia* to the Archbishop for him to take a look at, promising once again to let him see the draft copy of the Constitutions. The final lines of his letter showed what the blockage was, visible in the tautological motivation for a proposal that the Archbishop probably felt was offensive: "if you would also like your recommendation to be printed along with the *Brevis notitia*, it would make it much easier to ensure it would be read."⁸⁸

On 10 February, 1873, Archbishop Gastaldi issued his letter of recommendation in Latin. In it he wrote an extremely benevolent account of the history of Don Bosco's work and the work of his Society on behalf of the young, regarding it 'as worthy as ever to be given the protection of the Holy Apostolic See.' However, he added six predictable conditions: the founder would have to present the final version of the Rule and include in it rules for the novitiate which would guarantee a lasting formation of excellent members, keeping them as close as possible to the current rules of the Jesuits; no member of the Salesian Society would be promoted to Holy Orders before professing perpetual vows; those being promoted to either minor or major Orders would, following the precepts of the Council of Trent, have to submit themselves to a diligent examination by the ordaining bishop; the right of the bishop to visit the public churches and oratories of the Congregation was to be maintained; the Congregation would be granted the decree of exemption from the bishop's jurisdiction that was needed for its preservation, and no more. The right and duties of bishops in everything else were to remain intact.⁸⁹ The Archbishop communicated identical thinking to the bishops of Piedmont and of other dioceses where Salesian institutes were to be found, expressing the wish that they include similar requests in their own letters of

85 Letter of 9 November 1872, in MB X 684–685. The novitiate was not really spoken about, not even in the text of the Constitutions that Don Bosco set about providing for the request for approval on 1 March 1873.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 685.

87 Letter of 23 November 1872, Em III 494–495.

88 Letter of 23 December 1872, Em III 499.

89 The recommendation found in *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 9–11, OE XXV 345–347.

recommendation so as to 'maintain good harmony between the respective bishops and the houses of the Congregation when' as he said 'I hope it will be approved.'⁹⁰

Don Bosco departed for Rome on 18 February, 1873. He left there on 22 March after presenting a formal request to the Pope for approval of the Constitutions. The request, in Latin, was dated 'Turin, 1 March, 1873.' The opening gambit was an example of considerable dexterity: 'The Salesian Society, which you, Holy Father, have founded guided and bolstered through your efforts and advice, begs new favours of your great kindness.' A twofold request followed: 'definitive approval to issue dimissorials.' He provided a list of attachments: the *Brevis notitia*, various copies of the latest edition of the Constitutions, 'some remarks on various small variations which experience has shown to be very useful for the development and consolidation of the Congregation' that is, the well-known *Declaratio*.⁹¹ He also passed on the letters of recommendation to Archbishop Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi, the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. These had come in February and March from the Bishops of Casale, Savona, Vigevano, Albenga, Genoa, Fossano.⁹² Of these, the only one which accepted some of Gastaldi's requests was the Archbishop of Genoa, Salvatore Magnasco: perpetual vows required of ordinands, examination prior to ordination, the right to visit churches and chapels.⁹³ The letter of recommendation defending the Congregation issued by Bishop Manacorda was exceptionally substantial. As a young priest he had entered the Roman Curia through Don Bosco's recommendation and as a thirty-eight-year-old, again at Don Bosco's recommendation, he had been appointed Bishop of Fossano in November 1871.⁹⁴

Archbishop Gastaldi did not limit himself to a letter of recommendation. He further illustrated the conditions he had listed there. If they were not met he did not consider approval appropriate, as he wrote in two letters, one to Cardinal Prospero Caterini, Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, and the other to Cardinal Andrea Bizzari, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, dated 19 February and 20 April 1873 respectively. In the former case he indicated his fear that Don Bosco might not for now present his requests for 'definitive approval' of the Congregation because of the conditions laid down by his Ordinary. In fact, Gastaldi was of the view that the approval thus far gained was incomplete and 'temporary'. Don Bosco's possible refusal to send on the request would probably lead some to look for the reasons for the conditions imposed by his archbishop: a regular novitiate, sound and serious philosophical and theological studies, perpetual vows prior to holy orders. Therefore he was briefly illustrating these so Cardinal Caterini could examine them and offer his view. As for dimissorials, though, he was of the opinion that Don Bosco could keep the faculty of issuing them for those who had entered the Oratory before they turned 14 and had taken perpetual vows.⁹⁵

The letter to Cardinal Bizzari on 20 April was more expansive, and concerned with the present and future of the Salesian Society. The archbishop was asking primarily if the Society should be 'considered as already approved by the Holy See and therefore already admitted to enjoying *the rights and privileges of Regulars*,' or should it be 'considered as a Congregation' – and he wanted this clarified – 'only enjoying the *benevolence* of the Holy See, and therefore those privileges already granted should be thought of as *ad experimentum*, temporary, and not to be extended to being the *privileges of Regulars*.' He then went to certain content in the constitutions which, furthermore, had never been approved by him or his predecessors: 1) Above all they lacked 'rules

90 To Bishop P. De Gaudenzi, Bishop of Vigevano, 11 January 1873, MB X 694.

91 Em IV 59–60; cf. The Italian translation and, following on from the Latin text, indications of modifications to the Constitutions, in MB X 699–703 and again 894–895.

92 Texts found in *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 18–27, OE XXV 354–63.

93 *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 26–27, OE XXV 362–363.

94 *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 23–25, OE XXV 359–361.

95 Letter of 19 February 1873, in MB X 697–698.

essential for a good Novitiate.’ What Don Bosco was doing with an education that could form excellent Christians was not enough to form ‘good religious’; 2) It was ‘no small disturbance to ecclesiastical discipline’ in the diocese when the Superior had the ‘faculty to present’ young men ‘for ordination’ who lacked ecclesiastical patrimony and had only professed triennial vows; 3) Even more serious was the problem ‘following another faculty’ which Don Bosco claimed he had ‘for presenting young men for ordination who had entered his Congregation after turning 14, even after turning 20,’ some of whom had been sent away from the seminary and had then been assigned to institutes in other dioceses to be ordained. ‘Some of these’ he said ‘returned to the diocese when their triennial vows elapsed.’ ‘They are priests without their diocesan bishop playing any part in it, and whom indeed he may even have judged unsuitable.’ He mentioned the case of a priest from Saluzzo diocese, Luigi Chiapale, who drank too much, had already been professed as a Salesian [probably with temporary vows]; had been expelled or left the Congregation of his own accord and then returned to the diocese; 4) Finally, it was difficult to form clergy well-educated in philosophy, and candidates for ordination in theology who were engaged ‘in school, teaching Latin or some trade or other subject.’ He then followed up with a few practical proposals which we have substantially noted. The first of them was the only novelty: ‘Let the rules of this Congregation be examined by the Archbishop of Turin and approved by him. If the Archbishop refuses to approve them, he will explain the reasons to the Bishop of Casale, Savona, Albenga and the Archbishop of Genoa where Don Bosco currently has houses, and between them arrive at approval among all of them.’⁹⁶

This was a tough blow for Don Bosco, who precisely over these days was led to fear he could lose his highest protector – in early April the national and foreign press had spread news of a sudden worsening of the state of health of the eighty-year-old Pius IX. Further, but passing concern at his decline was announced in May, but this was followed by an overall improvement in June, and after a brief lapse this improvement picked up finally at the end of August.⁹⁷

Around the end of April, beginning of May 1873, the archbishop gave a practical example of his convictions regarding a few particular cases. Through his secretary Canon Tommaso Chiuso, he let Don Bosco know that he was not admitting members of the Salesian Society to ordination while he was allowing two seminarians who had left the seminary, Borelli and Rocca, to be put up at the Oratory, and until Don Bosco had made a formal declaration that anyone who had been at a seminary in the Turin Archdiocese would not be accepted as a cleric in any of the houses of the Congregation.⁹⁸

Don Bosco responded firmly, finding the conditions the archbishop had imposed to be drastic and unjustly punitive with regard to those who had left the seminary, since they also needed special help. As for the request for a declaration, he felt it was illegal and harmful both to his men and the diocese. He did not feel authorised to issue such a statement unless there was ‘some ruling from the Church’ which he did not know about.⁹⁹ Towards the end of the letter he went further, making a disconcerting and decidedly counterproductive reference to Gastaldi’s elevation to the episcopate and his appointment to Turin. He wrote: ‘I would like you to be informed that certain news items which someone else has locked away in Government drawers, are doing the rounds in Turin. We hear from these that if Canon Gastaldi was Bishop of Saluzzo it was because Don Bosco proposed him. If the Bishop then became Archbishop of Turin it was almost at Don

96 *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 12–17, OE XXV 348–353. On Chiapale’s return to the diocese, cf. letter of Don Bosco to Archbishop Gastaldi of 16 June 1869, Em III 100; on some precedents, letters of Don Bosco to Fr Rua of 24 January and 21 April 1869, Em III 43 and 75.

97 Cf. C. M. FIORENTINO, *La malattia di Pio IX nella primavera del 1873 e la questione del conclave*, in “Rassegna storica del Risorgimento” 78 (1991) 175–204.

98 Cf. letter of 29 April and 7 May 1873, cit. in MB X 716–717.

99 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 14 May 1873, Em IV 96–97.

Bosco's suggestion. And we know what difficulties had to be overcome for this to happen. Also noted are the reasons why I went into bat for you, amongst others the great good you had done for our house, our Congregation.¹⁰⁰ An identical direct statement of the kind would appear once more on the dramatic 28 October 1875, about which we will have something to say.¹⁰¹

Other remarks which would not have pleased the archbishop can also be found in a letter of 12 August, 1873, in which Don Bosco defended his actions on behalf of certain former seminarians. There he dared comment on a letter Gastaldi had written about him to the Bishop of Vigevano: 'If it was not a bishop you had written to I would say it was written in jest, but instead it was serious;' 'I can say that I will have to account to the Lord for some mistakes I have made in my lifetime, but I know of none in your regard ... I know you are concerned about what is for the greater glory of God and I do what I can to the same end; so why can't we agree? Try to tell what you want from me.'¹⁰²

Undoubtedly, despite their friendship in the past, as bishop, Gastaldi did not intend having one of his priests as his monitor and spiritual counsellor. He wanted obedience and submission, pure and simple, similar to what he had sought from his confreres as the disappointed superior of the Rosminian community at Cardiff.¹⁰³ However a fortnight after the traumatic letter of 14 May, Don Bosco thought it appropriate to follow up on the request for the problematic declaration, except for two situations and with one reservation. He would continue to accept people who had been in Salesian houses prior to turning 14, or who had asked to come in order to learn some skill or trade. Finally he wanted his declaration made 'with the reservation and limits prescribed by the sacred canons established to safeguard the freedom of religious vocations.'¹⁰⁴ Naturally, the reservation which gave Don Bosco a free hand to act according to his conscience was not one the archbishop accepted, and he rejected the declaration. This was a dispute between two men of strong character and tenacious beliefs. A reforming bishop was struggling with determination *pro aris et focis* for his diocese, the Church, for the serious nature of religious and clerical life, and was trying to win his brother bishops over to the cause. And besides, 'good must be done well' was a phrase a younger Don Bosco had been told in the 1850s by the austere but also benevolent Fr Cafasso. On the other side, a man counter-attacking, intent on consolidating his Religious Society, his youth world and the personnel running them, trying to resolve the urgent problem of *salus animarum* and moved by a different functional point of view; 'It is enough to do the good you can amid so many miseries,' as he had first replied to Fr Cafasso two decades earlier.

7. The objective achieved (3/13 April. 1874)

Procedures set in motion within the Roman Curia did not stop. By letter on 19 May. 1873 the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi, let Don Bosco know that the Congregation's Consultor, Dominican Fr Raimondo Bianchi, had given his 'vote' on the text of the Constitutions, suggesting 'many modifications.' Letting him know he would be sending him the official summary of their comments, he anticipated one item of information that would have alarmed Don Bosco and was intended to make him more prepared to acquiesce: 'Meanwhile, what I can tell you is that the matter of the dimissorials has been argued against by all parties.'¹⁰⁵

100 Ibid., Em IV 97.

101 Cf. Chap. 20, § 4.

102 Em IV 143–144.

103 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815–1883*, Vol. I, *Teologo, pubblicista, rosminiano, vescovo di Saluzzo: 1815:1871*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1983, pp. 112–115.

104 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 29 May 1873, Em IV 105.

105 Letter cit. in MB X 726.

The summary arrived at the end of July with 28 '*animadversiones*' drawn from the 38 the Consultor had formulated.¹⁰⁶ Vitelleschi suggested in a friendly but frank manner that he willingly follow up on these. Moreover, this Curia man who also came from a noble family very sympathetic to Don Bosco, was the best one to inform him of the legal limits beyond which it was neither permitted nor productive to venture into. He wrote: 'I am of the view that you should accept them without demure, include them in the Constitutions then send these back to the Sacred Congregation. Most of the '*animadversiones*' are an application of rules established by Rome for new Institutes. I can see what they want for Novitiates and Studies and Ordinations is what you would like modified and eliminated; but on the other hand, it is precisely all this on which Ordinaries have always insisted and on which the Holy See has stood firm and immovable.'¹⁰⁷

The position of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on the legal ties between the diocesan Ordinary and the Salesian Society emerged from the reply – given on 26 July – to Archbishop Gastaldi's query: is the Congregation of St Francis de Sales 'directly subject to the Holy See and is it immune from the bishop's jurisdiction, yes or no?' The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was able to indicate, said the reply on 8 August, that the Salesian Society 'is only an institute of simple vows and such institutions are not exempt from episcopal jurisdiction except for the Constitutions when they have been approved by the Holy See, and any special privileges it has obtained'; 'however, we should not hide the fact that Father Bosco has obtained more than one special privilege concerning dimissorials to be issued for a certain number of his students and most recently at an audience on 8th inst. (August) he has obtained another similar privilege for six students.'¹⁰⁸

Don Bosco knew of neither the question nor the reply when he responded to Archbishop Vitelleschi's letter of 26 July on 4 August. He noted that the current '*animadversiones*' 'put matters further behind than they were earlier,' meaning 1864, and that the 'unrestricted faculty for dimissorials' was absolutely essential for the Salesian Society not to remain 'a diocesan Congregation.' As for 'study, the novitiate and other matters' he had explained what had already been agreed with Bishop Svegliati, Cardinal Quaglia and Pius IX himself. Finally he said: 'If I could not count on your valuable patronage I would have quickly withdrawn.'¹⁰⁹ It was an off-the-cuff reply but one full of hope for a positive hearing. His state of mind changed profoundly when, after a ' cursory glance', he gave the document a more thorough reading. He wrote of this to his usual authoritative man of trust, Archbishop Vitelleschi. On 25 August, he wrote that in practical terms he had met 'serious difficulties' in modifying the Constitutions in the manner proposed by the '*animadversiones*'. So he returned to well-worn arguments that were outdated or of scant credibility: he would have had to remove things 'that in general had already been approved for other Religious Orders and clerical Congregations' such as the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Oblates, Rosminians,¹¹⁰ he would have had to 'also radically alter a basis established by the Holy Father with which I have had to coordinate all the Salesian rules'; the Congregation 'would not exist as such' because having houses in different dioceses, it would have to depend only on the Ordinary, in the external exercise of what pertains to Religion'; 'and besides, I have tried not to vary or destroy what it seemed had already been established by the two decrees issued in 1864, 1869.' He had lost faith in the proceedings and was resolute: 'Should you see it as absolutely essential to adopt all these observations I will desist from any further requests since an approval in this sense would very

106 Cf. Text in *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, pp. 37–40, OE XXV 373–376; *Cost. SDB* (Motto) 244–245.

107 Letter of 26 July 1873, cit. in MB X 728.

108 Letter in MB X 729–730.

109 To Archbishop S. Nobili Vitelleschi, 4 August 1873, Em IV 138–139.

110 From the Rome chronicle of Don Bosco's secretary, Gioachino Berto, we see that in the first ten days of February 1874, Don Bosco met especially with Redemptorists, Passionists and Vincentians.

much worsen the current situation of the Salesian Society.¹¹¹ Naturally, he had no interest in going back to *animadversiones* which had accompanied the 1864 decree but which had never been forgotten by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. It is obvious that some of the *animadversiones* from summer 1873 would radically go against Don Bosco's older and essential expectations, and would indeed make these worse by adding new requests: in particular the 4th (civil rights) 5th (vow of poverty), 16th (novitiate), 17th (time and place for philosophical and theological studies), 25th (purchases and alienations, civil causes), 28th (the faculty of dimissorials). The consultation prepared for members of the Special Congregation in 1874 would have emphasised these same points regarded as fundamental by those requesting them and inadmissible by the one being asked to implement them.¹¹²

The new, broader and just as forceful observations led Don Bosco to prepare his defence on a more extensive front and to draw up supplementary documentation. This included: *Osservazioni sulle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales e loro applicazioni* (Observations on the Constitutions..... and their application)¹¹³ and a *Cenno istorico* (Historical outline) as his historical, legal justification.¹¹⁴ In Rome, Don Bosco would have been discouraged from attaching the *Cenno* to the official dossier, so he would have distributed it privately to members of the special Congregation. On 30 December he was in Rome with his secretary and valuable copyist Fr Joachim Berto, to follow up the final stages of these lengthy procedures. He immediately met with Archbishop Vitelleschi and Cardinal Berardi whom he considered influential and trustworthy friends. Received in audience with the Pope on 5 January, 1874, among other things he spoke of negotiations for the imminent foundation of a school of arts and trades in Hong Kong and of other matters concerning the life of the Congregation.¹¹⁵ Already in the early days of his stay in Rome, Don Bosco met with Bishop Simeoni, Secretary of Propaganda, and the Cardinal Prefect, Alessandro Barnabò, had expressed the wish to see him again. Don Bosco said he would visit him after having spoken with Archbishop Raimondi, Prefect Apostolic of the Hong Kong mission. They met a number of times during January¹¹⁶ arriving at an agreement which would not, however, come to a good result, though Don Bosco had already thought of the Economist General, Fr Angelo Savio, as the Rector of the new work.¹¹⁷

Fr Giovanni Bertazzi, a missionary from Brescia, had a number of meetings and an exchange of letters with Don Bosco, in the name of the Bishop of Savannah, Redemptorist William Gross. He was in Rome and Turin for a number of months to discuss the founding and running of a complex work: the diocesan seminary, a college, hospice for orphans, two free schools.¹¹⁸ On 6 March, they had an audience together with the Secretary of Propaganda Fide, Simeoni.¹¹⁹ Fr Bertazzi was also a guest at the Oratory for a few days, even hoping to return to the United States at the end of May with two Salesians. Among them and leading them he had in mind Don Bosco, or Fr Rua, who knew some English, or Fr John Cagliari or Fr Angelo Savio. But this grand plan laid out in a widely read memoir dated 'Turin, 9 April, 1874' was seen to be unworkable.¹²⁰

111 Letter of 25 August 1873, Em IV 151–152.

112 Cf. *Consultazione per una Congregazione particolare*, pp. 7–13, OE XXV 393–399.

113 Published in *Cost. SDB (Motto)* 245–247.

114 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno istorico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti*. Tip. Poliglotta della S. C. di Propaganda 1874, 20 p., OE XXV 231–250. On the draft and its contents, cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno istorico" di don Bosco del 1873/1874*, RSS 6 (1987) 245–331.

115 Cf. Letter to Fr M. Rua, 5 January 1874, Em IV 194–195.

116 Cf. G. BERTO, *Brevi appunti...*, pp. 14, 27, 35, 38, 40.

117 Cf. Letter to Fr M. Rua of 11 January, Em IV 203: 'Tell D. Savio' he wrote 'to prepare himself to be a saint so he can go and sanctify people in Hong Kong.'

118 Cf. G. BERTO, *Brevi appunti...*, pp. 64, 70, 72; letter of Don Bosco to Fr M. Rua, 4 April 1874, Em IV 275.

119 G. BERTO, *Brevi appunti...*, p. 73.

120 Cf. MB X 1270–1272, 1358–1371.

At any rate, on the threshold of approval of the Constitutions, one or other of the proposals was still the subject of serious negotiations. It was no utopia. Don Bosco felt justified in insisting in word and in writing on the granting of faculties vital to the more efficient operation of his Religious Institute.¹²¹

However, those who were hesitant about this were no less insistent. A particularly strong letter from the Archbishop of Turin had come to Cardinal Bizzari in early January, repeating the need 'to make a two year Novitiate obligatory,' with serious formation in *humility* and *submission*. He added two new proposals: giving the Ordinaries of dioceses where Salesian houses were to be founded the faculty of interfering in promotion of members of the Society to Holy Orders 'so that none of its members could be promoted without the positive and explicit consent of the diocesan bishop,' also giving the same bishops 'the faculty of examining said members before admitting them to perpetual vows.' Also repeated and made more loaded were accusations concerning the lack of clerical formation within the Salesian Society, reporting the problematic situation of two clerics, one from Saluzzo diocese, the other from the Archdiocese of Turin and both formed at Don Bosco's Oratory.¹²² By comparison with his earlier letters, Archbishop Gastaldi took a daring step forward: he seemed to be offering himself as Don Bosco's collaborator in giving stability and cultural and spiritual consistency to the Salesian Society, almost as the guardian of a body without a father, or with a father who was as inadequate at forming religious as he was exceptional as an educator of the young.

It should be noted that in the meantime, Don Bosco was also busy with extraordinary diligence with the problem of the *exequatur*.¹²³ Over the first two months of his time in Rome he informed his archbishop of the shifting events in the matters, wanting him to be the first to benefit from such a hotly debated solution. The four letters sent to Gastaldi between 11 January and 8 February reflect the tortuous path in search of formulas acceptable to both the Italian Government and the Holy See: 'Proceedings in the well-known affair are progressing well;'¹²⁴ 'the well-known affair is complete. One formula has been accepted by both parties;'¹²⁵ 'everything appears to be at an end, but today there is a hitch.'¹²⁶ It seems a solution might have been arrived at, but 'publicity in the matter' attributed to the Archbishop of Turin had aroused opposition – 'but all that was just a smokescreen to hide the real situation.' Don Bosco maintained that 'the real truth is that a day earlier, a harsh letter arrived from Bismarck protesting against the voices of reconciliation and especially against the bishops who ... etc. Proceedings have not broken down, just been interrupted.'¹²⁷

Don Bosco only found out about the Archbishop's 9 January letter to Cardinal Bizzari some weeks later, but in time still to prepare his defence. It had been copied and signed by one of the accused, Fr Giovanni Battista Anfossi, a former pupil at the Oratory. The copy was sent to Don Bosco, who in turn also had it copied and sent to each Cardinal in the special Congregation.¹²⁸ He also had the text of the Constitutions printed in January by the Poliglotta Vaticana. The articles on civil rights and the fact that the Congregation was not a moral entity remained unchanged. Two

121 Cf. [G. BOSCO], *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 20, OE XXV 250 e P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno storico"...*, RSS 6 (1987) 309–310, 318; *Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*, in *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...*, p. 47, OE XXV 383; letter to Pius IX, March 1874, Em IV 252.

122 Letter of 9 January 1874, in MB X 757–758. The two priests were Fr Luigi Chiapale and Giovanni Battista Anfossi.

123 Cf. Chap. 18, § 7.

124 Letter of 11 January 1874, Em IV 200.

125 Letter of 16 January 1874, Em IV 204.

126 Letter of 24 January 1874, Em IV 211.

127 Cf. Letter of 8 February 1874, Em IV 223.

128 Cf. MB X 759–760.

chapters were added: 16, on the Novitiate, but conceived of rather as a practical period of active life (art. 8) and 15, *De Studio* with four rather vague and generic articles. What was stated concerning dimissorials and external members also remained unvaried.

Hoping to soften opposition, in March Don Bosco had a constitutional text reprinted without the appendix on external members and including some rather formal corrections.¹²⁹ The judgement which the cardinals he had visited and asked protection of over those weeks was not entirely mistaken, according to Archbishop Vitelleschi: 'Don Bosco solves all the problems and makes them disappear. He accepts everything while accepting nothing.'¹³⁰

At the advice of the Compiler, Fr Carlo Menghini, who had put together the explanatory document of request for approval, Don Bosco prepared a *Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel February 1874* (A summary ... February 1874) to be added in place of the earlier *Cenno storico* to the fourteen documents of the *positio*. On 7 March, each of the Cardinals making up the special Congregation – Patrizi, De Luca, Bizzarri, Martinelli – received the text of the March edition of the Constitutions, the *Consultazione*, Don Bosco's petition to the Pope sent on 1 March, of the preceding year.¹³¹ That was not all. On 18 March, Don Bosco privately sent each member of the special Congregation, as well as the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Cardinal Berardi and Pius IX, a note with a rather eloquent title: *Some thoughts moving Don Bosco to humbly petition for the definitive approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society*. There were both old and new factors militating in favour of the complete legal legitimisation of the Salesian Society by the definitive approval of the Constitutions: 'The trial run of the Constitutions over thirty three years,' [he has gone back to 1841 once again] 'the letters of recommendation from forty four bishops, 'the fruits of blessing' thus far obtained, 'sixteen houses opened in various dioceses,' 'the number of members (330) and of youngsters (around 7,000) entrusted to them, the nearly complete negotiations to open houses in America, Africa, China,' 'the need for a practical Directory of the Constitutions for both the moral and material parts,' 'the keen desire that this great act, the most important one an Ecclesiastical Congregation can make' be completed by the current devout, learned and charitable Eminences, the Cardinals' and approved by the 'saintly and marvellous' Pius IX. Perhaps Don Bosco believed some incense would not go astray, given he was addressing clerics. But the proposal he advanced to escape the hidden dangers of the *animadversiones* could seem quite evasive and improvised: 'If we see a need to modify some articles of the Constitutions, that could be done in the account presented to the Holy See every three years on the moral, religious and material state of the Institute, or in the General Chapters held every three years.'¹³²

The lengthy meeting of the special Congregation on 24 March, remained unfinished. Work was adjourned until 31 March. Don Bosco was unbeaten and tireless and on 29 March attempted his final defence regarding Gastaldi's letter to Cardinal Bizzarri on 20 April, 1873. He sent the Cardinals of the Congregation a brief *Note on a letter from the Archbishop of Turin regarding the Salesian Congregation*.¹³³ He intended it to be a detailed refutation on matters of law and fact. But if Gastaldi's letter was not quite precise, neither was Don Bosco's counter argument. On 31 March, after lengthy discussion, the Congregation replied to the question put at the end of the Consultation: 'Whether and how the recent Constitutions of the Salesian Society should be

129 Both texts are copied in OE XXV 253–292, 295–333. a detailed analysis of modifications introduced into both is found in MB X 746–755, 784–785 and 915.

130 Cf. G. BERTO, *Brevi appunti sul viaggio di don Bosco a Roma nel 1873–1874*, ASC A 0040402, p. 83.

131 The entire documentation on the procedure is found reprinted in OE XXV 295–400: *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*, pp. 295–333; *Congregazione particolare dei Vescovi e Regolari...* Relator Nobili Vitelleschi, pp. 335–385; *Consultazione per una Congregazione particolare*, pp. 387–400.

132 Em IV 263–264.

133 Em IV 268–270; cf. Letter on same date to Card. A. G. Bizzarri, Em IV 267.

approved? *Affirmative et ad mentem*. The *ad mentem* simply meant that the '*animadversiones* made by Consultor Fr Bianchi be included in the Constitutions.' As for the 'faculty for issuing dimissorials for ordinations, this Privilege could be sought from the Holy Father for a period of ten years.' 'The Holy Father can be asked for approval of the Constitutions as proposed and thus emended and extended. Three of the Eminent Fathers are of a view to grant definitive and perpetual approval.'¹³⁴

It was the inevitable solution. Furthermore, Don Bosco himself had helped make it possible. Perhaps hoping the members of the Congregation would not take things too literally, he had concluded the Consultation with a declaration (pragmatic?) that was a return to discretion: 'Finally, Don Bosco after repeated requests, asks for final approval after several years of negotiations and declares expressly for this purpose, *that he will also take account of every correction, modification, and any advice you should wish to offer from your elevated and enlightened wisdom, or simply advise to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls*'; he was thereby hoping to fall in line with the respective Ordinaries and peacefully pursue his negotiations on behalf of the foreign missions.'¹³⁵

At an audience given Archbishop Vitelleschi on 3 April, Good Friday, Pius IX confirmed and approved the opinion of the special Congregation, ordering him to proceed with the decree of definitive approval of the Constitutions and separately granting the indult *ad decennium* for issuing dimissorial letters for Holy Orders.¹³⁶

The 13 April decree and rescript regarding dimissorials meant the two acts could legally be made public.¹³⁷ The same day, Don Bosco informed the archbishop from Rome that he had gained 'the decree of definitive approval of our rules.'¹³⁸ The recipient noted on the reverse side, underlining the final words: '1874 – 13 April – Don Bosco – news of definitive approval of his Institute *which, however is not definitive*'¹³⁹ – and he was partly right – not everything had been completed – since the faculties of exemption and dimissorials for any bishop remained excluded from the text of the Constitutions. Specific concessions would have been needed for this, and Don Bosco had to struggle from 1875 until 1884 to obtain them.

Back in Turin, he wrote a letter in familiar terms thanking Archbishop Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi who was first in line according to him for bringing the procedure to a happy ending. He asked him to also convey his gratitude to all of his family 'for the great courtesy and kindness' they had shown him during his Roman sojourn.¹⁴⁰ He would soon need to write back to him to resolve a matter raised by Archbishop Gastaldi. 'The diocesan Ordinary' he wrote 'wanted to see the decree granting dimissorials.' It was an essential condition for admitting Salesians to Orders who were presented by Don Bosco. In a long letter, Don Bosco informed him that not only had he complied with the Archbishop's various requests concerning ordinands but he had also let him see the document regarding dimissorials. But the archbishop wanted a genuine copy for the Curia in Turin, something Don Bosco believed it was his duty to refuse. He took advantage of what he considered to be back-stabbing on the part of his superior to renew his old request. 'It would not be too daring of me to request dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*?'¹⁴¹ His patient reader replied to him on 21 May, advising him to ask the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for a duplicate of the

134 Minutes of the two meetings of the Commission of Cardinals on 24 and 31 March written by Archbishop Nobili Vitelleschi, MB X 795.

135 *Consultazione per una Congregazione particolare*, p. 13, OE XXV 399.

136 Statement by Archbishop Vitelleschi at the bottom of the previous minutes, MB X 796.

137 Cf. MB X 802–805.

138 Em IV 277.

139 Cf. MB X 808, 821–827.

140 Letter of 28 April 1874, Em IV 281.

141 Letter of May 1874, Em IV 288–289.

Rescript.¹⁴² Don Bosco did this, and half way through June was able to send the document to the archbishop's secretary, also discrediting the notion, as the archbishop thought that he had it in mind to publish his letter to Don Bosco.¹⁴³ He insisted on this a day later: 'I can state that I have never thought, never dreamed of printing any written material of the kind. I believe it is one of those things where the only support for the idea is misinformation. I would like to have just one argument to prove things to the contrary but this, certainly, no one can produce.'¹⁴⁴

In this climate, one can only imagine Archbishop Gastaldi's feelings when he read the hymn Fr Lemoyne had composed that year for the traditional feast on 24 June. Don Bosco was presented there as the new Moses who at the end of a road filled with obstacles, received the Law from an angel on another Sinai, Rome – a law written on gold foil:

'Quest'Angel di Dio di Cristo è il Vicario, appellasi Pio

Chiamotti sul monte la legge ti diè`... guerrieri del Cielo

Innanzi inchinatevi al nuovo Mosè'

This angel of God, Pius the Vicar of Christ / Called you up the mountain and gave you the Law / Warriors of heaven Kneel before the new Moses.

The archbishop had noted on the proofs presented him for the *Nihil obstat*: 'We will not block it from being printed, but the exaggerations are to be criticised; they could never achieve any good.'¹⁴⁵

During 1874, Don Bosco published the Latin text of the Constitutions revised and adjusted both by himself and Professor Vincenzo Lanfranchi.¹⁴⁶ Of particular import was the note following art. 12, Chapter 4 *On novices, the novice master and their rule of life*. It was a complete reversal of what the Roman Congregation had wanted, by modifying the version of the Constitutions presented for approval. The note said that on the basis of a concession granted Don Bosco by the Pope on 8 April, 1874 *vivae vocis oraculo*, candidates for the Salesian Society subject to the second trial, meaning the novitiate, could undertake some of the activities laid down for the first trial period.¹⁴⁷ In the 1875 Italian edition – and thus in translation into other languages – which was also accessible to people who knew no Latin, a more drastic solution was adopted. The number of articles in Chapter 14 was reduced from 17 to 7. Naturally, the ones omitted were the ones referring to the different trial periods, the Canonical erection of houses of novitiate, the separation between novices and professed. A number of notes of legal relevance were then added in a variety of contexts.¹⁴⁸ The complete Latin text of the Constitutions only came into the hands of Salesians in 1902.

142 Cf. Text of the letter in MB X 824–825.

143 Fr T. Chiuso, 17 June 1874, Em IV 297.

144 Fr T. Chiuso, 18 June 1874, Em IV 298.

145 Cf. P. BRAIDO – R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne attraverso 20 lettere a don Michele Rua*, RSS 7 (1988) 130–132.

146 Cf. G. PROVERBIO, *La prima edizione latina ufficiale delle Costituzioni salesiane dopo l'approvazione pontificia*, RSS 3 (1984) 93–109.

147 "*Pius Papa IX benigne annuit tyrones, tempore secundae probationis, experimentum facere posse de iis, quae in prima probatione sunt adnotata, quoties ad maiorem Dei gloriam id conferre iudicabitur. Vivae vocis oraculo die 8 aprilis 1874*" (*Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii Juxta Approbationis decretum die 3 aprilis, 1874*. Augustae Taurinorum, Ex officina asceterii salesiani, An. MDCCCLXXIV, p. 45, OE XXV 455).

148 *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 April 1874*. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1875, XLII–49, OE XXVII 51–99 (text of the Constitutions).

Chapter 20

TENACIOUS DEFENCE OF THE FREEDOM OF HIS INSTITUTIONS AMID INSECURITY AND PROTEST

(1874–78)

- 1875 29 January 29: announces plans for Argentina;
 18 February – 21 March: in Rome, attempting to gain privileges;
 The work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the clerical state'
 16 September: negative decision by cardinals regarding privileges;
 11 November: farewell ceremony for first missionaries;
 Second half of November: establishing a community in Nice.
- 1876 23 January: diocesan approval of FMA Institute;
 10 February: SDB and FMA community established in Vallecrosia;
 29 March: FMA community established in Valdocco, Turin;
 21 April: Some faculties and privileges obtained;
 June: assistance given to seaside camp at Sestri Levante;
 October: Community established at Biella (7), Lu Monferrato(8), Alassio (12).
- 1877 November: departure of first FMA missionaries;
- 1878 22 June: Sisters establish community in Chieri (Turin);
 September: opening of FMA Mother House at Nizza Monferrato with a girl's boarding school;
- 1879 Official presentation of printed Constitutions (1878) of the FMA;
- 1881 14 May: death of Mary Domenica Mazzarello;
 12 August: election of new Mother General, Caterina Daghero.

Now that his two Religious Institutes had undoubtedly achieved positive goals, Don Bosco could tackle their organisation and formation with renewed enthusiasm. But the contexts in which they were working were different. The actual world in which the fervent Mornese community in Acqui diocese was working created no particular problem. On the other hand, Don Bosco had the good sense to keep the new Congregation and its founder sheltered from legal complications with Roman authorities by associating it with the Salesian Society which was already approved, and maintaining it at diocesan level, easily gaining approval from generally benevolent bishops, also because they were often the first to benefit from the Sister's work.

Instead the to some extent imperfect approval of the Salesian Constitutions – imperfect certainly in terms of Don Bosco’s requests and expectations regarding the faculty of dimissorials and the privilege of exemption – created a number of difficulties for the Salesian Society. Given that it was made of mostly priests and aspirants to the priesthood, it was affected by a number of relationship difficulties in the Turin Archdiocese and with certain sectors of the Roman Curia. Our biographical reconstruction also needs to take account of these matters.

1. From legal disputes to disciplinary reminders (1874–76)

There is no reason to think that approval of the Constitutions and the Rescript on dimissorials, restricted though the latter was, were regarded or proclaimed by Don Bosco as a victory over his Ecclesiastical Superior. There is no doubt that it was a great conquest, but he had paid for it by acquiescing to some notable issues which translated as subtractions and additions to the constitutional text, depriving him of concessions he had yearned for and burdening him with things he had managed to dodge up until then. The *ad mentem* accompanying the cardinals’ affirmation vote imposed a number of weighty burdens. He had to strike out the article on dimissorials. Particulars were either dropped or added which, in Don Bosco’s opinion, cancelled out his rightful insistence on the civil rights of members and the private civil character of the Religious Society. As for the vow of poverty, the version in the Constitutions of the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers) was imposed. In order to alienate goods or contract debts it meant proceeding ‘*juxta SS. Canones et Constitutiones Apostolicas.*’ Reference to civil legislation regarding inheritance and legacies was suppressed. The articles on studies were a real reversal. They established two years of philosophy and four of theology, all of which the students had to pursue free of the activities proper to the Society except in cases of necessity. There were similar rules regarding the novitiate which had to take place in a suitable house, leaving the practical training period in specific activities of the Salesian congregation to earlier or later periods.

For Archbishop Gastaldi, even though he was unaware of its real terms, Don Bosco’s success in Rome could have been perceived as at least a partial denial of his own ideas on episcopal jurisdiction and on the serious requirements of a Religious Institute and even on the relationships of the bishop with the Roman Curia. Deep down, he could have thought that Don Bosco had been listened to and found to be credible, while his own recommendation with its conditions and conclusions, and his other letters were seemingly not given equal hearing.

Together with this was another initially unconscious and secondary element, but one which became explosive: satisfaction on the one hand and uneasiness on the other that Don Bosco might have contributed to his elevation to the episcopacy and then to the See of the subalpine capital, and the perception that his ‘benefactor’ was overly aware of the fact and had sometimes told others of it. We can gather this from a pacifying letter from the Bishop of Alba, Eugenio Galletti (1816–79), a friend of both of them, who was certainly reflecting a real complaint made by his correspondent. ‘For the love of God’ he wrote to the Archbishop, ‘do not to deny him, *in charitate Dei et patientia Christi*, the opportunity to gradually explain and speak about the reasonableness of his motives for excusing what he has done. Nor would it be a good idea to throw back at him that he has boasted of playing a part in making you Archbishop, or worse, that he is pretending to act as a “black Archbishop”.’¹ No wonder, then, that in his pastoral management, without questioning the reality of the Society of St Francis de Sales, Archbishop Gastaldi would have clearly tried to claim the episcopal authority he legitimately believed he had, and the responsibility that he felt could not be delegated. That meant an approach to governing adopted impartially

1 Letter of E. Galletti to Arch. L. Gastaldi, 3 September 1874, cit. in MB X 834. In ecclesiastical jargon he was called the “black Pope”, the hidden person prompting the popes. The Superior General of the Jesuits.

towards everyone in the diocese without overvaluing or making special allowances for Don Bosco and his Religious Society which, moreover, the Archbishop professed to love, and wanted to see as beyond reproach.

1.1 Disagreements over practical matters.

There was no lack of occasion for disagreement and more. However, after 13 April 1874, differences shifted from the plane of legitimately different attitudes regarding approval of the Constitutions to the level of facts, though not without connection to principles. In the background were the legal status of the Salsian Society and the importance of the constitutional norms, complicated by a different way of understanding the special faculties obtain in April 1874. It was well and good that Don Bosco sent the Archbishop's secretary Fr Chriuso the 'genuine duplicate' of the decree on dimissorials *ad decennium* in June² but the printed copy of the Constitutions was not yet available and less so did it 'compare with the true original' and it was not authenticated by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars – it was not published until 28 years later.³

The first incident, ending up in a copious exchange of correspondence, was due to a circular in which Don Bosco announced a *Retreat for school teachers* to be held at the Lanzo college from 7–12 September, 1874. *L'Unità Cattolica* informed readers of it in its 23 August edition. On the same day, the Archbishop had a letter dispatched to him complaining that his consent was required yet he had not even been informed. Don Bosco (mixing different kinds of retreats run at different times and for different circumstances) argued against the legal basis for requesting the Ordinary's 'consent' regarding a practice that had already been established for a decade 'in Turin, Moncalieri, Giaveno, and Lanzo,' 'in Valdocco and Trofarello, and which had been confirmed and legitimised, according to him, by decree on 31 March, 1852, and had continued on the basis of concessions from the Vicar General Ravina and Provicar Fissore.⁴ This was clearly a spur-of-the-moment extension of the decree with which Fransoni had appointed Don Bosco as 'Chief Spiritual Director' of the oratories, giving him 'all the necessary and appropriate faculties' for their development.⁵ The Archbishop also scolded Fr Federico Albert – the Archbishop's 'Vicar' for the Parish of St Peter in Chains at Lanzo⁶ – for agreeing to preach the retreat. He made his thinking clear: 'You should never have lent a hand to a work, which, though good in itself, even excellent and greatly pleasing to the Archbishop, is nevertheless vitiated by the spirit of *insubordination*, meaning that no mention of it was made to the Archbishop.'⁷ Obviously, Don Bosco cancelled the planned retreat.

Another less important case gave rise to a number of problems, At Don Bosco's invitation, and due to the wish of the family of a young pupil at the Oratory who wanted to enter the diocesan seminary, a parish priest of the diocese celebrated the rite of clerical clothing for the young man. In fact, even during the 1870s there was a constant influx of students from the Oratory and the college at Lanzo to the seminary.⁸ When the Archbishop protested at the clothing being done without his agreement, Don Bosco once again claimed faculties granted him by the 31 March 1852 decree, indicating the example of well-known diocesan priests who had received their clerical garb in similar circumstances and 'who, in their day, sat for the regular exams before being admitted to

2 Letter of 17 June 1874, Em IV 297.

3 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to Arch. L. Gastaldi 3 May 1874, Em IV 285, and of the Archbishop to Card. G. Bizzarri of 24 May 1875, in MB XI 550–552.

4 Letter of 10 September 1874, Em IV 316–317.

5 [G. BOSCO], *Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii...*, 1868, p. 4, OE XVIII 573–574.

6 Cf. *Il santuario di Sant'Ignazio di Loiola presso Lanzo Torinese descritto da un sacerdote di Turin*. Turin, P. Marietti 1878, p. 2.

7 Letter to Fr F. Albert, 17 September 1874, in MB X 836–837.

8 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815–1883*, Vol. II, *Arcivescovo di Torino: 1871–1883*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1988, p. 392.

the Seminary.⁹ Logically, the Archbishop asked his secretary to make it clear that ‘a huge interval of time had elapsed since Ravina and Fissore were the Vicar Generals’ and from when young students at the Oratory ‘were fully incorporated’ into the Archdiocese, until the present.¹⁰

On 23 September, the Archbishop once again queried the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on the legal status of the Salesian Society. They were questions posed a year earlier and which Cardinal Bizzarri had replied to on 18 August 1873: were the Constitutions definitively approved? Was the Salesian congregation considered to be a Religious Order enjoying all the privileges as such and therefore ‘immune from episcopal jurisdiction? Can the Rector admit clerics to the novitiate or vows who were ‘listed as diocesan clerics’ without *prior agreement* and also contrary to the *bishop’s disapproval*? ‘Was it licit to accept clerics into the Congregation whom the bishop had ordered to put aside the clerical habit, and without his consent and contrary to his disapproval?’¹¹ Vitelleschi replied that he would get a response from the Congregation of Bishops and regulars after the holidays.¹²

A day earlier, the Archbishop had written at length to the Pope himself, premising it with the fact that he had had the usual recourse, where there were problems inherent to the government of the diocese, to the opinion of Canon Luigi Anglesio, Cottolengo’s successor, and had received full approval of this letter. He reconfirmed his unconditional support for the Salesian Society as a *regular Congregation*. He complained, however, of the lack of a true novitiate and the abuse whereby clerics were accepted who had been sent away by the bishop because he maintained they were not competent for the clerical state. He also referred to the case of the retreat at Lanzo, presenting Don Bosco’s *irreverent letter* of 10 September, for the Pope’s judgement. He asked him ‘keenly, humbly, warmly,’ to offer ‘a decisive word’ on the conflict.¹³

Informed confidentially of the two letters, on 12 October, Don Bosco addressed an elaborate memorandum to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in which he asked for clarification concerning the legitimacy of the Archbishop’s queries on certain issues. They appeared to him to be without canonical foundation: the conditions for admitting Salesian clerics to ordination, acceptance of clerics who had left the seminary, organising retreats for laity and clergy in Salesian Houses. He concluded with a detailed refutation of the Archbishop’s complaints with five queries regarding his authority on the points of controversy.¹⁴

As Advent approached, the Archbishop repeated to Don Bosco that he would not be ordaining any cleric he presented until he was sent a written declaration that no more clerics sent away from the seminary would be accepted. It was the same position as in May 1873.¹⁵ The founder replied: ‘You know how strict is the duty of a superior to provide for the good of his religious; this is also the Church’s duty, and you certainly also know the cases where the Ordinary can refuse such ordinations. This is why I am offering you some reflections before asking Rome how I should proceed with matters.’¹⁶ He had done so in October probably without appreciable results.

He sent his request through Cardinal Berardi to Pius IX.¹⁷ At the end of the year he sent off a further letter to the Pope explaining the problems he had encountered with the Archbishop of Turin

9 To Fr T. Chiuso, 27 September 1874, Em IV 321–322.

10 Letter of Fr T. Chiuso to Don Bosco 28 September 1874, MB X 846.

11 Text in MB X 842–843.

12 Letter of 5 October 1874, MB X 844.

13 The text is found in MB X 847–854.

14 To Card. A. G. Bizzarri, 12 October 1874, Em IV 333–335; he also asked benevolent Card. Giuseppe Berardi for clarifications on the legitimacy of accepting clerics of the diocese by letter on 7 November, Em IV 344–346.

15 Cf. Chap. 19, § 7.

16 To Arch. L. Gastaldi, 10 November 1874, Em IV 350–351.

17 Letter of 18 November 1874, Em IV 353–355.

in exercising his tasks as Superior of the Salesian Congregation, asking his advice and protection.¹⁸ The two letters to the Pontiff had an unforeseen effect. Cardinal Berardi was given the task by Pius IX of asking the Archbishop of Vercelli, Celestino Fissore, to act as mediator between the two parties. Fissore asked both for their opinions. Foreseeably, Don Bosco's filled a number of pages. One name appearing for the first time in those pages was that of Blessed Luigi Guanella, who then joined the Salesians. This was also unknown to the Archbishop. 'A priest from Como parish was accepted into our Congregation,' he told the mediator. 'When [the Archbishop] came to know about it he wrote to the Ordinary there saying: "Inform Fr Guanella (such is his name) that when he came into this Archdiocese he never received his *maneat* nor the faculty to preach."'

It is interesting to note the role the devil was playing, according to the disputants: 'If I were to say what I thought, it would be this: the devil has foreseen the good that Archbishop Gastaldi could have continued to do for our Congregation, so he secretly sowed weeds and let them grow – huge disruption, gossip from all sides, lack of priests and confessors among us, serious problems for the Archbishop himself who was my close confidant for thirty years; see the results.'¹⁹

Fissore was in Turin on 3 February and met both Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi, first separately then together at the Archbishop's residence. From a letter of Don Bosco's to Cardinal Berardi on 7 February, 1875 and the report Fissore sent to Rome, we can see that the most controversial point of the discussion and for reaching any understanding was the declaration that no cleric dismissed from the diocesan seminary would be accepted in Salesian Houses. Dependent on this was the Archbishop's readiness to admit Don Bosco's candidates to Orders.²⁰ This was a simplification of the whole range of real or imagined broader issues made more complicated still by ideological or emotional content which was often unconscious or unexpressed. One need not be surprised, then, that even before the end of February, Don Bosco had written to Archbishop Fissore: 'We still have not reached an understanding,' indicating the problem of acceptance [to the Salesian Society, this time of priests] and ordinations.²¹

The Archbishop of Vercelli felt he could go no further, and had believed for some months that a more general coming to terms was required, sanctioned by a written document which, for the moment, was merely a utopian possibility.²²

1.2 A difficult understanding between two personalities who felt equal responsibility

Archbishop Fissore was dealing with two very firm characters of more than usual intelligence and both of a mind to honour their respective responsibilities to the utmost. They were similar in their passionate interest in carrying out their own projects, though one was more controlled, the other more volatile. But both personalities were admirable for their dedication to their hard fought service. It was probably more difficult for Archbishop Gastaldi. While he was determined and very proactive, he was also very much aware of his mission as a reforming pastor and his corresponding authority as a superior. In the earlier quoted letter which the Archbishop wrote to Fr Albert on 17 September, he warned him: 'So I am asking you once more to be careful and avoid cooperating with what is not in accord with the hierarchical order established by God ... I will see that the Archbishop's authority is not threatened by someone who should be giving a different

18 Letter of 31 December 1874, Em IV 376–378.

19 To the Archbishop of Vercelli, 12 January 1875, Em IV 391–393.

20 To Card. G. Berardi, 7 February 1875, Em 411–414; cf. Report to Arch. C. Fissore, 12 February 1875, MB XI 548–550.

21 To Arch. C. Fissore, from Rome 23 February 1875, Em IV 421–422; again, 1 and 27 June 1875, Em IV 468 and 471–472.

22 Cf. letter to Don Bosco 7 March 1875, MB XI 102–103.

example of reverence to that authority.²³ Two days later, when he came to know that Don Bosco had cancelled the retreat, he repeated the notion: it was not a matter of doing or not doing good but of doing it well, i.e. in agreement with the superior. 'Why did I let go of something good as a consequence of that admonition? Could I have warned him more charitably? Is not the authority I have a deposit which I am obliged to preserve in its integrity?'²⁴

For his part, Don Bosco felt the same keen awareness of having particular responsibilities of defending and strengthening the identity, specific nature and autonomy of his Congregation.' It was young and at a difficult stage of growth while at the same time involved in work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls that could brook no delay. 'Good must be done' continued to run up against the equally legitimate 'Good must be done where possible' in relation to concrete historical needs and circumstances. He feared an authority that went beyond its proper limits, a protection that became a stifling embrace, even in secondary matters. So on the one hand, he defended himself with great energy, while on the other, he leaned towards an industrious but never fully achieved reconciliation.

Worthy of note in particular are the beginning and end of his earlier cited letter of reply to the Archbishop on 10 September. The opening was diplomatic but its recipient thought it 'irreverent', and objectively speaking we might call it ironical. 'The attentive eye with which Your Grace watches over the progress of our poor Congregation demonstrates that you want exact observance of its rules and the Church's rules, and this can only be good for us and keep us vigilant over our duties, for which we give you heartfelt thanks. But there are certain things that I really do not know whether or not they are according to the spirit of the Church, or if they can be of any benefit to others.' Towards the end, before asking the Archbishop for a concrete and specific formulation of 'what you want [ed]' of the Salesian Society and reminding him of their earlier friendship, he was tugging at emotional strings. 'I now beg you to let me speak the language of the heart for a moment.' It was an appeal meant to decrease the hierarchical distance but it would certainly have increased it. 'It seems to me that before the Lord's judgement seat Your Grace and I, who are very close, will be much happier if we leave aside our concerns for what is better and set about fighting evil and fostering what is good, returning to the era when every idea poor Don Bosco had, was for you a plan to be executed.'²⁵ The Archbishop could hardly accept a deferential approach of this kind and being lectured in Canon Law, and even less so, on this occasion, by 'the language of the heart,' out of place in situations where he felt the only appropriate words were the dutiful exercise of authority for his part and obedience and submission by the other. In fact Don Bosco received a warning letter from Canon Zappata, the Vicar General.²⁶ He replied respectfully but not without highlighting aspects of his mindset and responsibility as a founder: 'I beg to reassure you' 'that I need to foster observance of the Rules as they were approved and that I have the duty of dedicating the few days the merciful God deigns to grant me still to countless improvements that the quality of the Institute and the times we are going through make difficult. Therefore we need all the indulgence of our Ordinaries that is compatible with their authority.' He added an interesting comment, one which could not be checked and to which there was almost no follow-up: 'Some days ago I sent Rome a printed copy of our rules' he said, with incredible innocence 'so they could see if they were in accordance with the original. As yet I have had no reply; nevertheless I am sending you a copy which I hope you will be pleased with and am asking you to also give a copy to His Grace. Should there be any discrepancy with the original I will hasten to advise you.'²⁷

23 Letter to Fr F. Albert, 17 September 1874, in MB X 836–837.

24 Letter to Fr F. Albert, 19 September 1874, in MB X 839.

25 Letter of 10 September 1874, Em IV 316–318.

26 Cf. MB X 854; E II 408.

27 To Can. G. Zappata, 11 October 1874, Em IV 331–332.

It would be superficial, then, to reduce the disagreement on related matters of religious and ecclesiastical jurisdiction to quarrels, acrimony, hostility, arrogance, obstinacy on the basis of distinct commitments and differing awareness of their respective duties and corresponding rights, further complicated by temperament and style of action. These did partly differ (though certainly not out of hasty opposition between charisma and authority) but they were also partly similar. No, within the context of the Catholic faith it was also a tense contrast between two spiritualities, theoretical and practical. Gastaldi and Don Bosco, as were Moreno and Riccardi de Netro before them, were men of God, priests. The three bishops were so at the highest level, dedicated unreservedly to working for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. They all celebrated Mass, absolved, preached, prayed, and suffered for the same cause: the Kingdom of God, the Church, the Gospel of salvation. However, their ways and means betrayed their mentality, perceptions of reality, their sometimes differing evaluations with consequent attitudes and prudent decisions. In the case of the three bishops, they were more rigorous and inflexible in keeping to the principles of a more strongly structured theology, ultimately assisted by a precise legal culture. Don Bosco was less rigid theologically and legally, and had been formed in probabilism and casuistry, so was more flexible, pragmatic, liberal or in the judgement of his antagonists, arbitrary, and more likely to abuse his position. So, with regard to practical conduct in individual issues, both had inevitable limitations of outlook and understanding each other. There were errors of evaluation, preconceptions, lack of trust, and neither was very much inclined to compromise.

Many things, not all of them balanced, have been written about Archbishop Gastaldi's temperament, while in Don Bosco's case it is especially the heroic aspects that have been stressed. It seems difficult to write an appropriate history of a great individual who has not been canonised and was heroic in other ways and who, out of a strict sense of duty had to deal with a future canonised saint in many situations.²⁸ Among other things, Gastaldi's rock-solid, consistent and convinced Rosminian approach in philosophy and theology, as well as his unbreakable solidarity with the Institute of Charity, considerably weakened his position in Turin. He suffered from this but fiercely preserved his loyalty and fidelity to it as demonstrated by the vibrant testimony he gave in the opening address to the first Regional Piedmontese meeting of the Work of the Congresses.²⁹ Zoologist and writer Michele Lessona (1823–94), was spot-on when recalling the figure of the Archbishop's brother, Bartolomeo (1818–79), an internationally renowned geologist and a colleague of his Turin University. He wrote that he found in all members of the Gastaldi family 'a special conformity of type' both physical and moral: 'Physically [they were] of medium height, lean-bodied, muscular, and of light brown complexion.' 'In moral terms [they were] of powerful intellect and very strong willed, of proud and dignified bearing, industrious, virtuous with a taste for the fine arts, and contemptuous of wealth.' Lorenzo, the first born, was 'an exceptional man who demanded much of others but much more of himself. He was the very model of an austere and religious life, unflinching in his convictions, fond of fatherland and Faith and ready to give his life for the latter.'³⁰

2. Mary Help of Christians, protector of vocations to the clergy

28 Cf. *Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825–1888). Miscellanea*. Turin, Bottega d'Erasmus 1977, pp. 109–110 and nos 117–118 and p. 157, no. 65; A. CASTELLANI *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo, Vol. II Il pioniere e l'apostolo dell'azione sociale cristiana e dell'azione cattolica (1867–1900)*. Rome, tip. S. Pio X 1966, pp. 151–157; G. DACQUINO, *Psicologia di don Bosco*. Turin, SEI 1988, a debatable psychoanalytical interpretation mediated by less than impartial and selective historical sources: what results is a confrontation between two characters said to be different: the 'normal' priest, and the archbishop as a subject of clinical psychology (cf. in particular, pp. 73–80).

29 Cf. G. DOTTA, *La nascita del movimento cattolico a Turin e l'Opera dei Congressi (1870–1891)*. Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1999, pp. 204–208.

30 M. LESSONA, *Naturalisti italiani*. Rome, Sommaruga, 1884, p. 209.

In harmony with the ecclesial significance of devotion to Mary under the title *Auxilium Christianorum*, Don Bosco named a work he had very much at heart, the *Work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the clerical state*.³¹ The vast work of poor and abandoned youth or rather, of poor and abandoned youth and the scarcity of priests, posed serious practical problems for the Church. Don Bosco saw the two as connected. Despite his great appreciation for the laity, he considered that the Christian education of the young could not be achieved without the presence of the priest who was the dispenser of the mysteries and spiritual guide. Therefore, halfway through the 1870s, as he intensified his campaign in search of and in forming good vocations, which he extended to a later age as well, he placed his solution to the problem under Mary's protection. He saw an indissoluble bond between Mary and the Church: 'This work has been placed under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians, because Mary, whom the Church has proclaimed *Magnum et singular in Ecclesia praesidium* will certainly see fit to protect a work that aims at finding good ministers for the Church.'³²

For this initiative, too, Don Bosco wrote an essential set of statutes which were clear though not so systematic, adding items in the 1877 edition. The following headlines came after a long preface: *First experiments, Means (Finances), Observations, Spiritual advantage, Programs*, this latter divided into four subsections: *Purpose of the work, Acceptances, Study, Personal belongings*.

The preface attempted to diagnose institutes in Italy, Europe, the missions. Needs were on the increase but vocations were diminishing. 'Work of charity for this purpose' had arisen in a number of countries 'and they had shown good results but were insufficient to meet the many and urgent needs.' He suggested another which would be more functional and practical, 'a course of studies for young adults intending to dedicate themselves to the clerical state.'

The conditions of acceptance stated that each student had 'to belong to an upright family, be healthy, strong, of good character and between 16 and 30 years of age.'³³ He demonstrated the advantages statistically: while only 20% of boys who felt 'called' actually became priests, 80% of older young men achieved that goal and most of them over a shorter period. So what was needed was an appropriate 'course of secondary studies' geared to 'young adults' who had the 'exclusive intention of pursuing an ecclesiastical career.'³⁴ The *purpose of the work* was: 'To Bring together older youth who have willingly decided on literary studies thanks to appropriate courses, in order to embrace the clerical state.'³⁵

Before suggesting ways that people could help – of a financial kind, mostly – Don Bosco responded to the likely (or real, as in Turin) objections of some bishops. His question and answer ran thus: Would not this work harm others already in existence? Not only would it not harm them but it would support them. Without priests, preaching, the sacraments, what would become of the Work of the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood and all the other pious works?'³⁶ In truth, 'once the literary course is completed, every student is free to become a Religious, go to the Foreign Missions, or return to his respective diocese to ask his bishop if he can take on the clerical habit. In this latter case, the Director of the Work will make haste to humbly recommend the

31 Cf. [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico benedetta e raccomandata dal Santo Padre Pio Papa IX*. Fossano, tip. Saccone 1875, 8 p., OE XXVII 1–8; [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice... ecclesiastico. Eretta nell'Ospizio di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli in San Pier d'Arena*. San Pier d'Arena, tip. e libr. di san Vincenzo de' Paoli 1877, 28 p. The quote is from this edition.

32 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, p. 17.

33 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 3–4 e 25.

34 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, p. 4.

35 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, p. 25.

36 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, p. 17.

candidate to their respective Ordinaries so that in accordance with his merit he may take him into kind consideration.³⁷

Financial support was assured by three categories of 'contributor': donors who promised to give two *soldi* [=10 cents; 0.35 euro] a month for priests, one mass offering; *correspondents* 'heading up a dozen or more donors; *benefactors* with more consistent offerings up to 300 lire [946 euro] a year with the right to 'send a student to the Institute for free' (the St Vincent de Paul Hospice at Sampierdarna), or give as much as 800 lire [2,524], enough to cover the entire literary course. Other than participating in various spiritual benefits and indulgences 'the reward of having contributed to a great work of charity' was considered to be the outstanding 'spiritual advantage'. He concluded: St Vincent de Paul says *one cannot do a better work than contributing to making a priest*.³⁸

In an extremely busy year in which Don Bosco was planning the *Salesian Cooperators Association* and preparing to launch the Congregation and its works in France and South America, the setting up of this initiative found easy and ready acceptance in Rome. As soon as he returned from the capital after his sojourn there in 1875, he told the assembled Chapter meeting and rectors on 14 April that he had spoken at length about the *Work* at one of the audiences granted on 22 February and 12 March. He wrote to Cardinal Antonelli about it on 8 August as a project he would have already known of: 'I also spoke of it with the Holy Father who advised me to put it all down in writing, which I did. His Eminence Cardinal Berardi was asked to make a report, which the Holy Father was pleased with. He blessed its purpose and recommended it into action, as soon as possible.'³⁹

When he spoke to his Salesians about it he had already sent a printed copy of the regulations to a dozen or so bishops. This was the booklet *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Work of Mary Help of Christians) yet to be published.⁴⁰ Between 12–18 April 1875, he had received letters of recommendation from the bishops of Albenga, Vigevano, Acqui, Alessandria, Tortona, Casale, and Genoa recommending both initiatives, the Cooperators and adult vocations.⁴¹ He sent Cardinal Berardi the four which came directly to him along with the twofold project of clerical vocations and Cooperators, asking him and Archbishop Vitelleschi to be intermediaries for obtaining indulgences from the Holy Father 'appropriate to each project.'⁴² He sent him further letters of recommendation a few days later asking that the spiritual favours be granted distinctly to each of the two projects and that the ones relating to the *Work of Mary Help of Christians* be passed on with particular urgency.⁴³

Both these men assured him of their support. However, Berardi recommended 'prudence and circumspection' with Archbishop Gastaldi, and Vitelleschi asked him to accept a 'suggestion' of his, that is, 'to give good consideration to setting up the work for clerical vocations outside the Turin Archdiocese.'⁴⁴

In fact, Gastaldi had wanted to involve all the bishops within the ecclesiastical provinces of Turin, Vercelli, and Genoa, so that the initiative would be carefully thought through.⁴⁵ At the same time, he wrote to Cardinal Bizzarri to put a stop to such a useless and harmful plan since the

37 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 25–26.

38 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice...*, pp. 3–4.

39 Letter of 8 August 1875, Em IV 496–497.

40 The regulations came out at the beginning of August in the second number of the *Bibliofilo*, a catalogue from the Libreria salesiana or Salesian Bookshop, the prelude to the *Bollettino Salesiano*.

41 *Documenti* XV 92–97.

42 To Card. G. Berardi, 18 April 1875, Em IV 452.

43 Letter of 22 April 1875, Em IV 453.

44 Letter of 7 and 11 June 1876, *Documenti* XV 168–169; cf. MB XI 37–38.

45 Cf. letter from Can. T. Chiuso to Don Bosco, 29 July 1875, *Documenti* XV 209.

diocese already had their seminaries and there was a risk that Don Bosco might take away some of their potential candidates.⁴⁶ Bishop Luigi Moreno was even more negative in a long letter to the same cardinal.⁴⁷

Don Bosco acted to clarify the state of things with two letters to the Archbishop's secretary: the indulgences granted had not yet been communicated in writing, and they were reserved to promoters of the work. Before going to print, things would be presented to the Archbishop.⁴⁸ None of the Vatican bodies had asked Don Bosco to come to any agreement with the Archbishop of Turin since the Work, was 'aimed at the general benefit of the Church.'⁴⁹ In the earlier mentioned letter of 8 August, Cardinal Antonelli informed him of the obstacles posed in Turin, and asked him if it was correct that his intention was to 'cut off all difficulties and begin the Work in one of the dioceses of the many bishops who had recommended it.'⁵⁰ On the 10th, Don Bosco wrote to Archbishop Vitelleschi: 'Had I followed your advice somewhat for the Work of Mary Help of Christians to begin it in another diocese I would have saved myself some trouble.' But the solution was already underway: 'I have an understanding with Bishop Manacorda and I will have everything printed at Fossano. I will try the first experiment in Genoa Archdiocese with full acceptance there of the bishop, with whom it was earlier agreed.'⁵¹ He informed Fr Chiuso of the idea of 'transferring elsewhere' 'the establishment of this project' if it were to happen at all, insisting on the universal nature of the initiative: 'Whoever would like a diocesan work is free to suggest it to the Ordinary, introduce it, modify it as he wishes; but here it is something general.' It was a Work aimed at 'helping Religious Orders, the Missions, and also a way of presenting some to their Ordinaries without giving any moral material concerns to them.' To the reply that he would not 'be allowed either to print or disseminate the project and its curriculum nor appeal to charity in the Turin Archdiocese, he replied by defending his right to print, other than the need for ecclesiastical review, and to beg for money. However, he gave assurances that he would not do so if it was denied. But he did not forget to remind them of how deserving the Oratory was in the archdiocese for producing vocations to the clergy and for its work among the young.⁵² On 24 August, Don Bosco sent a note to Archbishop Vitelleschi, who had informed him over those days of the letters from the Archbishop and Bishop Moreno, and which the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would need to respond to. He summed up the origins and successive development of the Work, recalling the difficulties posed by the Archbishop and made a suggestion: 'I have now decided to experiment with the *Work of Mary Help of Christians* in the house at San Pier d'Arena in the diocese of Genoa where I have the complete acceptance of the Bishop.'⁵³ He informed Archbishop Gastaldi of the decision as a *fait accompli*, on 29 September: 'So as not to cause your Grace either displeasure or concern, I have begun the Work of Mary Help of Christians in another diocese. Now I would like to disseminate some of the programs in the Archdiocese of Turin as well but I will not do so until I have due permission!⁵⁴

The Work opened happily both at Sampierdarena and the Oratory at Valdocco in 1875. Fr Luigi Guanella, who arrived in Turin at the end of January, was appointed as the one in charge of the Work at Valdocco. There is a splendid letter of his from April 1876, written in the name of all and personally given to Pius IX by Don Bosco. Pius IX signed it, preceded by the date (*die 16 aprilis*

46 Cf. letter of 25 July 1875, *Documenti* XV 207–209; MB XI 40–42.

47 Letter of 7 August 1875, *Documenti* XV 221–224; cf. MB XI 42.

48 To Fr T. Chiuso, 29 July 1875, Em IV 493.

49 To Fr T. Chiuso, 8 August 1875, Em IV 495.

50 Em IV 496–497.

51 Letter of 10 August 1875, Em IV 501.

52 Letter of 14 August 1875, Em IV 505–506.

53 Em IV 509.

54 Em IV 525.

1876) and added words of blessing: *Benedicat vos Deus et dirigat vos in viis suis*.⁵⁵ At the same time Don Bosco asked the Pope for special indulgences for the Work which were granted in a generous Brief.⁵⁶

The matter was resolved – in fact and in law. Don Bosco caused a minor issue a year later by sending an article on the *Work*, its purpose and the first successful year at San Pier d’Arena to *L’Unita Cattolica*, which published it on 17 September, 1876.⁵⁷ He followed up with a second on 19 September, but the editor, Fr Margotti, replied by sending him the admonition the Archbishop had his secretary, Fr Chiuso, pass on to him with some details on fact and the law. All in all, these corresponded to the truth. It said: ‘A Papal Brief was published in the article, which has not yet been communicated to the Archbishop of Turin, as it should have been, along with a genuine copy. We are speaking of a *canonically instituted* Association of the Faithful of which the Archbishop has no knowledge of its being *canonically instituted*. Indulgences have been published which the Archbishop knows nothing about, and this is contrary to the ruling of the Council of Trent; so the hierarchical order of the Church has been ignored and the prerogatives and requirements the Archbishop has in Divine and Church law have been harmed.’ He then returned to the principle already noted and we are not sure if it was addressed to the editor of the newspaper or to Don Bosco or both: ‘It is not enough to do good; this must be done well. *Bonum est integra causa, malum ex quocumque defecta*.’⁵⁸

On 5 October, Don Bosco sent the Archbishop a letter of explanation which could hardly have been persuasive, especially when he wanted the granting of indulgences to pass as the formal canonical institution of the *Work*.⁵⁹ The Papal Brief of 9 May, 1876 supposed the existence of the institution but did not create it: ‘Since, as explained, an association of the faithful or in other words a Pious Work, as we say, has been canonically instituted under the title of the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians.... So that such a society may increase daily...we grant a plenary indulgence.....’⁶⁰

It was not the most propitious moment for gaining privileges and the faculty of issuing dimissorials about which the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had to express an opinion at the same time. Would all of this favour Don Bosco rather than the Archbishop who was dearly contrary to these and other concessions?

3. Failure to gain privileges and the faculty of issuing dimissorials

Yet Don Bosco did ask for these special faculties, precisely to get around so many difficulties and obstructions to his increasingly feverish activity. The Congregation was growing numerically and its work was spreading. In 1875 it crossed the border into France and established itself in Nice. A few weeks later it arrived across the Atlantic, creating two bridgeheads in Argentina.⁶¹ According to Don Bosco, the Salesians needed greater freedom and flexibility of action. It seemed urgent to him to play the privileges card. The outcome initially was entirely negative, but there was some progress in 1876.⁶²

55 L. Guanella’s letter was 1 April 1876, MB XI 60–61. Don Bosco wrote to Guanella about it from Rome, Easter 1876, E III 39–40.

56 Petition dated 4 March 1876, the Brief 9 May 1876, MB XI 533–535.

57 A similar article had been sent to *Il Cittadino*, Genoa and perhaps to other Catholic newspapers (cf. MB XI 62–63).

58 Letter of 17 September 1876, in MB XI 65.

59 Letter of 5 October 1876, E III 100–101.

60 [G. Bosco], *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice*..., pp. 11–12.

61 Cf. Chap.21.

62 Cf. MB XI 174–200 (Chap. IX *Privilegi e dimissorie*) e 466–477 (Chap XXI *Nuovo passo per i privilegi*).

The state of mind of the Salesian Society's leaders concerning the opportunity for obtaining the most important privileges leading to more direct dependence on the Pope, was clear from the St Francis de Sales Conferences in January 1875. It had already emerged from discussions on the two decrees from 25 January, 1848: *Romeni Pontifices* and *Regulari disciplinae*, regarding the testimonials required for admission to the novitiate, clothing and religious profession. The prevailing opinion of those taking part in the Conferences was that they were not bound to their observance, either because of the special circumstances of the young postulants or because of what Don Bosco had obtained from the Pope *vivae vocis oraculo*.⁶³ This position was confirmed at the meeting on the following day, 27 January, at which Don Bosco presided.⁶⁴ Don Bosco spoke of the communication of privileges in the morning session the following day. He stressed the difficulties of obtaining them after hearing about those enjoyed by other Orders or Congregations, 'however he had studied the matter thoroughly and hoped to succeed.'⁶⁵ We can gather the kind of spirit he had gone to Rome with from a meeting he held with rectors on 14 April, three weeks after the Conferences. On his return, he spoke to them about the main purpose of his trip to Rome: 'To gain communication of the privileges for the Congregation and the faculty of issuing dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*.'⁶⁶ After providing a brief history of the privileges for Religious Orders and of their extension then to modern Congregations, he came to the Salesian case: 'The main purpose of my trip to Rome was precisely to see what to do with regard to these principles I have already spoken to you about on other occasions.' It was about privileges in general 'and especially about being able to issue dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque episcopum*' he explained. To Archbishop Vitelleschi's question as to which privileges he needed, he had replied: 'Many of them, both for smooth internal running and for the relationships we must have with Church authorities and the faithful.' He had prepared some eighty of them.⁶⁷

Don Bosco had dedicated a good part of his busy stay in the capital from 18 February to 16 March 1875, to setting the procedure officially in motion. He was there with his trusty secretary, Fr Gioachino Berto, who was as always extremely laconic with his diary entries. A number of issues were part of the agenda: the privileges, the Work of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators Association, and extending Salesian activity to the Americas. It was to these matters he dedicated meetings with his friends Cardinal Berardi and Bishop Fratejacci but especially, at the official level, with the secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Archbishop Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi and two important papal audiences on 22 February and 12 March. The Pope got Don Bosco to understand how procedures went for granting privileges and how this had changed over several decades, becoming more difficult. However, after two feverish sessions of research, two petitions were drawn up, one for the faculty of issuing dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*, the other for granting privileges given other Religious Institutes. An application by Archbishop Vitelleschi was added to the petition. It pleaded Don Bosco's cause for dimissorials for two reasons: the Salesian Society had extended across many dioceses and its members could be transferred from one to another, creating objective obstacles for Ordinaries to have suitable knowledge of candidates' readiness or otherwise for Holy Orders; the concession would greatly help the unified running of the Society, which was an essential element for preserving the purpose and spirit of the Institute.

The immediate result of the two petitions to the Pope was the appointment of a Special Congregation asked to put forward its vote. The composition was identical to the one formed to

63 Meeting of Rectors, 26 January in the morning, at which Fr Rua presided, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 2–5.

64 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 11–12.

65 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 7–8.

66 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, p. 33.

67 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 38–42.

approve the Constitutions. The relevant *Consultation* was prepared, with a *Summary* of five documents. This listed the difficulties that had arisen with the Ordinary of Turin since March 1874 when Don Bosco had obtained the Rescript for dimissorials *ad decennium*. The Founder had presented the two petitions 'in view of such difficulties' it argued 'and also so his Institute can enjoy the privileges that have been granted many Congregations which it is certainly not inferior to for the prodigious deeds carried out on behalf of religion and civil society.'

In one it asked for the faculty of issuing dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum* and *extra tempus*; in the other, the granting of privileges of Congregations similar to it. In the *Summary*, Don Bosco had included two *Clarifications*. In the first, he highlighted the progress made by the Society following the definitive approval of the Constitutions; in the second, he stressed difficulties for a timely concession of favours and privileges when they were being requested on a case by case basis according to need. Finally, in a *Petition for the granting of spiritual favours on behalf of the Salesian Congregation*, he explained which favours of which Religious Institutes amongst the many possible ones, he preferred: 'We ask by preference, those of the Redemptorists or the Priests of the Mission [Vincentians], whose Constitutions and purpose could be said to be identical to the Salesian ones.'⁶⁸

The truth was that it was not easy to obtain a favourable opinion, and Don Bosco could see the good and the bad of it. Before returning to Turin and while awaiting the verdict – as he told the rectors on 14 April – 'I went to find Cardinal Berardi who, along with Bishop Fratejacci, had kindly taken charge of the matter. I assured them that I would always be ready, as soon as I was called to return to Rome, for any necessary clarifications or to conclude the matter. Before leaving Rome I went to see the cardinals tasked with deciding issues. They all think well of us and see the Congregation in a good light. And they all said that since the Holy Father wanted it, they could not find serious difficulties.'⁶⁹ This was the 'bright side of the picture.' But he did not hide 'the dark side as well' from his listeners. To explain it, he invited secretary and archivist Fr Berto to bring two letters from the archives, both from Archbishop Gastaldi – one to Cardinal Bizzarri and the other to Pius IX, 'both against us' as the chronicler notes. 'The reading of these letters' the chronicler goes on 'was often interrupted to make similar observations. We could see the agitated mind of the writer in them and what most disappointed us was the untruthfulness of the things said about us.'⁷⁰

Further weakening Don Bosco's position before the cardinals in the Special Congregation was another letter to Cardinal Bizzarri on 24 May, 1875. The letter contained further complaints which were unfavourable to the founder of the Salesian Society: the archbishop had never had 'any communication of papal decrees approving the Congregation or the Constitutions'; all he had was a copy of the Rescript on dimissorials *ad decennium*; in order to know in what matters the Institute was subject to the Constitutions or the Ordinary, he would need an authentic copy of the Constitutions and not simply the printed one he had received, 'more so' he insinuated, and not without reason, because some believed 'the printed copy is not in complete agreement with the original; there were clerics and lay people working in the houses of the Congregation who had no intention of professing perpetual vows and had been accepted without his consent and not without diminishing his authority; there were others expelled from the seminary taking shelter in some houses of the Congregation without putting aside the clerical garb, and thus being assisted in their

68 'Mese di agosto' Anno 1875. *Sagra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari. Consultazione per la Congregazione speciale composta degli Eminentissimi e Reverendissimi cardinali Patrizi, De Luca, Bizzarri, Martinelli. Relatore Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Monsignore Vitelleschi arciv. Di Seleucia Segretario. Taurinen., seu Societatis S. Francisci Salesii super literis dimissorialibus, et communicatione privilegiorum*, 25 + XVII p., OE XXVII 101–143. The dossier reported only the commendation of Bishop Pietro De Gaudenzi, Bishop of Vigevano.

69 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 46–47.

70 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 47–48.

disobedience to their bishop.⁷¹ As the Congregation of Cardinals was about to meet, from Turin Don Bosco addressed an appeal to each of its members and especially to Cardinal Bizzarri, 'the benevolent father and outstanding benefactor at the time of approval' of the Constitutions, restating the 'two great advantages' that would accrue 'from this concession: 1. The Salesian Congregation would be at the level of others before the ecclesiastical authorities. 2. Since the Salesians were soon going to Argentina, 'it would be extremely useful for our religious to enjoy the privileges and spiritual favours of Religious Orders and Congregations already in that vast kingdom [sic]. He added a third advantage which was probably counter-productive: 'It would also remove the reason for the opposition the Ordinary of this Turin Archdiocese shows, since he is not convinced the Salesian Society has been definitively approved because he sees it does not *enjoy the privileges of other Congregations*.⁷²

The outcome of the Congregation held on 16 September was negative. Regarding the granting of the faculty for issuing dimissorials, the response was: *Negative et ad mentem*. And the *mens/mentem* was that Don Bosco's twofold request be communicated to the Archbishop of Turin, along with the Congregation's negative vote, also motivated by the fact that the founder already had a ten year indult from April 1874, Regarding the privileges, the response was: *Communicationem, prout petitur, non expedire*. The same evening the Secretary, Archbishop Vitelleschi, made a report on it to the Pope who approved the opinion of the Congregation of Cardinals. On 22 September, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars gave official communication to the Archbishop of Turin, at the same time asking him to hold to the Papal Indult regarding the dimissorials obtained by Don Bosco on 3 April, 1874.⁷³

4. Limited recovery amid new and more serious disagreements (1875–76)

Don Bosco did not give up. Taking advantage of the new situation created by the departure of the first Salesians for Argentina, he returned to the task on 5 December, 1875, asking for thirteen spiritual favours and indulgences and some privileges among which the *extra tempus* and the faculty for issuing dimissorials to any bishop. The favours and indulgences were on behalf of the missionaries mainly, but not only.⁷⁴ Meanwhile the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and regulars had changed. Archbishop Vitelleschi was made Cardinal,⁷⁵ and from 2 October, 1875, was succeeded by Archbishop Enea Sbarretti (1801–84) who in turn was made Cardinal in 1877. Due to a series of unfavourable circumstances but especially because of the ongoing reasons for the *negative* in September, the special faculties were denied, also because the already mentioned Indult of 3 April, 1874 was in force.⁷⁶

Here, too, there was interference from the Archbishop in Turin. Don Bosco visited him on 27 October to inform him of the proximate departure of his men for Argentina. Other problems must have arisen and the audience became heated if it meant Don Bosco beginning a letter the following day with: 'Yesterday Your Grace decided to tell me everything you thought it was appropriate to say without even letting me say a word in my defence or correcting what I was being blamed for. I feel sorrier for Your Grace than I do for myself.' The brief letter became a painful but firm message with the sense that an old friendship had been irreparably broken. He continued: 'I had in mind notifying you of matters that would have reduced your concerns, perhaps even freed you of some.' Then, 'With all due respect for the episcopal dignity' with which 'Your Grace' had

71 *Documenti* XV 155–157; MB XI 550–552.

72 Letter of 11 September 1875, E II 508–509.

73 *Documenti* XV 266.

74 Cf. text of letter to the Pope in MB XI 468–469.

75 Reserved, 15 March, declared, 15 September. He died suddenly on 15 October 1875.

76 Letter of 28 December 1875 of Card. G. Berardi to Don Bosco, *Documenti* XV 384; MB XI 472.

been invested, he went on to open an old wound: 'I believe I can tell you that if you were Bishop of Saluzzo and then became Archbishop of Turin, once serious problems opposing this were smoothed over, that this was due, as you know, to suggestions and efforts of poor Don Bosco who is now not even allowed to speak and is sent away – as you well know!' It was the beginning of a new level of relationship: 'I believe I can, and indeed have the duty, to speak; now I believe I am completely exonerated.'⁷⁷

Any hope of friendly collaboration now seemed out of the question. The Archbishop had probably ended up thinking that Don Bosco had chosen to follow his own path, preferring confrontation to discussion. For his part, Don Bosco had come to a point where he did not know what to do or believed he could do nothing to smooth things over, perhaps even fearing he was being engulfed by his role as founder and religious superior. He felt a keener need for freedom to advance, develop, and expand his works beyond Turin, Piedmont and even Italy. Hence, once again the urgent need he felt of having the appropriate legal tools.

Towards the end of 1875, an incident came to light which had an ambiguous significance. Eugene Ceria put it under the heading: *Don Bosco suspended from hearing confessions*.⁷⁸

Don Bosco's licence for confession had fallen due in September without anyone bothering to ask for its renewal or without others renewing it, even without a formal request. Don Bosco was informed by Fr Rua only on Christmas Eve. A reply came back a few hours later with an explanation from Fr Tommaso Chiuso, the Archbishop's Secretary, that the faculties 'would never have been interrupted had the procedure for similar cases been carried out in due time.'⁷⁹ The Archbishop knew of the case and Fr Chiuso's letter was in response to the letter Don Bosco had sent Gastaldi 'humbly asking for the faculty to be renewed to avoid gossip and scandal.'⁸⁰ It was not a suspension and the licence was renewed within the space of two days.⁸¹ 'The significance of the Archbishop's gesture (or the gesture of some powerful Curia member), Gastaldi's historian concludes, 'was clear: to get the "recalcitrant" founder to understand where the authority lay in matters of Church discipline. It was humiliating for Don Bosco, not so dignified on the part of the Curia and ultimately the Archbishop himself.'⁸²

The episode did not hide the chronic disagreements over different interpretations of a number of cases of Church discipline. This was the nature of observations made in a letter of the Archbishop on 31 December, 1825. Gastaldi listed five items, including bans and complaints to the Salesian Society: it could not receive postulants who had not 'presented testimonial letters from their Ordinary;' it did not have the 'right to run a college with young men wearing clerical garb without the bishop's permission;' nor did it have 'the right to give clerical garb' to any young man such that he could 'wear it outside the college without permission from the bishop' of the diocese he belonged to, as had occurred in the case of a young man from the parish of Vinovo; it had opened and maintained a 'rift' with the ecclesiastical authority in Turin by having commenced and 'persisted in having individuals in its houses dressed as clerics who had been sent away from the Metropolitan Seminary, not only without permission but contrary to the explicit disapproval of the ecclesiastical authority;' 'This was subversion of the hierarchical order and good discipline in the seminary and as a necessary consequence, wounded the heart of the Archbishop in one of its most sensitive parts;' 'such a rift' he said 'continues in letters, chats which lack due reverence for the Archbishop's authority' 'and then seems content to repair matters ... beginning with a

77 Letter of 28 October 1875, Em IV 536.

78 MB XI 478–490.

79 Letter of 27 December 1875, MB XI 485.

80 To Arch. L. Gastaldi, 26 December 1875, Em IV 586.

81 *Documenti* XV 383–384; MB XI 485.

82 G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815–1883*, vol. II..., pp. 271 and 276, no. 9; cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, pp. 33–35 (under the date 31 January 1876).

questionable or conditional “if”.’ The reference was to an audience given Fr Rua on 29 December. He had vigorously defended his superior, and the following day, in a letter to the Archbishop, had begged pardon for possibly going too far.⁸³ The Archbishop concluded with an all-embracing reminder: ‘Let the Congregation stay within the strict limits of Canon Law, observe its Constitutions in every detail, not forget the reverence due to the Archbishop and not do or attempt to do anything against his jurisdiction.’ ‘Let it not be lacking in the duties of justice towards him and the diocese,’ and ‘let us give an example of humility which is the first virtue of Religious Congregations.’⁸⁴

The reply written by Don Bosco but signed by Fr Rua, contained a very schematic set of observations. He was in agreement both *de iure* and *de facto* on the first three items: the Vinovo case was due to ‘pure inadvertence’ by the writer. As for young men dressed as clerics who wanted to enrol in the Salesian Society, this took advantage of faculties obtained in a decree attached to canonical approval in 1869. Reservations were expressed on the power of interdiction by the bishop in the matter of accepting priests or clerics from the diocese who asked to join the Congregation. As for irreverent letters and chats, he wanted to know about them ‘in order to detest them, make amends and reparations in the most formal manner. ‘Concerning observation of Canon Law’ he asked for understanding for a Congregation which, he said, ‘had been born and was now growing up in demanding times, so has need of everything and everyone with the greatest indulgence, compatible with the authority of the Ordinaries;’ therefore what was asked for was not ‘the rigour of Canon Law but the greatest charity and clemency in applying it.’ ‘Items listed in the last part of the letter were not particularly pleasing to its recipient.’ They were matters that had ‘caused great consternation and humiliation for the poor Salesians;’ the decree of 17 November, 1874 with which their Archbishop had removed privileges and favours granted by his predecessors; the negative reply to the request to come ‘to honour the seventh anniversary of the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians with some celebration’ and to administer Confirmation to the Oratory boys at Valdocco or allow him to invite another bishop; the refusal of faculties to preach for two Salesian priests. Despite all this the Superior was never ‘heard to say or write or foster anything in any other way that was to the detriment of his Ecclesiastical Superior;’ indeed he had not signed any of the correspondence against the Archbishop which had gone to Rome, and had dissuaded ‘the collaborator of one of our worst newspapers’ from publishing ‘a series of articles already paid for and ready’ and which were against him. Last October, at great financial cost to himself he had destroyed the manuscript of an ‘infamous biography’ of the Archbishop which had been sent him ‘so he could see to the printing of it.’ He was ‘always happy when, with sacrifices of the kind’ he could succeed in doing things that could ‘safeguard the honour of the Archbishop whom he had always loved and respected.’⁸⁵

Despite the unfavourable atmosphere, Don Bosco, who was working hard towards the upcoming departure of Salesians for South America, renewed his request for Salesian clerics, mainly if destined for the missions, to have some of the faculties among those contained in the earlier request. He would not have the Archbishop as an ally in pursuing them since there would be no reason for the latter to alter his deep-rooted convictions of principle or his beliefs about the ambiguous legal status of the Salesian Society and the uncooperative behaviour of its founder. The days immediately following were just one hard blow after another.

A first indication was a *Postulatum* the Archbishop had included in his *ad limina* Report on 21 March, 1876 and which, on 11 April, the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars ordered passed on to the compiler for the Congregation to summarise its content for the next papal audience. It touched on matters of the legal status of the Salesian Society and its interference in

83 Cf. MB XI 486–487.

84 Letter of the archbishop, 31 December 1875, *Documenti* XV 389.

85 Cf. signed letter of Fr M. Rua, January 1875, MB XI 302–305; E III 1–4.

diocesan life. The Archbishop prefaced his remarks by saying the Society 'had already done so much good and would do so in the future' but he then complained that it had 'the tendency to interfere in the discipline of my diocesan clergy.' It took in clerics dismissed from the seminary because they were 'considered unsuitable for the sacred ministries, and [the Society] sent them to colleges in other dioceses, promoting them to Holy Orders with serious embarrassment to the Archbishop. In fact, students at the seminary 'who were threatened with expulsion *laughed* at the threat, replying that in case of expulsion they *already knew* where they could safely go.' 'Therefore I am petitioning the Sacred Congregation to finally offer an effective solution to this serious confusion.'⁸⁶

On 20 March, 1876, Gastaldi wrote to Cardinal Bizzarri with a more detailed argument against the granting of privileges. He advanced reasons of principle and fact. The Archbishop stated that he was always a 'defender of Religious Orders' and recognised the need for them to have 'some privileges and exemption' for their internal government, for example dependence, transferal and destination of their members' and in the Foreign Missions. But 'lengthy study' and 'repeated practical observation' had confirmed his view that the privileges accorded Religious Institutes 'that ran contrary to the authority of the bishops' served 'only to threaten their authority which has more need than ever to be sustained and surrounded by the splendour and power of the Holy Apostolic See, so the civil power over it [episcopal authority] is diminished.' As for the granting of privileges to Don Bosco, he was opposed to one circumstance in particular: his spirit of *independence* and *superiority* which, moreover, was taking root in his disciples.' He then presented a kind of either-or that could only presumably have put the Cardinals of the Congregation in an embarrassing situation: 'If D. Bosco has deserved and does deserve the Church's kindness, then I believe that I too have not been and am not undeserving of it, and therefore I do not see why privileges should be conferred on him which will be a punishment for me.' The confession which concluded the letter was not rhetorical pathos but a touching message of intimate suffering: 'The Archbishop's authority in Turin has been stripped of any civil splendour, deprived of four fifths of its income, vilified, derided, mocked, insulted daily in almost every newspaper in Turin, and this because the Archbishop holds firm in manifesting his affection for the Holy See and in demanding observance of God's law and that of the Church, so it should not be further diminished by D. Bosco. His letters, words and deeds have shown themselves to be so contrary that one of the worst newspapers in Turin rejoiced that D. Bosco is known to be the *only priest able to resist* the Archbishop. If new privileges are to be given the Salesian Congregation in Turin which will harm my jurisdiction, at least wait till my death, which cannot be more than a few years away at most. Or give me time to retire from this post where, given the accumulation of new difficulties, I cannot remain for much longer.'⁸⁷ This letter, too, the Secretary of the Congregation ordered to be passed on to the compiler.

Archbishop Gastaldi made a last appeal in pained tone for Don Bosco not to be rewarded with privileges in his letter of resignation sent to the Pope on 3 April, 1876. 'I have one member of the clergy around me' he wrote 'who, although he has done and does still do great good for my diocese, has in some way brought and still brings great damage to my administration by speaking ill of me within the diocese and to surrounding bishops. Since he is about to gain new privileges I do not want to have further conflict with him.'⁸⁸ This was a voice of someone playing a part in a real drama where the antagonist was equally involved. Two believers, dedicated to doing good, not only did not understand one another but were doing wrong on behalf of doing good. There can be a lack of understanding even between saints. There can be an inability to understand and be understood

86 Cf. letter and *Postulatum* in *Documenti XVI* 186–187, 188; MB XI 472–474, 599–600.

87 *Documenti XVI* 186–187; MB XI 472–474.

88 Text in MB XII 642.

also in people who believe in the same God who is Love, people who certainly and sincerely love one another in Him and love what is for the good of God and neighbour.

The faculties requested were limited, and did not include the ones Gastaldi was afraid of. Having asked the Congregation of the Index for the faculty of reading and holding onto prohibited books, others were granted, including: for priests to be able to hear confessions in any diocese and while travelling; for erecting oratories and chapels; for exercising the pastoral ministry in all churches of the Congregation; the *extra tempus* for ordinations⁸⁹ Don Bosco told Fr Cagliero, the leader of the expedition to Argentina, that he was satisfied: the Holy Father 'has granted many privileges and spiritual favours amongst which the same rights as parishes for all our houses: confessors approved in one diocese can hear confessions in any of our houses and also while travelling. The *extra tempus* has been granted. You will receive a list of them all.'⁹⁰

Later, a letter from the Archbishop went to the curial lawyer, Carlo Menghini, stating that he had 'no difficulty with the privileges Don Bosco' might ask the Holy See for 'so long as they do not interfere with the bishop's jurisdiction.' So he opposed one which said: 'In all the churches of the Congregation they can celebrate Holy Mass, administer Holy Eucharist, expose it for the veneration of the faithful, teach catechism to children and preach the Word of God.' He noted: 'This jurisdiction would be seriously interfered with when a part of the flock *is removed from* the bishop to be given to D. Bosco, submitted to him, making it *independent* of the bishop in certain of its relationships.' He argued: 'Such a faculty should be in the bishop's hands and granted with due limitations, extended or restricted according to prudence or local circumstances.' Nevertheless he gave assurances the faculty had always been granted by his predecessors and by himself in a decree dated 17 November, 1874, but he had had to 'restrict it when a parish priest in Turin came to me assuring me that given the small size of his parish he could and did in fact look after *all the children and young adults who were his parishioners* but his efforts would be ineffective when the above-mentioned freedom was left to his parishioners.'⁹¹ At audiences on 3 May, and 10 November, 1876, Don Bosco also gained *vivae vocis oraculo* from Pius IX a dispensation from testimonials.⁹² However, this only came to the knowledge of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 16 December in reply to a severe letter from the Cardinal Prefect, Innocenzo Ferrieri, on 28 November.⁹³

What Don Bosco had gained was useful but far from what he had originally requested. Objectively, the state of relationships in the triangle made up of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Gastaldi and Don Bosco, did not permit rupture in the precarious equilibrium entrusted to the wisdom of the Roman protagonists.

A number of simple incidents occurred which did not contribute to calming matters. A disciplinary reminder was given on the occasion of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, which saw the Bishop of Casale celebrate the Solemn Mass with all due pomp but without the Archbishop's permission. Although it was a question of law, such defence of episcopal dignity seemed rather more political.⁹⁴ There are two letters of Don Bosco's from around this time, both interesting but for different reasons. In the first, dated 12 August, he invited the Archbishop to the Oratory to administer Confirmation to the boys.⁹⁵ Archbishop Gastaldi preferred the boys to come to the Archbishop's church at his palace to receive Confirmation. The other letter was to his bishop friend at Vigevano,

89 Rescript of 21 April 1876, MB XII 646–647.

90 Letter of 27 April 1876, E III 51–53.

91 Letter of 5 May 1876, MB XI 600–601.

92 Text in MB XII 647.

93 Cf. Chap.25, § 5.

94 Cf. MB XII 236–237; and letter of justification from Can. Santo Giuseppe Masnini, 8 June 1876, pp. 649–651.

95 E III 86.

Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi. He told him that the philosophy teacher for the clerics at the Oratory, Fr Giuseppe Bertello, had replaced the text with Rosminian leanings by Pier Antonio Corte, recommended by Gastaldi and used at the seminary in Turin, with another neo-scholastic text. He also offered some criticism on the collapse of moral teaching at the *Convitto* after Bertagna had been sacked in September. He ended with an obscure prediction: 'But for sure, God will put things right and maybe very shortly.'⁹⁶

Over these weeks, the Archbishop suffered a serious affront with the priestly ordination in Rome on 22 October of Blessed Francesco Faà de Bruno, with the direct backing of Pius IX, the Vicariate, and support from Don Bosco and Bishop Moreno, thanks also to dimissorial letters issued by the Bishop of Alessandria, Faà di Bruno's own diocese. The Archbishop moved very correctly in the case, seeking to avoid disparity of treatment in regard to similar cases in the diocese. What he had asked for was simply a calmer preparation extended over a few more months.⁹⁷ The end result was a dignified one with the new priest being incardinated in the Turin Archdiocese on 1 December.⁹⁸

5. Constitutions improved, diocesan approval of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. (1874–77)

The move of the first sisters from Mornese to Borgo S. Martino made way for the early rapid expansion of works that would characterise the next five years, as we see from the *Report to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales* for March 1879. From a mention of the Mother house at Mornese in the Salesian Society listings for 1873, it went to a list of 21 works in the *Report*, three of which were already in Uruguay and Argentina.⁹⁹ This vital expansion became one of the significant features contributing to the basic shape of the Institute. The strong practical link with Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation, in addition to the legal and textual link, seems to have been decisive for the FMA Institute's early history and rapid development.

As for the Institute's spirit, it is not possible to underestimate the part Don Bosco played directly or via trusted helpers in reviewing the text of the Constitutions carried out between 1872 and 1885. They were also an echo and result, naturally, of lived experience and mature reflection within the Institute of the Mother and her successor (1881), her Assistants and the communities embodying the law and spirit of the Constitutions.

Changes over the five years led to the text which gained diocesan approval of the Institute in 1876 from the Bishops of Acqui and Casale Monferrato, and led to the first printed text in 1878 (though in fact it was 1879).

Work on the *Constitutions* is documented by nine manuscripts which followed the *Costituzioni Regole* which we have spoken of (*ms A*) and which provided discipline for the life of the Institute at least until 1875 if not beyond. Over the whole period from 1872 to 1885, some manuscripts did not make waves while others that ended up being decisive cannot be found.¹⁰⁰ Other than the printed

96 Letter, autumn 1876, E III 99.

97 Cf. letter to Faà of 26 August 1876, reported by M. CECCHETTO, *Vocazione ed ordinazione sacerdotale di Francesco Faà di Bruno*, in *Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825–1888). Miscellanea...*, pp. 148–149.

98 Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815–1883*, Vol. II..., pp. 251–254; M. CECCHETTO, *Vocazione ed ordinazione sacerdotale di Francesco Faà di Bruno*, in *Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825–1888). Miscellanea...*, pp. 106–183; P. PALAZZINI, *Francesco Faà di Bruno scienziato e prete*, Vol. II. Rome, Città Nuova 1980, pp. 74–185; G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1867–1878)...*, p. 479.

99 S. Pier d'Arena, *Tip. Salesiana 1879*, 18 p., OE XXXI 237–254. pp. 14–16, OE XXXI 250–252 concern the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

texts of 1878 (1879) and 1885, approved and promulgated by Don Bosco, *mss D* (1874–75), *G* (1876–77) and *K* (1884) were highly significant.

Important intervention by Don Bosco is noticeable in the first two, and by Fr Cagliero as an authoritative interpreter of the founder's thinking in the third. He had experienced the life of the Institute with Don Bosco more than anyone else and over a longer period. The greatest number of Don Bosco's interventions are to be found in *Ms D* (1874). He intervened on at least two different occasions. Cecilia Romero indicates that they 'are found throughout the text of the Constitutions, in the formula for clothing and profession [the only manuscript with this], and even in the minutes relating to the foundation of the Institute there are two footnotes in his own hand.'¹⁰¹ They found confirmation in *Ms G* (1876), 'the most complete and authoritative of the manuscripts we have.' In fact, 'it brings together all the drafts of the preceding manuscripts; it was reviewed and carefully corrected by Don Bosco and is the one that coincides almost completely with the text approved in the diocese of Acqui.'¹⁰² The variants due to Don Bosco which are in both, provide further proof of how much at heart he had the task of giving life and shape to the new Institute structures.

With only minor variations, the two manuscripts sent to the Bishops of Acqui and Casale Monferrato for diocesan approval were identical to *ms D*. Don Bosco corrected their title, introducing the one of the Institute would finally settle for: *Costituzione per l'Istituto delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*. *ms G*, acknowledging *ms D*, with a number of corrections from Don Bosco, Fr Rua and others, was then the basis for the first printed text in 1878 (1879).

With regard to *ms A*, *Costituzioni Regole*, it is worth highlighting the articles which include the more 'bosconian' features, further qualified in that sense by adjustments Don Bosco made to *ms G*.¹⁰³ They were mostly to do with the crucial section 1. *Purpose of the Institute*: in the first instance it was 'to attend to their own perfection and to help in the salvation of their neighbour [*add especially Gb*; and 1878] by giving a Christian education to the girls of the people.' The articles that followed specified how: '2. Therefore before anything else, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will endeavour to practise the Christian virtues, and then act for the benefit of their neighbour. It would be their special concern to take on the running of schools [*add Girls Boarding Schools, Gb* 'educators' 1878], infant schools, education homes, festive congregations ['congregation' here to be understood as, say, Sunday prayer gatherings] and also to open workshops to benefit the older girls in the poorest towns and villages. Where there is a need they will also lend assistance to poor sick people, and other similar works of charity. 3. They can also accept young middle class women in their houses but will never teach them subjects and skills proper to the aristocracy and upper class. They will make every effort to form them in piety and everything that can help make good Christians of them, but so they can also eventually be able to honestly earn their daily bread. See the Institute's prospectus. 4. The Institute will comprise young single women who profess a common life in all things with temporary vows taken annually over three years. When they have finished their triennial vows the Major Superior, in agreement with the Superior Chapter, may also admit them to perpetual vows whenever they deem it useful for the Religious concerned and for the Institute. There will be cloister but within the limits compatible with their duties.' The Superior's powers were described as in the *Costituzioni Regole*.¹⁰⁴

100 The process is followed up in the excellent critical work by Sister Cecilia Romero, which we are drawing from.

101 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 86. In this manuscript all the variants, except for two, are from Don Bosco: cf. Analytical recognition and related considerations in pp. 87–95, and variants marked *D* in the critical apparatus for the critical edition of *ms G*.

102 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 203.

103 Quoting from the critical edition of *Ms G* along with corrections made, found in G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 209–252.

104 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 209–211.

The second section *General Arrangements of the Institute* was better structured on the basis of clearer links with the Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales, his representative or Director General, the local Rector–Parish Priest, confessor; and also regarding obligations of the vows, perseverance and defections. ‘The Institute is in immediate dependence on the Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales, who is known as the Major Superior. He can have himself represented by a priest whom he will delegate under the title of Director of the Sisters. The Director General will be a member of the Superior Chapter of the Salesian Society; the particular or local Rector will be the one to whom the management of some House or Institute is entrusted.’ (art. 1); ‘All the Houses of the Institute will be fully subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary for everything concerning the administration of the Sacraments and practice of religious worship. The Sisters of each House will have their Rector as parish priest, proposed by the Major Superior and approved by the diocesan Bishop.’ (art. 2)¹⁰⁵

Section 3 in Don Bosco’s hand was new: *Internal regime of the Institute*. The numbering of sections to follow changed as a result – there were now 16 sections instead of 15. It read: ‘The Institute is governed by the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation and guided by a Chapter made up of the Superior General, Vicar, Bursar [*Economa*] and two assistants.’ (art.1). ‘The Superior General will manage the whole Institute and all material and spiritual matters of the Houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will depend on her.’¹⁰⁶ This meant restructuring the three sections to follow: 4. *Election of the Superior General, Vicar, Bursar and two assistants*, 5. *Superior Chapter, Elections of the superior of individual houses and their respective Chapters* (the earlier version read: *Chapter of the central house and Council*), and 6. *Mother of Novices* (the earlier version read: *Bursar and Novice Mistress*). The three articles dedicated to the *Mother of Novices* were new. The second and third of these stood out for offering a concentrated summary of ‘spiritual pedagogy’: ‘The Novice mistress should be a Sister of proven virtue and prudence. She should have a profound and clear knowledge of the Rules and be known for her spirit of piety, humility and patience in all things’ (art. 2). ‘She will make the greatest effort to be kind and friendly so her spiritual daughters will open themselves to her in everything that will keep them progressing in perfection. She will guide them, instruct them in observance of the Constitutions especially in what concerns the vow of chastity, poverty and obedience. Similarly she will be a model for them so the novices can observe and fulfil all the practices of piety prescribed in their Rule’ (art. 3).¹⁰⁷ In 1878, the last part of the 3rd article was modified by Don Bosco thus: ‘She will be a model for them in everything so they may fulfil all the prescriptions of the Rule. She is also recommended to inspire the novices in the spirit of mortification but using great discretion so as not to go beyond their strength and make them unsuitable for the work of the Institute.’¹⁰⁸

The last part of the draft of *ms G* and the 1878 printed Constitutions made no reference to the ‘General Chapter’ which existed in fact. The election of the Superior General and the members of the Superior Council was up to a collegiate group made up of the Superior Chapter and the superior and one Sister elected by each house.¹⁰⁹ The 1878 Constitutions spoke only of the Superior Chapter and superiors.¹¹⁰ In the two following sections, the 7th and 8th, a clear distinction was made between the postulancy (three months *corr ex* three years: six months, 1878) and novitiate (two years), with strong similarities with the recently approved Salesian Constitutions.¹¹¹

105 Cf. G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, pp. 212–215.

106 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, p. 216.

107 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, p. 225.

108 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, p. 266.

109 Cf. tit. 4°, art. 4° and 6°, G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, pp. 219 and 220.

110 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, pp. 261, 262, 266.

111 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l’Istituto...*, pp. 228 e 268.

Distinctive of the spirituality of the Institute were the *Principal virtues proposed for study by the novices and for practice by the professed* as listed in the only article making up section 9, almost identical to the ones already proposed in the first text, the *Costituzione Regole*.¹¹² Again, in *ms G*, the earlier Section 9, *Distribution of hours of the day*, was divided into sections 10, *Distribution of time*, and 11 *Special practices of piety*, going from 10 to 14 articles all up.¹¹³ There were not many changes compared with *ms A* in sections 13 to 15 on the vows and in the final *Common rules for all the Sisters*.¹¹⁴ Section 15 and the final section of the *Costituzioni Regole* on the obligation of observing the rules and daily timetable disappeared.

6. Formative government in view of the missions (1875–77)

Over these years, Don Bosco did not limit himself to specifying or annotating the text of the rules. He was also involved in the religious, inner nature of the Institute, strictly connected with the life of institutions run by the Salesians. As indicated, from January 1815 onwards, he took steps to purchase the Castellino house next to the old Moretta house. However, its previous use and position did not make it suitable for a religious community. He was thinking of a dwelling with an attached courtyard or playground that could function as a festive oratory for the girls.

On 8 August, 1875, he wrote to a mature novice, Maddalena Martini (1849–83) from Turin, encouraging her to persevere in the pretty much heroic choice of religious life, given that she came from a well-to-do family, which could make it hard for her to bear the poverty of Mornese. The letter is a typical expression of Don Bosco's style and an exemplary document of his thinking on 'consecrated life'.

It was the kind of formation he knew how to provide as founder. 'Beloved daughter of J.C.,' he wrote 'Your going to Mornese has been such a blow to the world that it has sent the enemy of our souls to trouble you. But listen to God's voice calling you, to save you from an easy, smooth path, and put aside any suggestion to the contrary. Indeed, be content with the concerns and doubts you experience because the way of the Cross is what leads you to God. On the contrary, you could fear some trick by the evil enemy. So, be of the opinion that: 1. One only arrives at glory through effort. 2. We are not alone, but Jesus is with us and St Paul says that with Jesus' help we become all-powerful. 3. Whoever abandons home, family and friends and follows the Divine Master is assured of treasure in heaven that no one can take away. 4. The great reward prepared in heaven should encourage us to put up with any difficulty on earth. So take courage, Jesus is with us. When there are thorns, put them with Jesus' Crown of thorns. I recommend you to God in my holy Mass; pray for me too that I may always be, in J.C., your humble servant, Fr John Bosco.'¹¹⁵

She professed her vows on 24 June, 1876 and left for Argentina in 1879 as FMA Provincial, where she was a wise and much loved Superior. She died at Almagro, (Buenos Aires) on 27 June, 1883.

Don Bosco wrote to the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars from Mornese on 24 August, where he had arrived with Carmelite Fr Emiliano for a retreat for men and women: 'I am writing this letter from the House of Mary Help of Christians, where there is a retreat for 150 lay people run by the Sisters in terms of discipline and the material side of things. These are the Daughters of Mary of whom we have already spoken on occasions, and they are growing in numbers considerably. They already have schools in one town, a boarding school and two houses

112 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 230.

113 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 231–236.

114 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 239–252.

115 Em IV 499.

in other dioceses.¹¹⁶ The following day he also told Countess Girolama Uguccioni about the retreat.¹¹⁷ Don Bosco received and heard the confessions of those who came to him and he announced the possibility for Sisters who had completed their triennial vows of taking perpetual vows. On the 28th he gave the habit (no longer brown but black, with a blue veil) to fifteen postulants, among whom Maddalena Martini, received fourteen triennial professions and as many perpetual ones. Among the latter group were Domenica Mazzarello, Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone. The following day he gave a demanding conference to the whole community on cloister: it was strict from a religious point of view but flexible with regard to their educational tasks. Among other things he referred to the '*ruota*' [wheel or turntable for exchanging foodstuffs other items between the Sisters and the Salesians] already operating in the community at Borgo S. Martino.¹¹⁸

He left Mornese on 29 August, accompanied by Fr John Cagliero and Fr James Costamagna, for a destination and purpose he told Fr Rua of: 'To speak with the bishops with whom I have business to discuss. I am going to Ovada and I will let you know from there the day of my return to Turin.'¹¹⁹ A number of bishops had come to Ovada, the birthplace of the founder of the Passionists, St Paul of the Cross, to celebrate the first centenary of his death. Among other matters at Ovada he busied himself with reviewing the Constitutions in view of having a text ready to present to the Bishop of Acqui.

Following this, from Varazze, he insisted with Fr Rua on work to be done in preparing a place for the Sisters in Turin. 'Get on with works for our Help of Christian Sisters.'¹²⁰ Two days later, from Allasio, he gave instructions for the Rector at Mornese: 'Also write to Costamagna for the clothing of Sisters at [Borgo] S. Martino. Tell him also to prepare Campi and Fassio [two clerics in the Salesian community at Mornese, and both elementary grade teachers] for ordination next Christmas.'¹²¹ He also reminded him on the 24th from Nice: 'Make yourself available to go to Mornese the day after the Immaculate Conception, to do what has to be done.'¹²² We find out about what had to be done from a letter to Fr Cagliero on 4 December: 'On the 12th of this month Fr Rua and Fr Mino [a Vincentian] will go to Mornese for clothing of some Sisters and professions of some others.'¹²³

Don Bosco was in Nice to begin the Salesian work in France.¹²⁴ In the above-mentioned letter to Fr Cagliero on 4 December he also announced the proximate establishment of the Salesians and the Sisters at Vallecrosia, two kilometres from Bordighera. 'On my return [from Nice] he wrote 'I began the undertaking against the Protestants at Bordighera. The house which will look after the boys and religious worship has been entrusted to Fr Cibrario with some other townfolk. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will look after the kitchen and the girls ... They are still increasing in numbers. At the beginning of next January a group will go to look after the new house at Alassio.'¹²⁵

The double community began its work at Vallecrosia on 10 February, 1876, as he once again told Fr Cagliero: 'Yesterday (10 February) the two small houses at Ventimiglia were opened.'¹²⁶ The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians house at Alassio, instead, opened on 12 October. In a

116 To Archbishop S. Nobili Vitelleschi, Em IV 510.

117 Em IV 510–511.

118 *Cronistoria* II 146–150.

119 To Fr M. Rua, 28 August 1875, Em IV 513.

120 Letter of 18 November 1875, Em IV 562.

121 Letter of 20 November 1875, Em IV 564.

122 Letter of 24 November 1875, Em IV 566.

123 Em IV 574.

124 Cf. Chap.21, § 1–2.

125 Letter of 4 December 1875, Em IV 574.

126 Letter of 12 February 1876, E III 18.

petition to Leo XIII on 15 March, 1878, among the works most in need of help, Don Bosco included the schools at Vallecrosia emphasising their success: 'Four Salesians and three Sisters of Mary Help of Christians are at work there and thanks be to God their efforts have been fruitful. The Protestants have been forced to close their schools and conferences for lack of pupils and others attending.'¹²⁷ He wrote in similar terms on 12 March, 1879 to the Cardinal Secretary of State, Lorenzo Nina (1812–85)¹²⁸

Don Bosco had also made an amazing promise to Fr Cagliariero at the beginning of January 1876: 'Remember that in October we will be sending thirty Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with a dozen Salesians, maybe some earlier if it is urgent.'¹²⁹ It was a grand dream that would actually come true, though with a smaller group of Sisters in 1877.

On 14 January, 1876, he presented the Bishop of Acqui, Bishop Sciandra, with 'the rules of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians' with the request 'to give diocesan approval to the Institute and its Constitutions.'¹³⁰ The bishop granted this promptly by decree on 23 January.¹³¹ Then it was Turin's turn, with his thinking constantly on the Americas. On 12 February, Don Bosco wrote to Fr Cagliariero: 'The Sisters will come to Valdocco at the beginning of March. Should we prepare them for America?'¹³² To set them up in Turin, on 22 March he forwarded a request to the Archbishop to be able to open a girl's oratory with its own chapel for girls from the Valdocco district. 'The room set aside as the chapel' he specified, 'is about one hundred and fifty metres from the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, on the ground floor with public access and joined to the building destined as a residence for some of the Sisters who are gladly coming to look after girls at risk.'¹³³ Trusting in the 'outstanding prudence' of Bishop Sciandra, the Archbishop issued his decree on 28 March that 'the aforesaid rooms in the aforesaid location may be entrusted to these Sisters,' reserving the right to grant diocesan approval to their Congregation after adequate experience.¹³⁴ On the 30th, Don Bosco told Fr Cagliariero: 'Today we blessed the chapel for the Sisters in the Catellino house and for now there are seven of them. Sister Elisa is the Mother Superior. Mother Giuseppina is also here.'¹³⁵ On 5 April, Mother Mazzarello provided Fr Cagliariero with more detailed information on the various appointments for the Sisters and their respective duties: 'The Sisters who went to Turin are Sister Elisa [Roncallo 1856–1919] (Superior) and Sister Enrichetta [Sorbone 1854–1942] (these two for study; following her exams Sister Enrichetta will, I hope, return to Mornese), Sister Caterina Daghero and Sister David for the school, Sister Carlotta for the kitchen, Sister Adele Ajra for mending tunics, Sister Luigia di Lu for watching over the washer women.'¹³⁶ Don Bosco provided additional information for Fr Cagliariero on 27 April: 'Mrs Orsella Felicita has died. Teresa [her sister] will go and stay with our Sisters at Valdocco who are doing very well.'¹³⁷ Early in 1877 he gave Fr Rua a nice suggestion which the Sisters were certainly happy with since they were full-time 'housekeepers': If the Sisters like *teatrino* let them go.¹³⁸

127 E III 319.

128 E III 455–456.

129 E III 11.

130 Letter from Mornese, E III 11–12.

131 The texts of the request and episcopal decree are found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 160–166.

132 E III 18.

133 E III 30.

134 Cit. in MB XII 664–665.

135 E III 32.

136 M. E. POSADA, A. COSTA, P. CAVIGLIÀ, *La sapienza della vita. Lettere di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*. Turin, SEI 1994, p. 55.

137 E III 52.

138 Letter of 11 January 1877, E III 136.

Meanwhile, negotiations were underway with Bishop Basilo Leto, Bishop of Biella, to send some Sisters to look after the kitchen and wardrobe at the diocesan seminary. In a letter to Fr Rua on 25 April, Don Bosco offered an outline of points for agreement, not without reference to the canonical '*tarabacola*' or '*ruota*'.¹³⁹ With Fr Cagliero he once again took up discussion of the hoped for overseas mission candidates, along with some other dreams and a few short-term accomplishments: 'See if you can tell me the personnel needs, Salesians and Sisters, and I will try to quickly organise an expedition so that once things are in order you can return to Valdocco to start a house in Rome, then a trip to India ... It is understood that in October our Sisters will go and look after the seminary at Biella, and three Sisters will open a hospice in Trinità.'¹⁴⁰ At the end of another letter, filled with facts and plans, he could not hold back his emotion at so much grace: 'There are already 150 of our Sisters; we have to have two retreat sessions for them. There will be some houses of ours [Salesians and/or Sisters] at Sestri Levante, Trinità di Mondovì, Biella etc. etc. What movement!'¹⁴¹ The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians arrived in Biella on 7 October; the following day, another group set themselves up at Lu Monferrato to run a workshop, school, oratory and infant school, the first to be opened by the Institute. The Sisters were also requested by the Rota family, parents of Salesian Fr Pietro, who subsequently became Salesian Provincial in Brazil. With regard to financial arrangements at Biella, in a letter to Fr Rua on 13 October, 1876, Don Bosco noted: '200 francs [a year] for each Sister is small, while Countess Callori is giving 400 [for Lu Monferrato]. At least f. 250.'¹⁴²

A completely unforeseen involvement willingly taken on by the Central administration both in Mornese and Turin, was the one undertaken by the Sisters at Sestri Levante over June – September 1876, at a summer camp for scruffy children from Lombardy. Sister Enrichetta Sorbone was so well accepted that she gave the 'goodnight' each evening and was avidly listened to. Assistance in mountain and seaside camps ended up becoming one of the Sisters' ongoing forms of apostolate.¹⁴³

In September 1877, the Sisters also went to the college at Lanzo for the usual services of kitchen and wardrobe. Don Bosco had asked for the Archbishop of Turin's consent, assuring him that their presence would not interfere with other Sisters locally: 'We note that the Sisters will be involved exclusively in the college. For their practices of piety they will take part in the ones regularly taking place for the students at the College.'¹⁴⁴ Instead, the Sisters who crossed into Nice the same month to set up there were destined for assistance and educational responsibilities alongside the Salesians' *Patronage St. Pierre*. Theirs was the girls' *Patronage* of St Anastasia.

7. First move to South America; Mother house transfers to Nizza Montferrato (1877–78)

On 8 September 1877, the community at Mornese was told of the decision by Don Bosco to fulfil his longed-for dream, and Mother Mazzarello's too, to send some Sisters to Uruguay.¹⁴⁵ Don Bosco had already forewarned the man most interested, Fr Lasagna (Fr Cagliero was already on his way back to Europe) of the event by letter on 16 July, 1877. He had already asked him especially to decide on the number because Mrs Jackson from Uruguay had offered to meet the expenses of the journey.¹⁴⁶ He wrote to her two months later: 'Fr Cagliero has made his choice and

139 E III 50.

140 Letter of 27 April 1876, E III 52.

141 To Fr G. Cagliero, 29 June 1876, III 69.

142 E III 105.

143 *Cronistoria* II 193–194.

144 Letter of 10 September 1876, E III 94.

145 Cf. *Cronistoria* II 276.

146 E III 199.

the chosen six are hurriedly studying Spanish and preparing for their departure next November.¹⁴⁷ The names of those chosen were revealed at the end of the month. Angela Vallese, Superior, Giovanna Borgna, a native of Buenos Aires, Angela Cassulo, Angela Senegri from Mornese, Teresa Gedda, Teresina Mazzarello. On 25 October, Fr John Baptist Lemoyne arrived in Mornese to replace Fr Costamagna who was to go to South America. The missionaries left on 6 November for their farewell ceremony in Turin, and on the 7th for a papal audience fixed for the 9th. Halfway through November they were already well on their way to Villa Colón in Montevideo. The *Bollettino Salesiano*, which had come out a few months earlier for the first time, gave prominence to the farewell at Mornese and the departure.¹⁴⁸ On 31 December, Don Bosco hastened to tell Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, of the event in a report in which he listed the Salesian works in Argentina and Uruguay: '10. Not far from Villa Colón, a girl's boarding school and day school for poor and abandoned girls run by the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, who also belong to the same Congregation.'¹⁴⁹

He also outlined the arrival of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Chieri to start a girls' oratory. Don Bosco did not foresee the problems he would meet, but on a front quite other than that of his faultless and zealous Sisters.¹⁵⁰ He wrote to Fr Rua from Rome in January 1877, where he was involved in the matter of the Concetlini:¹⁵¹ 'Our Archbishop wrote a long letter giving news of his health and expressed pleasure at the idea of an Oratory in Chieri etc. etc.'¹⁵² He replied to the Archbishop: 'With regard to Chieri, I will do what I can to set up an oratory for girls and another for boys; the approval and support of the Ecclesiastical Authority give me greatest encouragement.'¹⁵³ More concretely, he asked Fr Rua to be involved in their future support, and 'for a priest.'¹⁵⁴ Less realistically, he told Fr Cagliero by letter on February how the arrival of the Sisters in Chieri had gone: 'Our sisters have opened a girls' oratory in Chieri.'¹⁵⁵ In reality, the opening would only take place in January 1878.

Over this period, Don Bosco also provided guidelines of a general nature for activity which confirmed his continuing and concrete interest in the Institute. From Marseilles on 5 March he suggested the following guidelines to Fr Rua: 'When there is a need to send Sisters to a new house, they should not all be taken from the Mother house, but as we do for Salesians in Turin, find someone in already opened houses who is capable, and replace her with a new one, and send her to run the new house.'¹⁵⁶

It was a time of change for the Institute, which rapidly came to a point where the Mother house needed to transfer. Don Bosco played a part in this. In the first half of May 1877, he wrote to Fr Bodrati who was from Mornese: 'A house has been bought in Nizza Monferrato where the house at Mornese will transfer to, to its great advantage, I hope.'¹⁵⁷ His involvement was especially intense as he tackled the considerable sum needed to purchase, then restructure the 'old convent and Church of Our Lady' 'reduced to being an awful wine warehouse' which had to be restored.¹⁵⁸

147 A E. Jackson, 13 September 1877, E III 213. He gave the news in letters of 30 September, E III 220 and 223, to the Vicar Apostolic in Uruguay, Bishop Vera, and to E. Fynn.

148 *Partenza dei missionari salesiani e delle Suore di Maria Ausiliatrice per l'America*, BS 1 (1877), no. 4, December, pp. 1–3.

149 E III 258.

150 Cf. Chap.28, § 5.

151 Cf. Chap.25, § 2

152 Letter of January 1877, E III 138.

153 Letter of January 1877, E III 142.

154 Letter of January 1877, E III 146.

155 E III 149.

156 To Fr M. Rua, 5 March 1877, E III 154.

157 E III 173.

158 To Mrs F. Pastore from Valenza Po, 6 May 1877, E III 169.

Three letters stand out from 1877, to Canon Edwardo Martini at Alassio, who had already been a generous benefactor of the college in his town and whom Don Bosco sought to involve in this 'great enterprise'. Between convent and church the cost of purchase was around 180,000 lire [567,907 euro]. The Canon indicated he was prepared to make available some bonds he possessed.¹⁵⁹ Since the building and church had been a former Capuchin monastery expropriated in 1855, he asked the Holy See for authorisation to purchase them.¹⁶⁰ He informed Countess Gabriella Corsi of the purchase so she could mobilise charity from her family and other residents at Nizza. 'Now we have to find the money. Tell me who I can write to; meanwhile stir up the piety of the clergy and faithful in Nizza. It is to their glory that a terribly profaned building may be returned to worship.'¹⁶¹ In March 1878, he also sent out a lengthy circular written in Rome and printed at Valdocco.¹⁶² It took more than a year for the building and church to be made usable.

In 1878, the oratory and workshop in Chieri were in the home straight. 'Go ahead with matters in Chieri' was his encouragement from Rome towards 20 March.¹⁶³ On 19 May, he informed the Archbishop of Turin that he had prepared 'a building and chapel dedicated to St Teresa at the former Bertinetti house' in Chieri and asked him to allow 'the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians' to 'go and live there to look after the girls as was granted the Sisters already running a school next to the church in Valdocco.' He asked him to delegate someone to bless the chapel.¹⁶⁴ The Archbishop issued the decree on 19 June. The Sisters took up residence in Chieri on 22 June, 1878.

Things moved rapidly in August for transferring the General House from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato. On the 23rd Don Bosco wrote to Count Cesare Balbo, son-in-law of Countess Gabriella Corsi, impatient to see the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato: 'We are unable as yet to fix the date for the opening of the House at Nizza, since work on the Sisters' dwelling and a place for the chaplain or rather Director, is still going on. However, arrangements for the girls' school are already complete and you will have them soon.'¹⁶⁵ Count and Countess Corsi were the greatest supporters and benefactors of the work, further supported by Count Cesare Balbo.

On 16 September, the first group of Sisters was in place with their superior, Sister Petronilla Mazzarello and the Economer General, Sister Ferrettino, and another five Sisters. They were followed over the ensuing days by the gradual arrival from Mornese of Sisters and girls.¹⁶⁶ Mother Mazzarello arrived there on 4 February, 1879 and welcomed with a brief academy by Sisters and girls.¹⁶⁷

Don Bosco disseminated the Prospectus for the boarding school at Nizza, after it moved in summer.¹⁶⁸ It was taken from the one at Mornese and adapted by Fr Bonetti and was accompanied

159 Letters in May 1877, E III 171–172, 174–175. He also told the Canon about the church 'reduced to being a horrible wine warehouse' (E III 171).

160 Cf. Petition to Pius IX on 25 August 1877, E III 210–211, and letters to Mrs Lansetti on 25 August and 8 September, E III 211, 212. The documents on the *Pratiche per ottenere dalle Autorità Ecclesiastiche facoltà di acquistare il sopradetto Convento e Santuario* are found in the first pages of the book *Notizie storiche sul Convento e sul Santuario di Santa Maria delle Grazie presso Nizza Monferrato*.

Nell'occasione faustissima che il Santuario veniva riaperto al divin culto ed il convento tramutato in casa di educazione pel Sac. Francesco Arrigotti. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1878, pp. 3–8, OE XXX 407–412.

161 Letter to Countess G. Corsi, 26 September 1877, E III 219.

162 E III 306–307.

163 To Fr M. Rua, E III 324.

164 E III 343.

165 Letter of 23 August 1878, E III 381.

166 A letter from the Superior to Fr Cagliari on 30 September is a significant document on the setup of the girls school: cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 257–259.

167 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 281–283.

168 Cf. Already quoted letter to Count C. Balbo of 23 August 1878, E III 381.

by a brief circular specifying the purpose of the Institute in the usual terms: 'Raising Christian girls in religion and morality.'¹⁶⁹ The *Bollettino Salesiano* was also involved. In September it gave ample coverage to the *Institute under the protection of Our Lady of Graces in Nizza Monferrato, and St Teresa in Chieri*.¹⁷⁰ On request on 28 September, sent to the school inspector at Acqui, the Provincial School Council at Alessandria granted the *Nulla Osta* for the opening of the girls' elementary school established in the boarding house, 'under the express condition' that the teachers there would be 'Roncallo Elisa and Daghero Rosa, and that the management be entrusted to the first named.'¹⁷¹ On 22 October, Don Bosco was able to tell his 'good and dearest Mamma,' Countess Gabriella Corsi, that the Church of Our Lady of Graces would be blessed on Sunday 27 October. He added: 'I was told that the Count [Cesare Balbo] has set up a committee to organise a collection to help with our expenses. I thank him for my part. He is a true Salesian Cooperator.'¹⁷² The General House and the girls' school belonging to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were starting out on a long, eventful and fruitful history.¹⁷³

Fr Bonetti, editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, treated readers to *A hope not disappointed: the St Teresa's Oratory at Chieri*.¹⁷⁴ He was chaplain there. The work was about to face some serious issues in January 1879.¹⁷⁵ The following edition had a prominent article-cum-news item on the departure of another ten Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for South America.¹⁷⁶

Don Bosco's activity on behalf of the Sisters continued in the years that followed, up until his death.¹⁷⁷

8. Trigger for renewed effort towards institutional maturity

Two important events in 1877–78 created new opportunities for the Institute to consolidate its Salesian religious identity and develop its own spiritual and active vigour. The two events were the Salesian General Chapter in September–October 1877 and the first assembly of the Sisters' Superiors and Superior Council in August 1878.

The former officially confirmed and sharpened the awareness by Salesians of the novelty of the women's Congregation which had a founder in common with their own Society as well as a common purpose, approach and spirit. As a consequence, they were committed to establishing correct and fruitful relationships between the two. However, this was a perspective that emerged during the Chapter. The printed booklet outlining topics the Chapter members would take into consideration made no reference to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. They did not even appear among the eight topics Don Bosco added in a manuscript of his own. Instead the topic came up halfway through the Chapter at the plenary assembly on the afternoon of 13 September.

169 Cf. Letter and prospectus in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 245–249. the prospectus was printed in modified form the following year: *Programma. Istituto femminile sotto la protezione della Madonna delle Grazie in Nizza Monferrato*. Turin, Tipografia Salesiana 1879, in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 289–292.

170 BS 2 (1878) no. 9, September, pp. 11–13.

171 The two documents are found in P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 253 e 267–268.

172 E III 397. The church was blessed by Fr Cagliero, and the *schola cantorum* from the Valdocco Oratory was there.

173 On the boarding section and school see the excellent monograph by P. CAVIGLIÀ, *Educazione e cultura per l'Ormaia. La Scuola "Nostra Signora delle Grazie" di Nizza Monferrato dalle origini alla riforma Gentile (1878–1923)*. Rome, LAS 1990, 410 p.

174 BS 3 (1879) no. 1, January, pp. 8–9.

175 Cf. Chap.28, § 5.

176 *Le dieci vergini prudenti ossia la seconda schiera di Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice partite per l'America*: BS 3 (1879) n. 2, February, pp. 5–7.

177 Cf. Chap.29, § 3 and 4.

At the end of a protracted discussion on the need for and ways of preserving the memory of the Salesian Society through chronicles in individual houses, with a view to a general chronicle, the assembly then went on, without any particular connection 'to establishing a commission' according to the minutes 'which would deal with the *Sisters* [the term used was actually *Monache*, or 'nuns'] in relation to our colleges.' Members of considerable stature were immediately appointed: Fr Cagliero as president and Fr Cerruti as supervisor, along with Fr Lemoyne and Joseph Ronchail. Topics to be studied and referred to were also indicated: 'Rules for the *Sisters*' house to be established, preachers, confessors, times for confessing. Visits from outsiders, and also ourselves.' It was clearly an improvised canvas.¹⁷⁸

But Don Bosco was thinking, on the day of discussion in the meeting hall, of offering a much broader perspective within which to examine the documents presented for discussion and decision at the general afternoon session on 22 September. Also present on this occasion was Fr James Costamagna, the Rector at Mornese, who along with Fr Bonetti had not turned up at almost all the other sessions. It seemed that the assembly had to confine itself to examining the articles of the proposed set of Regulations. What they did immediately begin dealing with was the 'direct communications' of the *Sisters* with Salesians, both in the case where they had a work next to the Salesians' work, and where 'so many good *Sisters* – these were Don Bosco's words – were 'taking care of the laundry and kitchens in our houses.' But having said this, the founder began a discussion that showed how elevated and vast he felt the Institute's mission was. He said: 'Once upon a time it was thought the *sal terrae* was exclusively for priests; but now every effort was being made to alienate them from teaching. Even for girls, efforts were being made to appoint teachers who preserved little of religious principle. Therefore we need to find a way for our Daughters of Mary help of Christians to be assisted in looking after the education of girls, especially poor girls from the various towns, doing for them what the Salesians are doing for boys. Thus, they too can be, and can dispense, the salt of the earth. They can especially do good in hospitals and by setting up schools. Now they are beginning to associate with us in the missions as well. The good they can do is immense.'¹⁷⁹

It was within this framework of the identity of objectives and the intensity of collaboration that he located the precautions to be taken in relationships, 'so that' as he explained, 'greater good can be achieved, so there will be no risk to one another, and so the eyes of evil-doers are not given cause for calumny.'¹⁸⁰ This registered the tone for the detailed discussion that followed on norms which needed to be drawn up.¹⁸¹

Reduced to eleven articles, the document *On the Sisters* concluded the *Deliberations of the General Chapter of the Pious Salesian Society held at Lanzo Torinese in September 1877* and published in 1878 with a presentation signed by Don Bosco on 1 November. But the eleventh and final article was no simple norm. It was much more. It was truly legal intervention from the highest legislative body of the Salesian Society in dealing with its parallel female Institute. It ran thus: 'The Chapter approves their particular Rule [the Constitutions] already in print and approved by the diocesan bishop of the Mother House at Mornese, and by other bishops.'¹⁸² Clearly, Don Bosco intended by this act that the Institute not only have the recognition of a handful of members in central government but that it be officially recognised by the whole Congregation: a Family that accepted the other Family and placed it side by side with equal dignity of religious life and apostolic activity.

178 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* II 184.

179 Nineteenth session, 22 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* III 3–4.

180 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* III 2–4.

181 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* III 4–10.

182 Turin, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1878, pp. 94–95, OE XXXIX 470–471.

A sign of the maturity reached by the Institute was the important event of August 1878: the first special gathering since its foundation, of leaders of houses and superiors on the Council. It had particular relevance for the internal life of the young Congregation. Analogous to the 'Conference of Salesian Rectors' it assumed functions to some degree close to those of a General Chapter. The meeting took place with a retreat from 13–20 August, 1878. Fr Cagliero presided at the sessions, suggesting topics to discuss, ruling on discussions and taking part in formulating deliberations.¹⁸³ It is difficult to establish whether or not Don Bosco, who was at Mornese from the 16th, exercised any direct influence. When he advised Fr Lemoyne of his arrival on the 16th (Lemoyne had been Spiritual director of the house for a year), he indicated something quite different. 'We will have time to chat at our leisure and count up all the money that you, the Sisters and others, can put towards the order of the day.'¹⁸⁴

183 Cf. *Cronistoria* II 335–337; P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, pp. 238–244.

184 Cf. letter to Fr G. B. Lemoyne, 6 August, E III 373, and Count C. Balbo of 23 August, E III 381; P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 237.

Chapter 21

OPEN TO THE WORLD (1875–77)

- 1874 10 and 26 October: Monsignor Espinosa and Fr Ceccarelli reply to *Commendatore* Gazzolo concerning the Salesians in Argentina;
- 28 and 29 January: Rectors and the Oratory told about the ‘missionary’ project in the Americas;
- 9–21 November: arrival of Salesians in Nice and the opening of the St Pierre hospice;
- 11 November: farewell ceremony for departing missionaries led by Fr Cagliero;
- 14 and 21 December: Arrival of Salesians in Buenos aires and San Nicolás de los Aroyos.
- 1876 9 February: Arrival of Salesians and Daughters of Mary help of Christians at Vallecrosia;
- 14 April: Don Bosco’s speech at Arcadia;
- 7 November: Farewell to Salesians leaving for Argentina with Fr Bodrato, and to Uruguay with Fr Lasagna.
- 1877 August: Fr Cagliero returns to Turin.

1875 marked the beginning of the expansion of Don Bosco’s work beyond the borders of Italy into Europe, and Latin America. It was no surprise for anyone who had been able to intuit his temperament and faith. This new leap forward went with his character, apostolic impatience and restlessness, which did not permit him to pause at goals already achieved. He was also responding to more or less explicit concerns: the institution, the Congregation, could run the risk of self-satisfaction and fossilisation if it did not reach out to new objectives, as was the case – following his spiritual doctrine – for every journey of moral and spiritual perfection, if it stops and is satisfied with goals achieved: *non progredi regredi est*. Nor should we exclude the desire he had to free himself of the many local legal restrictions hedging him in at both the civil and canonical levels: study qualifications, school inspections, paralysing regulations in civil terms; strict rulings on ordinations, excessive institutionalisation of religious formation, imposition of inflexible steps, and obligations in cultural formation, rigid steps for profession of vows, being barred from access to ‘privileges’ in ecclesiastical terms. Already from childhood he was inclined to avoid restrictions, suffocating spaces, through his dreams, especially the dream (more daydream than night?) of vocation to the priesthood.

In the late afternoon of 20 May, with his trustworthy Fr Barberis, Don Bosco indulged in significant reflection prompted by a globe of the world which Barberis, a geography teacher, had placed on a table in the library. Speaking of missions and missionaries, the discussion turned to Asia: ‘It has a population of about eight hundred million,’ Don Bosco observed ‘and yet very few

are Catholic. China alone, the Chinese empire, has around five hundred million souls and India almost two hundred million. Oh! How many souls, and how many missionaries would be needed.

‘We already think we are something here in Europe. Well, the Chinese empire alone has one and a half times the population of the whole of Europe. We are already used to speaking about Piedmont, going back over and studying its history, and observing its progress and backward steps, yet is not Piedmont but a mere drop in the middle of a lake? And then there is the atom which is our Oratory here in Valdocco!’ He continued, laughing: ‘Well, there’s so much to be done, and from this tiny corner we can think of sending people there, etc.’¹

In this context, over 1874–75, the notion of the Salesian Cooperators was maturing at the same time he was thinking of expanding into France and South America. The move into nearby France was something he personally saw to and followed up, the works in France becoming an object of his special concern and a frequent goal of his visits, while the works in South America he could only guide, sustain and animate from a distance.

1. The special Turin–Nice axis (1874–77)

The opening of the first Salesian work in France in 1875, at Nice, which belonged to the Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia until 1860, was accompanied by much caution. It should not make us think of a return of Italian nationalists to the country handed over to France as part of political bartering agreed upon at Plombières in 1858 by Napoleon III and Camillo Cavour, and legitimised by both parties.² In 1870–71, coinciding with the end of the Empire and the advent of the Third Republic, there was still a consistent movement which had gained new vigour and which was against the annexation and in favour of a return to Italy, though this had never been encouraged by the Italian Government. But by the end of 1871 this movement could be considered over.³ Don Bosco and the Salesians came to Nice without any of this in mind; it was well over by 1875.

Poor and abandoned youth, though, do not admit of nationalistic divides, and the new arrivals intended to dedicate themselves exclusively to them, requested to do so by people who loved their city and those of its children who were most at risk. They were sure of the support of the authorities, civil and political as well as religious.

It was the first time Don Bosco had crossed into France, destination Nice, capital of the Alpes Maritimes Département. Real need and charity were not unknown to this city. With more than 50,000 inhabitants, it displayed wealth but also signs of poverty: such as in all the Côte d’Azur, focus of much international tourism in the first half of the century, where there were many large groups of wealthy people coming from northern France, Russia, Germany, England. They gave considerable financial contribution to local charitable and philanthropic activities. The surrounding hinterland, mountainous and devoid of economic resources, brought poverty and misery and strong urban migration as people sought better fortune. They added to local need and widespread begging, encouraged by the munificence of well–off winter guests. Churches, especially Catholics, organised charitable initiatives. The clergy were enterprising, led by their bishops. Piedmontese Giovanni Pietro Sola (1791–1881), Bishop of Nice from 1857–77, was called ‘the father of the poor’. Lay Catholic activity also flourished, especially through the St Vincent de Paul Conferences and religious communities dedicated to assisting the needy and the sick: the Daughters of Charity,

1 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, p. 21.

2 Cf. Chap. 1, § 7.

3 Cf. E. COSTA BONA, *Echi italiani sulle elezioni a Nizza (1870–1871)*, in “Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento” 78 (1991) 161–174.

the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Hospitallers of St John of God. Also active in social work were Protestant groups, the Jewish community and the generous Russian Orthodox colony.⁴

The detailed chronology contained in the *Epistolario* (collection of letters) enables one to look at the early beginnings of Salesian work and the years that followed. Particularly helpful is a letter sent to Salesian aspirant Fr Luigi Guanella, with a precise indication: 'Nice, 12 December, 1874: ... Your place is ready. You can come when you wish ... P.S. Thursday [17 December] I will be [but in fact he was not] in Turin.'⁵ Don Bosco also wrote to Fr Rua: 'I am in Nice where I will leave on Saturday for Ventimiglia, Pigna [in the Bordighera hinterland], then Alassio. On Tuesday I will be in S. Pierdarena and Thursday in Turin, *si dominus dederit* ... I am leaving Nice right now.'⁶ He wrote to Fr Rua again from Alassio on the 15th: 'I am leaving for Albenga and will continue the journey, but I do not know if I will be in Turin on Thursday. I probably cannot be there until Saturday at midday. Matters are multiplying all the time. Pray and get the others to pray. Address everything to S. Pierdarena.'⁷

He returned to the Oratory on Saturday the 19th. Just prior to Christmas, he wrote two different letters to Baron Aimé Héraud and his wife, thanking them for their very courteous hospitality in Nice for himself and his companion, Fr Giuseppe Ronchail, and stating that he wanted to enrol the Baron 'among the list of our outstanding benefactors.' He also told him he had received 'a letter from Michel, the lawyer, who could not return for now.'⁸

Don Bosco's work in Nice did not come from nothing. From May 1874 until October 1875, a St Vincent de Paul confrere had been running a centre for catechetics and a night school in a former stable of a property situated on the *Place de la Croix de Marbre*. He did this while his health permitted. Meanwhile, after being in contact with some Religious Congregations, the bishop and members of the St Vincent de Paul turned to Don Bosco, whose work they knew of, given the connections between Nice and Turin through Conferences in Nice, Liguria and Piedmont, as well as through people close to Don Bosco such as Count Cays and Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres and members of Conferences in Nice. Among the latter were Baron Héraud and lawyer Michel, vicepresident of the Nice Conferences and president of the *Patronage* for apprentices.⁹

The meeting in Nice in December 1874 brought rapid results. Don Bosco felt that the former stable was inadequate, so Vincent de Paul members rented the Avigdor spinning mill situated at no. 21 Rue Victor, and set it up. The ground floor was set aside for the community life of residents and Salesians, and the basement for establishing shoemaking and carpentry workshops.

Once again, the *Epistolario* provides precise indications of movement back and forth between Liguria and Nice, close to the opening of the work in November 1875. Time was short for working out what to do, coming to agreement and realising plans. When questioned by lawyer Ernst Michel, the chief negotiator in dealings with Nice, a few days before the farewell to Salesians heading off to Argentina, Don Bosco replied by indicating the date of arrival and asking how many Salesians

4 Cf. O. VERNIER, *D'espoir et d'espérance. L'assistance privée dans les Alpes Maritimes au XIXe siècle (1814–1914). Bienfaisance et entraide sociale*. Nice, Éditions Serre 1993, 542 pp.

5 Em IV 362.

6 Letter of 12 December 1874, Em IV 363.

7 Em IV 364.

8 Letter of 23 December 1874, Em IV 369–370.

9 For precedents, the beginnings and development of Salesian work in Nice F. DESRAMAUT's work is fundamental: *Don–Bosco à Nice. La vie d'une école professionnelle catholique entre 1875 et 1919*. Paris, Apostolat des Éditions 1980; for relations between the St Vincent de Paul Conferences and charitable initiatives in Nice, with particular reference to Salesian work, cf. [E. MICHEL], *Noces d'or de la Société de St–Vincent–de–Paul à Nice, 1844–1894*. Nice, 1894, 98 pp.; [L. CARTIER], *Historique du Patronage St–Pierre à Nice*, in "Bulletin Salésien" 33 (1901) no. 1, January, pp. 15–22, dedicated to the *Année jubilaire de l'oeuvre de Don Bosco en France*.

should come with him, what they might need to bring, and what acceptance there would be if he wanted to bring with him a certain number of French-speaking boys who wanted to return to Nice. The date of arrival indicated was 20 November, and that day would mark the beginning of the work.¹⁰ Prior to that, however, it was necessary to advise an 'Excellency', probably a civic one, explaining the project and asking for his kind acceptance.¹¹ On 15 November, Don Bosco asked Fr Rua from Sampierdarena, where he had accompanied the Salesians who had left Genoa on the 14th for Argentina: 'It would be good if you could write to Perret, a cleric at Lanzo, and tell him to pack up and come with me to Nice where we are awaited on the 20th. Everything is ready. He can go directly to Alassio where I can meet him.'¹² Perret was still a novice. From Varazze on the 18th, Don Bosco informed Fr Rua of the final two steps: 'For your information, tomorrow, the 19th, I am going to Albenga; I will spend the night at Alassio. On the following morning, the 20th, I will leave for Nice where you can address mail for the next 6 days. The day after, or rather the 26th, I will go to Ventimiglia. From the 27th to the 30th again in Alassio, then to S. Pier d'Arena or wherever I tell you.'¹³ From Varazze, on the 18th, he wrote to Count Eugenio De Maistre about the departure of the missionaries and said: 'I am now heading for the Riviera to Nice with three of our priests to open a house in that city.'¹⁴ He wrote once more to Fr Rua from Alassio: 'God willing, I will write to you from Nice, where I am leaving for today at 9 a.m. with Perret, Cappellano and Ronchail.'¹⁵ One priest, Fr Enrico Guelfi, had preceded them there ten days earlier. Don Bosco then immediately added cleric Evasio Rabagliati for music and singing. On 24 November, after first saying 'things have begun here and we can give a hand to the work,' he gave instructions to Fr Rua that the twenty-year-old cleric, as well as bringing 'some music and his strictly personal gear' would accompany four of the eight boys from Algiers to Nice who had been sent to the Oratory by the Archbishop of Algiers, Archbishop Lavigerie, but instead he arrived with all eight! It would have been better for him to be in Nice for Sunday the 28th 'because that day,' he explained 'there will be Mass at the *Patronage de St. Pierre, Rue Victor 21.*' 'Much kindness and joy for us and the new hospice which has all the essentials of the one in Turin.'¹⁶ He informed Fr Cagliero on 4 December: 'On the 2nd of this month [more precisely, the 20th of the previous month] the *Patronage* was opened in Nice with a hospice for poor boys. The Rector is Fr Ronchail, Perret as teacher, Rabagliati pianist, Cappellano cook.'¹⁷ Don Bosco also had a letter of recommendation, sent to the Rector in Latin, to present to the diocesan bishop. He stated in it that Ronchail was a priest 'with good moral qualities approved by many bishops for preaching the Word of God and duly hearing confessions of both sexes as well as having formal registration as a teacher of classics and technical subjects, and French.'¹⁸

The *Semaine de Nice, Revue catholique* on 27 November, announced the presence in the city in the early days of that week of 'abbé' Bosco from Turin, the apostle of abandoned youth, a man of God, humble and admired for his works.' It then gave some information on those who had encouraged him to come there: 'It is thanks to the initiative and requests of the Bishop of Nice and a few respectable individuals, that it was possible to attract the concern of Don Bosco's great soul

10 Letter of 6 November, Em IV 544–545.

11 Signed and undated letter in which Don Bosco mentions the presence in the Oratory of Algerian youngsters and some from Nice. It would be convenient to transfer them to a hospice better suited to their particular circumstances: Em IV 541–543.

12 To Fr M. Rua, 15 November 1875, Em IV 554.

13 Em IV 562.

14 Em IV 560–561.

15 Em IV 564.

16 To Fr M. Rua, 24 November 1875, Em IV 565–566; another letter a few days later, Em IV 567–568

17 Em IV 574. He repeated this to him in a postscript to a letter on 12 February 1876: "The house in Nizza has started off very well. Fr Ronchail Rector, Rabagliati pianist, Per[r]et teacher, Chapellano cook, Guelfi Enrico the regular guard" (E III 18).

18 Certification ["Your 'dimissorial' to be presented to the Bishop of Nice"] 10 December 1875, Em IV 380.

to our city, where the number of lost, abandoned boys wandering the streets is on the increase.' Finally, it announced the opening of the *Patronage de St.-Pierre* on Sunday the 28th with Mass celebrated by the bishop at 8.30 a.m.

L'Unità Cattolica in Turin reported on the opening of the *Patronage* in Nice. It referred to the fact that 'eight young men from Algiers who were already gathered there were present in their Arab clothing' and reported on the Pope's words during the audience granted the Salesian missionaries when he learned from them of the imminent opening of the work in Nice: 'May God bless it and may it be the tiny mustard seed that becomes a huge tree so that many doves can take shelter beneath its branches. May the sparrow-hawk stay far from them.'¹⁹

2. A constant presence for the mother house in France

Don Bosco did not entrust the work to his men without being present to them in person or through correspondence. Four days after his return to Turin he began a letter to the Rector, Fr Ronchail, with these words: 'The newspapers have made much of our house in Nice, and we must take the greatest care to see that everything goes well.' He included reminders, prayers, greetings for various important individuals: Prince Sanguwski and his mother the Princess, lawyer Michel, Baron Héraud, the Count and Countess de la Ferté. He provided rules for looking after money: 'Do not keep money with you that you do not strictly need; if you have more than this, send it to the Oratory addressed to Fr Rua. That can be used for any trips that have to be made.' But he reassured him: 'Should you have some unexpected need and you cannot provide otherwise, ask immediately and we will try to provide you with something. Always make a note of the name and address of people who give alms, thank them and keep in touch with them, especially if they are ill. I believe Bishop Sola will have seen the Genoa *Cittadino*; if not, it is good that I know and I will send him the numbers that speak about him. Go and visit him sometimes. Please give out the enclosed notes with a greeting to all, especially to Cappellano.'²⁰

Resident students in the first school year were no more than a dozen, while the number attending the oratory is uncertain. Two weeks after the work began, the Superior sent special instructions to the Rector of the house in response to concrete situations. They can be found in an undated handwritten note. Some of the reminders concerned the internal regime: 'Work out which boys show signs of a Salesian vocation; see to familiar, cordial relationships 'with the clerics, the confreres.' Pay attention to frequent use of the sacraments and preaching to the boys, inviting clergy from outside. Make absolutely sure you do not get involved in the controversy surrounding the local Marian Shrine at Laghetto.'²¹

The most serious issue to resolve seemed to be almost immediately the location and inadequacy of the premises at the *Patronage*, which really had no future. Don Bosco and his men quickly sought another solution. Called to Nice to help with a *sermon de charité* run by Bishop Gaspard Mermillod on 24 February 1876, he quickly agreed on the purchase of Villa Gauthier, Place d'Armes, for 90,000 francs [295,429 euro] which in real terms was 100,000 francs [329,255 euro] taking additional costs into account. 'Our contract has now been concluded at f. 90,000' he told Baron Aimé Héraud.²² His appeal to his faithful administrator, Fr Rua, was 'We have made the contract. 100,000 all up. But it is a beautiful building. Get the money ready.'²³

19 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 284, Sun. 5 December 1875, p. 2035.

20 Letter of 10 December 1875, Em IV 579.

21 To Fr G. Ronchail, letter halfway through December 1875, Em IV 581.

22 Letter of 1 March 1876, E III 21

23 Letter of 2 March 1876, E III 21. Lack of money led him to press Fr Rua to recover the money spent in the earlier stages of construction of the Church of S. Secondo (cf. Chap 18, § 2.2): "When in Turin, we will speak about the Church of S. Secondo".

Three months later he got back to the Rector once more, suggesting some ingenious solutions: pass on news of indulgences to 'collectors and benefactors,' raise a loan through a mortgage, 'a building or some other property,' ask lawyer Michel, Prince Sanguwski, the City Council, the City Prefect to intervene. At the same time he guaranteed sure help from Turin.²⁴ He was very soon able to describe the steps to take for a solution, following a meeting with Bishop Sola in Piedmont. He wrote to Fr Ronchail from Alassio while visiting the houses in Liguria: 'Other than what Fr Rua will have written to you from Turin, you can regard the following as a basic set of activities: 1. Make a preliminary agreement for purchase of the Gaut[h]ier house, setting a month for paying the entire sum from the date of your agreement. A mortgage allowance. 2. Over this time I will see to making the thirty thousand francs [98,476 euro] or even more if needed available to you. On this basis bring together lawyer Michel and Baron Héraud, or better, ask them to meet with you, and tell them that since a common agreement is involved we need to bring the 'dance' to an end at the cost of some sweat and tears and maybe more. This is what God wants and that is enough. I have spoken at length with Bishop Sola and he is very keen on it. He told me that once he is back home, maybe today or tomorrow, he will dedicate himself *totis viribus* to Gautier [=Gauthier] house. He wants to contribute an amount and hopes something will also come from others, and he invited me to let you, the Baron and lawyer Michel know about these matters. Note well that we had some certain debt recovery items on which I was making calculations. They are sure enough, but time is a problem. Nevertheless, I have already provided otherwise and we will honour the time frame I am indicating. Thank our two champions as mentioned in a special way and I will prepare a certificate that I am sure they will like. I will send it to them as soon as someone here goes there in person. It is also good to note that before paying, free up any mortgage or claim weighing on our premises. Take very good care of your health.'²⁵

Fr Ronchail had 10,000 lire [32,825 euro] available for the preliminary contract. Fr Rua was invited to send him 20,000 from Turin.²⁶ The purchase was completed on 9 August. The building, three storeys including the ground floor, was ready for the new school year. A tailor's workshop was added to the two previous ones. The number of residents immediately increased to 45.

The official opening of the new premises took place solemnly on 12 March, 1877. We will refer to it ahead since it was in the booklet for the opening that Don Bosco's address was published. It was an archetype of his *sermons de charité* with the pages on the *Preventive System in the Education of Youth* as an appendix. Present were the bishop, civil authorities, a crowd of principal benefactors, while boys resident there put on a musical academy.²⁷ The *Patronage St.-Pierre* in Nice became the mother house and prototype for Salesian works in France.

Among events in the months that followed, one episode is worth noting as evidence of Don Bosco's desire to keep his work apart from political interference, also in France. Some rooms in the *Patronage*, as can be seen from early drafts of manuscripts of Don Bosco's address at the opening, were reserved for the Catholic Workers Group promoted by certain members of the aristocracy and the Legitimist [in favour of the monarchy] middle class. They began meeting there on 19 March.²⁸ The situation created problems which Fr Ronchail outlined to Don Bosco by letter on 22 March, ten days after the opening celebrations: 'The Catholic Group affair has given rise to rumours in the city and stirred up a range of opinions in our regard. The clergy in general and some of the Canons do not view this too favourably, and are saying that D. Bosco's priests are with the Chambord party and want to interfere in politics. I thought it best for those who spoke to me

24 Letter of 5 June 1876, E III 66–67

25 Letter of 5 June 1876, E III 66–67

26 Letter to M. Rua at end of July, E III 76–77 and again from Sampierdarena, 27 July 1876, E III 80–81.

27 Cf. the first edition in Italian and French, of the opening of the *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, 68 p., OE XXVIII 380–446.

28 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9.

about it to let it be seen that we have nothing to do with this and that it is only a temporary measure if they are using our place. What also created a bad impression was seeing the letter of invitation include names such as Gignoux, Bétheune, Michaud, La Ferté, Michel, because all these gentlemen did not approve of the Canons in the Laghetto affair.²⁹

Don Bosco must have let the Group know of the incompatibility of the two works, and they must have taken it well enough, since a few months later they moved to Villa Pauliani.³⁰ The reference to the Group in the draft manuscript and which was in the printed booklet for the opening of the *Patronage* did not appear in the text of Don Bosco's address.³¹ Nevertheless, despite the facile accusation of collusion with French Legitimists, In July 1883 Don Bosco did visit Count de Chambord, who was hoping for a miraculous remission of an incurable disease.³²

3. A personal and institutional plan for missionary involvement

Don Bosco received frequent requests in the 1870s to send Salesians to areas then considered to be 'missions': Mangalore in India, Hong Kong, Australia, China, Africa and in particular Cairo, the United States. We have already indicated two of the more detailed proposals relating to the months leading up to the approval of the Salesian Constitutions: Hong Kong, and Savannah in the U.S.³³ Apart from the scarcity of personnel, what made him hesitant was the difficulty created by countries outside the major flow of Italian migration, with language and culture so notably different from the neo-Latin roots of his potential missionaries.

But before being 'called' to Latin America, Don Bosco had nurtured an initiative of his own to make his religious Society 'missionary' and in countries of a very different language and culture. It was during the months he was in Rome for the approval of the Constitutions that he drew up a broad outline of his plan, with the serious intention of quickly giving it substance. He had agreed on it with a long-time friend who already in 1867 had wanted to contribute an offering to the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.³⁴ he was Irishman Mons. Tobias Kirby (1803–95), fully at home in the Roman world and the Curia, both as Rector – already the Vice Rector for some years – of the Irish College, and as confidant *ad omnia* of the episcopate in his country, either working at home or in countries under the jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide: Australia and the U.S. especially. At the centre of any number of reports, personal and in writing, he was elevated to the episcopal dignity in 1881 and assigned titular Sees, first of Lete and then the See of Ephesus, an archiepiscopal See, in 1885. Fr Berto makes a number of mentions of his and Don Bosco's presence at the Irish College in his 1874 *Brevi appunti* (Brief notes). It was an opportunity for cordial encounters with students and important clerics, among them cardinal, bishops and 'monsignori' of the Roman Curia, as well as any Irish bishops passing through.³⁵

It is natural that in a climate so imbued with sensitivity for the missions, and complete mutual trust between the Rector and Don Bosco from Turin, that the idea of a mission project should arise, with the latter playing the active role. To make it happen, he focused on the collaboration of two

29 Cf. letter of Fr G. Ronchail in ASC B 312.

30 Cf. *Notice historique des Conférences et des Oeuvres de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul à Nice depuis la fondation en 1844 à 1883 année des noces d'or de la Société*, Nice, Imprimerie-Librairie du Patronage de Saint-Pierre 1883, p. 57.

31 Cf. GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*. Introduction and critical texts, ed. by P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 179, 222, 236.

32 Cf. Chap. 31, § 2.

33 Cf. 19, § 7.

34 Cf. letter of 9 June 1867 "A Monsig. Reverend.ma [sic] Monsig. Kirby, Rett. del Seminario Irlandese di Rome Cameriere Segreto di S. S. Pio IX Rome" mons. Tobias Kirby, Em II 388.

35 Cf. G. BERTO, *Brevi appunti*..., pp. 41, 43–44, 60, 79 (17 March, Feast of St Patrick), 81 (Feast of St Joseph, with a special homily from Don Bosco).

young priests formed at the College: Reverends Liston and Hallinan. Don Bosco was in touch with them on his visit to the College on 22 February. The first-named had only been ordained a priest a few months earlier, while the other was still a deacon, though close to priestly ordination. As Bishop of Limerick he would welcome the Salesians into his diocese in 1919.

The beginnings were promising, helped by the very cordial relationships between the authors of the project. At the beginning of May 1874, towards the end of a brief letter of thanks to the Rector of the College for a donation of 100 lire [ca. 300 euro] Don Bosco wrote: 'Tell Liston and Hallinan that their rooms are ready. I will check them myself.'³⁶ It was certainly a visit that had been agreed on so that those who would have carried out the project in its initial stages in the field would have a precise idea of the status of Don Bosco's work in Turin. Confirmation of the visit would certainly have followed. On 5 June, Don Bosco signed a letter of recommendation in Latin, for the Irish bishops, on behalf of Fr Denis Hallinan. It is an interesting letter despite it being just a handwritten item. It stated that the Salesian Society, in agreement with Pius IX and wanting to devote itself to proclaiming the Catholic Faith '*ad exterarum gentes*', had made a choice for countries where the English language was predominant. Therefore it would be desirable to have workers for the gospel who had English as their mother tongue. With this in mind he was turning to Fr Denis Hallinan for help, so that on his return to Ireland he could seek out teenage boys outstanding for their moral and intellectual qualities and send them to Turin, so long as he was of the view that they were called to the clerical state and displayed 'some inward leanings towards the foreign missions or at least to professing vows in the Salesian Congregation.'³⁷ The document highlighted the elements of the future destination of young aspirants, which aroused considerable perplexity in the two young collaborators, already quite concerned about the treatment they would find in Turin with regard to food, clothing and lodgings. Valdocco's poverty would certainly have bothered them from the moment they first saw it.

From the essential and detailed correspondence with Don Bosco over the months that followed, the two trusted Irishmen and Mons. Kirby would have become clearer about the terms of the original plan, and the difficulties in carrying it through.³⁸ However, by October Don Bosco was convinced the difficulties had been settled. He wrote about them to his trustworthy correspondent, Mons. Kirby. Basically there were two difficulties. The request was that the young candidates – some twenty of them had already been identified – could be taken in at the more comfortable college at Valsalice, and that when they had completed their studies, they would be completely free to go to 'missions of their own choosing' without any ties to the Salesian Congregation. His reply to the first request was clear: 'There is absolutely no value in seating young men at tables for aristocrats if they are destined for the missions where life is one of continual self-denial.' He said he would be prepared to sit them 'at my table.' One can imagine it, but this would be the head table for the boys at the Oratory. As for the vocational request, the counter-proposal was more delicately put but firm: 'I have replied that I intend these new pupils to become members of the Salesian Congregation, and that in due course they would go to missions where English is the dominant language, but in the place where we can foresee that they would give greater glory to God.'³⁹ Unfortunately, Don Bosco did not follow the established practice at the Oratory and other colleges in stating what he felt was the right principle in this case. None of his students, even if initially inclined to the clerical state or to be Salesians, was obliged or urged to embrace this at the conclusion of his studies. The choice of secular or clerical, diocesan or religious life was an

36 To Mons. T. Kirby, 2 May 1874, Em IV 284.

37 Cf. Em IV 294–295.

38 We find traces of such correspondence between Don Bosco and the two eager young Irish priests in a letter he wrote to his trusty secretary, Fr Berto, from Lanzo halfway through September: "When you come, bring me the letters of [=for Fr Liston and of [for] Fr Aliman [sic] that are on my desk. In fact copy or have these two letters copied and send them quickly so we can gain a little time" (Em IV 320).

39 To Mons. T. Kirby, 3 October 1874, Em IV 329–330.

absolutely free one, as also demonstrated by the increasingly crowded gatherings of past pupil priests, laity, religious. It was also an ongoing, unarguable axiom in the Salesian Congregation that only those who made an explicit request were sent to the missions. However, he ended his letter by expressing trust in the goodness of the ultimate purpose for prevailing over any difficulties. 'This undertaking,' he said 'conceived with you in the Irish Seminary in Rome, will undoubtedly have initial problems, but it will certainly be of great value to the Missions where there is a real and fearful lack of priests.'⁴⁰

For his part, after repeated requests by the two Irish priests, Don Bosco believed he had again resolved the problem by relenting on the question of arrangements for the young aspirants and expressing his readiness to discuss the controversial points, or rather 'understandings' (or agreements) which his Irish correspondents believed he had 'altered'. The young candidates would be hosted at Valsalice and, as for the rest, he feared he had not been understood correctly due to the language difficulty. He concluded with genuinely theological words of hope: 'Since this is a new undertaking,' he repeated, convinced of its validity 'we will need to face up to many difficulties, but if it is God's work it will go ahead for his greater glory.'⁴¹

In the next two letters, Don Bosco reconfirmed his efforts to satisfy the requests, but refused to make this an 'absolute obligation.' At any rate, he 'wanted them to at least leave the choice of mission' to him. Finally, he stated his readiness to accept an alternative: to accept 'boys of another condition' meaning poor boys.⁴² He repeated this in his final letter on the matter. The fact that the ship had been wrecked even before it was launched, he assured Mons. Kirby who blamed himself, was not the fault of his generous friend, nor his own, rather was it what God wanted, respecting human free will as always. It would have been better had they sent him poor boys – there were many of them in Ireland even then. Their needs would have been fewer and the solution simpler. He concluded: 'If it is God's work it will come right next time. Any time you find some poor boys who want to be part of our way of life, I will be ready to accept them.'⁴³

But would this have been a convincing and lasting solution? There was too much disparity of sentiments, mentality, culture, habits, expectations. Neither Valdocco nor Valsalice nor any other Italian Salesian house would have been able to respond to these. It was one thing for them to do their formation in Italy, but in Rome in their own house, at a national ecclesiastical college; it was yet another to spend years outside their own natural surroundings, uprooted and inevitably misunderstood, starting with basic needs like food and lodging.⁴⁴

Parallel to this more ambitious project, however, a more limited 'Irish' project had more success and was perhaps more in line with what Don Bosco wanted. Elements for reconstructing this are few but significant. It is not improbable that the Irish bishop he met at Mons. Kirby's College for lunch on 1 February 1874, was Matthew Quinn (1820–85), a former student of the College and of the Urbanianum. From 1846–52 he was Vicar General of the Diocese of Hyderabad in India, and from 1865 Bishop of the new Bathurst Diocese in Australia, a suffragan of the Sydney Archdiocese. On that occasion, or following it, but certainly there was a personal encounter, the bishop and Don Bosco had reached a precise agreement. The missionary bishop, who was leaving for Dublin, recalled its essential terms in a letter to Don Bosco on 24 September 1874, replying to one from Don Bosco on the 21st. It reflected the broader agreement with Liston and Hallinan but in minor ways. The bishop would cover just the expenses of the journey to Turin for boys he would send

40 Ibid., 330.

41 To Mons. T. Kirby, 24 October 1874, Em IV 340.

42 To Mons. T. Kirby, 24 October 1874, Em IV 343.

43 To Mons. T. Kirby, 11 December 1874, Em IV 361.

44 Cf. W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics of growth. The foundation and development of the Salesians in England*, Rome, LAS 1991, pp. 37–41.

from Ireland. A first batch of five would come, and when they had finished their studies they would be destined for the 'missions' in Australia, whether they remained as diocesan priests or wanted to join the Salesian Congregation. In a p.s. he said he had been in contact with Liston.⁴⁵ So, Don Bosco was committed to sending his future Irish Salesians one day to a mission to be established, in agreement with the bishop, in Bathurst Diocese, Australia. He had not reached an agreement of this kind with Liston and Hallinan. He had intended that the students they recruited would become 'members of the Salesian Congregation' who would go 'when ready, to missions where English was the dominant language, but in a place that would be for the greater glory of God.'⁴⁶

But in writing to Kirby, Bishop Quinn saw that the more ambitious project discussed with Liston would inevitably fail. 'Poor Don Bosco' he noted 'is not in a situation to guarantee continuity to the planned institution. More than that, he was demanding of the Irish students that they promise to become members of his Congregation, and this they were not prepared to do.'⁴⁷

However, not even the negotiations with Bishop Quinn were able to result in a precise agreement. In an evening conversation on 6 December 1875 with various Salesians at the Oratory, Don Bosco confided that the mission in Australia was, for the time being, a long-term project along with Africa, California, Hon Kong and India. He said he had discussed the Australian project with Bishop Quinn, arriving at the following conclusions: 'We are not adverse to going, but: 1. For now we do not yet have sufficient men to embark on such a venture; 2. If we go, we will be seen there as a Congregation and will be our own people, subject only to the Holy See, and perhaps ... 3. We cannot afford huge expenditure and will need aid.' But the chronicler drew the impression that Don Bosco was sympathetic to this new undertaking and wanted two or three years to prepare it, given the difficulties it presented: English as the language, a preponderance of Protestants, the nature of the aborigines, the climate.⁴⁸

4. The mission urge finds realisation among emigrants and native peoples (1874–76)

Perhaps it was because of the difficulties encountered in managing the failed 'Irish' project that Don Bosco responded with particular haste to requests from Argentina. Called to extend the activity of his Religious Society to more familiar shores, he personally assumed responsibility and efforts towards this promising transatlantic initiative: the choice, acceptance, preparation, organisation of the first expedition and others immediately following it, as well as establishing the mission, finding personnel and resources combined with the ongoing search for essential financial means. What was driving him still was his innate, inspired instinct for arousing the resolute desire in others for evangelising conquest, spreading out from the civilised world to indigenous peoples, and vice versa. There was always this unsatisfied tension towards unlimited expansion. It was the same passion which had urged him towards his first work among young people in the 18540s in Turin through the oratory conceived of and experienced as activity especially for the benefit of those who, for various reasons, were outside any religious institution. It was typical missionary activity.

4.1 Don Bosco active behind the scenes

Don Bosco placed men of great worth and trustworthiness at the head of those who would offer themselves in due course for this demanding undertaking. Fr cagliero (who then became bishop and cardinal), the humble but tenacious worker, Fr Francis Bodrato, the energetic and indefatigable

45 Cf. letter of 24 September 1874, in MB X 1270.

46 To Mons. T. Kirby, 3 October 1871, Em IV 330.

47 Letter quoted by W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics of growth...*, p. 41.

48 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, pp. 36–38.

Fr Joseph Fagnano, who then became Prefect Apostolic of Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, and the creative and enterprising Fr Louis Lasagna (who died as a forty-five-year-old bishop in a railway accident in 1895), the lively Fr James Costamagna (who then became Vicar Apostolic and Bishop in Ecuador), the reflective and hard-working Fr Joseph Vespignani, a great personality in the Salesian Latin American world and within the general administration of the Salesian Society. Despite the many limitations due to the scarcity of men and means, Don Bosco initially gave and continued to give the necessary support for everything and anyone. Nor did he fail to offer real direction and spiritual accompaniment especially to the men mainly responsible for the work: provincials, rectors, but also individual Salesians and communities.

And finally, it was up to him to do the great work of keeping the missionary quality of the common task alive among his Salesians and before Church and civil authorities on both sides of the Atlantic. He also saw to providing legal foundation for the work with the erection, in August 1883, of the Apostolic Vicariate of North and Central Patagonia and the Apostolic Prefecture of Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.⁴⁹

The great adventure had its official beginning at the Oratory on the evening of 22 December 1874, when Don Bosco read out to members of the Superior Chapter three letters that had arrived from Argentina with concrete proposals for two foundations. One, at the request of Archbishop Federico Aneiros via his secretary, Mariano Antony Espinosa, was in Buenos Aires, to look after the *Mater Misericordia* Church. The other was to manage a college at San Nicolás de los Arroyos some 300 kilometres inland from the capital. This had been warmly supported by the parish priest, Fr Pietro Ceccarelli, and a founding Commission led by the generous octogenarian José Francisco Benítez. Don Bosco replied in the affirmative, with the understanding that he would take up the matter formally as soon as he could.⁵⁰

The first steps relating to Buenos Aires were assisted by *Commendatore* Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, the Argentine Republic's Consul in Savona. He sent two letters, one on 30 August to Archbishop Aneiros, the other on 10 September to his closest collaborator, Mons. Espinosa. The latter replied on 10 October, asking him to be in contact with the Confraternity of the *Mater Misericordia*.⁵¹

At the same time, another applicant was added, Fr Pietro Ceccarelli, who stated that he had admired the truly outstanding zeal of the excellent, indeed, incomparable Fr J. Bpatisst Bosco in Rome in 1867, 1868 or 1869.⁵² His letters on 26 October, 11 November, 2 December 1874 from San Nicolás de los Arroyos. Showed real enthusiasm for the Salesians.⁵³ He attached three official documents to the 2 December letter: a report on the establishment and organisation of the Commission, the deed of erection of the college building, and a description of it.⁵⁴ They came with an official request to Don Bosco to accept the running of the college. Fr Ceccarelli as parish priest was making himself and what he had available for the Salesians, while José Francisco Benítez asked for five Salesians and assured him of concrete support: 'We will make five tickets for travel available for Your Reverence, valid for the port at Buenos Aires, and also a money order for travel expenses. The Commission took it upon itself to provide the necessary furniture and fix an income

49 Cf. Chap. 30, § 4.1.

50 On these matters, cf. R. ENTRAIGAS, *Los salesianos en la Argentina*, Vol. I Años 1874 y 1875. Buenos Aires, ed. Plus Ultra 1969.

51 Letter in MB X 1294.

52 It is to be noted that Don Bosco's name is simply Giovanni (John).

53 Cf. letter of 11 November 1874, in MB X 1296; The text of the letters to Comm. G. B. Gazzolo are found in MB X 1296–1299.

54 The texts in MB X 1373–1376.

of 800 francs [2,380 euro] for two years, establishing a farm with flocks of sheep as an income basis.⁵⁵

En route between Alassio and Sampierdarena, Don Bosco received all the documentation from Gazzolo. On 22 December 1874, after letting the Superior Chapter know about the contents, he replied to Mons. Espinosa, Fr Ceccarelli and the foundation Commission for San Nicolás college, and Benítez, offering more than they were asking for. Some replies were still through *Commendatore* Gazzolo. 'Here are two letters,' he wrote on the same date 'one for Buenos Hayres, the other for S. Nicolás. I am putting everything in your hands. Do what you believe you should in the Lord. I will be most grateful.'⁵⁶

He dealt with the two different proposals together in the letter to Mons. Espinosa: '1. I will send some priests to Buenos Aires to set up a central hospice there. It would help to have a church for the sacred celebrations, especially for teaching catechism to the most abandoned children in the city.' Either the 'Church of *Mater Misericordia*' or another building would do which is 'suitable in some way for collecting and dealing with poor children.' '2. I will soon send the number of priests, clerics and laymen to S. Nicolás that will be needed for religious service, singing, also teaching where there is the need. 3. The Salesians could be sent elsewhere from these two locations as the Ordinary feels best.' Finally, he specified that the Congregation was definitively approved by the Holy See and 'although its primary purpose was to look after poor youth, just the same, it extends to every branch of the sacred ministry.'⁵⁷ There was no reference to migrants or missions.

When writing to the parish priest of San Nicolás, who was originally from Modena, Don Bosco also understood the proposal made in a broad sense: 'You are offering your house, parish and support to those spiritual sons of mine ... Our only wish is to work in the sacred ministry especially for poor and abandoned youth. Catechism, classes, preaching, playgrounds for recreation, hospices, colleges make up our main harvest ... I will place myself in your hands and send the number of priests, clerics, laymen, musicians, tradesmen at a time and in the quantity you tell me will be necessary.' He asked him, however, to remain with the men he sent until they were familiar with the language and customs of the place. Indeed, he asked for even more direct involvement – as an 'extern' Salesian or a professed one? – 'Who knows, but with the Salesians following your example and zeal, your advice, you might actually become their superior?'⁵⁸

With the respectable gentlemen of the Commission he touched explicitly on the question of the college, starting from a point in the draft agreement which he was particularly happy with: 'The college will be entrusted to the Salesian Congregation without any time limitation, reserving only its patronage as the property of the people.' 'These are conditions I gladly accept,' he said 'and I will begin preparing for next October the necessary personnel for material and spiritual direction, teachers for teaching and to assist the pupils, for service in the church and college. I will also follow the curriculum of a middle class college. But since the principal purpose of the Salesian Congregation is the care of the poor and at-risk youngsters, thus I hope the Salesians will also be free to run a night school for these, bring them together on Sundays and holy days in some area for pleasant recreation, and meanwhile instruct them in religion. Indeed, I also hope they will find support from the charity of the citizens of San Nicolás for gathering the poorest and abandoned in some charitable hospice in order to teach them a trade, so they can eventually earn an honest living.'⁵⁹

55 Cf. text of the letters in MB X 1300–1302.

56 To Comm.. G. B. Gazzolo, 22 December 1874, Em IV 366.

57 Letter of 22 December 1874, Em IV 366–368.

58 Letter of 25 December 1874, Em IV 372–374

59 Letter of 25 December 1874, Em IV 374–375. On 2 February he wrote a personal letter to the more generous member of the Commission, Mr José Francisco Benítez, with whom he remained in constant correspondence. He described Fr Ceccarelli in it as "my old friend" whom he had got to know in Italy in

The works foreseen were similar to the ones operating in Europe. Very soon, however, the term 'missions' in its proper sense infiltrated the discussion. Reference to migrants did not. It was within the perspective of the missions that Don Bosco presented the transatlantic enterprise during the St Francis de Sales Conferences both in the private meeting on 28 January and at the solemn assembly the following day in the presence of the entire Valdocco community.

4.2 The launch and feverish preparations

Don Bosco lost no time, and on 5 February, officially announced the historic enterprise in a circular to all Salesian confreres, asking them to be available to personally commit themselves to it. It was a prelude to the expansion into Patagonia. He spoke openly of the missions. 'Among the many proposals made for opening a mission in foreign lands,' he told them 'it seems preferable to accept the one from the Argentine Republic. Other than the already civilised part, there is an endless region inhabited by savages, amongst whom the zeal of the Salesians could be exercised with the Lord's grace. For now, we will start by opening a hospice in Buenos Aires, the capital of this vast Republic, and a college with a public church in S. Nicolás de los Arroyos not far from the capital. Now, while I go about preparing personnel to send on this first experiment, I would like the choice to fall on members who go there not out of obedience, but by completely free choice.' He suggested the following procedures: Apply in writing; the Superior Chapter will 'examine the health, knowledge and physical and moral strength' of the applicant; those chosen will be brought together to 'learn the language and customs of the people to whom they will bring the word of eternal life.' In general terms, departure was 'fixed for next month, October.'⁶⁰

It was the beginning of a more vigorous animation. The missions became the dominant theme of his propaganda, beginning with homely discussion and private correspondence. On Wednesday 12 May 1875, after night prayers, as recorded by Fr Barberis in his *Chronichetta*, 'D. Bosco spoke of the Buenos Aires mission' going back over the procedures involving Argentina and Turin and recalling that Salesians in the houses had shown themselves 'very ready to leave *en masse* if sent, but they had not made special application.' he then noted: 'Over these days we have seen real ferment among the Oratory boys. Some of them have wanted to go too, and immediately. Others are making formal application to D. Bosco and, afraid they may not be sent, are turning to different priests and Chapter members, asking them to propose and support their application.'

Fr Barberis also recorded Don Bosco's words of mission animation with particular reference to S. Nicolás de los Arroyos: 'There will be something to do there for every kind of individual': preachers for public churches, teachers for school, 'singers and players because people there love music so much,' shepherds for the sheep, people to look after the house. He noted especially that 'tribes of savages' were not far from the city, then guaranteeing those less inclined to martyrdom that 'they have a very nice nature and many already show good intentions of embracing Christianity so long as there is someone to instruct them in it.' He concluded: 'So let's take courage and seek every way of preparing ourselves to go and do good in those lands.'⁶¹

Relations with South America did not happen with telegraphic speed. Letters had to follow the rhythm of shipping departure schedules. In the very best of hypotheses, two months went by between sending and receiving, and this was prolonged by the essential need for reflection and decision at both ends.

So, it should not surprise us that some months later, Don Bosco was urged by 'missionary' fervour to ask Gazzolo, living in Savona, what stage matters were at with 'our project' overseas, as

circumstances note detailed: Em IV 406.

60 Letter of 5 February 1875, Em IV 408–409.

61 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 9–13.

he called it, 'and whether disturbances occurring in Buenos Aires in the transition from President Sarmiento to President Avellaneda had created difficulties.⁶² 'I cannot finalise the names of Salesians destined to cross the Atlantic' he told him in July, while again expressing a degree of concern: 'Your letter is very brief and to the point, but it does not say whether or not problems have arisen, and the foundation Commission has not yet made an official reply.'

Nevertheless, expecting to soon be able to complete the list of those going, he could for now communicate that Fr John Cagliero would be leading them, with five priests and three coadjutors as teachers. Meanwhile he was also thinking of organising a Spanish course for them. He had a dozen Spanish–Italian dictionaries in hand and was asking him to suggest a good grammar that could be bought in Turin.⁶³ Finally, on 26 July he was able to thank Gazzolo for the letters that he had passed on from South America and gave him the text of the reply to the Commission at S. Nicolás de los Arroyos. He gave him a provisional list of names of candidates for the mission – there were nine on it, among whom Frs Bonetti and Antonio Riccardi – and told him he had given out grammars for individual studies while waiting for a regular class together.⁶⁴ The potential pupils, however, were still busy in their respective houses and he was finding it difficult to get the course up and running. At the end of August, Don Bosco anticipated it could be organised at Valsalice 'for the first fortnight in September.'⁶⁵ More exactly, he wrote to Fr Rua from Mornese on 28 August: 'Next week, those going to Argentina will come together at Valsalice. Forewarn Fr Dalmazzo. There will be six or seven of them.'⁶⁶

Following conclusive replies at the end of July, Don Bosco had more immediate and substantial tasks to tackle, the principal one being the intensification of preparations so that departure of the travellers could take place in the shortest time possible.

It was due to Fr Ceccarelli's efforts that all the letters were sent, along with the documents with which the Commission at S. Nicolás guaranteed precisely how the Salesians would be safely and properly set up in the new college. For his part, Don Bosco confirmed that the Salesians would be involved 'with their good will' both in running the college and night classes. The five priests were 'all approved teachers furnished with certificates.' There would also be a music teacher and two coadjutors, thus avoiding non–Salesian personnel, 'so their activity could be even more secure.' He had appointed Fr Bonetti as Rector, though in fact he was replaced by Fr Fagnano. 'Father John Cagliero, Provincial or Vice Superior of the Congregation,' he specified 'would lead the Salesian confreres and have full power to deal with and conclude any business that may occur with civil or ecclesiastical authorities.' The Salesians would be accompanied by *Commendatore* Gazzolo, 'someone we fully trust, experienced in sea voyages and with knowledge of the places and many of the people among whom our men must establish their abode.' 'The travellers, therefore, will be ten in number' he summed up, including the ones going to Buenos Aires, and would leave around midway through November.⁶⁷

In a further letter to Gazzolo, he asked for detailed information on what they would need to bring: furnishings for the church, and the house; books for liturgy and prayer, catechisms, school books; he asked him about the Salesian dwelling, the state of the classrooms, piano, music books. He also sent him the regulations for night classes at Varazze and Turin, and asked what role the priests would have in parish ministry. He asked him for information on local daily prayer forms to include them in the booklet of piety he was preparing. He concluded: 'You need to be armed with

62 Cf. Letter of 10 April 1875, Em IV 449. "We await news from Buenos Aires", he wrote to him on the 24th of the same month, Em IV 456.

63 To Comm. G. B. Gazzolo, 11 July 1875, Em IV 479.

64 Cf. Em IV 488.

65 To Comm. G. B. Gazzolo, 26 August 1875, Em IV 511–512.

66 Em IV 513.

67 Letter of 28 July 1875, Em IV 490–492.

patience at the moment so you can instruct and help me. I would like you to help us present well, so nobody can say: *What a mess!* Since the honour of a fledgling Congregation is at stake, I intend not to spare any personnel or expense that could contribute to the success of our enterprise.⁶⁸

On the last day of August, he wrote to Cardinal Franchi, the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, informing him of the procedures now concluded with Argentina, but stressing in particular the missionary side of opening a school at S. Nicolás. He prefaced it with the fact that it was the first time the Salesian Congregation was opening 'houses in the foreign missions' and asked him to grant 'all the favours, spiritual graces and privileges the Holy See' usually gives to 'Religious' going to 'the Foreign Missions', and begged the Cardinal to supply 'some financial aid, some books especially in Spanish, either for use in church or school; sacred vessels, vestments and the like,' as 'your well-known charity' sees fit.⁶⁹

His intervention intensified as the departure date approached. On 29 October, the group of missionaries, led by Fr Cagliero, went to Rome and was received on the 31st by Cardinal Antonelli, and on 1 November by the Pope. They returned to Turin on 4 November and at Don Bosco's request were received by the Archbishop on the 8th.⁷⁰

The Archbishop had only just read Don Bosco's dramatic letter of 28 October some days earlier.⁷¹ 8 November was the date on the letter of public invitation to the evening function on the 11th in which he said 'our missionaries' would make 'their consecration to the august Queen of Heaven to implore her patronage on their new mission.'⁷²

L'Unità Cattolica, certainly at Don Bosco's urging, strongly emphasised the notion of foreign mission in the strict sense. If the headline on 30 October announcing the imminent departure seemed reticent: *Salesians of Don Bosco in the Argentine Republic*, the contents were not: the request had come from Argentina for 'priest-teachers who could come to those areas to sow the seeds of faith and civilisation.' The first 'eleven brave priests of Don Bosco' would open a 'Hospice for education ... in Buenos Ayres, capital of the State' and would lay 'the foundations for a college in the missions at S. Nicolás de los Arroyos.' 'Little by little' Don Bosco would be able 'then to take the road to nearby Patagonia, the land of Magellan, a part of the world so different from Europe where, unfortunately, no glimmer of the gospel was yet able to penetrate, nor any notion of commerce or other civilised element.'⁷³

On 5 November, the same newspaper spoke of *The Salesian missionaries of Don Bosco at an audience with the Holy Father*⁷⁴ and the headline for the news item on the farewell ceremony was: *Departure of Salesian missionaries for the Argentine Republic*,⁷⁵ with space reserved for recording names and official roles of the ten Salesian missionaries.⁷⁶

68 Letter of 12 August 1875, Em IV 503–504.

69 Letter of 31 August 1875, Em IV 514–515.

70 Cf. letter to Fr. T. Chiuso on 7 November 1875, Em IV 545.

71 Cf. Chap. 20, § 4.

72 Em IV 546.

73 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 254, Saturday 30 October 1875, p. 1014.

74 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 258, Friday 5 November 1875, p. 1030. Publishing Don Bosco's invitation for the farewell ceremony on 11, in the "Cronaca italiana" it was entitled: *Partenza dei missionari per Buenos Ayres*: "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 263, Thursday 11 November 1875, p. 1057.

75 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 266, Sunday 14 November 1875, p. 1062.

76 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 267, Tuesday 16 November 1875, *Cronaca italiana, I missionari salesiani*, p. 1068.

5. The mission is assigned

At the departure celebration on 11 November, Don Bosco took as the theme for his farewell address the words of the gospel: '*Ite in munum universum, docete omnes gentes, praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae.*' He spoke of missionary evangelisation: 'The Divine Saviour gave a command by these words. Not advice but a command, to go to the missions to preach his gospel.' Further on he insisted: 'in order to obey this precept, this Mission has been conceived. A number of missions had been considered and suggested before this, in China, India, Australia or America, but for various reasons, especially because ours is a fledgling Congregation and had great need of members, they could not be supported. But this one has been, and both because it presented special convenience and because our Congregation has already grown more and become stronger, it has been able to make members available who are suitable for this purpose.' still further on he said: 'In this way we are beginning a great work, not that we have pretensions or believe we can convert the whole world in a few days with this. No, but who knows – maybe this departure and this little bit may be like a seed from which a large tree grows; who knows, but it might be like a grain of millet or a mustard seed that spreads out little by little and is destined to do extraordinary good? I hope this is so!'

it certainly was the beginning of a great missionary urge that he sought to arouse among his listeners by offering mostly precise data on the worrying pastoral situation in Latin America among the baptised and the 'savages'. In fact, he added, 'in the region surrounding the civilised part, there are huge hordes of savages where neither the religion of Jesus Christ nor civilisation nor commerce have as yet penetrated; where a European foot has not yet trodden, and these areas are truly immense in extension. Their customs are not fierce; in various places, if they hear the religion of Jesus Christ preached, they easily surrender to it, but just imagine if there is no one to preach relating to them.'

He then went on to thank those who had made this undertaking possible, supporters and benefactors. Finally, addressing the ones who were departing, he revealed an interesting detail on the printed *Ricordi* (reminders/mementos) for them: 'I have already said aloud to everyone in particular what my heart inspired me to say, and which I believe to be of most use to them; I am now leaving you all some general written reminders that can be my testament for those going to these distant lands.'⁷⁷

Don Bosco left for Sampierdarena with the group the same night. A brief letter, dated the 12th, to Mr Benítez, thanked him for a cheque for 3,060 lire [10,628 euro] for travel expenses. He recommended his Religious to him and heaped great praise on *Commendatore* Gazzolo in particular for his extraordinary acts of kindness, amongst which offering himself as a Spanish teacher for his priests.⁷⁸ Before they embarked on Sunday the 14th, he gave Fr John Cagliari, the leader of the expedition, a letter with twelve instructions on the best way to guide the group and help it during the settling in period in South America. In fact, Fr Cagliari remained in Argentina until July 1877. The instruction Don Bosco gave the leader of the expedition regarding two of the departing members might seem strange today. These two did not have a passport, because they had not complied with the demands of military service, so they were embarking at Marseilles. If their clandestine border crossing was successful, Fr Cagliari was to send a telegram from the French port in the following words: *All arrived and in good health*, otherwise he was to omit the 'all'.⁷⁹ Obviously it was morally permissible for Don Bosco to get around a law on conscription that

77 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3 bis, pp. 3–9. In the same booklet we find a lengthy description of the farewell function (pp. 11–25); Cf. also *Documenti* XV 311–319.

78 Em IV 549.

79 To Fr G. Cagliari, from Sampierdarena, 13 November 1875, Em IV 550.

he felt was unjust. Exemption for clerics had been suppressed, so it was ‘merely a penal law’⁸⁰ and did not bind in conscience.⁸¹ He also entrusted a letter of presentation of the ten Salesians, in Latin, to Fr Cagliero for the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. It named each one and his role: five priests, one cleric, four coadjutors.⁸²

Don Bosco provided reassuring news on the travellers in two letters to Fr Rua from Sampierdarena on 15 and 16 November: ‘Yesterday, I accompanied our Argentinians on board. Food and berth all top class. They were all happy and left at 2 p.m. for Marseilles where they will give us some more news.’⁸³ ‘Good news from our missionaries.’ Fr Cagliero sent this dispatch from Marseilles; ‘We are all here and all well, a very pleasant voyage.’ The ‘all here’ alluded to Gioia and Allavena, who had gone to meet their confreres there. ‘Give the news to the other confreres. We thank the Lord and continue to pray.’⁸⁴ The move abroad by the two draft-dodgers, Giovanni (listed as Pietro in the Society’s official listing) Allavena and Vincenzo Gioia, had succeeded happily, and Italian law was unable to pursue them. One of them died in Argentina in 1877, the other in Chile in 1890.

Don Bosco wrote to Count Eugenio De Maistre from Varazze on the 18th about the departure of the missionaries from Genoa, his going aboard, and his first chat with Fr Cagliero and the travellers on board, and commented: ‘I have seen that our holy Religion when preached clearly and frankly is respected and well received even by non-believers.’ Then he announced the opening of the work at Nice in France and Vallecrosia in Liguria: ‘Now I am going on to the Riviera, to Nice with three of our priests, to open a house in that city and another among the Protestants who are wrecking things at Bordighera.’⁸⁵ On his way back to Italy early in December from Varazze, he sent Fr Eugenio Reffo at the Artigianelli College the text of Pius IX’s Brief of 17 November 1875, on his missionaries and the Sons of Mary. Reffo was a correspondent for *L’Unità Cattolica*. He asked him to publish it, adding: ‘I renew my thanks for the magnificent article on the farewell functions for the Salesians. I have received letters from authoritative individuals from Rome, Florence, Venice and many places praising it.’⁸⁶

Two other letters on 18 and 28 November did not have the desired effect. One was a request, the other sought clarification, and was more moderate in its expectations. They were addressed to the President of the Council of Propagation of the Faith in Lyons, hoping to obtain some help for the travel expenses of ‘missionaries who have left,’ another ‘eleven’ who would be leaving in spring, and ‘thirty Salesian Sisters,’ ‘Daughters of Mary Help of Christians’ who would be doing the same in 1876. The reply was that grants were made only for canonically-erected missions in non-Catholic countries.⁸⁷ It seems that not even hopes for two honours were heard – one ecclesiastical and one civil – for *Commendatore* Gazzolo, who it seems was keen on recognition of the kind.⁸⁸

80 On this topic, cf. G. PACE, *Le leggi mere penali*, in “Salesianum” 9 (1947) 297–317; 10 (1948) 29–42, 163–211, where furthermore, in changed times and in a democratic regime, they historical oscillations and weakness of the theory are highlighted.

81 Cf. Chap. 18, § 4.

82 Letter of 15 November 1875, Em 552–553.

83 Letter of 15 November, Em IV 554.

84 Letter from Sampierdarena to Fr M. Rua, 16 November 1875, Em IV 555. Identical news on the departure from Genoa and the arrival of “everyone” in Marseilles were given to Countess. C. Callori, from Varazze on 17 November 1875, Em IV 559.

85 Em IV 560–561.

86 Letter from Varazze on 2 December 1875, Em IV 572–573. Dated 17 November 1875, the Brief was published in Italian and Latin in “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 285, Tuesday 7 December 1875, p. 2038, under the headline *Pio Nono ed i missionari salesiani*.

87 Cf. Em IV 562–564 and 569.

88 Letter of Don Bosco to Comm. G. B. Gazzolo, December 1875, Em IV 571–572.

6. Reminders for the mission

Early in December, Don Bosco let Fr Cagliero know that the documents requested for the Salesians who had left for Argentina had arrived from Rome on 29 November.⁸⁹ a letter of recommendation from Cardinal Antonelli to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires dated 1 November 1875; another from Cardinal Antonelli to Don Bosco dated 14 November, along with two decrees from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide concerning the attribute 'apostolic missionaries' given to Fr Cagliero and companions, signed by Cardinal Franchi, and the faculties granted them.⁹⁰ What he wrote to Fr Cagliero was important for the work of missionary animation: 'When you or others write, take care to note even the smallest details that refer to you; already everyone wants to know any little news about you. All our houses are full; everyone wants to send greetings to the missionaries, and indeed, they want to go there and see them. Enjoy the thought and in due course we will send you results of the projects.'⁹¹

Of all the documents, the one closest to the missionaries' hearts was certainly the little collection of reminders given them at the time of their farewell. These were, if you like, a brief summary of missionary spirituality and ministry.⁹² Intermingled with the predominant advice on spiritual life were rules for prudent behaviour, exhortations to pastoral zeal, true realities like souls to save and getting to heaven, glorifying God. Don Bosco considered these matters to be fundamental and never ceased reminding his missionaries of them, both individually and collectively. 'Seek souls, not money or honours or dignity,' was the first. This was followed by typical features of bosconian Salesianity, especially safeguarding morality: 'Charity and the greatest courtesy with everyone,' but avoid 'conversation and familiarity' with women and making visits, 'except for reasons of charity and necessity.' He asked them not to accept 'invitations to dinner except for serious reasons,' to avoid 'idleness,' 'be modest with food, drink and rest' (*Ricordi* 2,3,4–5). He recommended that special deference be shown in new countries to all kinds of authority, civil and ecclesiastical, diocesan and religious (*Ricordi* 6,7,8,10). Among developing peoples whose numbers had been swelled by immigration, poor people seeking work and dignified sustenance, besieged by 'savages', a reminder of poverty and work was inevitable: take 'special care of the sick, children, the elderly and the poor.' They were to look after their own health and be known for being 'poor in clothing, food, dwelling,' since poverty was true wealth 'before God' and man, able to win over hearts (*Ricordi* 5,11,12). Such behaviour, however, would be the case if the evangeliser were nourished by the two primary sources: charity as love of God and neighbour, and piety. This would also be fertile ground for promoting vocations to the Salesians and the Church, made even more favourable by his usual typical concerns: love for chastity, and a horror of the opposite vice, being careful to separate good boys from the unruly ones, recommending frequent communion, practising 'charity through signs of love and kindness' (*Ricordi* 13,14,15,16,17,19). Finally, 'in difficulties and sufferings' the missionary's believing heart must look to heaven where 'a great reward' has been prepared (*Ricordi* 20).

On 6 December 1875, following a 25 day absence of Don Bosco from Turin, Frs Chiala and Lazzerio noted in their *Diario dell'Oratorio*: 'Don Bosco is back. In the evening after prayers, he spoke to the students and trade boys together in the assembly hall about a journey to S. P. d'Arena with the missionaries; of the departure and the mission that began on board.'⁹³ He also went back

89 To Fr G. Cagliero, 4 December 1875, Em IV 574.

90 In MB XI 584–587.

91 To Fr Cagliero, 4 December 1875, Em IV 574.

92 Cf. A. MARTÍN, *Origen de las Misiones Salesianas*. Guatemala, Instituto Teológico Salesiano 1978, pp. 167–195, Chap. VIII, *Breves glosas a los recuerdos dados por don Bosco a la primera expedición misionera*; J. BORREGO, *Recuerdos de San Juan Bosco a los primeros misioneros*, RSS 3 (1984) 167–208.

93 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866–1889). Documenti e testimonianze*. Rome, LAS 1992, p. 40.

over the various stages, adding news received from the travellers from Marseilles to Barcelona, Gibraltar, as far as St Vincent Island at Cape Verde, and indicating stopovers yet to come.⁹⁴

eighteen letters from the *Salesian missionaries* were published in 19 instalments by *L'Unità Cattolica* between 20 January and 24 June 1876.⁹⁵ Mixed with these were other headlines of similar tenor: *Salesian Mission in the Argentine Republic* which began: 'One of the main reasons for the Salesian expedition to the Argentine Republic was to make a new attempt to evangelise the Patagonians, who up till now have been resistant to every principle of civilisation and religion.'⁹⁶ The Salesian missions in Patagonia 'together with the Pampas, are in the northern part and extend almost to the Equator. They are also inhabited by savages and the islands spread around there form an extension almost equal in area to Europe.' It was all rather an imaginary description – which responded to Don Bosco's encouragement – of the cultural and religious circumstances of the 'immense region'. 'The number of Patagonians is unknown, but it seems to be much greater than geographers have hitherto indicated for that area, since it is now calculated that it could be as high as several million. They are entirely savage, without laws, government, houses.'⁹⁷ In Don Bosco's imagination, tens of thousands became millions.

The idea of *missio ad gentes* returned once more in the farewell to those departing in November 1876 and 1877, when Don Bosco was still addressing them. He was replaced by others after that. On 7 November 1876, recalling the ceremony the previous year, he went back to what those departing had done: 'They went to Rome first to receive the Holy Father's blessing, where the Vicar of Jesus Christ received them most cordially. They received the Mission from him, then returning to Turin, they left on 11 November from here, at the feet of Mary Help of Christians.' Their successors were now only missing out on 'going to Rome to receive a special blessing from the Supreme Leader of the Church, the Vicar of O.L.J.C.' He concluded with reference to the *Ricordi* which they had already received and could easily have re-read.⁹⁸

An explicit element of anti-protestant polemic came into the address, on 'mission' on 7 November 1877. 'Let's see,' Don Bosco began asking 'what the word "mission" means' and who could legitimately confer it. His resolute reply: 'He who is among us in God's name, the Supreme Pontiff. It is from him that we must receive the *ite*. And now, before setting out for America, they go to Rome, not just to receive a blessing, to see him, bring him their homage, but to receive the mission from him as if it were from Jesus Christ himself: *ite praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae*. Who are Protestants sent by? ... By the Queen of England ... Who do Catholic missionaries receive the mission from? From Jesus Christ, represented by his Vicar, the Supreme Pontiff ... One goes to win souls, the other to earn money.'⁹⁹

7. Work under way in Latin America with Fr John Cagliero (1875–77)

Don Bosco quickly accepted the works that had been proposed. On the one hand, they were not so distinct from the ones in place in Europe, even if they were soon presented as a bridgehead from which to develop the completely new initiative of the mission among the so-called savages. But he was unable to prepare precise concrete plans for this, neither for potential works among the people, nor in terms of missionary activity. The main players in these early years of activity had to

94 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3 bis, pp. 26–36. He continued on the evening of 8 December with information about the imminent foundation at Vallecrosia (Ibid., pp. 37–42).

95 The only non-"missionaria" news item regarded the opening of the Salesian college in S. Nicolás, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 116, Wednesday 17 May 1876, p. 462.

96 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 182, Sunday 6 August 1876, p. 726.

97 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 195, Wednesday 23 August 1876, p. 778.

98 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 10, pp. 10, 13–25.

99 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 16, pp. 33–41.

invest almost everything, and with scarce personnel and means. Very soon, problems arose due to the inadequacy of some, the inability of others to adapt, and some who left. But since they had been educated in the school of a courageous and far-seeing man, and were sustained by the attraction he continued to exercise over them, their activity was marked by its fast rhythm. Thanks to super-human, long-suffering effort, this soon led to unforeseen developments.

The beginnings of the mission were entrusted to the responsibility of Fr John Cagliero, a member of the Superior Council and representative *ad omnia* of Don Bosco. In terms of trust, he could see himself being on a par with Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco's closest collaborator, who had been vicar in fact before he was so in law, and ultimately his successor. Fr Cagliero was succeeded as Provincial by Fr Francis Bodrato (1877–80). Fr James Costamagna (1880–94) and, for Uruguay and Brazil, Fr Louis Lasagna (1882–95).

Fr John Cagliero had entered the Oratory as a thirteen-year-old in November 1851, and was forged as an aspirant to clerical and Salesian Religious life by Don Bosco, becoming the second member of the Council assisting Don Bosco in governing the Salesian Society. Over the twenty months of his first period in South America, he received any number of letters from his Superior, who guided him and listened to him, kept him informed and was informed by him in a convergence of responsibility and decision-making that was extraordinarily prolific.

This climate of regulated and free enterprise which went beyond what was foreseen in Turin, and which Don Bosco was promptly open to, permitted special attention to be given in Buenos Aires to the spiritual needs of Italian migrants. This was carried out in the church belonging to the *Mater Misericordia* Confraternity, which the capable mission leader very soon gained full and lasting use of. The pastoral care of a Catholic migrant community revealed itself to be the most urgent mission of *missio ad gentes*.¹⁰⁰ Fr Cagliero himself was partly involved, but along with the boundless zeal of humble Giovanni Baccino (1843–77), who died from his untiring work on 14 June 1877. Baccino had not received any letter from Don Bosco, who nevertheless mentioned him on several occasions in letters to Fr Cagliero. But his own letters to superiors and Salesian friends in Italy and to Don Bosco himself, were overflowing with love for the Father who sustained and supported him in his work. 8 out of 19 of these letters remain, addressed directly to his Superior far away.¹⁰¹ His view of the religious and moral circumstances of the city was not optimistic, urging him to even more intense apostolic effort. He asked for books, but above all 'good, hard-working priests,' 'because the harvest is great.' 'We need help, and soon,' he begged 'otherwise these Argentines will kill us from overwork.' 'Send a good, strong Director.' He asked him not to take Fr Cagliero away: 'Send other men for the *Indios*.' If personnel were reinforced 'we can challenge all the devils in hell.' 'The church is packed' he said; they were carrying out a truly 'missionary' activity. 'I would like to see my dear Father D. Bosco once more' was his last wish on 20 April 1877. He died on 13 June.¹⁰²

Don Bosco's first letter to Fr Cagliero was in January 1876, written after he had received his first one from America. It shows how much Don Bosco dreamed. Far from the new field of work, with insufficient perception of the difficulties of the works that had just begun there. As we have already seen, he promised to send 'Thirty Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with a dozen Salesians' in October, and added, fantasising: 'Given the serious lack of clergy in Brazil, would there not be a chance to look at the possibility of a house in Rio Janeiro?'¹⁰³ In the following letter he said he had

100 Cf. C. BRUNO, *Los salesianos y las hijas de María Auxiliadora en la Argentina*, Vol. I (1875–1894). Buenos Aires, Instituto Salesiano de Arte Gráfica 1981, pp. 48–61.

101 Cf. J. BORREGO, *Giovanni Battista Baccino. Estudio y edición de su Biografía y Epistolario*. Rome, LAS 1977.

102 J. BORREGO, *Giovanni Battista Baccino...*, pp. 380, 388, 390, 393, 394, 402–405.

103 To Fr G. Cagliero, January 1876, E III 11.

received another from Fr Cagliero and other Saelsians, among whom Fr Fagnano, director of the college at S. Nicolás de los Arroyos. He touched on the problem of 'Salesians and Sisters, gardeners etc.' whom he had to get ready. He was awaiting 'positive indications' from Fr Cagliero, and suggested a good preacher for him in a certain Fr Sammory. He then expressed regret over a letter Fr Tomatis had sent to Fr Francesia, the Rector at Varazze, sent from San Nicolás. He explained that 'in the letter he said how he was not so much in agreement with someone, and that in a short while he would be returning to Europe.' He gave Fr Cagliero the task of giving Tomatis a good lesson on missionary mentality: 'Tell him two things: 1. That a missionary must obey, suffer for the glory of God and take the greatest care to observe the vows by which he is consecrated to the Lord. 2. That when there is cause for discontent, he should tell his superior or write to me immediately so he can have guidelines on how to act.' He provided information and passed on greetings from many acquaintances in Rome and Turin, asking for news about the 'financial status'. He asked him to pass on his requests to supporters and benefactors, the archbishop, Mons. Espinosa. Fr Ceccarelli, 'papa Benítez' who was praised in Turin for his letter in perfect Latin by the people who needed to understand it.¹⁰⁴

Fr Tomatis had written his letter on 28 December, a week after arriving in the Argentine city, and without naming him, was referring to Brother Molinari, the music teacher, who had fallen out with the other six members of the community.¹⁰⁵ Don Bosco wrote once more, two days later, to tell Cagliero, the author of the *Figlio dell'esule* (The exile's son), of his great emotion a day earlier, 'yesterday' at the theatre where Cagliero's and his own play, *Disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante* (Argument between a lawyer and a Protestant minister) were performed: 'All during the singing and performance itself, I could do nothing else but think of my dear Salesians in America.'¹⁰⁶ 'Give me positive news of the material, moral and health status of our houses and individuals' he asked once more the following month from Varazze.¹⁰⁷ 'Greetings to all our dear Salesians, and tell them all: *Alter alterus onera portate et sic adimplebetis legem Christi*' he wrote two weeks later.¹⁰⁸

On 13 April, Don Bosco left the Oratory for Rome where he arrived on the 15th. Various meetings awaited him in the Roman dicasteries [Vatican Departments], but especially his active participation in a special academic event. In 1874, with a few other Salesians, he had accepted the indication to be part of the Roman literary Academy, the Arcadia, where he assumed the name Clistene Cassiopeo. Complying with this request could broaden the circle of friends of his youth activities. They had also agreed to read one of his own compositions at the Academy, and on 12 April 1876, Good Friday, he was asked to give an address on the Passion of Jesus Christ at the annual meeting of the Academy's members. As his theme, Don Bosco chose Jesus' seven last words on the cross and, assisted by Fr Durando, prepared this carefully in an appropriate style. The reading, rather lengthy and presumably all in a single session, aroused a variety of reactions and evaluations. It certainly was not his usual field of expertise, but there is no doubt Don Bosco did not overlook the hour and person he was speaking about: nothing charming, but 'a real life sharing in Jesus Christ crucified' (or alternatively, 'a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross') (Gal 3:1). There was a final, passionate exhortation to unconditional fidelity to the Church and the Pope!¹⁰⁹

104 To Fr G. Cagliero, 12 February 1876, E III 17–18.

105 Cf. D. TOMATIS, *Epistolario (1874–1903)*, ed. J. Borrego. Rome, LAS 1994, p. 60. Fr Tomatis would then be directly reprimanded by Don Bosco: Letter of 7 March 1876, E III 26–27.

106 To Fr G. Cagliero, 14 February 1876, E III 19.

107 To Fr G. Cagliero, 12 marzo 1876, E III 29.

108 To Fr G. Cagliero, 30 marzo 1876, E III 32.

109 Cf. MB XII 159–160, 170–173; 631–642 (text of the address).

Meanwhile, and not so realistic for whoever was at work on alien shores, Don Bosco continued to dream up ideas, though unable to visually calculate the lack of proportion between so much work and the qualitative and quantitative possibilities for doing it all. As a prelude, on 16 April 1876, he presented the Foreign Minister, Luigi Amedeo Melegari (1805–81), a moderate on the Left who came to power on 25 March, with a plan for setting up an Italian colony on the coastal region of Patagonia, between the 40th and 50th parallels, from the Río Negro to the Magellan Straits, where – as he believed and said – ‘no one lives, there is no port, no government with any right.’ The colony would bring together ‘the countless number of Italians eking out a struggling existence in the States of Chile, the Argentine Republic, Uruguay and Paraguay etc.’ They could find ‘Italian language, customs, government’ there.¹¹⁰ In two successive letters to the all-powerful Minister’s secretary, Giacomo Malvano (1841–1922), a Mason but favourable to Don Bosco, and to the Minister himself, he asked more practically for aid and support for the Salesians preparing to leave for South America and for the Salesian work there. He specified that ‘more than being a national effort, this work is aimed in a special way at the neediest class in society, children at risk who belong to Italian families.’¹¹¹ The political climate at the time and the role played by the two recipients meant him receiving merely a courteous and elusive reply from Malvano.

The seventeen points in a letter on 27 April 1876 to Fr Cagliari from Rome, covered a wide range of issues, but all concerning the work in Argentina and future missions, especially the establishment of Vicariates or Prefectures, ecclesiastical circumscriptions in Patagonia. At a time when there was not the least shadow of real mission. Don Bosco told him: ‘The Holy Father was greatly consoled by our Argentine mission; with me and others he praised the spirit of Catholicism always shown by the Salesians.’ ‘He has granted many privileges and spiritual favours’ to the Salesians in America. He awarded Benítez with the title of *Commendatore*, and Fr Ceccarelli with the title of *Cameriere* (in secret). He provided details on the celebration Frs Fagnano and Tommatis would need to prepare for the solemn bestowal of these honours. It seemed that the Pope also had ‘some plan’ in mind for the Archbishop of Buenos Aires – a cardinalate. Furthermore, the Pope had suggested three Apostolic Vicariates for the Salesians, one in India, another in China and yet another in Australia. Don Bosco said that he had accepted the one in India. He proposed involving Fr Cagliari in this one, thus his need to return to Europe: to open a house in Rome then go to India. He also asked him to inform him of personnel needed – Salesians and Sisters, promising to send them soon. He suggested he talk to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires about the Holy Father’s ideas of there being an opportunity for establishing the Salesians in Patagonia, the ‘basis always being colleges and hospices ‘in the vicinity of the savage tribes.’ He asked for ‘information on the financial status Towards the conclusion, he gave free reign to his fatherly instincts: ‘When you are able to speak with individual Salesians, then, tell them how much I love them in J.C., and that I pray for them every day. May they love each other, and may each do what he can to be a friend and *coram Domino* lessen any reason to quarrel or give grief to others.’¹¹²

In May 1876 in Rome, Don Bosco presented the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Franchi, with Salesian plans for Patagonia, painted in gloomy tones: it was a region no longer crowded with millions of natives; in fact, ‘whether because of the vastness of the area, the lack of inhabitants, or the fierce and gigantic stature of the latter, or the harsh climate,’ ‘neither Christianity nor civilisation had been able to penetrate until now, and no civil or ecclesiastical power had been able to extend its influence or empire over the region.’ In recent times, he added, ‘a slight dawning of hope and divine mercy’ had appeared thanks to foundations in the vicinity of cities and towns where people had begun to establish relationships. The two works in Buenos Aires and San Nicolás were a first nucleus of youth works reaching out ‘to the borders’, to be a bridge between the children educated

110 Letter of 16 April 1876, E III 43–44.

111 Letter of 12 August 1876, E III 84–86.

112 To Fr G. Cagliari, 27 April 1876, E III 51–53.

there and their 'families, and so, little by little, making inroads among the savage tribes.' It was already the beginning of 'evangelisation among the savages.' Therefore, he was asking for aid to open further works, to prepare and send personnel, purchase many of the essential material needs. Finally, he asked if an Apostolic Prefecture could be established 'for the purpose of exercising ecclesiastical authority over the Pampas and Patagonian inhabitants who for now' he said 'do not belong to any diocesan Ordinary or any civilian government regime.'¹¹³ He did note that the huge area south of the Argentine capital belonged to Archbishop Aneiros' Archdiocese. He had not allowed up till now, nor would he allow the existence of an Apostolic Vicariate in the future which did not come under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary in Buenos Aires.

Once again, he told Fr Cagliero of Pius IX's readiness 'to try out something in Patagonia and the Pampas', and of his wish (it was mainly the writer's wish!) that 'a college or hospice' be opened 'as soon as possible in Dolores,' the location south of Buenos Aires that Don Bosco mistakenly believed was close to the native tribes. He also spoke of the suggestions put to Propaganda, one of them from *Commendatore* Gazzolo, that an Apostolic Prefecture be created. He spoke of preparations for a second mission expedition and his wish that he return urgently to Turin.¹¹⁴ One month later, he announced that two certificates were coming for Benítez and Ceccarelli, and encouraged him to be in touch with the Italian ambassador in Buenos Aires, Marquis Spinola, 'a good Christian and good Catholic,' and again reminded him of the Pope's wish for Salesians to be involved with the people of the Pampas and Patagonia. Then, as a personal note, he said: 'I believe a house in Dolores would be most appropriate, another in Córdoba and also closer to the savages.' Then he told him audaciously: 'Meanwhile, this week I am writing to the Bishop of Concepción in Chile to see about some institutions over there. This is what the Lord wants from us at the moment. Houses and colleges for the poor, shelters for savages or semi-savages if we can have them. A great effort at nurturing vocations.'¹¹⁵ What personnel would achieve all this he did not say.

Don Bosco was placing much hope in local vocations, so much so that he asked Pius IX for authorisation, granted on 6 July, to open a novitiate house in South America.¹¹⁶ 'Broad faculties from Rome for opening a novitiate and studentate in America, anywhere, but *de consensu Ordinarii Diocesani* as you will see from the attached decree' he told Fr Cagliero.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, he continued to insist on the idea of extending works in various directions, and was thinking of other continents: 'Don't lose sight of Dolores' he insisted, as if Fr Cagliero had an army of Salesians at his disposal, 'and I believe it is in the interests of the Government that we open a house there, modelled on the one in Turin or S. Pier d'Arena; take this up with the archbishop of dear Mons. Ceccarelli.' Then, ever the dreamer, he continued: 'You are a musician, I am a poet by profession; so let us act in such a way that matters concerning India and Australia do not disturb matters in Argentina. Remain there until everything is set up, and following your *alta saviezza* (great wisdom), decide when you can return to Valdocco without causing problems ... Do what you can to find poor boys, but by preference, if possible, ones that come from the savages. Should it ever be possible, send some to Valdocco and I will gladly take them in.'¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, plans were being extended as far as Pacific shores. In a letter to the Bishop of Concepción in Chile, Don Bosco described the presence of the Salesians in South America, mixing reality and imagination, then his approach to evangelisation: 'Montevideo, Buenos Aires, San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Dolores already have Salesian hospices. Evangelisation through hospices

113 Memorandum, 10 May 1876, E III 58–61.

114 Letter of 30 May 1876, E III 64–65.

115 Letter of 29 June 1876, E III 68–69.

116 E III 70–71.

117 Letter of 1 August, E III 81.

118 To Fr G. Cagliero, 13 July 1876, E III 72–73.

for abandoned youth seems to be a secure and very useful approach which, if it pleases you, I would like to try to extend to lands to the west of Patagonia.' He then asked, should this plan be 'appropriate and worthy of consideration' if the Chilean Government would be in favour and supportive, and what language was spoken in the Republic.¹¹⁹

In a letter to Fr Cagliero, he returned to the topics discussed earlier, and was quite directive in view of starting up in Uruguay: 'If matters are concluded for Villa Colón, as Rector there I will send Fr Daghero or Fr Tamietti, or Fr Lasagna or Fr Belmonte ... They are all very ready.'¹²⁰ Fr Lasagna was the one chosen.¹²¹ Meanwhile, he reminded Fr Cagliero once more: "In general, always remember that God wants us to go to people in the Pampas and Patagonia, to the poor and abandoned children there. I have not yet had a reply from the archbishop [for a foundation at Dolores]; Cardinal Franchi is anxiously awaiting it, but he is comfortable with it.' He then entrusted Fr Cagliero with more jobs: 'My dear Fr Cagliero, there is so much to do! Others will write to you about other matters. Give my kindest regards to Fr Baccino and tell him I am very happy with him, and for him to keep going ... I am of the opinion that at least one of them at S. Nicolás who knows Spanish well could move to Montevideo for the planned future college.'

He floated another idea: 'If you are ever able to send a dozen or so [boys] from the Pampas or Patagonia or the like to Europe, please do.'¹²² A month later he wrote: 'Just now I have received your letter from S. Nicolás. I will set things moving. But wouldn't Fr Daghero be better than Fr Tamietti? By 15 September, I hope to be able to list personnel for Villa Colón.'¹²³ 'By 1 October you will know who and of what quality. We will have to wait until April for the Sisters.'¹²⁴ The Archbishop indicated he was available for a work at Carmen de Patagónes,¹²⁵ and Don Bosco was in touch with Fr Cagliero on 13 August, adding effusively and with pleasure: 'Around two hundred are asking to go to Patagonia. All of political and religious Italy are talking about our Patagonian project. God wants it and wants to help us do our part.'¹²⁶ Imagination gone wild!

Don Bosco sent Cardinal Franchi a lengthy note on Patagonia which he had asked for. Fr Barberis put it together, sending Don Bosco an outline and indicating sources to draw from.¹²⁷ Don Bosco used the opportunity to ask for help for the second expedition, money and items for worship, 'especially for the houses the missionaries are about to open on the border with Patagonia' and to let him know that 'vocations in S. Nicolás and Buenos Aires have already begun to show among the natives. I hope that in a few years from now, expeditions will be rare or no longer needed.'¹²⁸ He persisted with the illusion that Argentina would be like Italy for vocations.

The discussion on missions continued to expand: 'There is great excitement about going to the missions: lawyers, notaries, parish priests, teachers are asking to become Salesians *ad hoc*. Do everything you can to have experienced students or adults among the savages. If some want to do their studies or learn a trade in Europe, send them. Write to me about the visit you will make with the Archbishop to Carmen or Patagónes; tell him the Holy Father wants new experiments for the

119 Letter of 29 July 1876, E III 79–80.

120 Letter of 1 August 1876, E III 81.

121 In an earlier letter he had appointed Fr Bodrato as "Capitano Salesiano" (Salesian captain) of the second expedition (Letter of 30 May 1876, E III 65): split between Argentina and Uruguay, they would have had two different leaders.

122 To Fr G. Cagliero, 1 August 1876, E III 81–82.

123 To Fr G. Cagliero, 1 September 1876, E III 93.

124 To Fr G. Cagliero, 12 September 1876, E III 95.

125 Cf. Letter of Archbishop F. Aneiros to Don Bosco on 1 July 1876, MB XII 667–668.

126 E III 87.

127 To Fr G. Barberis, 14 May 1876, E III 61–62; Cf. J. BORREGO (Ed.), *La Patagonia e le terre australi del continente americano pel sac. Giovanni Bosco*, RSS 7 (1988) 255–442.

128 To Card. A. Franchi, 23 August 1876, E III 88–89.

savages and applauds our efforts to open houses of education on their borders, and doing everything we can to have an indigenous clergy.¹²⁹

In the following months he wrote: 'The missionaries are studying Spanish. A few have made good progress; others *secundum quid*, but after a short time studying over there, I believe they will be able to go into the classroom' as teachers. 'I do not have time to write to the others. Let them all know the news, tell them I love them in J.C., and pray a lot for them. But tell them to remain as solid as pillars and to be holy like our Patron etc.'¹³⁰

8. Activity in South America expands

Don Bosco's letter of 31 October 1876 was important for consensus on two new works in Buenos Aires and for further plans in 1877. It was written while awaiting news about Archbishop Aneiros' pastoral visit to Carmen de Patagónes, a visit that never took place: 'You will already have received my agreement for the *Bocca del diavolo* [he meant Boca parish or 'Devil's mouth'] and S. Carlo parishes.' 'In 1877 you will need to be able to make a trip to Europe and then another to *Ceilan* [Ceylon] in India to open another very important Mission,' 'so long as our beginnings in Buenos Aires are steady and in order.' 'It is essential to have a site or part of a building for a novitiate. If needed, I have a novice master ready.'¹³¹

The second expedition of Salesians to Latin America contributed much to intensifying the missionary motives, even though there were as yet no true and proper mission centres. We can discover plentiful news of the preparations from letters to Fr Cagliari. He insisted especially on asking for and getting others to ask for free travel vouchers, or for someone to finance them.¹³² He announced this in a circular on 15 August, which provided information on work thus far accomplished and the 'charitable individuals' whom he had asked for assistance.¹³³ The expedition had twenty three members led by Fr Francis Bodrato for those going to Argentina, Fr Louis Lasagna for those sent to open the new work at Villa Colón near Montevideo in Uruguay. On 4 November, he sent out the invitation to the farewell ceremony.¹³⁴

The *Diario dell'Oratorio* (Oratory Diary) kept by Frs Chiala and Lazzero had entries on 14 and 15 November summing up what had taken place: '14. D. Bosco accompanied the missionaries on board the steamship *Savoie* and had *déjeuné* with them; he was very warmly received by the ship's Captain, and in fact gave D. Bosco his portrait as a gift, showing how fortunate he felt having his missionary sons with him as far as Buenos Aires. He recalled that the year before was one of the best voyages. A salesman for Protestant bibles who began an argument with D. Bosco on board was soon thrown off at the Captain's stern command. 15. The caravan of missionaries bound for Montevideo left from S. Pier d'Arena. They arrived in Bordeaux. They thought they were leaving at 20.11 on the steamship *Orenoch*, but this departed at 18.00, and they did not arrive in time. They had to remain there until 2.12.76. They stayed at the city's main seminary.'¹³⁵

In his November 14 letter, Don Bosco gave some directions to Fr Cagliari on distribution of personnel led by Fr Bodrato, and recommended: 'In assigning personnel to each house, see that the members of that house are brought together and read the reminders from the year before with

129 From Lanzo to Fr G. Cagliari, 12 September 1876, E III 95.

130 From Vignale to Fr G. Cagliari, 13 October 1876, E III 103–104.

131 To Fr G. Cagliari, 31 October 1876, E III 107.

132 Cf. Letter to Fr G. Cagliari, 30 May, 29 June, 13 July, 1 and 13 August, 1 September, 13 October, E III 65, 68–69, 72–73, 81–82, 87, 92–93, 103–104; To Comm. G. Malvano, 12 October 1876, E III 101–102, etc.

133 E III 89–91.

134 E III 108.

135 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 49.

some words from yourself.' 'Among things to keep in mind are a house or site for a novitiate and studentate. Do whatever you can to have some natives educated in the sense of a clerical vocation. If you need a good novice master, I will send you one.' He also asked for some interesting information on Fr Ceccarelli: 'Who knows but he might know some English.' The reason for wondering this had been revealed a few lines earlier: 'I have definitely accepted the Vicariate in India and we will go there in 1878. The Holy Father told me to begin arranging for someone he could choose as bishop for the new Mission.'¹³⁶

Hardly two days had gone by when he sent another letter. Given that *Commendatore* Gazzolo – whom he described as *ajassin* [a Piedmontese term meaning a corn on the foot] – had been with the Salesians bound for Uruguay as far as Bordeaux, he once again took up the strictly missionary theme: 'The Holy Father is pining for the Pampas and Patagonia, and is ready to help us including with material means if we need them. For the rest, we will be in touch. *Son mes ciouc* [I feel half drunk], but that doesn't matter. God will help us, and everything will proceed in such a way that the profane will say it smacks of magic, and we will say it is miraculous.'¹³⁷

The following day, he sent the Apostolic Delegate in Uruguay, Mons. Giacinto Vera, who later became Bishop of Montevideo, a letter of presentation of the group of Salesians who had gone 'to begin the *Collegio Pio* founded by his charity and zeal.' He manifested his intention of 'opening a house for young artisans as well, and as part of the expedition for this purpose, there are also some trade teachers who can lend their efforts; but Fr Cagliero will see to the possibilities for this.'¹³⁸

On 22 November, he turned to the Secretary of Propaganda Fide whom the Prefect of the Congregation had indicated as the point of reference for attending to matters regarding the 'Salesian missionaries in America,' for asking that faculties granted the Salesians in Argentina be extended to those who had left for Uruguay and, in general, 'to all Salesians who had left for the foreign missions.' He also asked for furniture and worship items for the five churches attached to Salesian works in Latin America, including the one in Montevideo.¹³⁹ Further on, he wrote to Fr Cagliero about vocations flowing into the Congregation to cover the gaps left by those who had gone to South America, once again mentioning India, and speaking of negotiations for *Commendatore* Gazzolo to buy land adjacent to the *Mater Misericordia* church, the 'Italian church'.

But Don Bosco was rather disappointed in Gazzolo: 'I can tell you that *Commendatore* Gazzolo's star is on the wane. It used be very bright.'¹⁴⁰ There was no lack of reasons for this. The above-mentioned land negotiations failed, due to the able speculator's excessive demands. We know this from interesting passages in letters Don Bosco wrote to Cagliero from Turin: 'I have not yet been able to speak with Consul Gazzolo about his land,' he wrote on 31 December. 'I hope he wants to sell as soon as possible. I will send a reply 15 January next.'¹⁴¹ 'I have not yet been able to finalise the cost of the site' he said on 14 January 1877. 'I hope it can be done at the beginning of February.' 'The Consul seems well disposed but he is Genoese and takes a long time over business matters.'¹⁴² Around mid-February he said disappointingly: 'After a week of calculations and talk, *Commendatore* Gazzolo has lowered his demands to f. 60,000 for his seven hundred metres of land ... it is our understanding that he will limit himself to this price as a favour.' 'When I told him of your price of f. 18,000 he was surprised, saying: "This is barely the price I paid when I

136 To Fr G. Cagliero, da Sampierdarena 14 November 1876, E III 111–113.

137 To Fr G. Cagliero, da Sampierdarena, 16 November 1876, E III 113–114.

138 Letter of 17 November 1876, E III 114–115.

139 Letter of 22 November 1876, E III 118–119.

140 To Fr G. Cagliero, 30 November 1876, E III 121–122.

141 To Fr G. Cagliero, 31 December 1876, E III 129.

142 To Fr G. Cagliero, 14 January 1877, E III 141. as for the "countries bordering on the savages" and what follows, see what is said about the *Expedición al Desierto*, Cf. Chap. 2, § 8.

bought it.” As you can see, he paid 19,000, and as a favour to us he is now giving it to us for 60,000 [the difference of 56,791 and 189,302 euro respectively!] Ah! *Rogno! Rogno!* [What a bother this is].¹⁴³

While awaiting Fr Cagliari’s return, letters were rare, but Don Bosco’s active and keen presence was constant, with Cagliari and others. On 1 January 1877, he had asked Fr Rua to bring the tutor at Pamparato house a translation in Spanish of the *Giovane Provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) adapted for use in Latin America, for a final check before printing it.¹⁴⁴ A few days later, he offered a more concrete projection of his thoughts and plans for Brazil. He said he was happy that the recipient of one of his letters, Mr Andrea Boassi, was ‘in friendly contact with D. Pedro and his wife, the Empress of Brazil,’ adding: ‘If it is convenient, suggest we have one of our houses in that vast empire. I believe many poor children will become good citizens. Otherwise they will end up in prison. But be prudent in everything.’¹⁴⁵

Laden with future potential was one plan in particular which Don Bosco presented Fr Cagliari with on the 14th. There was no lack of imagination in what he presented on the basis of two suggestions from the Pope (or which he put to the Pope and were accepted?): ‘An Apostolic Vicariate in Patagonia, e.g. at Carmen or S. Cruz, or Puntarenas or even better, just one Vicariate covering all three?’ He could begin ‘with a house of education and seminary in Carmen, also known as Patagónes, and Concepción.’ Finance would be provided by Propaganda, the Work of the Propagation of the Faith, the Pope, the Salesian Society. He continued: ‘And personnel? It all has to be flour from our own sack; and among other things, my thoughts are to invite Mons. Ceccarelli to head up this enterprise, so speak with him directly. It is true that he should be consecrated bishop, but he could keep the parish. Get one or two Salesians to take his place in S. Nicolás. And for Fr Cagliari, *quid?* To India. For the beginning of 1878 we are going to take on the Apostolic Vicariate of Mangalore in India with about three thousand souls. So Cardinal Franchi tells me. Fr Cagliari Vicar Apostolic, Fr Bologna his Vicar General etc. etc. Between the individuals already there and others we are preparing, there will be [sufficient] personnel. Six Salesians can easily be prepared for Patagonia, ten priests and ten catechists for India. God will do the rest!’ He left Fr Cagliari and his helpers to ‘weave the cloth.’

Don Bosco returned to the topic of Patagonia in the postscript, telling him that Archbishop Cesare Roncetti (1834–81), appointed on 18 July 1876 as Apostolic Nuncio in Brazil and Apostolic Delegate for Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile (1876–79), would be passing through Buenos Aires, where he would ‘also negotiate with the Archbishop on the possibility of going to the Pampas and Patagonia.’ He noted: ‘He is kind to us and I have sown the seed, which is why he was chosen for this mission ... On his return, he will be made Cardinal, something he is unaware of, and when you see him you can let him know.’¹⁴⁶ This prediction was destined to fail. Roncetti completed his diplomatic career at the Nunciature in Bavaria (1879–81).

Don Bosco dedicated a small poem on the back of his letter on 22 January 1877 to Fr Bologna, ‘Vicar General *in pectore*’:

Il Ceilan è preparato

Mangalor ansiosa attended Ognun prega e il braccio tende;

Vieni presto ai lidi tuoi.

Porta teco lunga schiera

143 To Fr G. Cagliari, 13 February 1877, E III 149–150.

144 E III 133.

145 E III 136; Cf. Chap. 8, § 8.

146 To Fr G. Cagliari, 14 January 1877, E III 140–141.

Dei seguaci del Saverio.

Anche a voi l'istesso imperio

*Dio pietoso destinò.*¹⁴⁷

[A recast rather than a literal translation in English might be along the following lines:

Ceylon is set and ready Mangalore

In prayer with arms outstretched:

Come quickly, come, and reach the shore;

bring multitudes unending

Of those who come as Xavier came To share, as God has willed,

An empire great that bears His name –

His Kingdom now fulfilled].

In a following letter, Don Bosco thanked Fr Cagliero for a substantial cheque he had sent from Fr Fagnano, the Rector at S. Nicolás, and recommended careful administration of the 'charity of well-off faithful' in Montevideo. He then proposed the problem of Patagonia once more, asking him to be in touch with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires to inform him that 'the Holy Father wants to do something for Patagonia'; 'The Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide' he said 'will write to him perhaps with the same courier about the convenience of establishing an Apostolic Prefecture at Carmen.' 'The Holy Father is especially moved by news received from countries bordering on the savages, like the Argentine Republic, Chile etc., intent more on fighting and destroying the savages than on converting them!

He then turned his gaze in several directions with projects that were certainly disproportionate to available forces and tasks already undertaken, but not his imagination as believer and 'creator': 'If they make a formal request for missionaries in Brazil or Paraguay, you may accept on these two conditions: 1. Help with the many costs we have already contracted and have to manage on a daily basis. 2. For 1878.' As if that were not enough: 'The Holy Father is suggesting an Apostolic Vicariate in India, and another in Australia. For now, I have accepted an expedition to Ceylon in 1878.' He reminded him in the postscript: 'It would be good for you to send me names of Cooperators.'¹⁴⁸

He also dealt with issues internal to the communities over there: 'Also prepare for the ordinations of clerics Allavena and Rizzo: in time, you will have the dimissorials and faculties you want. But remember, you have the faculty to issue dimissorials. If you can, send a report on the state of the Congregation in South America, and I will have it brought to the Holy Father for his episcopal jubilee, which has all of Europe and America excited. It will be possible for you to take part in the General Chapter, which should commence at the beginning of next September. It should deal with and resolve some very important matters; so look, observe and tell me *si fieri potest*.'¹⁴⁹

However, Fr Cagliero had warned him: 'With regard to Patagonia, there is no need to go at the speed of electricity.' Both he and Fr Fagnano were critical of the undue publicity and its

147 E III 147.

148 To Fr G. Cagliero, 13 February 1877, E III 149–150.

149 To Fr G. Cagliero, 31 marzo 1877, E III 162.

importunate nature in Italy, both in spoken word and in writing regarding what the Salesians were achieving in Argentina.¹⁵⁰ Hearing that the Argentine Government had asked the Salesians for a parish priest, teacher and two lay teachers for Carhué, on of the centres set up towards the Cordigliera near the natives, Don Bosco reacted with moderate encouragement: ‘What you write about Patagonia is in accordance with my wishes: approach it a little at a time and thanks to opening houses in cities and towns closer to the savages, the Lord will do the rest.’ As for observations on the indiscreet publicity in Europe, he replied: ‘I know too much is said about us, but what can we do? I have always removed things that seemed to redound to our glory and modified what referred to others. However, if you can send me a report on the South American missionaries, send it to me and I will put things right.’ And then: ‘You will receive the dimissorials and, if needs be, you or Fr Bodrato can issue them. I have begun procedures for travel on French ships. The President for the Society of Maritime Transport, Mr Bergasse from Marseilles, has promised us considerable reductions. Perhaps the Government in Paris will give us some completely free berths. Once these arrangements are complete, I will quickly let you know.’ Finally, he offered a surprising item of counter-information: ‘In view of the number of houses we are opening and arranging personnel for, on your return, the *Ceilan, Mangalore, Australia etc.* projects are suspended. But I am not losing sight of a dozen good sheep to send to *Doilores* if you tell me they are needed.’¹⁵¹

Two letters then followed, one to Fr Francis Bodrato in charge of Argentina and soon to be Provincial of all the American works, the other to the venerable Benítez at San Nicolás de los Arroyos. ‘You tell me you have so much to do’ he wrote to Fr Bodrato who, more than Cagliero, felt the dramatic inadequacy of personnel available, and not just in quantity. ‘I know I would like to be able to help you. Perhaps it could console you to know that we are snowed under with so many things here that we don’t know where to start or finish any more. For a number of months, now, I have sat at my desk from 2 in the afternoon, only to get up from it at 8.30 to go to supper. Just the same, he reminded him that ‘health is essential’ and invited him to do only what was possible. Support was not lacking: ‘You will have help with the workers we will send from here and those you have there.’¹⁵² He replied to Benítez, who was a fine Latin scholar, in Latin, naturally thanking him and at the same time asking for help, always stressing the *si poteris*. ‘*Vivite et vale, anima electa, amice fidelis, Deus te sospitem diutissime servet in annos plurimos.*’¹⁵³

Finally, a last letter arrived for Fr Cagliero about returning to Europe. First of all, he told him of trips within Italy with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Archbishop Aneiros, and following that, to Rome, then staying in Turin from 26–30 June, the festivities at Valdocco, then indicating departure from Italy on 14 July.¹⁵⁴ He continued to speak of Salesian America: ‘Just between us. I wrote telling you to go to S. Cruz. This is only my idea but if, *pensatis pensandis*, it seems better to put this off till later, *fiat sicut melius in Domino placuerit*. We have the personnel; since the school year is coming to an end, and if nothing blocks the way, the departure can be delayed as usual until 14 November next. If necessary we can anticipate the departure and we can adjust somehow. Read the letter to Marquis Spinola, then put it in an envelope and bring it ... What I am writing to you, I am also writing to Fr Bodrato and the others. For the Archbishop’s departure, we will prepare letters and other items. Bishop Lacerda from Rio Janeiro will pass through here next week, and will not leave without at least having five Salesians with him.’¹⁵⁵

150 Cf. A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Patagonia: I – Realtà e mito nell’azione missionaria salesiana. Il vicariato apostolico della Patagonia Settentrionale*, RSS 14 (1995) 17 e n. 24.

151 To Fr G. Cagliero, 12 May 1877, E III 170–171.

152 To Fr F. Bodrato, May 1877, E III 172–173.

153 Letter of 14 May 1877, E III 174.

154 Cf. Chap. 25, § 1.

155 Letter to Fr G. Cagliero, 30 June 1877, E III 194–195. He also informed Fr Lasagna of Aneiros’ visit, letter of 16 July 1877, E III 199.

Preparations for Archbishop Aneiros' visit are worthy of note. Don Bosco had his most trustworthy men help organise it – Fr Francesia's inspiration,¹⁵⁶ Fr Rua's organising talent,¹⁵⁷ faithful assistance from his secretary, Fr Berto to prepare a special gift for the Argentines: 'A box or two of bottles for the Archbishop of Buenos Aires: Bordeaux, Malaga, Barbera, Grignolino, Nebbiolo, Moscata di Strevi; 15–20 bottles in all. In order to make the origins of the wine even better, we can give it a rather ancient date, thanks to a vineyard. Get this box ready and it will be sent to Genoa at my indication.'¹⁵⁸

Ten days later, he also wrote to Fr Lasagna in Uruguay. He gave him some rules for governing: 'Prayer, steadfastness, courage, advice. However, do not forget the story of Fr Ubique and the magic box ... see everything with your own eyes, go to each place, speak with all who depend on you. This is the key for everything to go well. It was what '*Don Dappertutto*' [Fr Everywhere] did when he opened the magic box and found written: 'The owner's eye makes the horse grow fat.'¹⁵⁹

There was no stopping his future planning. While, in Buenos Aires, they were working within the limits of the impossible due to a chronic lack of men, and not only in terms of quantity, here was Don Bosco heading off in all directions over the vast areas of Latin America, north, south, north–east: a reckless and courageous conqueror. He was backed by the tireless, mature Fr Bodrato and the young, imaginative, far–seeing Fr Lasagna.

156 Letter to the Rector at Varazze, 13 June 1877, E III 186.

157 Letter of 20 and 24 June 1877, E III 192–193; Cf. letter of 7 July, E III 196.

158 Letter from Alassio, 7 July 1877, E III 196.

159 Letter of 16 July 1877, E III 199.

Chapter 22

A Catholic solidarity project in the mission to young people (1873–77)

- 1854 Introduction to a *Piano di regolamento per l'Oratorio* (Draft Regulations for the Oratory).
- 1872/74 *Associati alla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales* (Salesian 'Associates').
- 1874 *Unione Cristiana* (Christian Union).
- 1876 *Cooperatori ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume e alla civile società*. (Cooperators, or a practical way of helping good behaviour and civil society);
9 May: Pius IX grants many indulgences to the *Unio seu Sodalitas Cooperatorum Salesianorum*. (Salesian Cooperators Union or Sodality).
- 1877 Final text of the *Cooperati Salesiani con il Regolamento dei Cooperatori Salesiani* (Salesian Cooperators and their Regulations):
August/September: 1st issue of the *Bibliofilo Cattolico* (Catholic Book lover) or *Bollettino Salesiano mensile* (Monthly Salesian Bulletin).
- 1878 January: definitive title: *Bollettino Salesiano*.
- 1879 January: first of Don Bosco's annual open letters to Salesian Cooperators in the *Bollettino*.

Along with the missionary initiative, another kind of extension of his work among youth was maturing. He wanted a potentially unlimited army of men and women to be part of this work in organised form. They needed a generous faith for evangelising and civilising without the need to profess religious vows or choose common life. They needed to be men and women of good will, convinced of their decisive effect on the personal and social destiny of the young, on their cultural, professional, moral and religious development. It was not a complete novelty, since as a priest for young people, Don Bosco had never lacked the cooperation of clergy and laity. What was new was the proposal to enable their activity through the opportunity to belong to an *Association* or *Union*, properly structured within the Church allowing them to be in some way 'aggregated' to the fully approved Salesian Society.

The idea in its final shape, established in documentation in 1876–76, following the initial efforts in 1873–75 with variations in 1876, represented the full maturing of intuitions and concepts emerging from various forms of spontaneous or deliberate cooperation going back to the early oratory experiences in the 1840s and 1850s. These were distant ideals or real roots of an initiative which gave its adherents a precise institutional configuration: 'Salesian' (legally) 'almost a third order' (spiritually) 'workers', even though in 1876 Don Bosco presented the Union as a quasi-homogeneous development of an aggregation of collaborators which was already formally established early in the 1840s.¹ This was the *Storia dei Cooperati Salesiani* (History of the Salesian

1 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno storico"...*, RSS 6 (1987) 254–258.

Cooperators) he offered a summary of in the September issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. He put together, almost synchronously, very many different kinds of helpers starting from 1841.² His Salesian Cooperators' came from the very same mental framework that led him to locate the origins of the Oratory and the Salesian Society back in 1841.

1. Projects which were glimpsed or just broadly drafted

In his 1854 *Introduction* to the *Piano di regolamento per l'Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales* (Draft regulations for the boys' Oratory of St Francis de Sales) Don Bosco expressed the hope that the regulations would 'serve as a norm for administering this part of the sacred ministry and as a guide for the good number of clergy and laity who dedicate their efforts to it with charitable concern.'³ In fact, he loved to recall the considerable number of lay and clerical helpers there had been.⁴ The gradual expansion of collaboration, first of clerics for the pastoral care of young oratory boys, then lay men for Sunday and night classes, catechism and assistance, and women for mending garments of boys at the hospice, and of so many others offering financial support, was something Don Bosco recalled at the first Cooperators' Assembly in Turin on the afternoon of May 16, 1878.⁵ It was an ideal mobilisation of pastors of souls, parish priests in the cities and towns, teachers, fathers of families, everyone who had at heart the religious betterment of the people Don Bosco had tried to bring about through the *Amico della gioventù* (The friend of youth).⁶ Very similar was the small army of correspondents and propagandists he had organised and encouraged to spread the *Lecture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings),⁷ and membership of the Society for disseminating good books, planned in 1859 and 1866 with identical aims to those then proposed for the Cooperators.⁸ Then there were temporary groups such as members of lottery commissions and promoters. We should not exclude the idea that Don Bosco had nurtured the idea of a congregation or association of some kind, with different levels of membership, of regular workers for the work of the oratories, including hostels for workers.⁹ The boys he had captivated in a special way between 1849–57 and who took the soutane at some point, could probably have been seen as a platform for this.¹⁰

In the 1860s when the congregation or association was by then thought of as a Religious Society, a distinction was enforced between internal members, or religious true and proper, and other members. In reality, at the time of the first request for approval of the Society in 1864, the text of the Constitutions had a final section on *Extern members*. It comprised four articles: 1. Any individual living in the world, in his own home, within his own family, can belong to our Society. 2. He takes no vow but will endeavour to put into practice that part of the Rule compatible with his age and circumstances.' And in a draft written between 1862 and 1864 Don Bosco added: 'Such as teaching or promoting catechism class for poor children, making the effort to spread good books, helping organise triduum, novenas, retreats and other similar works of charity aimed especially at the spiritual good of youth or ordinary people.' 3. To participate in the spiritual goods of the Society one needs to at least make a promise to the Rector to use his energies and means in a way he

2 Cf. BS 3 (1877) no. 6, September, pp. 1–2.

3 [G. BOSCO], *Introduzione al Piano di Regolamento per l'Oratorio maschile di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino nella regione Valdocco*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 36–37.

4 Cf. Chap. 7, § 1.

5 Cf. G. BARBERIS, Cronichetta, quad. 13, pp. 48–52.

6 È parte del *Programma messo a capo* del 1° numero, del 21 October 1848; cf. circolare di January 1849, Em I 83.

7 Cf. Chap. 8, § 7.

8 Cf. circular of 6 March 1860, Em I 397; MB VI 487–489; cf. Chap. 9, § 6.

9 Cf. Chap. 6, § 5.2.

10 Cf. Chap. 11, § 6.

judges to be for the greater glory of God. 4. Such a promise, however, does not oblige under pain of sin, not even venial sin.'

In the second draft of the text, Don Bosco added a fifth article: 'Every member of the Society who leaves it for some reasonable motive is considered to be an extern member and can still participate in the spiritual goods of the Society, so long as he practices that part of the regulations prescribed for extern members.'¹¹ The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars adopted the observations of Fr Savini, the Consultor, including the comment referring to the last item: 'There is no approval of external individuals enrolling in the Pious Institute by affiliation.'¹² In his counter-observations, Don Bosco asked this section to be approved at least as an appendix since, he noted, 'almost all Congregations and Religious Orders have tertiaries, and we call people friends and benefactors when they aspire to a holier life particularly by promoting the good of the Society and seek to observe the religious constitutions in the world as far as possible.'¹³ In fact, the section with the first four articles did become part of the printed Latin text in 1867 as an appendix. In 1869, when the King's Procurator in Turin, Lorenza Eula, demanded the royal *exequatur* for civil recognition of the decree of approval of the Salesian Society on 1 March (and this was neither useful nor desired), Don Bosco replied that the Society was made up of 'individuals who preserve their civil rights.' Furthermore, 'its members can live at home and work from there, if they wish, to take poor youngsters off the streets and piazzas in order to guide them in good behaviour and set them on the path to some skill or trade.'¹⁴ Further on, although the Consultor, Fr Bianchi, confirmed the earlier negative response,¹⁵ Don Bosco kept the text in the January 1874 edition.¹⁶ Faced with insurmountable barriers he removed it from the last printed edition in March 1874 before it was approved.

This was the most evident prehistory or proto-history of what would become the *Association* or *Union of Salesian Cooperators* as it would be when formally established. As we have seen, only two 'extern members' as such are known of: Fr Ciattino, parish priest of Maretto in the province and diocese of Asti, and Fr Domenico Pestarino from Mornese, though the date this latter became a Salesian Religious is imprecise.¹⁷

There was, instead, a huge band of people working beside Don Bosco. Known and unknown, remembered or otherwise, without them his activity, based entirely on charity, would have remained a castle of good intentions, a soul without a body, and we are not only talking of financial support but of involving mind, heart and action. Hence we find expressed, to varying degrees, the various dimensions of collaboration which Don Bosco would see fully embodied in the Cooperator.¹⁸ A year earlier, on 30 July 1875, Pius IX granted specific indulgences to the Cooperators, giving the Superior General of the Salesian Society the faculty *pro-tempore* 'of communicating the indulgences and graces granted the Society to outstanding benefactors of the

11 *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 210.

12 *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 231.

13 *Cost. SDB* (Motto), pp. 233–234.

14 Letter of 10 June 1869, Em III 96.

15 Cf. *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 242.

16 *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*. Romae, Typis S. C. Propagandae Fide 1874, p. 40, OE XXV 292.

17 Cf. *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1875*. Turin, tip. dell'Orat. di s. Franc. di Sales 1875, pp. 31–36; *Brevi biografie dei confratelli salesiani chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna*. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1876, pp. 17–22. "Having heard D. Bosco, he wanted to meet him; with this in mind he came to Turin in 1862. He was so enamoured by the spirit of the Salesian Congregation that he immediately wanted to give his name to it, beginning to practise its rules. Gradually he dedicated himself entirely to this Congregation and was one of its exemplary confreres. The Superior, to whom he gave unconditional obedience, in view of the great good he was doing in the world, wanted him to continue to live in his hometown" (p. 20).

18 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 217–218.

Society, *no differently than if they were Tertiaries*.¹⁹ It was a prelude to indulgences granted on 9 May 1870 to the *Association or Union of Salesian Collaborators* and the 'qualification as tertiaries often given them.' This description was then illustrated in the *Bollettino Salesiano* almost as a comment on Leo XIII's Encyclical *Auspicato concessum* on 17 September 1882 on the Franciscan Third Order.²⁰

2. Towards a quasi Third Order

On 19 February 1876, Fr Barberis noted that Don Bosco had told him about a project he had had in mind for years: 'Now these schools are pretty much organised, I am working on another also very important idea: a Salesian association. I have been thinking about it for some time; it is quite difficult to set up things like this. I have been working at it for some years. Now that the work of Mary Help of Christians seems to be established I will work on this one and it will be made public before the end of the year. It will take two years to consolidate it. I have already worked on another project that I will bring to maturity over these two years and, when the Salesian Association is consolidated I will make that public.'

The Chronicler noted: 'He has already spoken of this Salesian Association on other occasions, especially last year, but it seems that in speaking to me about it now he has given it a slightly different title that is not 'association' but I can't remember what he called it.' 'The other project,' Don Bosco went on 'would be to set up what I would almost call a Third Order for women, not aggregated directly to our Order but associated with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.'²¹ The schools or classes he referred to as pretty much set up were the ones aimed at adult vocations. This was the work of Mary Help of Christians. They were also known as 'focus' schools because they followed a more focused and rapid curriculum. Their students were also called 'Sons of Mary'.

The early notion of Cooperators was entrusted to five pages of an exercise book and a separate sheet which, given content and references, can be dated to around 1873. The material was entitled *Associati alla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales* (Associates of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales).²² The project drew its inspiration from the figures of the 'faithful Christian in the world' desirous of 'achieving perfection and ensuring his salvation' and not prepared for various reasons to distance himself from the world. 'The pious association of St Francis de Sales 'offered a threefold opportunity: 1. 'A means of perfection' 2. Participation 'in the works of piety and religion' of Salesian members. 3. The meritorious 'union in doing good'. Don Bosco was enunciating ideas that would remain a fundamental motive of inspiration for Christian and Salesian cooperation, one that was familiar, besides, from the years of dissemination of the *Letture Cattoliche*. 'It is a fact' he wrote 'that only worldly men come together to spread bad press, sow evil ideas in the world, associate in order to propagate erroneous instruction among immature youth, and they succeed marvellously at it. And will Catholics remain inactive or apart in such a way that their works are paralysed by bad people? Never. Let us all unite under the rules of the Salesian Congregation, let us be of one heart and soul with external associates [members]. Let us to be true confreres. Let the good of one be the good of all, and what is bad for one be kept away as bad for all. We will

19 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I...*, pp. 217–218.

20 Cf. *I terziarii di S. Francesco d'Assisi e i Cooperatori salesiani*, BS 6 (1882) no. 12, December, pp. 189–192.

21 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, pp. 81–82.

22 The text was published by A. Amadei in the MB X 1310–1314 and republished with indication of variants by Francis Desramaut, spanning documents concerning the Cooperators written by Don Bosco between 1873 and 1876, in F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea*. Friburg (Switzerland) 26–29 August 1974, "Colloqui salesiani", 6. Leumann–Turin, Elle Di Ci 1975, pp. 355–359; mss of a number of redactions, ASC A 220.

certainly obtain this grand purpose thanks to association with the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.²³ The entire section from 'It is a fact ... confreres' was followed by an expression which was crossed out but which would then be picked up as the key motivation for documents to follow: '*Vis unita fortiori, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur* says the Lord, meaning that forces united are stronger, and though one string on its own breaks easily, it will be difficult to break when many pieces of string are entwined to make a rope.'

The activities proposed under the heading *Purpose of the Association* were similar to the ones listed in the first chapter of the Salesian Constitutions: (1. To benefit oneself by practising charity on behalf of one's neighbour, especially poor and abandoned children ... 2. To bring poor children together, instructing them at home, advising them of risks, taking them to where they can be instructed in the Faith ... Whoever cannot do these things himself can do then through others, such as by inviting or advising a companion, relative, friend or acquaintance to do what he or she can. Or one could equally make up by praying for those who are working or by providing material support where there is need.' 3. To be concerned with 'assisting poor boys especially ones who show' they have a clerical vocation. 4. To take 'great care in preventing any conversation, every word contrary to the Roman Pontiff or his supreme authority.' 5. The Salesians [sic] will make every effort to prevent distribution of bad books and spread good books, news sheets, printed papers of any kind.²⁴ Similarly, the life of piety and religious practice laid down in the lengthy section under *Rules for Salesian associates* was not so different from those prescribed for Salesian religious.²⁵

Not so relevant was a simple handwritten draft of Don Bosco's the *Union of St Francis de Sales* written either just before or after the *Christian Union*. Its aim was 'to bring some boys or clerical individuals together to be involved in those things which for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. The means will be zeal for the glory of God, and active charity.' 'No branch of knowledge will be neglected.' As for members, the statement was laconic: 'Every faithful Christian can be a member of the Union so long as he or she is determined to be involved in the purpose and means mentioned above.'²⁶

This project, less capable of assimilating the religious tone of the preceding one, was a forerunner to documents following where the evident active and functional character of cooperation presumed acceptance of the core principle: *vis unita fortior* This was immediately made clear in the first printed set of regulations for the Christian Union in 1874, which was the result of a more focused and structured reformulation of the content of the *Associati alla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*.²⁷ It began by stating '*Vis unita fortior*, God says.'²⁸ The second heading, with the more precise '*Associazione salesiana*' replaced the more generic heading. The definition, though not quite exact in historical terms, expressed ideas that were well rooted in Don Bosco and would remain so steadfastly into the future. The Association it said 'Could be called a kind of Third Order with ancient roots with this one difference, that in the traditional ones Christian perfection was proposed through the exercise of piety, but here it is the active life which is the principal aim, especially when it is on behalf of youth at risk.'²⁹ The purposes were identical to those described in the *Associati* ... but reduced from five to three, more focused and enriched; 'The first duty of an associate is charity to youth at risk, bringing them together, instructing them in the Faith, advising them of risks or taking them to where they can be instructed.' 'It is also a task of the Association to

23 F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea...*, p. 355.

24 F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea...*, pp. 356–357.

25 F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea...*, pp. 357–359.

26 Cf. original handwritten ms. Of Don Bosco, ASC A 2300401; MB X 1309.

27 Cf. *Unione cristiana*. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di s. Franc. di Sales 1874, 8 p., OE XXV 403–410.

28 *Unione cristiana...*, p. 1, OE XXV 403. The expression is not found in the Bible; "funiculus triplex" is in Qo. 4, 12.

29 *Unione cristiana...*, p. 2, OE XXV 404.

promote novenas, triduums, retreats and catechism lessons especially in places that lack material and moral means.' Secondly, 'each one will take special care of these youngsters whose behaviour and attitude to study shows some indication they have been called.' And finally, 'counteract irreligious press with good press by working to disseminate good books, cards, news sheets, printed material of any kind in places and among people where it seems prudent to offer them.'³⁰ The *Constitutions and government of the Christian Union* was a more sensitive title than *Rules for Salesians associates* in the *Associati ...* document. The *Rules for Salesian associates* had many prayer commitments, whereas the *Christian Union* was more interested in the organisational aspect of the association. Acceptance conditions were also different. The '*Rules*' said: 'Anyone can enrol in this Association so long as he or she is sixteen years old, of honourable conduct, a good Catholic, obedient to the Church and the Roman Pontiff.' The *Unione Cristiana* said: 'Whoever has turned sixteen can enrol in this Association so long as he or she conforms to the rules it proposes.'³¹

The document entitled *Associazione di opera buone* (Association for good works) was somewhat more systematic and led to the pretty much final 1876 version. It was almost a 'Salesian' summary, modelled on the Society Don Bosco founded but with earlier headings and content. There were eight headings: 1. *Christian union for doing good works*. 2. *Salesian Congregation*. 3. *Salesian Association*. 4. *Ways of cooperating*. 5. *Constitutions and government of the Association*. 6. *Particular obligations*. 7. *Benefits*. 8. *Religious practices*.³² It expressed the essential features of the Salesian Cooperator: 1) the explicit connection with the Christian vocation as lived in an exemplary way by the early Church through a real union 'in the spirit of prayer, charity and zeal.' 2) taking on tasks which substituted for and added to activity by the Salesians and were capable of responding 'at least minimally to need and daily requests made of them' in Italy, Europe, China, Australia, America 'and notably in the Argentine Republic.' It explained that 'the poor Salesians cannot meet so many urgent needs and therefore while they do what they can for their part, they turn to people who love our holy Catholic religion and the salvation of souls and invite them, indeed beg them out of love for Our Lord Jesus Christ to give a hand and cooperate with them in special works of charity which are the purposes of this Congregation.' 3) the strong connection with the Salesian Society 'as a stable bond of union' further guaranteed by the fact that it had become a 'pious Institute' definitely approved by the Church.³³ 4) the related 'third order' character of a predominantly active nature which differentiates it from the ancient Third Orders. It was expressed through charity to one's neighbours especially youth at risk, 'the particular aim of the Association.'³⁴ 5) the 'different ways of cooperating' substantially the same as those indicated in the *Christian Union*: promoting novenas, triduums, catechism classes etc. taking special care of youngsters inclined to clerical life, counteracting irreligious press with good press, 'and finally' summing up the predominantly youthful aim, 'the harvest where every member is invited to exercise his or her zeal:charity to youth at risk, bringing them together, instructing them in Faith, involving them in sacred ceremonies, advising them of risks, taking them to where they can be instructed in Religion.' It suggested that 'whoever cannot do these things himself can do them through others, such as by encouraging a relative, a friend to do them. One can cooperate through prayer or by providing material means where there is a need. The early faithful laid their goods at

30 *Unione cristiana...*, pp. 2–3, OE XXV 404–405; cf. *Associati alla Congregazione...*, in F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea...*, pp. 356–357.

31 *Associati alla Congregazione...*, in F. DESRAMAUT and M. MIDALI (eds), *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea...*, p. 356; *Unione cristiana...*, p. 3, OE XXV 405: duties of prayer are briefly listed under the heading *Pratiche religiose*, pp. 6–7, OE XXV 408–409.

32 Cf. *Associazione di opere buone*. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di s. Franc. di Sales 1875, 14 p., OE XXV 481–494.

33 *Associazione di opere buone...*, pp. 3–5, OE XXV 483–485.

34 *Associazione di opere buone...*, p. 6, OE XXV 486.

the feet of the Apostles to be used for widows, orphans and other serious needs.³⁵ 6) the conditions for belonging were taken literally from the *Christian Union* modifying only the manner of belonging. The *Christian Union* presented a *Formula of acceptance* in which the candidates declared: 'The undersigned has read the rules of the *Salesian Association* and willingly subscribes to them, both for the good of his own soul and to associate with others in order to achieve the spiritual and temporal benefits for his neighbour that are compatible with his circumstances.' He then signed this with name and surname.³⁶ For the *Association of good works* the approach was even simpler: 'Each member will fill out the following form and will send it to the Superior after signing it: I, the undersigned, living inStreet, No Have read the rules of the Salesian Association and with divine grace I hope to observe them faithfully for the benefit of my soul.'³⁷ This remained almost unaltered in the first edition in 1876 and was made more formal in the following 1876/77 editions by a 'Declaration of acceptance among the Salesian Cooperators. The undersigned states that on theday of.... 187... Mrwas listed among the Salesian Cooperators and as a consequence will in future enjoy all the favours, indulgences and spiritual favours granted by the Supreme Pontiff to those who are part of this Association and observe its rules.'³⁸ In practice, nevertheless, Don Bosco was generous in fostering membership of the grand family of Cooperators, even inviting French pilgrims passing through Turin to belong. They were admirers and potential supporters.³⁹

On the eve of the first General Chapter in September 1877, he added a new heading in his own hand to the preparation booklet, thinking of a possible second edition (which did not eventuate) of the *Association of Mary and the Salesian Cooperators*. It had a more flexible description of the Cooperator than the one in the published regulations. 'A very important Association for us' he wrote, is the work of the Salesian Cooperators, which is the soul ['right arm' 1878] of our Congregation and is connected with our doing good in agreement with, and with the help of good faithful living in the world.' We have Salesian Religious and the FMA Institute, he explained, who have 'boys at risk' and 'poor and abandoned girls' to work for. 'Now we need to have friends, benefactors, people in the world' he went on 'who fully practise the spirit of the Salesians and live in the bosom of their own families, precisely as the Salesian Cooperators do. They are a help in our need, our support in difficulties, our collaborators in what has to be done for the greater glory of God and for which we lack the necessary relationships or do not have the personnel and material means. These Cooperators should increase in number as much as possible.'⁴⁰ The text was shortened at the General Chapter, losing some of its spontaneity and flexibility.⁴¹

3. The process of canonical institution

Don Bosco spoke of the *Salesian Association* to Pius IX for the first time at the audience on 22 February 1875. At the Pope's suggestion, he asked for letters of recommendation from various bishops both for the *Work of Mary Help of Christians* and Salesian Associates, two projects

35 *Associazione di opere buone...*, pp. 7–8, OE XXV 487–488.

36 *Unione cristiana...*, p. 7, OE XXV 409.

37 *Associazione di opere buone...*, p. 14, OE XXV 494.

38 *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*. San Pier d'Arena, tip. e libr. di S. Vincenzo de Paoli 1877, p. 39, OE XXVIII 377.

39 Cf. addresses to French pilgrims on 11 May 1880 and 15 December 1881: "Bulletin Salésien" 2 (1880) no. 1, janvier, pp. 8–10 and BS 6 (1882) no. 1, January, pp. 17–20.

40 The text is added to pages 8 and 9 of the printed version with topics to be dealt with in the General Chapter; it is beautifully copied on sheets by Fr Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, and read. Reviewed and corrected by him.

41 Cf. *Deliberazioni del Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo–Torinese nel Settembre 1877*. Turin, tip. e libr. Salesiana 1878, pp. 91–93, OE XXIX 467–469, appendici, IV. *Associazioni varie – I Cooperatori Salesiani*.

'different from one another.' For both of them he asked Cardinal Berardi to 'ask the Holy Father for his blessing and the indulgences appropriate for each project so he could pass these on as opportunity presented itself.'⁴²

Once he had the recommendations of various bishops, on 4 March 1876 he turned directly to the Pope: 'Your Holiness,' he reminded him in reference to the Salesian Cooperators 'would you deign to examine such a project, bless it and commend it?' 'Many bishops have been happy to welcome it into their respective dioceses.'⁴³ By opening the 'treasury of holy indulgences,' he added 'each one can be assured that the 'Work of the Oratories has been blessed and commended by Your Holiness.'⁴⁴

The spiritual favours were granted in a Brief on 9 May 1876. The document was fundamental for Don Bosco for its *de facto* recognition of the Association, even before its value in granting the indulgences. At the first Cooperators Conference in Turin on 16 May 1878, he said openly: 'Our incomparable benefactor Pius IX died this year; Pius IX who approved the Cooperators Association and enriched it with so many special indulgences; Pius IX who wanted to be the first to enrol among the Salesian Cooperators.'⁴⁵ In reality, the Pope had bestowed the indulgences because, as the Brief put it 'a Pious Sodality, as has been referred to, known as the Association or Union of Salesian Cooperators has been canonically erected.' Pius IX granted two plenary indulgences reserved to members current and future. In the second part of the Brief he added: 'Wishing to bestow a special sign of our benevolence on the aforementioned members, we grant them all the indulgences, partial and plenary, that the Tertiaries of St Francis of Assisi can enjoy by Apostolic concession.' They could gain these on the feast of St Francis de Sales and in Salesian churches, just as the Tertiaries could on the Feast of St Francis in Franciscan churches.⁴⁶

Armed with Pius IX's Brief, Don Bosco prepared a new edition of the earlier booklet, now supplemented and modified. He sent Archbishop Gastaldi a printed copy on 12 July 1876, informing him briefly of the initiative: 'This morning we finished the printing and composition [binding] of the booklet *Salesian Cooperators*.' Don Bosco's presentation *To the Readers* was signed on that date, 12 July. 'It is a kind of *tertiary*' he clarified 'by which the Holy Father grants spiritual favours to our benefactors.' He then made a 'humble plea that you will also impart your blessing as Archbishop of the main house' and 'if you are not unhappy to be so' be listed 'after the Holy Father... in the list of these promoters.' Then with dubious diplomatic detachment he added: 'I make these two suggestions out of duty and if you can agree I will accept them as two special favours. But in any case, I ask you to accept this letter as a sign of my great esteem and profound admiration for Your Grace.'⁴⁷

His ecclesiastical superior's reaction could not have been particularly benevolent given that he was being asked to bless a *fait accompli*. The Archbishop was unhappy with two issues, according to his secretary Fr Chuiso: that Don Bosco had published 'the book *Salesian Cooperators* without submitting it for ecclesiastical review, and that he had made public indulgences and a pious society whose canonical institution had not come from the ecclesiastical authority in Turin.'⁴⁸ Don Bosco did not reply to the letter immediately. He was in Liguria from 20–29 July, but probably also did not reply because he wanted to offer a plausible response. He was interested in Alassio in Albenga diocese. There were good reasons for going there: the new, large building under construction

42 Letter of 18 April 1875, Em IV 452.

43 The reference is to the first edition in 1876 of the project *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*. Turin, tip. salesiana 1876, 16 p., OE XXVIII 255–271.

44 E III 25–26.

45 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 13, p. 58.

46 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 7–9, OE XXVIII 345–347.

47 E III 71–72.

48 Letter of 16 July 1876, *Documenti* XVI 413–414.

(1875–77), contact with generous Canon Edoardo Martini to look for personnel for the second missionary expedition and (why not?) to think of a solution to the problem of publishing the booklet on the Salesian Cooperators. The diocesan bishop, Pietro Anacleto Siboni, one of the names which appeared on the list Don Bosco proposed to the Holy See in 1871,⁴⁹ could and did in fact give ecclesiastical approval for it to be published. His diocesan curia issued the *Imprimatur* on July 26.⁵⁰

On his return to Turin on 1 August, Don Bosco replied to the 16 July letter through the Archbishop's secretary. It was a little bit brazen. 'Having returned from my visit to our houses in Liguria, I find your letter of 16 July last. Despite the delay, I now hasten to reply. The Salesian Cooperators booklet was not published. The first copy was sent to Your Grace the Archbishop, a copy not yet fully printed,' he explained 'so you could look at the 38 pages you found there. I wanted to add the blessing of our Archbishop to them should he decide to give it.' This truly would have been an odd place to include it – between the text and the index for the blessing of the Archbishop joining with Pius IX among the list of promoters of the Association. Then came the frank statement: 'The Cooperators work is general, not a diocesan one.' He continued with a few other considerations in the style already marked by the state of mutual relations between himself and Gastaldi: he would have spoken with the Archbishop 'had I not been forced to deal with you through an intermediary, making it difficult for things to be understood in their true sense.' 'When I was able to open my heart to Your Grace, I did not move a finger without your learned, prudent and wise opinion. Regretfully, I had to cease that when I no longer had the freedom to speak or was no longer believed.'⁵¹

Delays, however, did not slow him down in proposing the Association to the first great benefactors, the Marquis and Marchioness Fassati: 'I am sending you and the Marchioness your membership of the Salesian Cooperators which we have spoken of many times. Thus you can benefit from the many indulgences and spiritual favours granted, by the benevolent reigning Pontiff Pius IX.'⁵² He sent copies of the recently printed Salesian Cooperator to Fr Cagliari and asked him to bring a copy to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires whom he wanted to appear first, after the Holy Father, and to give one to others already indicated. He also informed him that 'all the indulgences noted there can also be gained by the Salesians.'⁵³ Later he sent him certificates and recommended prudent promotion of the Association.⁵⁴ Copies of the booklet which he sent to his noble benefactors in Florence were accompanied by a letter from him. Writing to Countess Girolama Ugucconi he said: 'I am sending copies of *Salesian Cooperators* to distribute to Mrs Gondi, Marchionesses Nerli, Digny and others who are fond of what we do. You will receive certificates with the *Letture Cattoliche* and you just need to let me have the red form signed,'⁵⁵ meaning the 1876 form we have spoken of. He replied to a young Salesian teaching at Trinità di Mondovì, who wanted to become a Franciscan Tertiary to gain the indulgences, that 'There is no need to become a Franciscan Tertiary because all the indulgences of that Order have been granted to the Salesian Cooperators to which you belong. Therefore read our little book, try to

49 Cf. F. MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti...*, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, pp. 312 and 314.

50 Cf. *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*. Albenga, tip. vescovile di T. Craviotto 1876, 34 [6] p., OE XXVIII 255–271; a reprint followed with publisher indicated as: S. Pier d'Arina – Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1876, 36 [4] p.

51 To Canon T. Chiuso, 1° August 1876, E III 83.

52 Letter of 16 July 1876, E III 73.

53 To Fr G. Cagliari, 1° August 1876, E III 81.

54 To Fr G. Cagliari, 14 November 1876, E III 112.

55 Letter of 2 December 1876, E III 122.

increase the number [of them] and you will gain the merit.⁵⁶ Fr Rua at Valdocco was in charge of sending certificates. He asked Fr Berto to do it, since he was directly in charge of them.⁵⁷

Archbishop Gastaldi's reaction to the publication of the 1877 edition of the booklet on Cooperators was even harsher than before. Don Bosco had first sent him a copy of the papal Brief from 9 May 1876 in Latin and Italian, along with the list of the many indulgences granted the Cooperators understood in the broader sense, in 1876 but also in 1875, and earlier in 1869 and 1870.⁵⁸ Archbishop Gastaldi threatened to make public among the parish priests of the diocese how he disagreed with the publication which was, according to him, illicit. In a letter which also touched on other controversial matters we will return to later, Don Bosco begged him to act in a way that would avoid pointless scandal harming everyone, and suggested both of them submit to the mature and authoritative judgement of the Roman Congregations.⁵⁹

On the other hand, on 12 December he was able to give good news to Canon Clemente Guiol, parish priest of St Joseph's Church in Marseilles: the missionaries passing through as his guests 'had been so enthusiastic about his kindness. As one they had written: 'the parish priest of St Joseph's is a true Salesian Cooperator. May God preserve him.'⁶⁰ On 15 December 1877, the Bishop of Genoa, Salvatore Magnasco, officially approved the *Pious Association of Cooperators* for his Archdiocese 'establishing its centre' at the St Vincent's hospice 'erected at San Pier d'Arena,' 'on condition, however, that it always remain under our Ordinary dependence.'⁶¹

4. The official and definitive form in 1876/77

The first text in 1876, with the additions and definitive shape it took later that year, which was then finalised in the 1877 text, meant that the official name and the final form was now fixed: the *Association or Union of Salesian Cooperators*. The frontispiece remained the same for all editions. In the 1877 edition the 'doctrinal' text was preceded by the general title: *Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators*. In all of them, compared with the text *Association of good works*, the second and third headings were modified: *The Salesian Congregation a bond of union*, and, *Purpose of the Salesian Cooperator. It is necessary for Christians to unite in doing good*. The contents were, for the most part, identical to the earlier *Association of good works* but were more direct and essential in the *Salesian Cooperators* version.

The 1877 text opened with the presentation 'To the Reader' signed and dated 'Turin, 12 July 1876. Fr John Bosco.' Don Bosco included parts of the petition sent to the Pope on 4 March 1876 to obtain indulgences. Addressing himself to the reader he correctly connected the now codified structure of the Salesian Cooperators with the original experiences of collaboration in the 1840s. But it was already something of a stretch to go all the way back to 1841. He was more correct in attributing the request for 'a set of regulations which would serve as a basis and bond for preserving uniformity and the spirit of these popular institutions' to 'pious and zealous priests and laity' in the years that followed. These were most likely the years 1847–52, where there were 'collaborators or cooperators' dedicated to 'the cause of young people at risk.' The *Regolamento dell' Oratorio di S. Francisco di Sales in Valdocco* (Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco) was a first response to this request as he said in the *Introduction*.⁶² We now hope that such a wish will be satisfied by the current booklet.' The conclusion was a compendium

56 To cleric L. Deppert, 28 May 1878, E III 177.

57 To Fr M. Rua, 6 July 1877, E III 195.

58 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, 36 [4] p., OE XXVIII 339–378.

59 To Arch. L. Gastaldi, 22 November 1877, E III 241.

60 E III 251.

61 Cf. text of the declaration in MB XIII 604.

62 Cf. Chap. 8, § 1 and 4; 10, § 2.

of formulas already familiar to the early Don Bosco: The Lord God, rich in grace and blessings, generously bestows his heavenly favours on all those who contribute to winning souls for Jesus the Saviour, doing good for youth at risk, preparing good Christians for the Church and upright citizens for civil society, and thus they can all one day be the fortunate inhabitants of Heaven.⁶³

The 1876/77 text was a schematic overview of the Cooperator proper to a set of regulations, but the actual reality would be more complex: for example cooperation and activity involving non-Salesian churches as well, and the emphasis in many contexts on financial aid. Nevertheless, it was the basic reference for identifying the features of a characteristic figure of the religious and social worker which deserves to be analysed more precisely. The headings of the definitive 1877 edition can be a guide.

The early headings strongly emphasise the dominant nature of the new Ecclesiastical Association: a quasi Third Order of works. The headings that follow describe the organisational and spiritual aspects. 'It is necessary for Christians to unite in doing good,' for a double purpose: 'To help one another in doing good and keeping evil at bay' and 'to foster the spirit of prayer, charity by every means religion offers and thus to remove or at least mitigate the evils which endanger the morals of growing youth in whose hand lies the future of civil authority.'⁶⁴

The Salesian Congregation a bond of union. The Association 'has as its primary aim, working for the benefit of youth on whom the good or sad future of society is founded. We do not mean to say that it is the only way of providing for such a need, since there are a thousand others we strongly recommend be put into action. We propose but one of them, which is the work of the Salesian Cooperators, that is, asking good Catholics who live in the world to come to the aid of the members of the Congregation.'⁶⁵

The purpose of the Salesian Cooperators. This is described in Salesian constitutional terms as sanctification of self and the salvation of others: 'Doing good to oneself thanks to the tenor of life which is, as far as possible, similar to that of common life' or proper to someone who enters 'the cloister,' 'continuing in the midst of their ordinary occupations, in the bosom of their families and living as though they were in fact in the Congregation,' as tertiaries who are different from the 'ancient' ones, and have 'as their main aim the active life, practising charity to their neighbour and especially youth at risk.'⁶⁶

The way to cooperate. This is expressed through activities similar to those of the Salesian Congregation with the addition of supporting it, including: 1. 'Promoting novenas, triduums, retreats and catechism lessons, especially in places, where material and moral means are lacking.' 2. Given 'the lack of vocations to the clerical state' if able, they are 'to take special care of those boys and also adults who have the necessary moral qualities and attitude to study, thus giving a sign they are called; this is also the purpose of the Work of Mary Help of Christians. 3. 'Counteracting irreligious press with good press, thanks to spreading good books, cards, printed sheets of any kind.' 4. 'Charity to youth at risk, bringing them together, instructing them in the Faith, bringing them to sacred ceremonies, advising them of risks, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion,' 'themselves' or 'by means of others.' There was an important addition: 'Everything recommended for boys at risk is also proposed for girls who find themselves in similar situations.' 5. Two other dimensions were included within apostolic charity: 'prayer' (including, we believe, the prayer of suffering) and providing 'material means where there is need after the example of the early faithful who laid their goods at the feet of the Apostles to be used for widows, orphans and

63 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, To the reader, pp. 3–4, OE XXVIII 341–342.

64 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 27–28, OE XXVIII 365–366.

65 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, p. 28, OE XXVIII 366.

66 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 29–30, OE XXVIII 367–368.

other serious needs.⁶⁷ The figure of the Cooperator at this point resembled the benefactor, including it as a dimension by no means secondary to the others. On more than one occasion Don Bosco sent, or had others send the Cooperators certificate to particular benefactors with reference to the 'tertiary' description.

Constitution and government of the Association. The structure harked back essentially to the *Association for good works*. It was a structure given more care and attention in the two texts in 1876/77. For example, the Association is always 'humbly recommended to the benevolence and protection of the Supreme Pontiff, the bishops, parish priests, but dependence 'in everything to do with religion'⁶⁸ was said to be '*absolute*', i.e., no longer '*absolute and unlimited*.' Particular importance is given in the Association to information and communication between the Superior and members. A 'bulletin or printed news sheet, will be provided. The meeting of members 'on the day of St Francis de Sales and the Feast of Mary Help of Christians' 'should contribute to communications, motivation and formation,' encouraging one another in devotion to these heavenly protectors, calling on their patronage so they may persevere in the works begun according to the purpose of the Association.'⁶⁹

Particular obligations. The evolution of the text is interesting with regard both to the integration of pecuniary tasks with communal spiritual aspects and the clarification of the first of these. *The Christian Union* limited itself to one article: 'The members are not bound to any annual subscription. They are only invited to make an offering to support works promoted by the Association.'⁷⁰ *The Association for good works* was more explicit and developed: '1. Every member will do what he can to promote and support the Association's works with his own means or through donations collected from charitable individuals. 2. Each year the members will make a donation of L.1 [around 3 euro] for works promoted and to be promoted by the Association. These donations will be addressed to the Superior or Decurions, Prefects, Rectors who will see that they get to him. 3. A collection will be taken up regularly at Conferences, especially the one for St Frances de Sales. Whoever cannot be at this conference can see that his donation comes to the superior in some other ways.'⁷¹

Salesian Cooperators, in its first 1876 edition, broadened the horizon with an initial article which spoke of fraternal communion among members of the Salesian Congregation and Cooperators. Then it included in its entirety the first article of the *Association for good works* and proposed the other two in modified form: '3. Cooperators have no financial obligations but will make a monthly or annual donation which he charity of their hearts suggests. These donations will be addressed to the Superior in support of works promoted by the Association. 4. There will be a regular collection on the occasion of the Conferences on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians and St Francis de sales. In places where members are not enough for a Decuria, and when someone cannot attend the Conference, he will see that his donations arrives through the easiest and most secure way for him.'⁷² Finally, the 1877 *Salesian Cooperators*, like the second 1876 edition, better reconciles the two aspects, the spiritual and the financial, deriving from the first, which remained unaltered, the send enriched under the banner of the believing fraternity.

'So all members, just as they are all children of our Heavenly Father, all brothers in Jesus Christ, will do what they can to promote and support the Association's works with their own material possessions or donations from charitable individuals.' Then there are copies of articles 3

67 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 30–31, OE XXVIII 368–369.

68 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, p. 9, OE XXVIII 263; cf. *Associazione di opere buone...*, p. 8, OE XXV 488.

69 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, p. 33, OE XXVIII 371.

70 *Unione cristiana...*, p. 5, OE XXV 407.

71 *Associazione di opere buone...*, pp. 10–11, OE XXV 490–491.

72 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 11–12, OE XXVIII 265–266.

and 4 of the earlier document, modified in the initial part: 'at least two Conferences are held each year, one on the feast of Mary Help of Christians, the other on St Francis de Sales Feast day. A collection will be taken up at each Conference as in the earlier no. 3.'⁷³

The *Benefits* –as previously, in the 1876 edition – consist of an abundant shower of indulgences and special graces granted by the Pontiff and uninterrupted intense participation in the Salesians' prayers as well as Masses and prayers offered daily in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, suffrages for deceased Cooperators each year on the day following the feast of St Francis de Sales, and prayers offered at time of illness and death.⁷⁴

The *Practice of piety* were reduced to a few basics: yearly retreat, monthly exercise for a happy death, frequenting the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, a daily Our Father and Hail Mary to St Francis de Sales. But what Don Bosco asks for in article 1 is typical of his vital prayer ['actual' meaning the 'active' prayer of St Catherine of Siena]:⁷⁵ 'No external work is prescribed for Salesian Cooperators but so their life may be similar in some way to those living in a religious community, it is recommended they be simple in dress, frugal at table, simple in home furnishing, chaste in speech, exact in their duties of state, and that they see that people dependent on them observe and keep Sundays holy.'⁷⁶

Don Bosco reminded them of these things in conferences, discussions, letters, circulars, along with insistent references to the strict requirement of almsgiving. Programmes or written regulations of a rough and scarcely elaborated kind were a threadbare cloth in which it was impossible to adequately incorporate lived experience prior to institutionalisation, and even more so the particularly rich experience of word and deed over the previous decade. In fact, the formulas describing the relationship between personal sanctification and active involvement in charity in its varied forms were rather approximate. They do not even appear to have touched on the lay character of the spirituality of the non-clerical Cooperators, and as for Cooperator bishops, priests, religious, while they were there in fact and by right, there was total written silence concerning them.

The model of life offered was a Salesian one, the Salesian priest; there was no mention of the coadjutor, the Salesian lay man who was a full-time Religious with his own special lay manner of living his consecration and mission in common with the priest. But the legal and spiritual personality of the coadjutor was, at the time, perhaps even less determined than that of the Cooperator, encouraging confusion in identifying two realities and their respective denomination.

5. The Salesian Bulletin

The problem of communication underwent an interesting evolution in the title *Constitutions and government of the Association*. The *Christian Union* stated: 'At the end of each year the Superior will communicate to members the works which seem most in need of being promoted in the coming year and at the same time will offer news of those called to eternal life over the past year and will recommend them to everyone's prayers.'⁷⁷ The *Association for good works* retained this text but prefaced it with an additional duty: 'Every month, members will be given information through a bulletin or printed sheet on matters proposed or already completed.'⁷⁸ The *Salesian Cooperators* adopted the text of the *Association for good works* in all editions, though less rigidly:

73 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 33–34, OE XXVIII 371–372.

74 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 34–35, OE XXVIII 372–373; cf. *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1876, pp. 12–13, OE XXVIII 266–267.

75 *Il dialogo della Provvidenza* LVI.

76 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, pp. 35–36, OE XXVIII 373–374.

77 *Unione cristiana...*, pp. 4–5, OE XXV 406–407.

78 *Associazione di opere buone...*, p. 9, OE XXV 489.

'Every three months or even more often, through a bulletin or printed sheet ...'⁷⁹ In fact it was usually monthly.

By producing the *Bollettino Salesiano* (Salesian Bulletin), Don Bosco put in place a periodical still around today in many editions.⁸⁰ He spoke of it publicly for the first time in the general Conference on 6 February 1877, within the context of the Conferences of St Francis de Sales. In reference to the Salesian Cooperators he said: 'With regard to this we have decided to print a Bulletin that will be like a newspaper for the Congregation, because there are many things that need to be communicated to the aforesaid Cooperators. It will be a periodical bulletin, a bond between the Cooperators and the Salesian confreres.'⁸¹ After a few months he foresaw that it would be issued in July, as we can deduce from a letter to Fr Rua: 'I am sending you a thousand things among which the letter to be included with the Salesian Bulletin that you should attend to *quoad fieri potest* so it can be issued next month. Send me the prints [proofs].'⁸² Later, he delayed it by a month: 'Given the delay with the *Bollettino*, I believe it would be better to start in August, and in this sense I am sending the month of August for indulgences [meaning the list of indulgences that can be gained in August].'⁸³ Halfway through July, he wrote to Fr Lasagna: 'Get many Salesian Cooperators and send me their names so I can send them the monthly *Bulletin* we are beginning to publish.'⁸⁴ He wrote a note to Fr Barberis, who was at Lanzo on holidays with the novices in July and August. The note read: 'We need to get busy with the future number of the *Salesian Bulletin*. So prepare Fr Cagliari's letter for me which we have spoken about.'⁸⁵ Fr Barberis returned to Turin and 'stayed there some days' so he could 'speak at length with Don Bosco.' He refers to this and other days when he noted further on: 'We spoke at length about the *Bibliofilo Cattolico*, how to support it and how there was so much to do initially since there was no one in charge; it was in its initial stages and it was good that D. Bosco himself gave the direction he wanted it to take. Just the same it was essential to establish one. I hope [this is Don Bosco speaking] that we can soon have Fr Bonetti at the Oratory and among other things can ask him to do this, regarding its management. You need to keep thinking about letters from the missionaries etc. etc.'⁸⁶

At the first General Chapter (1877) there was discussion of the Cooperators and the *Bulletin*, dealing with the public identity of the Salesian at the same time. The *Deliberations* dedicated just one article to the magazine. 'The *Salesian Bulletin* is a bond of union between the Cooperators. When a member becomes unworthy of becoming a Cooperator we cease to send him a *Bulletin* without any other formalities.'⁸⁷ But it came up again in the Chapter in various discussions during the afternoon session on 7 September.⁸⁸ To the objection to the cost of sending it out free, the minutes record: 'It is to be noted that up to now, costs have been covered more than adequately because nearly everyone receiving it has asked how much association [subscription] costs, and

79 *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1876, p. 10, OE XXVIII 264; *Cooperatori salesiani...*, 1877, p. 32, OE XXVIII 370.

80 There is no desirable history of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, only partial studies on particular content. An article in the January 1976 issue of the magazine was dedicated to the celebration for the centenary of its foundation: E. BIANCO, *Il Bollettino Salesiano "incompiuta" di don Bosco* (pp. 6–8), and the entire September 1977 issue. There is the recent work by V. ORLANDO (ed), *Il Bollettino Salesiano. Progetto di rinnovamento e di rilancio*. Rome, Editrice S.D.B. [extra-commercial edition] 1998, pp. 19–32.

81 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 11, pp. 38–39.

82 To Fr M. Rua, da Roma 16 June 1877, E III 187.

83 To Fr M. Rua, da Borgo S. Martino 6 July 1877, E III 195.

84 Letter to Fr L. Lasagna, 16 July 1877, E III 199.

85 Letter undated, E III 203.

86 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, pp. 28–29. In the August issue, two letters of Fr Cagliari were published.

87 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale della Pia Società salesiana tenuto in Lanzo–Torinese nel September 1877*, p. 92, OE XXIX 468.

88 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali I* 48–55; cf. Chap. 26, § 1.2.

since it is sent without a fixed price they make a donation greater than what we would have asked for; others give nothing but then send alms on occasions, through the year, or help the Oratory in some way.⁸⁹

In November, Fr Bonetti left the job of running the college at Borgo S. Martino and took on the role at the Oratory of 'Prefect of the clergy' with the job of editing the *Bulletin*. We also know this from a letter in which Don Bosco ruminates about partial publication in the magazine of the pastoral letters of his bishop friend at Vigevano: 'Fr Bonetti will make a study of them to reproduce their essential bits in the *Bibliofilo*.'⁹⁰

In fact, for the first four months of its life, the magazine came out under the name *Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano mensuale* (Catholic book lover or monthly Salesian Bulletin). The *Bibliofilo Cattolico* was a simple list in small format printed by the Salesian Press and Bookshop. It began in 1875 and ran to four issues. The first came out as 'Year III. No. 5. August 1877.' It was twelve pages all up, and content mirrored the double heading with the following sections: To *Salesian Cooperators, About the Cooperators, Letters from Salesian Missionaries in South America, Various Matters, First trials of some Cooperators, Special indulgences for August, the College and boarding at Valsalice near Turin, Schedule*. These were followed by concluding pages, three filled with a catalogue of books, the first page all *Small works by Fr John Bosco*.⁹¹ There were two instalments of the September issue. The first continued the series from the August as 'Year III. No. 6. September 1877' with the following articles: *History of the Salesian Cooperators, Brief biography of missionary priest John Baptist Baccino by Fr J. Barberis, Graces obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians*. They were followed by pages of advertisements for books, preceded by indulgences Cooperators could gain in September. The second instalment opened the new series of years and months noted as 'Year I, No. 1., September 1877.' As with the preceding issue it gave the address as Via Cottolengo, No. 32, Turin. This instalment was of four pages only, with just the first three articles from the August issue but only included the first of the three letters from South America. The indulgences were still the ones shown in the August issue. From October, the magazine continued the monthly series excepting August: 1, 2, 3, 4, from September to December. Up until 1881 included, each issue's pages were numbered in their own right. From 1882, the numbering was continuous from January to December. The number of pages for each issue went from a minimum of 8 to a maximum of 20.⁹²

The magazine's function and stance were described in the editorial for the first issue. These were in harmony with the nature and activity of the Cooperator. It ended with the implicit adoption of a stance confirming Don Bosco's prudent or wary approach to the political arena and also to the militant Catholic movement in the second half of the 19th Century: 'Since we stand outside politics, we keep ourselves constantly at a distance from anything that could be dependent on someone in constituted authority, civil, or ecclesiastical. Our stance will be unalterably as follows: leave us to care for poor and abandoned youngsters and we will make every effort to do all the good we can for them because by doing so we believe we can contribute to good behaviour and civilisation.'⁹³ Further on, it also touched on the topic of the Cooperator as a 'tertiary', expressed through 'works of charity carried out on behalf of any class of individual under the banner of any need that

89 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 49–50.

90 To Bishop P. De Gaudenzi, 24 November 1877, E III 242. Fr Bonetti with Fr Cagliero, from 29 to 31 October, had already preached the triduum introducing the new school year to the boys at the Oratory: J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 60.

91 The issue was printed by the "Tip. San Vincenzo de' Paoli, Sampierdarena", and would be until the March edition 1886. Beginning with the April 1886 number, it was replaced by the "Tipografia Salesiana, Turin".

92 Editions continued to give some space at times to advertising new books published by the Salesian Press, which for its part instead, used an occasional catalogue called *Bibliografia salesiana*.

93 "Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano mensuale", A. III (1879) no. 5, August, pp. 1–2.

presents itself,' but especially 'young people' since, it specified, 'the education of abandoned youth in these times is a need that embraces all other needs.'⁹⁴

From January 1878, the title *Bollettino Salesiano* was used exclusively. One of the principal means for animation and to provide cohesiveness beginning with January 1879, was the *Letter from Fr John Bosco to Salesian Cooperators* at the beginning of each year. The letter informed Cooperators of work carried out the previous year and other work planned for the coming year as well as urgent needs and possibilities for helping with material aid. The magazine was the normal way of advertising the lotteries with traditional pressure on Cooperators to buy and distribute tickets, or promoter subscription to the *Catholic Readings* on the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* (Library of Italian Youth). One of the aims of the Cooperators Union was to spread good press.⁹⁵

Each booklet advertised the missions through direct and detailed information. It was the privileged topic of the *Bulletin*, with uninterrupted insistence on the urgent need for financial aid as well as furnishings religious items and the like. There was no lack of advice on being vigilant with regard to Protestant proselytism, corruption of *mores*, irreligious and immoral press, all of which were specifically harmful to young people.

This Salesian magazine was sent to all likely benefactors and potential Cooperators. It suggested 3 lire [10 euro] as a likely annual amount to cover the cost of printing and mailing. However, every now and then the magazine issued a notice saying this was not a subscription cost and that no contribution was obligatory. It was simply a suggestion for whoever could and freely wanted to.⁹⁶

Don Bosco offered interesting details at the Third General Chapter in 1883 on the relationship of identity and distinction between Cooperators, benefactors and the usual recipients of the magazine: a rule to guide the pious Society of Salesian Cooperators. He prefaced it by saying: 'One group are Salesian Cooperators who are our benefactors. Another group are subscribers to the Bulletin as a magazine. The Bulletin is only a means of communicating our work and binding good Christians together with one spirit and aim. It should not be thought of only as a magazine for spreading the truth etc., etc., and news. Charitable people today almost do not know what to do with their wealth for pious works, for political reasons. So the purpose of our Bulletin is to make our work known so that, God willing, they can help Salesian works. Do not promote it as a magazine. 1. Promote the two Conferences where we take up a collection and they can spend alms. 2. Make the purpose of the Cooperators known: to help with catechism lessons, foster good press, send [youngsters] to good religious colleges. It does not matter to us whether or not we receive 10 lire [30 euro] more or less, but acting for the greater glory of God is what matters. If those who govern us do not get in our way, the Bulletin will become a power not in itself but for the people it will bring together.'⁹⁷

For almost a century, the Salesian Bulletin seems to have remained faithful to the original intentions, even though the link with the Cooperators underwent gradual change. An indication of this is the change to the subtitle which occurred in the early 1900s. Until 1903 the 'bulletin' or news sheet came out in the Italian edition simply as *Bollettino Salesiano*. From January 1904, the obvious connection with the Cooperators was specified by calling it a *Periodico* [from 1915 'mensile' or monthly was added] *della Pia Unione dei Cooperatori Salesiani di Don Bosco* (Monthly Magazine of the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators of Don Bosco). From 1923, the subtitle

94 "Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano mensile", A. I (1877) no. 2, October, pp. 1–2; cf. Chap. 2, § 3.

95 Cf. BS 3 (1879) no. 4, April, p. 13; no. 7, July, p. 1; 2 (1878) no. 12, December, pp. 4–5; 4 (1880) no. 1, January, pp. 4–5.

96 Cf. e.g. *l'Avviso ai Cooperatori*, BS 3 (1879) no. 1, January, p. 9; *La Direzione del Bollettino Salesiano ai Cooperatori e Cooperatrici*, BS 5 (1881) no. 1, January, pp. 6–7.

97 G. MARENCO, *Verbali*, pp. 16–17.

became *Monthly Magazine for the Cooperators of Don Bosco's Works and Missions*. From 1946 it came out in two different editions, one on the 1st and the other on the 15th of each month, both bearing the Subtitle *Periodico quindicinale delle Opere e Missioni di S. Giovanni Bosco* [Fortnightly Magazine of St John Bosco's Works and Missions]: the first issue added the words *Edition for Salesian Cooperators*, while the other read *for Very Reverend Diocesan Directors and Decurions*. From January 1957 to February 1972 the first issue for each month took on a new subtitle *Organo dei Cooperatori Salesiani* or Chief means of communicating for Salesian Cooperators, a subtitle that became common to both monthly issues from January 1965 to April 1967 (the 15th of the month issue from 15 May 1967 was subtitled *Edition for Leaders* and from June–July 1972 *Edition for leaders of the Cooperators*. In the final 30 years of the 20th century, the specific link [to the Cooperators] was ignored in a series of rapid changes: from 15 March 1972, the subtitle became: *Organo della Famiglia Salesiana*, or Chief means of communication with the Salesian Family. And from 1976, *Rivista della Famiglia Salesiana* or Salesian Family magazine. Soon after, there were the following additions: *founded by St John Bosco*, which then became *Magazine founded by Don Bosco* [then *St John Bosco*] subtitled *Fortnightly* [then, *monthly*] *of information and religious culture*. Added, from 1982: *published by the Salesian Congregation of St John Bosco*.

6. The Salesian Cooperator in word and deed

From the wealth of material available, we know that the reality of the Cooperator was richer and more concrete than what can be deduced from the simple Rule. Essential additions to the Cooperator's identity and the significance of his or her activity were provided by explicit or implicit factors mentioned at Conferences or in talks Don Bosco gave, many of them in the final decade. Cooperator benefactors were the privileged recipients, but also individuals involved in a whole range of apostolic initiatives either on their own or as part of ever wider Church circles. Material charity, alms, about which there was only minimal regulatory indication, became more extensive in word and deed and his appeals to Cooperator benefactors became ever more insistent and demanding.

At the first solemn conference held in Rome on 29 January 1878, Don Bosco dedicated most of his address precisely to sketching a complete profile of the Salesian Cooperator. He did it not with definitions or abstract descriptions but by recalling their history since 1841. Appearing in this was the considerable crowd of clerics, ladies, gentlemen who had contributed to the work of the oratories as helpers and promoters in a whole range of ways and means from teaching Catechism to providing financial support.⁹⁸ The address he gave at San Benigno Canavese on 4 June 1880 along the same lines could be regarded as typical. He said that the Cooperators 'are like another arm with their prayers, assistance as a group, financial aid, working with the Head and other members [= arms and legs] of the Salesian Congregation.'⁹⁹

Don Bosco extended their room for action in a brief meeting to French pilgrims on their way to Rome who made a stopover at Valdocco on 15 December 1881. They were interested in Salesian works and wanted to bring similar initiatives into their areas on behalf of abandoned youth. 'Well then' Don Bosco said in reference to this, 'nothing is preventing you from being Salesian Cooperators. You are already doing the work and only lack the title and formal association in order

98 *Conferenza dei Cooperatori salesiani in Roma*, 31.1.1878, handwritten manuscript of Don Bosco's, ASC A 2260201, ms. written by another [3 pp.]; more widespread text by secretary Fr Gioachino Berto, ASC A 0250214 [8 p.] and a report by him on the conference, sent to Fr Rua, ASC A 0250213 [6 p.]; cf. *Feste in Roma di S. Francesco di Sales*, "L'Unità Cattolica" no. 30, domenica 3 February 1878, p. 118; *La festa del Dottore S. Francesco di Sales e la prima Conferenza dei Cooperatori in Roma*, BS 2 (1878) no. 3, March, pp. 10–11: Don Bosco's address appears there almost entirely devoid of the narrative section.

99 BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, p. 12.

to enjoy the indulgences and communion of good that is achieved.' 'All you need do is show your desire for this; you then only need to provide your name and home address.'¹⁰⁰ The extension of typical tasks was repeated in Turin on the vigil of the external festivities for Mary Help of Christians on 1 June 1885. Don Bosco ('His appearance was that of a man who was tired and his voice was somewhat feeble') began replying to the question 'What does it mean to be a Salesian Cooperator: 'Being a Salesian Cooperator means supporting, along with others, a work founded under the auspices of St Francis de Sales, whose purpose is to help the Church in its most urgent needs; it means promoting a work that has been very much recommended by the Holy Father because it educates youth to virtue, leading them to Sanctuary; because it has as its chief purpose instructing youth who are today the target of evil doers; because through its colleges, hospices, festive oratories and in families in the world it promotes, I say, love for religion, good behaviour, prayer, going to the sacraments, and so on.' He then went on to speak of the main works currently in place.¹⁰¹

The Association has a specific field of operation identical to that of the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, including outside their institutions in every civil and ecclesial context asked of it: sharing active charity on behalf of youth in society and in the Church. They were the educators and collaborators of works who were members of Religious Institutes, Salesian Cooperators, even when they were not directly helping the Salesians and the Sisters but applied themselves to similar activities in the same spirit. The range of approaches he proposed very realistically to Cooperators in Turin at a conference on 23 May 1879, for example, was huge: 'Instilling love of virtue and horror for vice in the hearts of boys and girls in your families, neighbours' families and those of relatives, acquaintances and friends.' It, 'some immature young girl runs the risk of not being upright and you take care to remove her from that and get her out of the clutches of ravenous wolves in time;' if 'you know that families have boys and girls to be educated or put to work, open your eyes wide and do something, suggest, advise, encourage them to be placed in colleges or workshops where they are also skilfully taught the fear of God, and where good *mores* are flourishing.' 'Let Catholic news sheets and books enter your homes,' 'see that as many people as you can get a chance to read them.' 'When you come to know that a young girl cannot be saved from ruin unless she is placed in some shelter make sure you do something about it.' And finally, 'the ones I recommend most to you are good-natured youngsters who love their practices of piety and show every hope of being called to the clerical state.'¹⁰²

Other practical indications were given to the Cooperators in Turin at the conference on 31 May 1883, the evening of the day he returned from France after a lengthy stay in Paris: 'Send the children to catechism, help parish priests to instruct them and assist them in Church, or even teach them yourselves at home.' 'Remove bad books from them if they have them and give them good ones.' 'Remove them from bad companions or other dangerous bad habits.' 'Choose colleges, institutes that do not neglect the soul. Do not ban Religion and its practices, colleges and institutes that impart the wisdom of the holy fear of God along with other knowledge.' 'Take special care of those boys, yours or of others,' who show 'an inclination to the religious or clerical state.'¹⁰³

In order to fire up or strengthen and renew practical charity, spiritual uplifting and apostolic effort were also looked to. The *Salesian Bulletin* was full of reminders of feasts to be celebrated and conferences held on dates indicated in the Regulations: St Francis de Sales on 29 January and Mary Help of Christians on 24 May. News of what had been done by various groups in many different areas was provided in other months. Conferences on 29 January began with reading a

100 BS 6 (1882) no. 1, January, p. 19.

101 BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, pp. 94–95.

102 BS 3 (1879) no. 6, June, p. 3. Similar was the address to Cooperators at Borgo S. Martino, 1 July 1880:

BS 4 (1880) no. 8, August, p. 9.

103 BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, p. 104.

passage from the life of a Saint, sometimes of Jane de Chantal if the conference was for female Cooperators. They were often preceded by Mass with confession and communion, suggestions for imitating the virtues of a Saint, a model of affective and effective love.¹⁰⁴ A similar setup but of increased intensity especially in Turin and the more significant Salesian works was provided for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. It was prepared for with sermonettes during May and the Novena, with a reminder of classical means: increased devotion to Mary and Jesus in the sacrament of the altar, saying of the rosary, approaching the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. Celebrations of the vigil and the day, the procession and two different conferences not far apart for the men and the women Cooperators were the culmination of festivities.¹⁰⁵

7. Financial support and the strict requirement of almsgiving

A friend and Cooperator, State official Carlo Canton, whom the reader already knows of, summed up the purpose of whoever joined 'Salesian Cooperation' in a brief sentence in a news item he sent to the *Apologista Cattolico* from Monrega; 'Coming to Don Bosco's aid morally and materially in the works he is undertaking.'¹⁰⁶ Undoubtedly, in the historical reality, material cooperation was seen to be much more evident than was laid down by the Regulations. Don Bosco openly matched the terms Cooperator and benefactor in many ways. Cooperators, he said at Sampierdarena on 5 May 1880, while not able to live the life of the Salesians [Religious] 'can nonetheless benefit from this life through prayer and material aid.'¹⁰⁷ When asking for a postal reduction for the *Bulletin* in areas belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Don Bosco spoke of 'a Pious Society called *Salesian Cooperators* which ... has as its purpose to aid the very many civil and religious works through moral and financial means.'¹⁰⁸

104 Cf. e.g., *La Conferenza e la Festa di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March, pp. 9–10; *Un ricordo per la festa di S. Francesco*, BS 4 (1880) no. 1, January, p. 5; *La conferenza a Lucca*, BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 9–10; *Prima conferenza dei cooperatori tenuta in Sampierdarena*, BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 10–11; *La festa di S. Francesco di Sales e la prescritta Conferenza*, BS 5 (1881) no. 1, January, pp. 4–5; *Notizie e conferenze salesiane*, BS 5 (1881) no. 7, July, p. 7; *La conferenza e la festa di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 6 (1882) no. 1, January, p. 7; *Relazione sulla festa di San Francesco di Sales e sulle Conferenze dei Cooperatori*, BS 6 (1882) no. 3, March, pp. 41–42; *La immagine di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 6 (1882) no. 12, December, pp. 192–194; *Relazione intorno la Festa di S. Francesco e le Conferenze dei Cooperatori Salesiani*, BS 7 (1883) no. 3, March, pp. 40–44; *La festa e la conferenza di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 8 (1884) no. 1, January, p. 5; *La festa e la conferenza di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 9 (1885) no. 1, January, p. 16.

105 Cf. e.g., *Novena e solennità in onore di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice nella chiesa a Lei dedicata in Valdocco Torino*, BS 3 (1879) no. 5, May, pp. 1–3; *Relazione della festa e novena di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice*, BS 3 (1879) no. 6, June, pp. 1–5; *Il mese mariano nella Chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino*, BS 4 (1880) no. 4, April, p. 8; *Tre mezzi di preparazione alla festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 4 (1880) no. 5, May, pp. 5–6; *In preparazione alla festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 5 (1881) no. 5, May, pp. 3–4; *La prossima novena e festa di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice*, BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, pp. 77–80; *Festa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino e sue particolarità*, BS 6 (1882) no. 6, June, pp. 93–96; *La festa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Genova*, *ibid.*, pp. 96–97; *Invito a ben celebrare la festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 7 (1883) no. 5, May, p. 75; *Aumento di fede e di pietà cristiana per mezzo di Maria*, BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, pp. 101–110; *Festa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Genova e in S. Pier d'Arena*, *ibid.*, pp. 110–111; *In preparazione alla festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 8 (1884) no. 5, May, pp. 65–67; *I figli insieme colla Madre ossia la festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, pp. 82–83; *Relazione sulla festa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, pp. 83–88.

106 *La prima Conferenza dei Cooperatori e delle Cooperatrici Salesiane tenutasi in Torino*, BS 2 (1878) no. 6, June, p. 7.

107 BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, p. 11.

108 Letter of February 1883, E IV 213.

Material support was, as he kept reminding them in the Bulletin, one of the 'essential requirements' for being a Cooperator.¹⁰⁹ Sometimes, Don Bosco spoke of it with a realism bordering on the ironic or the humorous. He was pressed by very real needs of boys with a healthy appetite and the legitimate insistence of the suppliers he owed money to. In a conference he gave Cooperators at the oratory in Marseilles, after giving a rapid overview of Salesian works in France he said: 'Now we come to the real, practical issue of satisfying creditors who are not happy with mere words,' 'we need to find the money to satisfy them.' 'Prayers are not enough; they go together with works. And not just creditors; not even our boys are satisfied with prayers. They eat bread, lots of it, and no matter what we do or say to get them out of this habit they don't want to know about it, not even for a day. It is not delicacies they want but enough bread and soup to fill them up, that's the food they want and which we must give them.'¹¹⁰ Don Bosco was not sparing in quotations to touch Cooperators' hearts and purses regarding the boys' appetites. 'Finally,' he confided to past pupils at Valdocco on 24 June 1883 'as you know I was in Paris and spoke in various churches to plead the cause of our works and, let's be frank, to receive money to provide bread and soup for our boys who never lose their appetite.'¹¹¹ 'It is consoling' he said in his address to Cooperators at Marseilles on March 17, 1884 'to see the good results obtained at S. Leone; very consoling, then, to observe how good the student's behaviour is and how healthy they are. They all have an excellent appetite and it is a pleasure to see them eat, though later we see the bills that have to be paid to the baker.'¹¹²

Don Bosco thought of the Cooperators as his guarantee, even on a financial level. Perhaps, he said and then resolved his doubt, someone might say 'But with so many works to worry about D. Bosco will end up bankrupt. No sir, we will not go bankrupt; we have not so far and we will not in the future. Divine Providence has guaranteed it as also has the charity of our Cooperators.'¹¹³ On the other hand, providing material charity was also an essential requisite for the Cooperator to be a good Christian. It was a consequence of the precise notion Don Bosco had of the human condition where it concerned possessions and use of material goods in a society made up of rich and poor in God's providential plan.¹¹⁴ There was a salvific mutual support between them both. Both were bound to observe the commandment of love in the inequality of their condition: 'God made the poor person so he could earn heaven through resignation and patience; but he made the wealthy person so he could be saved through charity and almsgiving.'¹¹⁵ Eugene Ceria notes in reference especially to the many conferences in Italy and France: 'No saint spent so much of his energy and time persuading people in public and private that almsgiving is a duty, a serious duty, and not almsgiving of measured amounts determined by selfishness, but as far as one's means allowed.'¹¹⁶

Don Bosco followed a doctrine whereby almsgiving was not only an act of charity and generosity but a strict obligation of distributive justice with clear social impact. At a conference held at Casale Monferrato on 17 November 1881, the discussion on almsgiving was presented in a very severe way from the point of view of current moral theology.¹¹⁷ Don Bosco himself acknowledged

109 Cf. *Un buon ufficio raccomandato ai Cooperatori e Cooperatrici*, BS 2 (1878) no. 12, December, p. 8; *Requisiti necessari per essere Cooperatore*, BS 4 (1880) no. 1, January, p. 6.

110 Conf. 29 March 1883, BS 7 (1883) no. 5, May, p. 79.

111 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 128.

112 MB XVII 52; "Dom Bosco parla semplicemente, citant St-Vincent de Paul", "il a demandé qu'on l'aidât à payer les notes qu'il a chez les boulangers et les maçons, puisque les enfants ne peuvent vivre sans pain et sans abri" ("Bulletin salésien", A. VI. N. 5, mai 1884, p. 44).

113 Conf. to Cooperators at Casale Monf., 21 November 1883, BS 7 (1883) no. 12, December, p. 202.

114 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, pp. 10–11 (*Un modello vetusto di "società cristiana"*).

115 Conf. at Genoa, 30 March 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April, p. 72.

116 MB XV 516.

117 BS 5 (1881) no. 12, December, pp. 5–7.

that his position was strictly inspired in a conference he gave in Genoa on 30 March 1882.¹¹⁸ He proposed similarly serious reflection in the already mentioned conference to female cooperators in Turin on 23 May 1879, even though they had been generous to the oratories for years. After reminding them of various initiatives to help youngsters, and the costs these incurred, he stigmatised 'the blindness of many individuals today. They squander money on pleasure trips, expensive furniture, carriages and horses, costly celebrations,' and 'we are dealing with giving alms, making an offering to put up or improve God's house, to build a shelter for the orphaned or abandoned, to provide food and clothing for a poor boy, to give the Church another priest, ah! Then hear the thousand excuses they have ready.' 'They are unable to support the most useful institutions and works of religion and Society.' But he did finish off with reassuring words; 'I do not intend to cause you scruples and teach you that you should not live according to your state and your own circumstances; I only want to say and instil in you that you do not allow the great plague, the great scourge of luxury, small or great to enter your hears and homes.'¹¹⁹

This was supported by the *Bulletin*. The editor, Fr Bonetti – who loved to expand somewhat – intervened with two significant articles on 'good use' of the 'power' that is money. 'it is clear' he wrote 'that employing at least part of our temporal goods for the greater glory of God and the relief of the poor, is not just advice but a precept, and that one's eternal salvation depends on its observance.'¹²⁰ 'The general rule should be this: *do for good what wicked people do for evil*. Some people spend endlessly to spread irreligious and immoral papers, books, and promote associations, or schools without Jesus Christ, building brothels and theatres or setting up Masonic Lodges. This is money that should have found generous response from good people to help initiatives aimed at the victory of good.'¹²¹

8. The promised temporal and eternal reward

Don Bosco was able to be so austere because, in line with his spirituality of the Last Things, he knew how to keep things wisely in proportion, or better, because he knew the immeasurable distance between the temporal and the eternal. He was completely familiar with the gospel's 'What does it profit a man to win the entire world if he loses or ruins himself?' Eternal salvation was truly the one thing necessary. He spoke of this at the end of the first conference to Cooperators in Turin on 16 May 1878, believing his own gratitude was too little recompense for their good works. 'I will leave the Lord to thank you for it,' he said. 'Yes, he often said that he considers done to himself what we do for our neighbour. On the other hand it is certain that there is greater merit attached to charity that is not just corporal but also has a spiritual purpose. I would like to say that not only does it have greater merit but also divine merit. The Holy Father agrees in repeating the saying of St Denis: "Divinorum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salute animarum." They explain this passage with St Augustine who says that this divine work is an absolute pledge of one's predestination: *animarum salvasti, animarum tuam praedestinasti*. Well then, by coming to the aid of the great good indicated, you can be sure that you are saving your own souls.'¹²²

However, in accordance with the mentality of his benefactor, he did not fail also to stress the temporal goods that Providence generally bestows on someone who is generous to the poor and weak, ones especially loved by God. This double motive was developed over many addresses beginning with the typical *sermon de charité* he gave in Nice on 12 March 1877. It can be considered as the model for similar addresses he gave in the years to follow. Among other things

118 Cf. Chap. 30, § 3.

119 BS 2 (1879) no. 6, June, p. 4.

120 *Una grande potenza e l'obbligo di bene impiegarla*, BS 4 (1880) no. 2, February, pp. 2–3.

121 *Regola pel buon impiego del danaro*, BS 4 (1880) no. 4, April, pp. 7–8.

122 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 13, p. 60.

Don Bosco reviewed, checked and corrected the written text on a number of occasions. The third part of the address – after the two points on the *History* and *Purpose* of this Institute – was dedicated to *Reward* as a reminder above all of what God will say at the end of their lives on earth to all who have done something for him in the person of the poor: ‘Come O blessed of my Heavenly Father.’ But he hastened to add: ‘But God the Father of kindness, knowing that our spirit is willing and our flesh so weak, wants our charity to reap a hundredfold even in this life.’ He listed a number of expressions of this.¹²³ The reward was reserved for whoever gave abundantly to the world of the poor while looking after his earthly interests. Punishment, instead, would inexorably descend upon those who were inordinately attached to their wealth and ignored the poor, closing themselves within their gilded castles. In the previously cited address in Genoa he said: ‘It is necessary for them to hear the terrible words of Jesus Christ: and the rich man died and was buried in hell: *mortuus est dives, et sepultus est in inferno*. Instead I am reminding you of the beautiful promises God makes to the one who is charitable, makes good use of his possessions, promotes and supports works of charity. Give and it will be given unto you says the Lord. *Date et dabitur vobis*. And what will he give you? A hundredfold in this world and eternal life in the next: *Centuplum accipietis et vitam aeternam possidebitis*.’¹²⁴

On a number of occasions he also warned that punishment would be anticipated in time. In decades and places where he felt the social climate was more troubled he did not fail to suggest to people of wealth that a violent future possibly lay ahead as a salutary encouragement to charitable foresight. He told his listeners he could see that young people who were poor and abandoned, if not helped in time were destined to be aggressive delinquents, and this could place the safety of their possessions and the lives of the ungenerous wealthy people at risk. These were the potential ‘purse snatchers’,¹²⁵ or young people ‘close to being nuisances to citizens and causing trouble for public authorities’,¹²⁶ or again ‘boys who are lost, without education and religion, most of whom will become the scourge of society, and perhaps not a few, will end up cursing their Creator in prison.’¹²⁷ He dared present some of the most dire and fearful predictions at Lucca in 1882, Guillotièrre in Lyons in 1883 and Barcelona in 1886.¹²⁸

9. A community united by active faith, gratitude and friendship

Don Bosco certainly did not think that Community and communion could be created only by rules and speeches. The prescribed meetings were certainly a means of bringing the Cooperators Association together, but Salesian fraternity was created above all by personal relationships of attention, gratitude, faith sharing, prayers and works. In a postscript to a letter on 4 December 1875 to Fr Cagliero in Argentina he wrote: ‘It is understood that every time I write I always include special greetings for Dr [Fr] Ceccarelli, Benítez, Espinosa etc. etc.’¹²⁹ The reminder was especially heartfelt in the case of the elderly Mr Benítez, a wonderful Christian and generous supporter of pious works. ‘Tell Mr Benítez,’ he wrote to his Vicar in America ‘that I thank him for the kindness he shows us. I would like so much to see him and if I never have this pleasure on earth, from now I am selling up the appropriate appointment in Heaven. Amen.’¹³⁰

123 Cf. G. Bosco, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, pp. 36–41, OE XXVIII 414–419.

124 Conference to Cooperators at Genoa, 30 March 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April, p. 72.

125 To Dr. E. Carranza, Buenos Aires, 30 September 1877, E III 221.

126 Circ. to inhabitants at Nizza Monf., March 1878, E III 333.

127 *Ai Cooperatori*, BS 4 (1880) no. 1, January, p. 3.

128 Cf. Chap. 30, § 3 and Chap. 33, § 5.

129 Em IV 574.

130 To Fr G. Cagliero, January 1876, E III 11.

He was giving more and more room to a true spirituality for the well-to-do and wealthy in the light of social charity, especially in the field of education. He wrote of it with particular intensity to the most active Cooperators in America. He wanted Uruguayan Mrs Jackson to personally understand the social spread of charity she had carried out through her translation work and by printing some of his publications, and by making it possible for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to be established in Uruguay: 'The souls these books will win over to the Lord' he assured her, 'will serve to increase the dowry of good works and the crown of glory that the angels have already prepared for you in heaven.' 'Founding an educational Institute in a country means doing a significant act of charity for all classes of citizens living there now and all who will live there after us.'¹³¹ He presented an identical idea a few days later to confreres at San Vincenzo in Buenos Aires: 'Experience has convinced us that this is the only way to sustain civil society: by taking care of poor children.' 'Those who perhaps go and populate the prisons and would forever be the scourge of civil society become good Christians, upright citizens the glory of the place they live in, an honour to the family they belong to, earning their bread honestly by sweat and work.'¹³² His letter to members of the Confraternity of the *Misericordia* (Our Lady of Mercy) was a hymn to charity which was heartfelt, clear, overflowing with affection and united Cooperator benefactors with the Salesians. Salesians who had embarked for Buenos Aires and left everything had found in them 'friends, generous Christians who made them welcome with exemplary kindness, offered them lodging, a church and bread; they offered them the possibility of commencing their sacred ministry.' He asked on behalf of those arriving in the third expedition: 'Continue to show them the same charity and kindness. Put up with their faults, give them good advice, and think of the assistance and bread you give them as something you are giving the humble writer whom you call "father" and to whom you sign yourselves with the sweet name of "children". I want these words of affection, esteem, gratitude and thanks that I have given you to also be passed on to your friends and all who are doing good for the Salesians in whatever way.'¹³³ Later, in a letter to Fr Costamagna, he asked him to give them his fond greetings, a request for prayers, 'an appointment for paradise' and 'woe to the one who is not there!'¹³⁴

In the 1880s, burdened with new tasks, first of which was building the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, in his family-style letters he turned above all to the Cooperators in Europe to ennoble charity. He was more regular in writing to the most generous families in those final years: the Quisard family in Lyons (22 letters) Mademoiselle Claire Louvet from Aire (58 letters) the Colle husband and wife team from Toulon (76 letters). Colle, a lawyer, was made a Roman Count by Leo XIII in 1882, in recognition of his exceptional charity which would be in the millions of euro by today's standards. Don Bosco was not only the promoter of charity whom they acknowledged but also their spiritual director guiding them on a path to happy and active Christianity. An example of the intensity of his words to Louvet: 'I will have the consolation of saying Mass exclusively for you; for you, your health, your holiness, your perseverance on the road to paradise, and all this to give you at least some recompense for the charity you do and the help you give our works.'¹³⁵ There were other similar comments before and after this one: 'Your good work,' 'your generous offering,' 'your charitable offerings,' 'your charity,' 'a providential mother for us and our works,' 'charity personified.'¹³⁶

131 To E. Jackson, 13 September 1877, E III 213.

132 Letter to Dr E. Carranza, 30 September 1877, E III 221.

133 Letter of 30 September 1877, E III 224–225.

134 Letter of 12 August 1878, E III 378.

135 Letter of 7 October 1885, E IV 469. On correspondence with Clara Louvet, cf. J. ITZAINA, "*Charitable Medemoiselle*". *Don Bosco fifty-eight letters to Clara Louvet*, in "Journal of Salesian Studies", 1 (1990) no. 1, pp. 35–46.

136 Cf. Letter to C. Louvet del 9 August and 21 December 1883; 26 January, 18 August, 4 October, 6 and 20 November, 20 December 1884; 21 February, 7 and 15 October 1885; August, 16 November, 9 and 26

Then there was his relationship of complete trust with Count Fleury, Louis Antoine Colle (1822–88), who was decorated with the medal of St Gregory the Great and who called himself ‘Commandeur’ because he was fully available to be ‘commanded by Don Bosco,’ awaiting orders from his ‘boss’, Don Bosco. He was quasi-administrator, delegate of Don Bosco’s multinational charity business. At a certain point Don Bosco said: ‘But why can’t we find similar benefactors in Italy? ... The reason is clear. There is only one Count Colle in France and Italy and we thank the good God a thousand times over that Count and Countess Colle are alive to help us, support us, and sustain us in our difficulties. May God preserve you both in good health for a long time and grant you the grace to spend many happy years in recompense for your charity on earth and, finally, in the next life for true reward, the great reward of Paradise where I fully trust we can find ourselves with Jesus, Mary, and our dear Louis, to converse eternally with God.’¹³⁷

He remained close to his Cooperators as he did with the Salesians, also during the years approaching the end of his earthly journey. He promised prayers for and presented other needs to Count Eugenio De Maistre who had brought him a sum of 6,000 lire [21,746 euro] on behalf of his elderly aunt: ‘All our missionaries, all our two hundred and fifty thousand orphans will pray that God will recompense you all greatly here on earth and in eternity. On this occasion I must carry out a duty of mine which is to thank you for the charity you do for the whole Salesian Congregation and their pupils in many situations At this moment we feel the greatness of your favours for the straits we are in and for the multitude of orphans incessantly asking for salvation on all sides. God bless you Count Eugenio, and may the Virgin protect you and all your family, guide them, all constantly on the path of virtue all the way to Paradise, along with you and this poor writer.’¹³⁸

He replied to one woman who was asking prayers for various sick individuals: ‘We will pray and get others to pray’ adding: ‘I recommend you note that God often said “Give and it will be given to you” and faith without works is dead.’¹³⁹) ‘The Lord assures us of a hundredfold also in this life,’ he reminded someone who had donated 500 lire [1,846 euro], and to another who had thrown ‘a little water on arid land’¹⁴⁰ by donating 600 lire [2,215 euro]. In January 1885 there was a circular to Cooperators in Paris inviting them to support the Patronage Saint–Pierre opened in France’s Capital. He ended with his habitual line: ‘I assure you that I will pray every day and will get our boys to pray at the altar of Mary Help of Christians so she will gather you and your families under her mantle; that she will protect and bless you in body and soul in this life and finally that she will obtain from her Divine Son Jesus the grace that you receive the reward of your charity in heaven.’¹⁴¹ More personalised was the letter to Cooperators at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, close to the Salesians in the city. ‘I know you help them’ he told them ‘and the little they have already done is due to your charity. Continue your work.’¹⁴²

His crusade of charity would only come to an end with the end of his own life.¹⁴³

December 1886; 3 May, 12 June, 4 July 1887: E IV 457, 459, 461, 463, 464, 465, 466, 468, 469, 470, 471, 474, 475, 477, 478.

137 Letter of 29 December 1884, E IV 510–511.

138 Letter of 6 March 1887, E IV 372–373.

139 Letter of 6 March 1887, E IV 372–373.

140 To Fr T. De Agostini, 13 August 1884, E IV 286–287.

141 Circ. 29 January 1885, E IV 310–311.

142 Letter of 25 July 1886, E IV 357–358; cf. Also circular translated into several languages and disseminated throughout Europe, drawn up on the basis of his outline and reviewed by him, 15 October 1886, E IV 360–363.

143 Cf. Chap. 34, § 5.

A builder of live, vital youth communities (1870–77)

- 1870 Past pupils at Valdocco gain visibility as a group.
- 1875 29 January: Fr Luigi Guanella enters the Oratory.
- 1876 10 February: opening of classes at Vallecrosia;
6 August: meeting politicians from the Left at Lanzo;
Autumn: commences management of elementary classes at Ariccia and lower secondary classes at Albano;
10/19 November: classes begin at Trinità di Mondovì.
- 1877 Autumn: double commitment at Magliano Sabina.

The spread of youth works, founding a female Religious Institute, legal consolidation of the male branch, geographical extension of the works, establishment of the *Work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the clerical state*, the practical and spiritual organisation of the Cooperators, and inter-diocesan disputes – none of these distracted Don Bosco from the first and principal aim of the mission: the human and Christian education of young people and the spiritual formation of those dedicated to them, bound by special consecration to God.

The events and chronologies offer us a man ‘completely consecrated’ as the preventive system required, both to young people and those who form them, in response to his original passion as a priest for the young and his consequent concern as founder to achieve the same aim: salvation, sanctification. The two chapters to follow are dedicated to these and cover the salient moments of Don Bosco’s activity over the three years from 1875–77.

1. The spread of works in 1876

1876 marked the establishment of new works, all in Italy. The first opened on 10 February and still continues today, in Vallecrosia near Bordighera on the extreme western edge of the Ligurian riviera. Others were added in late autumn but were of limited duration: very brief at Ariccia, Albano and Trinità di Mondovì; longer at Magliano Sabina.

Reasons for the requests were not all equal, and motives for accepting them were profoundly different: tactical in some cases, substantial in others. Don Bosco was personally involved in them all, but with clear predilection for Vallecrosia, which brought him back to the popular and anti-protestant involvement of the first two decades of his priestly activity.

1.1 In defence of the Catholic faith: Vallecrosia

In his letter to Fr Rua in November 1875, telling him he had to go to Nice, Don Bosco informed him that he would be stopping at Ventimiglia on his return.¹ He was even more explicit in a letter the same day from Nice to his friend Count Eugenio De Maistre: as well as Nice he would be opening another work 'among the Protestants who are causing a mess in Bordighera.'² He wrote again to Fr Rua from Nice: 'The day after tomorrow I will go to Ventimiglia and will see what can be done for Bordighera.'³ At Ventimiglia he met the Bishop, Lorenzo Giovanni Biale (1785–1877), who was concerned about Protestant proselytism, the Waldensians and Evangelicals who were particularly active in the Vallecrosia plains, a coastal strip about 4 kilometres long between Bordighera and Ventimiglia [Nice was an error], the former Vallecrosia alta (Upper). Already in the early 1870s the bishop had expressed his concerns to Pius IX about the way Protestants lured youth to their schools. The Pope sent a letter deploring the situation and encouraging him, offering to motivate others to help support the bishop's plan to counter their schools with schools of his own.⁴

In 1875 Bishop Biale used Fr Cerruti's mediation to get through to Don Bosco. Writing to the Rector at Alassio on 23 February 1875, he said: 'It is certain that a city will soon arise on the plains between Ventimiglia and Bordighera. This can easily be argued from the fabulous prices people are paying for land, the luxurious dwellings and other more modest ones suddenly springing up, the *Hôtels* already filled with upper class people from England, France and Germany holidaying in this delightful spot.' He also told him he had bought land there to build a church and school to counter ones built by the Protestants very close by.⁵

It was an attractive invitation for Don Bosco. It meant continuing elsewhere the battle begun in Turin with the St Aloysius oratory and by his writings. It would need to develop in Vallecrosia in the area of popular education for boys and girls and through pastoral, catechetical and sacramental activity by setting up a public church. He quickly accepted the free and generous offer: the diocese had scant means and priests. Don Bosco quickly mobilised the Salesians, and, as we have seen, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.⁶ He informed the rectors of the imminent commencement, as well as the Valdocco community during the public afternoon conference on 3 February 1876, one of the usual series of St Francis de Sales Conferences.⁷

A week later, a Salesian priest and two novices, one a cleric, the other a layman, and three Daughters of Mary Help of Christians went there.⁸ 'The day before yesterday (10 February) the two small houses at Ventimiglia were opened. Fr Cibrario as Rector, Cerruti as teacher, Martino as majordomo,' Don Bosco told Fr Cagliari.⁹ They began immediately among poor buildings and with whatever money they could find, setting up elementary classes, two oratories – one for boys, one for girls – and religious ceremonies in a narrow, bare chapel. A few days later Don Bosco sent a letter of encouragement from Nice for a 'very difficult' work of humble beginnings. He addressed it

1 To Fr M. Rua, 18 November 1875, Em IV 562.

2 To Count E. De Maistre, 18 November 1875, Em IV 561.

3 Letter of 24 November 1875, Em IV 566.

4 Cf. letter of Pius IX to Bishop L. Biale del 12 August 1872, *Pii IX pontificis maximi Acta*, p. I, vol. VI 67–68.

5 MB XI 592–594.

6 Cf. goodnight, 8 December 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3 bis, pp. 40–41.

7 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 5, pp. 3–4; quad. 14 bis, pp. 23–24.

8 *Cronaca della Casa di Vallecrosia*, in the archives of the Salesian work at Vallecrosia; E. COLOMBARA, *Don Bosco a Vallecrosia (1876–1951). Memoria dell'opera salesiana a Vallecrosia*. Ventimiglia, Arti Grafiche Silvestrini 1951; P. CAVIGLIA – B. NOTO, *La scuola "Maria Ausiliatrice" di Vallecrosia. Origine e sviluppo di un'istituzione educativa fondata da don Bosco (1876–1923)*, in "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 36 (1998) 1, 15–70.

9 To Fr G. Cagliari, 12 February 1876, E III 18.

to the Rector 'leading the small caravan which must become a tidy army with the Lord's blessing.'¹⁰ Ten days later he established a meeting at Ventimiglia for 2 March with the bishop 'to take orders and see what must be done.'¹¹ During the visit to Vallecrosia on 2 and 3 March he saw the need to build a church and on either side a house for the Salesians and the Sisters with respective classrooms, a dream that would be realised at the beginning of the 1880s. But Don Bosco told Fr Cagliero optimistically: 'The house near Bordighera has begun very well. They have already taken in a hundred girls and as many boys from the jaws of the Protestants. Their church has had a congregation of four for the last two Sundays. The whole population is going to Fr Cibrario. The anger is all directed at Don Bosco who is there above all to disturb consciences. They are right.'¹²

He returned a couple of times to Ventimiglia to support, consolidate and improve.¹³ In years that followed, in the general report on the various works he gave during the St Francis de Sales Conferences, Fr Rua told the rectors and Salesians at Valdocco, the professed, novices and aspirants about Vallecrosia. He spoke of the poor, bare rooms, the poverty of the two small Salesian communities, the generosity of the people, the huge numbers flocking to the boys' and girls' schools and the massive desertion from the Protestants' schools.¹⁴

In March 1878, before attending an audience with the new Pope, Leo XIII, Don Bosco sought to prepare him favourably with a letter on the works recently begun. With reference to Vallecrosia he stressed the efforts of the Protestants and the rapid decline of their schools and gatherings but also the encouragement and material help provided by Pius IX in previous years, his intention to buy land on which to build a larger, more adequate classrooms and a church 'in order to provide regularly and decently for Catholic worship.' He stressed the fact 'the Pontiff (Pius IX) was generous in aiding us in the most serious needs' and that 'these works aimed at sustaining the faithful in their faith' had no 'means of supporting themselves,' therefore they were 'truly at risk of collapsing and not achieving their aim. Which is why I humbly recommend them to the charity of Your Holiness who is our universal father, and for the support of Catholics at risk.'¹⁵

He also provided a brief history of the work in Vallecrosia at the Cooperators Conference in Turin on 16 May 1878. He linked it with the anti-protestant campaign begun with the St Aloysius oratory in 1847, then later pursued at Sampierdarena, Nice, La Spezia, and with problems created by spurious forms of freedom. Heresy, he noted, 'is creating destruction in Catholic countries and spreading, along with the spread of freedom in the political world. There are always sad consequences when evil is given open licence to operate under the banner of freedom, and meanwhile the work of good people is hindered.' He went on to suggest that Protestant proselytism had achieved easy conquests in a rapidly increasing population through its churches and schools. The Salesians and Sisters had quickly reversed the situation: 'The Protestant schools have completely closed down' and those who had 'begun attending the Protestant church ... had abandoned a place that was about to become the centre of heresy in Liguria.'¹⁶

On 8 November 1878, Don Bosco asked the Rector, who was busy buying land for improving the work: 'How are you off for money? Is the land you were dreaming of large enough for your needs?'¹⁷ The question of the usefulness of this work, always in terms of its anti-protestant value, returned in a letter he wrote to the Secretary of State in Rome, Cardinal Nina, on 12 March 1879.

10 To Fr L. Cibrario, 19 February 1876, E III 20.

11 Letter of 29 February 1876, E III 20.

12 Letter of 12 March 1876, E III 28–29.

13 Cf. letter to Fr L. Cibrario, 29 November 1876 and 20 February 1877, E III 120 and 152.

14 Afternoon Conference on 6 February 1877, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 11, pp. 19–22.

15 Letter of 15 March 1878, E III 319.

16 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 13, pp. 55–57.

17 To Fr L. Cibrario, 8 November 1878, E III 411.

Nina was also Protector of the Salesian Society from the 24th of that month.¹⁸ It was a new opportunity for listing the most recent works, all involved, according to the writer, in the same battle against heresy and 'irreligion' which had begun with the St Aloysius Oratory in Turin: La Spezia, Vallecrosia, the St Leo Hospice at Marseilles, the agricultural schools at St. Cyr and Navarre, and establishments in Nice, Sampierdarena, Lucca, Montevideo, Buenos Aires. The request for material aid and advice was inevitable for 'churches and hospices' which needed to be built in 'Turin, La Spezia, Ventimiglia.'¹⁹In spring 1879 he was given a free grant of land thanks to the generous Migone family from Genoa, to build a church and a better building for classes.²⁰

He had the full support of the new Bishop of Ventimiglia, Bl. Tommaso Reggio (1818–1901) who had been Coadjutor with right of succession to Bishop Biale from 20 March 1877. He became Archbishop of Genoa in 1892. Sensitive to social problems he was already a promoter of Catholic worker societies in Genoa, and on 12 June 1879 he sent out a circular to invite the faithful of the diocese to give their contribution, and set up a commission of priests and laity to publicise and collect donations. It was about 'building a church and providing regular schools for both sexes run by the Salesians' to replace 'the small school' and the 'less than modest little church.' The church would become 'the church for the three parishes of Vallecrosia, Borghetto and Camporosso.' In his strong appeal, inspired by deep passion for the defence of the Catholic Faith, the prelate praised 'the intrepid D. Bosco' who had courageously set about this 'new undertaking of his unquenchable charity.'²¹ The 'intrepid D. Bosco' soon got down to work. He sent the Rector, Fr Cibrario, drafts of letters to government bodies and others asking for grants, and a form for donors, turning to them with an appeal signed by himself and commission members. He also sent a petition to Leo XIII who sent his blessing and the considerable sum of 500 lire [1,658 euro].²²

Work on the new building complex began in autumn 1880. The laying of the foundation stone of the church in the afternoon of 7 March 1880, *Laetare* Sunday, was a solemn affair with an address by Bishop Reggio and in the presence of Bishop Allegro Albenga, of Savona, Bishop Boraggini and with the Bishop of Albenga, Bishop Allegro and Bishop Boraggini of Savona also present. Don Bosco also spoke and his brief address was transcribed in the minutes which were sealed in the foundation stone.²³ At the end of the ceremony, purse in hand, Don Bosco stood at the exit to collect alms from the thousands who attended. The *Salesian Bulletin* gave it extraordinary coverage.²⁴ At the beginning of 1881 Don Bosco provided details in his letter to Cooperators: 'At Vallecrosia near Ventimiglia, the building of classrooms for the teachers [Salesians and Sisters] has finished. Work on the attached church is also progressing, and we hope it will be open for divine worship in 1881.'²⁵

Don Bosco stopped over once more during his return trip from Nice on 27 March 1881 and on 1 April was in S. Remo as guest of the Visitation Sisters until the 4th to organise a 'sermon of

18 Cf. text of decree of appointment signed by Archbishop Serafino Cretoni Pro-Substitute for the Secretary of State, 26 March 1879, *Documenti* XX 163; G. BERTO, *Appunti sui viaggi di D. Bosco a Roma 1879–80*, pp. 27, 72, 84, 87.

19 E III 455–456.

20 To Fr F. Migone, 6 April 1879, E III 464–466.

21 Erection of a Catholic church at Ventimiglia, with text of the letter *Alle anime generose e pie di Tommaso dei marchesi Reggio, vescovo di Ventimiglia*: BS 3 (1879) no. 8, August, pp. 2–5.

22 Cf. letter to Fr L. Cibrario, petition to Leo XIII, appeal to benefactors, request to Royal Economato, August and September 1879, E III 511, 521–524.

23 In the glass urn located in a cavity in the stone with photograph of various personalities, also included were two articles from the *Bollettino Salesiano: I valdesi o evangelici di Vallecrosia e la casa di Maria Ausiliatrice e Lettera di un Giovane convertito alla Fede cattolica ai Superiori dell'Asilo Evangelico di Vallecrosia*, BS 3 (1879) no.7, July, pp. 1–4, 4–8.

24 Cf. *Nuova chiesa e scuole di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 4 (1880) no. 4, April, pp. 1–7.

25 BS 5 (1881) no. 1, January, p. 2.

charity.²⁶) He announced it would be on Sunday 10 April at the parish of S. Siro, in a circular on 5 April, addressed to the 'deserving citizens.' He set up a committee of 36 men and women. After giving a conference he walked around the church with a collection bag, collecting eight hundred lire [2,737 euro]. He also went begging for money at Porto S. Maurizio, where he was the guest of Canon Fabre for two nights.²⁷

Don Bosco was besieged by many problems and caught up in financial burdens: completing the Church of St John the Evangelist in Turin, commencing work on the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, extensions in Nice and Marseilles, the hospice in Lucca, the church at La Spezia. This did not prevent him pushing forward passionately on the Vallecrosia plains, building either side of the church, one a residence for Salesians and their classrooms, the other for the Sisters and their pupils. The July 1881 *Salesian Bulletin* highlighted *The Defeat of Heresy* in Vallecrosia, giving news of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians and the blessing of a new chapel dedicated to her on 12 June, while awaiting completion of the church.²⁸

He made important stopovers there in years to follow as well. In order to increase potential attraction to the Catholic schools, he stopped there on 13 February 1883, as part of the forthcoming lengthy trip through France, and planned a lottery for the schools with the Rector.²⁹ He wrote a circular in Marseilles to collect items for it,³⁰ but the request for authorisation from the Prefect of the province was turned down.³¹ The 1881 legislation did not permit lotteries except for legally constituted entities, something Don Bosco would soon discover again personally when trying to run a lottery in Rome. In Rome's case a solution was found, but not for Ventimiglia.

He made an exceptional intervention there when the Work at Vallecrosia was seriously damaged by earthquake affecting the riviera from Savona to Mentone, wreaking serious destruction. The building at Vallecrosia had to be pulled down. 'The church, classrooms, hospice at Vallecrosia, Ventimiglia had to be either repaired or rebuilt,' he wrote to Mrs Anne Parodi Cataldi in Genoa.³² Don Bosco sent his trustworthy contractor, Carlo Buzzetti, to take a look. He told him it would take 6,000 lire [21,746 euro] to make the buildings habitable. Don Bosco immediately set to work for this and other works in Liguria, having two circular letters drawn up and signed by himself, dated 1 March – one to the Cooperators, the other to the Salesians.³³ He personally wrote other letters to many benefactors asking for money and thanking them for it.³⁴

1.2 Two suburbicarian dioceses in Rome

Don Bosco displayed very keen interest in accepting two works in the 'Castelli Romani', the hills outside Rome, also to guarantee charity and as likely support for what he was doing in Rome. These were in Ariccia and Albano, though they were short-lived from autumn 1876 to summer 1879.

26 Cf. letter to Fr F. Dalmazzo, da Alassio 6 April 1881, E IV 42.

27 Cf. letter to M. Acquarona, from Rome 27 April 1881, E IV 48.

28 BS 5 (1881) no. 7, July, pp. 23–24. Don Bosco gave news of it to Cardinal Protector Nina, letter of 30 June 1881, E IV 64.

29 Cf. letter to Fr G. Bologna, from Varazze 5 February 1883, E IV 211.

30 Circ. of 20 April 1883, E IV 217–218.

31 Letter of March–April 1884, E IV 254–255.

32 Letter of 17 March 1887, E IV 373.

33 *Documenti* XXXIV 96–98, 99–100; MB XVIII 758–762.

34 Cf. letter to Marchioness E. Nerli, 3 March 1887, E IV 371–372; to Count E. De Maistre, 6 March 1887, E IV 372–373; to Mr O. Dufour, s. d., E IV 374; to Baron R. Cataldi, s. d., IV 374–375; to Marchioness G. Tagliacarne, 30 March and 4 April 1887, E IV 376; to Count and Countess Colle, 22 March 1887, E IV 525.

Prince Mario Chigi di Campagnano and his lady were interested in offering him the care of a church and elementary school at Ariccia: it required one priest and two teachers.³⁵ The Pope authorised a Religious Community with fewer than six members.³⁶ The authorisation became superfluous when Cardinal Di Pietro, the suburbicarian Bishop of Albano, asked Don Bosco to send at least two more qualified teachers to Albano for secondary classes which he would also send seminarians to.³⁷ The Schools Superintendent quickly approved the secondary classes. Don Bosco replied to Bishop Francesco Latoni, promising four teachers for the secondary school, guaranteeing compliance with the law and assuring him he had written to Cardinal Di Pietro about this. In the official list of members and Works of the Salesian Society for the 1876–77 school year there appeared mention of ‘the House at Albano, Our Lady of the Star Oratory and the municipal schools at Albano and Ariccia.’ It comprised four priests and a further six professed members, five of whom were clerics, three coadjutors of whom two were novices. They all live at Ariccia in a rather uncomfortable residence.

The Salesian Year Book then listed ‘some staff for the school at *Magliano (Sabina)*’ with two professed members, one a priest, the other a cleric, and two novices, as well as diocesan priests’ Antonio Pagani and Canon Francesco Rebaudi. In fact the Cardinal suburbicarian Bishop, Piedmontese Barnabite Luigi Bilio (1826–84), had asked for two teachers for his seminary.

From the end of October and during November 1876 the staff were already at work in all the three places. Don Bosco soon had to take note of the various circumstances and establish contacts with the civil and Church authorities. He came to Albano from Rome on 16 January and stayed there three days. On 29 January he went to Magliano Sabina where he was met at Borghetto station by the auxiliary bishop. Along the way he met students, clerics from the seminary, residents of the college, day students at the schools and their teachers, all of whom came to meet him. As at Albano he did the monthly exercise for a happy death. He left there on 1 February. Thus he was able to provide direct information at the General Conference held on 6 February as part of the usual St Francis de Sales Conferences in February in 1877. At Ariccia too, the elementary classes, ‘very well attended’ were aimed at opposing the Protestants who were employing every means to attract pupils. He foresaw that they would ‘soon be bankrupt.’ He also said he would try to open ‘night classes for adults and the festive oratories.’ He then went on: ‘We also have to teach in the municipal secondary school and the junior seminary, and everyone’s very fond of the Salesians.’ During his visit most of the students had besieged him to hear their confessions. A similar scene was repeated during the visit to Magliano Sabina where he received an especially warm welcome.³⁸

In the summer of 1877, Don Bosco sought better arrangements from civil and Church authorities for Salesians employed in the secondary schools there, since they had to shuttle between Ariccia and Albano twice daily. He asked the Mayor to ‘settle the accommodation, how many were needed, and their salary.’³⁹ He asked the Vicar General’s support for his requests to the Mayor and added the suggestion of ‘connecting a college to the current junior seminary but always in reference to the diocesan Ordinary.’⁴⁰ Nothing happened.

Following the transfer of Cardinal Di Pietro on 12 March 1877, and the death on 26 April 1879 of his successor Cardinal Morichini, a firm friend of Don Bosco and the Salesians, the atmosphere changed on the arrival of Cardinal Hohenlohe. Of Rosminian persuasion, the Cardinal was a friend

35 Letters of Prince Chigi of 31 May, 10 and 24 June 1876, *Documenti* XVII 470–472; MB XII 687–690.

36 Letter of Bishop F. Latoni, Auditor of the Holy See, 22 August 1876, *Documenti* 473; MB XII 690–691.

37 To Don Bosco, 12 August 1876, *Documenti* XVII 472; MB XII 691.

38 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 11, pp. 31–35.

39 Letter of 12 August 1877, E III 206–207.

40 Letter of 12 August 1877, E III 207–208.

and informant of Archbishop Gastaldi on Roman views concerning the Archbishop's stance when the 'Rosminian question' reignited between 1876–83.⁴¹ The limited field of activity for the Salesians became clearer. Don Bosco stressed this in summer 1877 in a letter to the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, La Valletta, who had sent an instruction to parish priests in the capital concerning Protestant proselytism, which *L'Unità Cattolica* published on 3 August.

Don Bosco grabbed the ball on the rebound, both in terms of the long–desired house in Rome and to free himself of works without a future, explaining that 'the Salesians in Albano have a too limited harvest. There are twelve teachers, all accredited, and all they have is thirty–five pupils between seminarians and day students. So I would put all or some of these at Your Eminence's disposal if they can be used in school teaching or the sacred ministry as you determine best for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls.' The problem of the buildings was not insoluble. If it had been resolved in many other places 'could we not succeed' he asked 'in opening a hospice in Rome with Your Eminence's support and the assistance of Divine Providence which has never failed us.' He said finally that he had shared his thinking with Bishop Domenico Jacobini who would visit the Cardinal to hear his opinion, which Don Bosco would willingly accept.⁴²

Months later, during his extended tour through Italy with Fr Durando to examine the many requests for foundations on site, Fr Cagliero wrote to Don Bosco from Acireale, expressing similar doubts about remaining at Albano. 'Given the urgent requests to open boarding places and no hope of opening any in Albano' he wrote on 3 March 1879 'it seems to us that this is a waste of personnel. The little good our men are doing in the two German hills could be done by the priests of the place themselves. And the results of the well–disciplined work they do is very little when there would be much better results if they were occupied in some boarding school elsewhere.'⁴³

The Rector of the Salesian community in Albano developed identical concerns in a letter to Fr Bonetti published in the *Salesian Bulletin*: the good that can be done 'is very little'. 'Literary instructions could also be provided by other teachers.' 'Our ministry is not necessary nor is it of any special help in a city like Albano where the secular and religious clergy are numerous and more than sufficient for any needs souls have.' The conclusion was obvious: 'If there is no hope of more work it will certainly be right, though not without regret, at having to leave so many good people in this city, to pick up our tents and put them in a more extensive and abandoned vineyard, perhaps even among the people of the Pampas and Patagonia.'⁴⁴ Over the same weeks, motivations of the kind soon lead to a rapid and consensual decoupling from Ariccia. The Castelli Romani experience was done and dusted in the space of three years.

The commitment to Magliano Sabina, instead, grew with the 1877–78 school year. Don Bosco was asked to accept control of studies and accounting for the seminary. He accepted, asking for some 'clarifications' then sent a draft agreement.⁴⁵ Agreement was soon reached and from Rome he informed Fr Rua of it. 'The negotiations for the seminary at Magliano are complete in the sense we have understood. This will be the first example of a seminary administered this way. I will send you a copy of the agreement, as soon as Fr Berto has made a good copy of it.'⁴⁶ At the same time he added a suggestion that extended ultimately to the field of activity: creating a boarding school for young students next to the seminary 'with the obligation of keeping strictly to the common discipline' and also allowing boys from the city to attend classes 'as simple day students or part–

41 Cf. D. FRANCHETTI, *Alcune memorie intorno a monsignor Gio. Battista Bertagna....* Turin, P. Marietti Editore 1916, pp. 86–93.

42 To the Card. Vicar, 6 August 1878, E III 375–376.

43 MB XIV 326.

44 *I Cooperatori e la casa salesiana di Albano*, BS 3 (1879) no. 8, August, pp. 7–8.

45 Cf. text in MB XIII 982–983.

46 To Fr M. Rua, 12 June 1877, E III 183; cf. Also letters of Card. L. Bilio to Don Bosco in MB XIII 983–986.

time boarders.’⁴⁷ In the official Year Book for the Salesian Society for the 1877–78 school year, the ‘employees’ of the previous year were replaced by a regular community: ‘House at Magliano Sabina. Seminary – Immaculate Conception College. Chapter: Rector Canon Francesco Rebaudi; Prefect, Fr Stefano Chicco; Catechist, Fr Antonio Pagani; School Councillor, Fr Giuseppe Daghero; Councillor, Cleric Biagio Giacomuzzi’ who became a priest the following year. Among members not belonging to the Chapter were two coadjutors and a cleric, two novice (clerics) and three aspirants (coadjutors). In the 1879 Year Book Salesian teacher and priest Fr Pietro Guidazio’s name appeared. He was listed as ‘Teacher at Montefiascone Seminary.’ This title disappeared from the list the following year. Fr Guidazio, an excellent teacher, ended up becoming somewhat an outsider in a school which was culturally poor and pedagogically out of date.⁴⁸

Various disagreements arose at Magliano Sabina but were overcome thanks to a providential visit from Don Bosco in 24–26 March 1879. Both the seminary and the boarding section functioned to the manifest satisfaction of Cardinal Bilio.⁴⁹ There were other visits in years to follow: in 1880 Don Bosco stopped over from 20–23 April, days spent in a happy long excursion with boys and staff, hearing confessions and giving audiences. In 1882 he stayed from 9–11 May. In 1884, physically exhausted, he met the clerics and boys during a stop at the Borghetto station on his trip from Rome to Florence mid-way through May.

At the beginning of the 1883–84 school year some disagreement arose between Canon Pagani and Fr Daghero, which worsened following the death of Cardinal Bilio on 30 January 1884 and the succession of Cardinal Martinelli on 24 May. The dispute was over the approval of the Constitutions and the gaining of privileges in 1884, Fr Daghero being in favour of Don Bosco, of course. Among other things, Cardinal Bilio had authorised the founding of a semi-boarding school run by Fr Rebaudi which took boys away from other boarding schools. In May 1884 Don Bosco gave notice, which was not accepted by the Pope and Cardinal Martinelli, especially since it should have been communicated five years earlier.⁵⁰ The pull-out took place at the end of the 1888–89 school year after five years had elapsed. The staff was utilised in the promising municipal college or boarding school at Terracina. It too, however, was short lived (1889–93) it seems because the municipality failed to fulfil its part.

2. Fr Luigi Guanella as Rector at Trinità di Mondovì

Also with a brief lifespan was the typical work at *Trinità di Mondovì*, a little day school for boys and a night school for adults. Located in a district centre of around 3,000 inhabitants deep in the Piedmontese countryside south of Turin, 24 kilometres from Cuneo, the new work had the privilege of having an exceptional priest as its Rector, a Salesian for three years, Blessed Luigi Guanella (1842–1915), who later founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Providence, and the Servants of Charity.⁵¹ From the province of Sondrio and diocese of Como, ordained priest in 1866, he was initially the spiritual ‘economiser’ at Prosto then parish priest at Savogno. He very soon came into contact with Cottolengo’s and Don Bosco’s works in Turin. He had been busy as a

47 To the Vicar General of the diocese, 29 May 1877, E III 177–178.

48 Cf. two of his letters to Don Bosco, one on 22 April 1879, and the other to Fr C. Durando in January of the same year (MB XIII 979–982).

49 Letter to Don Bosco of 14 October 1879; MB XIII 985–986.

50 Discussions pro and con the recession occupied sessions of the members of the Salesian Society’s general administration on 26 January, 19 May, 26 August, 28 October, 5, 9, 18 December 1884 and 12 June 1885: cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 4r, 11v, 19v; fol. 44v–45r, 49r–v, 51r, 53r–v; fol. 60r–61v.

51 Fundamental regarding this is the study by M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e Don Bosco. Storia di un incontro e di un confronto*. Rome, Nuove Frontiere Editrice 1989.

pastor and in charitable work which included school experience. To make his teaching legal he had gained his certificate as a lower elementary teacher.

In 1870, Guanella met Don Bosco on a number of occasions in Turin, and over the years sent boys to the Oratory and girls to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese. In 1873 he had his first book printed by the Oratory Press, *Saggio di ammonimenti famigliari per tutti, ma particolarmente per il popolo di campagna* (An essay on warnings of a family style for everyone but especially for country folk),⁵² Confirming civil authorities in their belief that this parish priest was intransigent in thought and action, Fr Guanella then set about getting Don Bosco to found a college with elementary and middle school level classes at Chiavenna, a plan that was rejected as unrealistic.⁵³ He never abandoned the idea and as a Salesian proposed it once more, this time for Ascona, in 1876 and Mendrisio in 1877⁵⁴ both in the Ticino Canton in Switzerland.

For years he nurtured the thought of entering Don Bosco's religious and educational institution. Finally, despite difficulties posed by his bishop, he sent the founder a formal request to be accepted. Don Bosco wrote to him from Nice: 'Your place is ready. You can come when you want. Once I'm back in Turin we can decide on the place and house best for you ... Just try not to leave any complications behind that could force you to be recalled home.'⁵⁵

Guanella arrived at the Oratory on the evening of the Feast of St Francis de Sales 1875, when Don Bosco announced his acceptance of the South American Missions to the whole community. In the first few months he was involved in various tasks. In June, asked to look after the St Aloysius Oratory, the day after Don Bosco's feast day he brought around 150 of the oratory boys down, to bring their greetings to the Superior. Fr Barberis, the chronicler, noted: 'It wasn't such a bad effort considering the audience made up of all of them, Fr Guanella, just beginning as director of the festive oratory, cleric Vigliocco, almost the vice director, and me!' 'Don Bosco welcomed them with a familiar talk but it seemed rather nice to me.' He thanked them for what they had done, noting however: 'This is all due to the kindness of those leading you. It is not me, then, you should express your gratitude to; it is the ones who are looking after you; I am not doing anything for you. Thank Fr Luigi. Then he encouraged them: 'Always go willingly to the Oratory on Sunday, both mornings and afternoons.' 'I am happy that you are enjoying yourselves, playing, being cheerful. This is the way to become saints like St Aloysius. So long as you try not to commit sin. If you have some special need, address it to Fr Luigi.'⁵⁶

After a rather atypical novitiate, Fr Guanella took triennial vows on 25 September. On 31 October, 'Fr Guanella was appointed ... professor of literature for the students of philosophy who were weak in that area.'⁵⁷ One day a week he also went to Valsalice to hold theology classes for the clerics who were assistants at the college. Meanwhile he was putting together an explanation of Christian Doctrine with parables and examples, a work he published in 1883 with the title '*Vieni meco La dottrina cristianna esposta con esempi in quaranta discorsi famigliari*, (Come with me. Christian doctrine explained through examples in forty familiar talks).⁵⁸ It was an activity he continued while in charge of the small work at Trinità, which left him some space for preaching in parishes and educational institutes.⁵⁹

52 Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1872.

53 To Fr L. Guanella, 8 August 1873, Em IV 140; cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 32–35.

54 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 35–37.

55 Letter of 12 December 1874, Em IV 362.

56 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, pp. 20–22, Friday 25 June 1875.

57 Chapter Conferences at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 28 March 1875 to 4 June 1876, in J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 210 (Seduta delli 31–10–75).

58 Milan, Tipografia Eusebiana 1883, 350 pp.

59 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 74–75.

On day three of the Francis de Sales Conferences in February 1876, in the afternoon session, Fr Guanella reported on the St Aloysius Oratory. Attendance on Sunday was 200/250 boys, 'very good'. They were also attracted there with 'some small gifts' and 'some outings.' He said he was grateful to the 'good members, both academic and trade students [from the Valdocco Oratory] who came along to teach Catechism to the boys at no little inconvenience to themselves.' However as an experienced parish priest he said 'It would be desirable and I hope this is done for them, to do appropriate study as young catechists in Christian doctrine or the catechism, explaining various difficulties and seeing they understood it well, beginning with me first of all.' He ended with an appeal: 'Those poor boys are in great spiritual and temporal need. Therefore if you have some small things that can fall from your tables for these poor youngsters, I will willingly accept them and get as much benefit out of them as possible.'⁶⁰

He was also asked to look after the Sons of Mary who had not been joined with the larger group at Sampierdarena. On his trip to Rome in April 1876, Don Bosco brought a letter of theirs with him to give to the Pope. In a letter to Fr Rua and the boys at the Oratory he told them about the papal audience: 'It lasted about an hour. With truly fatherly kindness he read the letters from Marchioness Fassati, Fr Barberis and his novices, Fr Guanella and the Sons of Mary. He then went on to read all the letters, long and short. The last was from a certain Garrone and the Pope noticed the many spelling and grammatical errors. Jokingly the Holy Father said that this one would need to prepare himself a bit before presenting for the Literature exam.'⁶¹

The same day – it was Easter – Don Bosco wrote to Fr Guanella: 'In the last audience yesterday (15) the Holy Father showed great kindness and read all of the letters addressed to him by the Sons of Mary. He then asked how many there were, about their studies, their hopes, health, whether they showed interest in the foreign missions etc.' And he concluded: 'Meanwhile my dear Fr Luigi, work willingly. Divine grace will not fail us. Peace, patience and courage. Many more things when we can speak ... My fondest greetings to all the Sons of Mary and write, too, to Fr Albera about the special blessings the Holy Father sends the Sons of Mary in his house.'⁶² On 10 November 1876, Fr Guanella was appointed Rector of the small community going to open the house at Trinità. The work had been encouraged by the wealthy couple from Challonges in Savoy, Giovanni Battista Dupraz and Angela Giusiana, who had a large country house at Trinità belonging to her. They wanted a private Catholic school and oratory to counteract the secular teaching in the local elementary school there. On Thursday 30 March, Fr Barberis noted in his chronicle: 'Today I found out that over these days the *formal contract* was signed (last Monday I believe) to open a school at Trinità di Mondovì. They have been working on this for three months.'⁶³ The same day Don Bosco told Fr Cagliero: 'Today it was decided a new house would be opened at Trinità. Tell Fr Tomatis [from Trinità, he was now at San Nicolas de los Arroyos in Argentina]. It is a shelter with a school.'⁶⁴ The deed of agreement was signed between Fr John Bosco and Mrs Angela Giusiana in July. It ceded part of the house for twenty years to be used as a pious private institute for the education and instruction of poor and abandoned boys from the district and province, and she committed herself to contributing 1,500 lire [4,924 euro] a year. Don Bosco was also able to use the building for a day school for poor boys who could not attend the district schools, and for other boys who could pay a monthly fee. Initially, Don Bosco had appointed thirty-two year old Fr Luigi Porta as Rector, but the Dupraz family felt he was too inexperienced. Don Bosco chose the more experienced Fr Guanella.

60 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 6, pp. 25–27.

61 Letter of 16 April, Easter, 1876, E III 41.

62 Letter of 16 April 1876, E III 39–40.

63 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 6, p. 50, Thursday 30 March 1876.

64 To Fr G. Cagliero, 30 March 1876, E III 32; they were repeated in the letter of 27 April, specifying that there would be three Salesians (E III 52), and again in others of 13 July and 31 October (E III 73 and 108).

The oratory opened on Sunday 19 November and the following day the lower grades of the day school, soon to be complemented by the upper grades, reaching the total of four elementary classes. In order to be able to teach the higher classes, on 17 August 1877 Fr Guanella gained his certificate as a higher grade teacher at the *Regia Scuola Normale* (Royal Teachers College) in Mondovì.⁶⁵ In an item published by *L'Unità Cattolica* which came from Mondovì Piazza on 19 December 1876 a visitor had visited these night classes, with 100 pupils spread over three classes covering the 16–20, 20–30, 30–50–year–old groups. The day classes had 120 pupils from 8–16 year–olds in three classes. The oratory and Sunday schools had 200 attending.⁶⁶ For boys from hamlets around the countryside, there was also a partially free lunch at midday.⁶⁷ The Chiala and Lazzero *Diario* reported on 12 December 1876: 'D. Bosco goes to Trinità on a visit to the small house opened there this year.'⁶⁸

Fr Guanella's letters provide fragmentary but interesting news on the life of the community and their work. Don Bosco did not fail to offer advice and guidance for a fraternal and observant religious life. He summed up, 'the Rector's art of governing' in five 'friendly suggestions': "1. Keep an eye on the morality' of Salesians and pupils through the privileged means of the '*rendiconto*' (manifestation or friendly talk) and monthly exercise for a happy death.' 2. ' *Age quod agis*' don't get distracted, dedicate everything to your task. 3. Aim at financial autonomy for the work along with some possible contribution from the mother house. '4. Prepare sermons, write them down, help the Salesians with their studies providing or pointing to appropriate books.' '5. Read, meditate, practise and see the others practise the rules of the Congregation.'⁶⁹ He provided earlier and new rules a year later: '1. Greatest vigilance in observing each and all our rules' and make the monthly recollection 'to examine progress or otherwise in observing the rules.' 2. Mutual charity among Salesians. 3. 'Good example in behaviour outside.'⁷⁰

In September and October 1877, Fr Guanella took part in the First General Chapter of the Salesian Society. However, during the 1877–88 school year as the time for renewal of triennial vows approached, he re–thought his choice for the Salesians in the search for other areas for exercising charity.⁷¹ Don Bosco's last letters to him to hold on to him were pressing and insistent, but Fr Guanella did not communicate either his torment or his deep motivations for his choice with his Superior, preferring to write to his own bishop.⁷² Over June and July, Don Bosco wrote three letters to him. The first was in reply to a letter the previous day where Fr Guanella asked his advice on a rather special alternative reflecting a strong functional choice of consecrated life: 'I have told you elsewhere that I aspire to one of two things, that is to start up some Institution in Como diocese or, if this is impossible, I would ask to enlist for the Salesian American missions. I wrote to the Bishop of Como, along similar lines also, letting him know of a potential special program. I am now asking Your Reverence to enlighten me in such an important matter, and help me, together with the Bishop of Como.'⁷³

Instead, Don Bosco invited him to meditate seriously before the crucifix on fidelity to his consecration and made an appeal to mission: 'Dear Fr Luigi, help me to save souls. Europe and America are calling out for Gospel workers. Do not abandon me in this fight; fight strongly and you

65 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 76–79.

66 "L'Unità Cattolica", n. 296, p. 1182, Friday 22 December 1876.

67 M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 62–67.

68 *Diario* of Fr Chiala and Fr Lazzero, in J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 52.

69 To Fr L. Guanella, 10 April 1877, E III 165.

70 To Fr L. Guanella, 8 March 1878, E III 311–312.

71 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 88–97.

72 Cf. letters from one and the other in M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 175–192.

73 Letter of Fr L. Guanella to Don Bosco, 1 June 1878, in M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, p. 179.

will be sure of the crown of glory.⁷⁴ In the second letter, in reply to two letters, one of best wishes for his feast on 24 June and the other in reference to the community at Trinità, Don Bosco, interpreting Fr Guanella's request 'to enlist for the American Missions' in his own way, offered him a precise suggestion: 'The Holy Father has ordered that this year we send an expedition of missionaries to S. Domingo to run the junior and major seminary, the cathedral and the university. Dear Fr Luigi, would you like to be part of this new expedition and a new kind of mission? The language is Spanish. I believe it could be a providential opportunity for you. I will pray. You pray too for this same purpose.'⁷⁵

The last letter was concise – and sententious: 'With regard to your position, do not forget the saying: whoever is okay does not make a move and whoever does well should not seek something better. Many were disappointed and taking no notice of this saying sought what was better and could not even do good anymore because, as another proverb says, the better is the enemy of the good. I am speaking, wearing my heart on my sleeve, because I love you and want your happiness, now and in blessed eternity.'⁷⁶

Fr Guanella returned to the diocese when his triennial vows elapsed (25 September). He resumed writing to Don Bosco in August and September 1880, expressing the desire to once again be accepted among the Salesians.⁷⁷ It did not happen. He always admired and loved Don Bosco and saw him again to receive his blessing at the end of January 1887. He recalled this final meeting at the end of a series of Thoughts about Don Bosco which he sent to Fr Lemoyne in April 1891: 'D. Bosco seemed to be in great majesty of kindness and severity. He seemed to be someone who was struggling between this world and eternity: to me he looked transparent. In his diaphanous appearance I thought I saw a ray of divine grace. He marvelled that I had been able to put three houses together and as I knelt at his feet he blessed me and my little work with the greatness of his heart.'⁷⁸

The work at Trinità, after two years of flourishing religious life, the two years under Fr Guanella, went through gradual decline and ended up closing at the end of the 1880–81 school year.⁷⁹

3. An episode of freedom without any alliances

It was difficult for Don Bosco to sever ties with someone by his own initiative. On Sunday 6 August he was at the college at Lanzo which had been made available to the political and administrative authorities for the opening of the completed Turin – Lanzo railway line. The leaders of the Left, who had come into power after the collapse of the Minghetti Government following the vote in the House on 18 March 1876,⁸⁰ had transformed the completion of the 11 kilometre stretch of track from Cirie to Lanzo into a political event of national importance.

The Turin – Cirie section of 21 kilometres had been in use since February 1869. Don Bosco had given Fr Lemoyne freedom to act in response to a request, writing from Sampeirdarena: 'Do whatever you want for the Railways celebration ... Check with Turin for music so long as the City

74 Letter of 2 June 1878, E III 351.

75 Letter of 15 July 1878, E III 362–363.

76 Letter of 27 July 1878, E III 369–370.

77 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 196–213; MB XV 76–77. The text is published in ID., *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 275–284. Bl. Guanella also published a brief profile of Don Bosco, proclaimed Venerable, in "La Divina Provvidenza", August 1908, pp. 117–122: cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 285–288.

78 *Pensieri intorno a D. Bosco*, p. 20, ASC A 1210728.

79 Cf. M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco...*, pp. 67–73.

80 Cf. Chap. 1, § 10.

Council invite you. If I am in Turin I will gladly come along.’⁸¹ He arrived in Lanzo the evening before with the Oratory band. The following day, Fr Albert blessed the train and the line, then Ministers, Senators, other Members of Parliament retired to the Salesian College for refreshment offered by the City Council. Along with Fr Lemoyne Don Bosco received important visitors at the College entrance: the Prime Minister, Agostino Depretis and the Ministers for the Interior and Public Works, Giovanni Nicotera, and Giuseppe Zanardelli, the latter also representing the King. He was a man of anticlerical and Masonic leanings. The conversation, which went much longer than expected, was especially warm and aroused much sympathy for Don Bosco and his work. Neither he nor any other Salesian attended the meal then served in a temporary pavilion erected on the grounds.

The appearance of the new members of the Government in Turin before and after the event could not escape Catholic intransigence, well and truly represented by *L’Unità Cattolica*, which ran a series of articles high-lighting the party political exploitation of an event which in itself was irrelevant at national level.⁸² From its first issue after the celebrations and in others that week there were articles mentioning Ministers, Members of Parliament, the Salesian College, and Don Bosco. They were hardly favourable: *Triumph in Turin for Left Triumvirate*, *Entry and time in Turin and Lanzo – Nicotera, Depretis and Zanardelli*, *Reception at Lanzo, At College – boarding school of the Salesian Fathers*, *Nicotera in a Don Bosco College*.⁸³) Don Bosco’s presence there was uncomfortable because he could have been expected to have remained outside such a display, perhaps by feigning diplomatic illness.

L’Unità Cattolica published a letter ten days later from a ‘Salesian’ (Cooperator? Benefactor?) which tried to put Don Bosco’s involvement in perspective. The paper presented it with an initial comment: ‘We very willingly publish the following letter from a Salesian, relating to the praises of the *Bersagliere* (a Roman newspaper closely aligned with the Left for Don Bosco). We could have wished that Don Bosco had had one of those moments of indisposition which diplomats, including Papal Nuncios, seem to be happy to seize upon in similar circumstances.’ The ‘affectionate son of Don Bosco’ ‘most mortified by the badly penned praises published by a Roman newspaper’ ascribed the part played by Don Bosco to the simple fact that ‘Don Bosco, when requested by Lanzo City Council to make the college premises available for the Ministers to *dejeuner*, could hardly have refused for civility’s sake even more so because part of the building belongs to the Council itself.’⁸⁴

However, the paper’s chief editor, Fr Giacomo Margotti, who was sensitive to Don Bosco’s work, either under pressure from someone, or of his own accord, seems to have wanted to compensate his priest friend (who had not been asked to justify himself) by reinterpreting his behaviour in the light of higher intentions. The 23 August issue of the paper came out with an article on *The Salesian Missions in Patagonia* preceded by a very significant footnote: ‘*L’Unità Cattolica* is always full of affection and veneration for D. Bosco and knows that in anything he does he is motivated only by the glory of God, love of the Church and Pope, and the desire to win souls for Jesus Christ. We regard ourselves as very fortunate nay time we can benefit his truly apostolic labours through our newspaper.’⁸⁵

81 To Fr Lemoyne, from Sampierdarena, 25 July 1876, E III 78.

82 Cf. “*L’Unità Cattolica*”, no. 182, Sunday 6 August 1876, pp. 725–726, *Da Rome a Lanzo dov’è l’epigrafe della vittoria di Pio Nono* (the inscription on an arch at Lanzo praised the Pope’s peaceful victories) and *Le due feste di Nicotera nell’August del 1860 e nell’August 1876*.

83 Cf. “*L’Unità Cattolica*”, no. 183, Tuesday 8 August 1876, pp. 729–730; no. 186, Friday 11 August 1876, p. 742; no. 187, Saturday 12 August 1876, p. 747.

84 “*L’Unità Cattolica*”, no. 190, Thursday 17 August 1876, p. 758.

85 “*L’Unità Cattolica*”, no. 195, Wednesday 23 August 1876, p. 778.

Though he said little, Giuseppe Zanardelli seems to have been deeply touched by the atmosphere created by the Salesians in the encounter at Lanzo. Perhaps Don Bosco had this in mind when he asked him as Minister for Public Works in December for a 'free ticket' on Italian Railways for himself and a travelling companion 'to provide for a need that is still very much felt – the growing number of young people at risk and abandoned.'⁸⁶The request received a positive response for the Upper Italy Rail Network.

4. Managing and encouraging educative communities.

With boarding and other schools springing up by agreement with municipalities, came the obvious breaking down of conformity of works modelled on the Oratory in Turin, where Don Bosco maintained his privileged rapport as Director flanked by a Vice Director, first Fr Rua then Fr Lazano. The type of boy, services provided and objectives agreed upon in the colleges led to a more flexible cultural, disciplinary, educative kind of management and thus more open directives than the kind needed for an institution like the Oratory at Valdocco where specific results were expected, such as the flourishing of vocations to the clergy and the Salesians. Nevertheless, the substance of the inspirations and directions of a properly educational nature (discipline, morals, religion) remained identical and were passed on through letters to rectors and communities, visits, sometimes by boys or their representatives coming to Valdocco for some special solemn occasion.

4.1 The Oratory as the basic educative model

It would take a much deeper study to describe Don Bosco's way of governing as director, educator, confessor, spiritual director in his Oratory. It was his home, family and whenever far from it he was thinking nostalgically about it: 'Although here in Rome I am not solely occupied with the house and our boys,' he wrote to Fr Rua 'nevertheless my thoughts fly to where my treasure is in Jesus Christ, my dear boys, at the Oratory. I want to visit them many times a day.'⁸⁷

A few days before his return to Turin from his absence due to illness at Varazze, he confessed to his closest collaborator: 'Next Thursday, God willing, I will be in Turin. I feel a serious need to go there. Here I am living in the body but my heart, thoughts and words are always at the Oratory among you all. This is a weakness and I cannot overcome it.'⁸⁸ Again, at the end of his lengthy stay in Rome in 1874, after a quick reply to Fr Rua who had sent him a telegram on the death of Fr Provera, he included a message to the boys: 'To our boys: Your father, brother, and friend of your souls, after three and a half months away from you, is leaving today (14) from Rome, spending Wednesday in Florence and overnight, then hopes to be with you on Thursday at 8 a.m. No need for celebration, music, welcome [solemn reception]. I will go to the Church and God willing, will celebrate Mass for our dear and beloved Fr Provera.'⁸⁹

He was very busy at the Oratory from morning to evening, whether there directly involved or absent, but inspiring and advising his trusted helpers, and more immediately in contact with the various categories of resident: academic, trade students, or working boys, novices, clerical students of philosophy (some still novices) and theology, or young priests who had still to sit for exams in theology or study to gain their faculties for confession, recently appointed superiors to be prepared for the art of governing as rectors, prefects catechists, school or technical counsellors, bursars.

86 To G. Zanardelli, 4 December 1876, E III 123–124.

87 Letter at beginning of February 1870, Em III 169.

88 Letter of 9 February 1872, Em III 395.

89 Letter of 14 April 1874, Em IV 278.

He exercised many explicitly formative roles in the course of a day: early in the morning as confessor for boys and Salesians; as spiritual director in his room: 'Many of you come and speak with me in confession and others in my room' he told the trade boys in a goodnight on 31 March 1876: 'Bear this in mind, that I am always very happy when you come and find me not only in church but also outside of church.'⁹⁰ He was often with the boys in recreation, dispensing a 'word in the ear.' And then there was the classic Goodnight in the evenings. Every month he was at the exercise for a happy death, again in the role of confessor and spiritual director, a ministry he offered with special intensity during the time of annual retreat around Easter. He was very busily involved in the important moments of Oratory life: welcoming the boys during the first days of the school year, the novenas. Especially for the Immaculate Conception and Christmas in December and Mary Help of Christians in May, then October (Our Lady of the Rosary), March (St Joseph), June (Sacred Heart), Lent and Holy Week, farewelling the boys for the summer–autumn holidays and providing them with appropriate reminders. Add to this the special celebrations: the great liturgical solemnities and Salesian ones, often highlighted by academies where he would offer a fatherly word, his name day on 24 June, (even though it really should have been St John the Evangelist) beginning with a vigil, then his birthday, which he always celebrated on 15 August, not on the 16th.

The brief talks by way of Goodnights were the most regular occasions for bringing together his moral and religious teaching, undoubtedly echoed in confession, private advice, sermons and often in letters to individuals or groups. The dreams were presented as stories, and couched in poetic or dramatic terms what in other contexts was doctrine, discussion, exhortation. The evenings of each day were occasions for expressing the familiar concerns and ideas of Don Bosco the priest, formed in the practical moral theology of the *Convitto*, enriched by his considerable experience as confessor and director of a religious and educative community modelled on the same thing – it was an essentially moral service of the word focused on duties. There were no grand motivations or biblical, theological perspectives and even less so any broad cultural, social ones. Every word focused on conduct, approaching the sacraments, the tough struggle to avoid falling into sin, all converging on achieving the final objective of all his social and educational and pastoral activity, and on the ideal to which every Christian was called: 'to live in *grace*, which had to be defended, persevered and where needed regained; and finally, *holiness*, the prelude to the glory for running the bumpy, up and down path to that goal, essentially a single path but differentiated in form and degree: '*Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet.*' (Gal 6:7).⁹¹ At the heart of it was the appeal to the will, personal commitment, resolution, obviously all working with the primary action of active, co-operative grace.⁹²

The ideal was embodied in many different kinds of models: from the early Church, the Saints, especially St Aloysius and those remembered in the liturgical calendar – St Francis de Sales, St Joseph, St Charles (Borromeo). Then there were closer, more familiar models like the boys who had lived at the Oratory, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco and others.⁹³

Playing a primary role in the life of grace and holiness were the virtues to be practised: faith, charity, obedience, mortification, and humility, with special emphasis on modesty, or purity which was understood as being synonymous with chastity.⁹⁴ This was clearly the object of most important concerns and encouragement. 'If there is this, then there⁹⁵ is everything. If this is missing then we

90 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 6 bis, p. 13.

91 Evening of 7 July 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, pp. 39–42.

92 Cf. goodnight on 27 October 1876, *Documenti*, XVI 525–526.

93 Evenings of 27, 28 October and 5 November 1875, *Documenti*, XV, pp. 292–293 and 304; 27 October and 28 November 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 2, pp. 6–7 e 27–29.

94 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 2, p. 44, Evening talk on 22 December 1876.

lack everything. Prayer and confidence in God were proposed as support for this.⁹⁶ The virtues were solid bulwarks against the violence of passions which were not unlike the wave in a storm, or were represented by the various ‘monsters’ populating his dreams.⁹⁷ It was the passions that urged people to impure thoughts, words, deeds, scandal, insubordination, or encouraged them to yield to laziness, gluttony, distaste for the practices of piety. To overcome these one needed ‘constant perseverance’ in ascetic effort. Withdrawal and avoidance were often the preferred approach rather than a head on confrontation: mortification of the senses especially,⁹⁸ was always needed where dangerous individuals, books and places were concerned.⁹⁹

But human effort was not enough. Nothing was possible without the aid of grace. This was guaranteed by the universal remedy of frequenting the sacraments – Confession and Communion – received with all due reverence and as frequently as was determined by the chosen spiritual objectives.¹⁰⁰

God’s name was associated with the sense of fear, which was not just fear of punishment but above all veneration, respect, the trepidation felt by fragile creatures and trusting children. Certain biblical sayings were axiomatic: *Initium sapientiae timor Domini, Sapientia non introibit in animam malevolam et non habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis.*¹⁰¹ The young person who was fearful of God in this upright way acted according to a good conscience and not out of the fear of human punishment or expulsion.¹⁰²

The figure of Christ was not usually presented in some distinct way, but Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man, was proposed daily as Redeemer and Saviour who redeemed us from sin and offers us forgiveness and grace. He is present and active to the highest degree in the Blessed Sacrament, immolated in the Sacrifice of the Mass, received in Holy Communion and adored in the Tabernacle and the solemn exposition of the consecrated host.¹⁰³ Explicit attention was given to devotion to the Sacred heart, which sought, ‘to honour the love Jesus shows mankind.’¹⁰⁴ Added to this was the protection of the Blessed Virgin under the privileged titles of the Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians, as well as the Assumption and the Rosary. She appeared in the dreams with her protective mantle and was called on at the time of her feast days and in May and October.¹⁰⁵

The evening talks to the boys, of varying lengths, did not only channel Don Bosco’s thoughts and feelings as a spiritual father but also and primarily as the director of a house of education inasmuch as he was addressing a large, poor, crowded and mixed community of youngsters where he presented problems relating to discipline, order, regularity, morality. Therefore, he needed to balance loving-kindness with firmness, the latter expressed depending on the seriousness required through reminders, warnings, even the inevitable suspension. He made reference to these things especially during retreats, monthly recollections, novenas and other especially critical

95 Evening of 18 May 1875 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 14–15; cf. Evenings of 28 May 1875, in reference to St Aloysius, *ibid.*, pp. 34–35; and 7 July 1875, quad. 2, pp. 39–42.

96 Dream told on 30 June 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 8 bis, pp. 1–9.

97 Evening of 13 March 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 5, pp. 18–22.

98 Evening of 1 August 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, pp. 39–42; evenings of 13 and 26 March, *ibid.*, quad. 5, pp. 18–22; quad. 6 bis, pp. 17–18.

99 Evening of 26 March 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 6 bis, pp. 2–3.

100 Evening of 20 January 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4 bis, pp. 1–6; 30 October 1876, *Cronaca*, 2, pp. 1–3; 20 December 1876, *ibid.*, pp. 30–36.

101 Evening of 2 November 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 2, pp. 18–21.

102 Evening of 26 October 1875, *Documenti*, XV, pp. 291–292.

103 Evening of 7 December 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, pp. 67–68.

104 Evenings of 3 and 16 June 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 46–47; quad. 2, pp. 10–11.

105 Evening of 10 May 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 1–3.

moments: scandal, theft and serious lack of discipline.¹⁰⁶ He linked this with thoughts of what could or did happen to boys once outside the place, especially during holidays. Don Bosco often spoke of this before they returned to their families for a short time, arming them with grace, and reminders, and again on their return, encouraging them to clean up their soul and courageously start over again.¹⁰⁷

The question of the outside world and living in that world was often raised, often from a future perspective, in his frequent insistence on choice of a state in life, a lay or clerical vocation, in the 'world' (in the diocesan clergy) or in a Religious Institute. 'This is the most important thing in life,' he opined.¹⁰⁸ There was frequent exhortation to think about it, reflect, pray for the most suitable solution to guarantee a happy life and especially blessed eternity. Don Bosco was a tireless promoter and animator of vocations especially when speaking of works for poor and abandoned youth, or of missions and missionaries, indicating broad areas where clergy and laity could give their lives full meaning, now and for eternity.

He often referred to *respice finem* understood in its double sense, the end in time through death and the end which opens onto a happy or unhappy eternity. The Gospel's *estote parati*,¹⁰⁹ remained his insistence in the 1870s as it was in the 60s, often accompanied (always on 31 December) by a reminder of real deaths which would inevitably be the lot of boys and adults in the Oratory in the coming year. Naturally, this was not the final objective, since earning paradise was ultimately the real meaning of life. The dreams he had at Lanzo on 6 December 1876 and recounted at the Oratory on the evening of the 22nd with Dominic Savio as the central character, offers a fascinating captivating image. The flowers in the bouquet the youth held in his hand, 'the rose, violet, lily, gentian and sunflower' symbolised 'charity, humility, chastity, penance, obedience.'¹¹⁰

4.2 Letters to individuals and groups among teachers and college boys

As strong as the link with the Oratory was, Don Bosco felt that all the boys in his colleges, hospices and oratories were his 'dear sons in Jesus Christ.' He knew very many of them personally and had received many a confidence from them during his visits. So we find no difference in tone between the letters he sent to the Oratory when away from there and those he addressed to other places. Both felt they were close to him not only emotionally but also for the spiritual setting they were in, differentiated only by the individual's moral and religious circumstances.

In the summer of 1873, when he was at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius near Lanzo as usual, he added a brief message To our boys at the Oratory to a letter to Fr Rua. It was a clear reference to vocations: 'When you give goodnight to our dear beloved boys tell them to be cheerful and good. Here I am recommending them all to the Lord and am asking for the three 'S's from them [*sanità*, (health), *scienza* or *sapienza* (knowledge, wisdom) *santità* (holiness)] but in capitals. On Sunday, I will say Mass for all of you, dear boys, at this Sanctuary. If you love me you will also go to Holy Communion for me. I am also praying for those doing exams. Regarding these boys, tell them that if they have not as yet thought about their vocation they can wait for me on the 14th of this month,

106 Examples of various others are "good nights" on 30 and 31 March 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 6 bis, pp. 4–10 and 11–19.

107 Cf. e.g., *Ricordi per un giovanetto che desidera passar bene le vacanze*. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1873, 4 p., 11+16 cm.

108 Evening of 7 July 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, p. 252.

109 Account of a dream with prediction of deaths, 23 January 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4 bis, pp. 12–15.

110 Evening of 22 December 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 1, pp. 20–31; quad. 2, pp. 36–47.

otherwise they can talk to you about it or come to the retreat at Lanzo where we will be happy together. There are 110 exemplary gentlemen at the retreat. They do not leave me in peace for a moment and want to talk with me at all hours.’¹¹¹

1874 began with four letters to men in charge of communities, Fr Lemoyne and Fr Rua at Valdocco on 5 January, others on the 6th to Fr Bonetti at Borgo S. Martino and Fr Dalmazzo and the trade lads at the Oratory at Valdoco. The letters were full of affection and contained both common elements and individualised references. A dominant feature in all of them was the Pope who implicitly endorsed moral and educational notions dear to Don Bosco with his authority. In his letter to *My Dear Fr Lemoyne and all of you, dear sons at Lanzo* he began: ‘The first words I am writing to any of our houses from Rome I am addressing to you, my dear and beloved sons at Lanzo. I am giving you this preference because I know that you hold me in great affection, something you have always shown every time I have gone there.’ Then after writing of the interest the Pope had shown in the boys at Lanzo, he asked: ‘Meanwhile, my friends, have you begun the year well? Do you all wish to be good, holy and always my consolation? I can hear your heart’s voice assuring me that you are all sincerely saying “Yes, yes.”’ He ended with advice he wanted the Rector to explain to the boys: ‘If you want to be happy here on earth and then be happy in blessed eternity, try to avoid scandal and go to Holy Communion.’¹¹²

Briefer, but no less affectionate, was the letter to *My Dear Fr Rua and all you living at the Oratory in Turin*: ‘Let me tell you that I bear you much affection and wherever I am I never cease to recommend your spiritual and temporal well-being to God.’ He then spoke of the papal audience and Pius IX’s interest in matters concerning the Congregation and the Oratory, ending with a number of ‘family’ matters, questions to Fr Rua.¹¹³

In the letter to *My dear Fr Bonetti and all of you, dear sons, at S. Martino* he said: ‘He [the Pope] spoke a lot in general about our boys and finally the conversation came around to you, beloved sons at S. Martino. He asked many details of me: what studies you were doing, if there were some very good boys among you, if you went to Holy Communion, if there were any the equal of Dominic Savio. I tried to satisfy him in a way that certainly did great honour to yourselves. Then allowing me to ask for something in your regard, he asked me to express his great satisfaction at the good hopes you were offering of living a Christian life amid a world contaminated with so much vice.’ Then he added his own thoughts: ‘Meanwhile, I too want to ask a great favour of you that will certainly benefit your souls; that you all try to prevent and cast aside unbecoming conversations. He concluded with a lengthy quote in Latin from 2 Tim. 4:2: ‘*Tu vero, Fr Bonetti, praedica verbum opportune, importune*’¹¹⁴

Even briefer was the message from Rome to *My dear Fr Dalmazzo and my dear boys at the college of Valsalice* in which we find perfect harmony between Don Bosco’s thinking and the Pope’s: I then asked him for a particular thought I could write to you in his name. He looked at the crucifix and replied; only God is a faithful friend who will never abandon us. May they love this good God who will never abandon them.’¹¹⁵

More personalised and more relevant for its pedagogical content was the letter to *My dear Fr Lazzerio and my dear trade boys at the Oratory*, whom Don Bosco described as ‘the pupil of my eye:’ ‘There is no need to tell you that I bear much affection for you; I have given clear proof that. There is no need for you to tell me that you love me, because you have constantly shown this. But what is this mutual affection based on? Money? Not mine because I spend it all on you. Not yours

111 Letter beginning of August 1873, Em IV 136.

112 Letter of 5 January 1874, Em IV 193.

113 Letter of 5 January 1874, Em IV 194–195.

114 Letter of 6 January 1874, Em IV 196–197.

115 Letter of 6 January 1874, Em IV 197–198.

because – and don't be offended – you have none. Well then, my affection is founded on the desire I have to save your souls which were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I am trying to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. So, the good of our souls is the foundation of our affection.' He invited them to make an examination of conscience on this essential point: were they working on the salvation or the loss of their soul? Would they be ready to present themselves before the judgement seat of God? 'Resolutions made and not kept; scandal given and not made up for; conversations that taught others bad things are the matters we must fear being reproached for.' He concluded: 'Put into practice the words of St Paul I will translate for you: 'Encourage young people to be sober, let them never forget that everyone must die and that after death we must all stand before Jesus our judge. The one who has not suffered with Jesus Christ on earth will not be crowned in glory with him in heaven. Avoid sin as your worst enemy and avoid the source of sin, that is, bad conversations which are the ruin of good habits. Give good example to one another in word and deed etc. etc. Fr Lazzero will tell you the rest.'¹¹⁶

Again from Rome he replied to *My dear Fr Cinzano and all you very dear students* thanking them for the gift of 'two weeks of excellent behaviour,' promising and reassuring them: 'I will show my gratitude as soon as I am home. A glass of something pure, an extra dish, a biscuit, etc. etc. will be the sign of my satisfaction I will give each one. I will soon be with you again, with you who are the object of my thoughts and concerns with you who are the masters of my heart and, as St Paul says, wherever I go you are always *gaudium meum et corona mea*.' Finally as with the letter to Fr Bonetti but in different words, he addressed the twenty-year-old cleric, an assistant, with something drawn from 1 Cor. 16:13 : '*Tu vero, Cinzano, fili me, age viriliter ut coroneris feliciter*.'¹¹⁷

In 1875 he sent the so-called Strenna to each of the rectors. To Fr Bonetti, for example, he sent various versions of it, depending on who would receive it: 'For you, act in such a way that everyone you speak to becomes your friend. For the Prefect: build up treasure now and for eternity. For Teachers, Assistants: *In patientia vestra possidebitis animus vestras*. For the boys: frequent communion. For everyone: exactness in your duties.'¹¹⁸

The letter *To my dear sons the Rector, assistants, prefect, catechist, pupils and others at the college at Lanzo* was exceptionally strong for its educational, programmatic content. He expressed his regret that he had been unable to visit them, assuring them of a daily memento and thanking them for their 'message of best wishes.' He passed on his regards, wanting 'holiness from heaven, study, morality' for them, then commented on these: *Holiness*, 'a precious gift from heaven' needing to be looked after and protected from intemperance and imprudence. *Study* was to be nurtured, looking to the future: 'make up a kit full of knowledge with which in due course you can earn your bread, ... Earn your food honestly.' 'Let it never be said' he concluded 'that we live off the sweat of others.' He wrote at length on *Morality*: 'It is the bond between holiness and study, the foundations they are based on' and the basis for their honourableness in society ('you will be loved and respected even by evildoers' or 'be generally disposed.') as well being the basis of eternal salvation. And at the end came the unfailing appeal regarding vocations: 'I hear the voice crying from afar: "O my sons, pupils of Lanzo, come and save us!" These are the voices of so many souls awaiting a kindly hand to pull them back from the brink of perdition and set them on the path to salvation. I am telling you this because a few of you are called to the sacred ministry to win souls. Have courage: there are many waiting for you. Remember the words of St Augustine: *animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*.'¹¹⁹

116 Letter of 20 January 1874, Em IV 208.

117 Letter of 7 March 1874, Em IV 244–245.

118 Letter of 30 December 1874, Em IV 375.

119 Letter of 5 January 1875, Em IV 385–386.

Again from Rome he passed on thoughts and words from the papal audience in March to some of the rectors, sometimes echoing what was said in 1874: more likely his words than the Pope's but certainly in agreement with them. He assured Fr Dalmazzo and his pupils at Valsalice: 'I pray for you every day at Mass asking for the usual three 'S's, which our intelligent students will know how to interpret: *Sanità, Sapienza* and *Santità*. Tell all your students to be courageous and holy missionaries and such that each is worth a hundred others. Only then will we begin to satisfy some of the countless needs we are besieged by.'¹²⁰

His return imminent, he wrote to Fr Rua, Francesia, Bonetti, and Lemoyne, passing on the Holy Father's blessing.¹²¹ To Fr Rua he said: 'That was a wonderful gift, the general excellence of behaviour of the boys.'¹²² To Fr Bonetti he repeated matters more or less of the kind passed on on 5 January 1875 relating to the papal audience: 'He was happy to ask me lots of questions, including if there were boys who could be compared to Dominic Savio. I replied that some seemed to be his equal but a greater number are on the way to being so and even surpassing him. He laughed and said: "God bless the rectors, other superiors and all the boarders."¹²³

At the beginning of 1876, he also wrote to two rectors of colleges. The most affectionate of these was addressed to *My dear friends the Rectors, Teachers, pupils at Lanzo college*, then in complete spontaneity: 'Let me tell you, and let no one be offended, that you are all thieves. Let me say it again, you have stolen everything from me. When I was at Lanzo you charmed me with your kindness and love, bound my mental faculties with your piety. Just my poor heart was left and you stole all its affection. Now your letter, signed by 200 dear, friendly hands has completely taken possession of this heart, nothing more is left except the keen desire to love you in the Lord, do good for you, save all your souls. This generous display of affection invites me to come as soon as possible to visit you again and I hope that will not be too far away. On that occasion I want us to be happy in body and soul and let the world see how happy we can be in body and soul without offending the Lord.'¹²⁴

To the Rector of the college at Varazzo, instead, he wrote especially about management issues, though not without a thought for the students: 'Tell them all that I love them with all my heart in the Lord and that I pray for them every day at Mass asking for steady health, progress in study and the true wealth which is the holy fear of God.'¹²⁵ He did not overlook the ones he also called *My dear sons from S. Nicola's* from whom he had received greetings and best wishes. 'I hope that along with knowledge you will learn the holy fear of God' at the college. 'Your superiors tell me you are very good and this consoles me greatly. Continue on the path of virtue and you will always have peace of heart, the good will of men and the blessing of the Lord.' At the same time he conveyed the Pope's blessing, having told him about them and concluded: 'May God bless you all my dear sons. Be happy, but avoid offending the Lord, go to Holy Communion, send me some letters and pray for me.'¹²⁶

He expressed similar thoughts the following year to his beloved sons at the college at Villa Colón (Uruguay). He thanked them for their greetings on his name day and conveyed the Pope's special blessing for them, their parents, as well as his message: 'May they all become very rich, very rich but in the true wealth that is virtue, the holy fear of God.' He said finally he would be

120 Letter of 8 March 1875, Em IV 433–434.

121 Cf. Letter between 12 and 15 March, Em IV 436–443.

122 To Fr M. Rua, 12 March 1875, Em IV 436.

123 Letter of 15 March 1875, Em IV 441.

124 Letter of 3 January 1876, E III 5.

125 To Fr G. B. Francesia, 10 January 1876, E III 6.

126 Letter of 1 July 1876, E III 69–70.

waiting for their reply to four questions. “1. Are you good? 2. Will you write me more very long letters? 3. Will you all be missionaries? 4. Will you all become saints?”¹²⁷

4.3 Visits

A useful indication of the way he prepared and carried out visits to the colleges can be found in this letter to the Rector of Lanzo, Fr Lemoyne: ‘On Wednesday afternoon I hope to be with you in Lanzo. If you can send me a note on the blackbirds, needing to be defeathered, it will give me a guide as I gradually catch up with them in the college.’¹²⁸ His thanks for Christmas greetings were also, understandably, a reflection of things seen, words heard and spoken during the visit: ‘May God reward you for the kindness you have shown me. A word for everyone: let the Rector never put off good advice and salutary warnings whenever there is occasion for such. Let the priests work with one another in everything to do with eternal salvation, theirs and the boys at the college. Let the teachers question everyone in the classroom and look after the weaker ones. Let the assistants make every effort to prevent unbecoming conversations. And let priests and clerics remember they are *sal terrae et lux mundi*. Let the students love modesty and simplicity. I recommend that everyone have boundless confidence in the Rector. May God bless you all and make you rich in the true wealth that is the holy fear of God. You are my consolation; let no one pierce my heart with the thorns of bad behaviour.’¹²⁹

We have no detailed documentation on the visits since we do not have the appropriate house chronicles for the individual houses which Don Bosco often encouraged them to keep, though without appreciable results. We can reconstruct something from indications in the goodnights given at Valdocco and from the *Epistolario*. In general to economise on time, Don Bosco did want undue outward show. By preference the work done was internal, involving his joint responsibility with the religious superior as manager of a house of education, governor, educator, spiritual director, confessor, animator, father, brother, friend of the teachers and pupils.

He was busy with a visit to Mirabello, Cherasco and Lanzo from 10/11 to 20 March 1870.¹³⁰ Another was planned for Lanzo in a letter he wrote from Rome early in the month, for the second week of Lent, 14–20 March. In the postscript he recommended: ‘When I come to Lanzo do not plan any celebrations. In church but nowhere else.’¹³¹ When at Mirabello he promised a new visit for the ‘first fortnight in May’ the same year.¹³² He announces to the boys at Lanzo on 11 February 1871 that he would be visiting on Monday morning, 13 February ‘to celebrate carnival’ with them.¹³³

He went to Borgo S. Martino ‘Tuesday next at 11 a.m.’¹³⁴ He indicated another visit to Varazze and Morassi at the end of June 1872: ‘Tomorrow [Wednesday 12] I am going to Varazze and Friday evening hope to be in Genoa.’¹³⁵ He visited the college at Lanzo at the end of November 1872 and a few days later, the hospice at Sampierdarena. He made a brief visit to Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena from 26–29 April, and on 26 November was again at Sampierdarena, and at Borgo S. Martino on the 28th. He spent a few days at Lanzo from 6 December. From 10–13 May, 1874 he went from Alassio to Varazze to Sampierdarena, visiting the colleges once more from 9–12 June. From 25–29 June he was again at Sampierdarena, Sestri Ponente and Genoa.

127 Letter of 16 July 1877, E III 200–201.

128 Letter of 24 November 1872, Em III 496.

129 Letter of 26 December 1872, Em III 500–501.

130 From Mirabello, a letter to the secretary of the Bishop of Casale, 10/11 March 1870, Em III 193.

131 To Fr Lemoyne, 17 February 1870, Em III 186.

132 To Fr Bonetti, 17 February 1870, Em III 185.

133 To Fr Lemoyne and the boys, 11 February 1871, Em III 308.

134 To Fr G. Bonetti, 27 July 1871, Em III 349.

135 To Baron Cataldi and Countess Gambaro, 11 June 1872, Em III 439–440.

As we have seen, on his way back from the first trip to Nice he stopped at Alassio from 15–19 December and from there went on to Sampierdarena.

In 1875, Don Bosco dedicated the first half of June to the colleges in Liguria, Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena.¹³⁶ At the end, from the hospice at Sampierdarena he planned a visit to Borgo S. Martino from Friday 18 to Monday 21 June, including a meal with the Bishop of Casale and another with the parish priest of the area.¹³⁷ He returned there halfway through November.¹³⁸ When the foundation was opened in Nice in 1875, as we have seen he stopped over at Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena both on the way there and on return. He spoke of this at Valdocco on the evenings of 7, 8 December. Speaking on the evening of 22 December, he brought greetings from the boys at Lanzo to their schoolmates at Valdocco.

We have already noted the letter of 3 January, 1876 and his talk on the 22nd reflected the contents.¹³⁹ Then on 12 January, in a circular to the Salesians, he took his cue from the visits to the houses noted above, expressing his complete satisfaction at how they were going 'morally and materially' and with regard to their 'internal administration and their relationships outside.'¹⁴⁰ From the last week of February to 12 March 1876 he made a long visit from Nice to Vallecrosia, Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena, as we see from letters from the various cities. 'I am visiting the riviera' he wrote to Fr Cagliero on 3 March 'and our houses are proceeding to my greatest satisfaction.'¹⁴¹)

His travels and visits, as well as being of a guiding and directive nature, were of great educational and spiritual value. Don Bosco's priority everywhere was with the rector and their collaboration. He loved informed about the various moral, pedagogical, disciplinary, administrative problems and relations with civil, scholastic and religious authorities. He pointed to possible solutions, settled some internal and external disputes, and met the most accessible benefactors and Cooperators. He visited the sick of the house and gave the goodnight each evening, heard confessions of boys and Salesians morning and evening, and made himself available for the exercise for a happy death, met with Salesians after night prayers, joined with the boys and their teachers in the courtyard, was present at any academics or plays. The boys he gave special preferences to were the ones from the higher classes, receiving them for private chats, speaking especially of vocations. During the goodnight he brought news and greetings from the other colleges recounted his dreams, encourage them to remain in God's grace, avoid idleness, bad conversations and actions, invited them to be sincere in their confessions, encouraged them to be open with their Rector and warned the discontented and restless ones.

Between the Rector and the Prefect he was informed of the financial status of the work, helping the weak and soliciting some contribution from the more flourishing ones. He did not fail to collect any possible monies available to help the mother house which constitutionally had little income and was more a charitable hospice than a college and was responsible for the entire formation of most of the personnel destined to run the other works.

5. Youthful celebrations at Valdocco

There were two main events on which not only the young residents but boys from other works nearby or at least their representatives focused, and to which those further away or a very long

136 Cf. letter to Fr Chiatellino, 30 June 1875, Em IV 475.

137 To Fr Bonetti, 16 June 1875, Em IV 470.

138 To Fr Bonetti, 13 November 1875, Em IV 550.

139 To the college at Lanzo, 3 January 1876, E III 5.

140 E III 6–7.

141 E III 28.

way away sent messages of various kinds: the Feast of Mary Help of Christians on 24 May and Don Bosco's name day, which by convention was held on 24 June. Both created a fervour of expectation and emotions over the few weeks preceding and following the events. An example is what he wrote in January 1871 to the Rector of Borgo S. Martino, sending him the *Strenna* for the new year: 'You can renew the hope for our dear boys that up till now everything is going well for them to come to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. They will be part of the program as follows: 23 May, a musical evening put on by the students from the junior seminary at Borgo S. Martino. I believe there will be no difficulties for food and the journey. We have to think about where they sleep. This will be arranged ... At any rate, *dante Deo*, I want us to have a great celebration and for us to be happy. We already have half price on the steam train. I hope we can do even better.'¹⁴²

We have already spoken of the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in June 1868, and the Marian devotion that flowed from it. The Feast of Mary Help of Christians was undoubtedly the most popular (in terms of participants) of the celebrations at Valdocco. As we have seen, the involvement of the Oratory boys was huge. But the boys were active along with a crowd of devotees from outside and who tended to dominate the scene.¹⁴³

The Feast of St John the Baptist, which was chosen for Don Bosco's name day, was by contrast a family occasion for the boys, Salesian Cooperators and past pupils. An especially rich section of the Salesian Central Archives is reserved for the *Honour shown Don Bosco during his lifetime*, mostly relating to his name day, a significant amount of material that deserves careful study. It highlights the fascination Don Bosco aroused and the 'educative' and emotional potential the celebrations led to and added to. Among the many community and individual letters of teachers and boys, prose and poetry compositions by young students, working boys, clerics and others, hymns written by Fr Lemoyne and musical compositions stand out, initially by the lay teacher from outside, Giovanni De Vecchi, then by Salesian Brother Giuseppe Dogliani (1849–1934). Particularly expressive was the one dedicated to *Fr John Bosco feted by the boys from the Oratory of St Francis de Sales on his name day on the occasion of his return from Rome*. Don Bosco had been at St Peter's celebrating his 25th anniversary of the election to the Papacy of Pius IX (1846–71). He had held over the celebrations at home until 8–9 July, and the bard sang:

All around echoes
With applause for the Director
The most tender Father
The king of our hearts.

Compositions by pupils and Salesians vied to outdo one another in their affection while past pupils 'once educated in this house' had their own competition. The better equipped were printers who could offer a professionally printed poem *To Father John Bosco, celebrating his return from Rome and his name day like tender children for their beloved father; the young printers from the Oratory offer their feeble floral tribute. It is little for what you deserve; it is nothing compared to our affection*.

An unforeseen but especially joyful celebration was the one for Don Bosco's return following his illness at Varazze. It was celebrated on the Saturday and Sunday, 17 and 18 February 1872, coinciding with the solemnity of St Francis de Sales. Fr Lemoyne, the poet once more, wrote:

The blessed feast
Your day of safe return
From illness dire

142 To Fr G. Bonetti, s. d., Em III 286.

143 Cf. Chap. 16, § 6.

Becomes a joy so keen
That sorrow must expire.

The celebration on 24 June 1873 was carefully prepared for by two meetings of the House Council, and a third meeting critically examined how things were proceeding.¹⁴⁴ We have already mentioned the 1874 occasion where Don Bosco was celebrated as the New Moses in an epic hymn. The house chronicle rightly noted: 'The Archbishop felt it was a bit over the top.'¹⁴⁵ The same year, for the first time Don Bosco's birthday was also celebrated. It was kept low-key however – just a musical and literary academy held on Saturday 15 August.¹⁴⁶ 'Festivities in 1877 reached fever pitch. They were transferred to 28, 29 June. On the 28th it was associated with a welcome to Archbishop Federico Aneiros of Buenos Aires with his retinue.¹⁴⁷ There were songs and other items for both men being feted. 'Two hymns were sung, one by the trade students put to music by Dogliani' based on epic texts by Fr Lemoyne. On the 29th, 'towards 6.30 p.m. the celebration for D. Bosco recommenced, all like the day before but there was a larger number of outsiders present. The session ended at 10.00 p.m.'¹⁴⁸ In 1878 celebrations began on the vigil of 24 June, a Sunday, when the external feast of St Aloysius was being celebrated. 'After the ceremonies it was Don Bosco's celebration, beginning 6.30 and ending at 8.30. Fireworks, supper then bed. 24. Solemnity of St John. At 9.30 a.m. the Old Boys from the Oratory were received at the door by the Oratory band, then entered and presented their usual valuable gift to D. Bosco for whom they always retain so much affection.' 'After the ceremonies, the celebration began in the courtyard at 6.30: reading of compositions, singing, musical instruments. The day boys attending the oratories of St Francis and St Aloysius presented their '*bocchetti*' [bouquets of flowers, prayers, etc.].' Rain prevented the evening celebrations from continuing so they were postponed till St Peter's day. But that day too the usual rain meant the academy had to be held in the study hall.¹⁴⁹

Similar festivities of the kind were held in the years to follow, right up to Don Bosco's final name day celebrated in 1887.¹⁵⁰

6. Past pupils – Salesians due to the education received

During Don Bosco's lifetime there was no official organisation of past pupils into unions or federations. The shift from relationships in person or through correspondence with Don Bosco to one of the group, visibly occurred in 1870 for the first time. A reasonable number of them, led by bookbinder Carlo Gastini, met on 24 June in a room adjacent to the Church of Mary Help of Christians, inviting Don Bosco to come. He gave them a very affectionate talk. They offered him a gift and listened to his kind words. In the years that followed numbers increased until in 1876 Don Bosco himself suggested adding a day in July to the 24 June date when they could meet for a meal together: on Sunday for lay people and a weekday for clergy.

Carlo Gastini (1833–1902) remained chief organiser of these meetings. He had been at the Oratory from 1848, was a cleric for a year, then a teacher of bookbinding and from 1875 the chief organiser of the Valdocco past pupils. He became president of a committee that coordinated the initiatives. In 1871 Fr Giacomo Bellia (1834–1908), a companion of Gastini's at Valdocco from

144 Cf. J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 179–180.

145 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 190–191.

146 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 192.

147 Cf. Chap. 25, § 1.

148 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 57.

149 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 67–68.

150 For some years there were indications, in J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 81 (1880), 94 (1886), 169 (1872), 207 (1875), 216 (1876), 241 (1878), 247 (1881), 250 (1882).

1848 to 1856, gave an address of welcome. Some notes in the chronicle for the name day celebrations in 1884 offer interesting information on Gastini's role. They speak of a group of more than 300 'old boys of the Oratory'. Clergy and lay people from all walks of life and professions. At 10.00 a.m. they went to Don Bosco to present their greetings and as a sign of gratitude offered him 'a beautiful ornate vestment.' At a certain point, the chronicle tells us, 'Mr Carlo Gastini stood up and as *head of the past pupils association*' spoke to the man they were celebrating on behalf of the others and the affection they felt for him. 'He offered warm wishes for a long and very happy life in *inimitable words*.'¹⁵¹ At the next gathering on 13 July, mainly of lay past pupils, a secretary and president were chosen for the committee organising the name day event. The *Salesian Bulletin* did not skimp on praises for the president Carlo Gastini, who in his performance as a joker appeared to put the address by Prof. Fabre and another speech by Prof. Germano in the shade. Following him, the secretary, Mr Luigi Fumero, recalled the fifteen or so years of those events and 'suggested a collection for the celebration of a Mass in the Church of Mary Help of Christians for deceased past pupils.' Don Bosco concluded by expressing his gratitude and consolation among things for 'knowing that everyone was in praise of this meeting since it was a real way of remembering the advice and counsel I gave you when you were boys.'¹⁵²

In the name of the committee, Carlo Gastini and Matteo Alasio, secretary, announced Don Bosco's death to the Oratory past pupils on 31 January 1888.¹⁵³

Don Bosco felt that the past pupils belonged to the same family and were as Salesian as their religious older brothers. By dint of the belief he entrusted them with the task of extending the educational and preventive mission they had benefited from as they exercised their own physical and spiritual fatherhood. In one of his talks to past pupil priests he prefaced his remarks with the following: 'By the name "Salesian" I mean all who are educated here in the Oratory in the principles and sayings, of this great Saint. So for me you are all Salesians.'¹⁵⁴ On 25 and 29 July, 1850 he encouraged lay and priestly past pupils to work together in the common task. He encouraged the lay members not only to be always and everywhere 'good Christians and men of probity' but also, if fathers of families, to share the education they had received at the Oratory with their dear ones: 'We are Salesians and as such we forget everything, forgive everyone, do as much good as we can and do evil to no one.' Therefore, show that you are 'good Salesians, true sons of D. Bosco whose keenest desire is to populate heaven with souls and empty hell of them, should there be any.' 'The education you received from D. Bosco at the Oratory is something to share with your dear ones.'¹⁵⁵ He also suggested the possibility of them being a specific social tool. He told them at a meeting on Sunday 23 July, 1882: 'Some have suggested you revise our former mutual aid society among yourselves.' 'From then on' he noted 'the so-called Catholic Workers Societies were founded in almost every city and town and they are a real blessing for our times.' He invited them to join one and take an active part in the spiritual and material benefits thereof.¹⁵⁶

On 3 July 1884, Don Bosco praised their coming together each year and stated: 'I feel that I love you now even more than once upon a time because by your presence you assure me that the principles of our holy religion I taught you have remained firm in your hearts and guide you in life. I feel that I love you more because you let me see how your hearts are all for Don Bosco. You tell me: "Here we are D. Bosco, to protest that we are all yours on the way to salvation and your

151 *L'onomastico di D. Bosco in Turin*, BS 8 (1884) no. 7, July, p. 98.

152 BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, pp. 112–113.

153 Text in MB XVIII 814–815.

154 Disc.on 17 July 1884, BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, p. 115.

155 *La gratitudine filiale a lieta mensa colla bontà paterna*, BS 4 (1880) no. 9, September, p. 10.

156 *Giocondo spettacolo di amor filiale e di bontà paterna*, BS 6 (1882) no. 9, September, p. 150.

thoughts are still ours.” And I say to you that I am all yours in every one of my thoughts and actions.’¹⁵⁷

His address to past pupils on 29 July 1880 was more detailed and demanding: ‘I would have many things to tell you,’ he began, ‘The main one is for you to do as much as possible for youth in your parishes, cities, towns and families.’ He then pointed out ways, approaches ‘for succeeding well with youngsters.’ Going back to the original principles he tried to instil in them: ‘Make a great effort to be well-mannered with them; make them love and not fear you. Show them and convince them that it is the salvation of their souls you seek. Correct their faults patiently and charitably. Above all, refrain from hitting them. In brief, see that when they see you they come running to you and not away from you as happens too often in many places and often rightly so because they fear being hit.’¹⁵⁸

Two years later he spoke of the long and difficult process before how could realise his plans for young people despite all the problems and opposition, and he spelt out a typically Salesian principle for doing good: ‘Does the world vilify and harm us? We just do good to it, working for its religious, moral well-being and, where we can, also moral and physical well-being. Let us put St Paul’s advice into practice: *Noli vinci a malo sed vince in bone malum* – do not wish to be overcome by the malice and perversity of your adversaries, but seek to win them over to God with your good works. Above all try to do good to children, the poor, the sick, like our Divine Master did and this way shut sad people up. And what is better, you will attract God’s [protection for yourself and the work of your holy ministry. He who is protected and blessed by God will be invincible.’¹⁵⁹

Again, on 19 July 1883, he stressed old and new aspects of apostolic zeal: ‘Live always as good priests as your old friend taught you and instilled in you. Be zealous for the salvation of souls who are unfortunately being lost. Take special care of youth in your towns, for society’s hopes lie in them. Remain united with the Head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Let us always love and pray for one another.’¹⁶⁰ Again, the following year, speaking to priests, he suggested a relevant apostolate in his view given the waste of lives in various ways, people gambling, duelling or suicide: he urged them to consider the precious gift of life: ‘Our life on earth well used is a foretaste of eternal life.’¹⁶¹

157 BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, p. 113.

158 BS 4 (1880) no. 9, September, p. 11.

159 BS 6 (1882) no. 9, September, p. 151.

160 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 129.

161 Address on 17 July 1884, BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, pp. 1–16.

Forger of religious Communities vowed to the education of youth (1865–77)

- 1871 January: *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori* (Confidential reminders for rectors);
30: Continuation of 'Rectors Conferences);
- 1872 12 October: guidelines for distribution of personnel.
- 1873 Begins drawing up the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*;
3 June and 15 November: two important circulars on religious life.
- 1874 5 February: third circular on religious life.
- 1875 January: Don Bosco unearths the manuscript on *Le perquisizioni* (Searches) from 1860;
First lives of deceased Salesians in the Year Book;
1–16 April: General Rector's Conferences;
26 May: Don Bosco retells the early Oratory times;
Spring – summer: *Ai soci salesiani* (To Salesian Confreres), introduction to the Italian edition of the Constitutions;
18–26 September: Conferences for Chapter members and rectors.
- 1877 The final St Francis de Sales Conferences.

Only from 1875 did Don Bosco begin to organise separate areas at the Oratory for novices and the young students of philosophy. Then from 1879 he created a community in an appropriate house at San Benigno Canavese, 19 kilometres north of Turin for one group followed by another 8 kilometres on at Foglizzo Canavese, just for clerical novices and philosophy students.

As already indicated for the Oratory, Salesians and boys in other works too formed two distinct communities, one educational the other religious, but not separate ones. Therefore the substance of educational and religious leadership and management of the colleges, hospices, oratories involved both boys and their religious education, including the spoken 'magisterium' or teaching imparted through goodnights and other forms of oral communication. Where possible, certain practices were reserved for the Salesians: meditation, special conferences, yearly retreats – often, however with a good group of aspirants and novices involved – particular circulars, the monthly '*rendiconto*' or personal talk prescribed by the Constitutions. So while we speak of Don Bosco as a formator and animator of consecrated Salesians through various approaches, we should not overlook his activity across the whole community, which offered substantial elements defining their personality both as religious and educators.

1. Forming those responsible for educative communities

Of all the formation channels for religious educators in a Salesian style, the dominant one was their constant involvement, working in common at the local and general level and in harmony with the Founder and Superior General, Don Bosco. His being and activity were the most reliable model and reference for the lived reinterpretation of Salesianity in religious, educational, social assistance terms.

1.1 Doing things like Don Bosco

His collaborators intuited and assimilated the Founder's and Father's faith, charity, realism, concreteness, far-sightedness, zeal for salvation, hopes. His very person, his style of government, his strong communicative ability were a more than implicit schooling for religious, educators, leaders of different kinds. He was somehow the prototype with his innate special mentality which had by now matured through his typical perception of the time and society in which he operated.

He explained all the things that made up his personality and action by instilling them through a whole range of behaviours: straight talk, essentiality, rejection of bureaucratic red tape, his lack of sufferance of formality, the wise way he circumvented interference by authorities he believed should be ignored or pre-empted, since they seemed to limit or coerce socially and educationally productive activities: surveillance efforts, inspectors, council administrators, scholastic advisers and superintendents, people responsible for conscription into the army, custodians of restrictive canonical rules.

It became easier for his co-workers near and far to identify with him and with someone closer to him than others who was able to support and interpret him and whom Don Bosco regarded as authorised to act in certain delegated areas with full authority. Fr Rua, as we shall see further on, acted as president at conferences or yearly rectors meetings, but especially as Prefect General and Vicar he was able for decades to be a daily and faithful echo of his founding superior's thoughts and intentions and not only in the disciplinary and administrative sector which was his specific competence.¹ On one occasion, when Don Bosco was absent from the Oratory at a decisive moment for redistribution of personnel for the new school year, it was to Rua, ably governing matters at Valdocco, that he turned: 'Go ahead with changes to personnel but do what you can to see that things are done freely and not by force.'² 'Adjust matters regarding personnel, as I have said, but do what you can to keep those in charge and the teachers happy.'³

On another occasion he ended a letter in these words: '*In omnibus caritas*. See that everyone you speak with becomes your friend.'⁴ It was a sign of complete trust in a man who was more and more becoming his *alter ego*, someone he also kept informed of his own health: 'My health has improved much; last night, however, I had a bit of a fever lasting around four hours but without consequence other than a bit of tiredness.'⁵ Some days earlier he had written: 'My health has improved somewhat: I felt the brief fever at night, instead of midday, but much milder and with less of a headache.'⁶

Educators and superiors, whether new or already proven, learned almost by osmosis from Don Bosco what was to be the fundamental feature of their profession: wisdom informed by charity. It was moderation which did not lessen the desire for perfection but responded to a wise and constructive realism. We find it expressed in the opening of a letter to one rector, a minor treatise

1 To Fr M. Rua, 18 November 1875, Em IV 562.

2 To Fr M. Rua, 16 October 1872, Em III 476.

3 Letter of 19 October 1872, Em III 478.

4 To Fr M. Rua from St Ignatius above Lanzo in "an amazing retreat session", 10 August 1873, Em IV 142.

5 Ibid.

6 Letter, beginning of August 1873, Em IV 135.

on professional spirituality: 'I am fully in agreement with you. The best is what we seek but unfortunately we have to content ourselves, amongst so many ills, with the mediocre. These are our times. Despite this, the results obtained thus far should satisfy us. Let us be humble before God, recognise that it all comes from him, pray especially at Mass at the "elevation of the host" for yourself, your efforts, your children.'⁷ It is clear that 'mediocre' does not mean 'little', something just a little better than adequate, but average, a measure between good and adequate.

1.2 Formation through story telling

'Doing as Don Bosco does' also concerned the past and future which he would refer to either through story or prediction. In the 1870s, he used to tell the story of exactly how he had done things in the 50's and 60's. Fr Barberis' diary or *Cronichetta* and other diaries he kept or encouraged others to keep, furnish us with Don Bosco's memories of his activity among the boys and the Salesians close to him as written down in various contexts between 1875 and 1879. They were used in the formation and animation of aspirants, novices and young professed. He had two main ways of retelling things –*viva voce* and in writing. On 26 May 1875, there was a lively discussion on the *Beginning of the Oratory*, the paradigmatic institution which summed up the various initiatives on behalf of young people. In ideal terms all these activities were the Oratory. There was no lack of dramatisation that gave little heed to historical precision.⁸ Beginning with 1873, these tended to reflect what Don Bosco had already entrusted to the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*. 'I have written down a number of things' he confided to them 'which will be very instructive for us' even though some 'cannot be published, at least for now.'

With those closest to him gathered around him, he would recall the origins in 1845–46 on a range of different occasions with extraordinary evocative potential.⁹ Sometimes the one urging him on was Fr Barberis, novice master, thus guide and animator for all those starting out in Salesian life. He liked of an evening 'after prayers, to tell the clerical novices something of the early days at the Oratory.'¹⁰ It was Barberis who recorded things covering a wide variety of topics which he heard from Don Bosco at Lanzo around the end of September, beginning of October 1876. On a one to one basis a whole range of memories of the early Oratory times flourished, where Don Bosco was the absolute main figure in confronting some of the most difficult youth situations, the *Cocche* (gangs), street fights, his ability to arouse religious sentiment.¹¹ There were other reminiscences in November 1878 when Don Bosco was putting the final touches to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: they regarded the turbulent events of 1848 and the search for trustworthy helpers.¹²

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* were written for the most part over 1873–75. There were summary outlines referring to 1815–24 and in more detailed form covering the decades 1825–35, 1835–45, 1845–55. The last twenty or thirty pages, refined in 1878–79 and beyond, record publicly known facts: the building of the Church of St Francis de Sales, the explosion at the powder factory, the beginning of the *Letture Cattoliche*, closing with the entrance on scene of an unexpected 'alien figure', the legendary Grigio or 'grey dog'.¹³ They were 'memoirs' – so the author tells us at the beginning of his work – which he intended to be reserved for 'my beloved Salesian sons: I forbid

7 To Fr G. Bonetti, 6 June 1870, Em III 213.

8 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 27–31.

9 Conversation on Saturday evening 1 January 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, p. 46–56.

10 Reflections on 1 January 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, p. 46.

11 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 11, pp. 14–26, 40–41; other reminders on 15 November 1878, quad. 12, pp. 46–53.

12 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 14, pp. 19–22.

13 MO (2010) 18–20; cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*. Lyon 1962, pp. 115–119.

that these things be made public during my lifetime or after my death.’¹⁴ The readers, unaware of the use they would soon be put to, took this prohibition literally, so much so that the first edition of the bulky manuscript was only attended to by Eugene Ceria in 1946.

The document had not been entirely secret. Already from 1877/78 it was in Fr Bonetti’s hands and he made use of it in writing the *History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* which came out in instalments in the Salesian Bulletin from January 1879 to August 1886. It contained more than half of the text, the part that reconstructed the beginning and developments of the Oratory and parallel activities between 1841 and 1854.¹⁵ Don Bosco himself had already described their narrative, formative and manifesto-like character in the title. They were not to be understood as ‘Auto-biographical memoirs’ but literally as ‘*Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* even though in certain ways the author sometimes seems to identify the beginnings and development of the Oratory with the events of his own life: his birth on 15 August, the dream at 9 years of age, his performances at the Becchi etc. There is no doubt it was – as he states in his preface – a normative history, a classic *historia magistra vitae* or aid to ‘help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past.’

It was to be recreational and evocative reading, ‘some entertainment’ for the children and an exemplary history he had inherited from the past, according to which the objective truth was inseparable from its theological interpretation: ‘Make known how God himself has always been our guide,’ this of course being the conviction of all believing historians over the centuries.¹⁶ To a considerable extent, then, they are memoirs of the future and, with many reservations, theological and historical memoirs of the past.¹⁷

Emerging from them are the unmistakable features of the Salesian educator which Don Bosco repeatedly described in narrative accounts, conferences, familiar conversations. The decision to dedicate himself passionately and joyfully to the most needy youth was not only a sign of a divine call confirmed at the moment of definitive choice: ‘My inclination is to work for young people.’¹⁸ At the summit of his charitable and educational assistance was the ongoing Christian yearning for eternal salvation guaranteed by the life of grace preserved or regained through appropriate means: prayer, the sacraments, catechism, devotion to Mary Virgin and Mother. ‘Religion was a fundamental part of education’ he recalled, writing of the college at Chieri, and it was also a sure safeguard for ‘morality’ and the ‘exact fulfilment of our duty.’¹⁹

The chief way to relate to young people was educative assistance [being with them in an educational way], experienced as a pressing personal and social need, something he felt from his first contact with boys ‘abandoned to their own resources.’²⁰ He was also deeply convinced of the need for new, fresh places to encounter young people and for them to come together, the oratory, by a variety of names and in varied forms: not only a place for catechesis and religious practice but also a school, hospice, club, a place for leisure.²¹ It was fully consistent, then, that prevention and assistance would give rise to various kinds of initiatives be they social, religious, apologetic: the *Mutual Aid Society*, the *Catholic Readings*, *Sodalities*, books and pamphlets.²² His interest was in

14 MO (2010) 30.

15 Cf. MO (2010) 133–190 compared with the preceding pages 27–132.

16 MO (2010) 30.

17 Cf. P. BRAIDO, “*Memorie*” del futuro, RSS 11 (1992) 97–127; A. GIRAUDO, *Introducción a San Juan Bosco, Memorias del Oratorio de San Francisco de Sales de 1815 a 1855. Notas históricas y bibliográficas de J. M. Prellezo*. Madrid, Editorial CCS 2003, pp. VII–XXXVII.

18 MO (2010) 108, 128.

19 MO (2010) among other references to religion, fulfilment of duty: 33, 35, 47, 55, 61, 63, 92, 105, 136

20 MO (2010) 101.

21 MO (2010) 151, 153, 154.

22 MO (2010) 149, 175, 179.

the whole young person, always leading to eternal and temporal, spiritual and material values, but able to fully embody the ideal of the profoundly happy believer in harmony with God, self, and others.²³

The educator that Don Bosco represented and proposed for imitation by his Salesians was one armed above all with loving and youthful kindness, able to restore lost affection, and fill sad loneliness with the intensity of friendly, community relationships: it was a counter point to the undoubtedly worthy but less accessible type of cleric the young Bosco experienced in his parish and at the seminary.²⁴ Again, it was essential for him to take the initiative and meet the irrepressible, youthful desire for happiness and the need to be cheerful, with joy and festivity. The 'tools, which were the church and recreation' were constantly paired with 'church functions' associated with recreational 'amusement,' 'games. Recurring terms in the text include cheerfulness, joy, hilarity, cheering up, laughing and, literally, 'singing, running, jumping, having fun,' 'somersaults, songs, making noise, leisure times.' This is why the boys found 'their earthly paradise' at the Oratory.²⁵

Over the same years, as well as writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, Don Bosco was attending to the revision of the old manuscript on *The Searches* from 1860. We have already spoken of this in reference to that dramatic year for the history of the Church in Italy. Don Bosco stated that he had written the manuscript at the time but felt it was particularly relevant now for the formation of his Salesians, so he took it up again in 1875, speaking of the searches a year later to the Salesians closest to him.²⁶ In early February 1875 he wrote to his secretary Fr Berto: 'This morning Savio brought me three exercise books [of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*]. Perhaps it would be good to revise the history of the searches once more before copying it.'²⁷ When it was published in the *Salesian Bulletin* between 1884 and 1886, considerably extended and paraphrased in the five chapters of the *History of the Oratory* written by Fr Bonetti, it was able to become a written 'magisterium' on what the superior and founder had taught them by word and example while he was still alive.²⁸

1.3 Conferences and circulars

A privileged vehicle for religious formation of superiors and subjects were the talks and conferences given on a regular or occasional basis, and circular letters.

On 6 April 1869, following the profession of triennial vows by Frs Giovanni Garino and Francesco Dalmazzo, Don Bosco gave a talk in which he said he hoped every member of the Society would be a founder called to guarantee that it would remain solidly anchored in the original motivations. A fundamental point was chastity and he pointed out its classic enemies: *otia, vina, dapes, idleness and intemperance* in eating and drinking. He then went back over cautions and safeguards: keep to the timetable of the house, make a visit to the Blessed Sacraments, go regularly to confession and communion, practise the rules of the Congregation, temperance in food and drink. He pointed to the tasks imposed by papal approval of the Salesian Society: there was a need to 'reorder and establish it.' This meant the need to 'examine which individuals' were suited to it and which ones not; religious and parish priests in the countryside were asking to enter and there

23 MO (2010) among others, 35, 55, 64, 74, 104–105, 131–132, 137.

24 MO (2010) 48, 80–81.

25 MO (2010) 35, 39, 54, 55, 66, 114 ...

26 Conversation on 1 January 1876, G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, pp. 46–47.

27 Letter beginning of February 1875; Em IV 405; cf. Chap. 13, §§ 2.1, 2.2, 2.3.

28 Cf. P. BRAIDO – F. MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su "Le perquisizioni"*. *Testo critico e introduzione*, in RSS 8 (1989) 143–144, 187–188.

was a need 'however, to go very slow in accepting them because,' he said 'they want to come here to command.' He went on: 'Let us be careful that none of the traditions are changed, otherwise it will be difficult to return to the fervour of old.' He announced the election of new members of the Superior Chapter to be held in December and concluded: 'Let us see that each of us is a *worthy founder of the Society of St Francis de Sales* so that those who read our history can find very many models among us.'²⁹

The election took place on 10 December. The only variation was the entry of Fr Albera (1845–1921) into the Chapter in place of Fr Francesia who was appointed Rector at Cherasco. Don Bosco reminded those elected that 'the job required patience and sacrifice.' He did not hide from them that they were 'beginning a life full of thorns' 'like at the beginning of the Society.' But they could be consoled since they had 'our Divine Saviour on the one side and the Blessed Virgin on the other.' He then announced that 'before the end of the year' he would have printed 'a list' of those making up the Congregation, and at the end, the names of deceased Salesians. He said these would soon be a separate 'monograph' written, pointing to the 'principal virtues for which the deceased was known.'³⁰

Notable, too, were the reflections he offered on 12 January 1873 after the re-election of the Economer, Fr Savio and three councillors: Frs Provera, Durando and Ghivarello. He stressed the fact that the growth of the Congregation had imposed the neat distinction between the Superior Chapter and the Valdocco Chapter, hoping the Superior Chapter could be given its own area to operate in and where its members could live. The Society's growth (Don Bosco pointed to the Jesuits as a model) demanded that its 'members be zealous ministers of it, worthy sons of Francis de Sales just as Jesuits showed themselves to be courageous sons of St Ignatius Loyola,' remaining united and supportive, although targeted from all side. Salesians, clerical or lay, in whatever role or whatever place on earth, alone or together, should always, 'bear in mind the purpose of the Congregation to instruct youth and our neighbour in general in skills and knowledge and more so in religion, that is, the salvation of souls.' Despite the pressing formation needs, in obedience to Pius IX's wishes, the work would be carried out bearing in mind, however, the purpose indicated and its demands.³¹

In the same year, 1873 the planning and already pre-announced series of three circulars began, touching on points he considered essential for religious life. The first on 4 June, concerned material interests, sharpened by the fact that 'the purchase, construction, renovation and establishment of new houses were cause for very serious expenditure,' as at Alassio, Varazze, Marassi, Sampierdarena and the re-founded Lanzo; 'the increase in all kinds of comestibles – including the tax on flour – 'meant that the 'monthly expenses' were 'far in excess of income.' He then gave the following directions: 'No building to be undertaken,' 'no journeys to be made' for useless reasons. 'Remember to observe articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 of Chapter 4 of our rules' relating to the vow of poverty: limiting purchases, introducing economics where comestibles were concerned. But he added one rather delicate reservation: 'But it is my intention that nothing be omitted which can contribute to preserving the health of the body or maintaining morality among the beloved sons of the Congregation and the students Divine Providence entrusts to our care.'³²

Another circular followed on 15 November: in this case discipline, not for pupils but for Salesian Religious. In essence this was understood as '*a way of living which complies with the rules and customs of an institute.*' This is why, he explained, 'to obtain good results from discipline it is first of

29 *Documenti* XI 269–271. Emphasis ours.

30 *Documenti* XI 314–316.

31 *Documenti* XIII 140–141; MB X 1062–1063.

32 Em IV 114–115.

all essential that all the rules are observed by everyone.' He explained that we can distinguish general rules, 'the rules of the Congregation' from the rules proper to each office.

In tune with his sense of concreteness he addressed each of the offices principally responsible for the smooth running of a Salesian college, omitting reference to the Prefect of Studies or School Councillor. Most references were to the *Rector*, with captivating images. He wrote that 'our houses can be likened to a garden.' The 'gardener is the Rector; the tender plants are the pupils and all the staff are the growers dependent on their master, meaning the Rector who is responsible for everyone's activity. The Rector will achieve much if he does not absent himself from the house entrusted to him except for reasonable and serious motives.' 'In all charity let him often visit or at least ask about the dormitories, kitchen, infirmary, classrooms and study. He should constantly be the loving father who wants to know everything in order to do good to everyone and evil to none.'³³

The Prefect was 'censor of discipline' the first one responsible for order in the house and relations with people outside. The *Catechist* or spiritual director of the group as a whole 'should remember that the spirit and moral benefit of our houses depends on fostering the *Altar boys society*, the *Immaculate Conception*, *Blessed Sacrament* and *St Aloysius sodalities*.³⁴ Let the *Teachers* be 'the first into the classroom and the last to leave. Let them love their pupils equally, encourage everyone and despise none. They should feel for the more ignorant ones in the class and take care of them, question them often and if needs be let them speak with whoever can see they are helped outside the classroom as well.'³⁵ The *Assistants* were required to be vigilant, especially to prevent 'grumbling' and worse, 'improper talk.'³⁶

The third and the most important circular of the series, on 4 February 1874, had *morality* as its argument, understood as irreproachableness both inwardly and outwardly, in the sexual arena. Don Bosco spelt out and developed two issues in this regard: '1. The need for morality in Salesian members. 2. The means for encouraging and sustaining it among our pupils.' He dwelt especially on the first of these. 'It can be established as an invariable principle that the pupils' morality depends on who teaches, assists and guides them.' He then pointed to the fact that 'public opinion decries 'immoral deeds that have taken place and ruined habits and caused horrible scandals' in certain houses of education. 'It is a great evil, a disaster' he lamented. The cause was clear: 'the cessation of holiness in those in charge was the cause of the disasters that occurred among those dependent on them.' He begged the Lord that all his works would disappear before 'similar misfortune' should take place there. Strictness was never excessive in a world which was inclined to invent non-existent matters or give substance to simple suspicion. He concluded emphatically: 'Oh chastity, chastity, what a great virtue you are! As long as you remain resplendent among us, meaning so long as the sons of St Francis de Sales practice recollectedness, modesty, temperance and everything we have promised God by vow, morality and holiness of habits will have a glorious place among us, and will shine like a burning torch in all the houses dependent on us.' Finally, he gave two brief rules: to have three 'conferences' or better, three practical examinations 'on the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience' and to re-read 'the chapter dealing with the practices of piety' in the Constitutions.³⁷

There is interesting content in a more restricted circular addressed to the two governing bodies at the mother house, the Superior Chapter and the 'House Chapter'. The style seems unusual, both for its opening and closing. Don Bosco was writing from Lanzo 'for the greater glory of God and the honour of our holy religion and the benefit of the Salesian Society' confirming in more

33 Em IV 178–179.

34 Em IV 179.

35 Em IV 179–180.

36 Em IV 180.

37 Em IV 215–217.

summary fashion what he had developed in the circular on 15 November 1873 and would stress again in the circular at the beginning of 1876. First of all he recommended promoting all four sodalities and the altar boys society. He then listed some points of particular importance for the smooth running of the mother house and other houses: 'Put into practice effective means for preventing criticism and grumbling about the running of the Oratory and the Superior's arrangements.' 'Take special care of sick confreres.' 'Ordinarily just one meat dish for dinner and a mixed dish at supper.' 'Remind people often that we have made a vow of poverty.'

He asked the superiors to carry these out in hierarchical order after the Vice director, Fr Rua: at the Oratory these were Frs Durando, Provera, Lazzero. Then concretising each one's tasks he wrote; 'Each day the Director of Studies should spend an hour with matters regarding classes. The Prefect should spend at least two hours visiting the kitchen, dormitories and other parts of the house.' 'Care of morality and the sick is entrusted in a special way to the Catechist.' Then there is an N.B. which stands out as a postscript: '*Understand*, visit, advise, counsel, direct the teaching staff, assistants and workers. Do not overlook the monthly '*rendiconto*', the weekly conference to the confreres as a group.'³⁸ It was a small *vademecum* or handbook of responsible, detailed government.

The first biographies of *Salesian confreres called to eternal life in 1874* were aimed at edification. These were published in the list of members and Salesian houses for 1875 similar to what other Religious Institutes did. According to Don Bosco the main purpose was to present exemplary figures for imitation: 'So those who lived among us and practised the same rules in an exemplary way may be an encouragement to us to follow them in promoting good and avoiding evil.'³⁹ Brief notes limited to a page, more or less, were already to be found in the 1872, '73 and '74 booklets. They foreshadowed what would appear in the more developed biographies and the edifying elements which could be drawn from them. 'After having shown clear signs of virtue' was the memory of a novice who died in November 1871 at a little more than sixteen years of age, 'he enrolled in our society to consecrate himself to the Lord in the bloom of youth and gave himself completely to divine service. But God did not wait for his works and wanted to compensate his ardent desires, calling him to enjoy the reward for the sacrifice he had made in abandoning home, family and friends.'⁴⁰

Writing of a coadjutor and cleric who died in 1872 he spoke of: 'The exemplary life they led all the time they were with us; their keen desire to work for the greater glory of God; their patience and resignation shown especially in their last long illness; the fervour with which they received the holy Sacraments.' 'Meanwhile let us try to imitate them in their detachment from earthly things and in the most precious virtue of obedience. Let us do what we can to faithfully observe the rules of our Congregation and thus hold ourselves in readiness for the great call that God, in his infinite mercy, will decide to make for some of us this year.'⁴¹

'These three confreres of ours' a cleric, a coadjutor, a priest who died in 1873 'have left us a shining example of religious observance. They despised the world and all its allures and now, as we believe, they are already with God enjoying the reward of their labours and sacrifices.' The cleric was 'most commendable for his piety and desire to work for the glory of God.' The coadjutor 'showed his constant affection for the Congregation by his tireless work and exact obedience in everything he was asked to do.' The third was 'a zealous, willing priest whose morality was truly

38 Letter of 27 September 1874, Em IV 323.

39 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1875. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1875, pp. 15–16.

40 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1872. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1872, p. 11.

41 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1873. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1873, p. 12.

admirable,' 'and he felt deep regret when he could not do the things he believed were for the greater glory of God.'⁴²

In 1875, memory was kept of the outstanding Salesians: Fr Francesco Provera, from 1871 until his death in May 1874 a member of the Superior Chapter; Fr Pestarino who played the main role in preparing the birth of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; they were followed a few months later by cleric Ghiglione and Fr Giuseppe Cagliero, who succeeded Fr Pestarino in Salesian guidance of the Sisters. 'In these dear confreres of ours' the memoir says 'we have lost four evangelical workers, all perpetually professed, all most affectionate towards the Salesian Congregation, faithfully observant of our Constitutions, truly zealous in working for the greater glory of God.' Summing up he said: 'We can say of them that they lived a short time but worked so much, as if they had lived for a very long time: *Brevi vivens tempore, explivit tempora multa*.'⁴³

What Don Bosco had to say about obedience in a conference on 26 September 1875, was of a deliberately religious nature, thus strengthening the bond it formed. 'Religious' obedience of consecrated persons was a strong point that the founder considered essential and did not fail to instil until the end of his life. 'Up til now it is to be noted that obedience was rather more personal than religious. We avoid this great inconvenience. We do not even obey because so—and—so is the one giving orders but in principle, because he is superior, because it is God who is commanding and does so through whoever it be. This is something we must begin to practise among us and instil, little by little, in others. Until we arrive at this point we will have gained little. We are not to do things because it pleases us to do them or we like the way they were commended; they are to be done willingly, simply because they have been commanded. This is to be instilled through conferences, sermons, confession and any other way possible.'⁴⁴

The circular he sent out at the beginning of 1876 following his visit to various works throughout the year before was full of points and practical guidelines. The Superior stated that he was satisfied with everything, spoke of the many requests for foundations in Italy, overseas, in the missions. He pointed to what was being done and what he hoped could be done in South America, and insisted on the need for clerical and religious vocations. He pointed to a number of main ways of nurturing them and helping the Salesians and boys to grow in the necessary 'spirit of piety.' Sodalities had prime of place, '*the key to piety, preserving morality, supporting clerical and religious vocations*.' He then warned of certain relationships, particular friendships, conversations be they in writing, books or gifts of whatever kind.' From this came the strict prohibition of all displays of ambiguous familiarity among educators, between them and their pupils and among the pupils themselves: 'holding hands,' caressing the face, kisses, walking arm in arm or going for a walk with arms around each others shoulders.' Thirdly, 'avoiding the world and its principles' was instilled, with a corollary: 'Therefore, do not go home to the family unless for serious reasons.'

He ended the series with a rule that is only apparently disciplinary and especially a guarantee of 'morality.' 'In the evening, after prayers, let each one go straight away to bed.' 'Punctuality in going to bed is linked with getting up on time in the morning, which I intend to insist on equally.'⁴⁵ There is no question that Don Bosco was absolutely intransigent where morality was concerned, however this was mixed with pity and respect for privacy. A brief letter to Fr Rua from Varazze is paradigmatic. He was visiting there and it was in regard to a temporarily professed cleric who was a dangerous recidivist. 'Just now' he wrote 'the cleric Bollea will have arrived there under the specious pretext of doing a job for me. But in reality, *ob eadem rationes anni elapsi*. Therefore,

42 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1874. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1874, p. 14.

43 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1875. Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1875, pp. 15–18; Em IV 381–382.

44 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 12, pp. 52–53.

45 Circ., 12 January 1876, E III 6–9.

dulciter moneatur; habitum deponat, atque saeculariter induatur, but by no means is he to return here. He could very much compromise us. *Ab omni malo libera nos, Domine*. Pray a lot.’

But this is not everything. The resolute governor was less so in carrying things out. He did not want to be pitiless, and consulted with his most trustworthy collaborator. ‘Let me advise you’ he said in a P.S. ‘to tell Bollea that all his belongings will be sent on. Be prudent and unafraid [Remain silent, do not fear] when I say here that he has gone to get ready to go to America. And would it also not be better for him to think that for two or three days?’⁴⁶

1.4 Rules and advice for Rectors

We have spoken of the relevant task of the rector in the individual communities and the important document known as the *Confidential Reminders* for Rectors.⁴⁷ They were often reinforced and sometimes recalled in individual letters. He reminded Fr Bonetti: ‘Do not omit the monthly “*rendiconto*” and go into all the details that can be helpful for the individual and the Society.’⁴⁸ He also drew up an action plan for him in terms which have by now become canonical: “1. The monthly ‘*rendiconto*’ where you insist on the duty the superior has of speaking frankly and telling his subject everything. The latter, for his part, tells him things and if they are not said they are called to mind. 2. See if things have improved or not in the “*rendiconto*” and if advice given has been followed, and insist they are carried out. 3. Never omit the two monthly conferences, one on ascetics, the other explaining the rules. 4. Meet with the Chapter and sometimes with all the teachers to study ways each one feels are appropriate to remedy what must be remedied. 5. Remember that the rector does not have to do a lot but must see that others do things, watching how each one does his duties.’ Finally he invited him to read the rules ‘given in writing to each rector of our houses, meaning the Confidential Reminders.’⁴⁹

2. Group formation through the General Conferences

We have already spoken of the Conferences of St Francis de Sales held from 1866 to 1870. From 1871, with the increase in works, the number of rectors also increased and sometimes, a number of autumn conferences were added for rectors and prefects, held during the retreat at Lanzo. These ceased with the First General Chapter in summer–autumn 1877. There were still a brief series of conferences at Alassio in 1879 but with a limited number of rectors. Don Bosco was always the ‘teacher’ but Fr Rua began to emerge more frequently as president of most of the conferences.

At the general conference on 30 January 1871, the day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales, the rectors made reference to their respective colleges and Fr Pestarino to the Daughters of the Immaculate at Mornese. Don Bosco was pleased with what they presented, said he was satisfied that the Congregation had grown in quantity but especially ‘in good will, unity and love for work,’ and that ‘a considerable improvement’ had been noted at the Oratory, especially among the trade students who in other years were a real scourge for the house.’ He rejoiced that in all the houses confreres were available for all tasks: teaching, accompanying on walks, tutoring after school while finding ‘time still to read, study and prepare classes.’ Everyone was fully occupied. He then said: ‘Woe to us if idleness the ruin of Congregations, enters our houses.’ He invited them all to ‘make money’ especially through savings. There were ‘very heavy expenditures’ meaning ‘at least

46 To Fr M. Rua, 12 June 1875, Em IV 469.

47 Cf. Chap. 17, § 7.1.

48 Letter of 19 April 1871, Em III 324.

49 Letter of 17 April 1873, Em IV 79–80.

200,000 francs [729,857 euro]. There was also the 'scourge of conscription,' buying back conscripts, over and above the costs of formation of personnel who could not as yet work. Still, he confirmed the principle by which the Society should not keep real estate, money-producing 'tenements' which would alienate us from Providence. The discussion then turned to '*teatrino*' or 'small theatre' and went on at length; Don Bosco was highly critical of certain kinds of language. The basis should be *to amuse* and *instruct*. Some months later, for the first time he issued a four page printed pamphlet, *Regola pel teatrino*. (Rule for '*teatrino*').⁵⁰ The text then became part of the Regulations for the houses in 1877 and, in 1878, part of the printed *Deliberations* from the First General Chapter of 1877. He continued to emphasise the 'miracle' of the 'admirable growth' of the Society despite 'the evils of the time, the great upsets and fierce wars being waged against good people.' 'Here we see the finger of God,' he assured them and 'the protection of Our Lady.' There were many forces hostile to religious life: 'civil authorities,' 'laws,' 'Masons,' 'a good number of journalists.' Salesians should continue to work with all their strength and means. Arriving at the conclusion he felt he could only but recommend 'the virtue which embraces all the others, meaning obedience.' 'Obedience is everything in a Congregation. If obedience is lacking there will be disorder; everything will go to rack and ruin.'⁵¹

There is no documentation on the Salesian conferences in 1872, held after Don Bosco's return from Varazze. It would have taken place on the evening of Friday 16 February in an atmosphere of simple familiar confidence following his return to health.⁵²

In 1873, the Feast of St Francis de Sales was celebrated on Sunday 2 February. The General Conference took place the following day and was particularly interesting for new accomplishments of the previous year: the opening of the college at Valsalice, extensions at Lanzo and Alassio, the transferral of the hospice at Marassi to Sampierdarena. At the beginning of the meeting Don Bosco had Fr Rua read out the list of members of the Superior Chapter, different from the Oratory Chapter even though some belonged to both. Then each Rector referred to his house, though Fr Bonetti from Borgo S. Martino, was absent. As for Mornese, Fr Pestarino said that everything was going well enough; that we only lacked a superior who is a bit more learned.⁵³ Don Bosco dwelt on three points: above all the economy 'in very critical times for supplies.' He then said that 'the most important thing' for the Society was 'exact observance of the rules.' Finally, there was need for example which would lead others to follow 'because *si verba movent, exempla trahent*.'⁵⁴ A result of 1873 conferences was a series of *Deliberations* sent to the houses.⁵⁵ In autumn, Fr Ghivarello, the Economer General, called the rectors and prefects together to discuss problems regarding keeping regular records and fulfilling duties imposed by the Regulations on the prefect of each house.⁵⁶

In 1874, the conferences were held on Don Bosco's return from his long Roman sojourn from 30 December 1873 to 14 April 1874 with the Constitutions approved. It seems that there were only two, one in the morning and the other in the evening of 17 April.⁵⁷ We can discover 'the most salient points' put by Don Bosco from a memoir by Fr Lemoyne. They focused on two ideas, fundamental ones following the approval of the Rule: forming oneself in a religious mentality and feeling that one belonged to a 'Congregation'. Suggestions relevant to this came from it: the need

50 Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales [1871].

51 *Documenti* XII 129–132; MB X 1054–1059.

52 Cf. letter to Fr G. Bonetti 11 February 1872, from Varazze, Em III 397.

53 *Documenti*, XIII 145. MB X adjusts the source: "He said how there too things were going very well; it only lacked a superior who had not yet been chosen" (p. 1065).

54 *Documenti* XIII 145–146.

55 *Documenti* XIII 142–143; MB X 1067–1068.

56 Cf. *Documenti* XIII 207–208; MB X 1069–1070, 1111.

57 *Documenti* XIII 127; MB X 807.

to proceed in a precise order; creating unity around the superior who needed to be able to count on the unconditional availability of the confreres to offer 'true obedience', interpreting it not to exempt oneself but to work 'prudently and cheerfully.' As for the Congregation, there was a need 'to love it, to defend its reputation' and not do anything that would dishonour it, 'working for its growth and prosperity.' Detachment from relatives, fidelity, 'no one going backwards.' He concluded: '*Nemo quaeret quae sua sunt, sed quae Jesu Christi.*' Frequent conferences should be held where either Rodriguez could be read or the rector could speak about the vows, the virtues of obedience, detachment from earthly things, chastity and how to preserve it, how to conduct oneself with relatives. There should be a conference once a week and a chapter meeting every fortnight. Poor boys, spreading good books, and preaching, are three vast areas for us to exercise our efforts in.'⁵⁸

There is also a manuscript partly written by Fr Barberis with corrections by Don Bosco that has been assigned to 1874. It was entitled *Deliberations taken at the General Conferences of the Society of St Francis de Sales. Explanatory notes on our rules*, but it seems more reasonable to assign it to 1875.⁵⁹ It was material that eventually formed part of the printed 1878 *Deliberations* following discussions at the First General Chapter in 1877. They would eventually form part of the practical patrimony of norms that would result in various sets of Regulations for Salesian Religious, reaching their greatest number in 1906. Relating to 1874 were the *Summary of Autumn Conferences of the General Chapter in 1874* and the *Summary of Prefects Conferences* held at Lanzo in autumn. Both were written by Fr Rua.⁶⁰

Richer still is documentation owed to the attentive efforts of Fr Giulio Barberis relating to the Conferences of St Francis de Sales of 1875, 1876, 1877. After the high point of 1875–77 they ended up losing their original significance, either because of the series of General Chapters (1877, 1880, 1883, 1886) or because of the expansion of works beyond Italy and abroad which made it impossible for many rectors to be there.

1875 saw a wealth of plenary meetings: at the St Francis de Sales Conferences, in April and autumn. Following approval of the Constitutions, Don Bosco seemed to want to force the pace in forging a true Religious Congregation which was disciplined and had a well-defined spirit, compact in how it felt about itself and acted. This was prepared for in autumn by two great outward movements: over the Alps in France and over the Atlantic in Argentina.

The first series of conferences took place over the three days prior to the Feast of St Francis de Sales from 26–28 January. Four were private, that is in the presence of the chapter members, rectors of houses, and the novice master. Two were public or rather, it was one which took place over two sessions,⁶¹ At the first three private ones presided over by Fr Rua, problems relating to religious life were dealt with, among them reading material and application of the Holy See's 25 January 1848 decrees *Romani Pontifices* and *Regulari disciplinae*. These had been generally avoided in reference to the testimonial letters from the diocesan ordinary for acceptance to the novitiate, and religious clothing ceremony and admission to profession of vows.⁶² The chronicler described the private conferences at which Don Bosco presided in the late morning of 27 January as 'Memorable in the annals of the Congregation.' The founder began by speaking of the privileges which he had been asking for in Rome from 17 February to 15 March. For the first time he made reference to the letters from South America mentioned earlier.⁶³ He also made known the content of letters Archbishop Gastaldi had sent to Rome, and the appointment of the Archbishop of Vercelli,

58 MB X 1071–1072.

59 The handwritten text can be found in ASC D 577; printed in MB X 1112–1120.

60 ASC, *Conferenze generali*, in *Documenti* XIV 158–159, 160; MB X 1072–1076, 1120–1122.

61 Cf. *Conferenze tenute nell'occasione in cui all'Oratorio si celebrò la festa di S. Francesco di Sales* – an. 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 1–29; MB XI 21–30.

62 *Conferenze tenute...* an. 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 2–5.

63 Cf. Chap. 21, § 3.1.

Celestino Fissore, to 'mediate' between the Archbishop and Don Bosco. With regards to the precepts of the 1848 decrees he invited them to a somewhat limited observance: 'We will begin to carry out what we can.'⁶⁴

The public conference 'attended solemnly by all the rectors and all other members whether professed, novices or aspirants ... was held in the chapel of St Francis de Sales.' 'There were around 150 of us' the chronicler tells us. The afternoon of the 27th was dedicated to the conference with reports from rectors and Fr Rua, and on the morning of the 28th, an address from Don Bosco. Each rector gave a brief report on the 'state of the college he was running in financial, health, material, intellectual moral and religious terms.' In general, the information was marked by optimism aimed at enthusing and encouraging. Young people were coming in great numbers and extensions were being made at Lanzo, Alassio, Sampierdarena, Even at Valsalice the number had almost doubled compared to the previous year. The new 'Director' for the Sisters, Fr Costamagna, spoke of the 'fervent and perfect spirit' of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, beginning with information on the transfer of the boarding school to another more accessible and populous centre. Fr Rua referred to the Oratory at Valdocco, dwelling in particular on the 'outsiders' or Oratory boys for whom night classes had been set up in recent months 'attracting many older boys who then come on Sunday as well.' He also highlighted some improvements in the religious life of the Salesians, professed and novices. 'Meditation has been established for all members of the Congregation, made 'separately by the novices' who also had a 'separate study hall' with classes and conferences entirely for them. A relatively separate setting at the Oratory was being gradually established for the novitiate.'⁶⁵

In his addresses, Don Bosco spoke of the good impressions he had received from his recent visits to the colleges, 'full of healthy, good young people.' He had been struck especially by the work of the Salesians which was 'immense,' carried out in a 'heartfelt' way in a 'spirit of obedience and freedom' despite the narrow building which did not permit giving each teacher a 'comfortable room' or offering 'the novices Good airy, healthy dormitories.' He then recommended introducing Christian classics into the schools: it would be no small matter to know how 'to write Latin as it was written by Jerome, and Augustine, Ambrose, Leo and Sulpicius Severus.' It was not necessary to emulate Cicero or Livy. 'If you can do it' he said 'then you will be introducing so many strange, useless, many of them dangerous ideas,' into the minds of young people 'ideas found on every page of the pagan classics.' By way of conclusion he could not fail to refer to the news of the day: the 'Missions in America' in preference to those requested for Asia, Africa, Oceania 'both because of special circumstances, and the language,' Spanish, 'much easier than English, which is flourishing in many of the other places.'⁶⁶

Resulting from these discussions and conclusions were brief *Deliberations* on the possible reading and observance of the 1848 decree *Regulari disciplinae* on provincial examiners for vocations and the use of the Christian classics.⁶⁷

Similar conferences, five private and one public, took place after Easter (28 March) from Wednesday 14 April to Friday 16. The chronicler described the private conferences as 'general chapters.' Three were presided over by Don Bosco where information was given and relevant matters dealt with.⁶⁸ In the first one on Wednesday morning, Don Bosco gave information on what

64 *Conferenze tenute...* an. 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 7–12.

65 Cf. *Conferenze tenute...* an. 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 12–23.

66 Cf. *Conferenze tenute...* an. 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 23–29.

67 Cf. *Deliberazioni prese nelle Conferenze generali della Società di S. Francesco di Sales in occasione che i direttori delle diverse case si radunarono in Turin a festeggiare il loro Titolare* an. 1875 [3 pp.]; *Documenti XV* 54.

68 *Conferenze o Capitoli generali della Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales, tenutesi nell'Oratorio Salesiano di Turin in occasione della venuta di D. Bosco da Roma. 1875*, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad.

he had gone to Rome for: to get the privileges, especially the faculty of dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*. He had also spoken with the Holy Father about the American project and the 'Salesian Association and the Work of Mary Help of Christians.' He then dealt with each, offering 'just an overview of the "Salesian Association" (Cooperators) which we will be tackling this autumn' as he reminded them. Instead, he spent time on the Work of Mary Help of Christians for adult vocations – '18 to 30-year-olds are accepted' – explaining the original inspiration, referring to procedures initiated to obtain the brief of approval from the Holy See and indicating the difficulties created in Rome by Archbishop Gastaldi. He then dwelt at length on the request for privileges, going into historical discussion, telling them of steps he had taken in Rome especially with Archbishop Vitelleschi, the Holy Father and the cardinals who were members of the special Congregation, noting the difficulties which ceased to be 'serious' once the Holy Father was favourable.⁶⁹ We know that these fond hopes were to be disappointed.⁷⁰

At the morning session on the following day they decided to ask Don Bosco's opinion on two matters: whether the rector of a house had the power to change his subjects' roles, and the best time for theatrical performances. Don Bosco replied the following day, saying changes to roles of personnel in the house were possible but with the prior consent of the Superior Chapter. He also spoke of the freedom members had to correspond with the Superior and for professed members to leave the house: risky if alone but if with someone else, then licit and in compliance with the Rule. Don Bosco ended the discussion by promising that he would 'soon write a circular letter for all the houses drawing the rectors' attention to the need to carry out these points of the Rule.' The assembly also discussed at length the best time for theatrical performances. Don Bosco suggested a compromise: eat *alla francese*: that is, dine at 11.30 a.m. with dinner around 5 p.m. then theatre at 6.30 p.m. followed by prayers and everyone off to bed. In the afternoon on the same day, when Fr Rua was presiding, they dwelt with exam preparation for obtaining a teacher's certificate either for technical teaching or lower and upper secondary, and the best choice to make.⁷¹

The private conference on Friday morning, April 16, was filled with information, problems, and suggestions. Don Bosco gave detailed information on how the Salesians were going in Argentina and on what he had discussed in Rome, from a missionary prospective with the Pope, the Prefect and Secretary of Propaganda, Cardinal Franchi and Bishop Simeoni. He spoke of proposals for 'new colleges' at Bassano, Cremona, Crema, Como, Milan, Rho. He concluded: 'Now we have no great need to expand but rather to consolidate, therefore, unless there is something especially attractive we will not go elsewhere.' He maintained they had not found any favourable school authorities in Lombardy. However, Fr Rua highlighted the importance of expanding 'beyond the former Sardinian States.' They then dealt with the admissibility or otherwise of members of priestly ordination who were only in triennial vows and whether with patrimony or *titulo mensae communis*. At the end, Fr Albera asked when the Rule would be printed in Italian since everyone was waiting for it. It was concluded that this would be done as soon as possible when Don Bosco had been able to write 'a preface and some observations.'⁷² This would end up becoming the introduction '*Ai soci salesiani*' or 'To Salesian Confreres.'⁷³

The general conference at 9.00 p.m. the evening before, had particular pedagogical significance. Present in the Church of St Francis de Sales were Chapter members, rectors, professed, novices and aspirants. Don Bosco spoke with admiration and affection of the audience granted him by Pius IX, of the spiritual favours he had given, and the benevolence shown the

18, pp. 30–84; *Documenti* XV 99–120.

69 Cf. *Conferenze o Capitoli Generali...* 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 38–48.

70 Cf. Chap. 20, § 3.

71 Cf. *Conferenze o Capitoli Generali...* 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 49–68.

72 Cf. *Conferenze o Capitoli Generali...* 1875, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 18, pp. 75–84.

73 Cf. further on § 5.

Congregation in Rome and its current situation: legal position, lacking only the privileges, internal life, and an increase in members. He ended with some recommendations: 'first of all' 'to try to work hard to achieve much good,' 'to get rid of grumbling, including among ourselves,' 'to take care of our health.' And finally, 'to agree on doing the practices of piety ... of the Congregation well, especially the exercise for a happy death.'⁷⁴ 14 deliberations were formulated on the various issues discussed. With regard to the Constitutions in Italian 'it was decided to print the Italian translation of our Rule as soon as possible.'⁷⁵

Fr Rua was the key man for most of the conferences, acting as the Prefect of the Congregation by mandate from Don Bosco to whom the most important decisions were submitted for approval. 'An excellent approach to facilitating government' Eugene Ceria observed in reference to Rua and the other participants.⁷⁶ For Fr Rua it was a practical apprenticeship for his future as Vicar then Rector Major. In 1875 meetings for Chapter members and rectors took place again at Lanzo during the retreat on 18, 23, 24, 25 and 26 September. Among other matters discussed was the appointment of rectors, bearing in mind especially who would be in charge, not yet decided, of the group of a dozen or so to go to Argentina, other than Fr Cagliari who would accompany them as they settled in. They then decided on the movements of Prefects and teachers, beginning with the theology, philosophy and secondary school classes at the Oratory in Valdocco. From 23 September they looked at problems of internal order especially: a more regulated practice of the exercise for a happy death, authorisation for building works at the colleges, the timetable and religious observance in communities. Don Bosco presided in the afternoon of the 23rd and used the occasion to show his preference for immediate admission to perpetual vows, skipping triennials. He presided at both meetings on the 24th dedicated to questions of religious discipline, theology studies for candidates to the priesthood of for those who had been ordained prior to completing all the treatises, teaching philosophy to those who had fast-tracked their secondary studies due to advanced age: it was established for them that 'private study of philosophy consisted for them that 'private study of philosophy consisted in translating the treatise into Italian and adding the essential notes for understanding the terminology.'⁷⁷

At the Superior's invitation, on the morning of the last day, Sunday the 26th, Fr Rua read out a letter from lawyer Ernst Michel inviting the Salesians to Nice in France. In the afternoon Don Bosco presented a range of ideas and things to be done – the chronicler listed twenty: printing a form for 'letters of obedience' and communicating to houses the names of Salesians appointed to them; seeing that every Work prepared its own personnel; that agreement among superiors be maintained and that no subscriptions to newspapers be taken out other than by the rector. Central, however, was the topic of *morality*, recurring in Don Bosco's circulars and talks between 1873 and 1876. 'Another thing' he began, 'that I believe is most important for all our houses is to find every way of obtaining, promoting, propagating, ensuring morality in our houses. So long as we have reputation without exception in the public forum, boys will always flock to us and we will be considered excellent educators and our colleges will flourish in every way. The moment this is lacking, everything will be lacking.' To safeguard it he suggested many approaches, some seemingly futile but not in such a delicate matter: 'The usual conferences twice a month by the Rector to the Salesians; scrupulous observance of the Constitutions; fidelity to the "monthly *rendiconto*," 'the key to all order and morality,' opportunities (without going into conscience matters) for confidences and information extremely valuable for dealing with possible problem situations;

74 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Conferenza pubblica del 15 April [1873]*, quad. *Conferenze generali pubbliche*, pp. 1–14; *Documenti XV* 112–116.

75 Cf. *Deliberazioni prese nelle generali Conferenze tenute in occasione dell'arrivo del Sig. D. Bosco da Roma (Aprile 1875)* [3 p.], ASC D 577, FdB 1873 B3–5.

76 MB XI 339.

77 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 12, pp. 3–43; *Documenti XV* 269–274; MB XI 345–350.

absolutely eliminating the 'long snacks' 'that both boys and clerics have,' 'always keeping rooms locked,' 'avoiding all particular friendships,' 'seeing that boys and clerics avoid manhandling one another in any way.

Finally, he announced that a circular would be sent out very soon on the issue of morality, the one we know as the January 1876 circular. Don Bosco encouraged 'every way of obtaining, promoting, propagating, ensuring morality, especially in the way the colleges were managed. He ended the conference by stressing two things, one spiritual the other organisational, both aimed at giving the Salesian Society the stamp of a real Religious Congregation. Obedience had to shift from being personal to being religious, not done *intuitu personae* but out of faith; that is, because it is God who is commanding through the Superior. During the coming school year he wanted to focus on 'unifying the general administration of the Congregation and thus take care of the Oratory away from the Superior Chapter.'⁷⁸ This was gradually done and announced to the entire Oratory population during the goodnight on 20 December 1876.

The 1876 St Francis de Sales Conferences were held from the morning of Wednesday 1 February to the morning of Friday the 4th: five were private, four of which Fr Rua presided over and Don Bosco the last of the. Don Bosco presided at the two separate public conferences.⁷⁹

Discussion at the afternoon conference on 1 February focused on establishing a 'historiographer for the Congregation' who would be able to rely on the chronicles of individual houses.⁸⁰ The matter was taken up again by Don Bosco in a private conversation after supper on 2 February revealing the fact that he had written the history of the Oratory up till 1854.⁸¹ At the conference they also 'began to read and examine the explanatory notes on the regulations'⁸² which continued through to the final morning session the following day.⁸³ This work ended up, in 1877, as the printed edition of the *Regolamento per le case della società di S. Francesco di Sales or Regulations for the Houses*.

During the morning meeting on 3 February, problems emerged relating to the Catechist's role. They also discussed a religion text for lower and senior secondary and for other minor subjects.⁸⁴

During the morning meeting on 2 February, the first stage of the public conference took place with Don Bosco presiding, and continued on until the afternoon of 3 February. All the rectors stressed the increase in resident student numbers as well as day boys in the colleges in both elementary and classic classes. Added to day students at Varazze were adults, night classes and a flourishing festive Oratory which opened in 1875. The Salesians also taught in the local public schools. There were 160 boarders at Alassio and together with day boys total numbers for classes were 500. 'A much larger building had been erected' at Sampeirdarena with others planned, to double the number of boys between academic and trade students to 250. There were also 50 'Sons of Mary Help of Christians' in the house. At Mornese, the Sisters' numbers had doubled from 50 to 100 amid so much poverty, and the Salesian community there was being supported from the Capital, i.e. from the Oratory. 'As well as girls' boarding there were also 'the Sisters public schools,' 'classes for local girls' 'which the Sisters are running in our house.' For the boys there was 'one of

78 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 12, pp. 43–53; *Documenti* XV 275–280; MB XI 350–357.

79 Cf. *Conferenze tenute in occasione della festa di S. Francesco di Sales l'an. 1876 dal capitolo superiore dell'Oratorio coi direttori dei collegi radunatisi in Turin*, G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, pp. 1–64; 14 bis, pp. 5–36; *Documenti* XVI 87–110, 123–132; MB XII 52–94.

80 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, p. 12.

81 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, p. 39.

82 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, pp. 12–14.

83 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, p. 15.

84 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, pp. 21–24.

our confreres teaching in a room offered by the local Council.' The *Patronage* had opened in Nice with five boys, two clerics, the Rector and a cook.⁸⁵

In the afternoon of the following day discussions continued with reports from Fr Guarella on Trinità di Mondovì, Fr Rua on the house at the Oratory. Don Bosco introduced his address by referring to other educational institutions Salesians were working in: the St Joseph oratory in Turin run by Messrs. Occhetto, the Family of St Peter at Borgo S Donato, the St Joseph's workshop. He then spoke of the Congregation's development, the increase in the number of Salesians (330 members of whom 112 were perpetually professed, 83 in temporary vows, novices and aspirants) and he predicted a radiant future for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, then highlighted the many financial needs, inviting people to greater economy and spirit of poverty. Finally, he insisted on the practice of the Rule, and obedience.⁸⁶

Sixteen people, Chapter members and rectors, met at the final private conference on 4 February. Before saying goodbye, Don Bosco spoke to the rectors in particular, asking them to facilitate his visits to the houses by ensuring he first had a list of confreres, with any suitable information which would make their encounters more fruitful and for them to establish a precise time so whoever wanted to could speak with him. He asked them to let confreres know that he was working on a new expedition of Salesians to South America, inviting them to express possible availability to be part of it. He asked them to look after vocations to the clerical state, 'the main aim' he stated 'which our Congregation tends towards.' With this in mind he offered some criteria for recognising the signs: 'the inclination, study, *morum probitas*' and ways of nurturing the call in the young: '1. Frequenting the Sacraments.' 2. 'Great loving-kindness.' 3. 'Not only treating them well' but 'encouraging the older ones who give some hope of placing much confidence in the Superior.' 4. 'Do the ceremonies well.' 5. 'Promote the altar boys society.' 6. 'Show much familiarity to a young person; lead the boys at the college to making a general confession, encourages the *Biblioteca della gioventù* (Library of youth) and especially the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Reading).

Then came a question and answer session on certain crucial problems. The Salesians needed better knowledge of the life and works of St Francis de Sales at least the *Philothea* (Introduction to the Devout Life). The biographies by Gallizia and Capello were suited neither to the boys nor the times. Don Bosco wanted Fr Bonetti to write two, a short one for the boys and ordinary people, another more demanding one in two volumes in which 'we need to aim at the Catholic principle, that is personifying the Catholic religion in Francis, contrary to Protestant principles,' in other words 'Catholic life as personified in Francis.'

We can see from the chronicle that there was the usual apprehension about 'morality'. The great observation he made was this, the chronicle recorded 'that the *Philothea*, such a valuable work, cannot be put into the hands of the boys, not even the girls or Sisters because, since it was written for people in the world it has many expressions and various matters that could give rise to immodest thoughts, so it is not really suitable for youth. The great majority of things are valid for all and like refined gold however. The suggestion is to print one which alters certain expressions and leave some things out. But how do we do that with such a valuable and well-known work? We thought of doing it this way: point it out on the frontispiece and in the preface. Let the title be: "The *Philothea* of St Francis de Sales addressed to the young and houses of education." Let's hope the result is a fine book cleaned up a bit, and that it sells well. But let a further edition be printed as is and as part of the complete works so that whoever wishes to can find it with us Salesians.'

85 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14 bis, pp. 5–21, 59–64.

86 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14 bis, pp. 21–36.

He noted that subscriptions to the *Letture Cattoliche* were still growing while those to the *Biblioteca della gioventù* were only two thousand. Finally, he suggested a religion textbook for upper secondary by Giovannini. For lower secondary he felt the 'large catechism' was sufficient for the moment 'since the whole world is waiting for the universal catechism from Rome. When we see how this goes we can make an absolute decision.'⁸⁷ At the beginning of the meeting Don Bosco had accepted the proposal of sending the deliberations taken in the preceding years to press, after further revision. These were discussed at private conferences run by Fr Rua. It was not followed through.

In 1877 the St Francis de Sales Conferences were held from the afternoon of Monday, 5 February to Thursday the 8th. There were seven of them, one of which was public.⁸⁸ The first, under Fr Rua's presidency, dealt with problems of internal management: appointing an Economist General after Fr Bodrato's departure for Argentina, the possible establishment of regional storage for provisions, assigning personnel to certain works, proposals for new foundations: Nizza Monferrato as mother house for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in place of Mornese, and as well, Rosignano, Novi Ligure, Caravate, Annecy etc. Following Don Bosco's wish, it was decided to introduce the practice of a triduum in the colleges at the beginning of the school year. Uniformity in record-keeping was also recommended.⁸⁹

At the morning conference on Tuesday 6 February, after confirming decisions taken at the first session, Don Bosco announced some interesting new items: the offer to the Salesians to run the Consolation Hospital in Rome, which was not followed through; the task given Don Bosco to help with the religious reform of the Concettini; the opportunity to purchase convents that had been confiscated, in order to protect or salvage them from the profane use; the plan to move the mother house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato; new requests for colleges, apropos of which he was still insisting on the 'monograph'⁹⁰ – at Albano, Magliano Sabina, and Cecona and Ascona in Switzerland. Finally he posed the problem of the college at Valsalice, since the five year lease had fallen due and there were insufficient numbers of boys: he invited them to delay in making any decision. The chronicler noted: 'Here Fr Guanella suggested another college at Lake Maggiore ... D. Bosco cleverly changed the topic and came to the conclusion.' He offered three reminders from Pius IX; '1. Introduce the spirit of piety among boys and confreres. 2. The spirit of morality. 3. The spirit of economy.'⁹¹

The General Conference took place on the afternoon of Tuesday, 6 February. Fr Rua referred to all the works, since reports from each rector would have made the meeting too long. Beginning his address, Don Bosco spoke of other institutions left out by Fr Rua: the oratories of St Aloysius and St Joseph, services given to the Refuge and Shelter of the Family of St Peter. He referred briefly to works in America: the most recent, the Pius IX college at Villa Colon in Montevideo, the first works, the Church of the Misericordia in Buenos Aires and the college at San Nicolás where they had taken in 140 boys over seven or eight months. He then went on to speak in rather quaint terms of the expected opening of a mission among the Patagonians: 'some savages' were already at the San Nicolaás college. On Fr Cagliari's return perhaps some would be brought to Turin. 'Who will

87 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14 bis, pp. 39–57; for the religion text it refers to the handbook by Fr E.

GIOVANNINI, *I doveri cristiani esposti alla studiosa gioventù italiana. Terza edizione con nuove correzioni e aggiunte*. Bologna, tip. pont. Mareggiani 1876. It would also be proposed in the 1 General Chapter in 1877 (G. BARBERIS, *Verballi*, quad. 1, p. 12) and the 2nd in 1880 (*Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo generale...* Turin, tip. salesiana 1882, p. 68, OE XXXIII 76).

88 *Conferenze tenute dal Capitolo Superiore Generale in occasione delle Feste di S. Francesco dell'anno 1877. Per cura del Sacerdote Giulio Barberis* (First original edition stereotyped). Turin, Tipografia del proprio pugno, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 1–27; *Documenti XVIII* 51–68, 71–75; MB XIII 64–86.

89 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 4–11.

90 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 12–16.

91 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 16–22.

be the courageous ones' he asked 'to expose themselves to such dangers? To be pastors to the savages? We will see. Many are already asking to be the first to risk those parts and bring our holy religion to those people. I praise their good will, their courage. Nevertheless it is my wish, indeed my duty to proceed cautiously in order not to sacrifice anyone's life. But if, despite the patience and prudence, someone becomes a martyr, we have to thank heaven. But I hope with prudence, we will do something without paying the price of being murdered or eaten.'

Requests had come from Concepción in Chile and from Paraguay and Brazil. He needed to wait in order to have greater availability of personnel. In Rome and thereabouts he had noticed that what some people were saying was not true, that 'that the people there are different' and that he would not be able to set up oratories like in Turin. As for the schools at Ariccia and Albano, the way they were flourishing belied predictions: 'the Protestants were desperate. At Magliano Sabina too, 'just two hours by steam train from Rome' (70 kilometres of track) youngsters had shown themselves to be 'obedient and respectful.' The clerics as a body, he stated, 'are asking to become Salesians. The Rector of the seminary, the bursar and spiritual director' 'are also asking to enter our Congregation and were accepted as novices.' In fact we have seen them as members of the House Chapter⁹² and we will see the spiritual director at the First General Chapter.⁹³ He also referred to the task with the Concettini which the Pope had entrusted him with.⁹⁴ He added that if all the colleges proposed in the Rome area were accepted, within a year there would be 20 of them. There were also negotiations for India and Australia but a conclusion was still far off. He spoke of grandiose expectations of the Cooperators to be encouraged 'slowly and prudently' in terms of acceptances. ;' Apropos of this' he told them, 'a bulletin will be printed that will be like a newspaper for the Congregation: with so many houses we need something that comes out regularly; it will be a link between Cooperators and Salesian confreres. I hope that, if we do God's will, not many years will pass before whole populations, cities, will not be distinguishable from the Salesians other than where they live and if there are only 10 now, by then there will be thousands and thousands.'

Firstly, he referred to some flattering comments by the Holy Father: 'Go, write to your sons, begin now and keep saying it that there is no doubt the Lord's hand is guiding your Congregation. But it places serious responsibilities on you ... If you correspond, promote the spirit of piety, promote the spirit of chastity, have zealous ministers, you will see religious vocations multiply for you, for other religious and dioceses ... I believe I am revealing a mystery to you, that this Congregation is the Lord's secret made to rise up in these times so it can be a religious and secular Order, so it can have a vow of poverty with possessions, being part of the world and the cloister, its members being citizens and "monks", until we see what Jesus Christ said: "Give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's."'⁹⁵

From the afternoon of 7 February to Thursday afternoon of the 8th the private conferences had a single topic: 'additions, corrections, observations' on the text of the Regulations for the houses with a view of them being printed. This took place in October.⁹⁶

3. Valdocco as a school for educators: chapters and conferences

The mother house at Valdocco played a key role in the process of forming personnel as leaders in the teaching and general educational field who would then go out to the various works. It has been

92 Cf. Chap. 23, § 1.2.

93 Cf. Chap. 26, § 1.1.

94 Cf. Chap. 25, § 2.

95 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 1, pp. 47–58; quad. 16, pp. 1–23.

96 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 24–27.

described as a 'pedagogical workshop', the term being intended in its broadest sense.⁹⁷ In fact with the establishment and development of the Salesian Society and its works, the Oratory of St Francis de Sales had become the engine room, a point of reference and extension for a variety of works spread over increasingly wider areas. With the Salesian Bulletin in 1877 it also became the centre for Co-operators and benefactors and their encouragement and, to some extent, for past pupils. This meant it had the greatest concentration of professed Salesians and, prior to 1879, of novices.

The Superiors there were aware they had the responsibility for preparing leaders, especially ones destined to give a Salesian face to new works. The Oratory created a style and was the source of a spirit which it disseminated. This is why it was desirable for the personnel sent out to found and lead works far from Valdocco to have done their formation there. When Fr Giuseppe Bologna was proposed at the Superior Chapter meeting on 15 May 1878 as the rector for the new house in Marseilles, it was stressed in his favour that he knew French and spoke it fairly well, but it was noted in particular that 'on the other hand, having already been Prefect here for some years and always in contact with D. Bosco as someone brought up here, he knows all the customs and the spirit of the place.'⁹⁸

Various documents can be read from this perspective, some of which have already been indicated and which testify to the reality of *Valdocco in the 19th century*: the minutes of *Chapter Conferences* (1866–67) written up by Fr Rua, reports on *House Chapter Meetings* and *Monthly Conferences* seen to by Fr Lazzero and the *Diary of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*. (1875–88) also by Fr Lazzero with some early pages by Fr Chiala.

We can extract some important elements from these on the gradual construction of a pedagogy which, though not learned, was effective and which led Don Bosco in 1877 to draft pages which were soon presented as an introduction to the Regulations for the houses. Some of the more faithful though not yet systematised applications were studied and discussed at the various meetings or conferences. They became a normative patrimony which the Salesians would have taken note of and passed on to successive generations in the form of usages, practices, traditions, in the spirit of Don Bosco. It was a predominantly collegial type pedagogy. The topic of discipline inevitably held special place along with, naturally, problems of sustenance: kitchen and refectories, distribution of foodstuffs, classrooms and desks, dormitories and beds, workshops, cleanliness of buildings and yards. They dealt with and discussed study and work timetables, day and night classes, singing and music, also daily and occasional recreational activities, *teatrino*, academics, annual walks. Then there were the various religious manifestations like daily, weekly, monthly and annual practices of piety, liturgical and family celebrations. There was the life of the sodalities, altar boys, music and singing classes in plain chant, and more elaborate styles.

The key personnel, members of the Superior and Local Chapters met regularly, often together with teachers of varying age and maturity, and with the assistants. Characteristic features of the Salesians of Don Bosco's educational approach emerged, love most of all, which did not exclude reverential fear. In essence those who took part sought to discover 'why' as Fr Rua noted 'the boys fear us more than love us' since 'this is contrary to our spirit or at least to the spirit of Don Bosco.'⁹⁹ Already, years earlier, Fr Rua believed he had found the simple solution: 'Making ourselves both loved and feared by the boys. This is easy.'¹⁰⁰ However, the assistants who were the youngest among the educators, and even the other more experienced people were urged 'to be united in wanting one thing only, to love and advise one another on how to nurture the obedience, esteem

97 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Presentazione a J. M. PRELLEZO, Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 5–10.

98 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, p. 4.

99 Conference on 9 March 1883, J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 258.

100 *Adunanze del Capitolo della Casa*, February 1872, J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 263.

and love of the boys.' To gain this, the minutes noted, 'it was established that recreation will always be had with them and, as far as possible, with the ones most in need of assistance.'¹⁰¹

At the level of organisation, a wide range of activities was indicated and prepared for, timetables and teachers for classes were established, tasks and roles were distributed for the smooth running of celebrations, the large annual excursion (walk) was planned, the results of various activities were analysed, indicating problems to be remedied in the future.

It was a practical schooling for proven educators and apprentices in the art of educating who were dedicated to a tough internship in the field. It was a schooling which formed the educator in a reflective way as someone capable of initiative, a good organiser in every area, inventive, someone who often had to be a jack-of-all-trades able to respond to the needs of youthful communities looking for new things and loving the unpredictable.

Don Bosco was rarely to be found there in the flesh but he was there always as a precise criterion for evaluation and decision making. He was constantly apprised of decisions taken and in every case was asked for his opinion and ultimately his *nulla osta* for collegially discussed operational solutions. He taught them and created traditions this way too but was at the same time enriched by the experiences of his co-workers, immersed as he was in the multiple contingencies of a very mobile educational world and one full of surprises.

4. Formation of young Salesian personnel

From the time the Constitutions were approved, Don Bosco had to accept the neat distinction between three successive trial periods for the incorporation of candidates into the Congregation: the prenovitiate or aspirantate, (aspirancy) the novitiate, the postnovitiate period of temporary vows.¹⁰² For clerics, this period was mixed with the normal occasions for humanistic, philosophical, theological formation. We have already mentioned the special note Don Bosco placed on art. 12 in the printed Latin text of the Constitutions. He stated that he was authorised by Pius IX to allow activities proper to the prenovitiate and postnovitiate to be part of the novitiate.¹⁰³

Halfway through the 1870s however, some concrete measures were taken for a gradual assumption of the prescribed processes for religious, spiritual, cultural, pedagogical formation of the Salesians, one of the strongest and sometimes legitimately contested aspects of Don Bosco's activity as founder. Foremost was the problem of the novitiate. There were *ascritti* or 'enrolled members' (novices) in almost all the works. But there was also the problem of better regulated studies for the specific formation of future priests. Formation came up many times during the St Francis de Sales General Conferences but emerged even more from analysis of other channels. Conferences to novices and young professed Salesians at Valdocco, instructions and goodnights during retreats at Lanzo, circulars on religious life, letters to individual Salesians (provincials, rectors, simple confreres), the introduction to the 1875 and 1877 editions of the Constitutions, the many conversations on Salesian formation with the novice masters of the Congregation, Fr Giulio Barberis who wrote them down in his various chronicles and diary entries, discussions during Superior Chapter meetings or promotion and care of vocations, acceptance of new members,

101 Monthly conferences, August 1871, in J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 262.

102 Cf. *Regulae seu Constitutiones...*, 1874, Chap. XI, *De acceptione*, art. 6 and 7, *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 173; cf. Chap. XIV *De Novitiorum [= Tyronum, Ascritti] Magistro eorumque regimine*, art. 1–6 (prima probatio), 7–13 (secunda probatio, novitiatus), 14–17 (tertia probatio), *Cost. SDB* (Motto), pp. 192–197.

103 *Cost. SDB* (Motto), p. 196. Bear in mind that of the 14 original articles of the chapter on the novitiate, in the Italian edition in 1875 only seven were printed.

profession of temporary or perpetual vows on completion or otherwise of theological studies prior to priestly ordination.

A new type of religious educator, cleric or lay, was defined with precise enough features from all this, one as we have already seen that had emerged from Don Bosco's early oratory experience as a diocesan priest but now with particular features deriving from his educative and socially supportive work among even more needy young people. Without doubt, Don Bosco ended up passing on to his clerical religious a new and specific mentality, culture and spirituality. Similarly, though more slowly, he was also conceptualising and shaping the religious and apostolic figure of the lay Salesian, the coadjutor.¹⁰⁴

The best formation was not entrusted primarily to formation centres and structured study. These were not excluded in principle and indeed there was an increasingly legal and pedagogical felt need for them. But primacy was given to formation in the field, very much prevalent in these and the coming years also because, as in the past, functioning works could only be fully guaranteed by the omnipresence of clerical students of theology and philosophy, even novices and lay and clerical aspirants, some priests among them. An example is what Don Bosco recommended to Fr Ronchail at the beginning of the hospice in Nice: to identify and nurture in a kind way any boys who seemed suitable for the Congregation, and to maintain a relationship of trust with Salesian boys and adults 'showing them a special openness of heart.'¹⁰⁵

4.1 Promoting Salesian vocations

Given his tendency to ever broader activity on behalf of poor and abandoned youth, Don Bosco was hungry for vocations. With the advent of his bold overseas missionary undertaking, the reasons for seeking them and motivations for animating them multiplied. As we have seen, he gave a practical example of it in his two goodnights on 6 and 8 December 1875, after speaking of the departure of the first missionaries for America and the opening of the house in Nice in France. On the first occasion he said at the end: 'Naturally, right at the moment many others among you feel a great desire to leave and also become missionaries. Well, I can tell you that even if all of you were to be included in this number there would be a place for you all and I would know very well how to keep you busy given the huge needs there are and the many requests I receive from everywhere from Bishops begging and telling us that various missions already begun have to be let go of for want of missionaries.' The chronicle indicated the result: 'The boys were so fired up by these words that really, most of them wanted to leave, even immediately to go off and do good for those far away peoples.'¹⁰⁶

The appeal was even more explicit in the second goodnight; Don Bosco did not hold back in revealing the motives for what he was telling them: 'I do not want to keep you in the dark about the great needs the Church has; of the great field there is for doing good when one is really working for the greater glory of God.' 'The field to be cultivated requires very many workers, the harvest is truly abundant.'¹⁰⁷

4.2 The Novices

After the approval of the Constitutions which forced a more precise structuring of formation of novices, the 'Capitular Conference' on 25 October 1874 established certain 'details' reserved just

104 Cf. A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore nel 1883*, RSS 13 (1994) 143–224.

105 Letter halfway through December 1875, Em IV 581.

106 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, p. 36.

107 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3, p. 42.

for them. It would gradually be put into place that ‘1. All the clerical novices will study 1st year philosophy separately. 2. These novices will have meditation separately with the coadjutor novices. 3. All novices will have spiritual reading separately at 2. p.m. in the day boy’s chapel [the Church of St Francis de Sales]. 4. As far as possible, the novices will have a separate dormitory with curtains separating them from one another. 5. Novice students in 1st year philosophy will have a class in sacred pedagogy instead of mathematics, which will be taught by their master, Fr Barberis. 6. Finally, they will have a weekly conference alternating on the rules and moral topics suited to them. There was also, talk of separating them from the others in the church.’¹⁰⁸ Thus on the evening of 13 December 1875, for the first time Don Bosco was able to speak with all the novices of the Oratory in an area reserved for them. It was a systematic talk on vocation: how precise it was, how to act when in doubt, ways to preserve it. He concluded: ‘Read the things told you at the beginning of our rules [the introduction *To Salesian Confreres*] where you will find a summary of all the things I have indicated. Your novice master will then explain them to you again a little at a time and more expansively.’¹⁰⁹ This was Fr Guilio Barberis (1847–1927), a vice–master and then for decades office novice master of the Congregation and considered to be *the* master of many a novice master and formator. In 1876, the idea of a separate house for the novices at Lanzo was under consideration, an idea that switched the following year to another possible location near the Mellea Sanctuary at Farigliano (Cuneo).¹¹⁰ Instead, in 1879 the house was established at S. Benigno Canavese.¹¹¹ From August 1876 the novices also had their own summer holidays at Lanzo, away from the heat in Turin. In October ‘it was decided to send the novices for recreation in their own courtyard.’¹¹² On 10 December 1876 Don Bosco solemnly blessed the statue of Our Lady place in the new classroom and study hall for the novices gained by taking part of the sacristy on the west side of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.¹¹³ Finally, on 24 December they had their new refectory¹¹⁴ where Don Bosco went to lunch on Sunday, 18 February 1877 and gave 65 novices an appropriate little talk. He recommended they look after their health, encouraged then with some insistence to avoid murmuring and spoke of the admiration the Salesians had aroused everywhere and thus the need to assimilate its model: in many places presenting oneself, saying ‘I come from the Oratory’ was a title of honour.¹¹⁵

In November 1877 it was also decided to separate the clerical novices, who had already done a trial year, from the others,¹¹⁶ the novitiate and post–novitiate. In 1878 it was decided ‘to look for a dormitory for the lay novices,’ the coadjutors.¹¹⁷

4.3 The students of philosophy and theology

108 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 193.

109 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 19, pp. 23–44.

110 On Fr Barberis and the novitiate, see also notes in P. BRAIDO, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana nello scritto “Ai Soci Salesiani” di don Bosco del 1877/1885*, RSS 14 (1995) 103–105; G. BARBERIS, *Lettere a don Paolo Albera e a don Calogero Gusmano durante la loro visita alle case d’America (1900–1903). Introduzione, testo critico e note a cura di B. Casali*. Roma, LAS 1998, pp. 14–25; P. ALBERA – C. GUSMANO, *Lettere a don Giulio Barberis durante la loro visita alle case d’America (1900–1903). Introduzione, testo critico e note a cura di B. Casali*. Roma, LAS 2000, pp. 23–24.

111 Cf. Chap. 29, § 1.1.

112 *Conferenze capitolari del 15 ottobre 1876*, J. M. Prellezo, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 216.

113 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 10, pp. 33–37.

114 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 10, p. 53.

115 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 11, pp. 46–49.

116 *Adunanze del Capitolo della Casa, 18 November 1877*, J. M. Prellezo, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 237.

117 *Adunanze del Capitolo della Casa, 20 October 1878*, J. M. Prellezo, *Valdocco nell’Ottocento...*, p. 241.

In a memorandum, the *Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relative schiarimenti* (Historical outline of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales and relevant clarification), other than giving substance to the formation given to novices,¹¹⁸ Don Bosco presented his ideal plan of studies for candidates to the priesthood: lower secondary course, two years of philosophy, three years upper secondary for those who had to 'prepare for public exams,' the 'five' year course 'regularly established at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales' in theology, with 'Sacred hermeneutics, church history, moral dogmatic and speculative theology.' After ordination, which could be anticipated by a year for reasons of age or some other serious reason a two year study of moral theology in preparation for the confession exam.¹¹⁹

In reality it was not so, since the novices and students of philosophy were also in other houses and clerics closer to ordination were regularly spread around the various works. Thus the problem of a separate study centre would find partial solutions only in the early years of the next century. As well as the essential work of assistance or teaching in the house, some were attending university and some priests were also pursuing their doctorate in theology. After 1873, this could be gained from the theological faculty of the diocesan seminary. Some were preparing privately to gain their certificate for elementary and secondary teaching.

In minutes of conferences or meetings at Valdocco we find indications on various dates regarding the timetable for classes for clerical novices or post novice students of philosophy. In 1872, Don Bosco blocked a proposal which was courageous and advanced for its time, put forward at a Chapter meeting: 'A class in modern history was proposed, but D. Bosco did not allow it. Therefore classes in mathematics were increased.'¹²⁰ In October 1873, they dealt with dates for 'exams in philosophy and theology' when they also established timetable and teachers for the new school year.¹²¹ Also recorded was a list of Salesian and non-Salesian 'professors of philosophy and theology' with their respective timetables agreed on at the November 1877 meeting.¹²²

A circular in 1874 written by Fr Cagliero and corrected by Don Bosco also dealt with the theology studies of clerics spread around the various houses. It was addressed *To my beloved sons, rectors and clerics of the Salesian Congregation*. The concrete decisions make an interesting document suggesting their level of commitment: 'Rectors are asked in a heartfelt way to watch over and see that all the time compatible with their other duties be spent each week on Theology. To facilitate this study which is the science of sciences: 1. Three exams will be held each year on different treatises: one in March, another in July and the third at the beginning of 2 November. For this year, treatises are: *De Gratia, de Ordine, de Matrimonio* and if possible also *de Virtute Religionis* and *de Praeceptis Decalogi*. 3. Exams will be sat for at the times established above by the examiners appointed by the Superior for this purpose.'¹²³ The idea was refashioned, mostly in terms that were also theoretical. Putting it into practice was more problematic. Observance of these prescriptions and the study of ceremonies, which was especially recommended, was the subject of many a reminder at the time. The insistence was not without reason.¹²⁴

118 Cf. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno storico"...*, pp. 291–293.

119 P. BRAIDO, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel "Cenno storico"...*, pp. 294–301.

120 Meeting on 3 November 1872, J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 172.

121 *Conferenze capitolari del 24 October 1873*, J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 182.

122 *Adunanze del Capitolo della Casa, 4 November 1877*, J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 235–237.

123 Circ., 23 November 1874, Em IV 358–359.

124 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Michele Rua primo autodidatta "Visitatore" salesiano. Relazione di "ispezioni" nelle prime istituzioni educative fondate dTo Fr Bosco*, RSS 9 (1990) 97–168, in particular, pp. 101, 107, 130, 149, 151, 152, 155, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 167–168.

4.4 Guidance of young Salesians

Non-direction was not Don Bosco's habitual style, even less so in vocational matters. His advice, or better, reminders, were energetic, as happened in a letter to a mature cleric at the college in Lanzo professed with perpetual vows, Pietro Guidazio (1841–1902). He was hesitant and restless, but later a pioneer of Salesian work in Sicily. The advice? To abandon himself completely to the guidance of his superiors, and that there was a lack of substance in reasons given for dispensing him from perpetual vows; perseverance too: 'The devil would like to trick you and me' was the peremptory warning. 'He has partly succeeded in your case but he has completely failed against me. Have complete faith in me as I have always had in you; not words but deeds, zeal, good will, humble, prompt and unlimited obedience. These are the things that will bring you spiritual and temporal happiness and will really bring me consolation.'¹²⁵

The advice he gave three clerics was also sure and reassuring: 'Do not worry about what you write of. When the devil has lost the game he wants to try again in other ways, but take no notice and go ahead calmly, with your ordinations as I have told you verbally.'¹²⁶

To one already a priest he wrote: 'I am happy that after taking your perpetual vows you have more peace of heart. It is a sign that God is blessing you and that his divine will is fulfilled in what you do. So, *si Deus pro nobis quis contra nos?*'¹²⁷

He gave a final push to a twenty-four year old priest not yet perpetually professed: 'Since you have no difficulties or thoughts against your vocation, you can take perpetual vows with all tranquillity.'¹²⁸ The priest made his profession on 23 April 1872. 'Your letter' he wrote to cleric Tamietti 'removes a thorn from my heart that was stopping me from doing you the good I have been unable to do up till now. Good. You are in Don Bosco's hands and he will know how to use you for the greater glory of God and the good of your soul.'¹²⁹

Don Bosco was more flexible in particular cases in questions of obedience, though not in stating the principles. He showed some latitude in asking this of Tamietti: 'I don't want you at Valsalice by force, on the other hand I need to test your obedience, especially before ordination. Therefore I am sending you to Alassio and I will call on someone there to go [to Valsalice] to replace you: Be in touch with Fr Dalmazzo and let him know in good time; try to finish up with good grace.'¹³⁰

He replied to an unequivocal request from cleric Cesare Cagliari confirming the authorisation he had already given in an earlier letter which never arrived. He summed up its contents for him: 'I said you could go to the university so long as you also remained my friend and became a model cleric of ours, the most zealous of our teachers.'¹³¹ He sent a gracious little letter in Latin to cleric Luigi Piscetta, whose intelligence was in inverse proportion to his height: 'Now you are small so fish for little fish – there are many among us. When you are an adult, the Lord will make you a fisher of men.'¹³²

His way of asking obedience of one young cleric was affectionate: he was promoted from assistant to teacher at the Oratory. 'Do not worry about what you have to do. Just come with good

125 Letter of 13 September 1870, Em III 250.

126 To G. Ronchail, 5 March 1872, Em III 405.

127 Letter of 15 January 1875, Em IV 395.

128 Letter to G. Garino, 21 March 1872, Em III 410.

129 Letter of 25 April 1872, Em III 428.

130 Letter of 18 November 1872, Em III 493.

131 Letter from Rome, 16 February 1874, Em IV 229. There is a touching letter of condolence written by him on 8 September after the death in Mornese of his brother, a young Salesian priest (1847–1874) (Em IV 314).

132 Letter from Rome, 22 February 1874, Em IV 233: "Nunc parvulus es, ideo collige pisciculos: multi enim sunt apud nos. Cum autem vir factus fueris, Dominus faciet te piscatorem hominum".

will and we will decide together how much you can do and no more. Always remember you are with a friend who wants nothing else but your spiritual and temporal benefit. We will obtain this with the Lord's help and by always keeping an open heart.¹³³

One intelligent and lively cleric, Luigi Nai (1855–1932) who was hesitant in professing vows, was invited to lift up his thoughts: 'Cricketts are above and below the ground and the vows you intend to take fly to God's throne, therefore the former cannot disturb the latter. So fear nothing and go ahead. If observations are needed, we can speak of them soon, God bless you. *Age viriliter ut coroneris feliciter.*'¹³⁴

He replied to a witty request from a reflective rector with a witty reply: 'As soon as the Argentine Republic asks me for a clever poet, your venerable person will be set in motion.'¹³⁵ One note to a very young novice who was to move from Borgo S. Martino to Ariccia stands out: 'Your destination has been altered. You will go to Rome with Fr Gallo, make a visit to the Holy Father, kiss his feet for me, ask him for his holy Blessing, then leave to go and sanctify those living in Albano and Ariccia. You will sanctify yourself by exact observance of our Rules, your monthly "*rendiconto*" and the monthly exercise for a happy death. Whenever there are difficulties write to me often and tell me about your life, virtue and miracles.'¹³⁶

To the more mature cleric, Giovanni Battista Rinaldi (1855– 1924), who was writing from Albano asking for more helpers, Don Bosco replied with five quatrains. We offer the first and final ones here:

Datti pace e sta tranquillo
Che S. Bosco pensa a voi,
Proto aita apportera;
Ma voi sitta tutti buoni
Sempre allegri, veri amici
Ricordando che felici
Rende solo il bnuon oprar
Turin – from the reservoir of my Masses 27 – 11 – 76¹³⁷

An English version may run along these lines:

Be at peace and do not worry
'cause Don Bosco thinks of you.
All your troubles he will carry
And will soon bring help that's due.
But you all are very good
Always cheerful. Always friends.
Please remember as you should
The happiness to good work tends.

133 To Cl. G. Cinzano, 19 October 1874, Em IV 341.

134 Letter of 24 May 1875, Em IV 466.

135 To Fr G. B. Lemoyne, 3 March 1876, E III 22.

136 To Cl. F. Piccollo (1861–1930), between October–November 1876, E III 106.

137 E III 119. Don Bosco, a member of the Arcadia, knows that his Source is the archives of the roman Literary Academy.

The poet was a member of the Arcadia! Two days later he encouraged a cleric with resolute words in good Latin that produced a positive effect: 'No one who has put his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. But do you want to look back? Absolutely not. Continue on as you have begun: persevere in the vocation to which you have been called?'¹³⁸

His intuition did not fail. They concerned men with a sure future, some of them especially rich in initiative and capacity to work: Fr Guidazio, founder of Salesian work in Sicily, Fr Ronchail in Nice and Paris in France, Fr Garino an excellent scholar, Fr Tamietti who started up the college at Este, Fr Cesare Cagliero who ended up in Rome as Procurator General and Provincial, Fr Nai, Provincial in Palestine and Chile, Fr Piccollo, Rector of Colleges in Sicily for thirty years, Fr G.B. Rinaldi, founder of the challenging work at Faenze.

Instead, Don Bosco was extremely severe with two brothers, both priests, Frs Francesco and Giacomo Cuffia, who abandoned the colleges at Varazze and Alassio, and the Congregation: 'Prevent Fr Franscesia and Fr Cerruti' (their respective rectors) 'from freeing the Cuffias; give them only their personal items, whatever is needed to cover their journey or what comes from their family. Write no reference, good or bad; pull out their old account and ask them to pay for it.'¹³⁹

5. 'To Salesian Confreres' (1875–1885)

With the publication of the Constitutions, Don Bosco dreamt of putting together a 'Directory' or handbook for the specific religious formation of the Salesian educator. It was one of the ideas that had moved him to petition members of the Special Congregation for final approval of the Constitutions,¹⁴⁰ It remained an idea. But he replaced it with a significant text that was considerably enriched over the time that elapsed between the first edition in 1875 and those that followed in 1877 and 1885. This is the *Ai soci salesiani* (To the Salesian Confreres) which introduced the various Italian editions of the Constitutions and other language editions dependent on them.

5.1 The first edition (1875)

The unexpected introduction to the Constitutions could be thought of as a small *summa*, a very complete one, of what could be described as Don Bosco's theology of religious life. Ideas come together in it that had been maturing since he had written a Church history, the lives of the Popes, and began later to draw up the Constitutions and documents for their approval. His thinking was ultimately enriched through local and general conferences, instructions given at retreats in the late 1860s and early 70s, and as expressed in individual letters, circulars and private advice.¹⁴¹ Classic topics were to be found in this introduction: entry into religious life, its temporal and spiritual advantages, the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity, the practices of piety. Five special reminders came next: avoiding 'itch for reform' solidarity with confreres and superiors by doing one's duty, duties of office and in the spirit of consecration to God. It concluded with some brief pointers on doubts in one's vocation and how to resolve them. The text of the first edition was written entirely by Don Bosco, achieving it, as we can see from the manuscripts, thanks to a considerable effort of rethinking, correction, improvement. It was the expression of a founder, by now the expert, with personal touches of demanding asceticism. The prevailing literary source was St Alphonsus Rodriguez. This had already been noted in reference to instructions given at the

138 To Cl. F. Toselli (1857–1918), 29 November 1876, E III 119–120.

139 To Fr M. Rua, from S. Ignatius above Lanzo, 5 August 1874, Em IV 305.

140 Memo of 18 March 1874, Em IV 263.

141 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana nello scritto "Ai Soci Salesiani" di don Bosco del 1875*, RSS 13 (1994) 361–448; ID., *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana... del 1877/1885*, RSS 14 (1995) 91–154.

retreats at Trofarello in 1867 and 1869.¹⁴² By comparison with these, the Alphonsian material in *To Salesian confreres* had increased, and underwent a further increase in the extended 1877 edition.¹⁴³

The first element came from the desire to give the Salesian Society a well-defined religious character. It sought 'to be a structurally compact Congregation *ad intra* and *ad extra*, guaranteed in stability and continuity by papal authority and firmly gathered around its superior, general or local, with a certain easing of external ecclesiastical dependence and a leaning towards exemption and privilege.'¹⁴⁴

The vows play a decisive role, conferring a strong stability and compact operational unity on religious incorporation. 'Our vows' he writes 'could also be called spiritual ties by which we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and place our will, belongings, our physical and moral energies in the power of the superior so that we are all one heart and soul in promoting the greater glory of God, according to our Constitutions. The legal and functional obligations of the vows and their theological and spiritual value are both emphasised, while complete fidelity to the religious community and its aims guarantees members financial and social reassurance and the certainty of eternal salvation. The community then finds its compactness and greatest operational potential in the rapport between everyone, each individual, with the head, the superior in obedience 'the sum of all virtues' and privileged way of being conformed to Christ who *factus oboediens usque ad mortem*, and as a consequence, through rigorous observance of the Constitutions.

Don Bosco returned to this point in the public conferences on 3 February 1876: 'It is now no longer the time to do things as we used do them, that is, to continue with traditional, almost patriarchal government. No. We need to hold fast to our code, study it in all its details. Understand it, explain it, practise it, do things according to its rules.' 'The only way to propagate the new spirit is by observance of the rules.' 'The good that must be expected from Religious Orders comes precisely from what they do collectively: if that were not the case they could no longer do great work.'¹⁴⁵

Obedience in *To Salesian Confreres*, other than its ascetic importance, has a decidedly pragmatic value for apostolic and educational work demanding compact unity of direction and total consensus. 'In individual selfishness' must give way to seeking the 'common good' which is the good of the young people we work for. In essence the community is a well-ordered 'militia' not caught up in internal and external ties, made up of free members who can function in an agile manner. Such a situation is favoured by poverty and chastity that free us from unnecessary things and help us achieve the ultimate goal, the glory of God and the temporal and eternal good of one's neighbour, in particular the young.

From this came a denunciation of the dangers that can threaten the vitality of the mission. (*Five important reminders*), the stability of those dedicated to it (*On doubting one's vocation*). This comes from Don Bosco's passionate concern for a society of spiritually rich religious educators who are inwardly vital and intensely supportive of one another, able to tackle even greater and more demanding tasks; a Congregation in rapid expansion, having entered France and landed in South America in 1875, needed to be able to depend on the greater number possible of effective men and be sure of their fidelity.

142 Cf. Chap. 15, § 11.

143 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. 43–46.

144 P. BRAIDO, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana... del 1875*, RSS 13 (1994) 393 and 394.

145 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, pp. 31–32.

5.2 The 1877/1885 editions

The reprinting of the Italian Constitutions in 1877 could have been due simply to depleted stocks of the 1875 edition. But the expanded version of the introduction *To Salesian Confreres* was not just by chance. It revealed Don Bosco's greater concern for a more markedly religious structure for his Society of consecrated individuals, by 'strengthening the spirit' and 'observing the rules,'¹⁴⁶ while preparing to improve the overall organisation with the first General Chapter. There was also the matter of being consistent with what he was doing for the Concettini.¹⁴⁷

The text was a summary of considerable work by the novice master, Fr Barberis, and Don Bosco's own drastic editorial intervention. Fr Barberis introduced many complementary elements to points in the earlier edition and provided material for enriching the text with five new sections: *The importance of following one's vocation*, *Following a vocation promptly*, *Ways for conserving a vocation*, *Manifestations (rediconto) and their importance*, *Fraternal charity*. Don Bosco selected, thinned out and reworked the suggested texts, correcting and modifying them.¹⁴⁸ The *Letter of St Vincent de Paul addressed to his religious on all rising at the same hour* from 15 January 1650, was relegated to the appendix to the Constitutions. In the more carefully prepared 1885 edition, the Letter was placed as an appendix to the text of the Constitutions along with six letters of St Alphonsus to his religious. This appendix was called: *Some circulars letters of St Vincent de Paul and St Alphonsus Maria Liguori to their religious and very useful also for Salesians*.¹⁴⁹

The authors Fr Barberis had abundantly drawn from were above all St Alphonsus Liguori's (1696–1787) *Avvisi spettanti alla vocazione religiosa* of 1750 for the section on vocation, and *La vera sposa di Gesu Cristo*. 1760, for the one on fraternal charity; and Jesuit Alphonsus Rodriguez's (1541–1616) *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù religiose* for the manifestations or *rendiconti*. Don Bosco made use of the practical reflections and aspects rather than their theological arguments. Also included in the paragraph relating to 'following one's vocation' was an excerpt from St Francis de Sales in the *Avvisi* by St Alphonsus and already drawn from the Jesuit Girolama Piatti's (1545–91) *Del bene de lo stato de' religiosi*.

With this new text there was a considerable expansion in the range of topics qualifying Don Bosco's concept of religious life. It was consolidated and presented in greater depth, especially in its evangelical roots. In fact, content and motivations which could be put before all Christian faithful had clear prevalence over specifically religious considerations, especially regarding obedience, poverty, chastity, these being virtues before vows. Playing its part, too, was the experience of the diocesan priest shaped as a religious together with his younger disciples, growing with them and also improving the forms and manner of community living with them.

Finally, the added paragraph on vocation responded especially to the desire he had to bring together the greatest number of lay and clerical co-workers, given the expansion of his social and educational works for youth. Just the same, and his desire notwithstanding, one gains the distinct impression from the texts as a whole that Don Bosco intended to soften a certain rigidity in the original source material concerning the obligatory nature of the choice of a religious vocation, its requirements for perfection and ways of making it definitive. For example the road one 'must pursue in order to be saved' if one felt called, becomes, in Don Bosco's corrected version, 'the road by which one can more easily achieve one's eternal salvation if it is taken.'

146 G. BARBERIS, Cronaca, quad. 14, 2° verso, p. 32 (general public conference on 3 February 1876): "Tje only way to propagate the spirit is through observance of the Rules".

147 Cf. Chap. 25, § 2.

148 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana... del 1877/1885*, RSS 14 (1995) 97–106.

149 They remained in the appendix to the Italian text of the Constitutions until the 1903 edition; they were removed from the 1907 text onwards.

The topic of the *rendiconto* or manifestation, aimed at strengthening the bonds between subjects and their superior, while always a family style relationship, was intended to generate trust and confidence. Therefore, unlimited openness to the superior was softened in the 1885 edition and the discussion on fraternal charity internalised the relationship between superior and subjects in a more familiar and agile way than in its Alphonsian source.

The introduction to the Constitutions was something Don Bosco felt was so important, that in his significant letter on the preventive system, understood as an essential dimension of the Salesian spirit, which he sent Fr Costamagna on 10 August 1885, he recommended: 'Read, and encourage the reading and knowledge of our rules, especially the chapter that speaks of the practices of piety, the introduction I have written to our rules and the decisions taken in our General or Special Chapters.'¹⁵⁰

Don Bosco as Founder in a very busy 1877

- 1876 29 October: a letter from Cardinal Bilio entrusts the matter of the Concettini to Don Bosco;
- 17 November: Pius IX approves of Don Bosco's and Mons. Fiorani's plan;
- 28; Cardinal Ferrieri's letter on testimonials;
- 12 December: Pius IX perplexed at the plan Don Bosco now wants to act on regarding the Concettini;
- 16: reply to Cardinal Ferrier with clarifications.
- 1877 1 January – 14 February: Don Bosco in Rome;
- 6 February: Pius IX's Brief on Don Bosco as Visitor *in spiritualibus* of the Concettini.
- 8: *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales in Turin*;
- 12 March: opening of new site for *Patronage Saint-Pierre* in Nice.
- 17/19 May: Archbishop's letter regarding publication of favours/graces;
- 1–26 June: Don Bosco in Rome;
- 20: Memorandum on the Concettini to the Vicar and Pope;
- July: General Chapter of *Salesian Congregation to be called together at Lanzo for next September*;
- August: Text of the *Preventive System* made public;
- 1st edition of the *Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano mensuale* (Catholic booklovers or Monthly Salesian Bulletin);
- 26: Mass service incident suspended;
- October: Printed edition of the Regulations for oratories and colleges.

Centralised government of people and youth institutions and the Religious Institutes dedicated to them required Don Bosco's full-time ongoing personal care. It was a task that underpinned all the other tasks which were by no means unimportant ones, but he managed to hold it together. The huge workload that resulted seemed to manifest itself more visibly and consistently in 1877, both within the works and in civil and Church relations.

Don Bosco was tenacious in pursuing the privileges and careful to ensure good relations with the Holy See. There were the ongoing quarrels with the diocesan Ordinary and now he had to give new attention to careful personal relations with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires who had arrived in Europe. The passing role he played in the Concettini Institute was unexpected and of an extraordinary nature, but he was much more dedicated to the internal consolidation of the Salesian Society at the level of organisation and spiritual and pedagogical animation. He needed to adjust

documents that would then pass into history, prepare for the First General Chapter and publish the *Salesian Bulletin*.

1. A packed calendar

At the commencement of 1877, the founder had 361 Salesians for 17 works: 163 perpetually professed of whom 82 were priests, 41 clerics, 40 coadjutors. There were 78 triennially professed, of whom 4 were priests, 50 clerics, 24 coadjutors. And there were 120 novices of whom 3 were priests, 82 clerics and 35 coadjutors. Added to this were 79 aspirants, 2 of whom were clerics, 25 students for priesthood and 32 coadjutors.¹

Although assisted by a Vice director, Fr Rua until 1875, Fr Lazzero from 1876, Don Bosco was above all the Director of the Oratory, an institute of instruction and education for trade and academic students and for this latter group also a junior seminary. It was a novitiate for a steady influx of novices, a postnovitiate and studentate of philosophy. Along with this he was also Superior General or Rector Major of a Congregation running colleges or hospices at Borgo S. Martino, Lanzo Torinese, Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena, Valsalice (Turin), Nice, San Nicolás de los Arroyos (Argentina), Villa Colón (Montevideo); secondary schools at Albano and Magliano Sabina; elementary schools at Mornese, Vallecrosia and Trinità di Mondovì with an oratory, and Arricia; an oratory and public church in Buenos Aires.

1877 was characterised by more than fleeting trips through Italy and into France, two to Rome from 2 January to 4 February and from 1–26 June, and a third beginning 18 December, which lasted until the end of March 1878. Don Bosco began the year in Rome where he had arrived on the 2nd with his secretary Fr Berto, and Fr Giuseppe Scappini, appointed to take up the role of spiritual director of the Concettini, a group of Religious who were lending assistance in the male section of the Holy Spirit Hospital. Don Bosco had personally been assigned by the Pope in precise terms which he had accepted in November, as visitor of the lay Religious Congregation of the Immaculate Conception. This appointment was formalised in a Brief issued on 6 February.

Don Bosco was in Valdocco from 5–8 February for the final St Francis de Sales Conferences. On the 6th, as earlier indicated, he spoke there of the decision ‘to print a newspaper for the Congregation’ and this came into being as the *Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano mensuale* (Catholic Booklover or Monthly Salesian Bulletin).²

On 21 February, he left for a long trip to Liguria then went to Nice and Marseilles, and back to Nice for the opening on 12 March of the new mother house for works in France. He gave an important address there in the style of the *Sermons de charité*. He departed the following day, stopping over at houses in Liguria, and arrive in Turin around 16–18 March. The days that followed were spent completing the written version of his talk in Nice and in putting together the pages on the preventive system and the ten *General Articles* of the introduction to the *Regulations for the Houses*. These became printed booklets between August and October.

In April, given that in reforming the Concettini he was insisting so much on the need for a novitiate house, Don Bosco spoke expressly to Fr Barberis about the need and possibility of ‘opening a house for clerical novices separate from everything else.’ He had the Sanctuary of Mellea at Farigliano (Cuneo) in mind for this purpose.³

His time at Valdocco in April and May allowed him to put his hand to the preparatory document for the First General Chapter which he had spoken of to Fr Barberis for the first time on Saturday

1 “Aspirants” appear for the first time in the 1875 list of Salesians.

2 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 11, pp. 38–39.

3 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, pp. VII–VIII and 2–3.

21 April. 'Some evenings later,' he told him that he was drawing up 'a sheet with matters to be dealt with.'⁴ As we know already in a letter on 31 March, he had asked Fr Cagliero: 'Will it possible for you to come to the General Chapter which should start at the beginning of September next? It should deal with and resolve some very important matters; so take a look and let me know si fieri potest.'⁵ The foolscap pages of matters to be dealt with was soon replaced by a printed booklet. He also prepared a second, larger edition but it was not printed, perhaps for want of time.

Over spring and summer he also drew up a second and larger version of the introductory item *To Salesian Confreres* for the reprinted Constitutions. This was certainly compiled in the first half of September, since the head of Andrea Pelazzo Press, obviously with the text already typeset, asked Don Bosco at the end of the month how many copies he wanted printed. We can deduce this from Don Bosco's reply: 'I believe a thousand copies of our Rules will be enough.'⁶

He was also expending considerable energy preparing the third expedition to South America, involving the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for the first time. He was also working at giving structure to the Salesian Cooperators Union. Despite the commitments, Don Bosco was intensely involved with the Argentine delegation led by Archbishop Anieros, who was in Rome, to pay homage to Pius IX during his episcopal jubilee. Don Bosco met them at Sampierdarena on 1 June, travelled with them to Rome on 23 June went with them to Loretto, then accompanied them to Valdocco on the 26th where they triumphantly welcomed and sumptuously feted, during the festivities for St Peter on 29 June, the Archbishop, Don Bosco's name day – with Fr Lemoyne's imaginative hymns.

On the days that followed, he accompanied Fr Ceccarelli on a visit to the colleges at Borgo S. Martino and Alassio, where he met Archbishop Aneiros again who was with him on a visit to Nice. The delegation then set sail from Marseilles on 17 July.

Don Bosco would have been exhausted by this stage. At the end of July, Fr Barberis recorded that the Superior had not been well for some time.⁷ Moreover, Don Bosco himself had written to Fr Rua from Marseilles: 'I am tired *non plus ultra*.'⁸ He confirmed this a few days later: I am at Alassio and somewhat worse for wear ... probably on the morning of the 25th I will set sail for Turin. In the P.S. he added 'Alimonda is Bishop of Albenga. Excellent choice for us.'⁹ Despite it all, over the same days he let himself be caught up in the first steps for the Salesians to go to La Spezia, after buying a paper mill at Mathi Torinese in April.¹⁰ In the second half of the year he felt overcome not only by physical fatigue but also by the anguish he felt at new misunderstandings with Archbishop Gastaldi, due to clumsy decisions by other individuals.

In July and August, Don Bosco saw to the printing of the booklet for the *Opening of the Patronage St. Pierre* at Nice. From 5 September to 5 October his residence was at the college at Lanzo with members of the First General Chapter. During a break in proceedings he spent part of Sunday 30 September writing a series of letters to individuals involved or whom he wanted to involve in the South American undertaking.¹¹ When the General Chapter was over, and having at the same time interrupted his role as Visitor to the Concettini, he presided at meetings of the Superior Chapter dedicated to re-reading of the minutes of the General Chapter in order to prepare the text for the *Acts* which had to be sent to Rome in due course. This was held over until

4 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, pp. VIII–IX.

5 Letter of 31 March 1877, E III 162.

6 Letter from Lanzo 28 settembre 1877, E III 219.

7 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, p. 28.

8 Letter 10/15 luglio 1877, E III 198.

9 To Fr Rua, E III 201.

10 Cf. Chap. 27, § 11 and 12.

11 Cf. E III 220–226.

after 18 October 'Since [Don Bosco] was absent from Turin for around a week.'¹² In fact he went looking for money in the area around Saluzzo–Cuneo. Meetings resumed on 29 October then again in November until the final one on 6 December. The chronicler wrote: 'D. Bosco needs to leave immediately for Rome.'¹³

The *Regolamento degli esterni* (Regulations for day boys) and the *Regulations for the Houses* were typeset and printed over September–October. In the third session of the First General Chapter on the morning of 7 September they discussed the 'rules for the colleges' which still needed to be printed and Don Bosco stated: 'There is a set of regulations almost ready.'¹⁴ In the 15th session on 14 September, in reference to the regulations for *teatrino*, it was said that 'there is already a chapter regarding *teatrino* in the *Regulations for the Houses* (already typeset and ready to have proofs in hand for any appropriate observations.)'¹⁵ On 4 and 5 November, they were publicly read out at the Valdocco Oratory.¹⁶

Don Bosco also spent October in resuming high level relations: with Cardinal Ferrieri in response to matters from Archbishop Gastaldi,¹⁷ with the Italian and French Foreign Affairs Ministers on behalf of Salesian missionaries¹⁸ and with Cardinal Franchi, Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation.¹⁹

In November all was in expectation of the third missionary expedition already months in the preparation. Concern over the difficult relationship with the Archbishop continued, Don Bosco wrote him a letter on a number of pending issues, with disastrous results.²⁰ He received two replies that could have led him to have to suffer a *latae sententiae* suspension from the ministry of confession.²¹ On 29 November, in a letter to Cardinal Bilio, he concluded his mission on behalf of the Concettini, reaffirming his personal point of view. On 18 December, he left for Rome where he spent more than three months. The year ended with a further memorandum on the missions sent to Cardinal Alessandro Franchi.²²

2. A unilateral plan for the Concettini (November 1876–November 1877)

From autumn 1876 to autumn 1877, Don Bosco was asked by Pius IX to be involved with the lay Religious Congregation, the Hospitaller Brothers of the Immaculate Conception' or Conceptionists or Concettini).²³ Founded on 8 September 1857, the Congregation had obtained the *decretum laudis* on 4 October 1862 and papal recognition on 10 May 1865. On 5 June 1875, the Constitutions were approved *ad quinquennium*. Pius IX followed the Congregation with particular kindness, concerned at the many difficulties hindering its existence in both religious and

12 *Conferenze del Capitolo superiore a compimento delle cose trattate nel Capitolo Generale*, G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* III 63–77.

13 *Conferenze del Capitolo superiore...*, G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* III 78–101.

14 First General Chapter, G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 32 and 34.

15 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* II 191.

16 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 60.

17 Letter of 12 October 1877, E III 227–229.

18 Letter of October, E III 229–230.

19 Letter of October, E III 230–233.

20 Letter of 21 November 1877, E III 240–242.

21 Cf. Chap. 26, § 3.

22 Letter from Rome 31 December 1877, E III 256–261.

23 The best documented and most authoritative reconstruction of this affair is presented in the extensive study by E. Perniola on the Conceptionists, *Luigi Monti fondatore dei Figli dell'Immacolata Concezione*, 2 vols. Saronno, Editrice Padre Monti 1883: Cf. especially Vol. I, pp. 513–572 (*I Concezionisti e Don Bosco*).

organisational terms. He wanted to provide the spiritual and material means for them to overcome these problems.

The Pope gave Don Bosco an express mandate to bring his contribution to all this as an expert in religious foundation but wanted it done in agreement and collaboration with Monsignor Luigi Fiorani, a Roman domestic prelate who was Protector of the Institute and Administrator of the Holy Spirit Hospital, where the Concettini had most of their members involved in assisting the sick in the men's wards. Until November 1876 the Concettini depended on the Capuchins and were considered to be Tertiaries of the Order. The Superior General from 1875 to 1976 was Brother Gregorio Coriddi, the majority of members preferring to keep their distance from the founder Brother Luigi Monti. But persuaded by the Capuchins and others (Fiorani among them) that the Institute was incapable of self-government, Pius IX decided that the Capuchin Minister General would be 'Director of the Brother Superior of the Institute.' He did this by Rescript on 30 April, 1875, followed by a 'Declaration' from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 4 August 1875. However, Coriddi was succeeded by Brother Giuseppe Maria Petrolli, and a decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 31 January 1876 decided that this decision would be valid for three years only, despite the fact that the concerns of the members of the Institute were not yet resolved. On 10 November 1876, the Brothers appealed to the Pope, asking that what he had originally determined be carried out when he had approved the new Constitutions *ad quinquennium* on 30 April 1875. They were promulgated on 5 June by decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, The Constitutions established that the Institute would have its own Superior equal to other lay Religious Congregations of the kind.²⁴

At this point, the Pope's thinking turned to Don Bosco. However, Don Bosco soon agreed with the previous 'external' superior and with Mons. Fiorani himself that the Brothers were incapable of self-government, and that Brother Monti was not up to being the Superior General. The Pope's wish was passed on to Don Bosco through Barnabite Cardinal Luigi Bilio, already dealing with him over the foundation at Magliano Sabina in his suburbicarian diocese. The letter was dated 29 October 1876. For it to reach its addressee, Bilio used Francesco Faà di Bruno, returning from Rome on 30 October following his priestly ordination on the 22nd.²⁵

The task was put in general terms: 'This Institute ... Was directed by the Capuchins. They no longer seem best suited to such direction and since the Institute is in need of being set up in a better way, the Holy Father has considered that the man for this is D. Bosco.'²⁶ On the evening of 7 November, Don Bosco left for Rome with Salesians destined for America, Ariccia and Albano. They were received in audience as a group on the 9th. The following day Don Bosco had a private audience which was crucial for the role involving the Concettini. We do not know exactly what was agreed but probably the audience dealt with general issues involving the task on the one hand and more defined guidelines on the other. It is to be presumed that the Pope did not go into legal and technical aspects of the problem.

Don Bosco came away from the audience, again presumably, with a very simple idea: aggregating or affiliating the Concettini to the Salesian Society. That the main individuals involved were unclear about the precise task from the outset seems demonstrated by what happened later and the exchange of correspondence between Rome and Turin during the final phase of this complicated scenario. It is more than natural that in carrying out his mandate, Don Bosco would

24 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, pp. 479–509.

25 Cf. M. CECCHETTO, *Vocazione e ordinazione sacerdotale di Francesco Faà di Bruno...*, in *Francesco Faà di Bruno (1825–1888). Miscellanea*, pp. 136–172.

26 Letter of Card. L. Bilio del 29 October 1876, *Documenti XVII* 527–528; *MB XII* 692–693. Don Bosco referred to it in the Superior chapter on Sunday 5 November: G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 1, fol. 16r.

have believed it essential not to shift away from the terms he had received, even when very soon a more radical solution came under discussion.

On the other hand, in a year packed with other commitments, it seems he could not have found the time and ways to give a sufficiently flexible, shared organisational and juridical shape to the project; even less so in order to be able to follow the various twists and turns in development in the circumstances, their interpretation, the sensitivities of the Roman world and within the Concettini Institute itself. But the guidelines he very soon passed on to members of his Superior Chapter were very clear and were faithfully recorded by the minutes taker and chronicler, Fr Giulio Barberis. In order to reorganise the Institute it is probable that Don Bosco intended to draw his inspiration from a similar formula to the one controlling relationships between the Society of St Francis de Sales and the FMA Institute, recognised a few months previously by the Bishop of Acqui. In this he was establishing precise legal and spiritual connections associated with relative functional autonomy. However, following his *Report* on the state of the Salesian Society in 1879, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had not been overly convinced of this arrangement.²⁷ Nevertheless, in the case of an Institute of women, he was able to think more obviously of separation, while with the Concettini he was able to open himself to the possibility of a strict link, one which excluded a Superior General of their own.²⁸ At any rate, his efforts were intended to bring about a well-ordered, vigorous Religious Institute even though for a moment an invasive form of protectors and integration was more visible. A number of letters over these days, confirm this. He wrote to Fr Rua: 'Today I must visit the house [intended for the Concettini in Piazza Mastai in Trastevere] which the Holy Father wishes to make available to us.'²⁹ He wrote to Fr Cagliari in even more daring anticipation: 'The Holy Father wants us to go to Rome for his work and in moving ahead to a point where it is nearly decided, with a house where we can begin [the house in Piazza Mastai]. The missionaries will give you the details.'³⁰ Later he wrote to Cagliari once more: 'The Holy Father, by appropriate decree, has placed the whole armada of Concettini under our authority to make Salesians out of them. This is a new undertaking for the Church. We will see what becomes of it.'³¹ *The Concettini house in Rome* was included in the List of houses and members for 1877: 'Spiritual Director of the Concettini Religious, Fr Scappini Gius, Novice Rossi Pietro, coad.'³² On the other hand, writing to Fr Lemoyne to ask him to make Fr Scappini available, he still seemed uncertain as to 'what to do ... the Holy Father will tell us what to do and with God's help we will do it. This is the ongoing business of the Concettini.'³³

What happened then removed all uncertainty and ambiguity. Information on the Institute which Mons. Fiorani gave Don Bosco was added to his reading of their Constitutions. On the basis of this, and subsequent to an audience with the Holy Father, Don Bosco agreed personally with Mons. Fiorani, on 10 November 1876, on certain faculties to ask of the Pope as the basis for action aimed at giving the Hospitaller Brothers Institute 'a new impulse in its spirit and works of charity.' This had been the wish of the Holy Father who had 'deigned to entrust it to the direction of the priests of the Salesian Congregation in Turin and aggregate it to them.' These were the words Mons. Fiorani used at the beginning of the *Report* he submitted to the Pope for approval on 14 November, at the same time requesting the faculties Don Bosco had asked for. They were as follows: '1. To modify and adapt the current Constitutions of the Hospitaller Brothers, the Concettini, according to the spirit of the Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation, always

27 Cf. Chap. 29, § 3.

28 On the wording of the Constitutions of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1876 regarding the general arrangements for the Institute and its internal management, Cf. Chap. 20, § 5.

29 Letter from Rome '11 November 1876, E III 111.

30 Letter from S. Pierdarena 14 November 1876, E III 112.

31 Letter of 30 November 1876, E III 121.

32 *Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Anno 1877. Turin, tip. Salesiana 1877, p. 19.

33 Letter of 18 December 1876, E III 127–128.

excepting the purpose and aim which the Concettini Institute is directed to. 2. To establish common life as prescribed in article 1 of Chap. V. 3. To establish a regular novitiate. 4. To be able to organise the Brother's life in such a way that while engaged in their charitable work on behalf of the sick they can also constantly fulfil the practices of piety according to Chapter III of the same Constitutions. 5. To apply these faculties always with an understanding with a person whom Your Holiness trusts, and the request is that such person be appointed.' Fiorani encouraged the granting of these faculties. The Pope did so immediately by rescript. In it, he prescribed that Don Bosco should use them 'in an understanding with the *Commendatore* [administrator] of the Holy Spirit [Hospital] as the Institute's Protector.'³⁴

On 16 November, Fiorani passed on the *Report* and *Rescript* to Cardinal Ferrieri, Pro-prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars 'informing him that the Pope, by *motu proprio*, had decided to substantially change the Institute by aggregating it to the Salesian Society in Turin.' At the bottom of the document, someone from the Congregation had added: 'The Institute of the Hospitaller Brothers of Mary Immaculate known as the Concettini, by will of the Holy Father, Pius IX, is aggregated to the Salesian Congregation in Turin, whose Superior General is Father John Bosco.'³⁵

However, the binding clause connected with the first faculty granted still applied: 'Always excepting the purpose and aim to which the Concettini Institute is directed.' Also there had been no clarification as to whether entrustment to the Salesian Society, could be understood by the Pope, or at least interpreted by him as a temporary measure aimed at revitalising the Institute in its spirit and work and making it capable of autonomy and self-government, or otherwise. Subsequent events revolved around the alternatives.

Don Bosco's interpretation could have given rise to greater concerns when it was finally specified in his letter to the Pope on 18 November, and even more so in the attached document. He stated that he found the Concettini rule to be 'very similar' to the Salesian Rule and expressed the opinion that 'with few adjustments' the rules could be 'identified with one another.' Perhaps it would not be easy 'to lead the Concettini to practise the vow of poverty and common life' but it was hopeful that with patience this would be achieved. What was of key importance, at any rate, was the solution to the problem of the novitiate since, he claimed, although they have good will, without a novitiate where their students practise the Constitutions and how to observe them, 'those Religious will carry out a work that they either do not know about or will have learned imperfectly.' Finally, he asked that Mons. Fiorani give him 'an indication of the number of Concettini, the houses offering service and anything else concerning their moral and material state.'³⁶

In the attached memorandum, he interpreted the *Report* agreed on in Rome with Fiorani and added '8 articles to be placed as an appendix to the Hospitaller Brothers' Constitution' preceded by five operational guidelines. The eight articles presented the outline of his reform based on the precise configuration of the relationship between the Concettini and the Salesians: '1. The Institute is perpetually affiliated to the Society of St Francis de Sales. 2. The spiritual direction of the Concettini Brothers, professed and novices, is perpetually affiliated to the priests of the said Congregation. 3. The office of Superior General of the Concettini will be held by the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation who can also appoint his representative from among the Salesians resident in Rome. 4. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation will provide everything needed by the Concettini both for their state of health and in case of illness. 5. All Concettini are considered to be, as they are in fact, Salesian Co-operators. 6. In any case the material and disciplinary side of things will always be entrusted to a Concettini Brother who will be chosen and will be assistant to

34 *Documenti* XVII 571–572; MB XII 496–497; E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, pp. 516–517.

35 Cited by E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, p. 518.

36 Letter to Pius IX, 18 November 1876, E III 116–117.

the novices. 8. Distribution of tasks, acceptance for first trial, admission to the novitiate and religious profession is up to the Superior of the Salesian Congregation but always with the opinion of the Concettini Director and Prefect or Bursar of the house the postulants resides in.'

He asked for the Holy Father's sanction of all eight, and meanwhile set about 'getting the Concettini Constitutions to conform to those of the Salesians.' He would have presented this work to the Holy See, promising once again to carry out such 'conformation of the two Institutes ... in full agreement and with the consent of His Excellency, Mons. Fiorani.'³⁷

Fiorani, however, had not been previously informed by Don Bosco of the eight articles added to the agreed plan. But supporting Don Bosco's wish and being unable to send him the Concettini Superior who was ill, on 23 November he announced the arrival in Turin of the former Superior General, Brother Gregorio Coriddi.³⁸ It was the only way of involving the Concettini in the work being done on their behalf, and which affected them. He was an envoy of the Protector sent not to negotiate but simply to inform and be informed.

Brother Gregorio arrived in Turin on the evening of 26 November, a guest of the Oratory until 10 December. He brought with him a long letter of presentation from Fiorani with a brief report on the state of the Concettini Institute.³⁹ The following was recorded in Frs Chialo's and Lazzero's *Diario*, a reflection of what they thought in Valdocco of the mission entrusted to Don Bosco: [27 November], the Procurator of the Concettini [Hospitallers] came from Rome to talk with Don Bosco about the takeover of the administration of this Institute by the Salesians. It is the Holy Father, Pius IX, who wants it.' [11 December, Bro Gregorio, Procurator of the Concettini, left the Oratory].⁴⁰

On the evening of 22 November, Brother Gregorio found himself in discussion with Don Bosco as members of the Superior Chapter were about to commence their meeting. In their presence, Don Bosco addressed intentionally soothing words to the Concettini: 'The point is this, that they be convinced that we will most gladly do what we can for their benefit; that we are not seeking to destroy their Institute but to leave it as is, improve it and make it grow, and then whatever the Holy Father does in this regard, let then be convinced that we have no other aim than to support their intentions. Since it is not about us wanting to impose new things, it is a matter of setting up the Institute in such a way that its preservation and improvement can be assured.' Brother Gregorio left at this point but he would have been profoundly disturbed had he been able to hear the summary presentation of the plan Don Bosco presented Chapter members with: 'The memo given me by His Holiness' he declared 'was the execution of this principle, that the Concettini accept our rules and observe them in their entirety: the Superior General of the Salesians will be their Superior. An appendix will be given them with our Rule in which rules for good management of the hospitals will be included.' That was all for the evening since at that point they could not arrive 'at any conclusion.'⁴¹

Don Bosco's plan was even more radical if we consider the use of the word 'merger' in the earlier-mentioned letter to Fr Cagliari on 30 November. Perhaps it should be understood as incorporation of their work into Salesian work except for their specific mission: '8. At the moment I have the Superior General of the Concettini in my room, sent by the Pope to negotiate the difficult undertaking of the merger. Let's see.'⁴² The idea must have been widespread at Valdocco. Fr Barberis, referring to a small academy prepared by the novices on 10 December, and after

37 *Documenti* XVII 572–573, 573–576; MB XII 499–500.

38 *Documenti* XVII 576.

39 *Documenti* XVII 578–579.

40 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 50, 52.

41 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, 27 November 1876, quad. 1, fol. 21r–22r; *Documenti* XVII 582–584.

42 E III 121.

mentioning the blessing of the statue of Our Lady in their classroom and study hall, wrote in the chronicle: 'It would be good to note that a Concettini was also present. He has been with us for some days, sent by his confreres to deal with the unification of their order with ours. He will leave tomorrow.'⁴³

The validity of the plan was perhaps compromised by an inadequate appreciation of the history of the real religious, moral and disciplinary state of the Institute at the time and especially of the painful period it had gone through, partly due to outside superiors, protectors, guarantors.⁴⁴ However, the exchange of information and discussions with Brother Gregorio had to have produced some benefits if Don Bosco then revised the eight articles in minor fashion. The first two remain altered. Then came nine articles preceded by the following note: 'Other than these ongoing arrangements, until there are new ones from the Holy See, what follows will be observed.' The article regarding the Superior General and his representative was altered. There was no longer mention of the 'Salesian Co-operators.' The presence of Salesian priests at the Holy Spirit Hospital and novitiate was specified as having an exclusively spiritual function. Concettini were assigned roles in the mother house, particularly as superior of the house in Rome, Orte, Civita Castellana, and of the novitiate. Nevertheless it said: 'All these Concettini office holders have a consultative vote where they are called to give their opinion.' There was no word of a central Concettini superior.⁴⁵ On 4 December, Mons. Fiorani acknowledged receipt of Don Bosco's letter 'along with the memorandum containing other new bases for the Concettini Institute and reasons' motivating them. He gave them all to the Pope on Tuesday 12 December.⁴⁶

The interpretation that was given to the *Report* and *Rescript* of 14 November, with the additional articles, did not find Pius IX fully accepting of Don Bosco's 'new outlook.' Mons. Fiorani wrote to Turin about this in controlled and respectful terms. The Pope was satisfied with Don Bosco's 'kind efforts' 'no less with the fact that he spontaneously submitted his new perspectives to his Supreme Will.' He appreciated the reasons for the additions of 'some new articles' however, he would have liked 'them to be somewhat modified in places, because as he currently sees them, they do not correspond perfectly to his way of seeing things.' He has 'explained his mind' to Fiorani 'and since there were some matters for discussion' there was need for 'an exchange of ideas about them.' Therefore he was inviting him to Rome where 'in a couple of days at most' he wrote 'we will combine our perspectives and will be fully clear on what we intend.'⁴⁷

Don Bosco gave Superior Chapter members an extremely summary version on 17 December, noting some concern. In essence, Mons Fiorani had written: 'I was with His Holiness and he told me he is very happy with your plans regarding the Concettini. Nevertheless, he has his own ideas on some points' which he had explained to the Monsignor and needed to deal with in person. This is why 'to bring it all to a conclusion' the Pope was inviting him to Rome with 'a priest, to immediately take up the administration of the Holy Spirit Hospital.' 'I have already given it much thought, reflection, prayer,' Don Bosco said 'and now it is only a question of carrying matters out ... We are not going there to propose but to do what has been suggested ... since here it is a case not of discussion or suggestion but of listening, then acting.'⁴⁸ The same day, 17 December, an upset Brother Gregorio had written to Brother Monti, the director of the house at Orte: 'I believe that Don Bosco will soon come to Rome to conclude our business with Fiorani and then with the Holy Father. The Concettini have nothing to do with it. All they have to do is await their fate.'

43 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 10, p. 35.

44 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, pp. 522–524.

45 The text in *Documenti* XVII 574; MB XII 505–506; Cf. also E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, I, pp. 527, 529.

46 *Documenti* XVII 590.

47 *Documenti* XVII 595–596.

48 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, 17 December 1876, quad. 1, fol. 27r–v, 29r.

Enough ... Confidence in Mary. We do not tire of praying; indeed let our prayer to Mary be persevering and persistent. *Toto ratio spei mease*.⁴⁹ He was right. In the letter to Don Bosco on 4 December, when Brother Gregorio was in Turin still, Fiorani had written: 'Concerning Bro. Gregorio, he need not await the conclusion [=he will play no part in the conclusion] of the matter we are dealing with, and he is not asked to intervene in it and discuss it.'⁵⁰

However, not only the Pope, Mons. Fiorani and Don Bosco were interested in the Concettini; in Rome there were also some convinced supporters of theirs. Other than Pius IX himself, a great supporter perplexed about Don Bosco's most recent executive plan was and would continue to be Cardinal Innocenzo Ferrieri (1810–87), who from July 1876 was Pro-prefect and then from July 1877 Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. From the end of November 1878 until 1884 he was President of the Concettini Institute and from 1884 until his death, their Cardinal Protector. There was also a good consensus among clerics in contact with the Brothers in Rome, and at Orte, (where Brother Monti lived and had the support of the Bishop and Vicar General), and at Civita Castellana, who appreciated their valuable and generous service. Mons. Fiorani himself, probably preoccupied with quietening widespread concerns, amongst them Brother Gregorio's, had decided to inform the Brothers about what was happening. The Institute's Super General, Brother Giuseppe Petrolli and his Council, thanked the Pope on 29 December on behalf of the Concettini for what he was doing for them, promising to accept 'with the greatest respect' the solutions that would be adopted, but they also begged him 'as one' that their Pious Institute could 'preserve its integrity in its own charitable purpose of assisting poor sick people in hospitals,' and they nurtured the 'firm hope' that 'their institution' would 'fully preserve its autonomy.'⁵¹

Meanwhile, without losing time, Don Bosco had prepared the fragile Salesian establishment in Rome. On 18 December he had written to Fr Lemoyne, asking him to make Fr Giuseppe Scappini available to transfer from Lanzo to the capital: 'At the latest' he specified 'by 1 January next, as we will set sail by train for Rome.'⁵² There is an entry for 1 January 1877 in Chiala and Lazzeri's *Diario*: 'D. Bosco leaves for Rome accompanied by Fr Berto and Fr Scappini. The latter is going to Rome to take up the administration of the Concettini.'⁵³ They arrived on the 2nd. Don Bosco wrote to Fr Rua from the capital: 'Frs Scappini and Berto are sleeping and eating at the Holy Spirit; I am with Mr Sigismondi and working at settling the difficult position of the Concettini with the Salesians.'⁵⁴

The scrupulous secretary had noted with his customary brevity, but this time more detailed and precise, the movements of his Superior and his frequent presence among the Concettini at Holy Spirit Hospital.⁵⁵ Don Bosco met many people of importance: The Cardinal Vicar, La Valletta and manager Mons. Lenti, Cardinals Sacconi, Oreglia, Berardi, Morichini, Bilio, Consolini, Archbishops Simeoni, Vannutelli, the substitute for the Secretary of State, Jacobini, Kirby, the new representative of the Holy Spirit Hospital, Prince Paolo Borghese. We do not find, among the names the one most interested in the negotiations underway, viz., Cardinal Ferrieri. Most of the scant information on the content of these audiences, naturally, could only come from Don Bosco.⁵⁶

There was a first meeting with Mons. Fiorani on 3 January. The following day he sent Don Bosco 'the agreed bases' to reflect on, setting up an appointment at his own home for the

49 Cited by E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, p. 528.

50 *Documenti* XVII 590.

51 Letter to Pius IX 29 December 1876, cited by E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 530–531.

52 Letter of 18 December 1876, E III 127.

53 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 50, 52, 53.

54 Letter of January 1877, E III 139.

55 Cf. G. BERTO, *Appunti pel viaggio di D. Bosco a Roma 1877*, 49 pp. (small pocket diary).

56 Some useful critical notes on information from the Salesian side can be found in E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 534–537 (*Dalla fusione al governo bicipite*).

afternoon of Sunday, 7 January.⁵⁷ As we see from a memorandum on 14 January, after a further meeting with Fiorani the day before, and recalling 'the Holy Father's thoughts,' Don Bosco (he believed he had found the Pope in agreement at the two audiences on 9 and 11 January) did not essentially desist from the 'first plan' he had considered necessary for the Institute.⁵⁸ He concluded with the forced offer of a temporary collaboration which was limited for the time being but a valuable one. It was gladly accepted: 'There is now such disparity and opposition of wills that there is nothing left for me to do other than offer a purely religious service, so long as it meets the Sovereign's pleasure.'⁵⁹

On 20 January, Mons. Fiorani referred matters to the Pope, who received Don Bosco the following day, expressing the wish that he keep the task entrusted to him, but in a more precise and limited way compared to what he had originally requested. At a meeting at the Holy Spirit with Mons. Fiorani, the Concettini, and another representative of the hospital, according to the chronicler, Don Bosco himself 'presented the Holy Father's view, viz., that Mons. Fiorani would look after the material side and D. Bosco the spiritual.'⁶⁰ During lunch on the 24th with the Sigismondi family where he was staying, Don Bosco gave his own interpretation of what he thought was a damaging but hopefully temporary change to the Pope's original plan: 'The Roman clergy sent a representation to the Holy Father to protest that he had called on D. Bosco, an outsider, to take over the Concettini.'⁶¹ At any rate, on 28 January, Mons Fiorani and Don Bosco, in agreement, appointed a new 'Chapter of the Religious Institute: Brother Luigi Monti, Superior, Brother Giuseppe Maria Petrolli, Bursar, Pietro da Palestrina for the Wards, Girolamo da Spino d'Adda for the novices.'⁶²

Don Bosco left for Turin on 29 January, stopping over at Magliano Sabina and Florence, arriving at the Oratory on the morning of 4 February, the external Feast of St Francis de Sales. In Rome, the agreed on interventions were given official sanction in the first week of February. A decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars appointed the two visitors to the Concettini Institute on 6 February 1877, describing their respective tasks. It was aimed at 'establishing the discipline of the Institute and promoting observance of the Constitutions,' 'eliminating possible abuses.' The 'Apostolic Visitor *in spiritualibus*' would be for the term of his natural life, the priest Don Bosco, and his successors at the Holy See's pleasure; the Apostolic Visitor *in temporalibus*. The priest Luigi Fiorani, *Commendatore* of the Holy Spirit Hospital and Protector of the Institute and his successors in the stipended role at the Holy See's pleasure. The jurisdiction of the Superior General of the Institute remained suspended. Both Visitors could delegate a suitable person of probity to act on their behalf, the first a Salesian priest, the second a member of the diocesan or religious clergy [including, as would happen, a Concettino]. The Visitor *in spiritualibus* had to appoint two Salesian priests for 'spiritual government', one for the professed, the other for the novices, 'according to the Constitutions still in force.' The Visitor *in temporalibus* 'in agreement with the Visitor *in spiritualibus* could 'renew and regulate the offices of the Institute,' 'admit postulants to clothing and novices to profession, and send them away.' Every three years the Visitors had to give the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars a report on their Visit.⁶³

The result was a clear reshaping of Don Bosco's role and extent of action. What he thought about this at the time he would explain two months later to Pius IX and Cardinal Lorenzo Randi.

57 Lett. To Fr Bosco, 5 January 1877, in MB XIII 905.

58 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 532–533.

59 Letter of 14 January with attached Memo on His Holiness' thoughts about merging the Concettini Constitutions with the Salesians, E III 143–145.

60 G. BERTO, *Appunti...*, pp. 21–22.

61 G. BERTO, *Appunti...*, p. 24.

62 G. BERTO, *Appunti...*, p. 28.

63 *Documenti* XVIII 69–70; MB XIII 905–907.

For him it was a change dictated by the desire 'not to clash with the principle' of the absolute wish for 'autonomy and independence' of the Institute which could not eliminate the 'many causes' preventing 'a stable organisation of the Concettini.' To obtain this, it would have been necessary to keep firmly to the papal *Rescript* back in mid–November,⁶⁴ obviously meaning the rescript as he had interpreted and included it. It was a twin visitation: *in spiritualibus*, his, with weak juridical impact, while the *in temporalibus* by Mons. Fiorani was the one that clearly dominated. 'It seems difficult to me' he had written to Cardinal Randi on 7 August 'for the two heads of the same family to arrive at a uniform type of command that will please everyone. But since they said this was the Holy Father's wish, I kept quiet and accepted the trial, though one I have seen from the outset to pose many difficulties.' In his view, the right solution had already been provided and remained such: it was in the memorandum agreed on in Rome with Mons. Fiorani and presented by him to the Pontiff on 14 December, then approved by him.⁶⁵

Don Bosco never abandoned the notion of aggregation or affiliation or merger. At one of the St Francis de Sales Conferences, on the morning of 6 February, he told Chapter members and rectors that he had found 'matters extremely tangled' in Rome. 'A number of delegations had gone to the Pope, one led by a Cardinal and they said, 'Are there no priests or Religious Orders in Rome such that there is a need to call on an outside priest to fix things up in this Congregation?' 'Now, many things need to be established, but the idea is to go slowly, a little at a time.' He reported the Pope's reply to the Cardinal: 'Go and tell D. Bosco yourself that I am happy that they [Salesians] are administrating this Institute and that yours can also come.'⁶⁶ Despite the 6 February decree he wrote to Fr Cagliero in mid–February: 'The Holy Father is enthusiastic about our Congregation. *Other than the house in Rome, the Concettini's, he wants us to accept another, the Consolation Hospital.*'⁶⁷ His temperament was showing here as it did in any defence of his Society against undue interference, and in defending the secondary classes at the Oratory against threat of closure. And here it was again in the case of the Concettini: tenacious fidelity to his own plans, tactical, temporary acquiescence to commitments he did not share, while hoping for ultimate success for the only valid solution – the initial one.

But another key player entered the Roman mission in 1877. He was humble and determined, a man of great faith and no less tenacious than Don Bosco. Blessed Luigi Monti (1825–1900). Success could not fail, and came via the route that was the normal one and most pleasing to Pius IX and Leo XIII, thanks to an Institute which discovered its own inner energy to regenerate itself in a vital way.⁶⁸ On 4 March, in fact, using his powers as Visitor *in temporalibus*, Mons. Fiorani appointed Bro Monti as his delegate in governing the Institute. The following day, Bro. Monti moved from Orte to Rome to commence his vigorous, patient and prudent work of reform.⁶⁹

From 17 April, Brother Monti was able to make use of the building in Piazza Mastai as the novitiate, furnished at the Pope's expense. On 11 March and 22 May, he sent Don Bosco two beautiful letters which revealed extraordinary humility, total dedication to the work of reform and reorganisation and heartfelt acknowledgement of the work of the Visitor *in spiritualibus*, as well as of Salesian Fr Giuseppe Scappini.⁷⁰ Although the sender dearly wanted a reply and Fr Scappini suggested one, Don Bosco never replied, firm in his belief that the Superior of the Concettini should be the Rector Major of the Salesians. He saw in Monti, then, more of an obstacle than a collaborator in setting the Institute on the path to an authentic autonomy, and to being religiously

64 To Pius IX, 20 June 1877, E III 188–191.

65 E III 205.

66 G. BARBERIS, *Cronaca*, quad. 13, pp. 12–14.

67 Letter of 13 February 1877, E III 149. Emphasis ours.

68 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 541–543.

69 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 540–541.

70 *Documenti* XVIII 111, 149–150; MB XIII 907–909.

fruitful.⁷¹ He did not manage to see the genuine will of the Pope in the 6 February decree, only the result of obscure Roman plotting.

On 19 May, speaking with Fr Barberis who had to go to Rome with Fr Lazzero to preach the retreat to the Concettini, he again showed his unwillingness to budge: 'When there was first talk of the Concettini, I immediately told Rome that what was needed for progress was for the Concettini to be merged with the Salesians, keeping only their purpose as hospitallers. Since the Pope approved of my thinking in general terms I sent him a memorandum, and the Pope approved it. Then various intrigues arose, various plots, and things had to be modified; but these modifications were only written to adjust things for the moment. Nevertheless, my initial plan as approved by the Pope still stands ... Now the effort is to reduce it [i.e. the Concettini] to this: that the Concettini be true Salesians and observe our rules. Then, as to the practical way of carrying out these rules, their own can serve as a guide. They all want to preserve their autonomy, supported and urged on by a thousand voices ... Now, there is nothing new regarding this but the need to move toward this goal and recommend obedience to the superiors through discussion, as Fr Scappini wrote to the Concettini Superior.'⁷²

June came without anything appreciably new happening. Moreover, in the preceding months Don Bosco had been overburdened. He had been in Rome for the entire month (June) for festivities in honour of Pius IX who was celebrating his golden jubilee of episcopal consecration, yet he had not succeeded in gaining a private audience with the Pope. He wrote to Fr Rua over that period: 'The Holy Father has often complained that D. Bosco has not come to talk about the Concettini, but how can I approach him?'⁷³

Nothing had changed by the 16th: 'I have still not have a special audience and the Holy Father does not want me to leave yet. I hope it happens as soon as possible, then I will fly *ad Lares*.'⁷⁴ Finally, being unable to reach the Pope in person, on 20 June, he gave the Cardinal Vicar for Pius IX a memorandum on regularising the religious life of the Concettini, speaking of the work carried out by the Salesian priests – without ever naming the involvement of Brother Monti. After listing the 'many clauses' preventing the Institute's 'stable organisation' and its current state, he indicated five clear and decisive 'measures' with a Salesian flavour: 1. Setting up a separate novitiate house. 2. Profession of vows made after a year's novitiate during which the novice must also 'try out his vocation' by spending 'some time with the sick.' 3. Rejection of hospitals where the religious would need to depend on or 'live cheek by jowl in their work with people of the other sex,' unless these latter 'lived and worked entirely and strictly separated from the Concettini.' 4. Accepting a hospital only if the Concettini were 'sufficient in numbers' to do what was prescribed 'without have recourse to lay helpers' or, where necessary, making use of 'paid servants, but of known morality.' 5. 'Absolute unity of command' with the Supreme Pontiff as 'absolute Superior' and, more immediately, 'the Salesian Superior' who would make use of a Director appointed by him [the only new item] and on whom 'all the directors of Concettini houses' would depend.'⁷⁵

'It was necessary' he said, persisting with his original idea, 'to reduce matters to the first plan already approved by the Pope' as Fr Barberis noted on 20 June while in Rome preaching the retreat to the Concettini.⁷⁶ So the meeting that Monti succeeded in having over those days could hardly lead to any substantial common understanding. If anything, the distance between them grew.⁷⁷

71 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, Vol. I, pp. 543–549.

72 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, pp. 5–7.

73 Letter of 8 June 1877, E III 182.

74 To Fr M. Rua, 16 June 1877, E III 187.

75 E III 188–191.

76 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, p. 8.

77 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, pp. 551–553.

Another solution was floated further on which he did not accept. It would have depended on a single Visitor without a Religious Congregation behind him.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, many other tasks and problems were absorbing Don Bosco's time and would involve him more seriously and completely in the coming months.

3. Preparation for the First General Chapter of the Salesian Society

Don Bosco attributed special importance to the First General Chapter. He considered it to be the most authoritative place for defining the concrete ways of practising the Constitutions, a decisive event for the future of the Salesian Society. General Chapters held over the eighty years that have followed have taken the same eminently practical approach, while the doctrinal guidelines were entrusted to the Constitutions themselves and, in particular, the introduction *To Salesian Confreres*, which Don Bosco had prefaced the Constitutions with as theological and ascetic guidelines of a kind.

He wrote to his secretary from Alassio on 7 July: 'As soon as there are copies of the *Work of Mary Help of Christians*, send some quickly to Nice, but do not forget to send some copies to Mons. Ceccarelli with a dozen or so copies of the *General Chapter* for Montevideo, Buenos Aires, San Nicolás.'⁷⁹ The 24–page printed booklet was sent over those days⁸⁰ 'in multiple copies to rectors of each house so they can be distributed to members of their own chapter, recommending and making it easy for each one to study the matters proposed.'⁸¹ The printed version had been based on a handwritten manuscript of Don Bosco's, ten foolscap sheets numbered from 2 to 20 by Don Bosco himself,⁸² with very many corrections. The handwriting in the first draft was irregular, untidy, nervous and its content somewhat meagre. The style was shabby and the many changes reveal a man who has just too much to do, is in a hurry and subject to distractions that sometimes led him to erase useful features. But he was by no means tempted by new insights or unexpected flights of fancy. Naturally, between this tormented manuscript and the eventual printed text, there had been an abundantly corrected and enriched manuscript. It offered a list of discussion topics to be translated into norms completely in function of behaviour and individual actions synchronised with the whole: 'Without common life everything becomes confused.' The 21 topics followed one another without any logical order: common life, health and associated matters, study [for Salesian clerics], study for pupils, text books, morality among Salesian confreres, morality among the pupils, clothing and linen, economy of provisions, economy in lighting, economy in the kitchen and with timber, economy in travel, economy in repairs and buildings, respect for superiors, inspectorates or provinces, hospitality, invitations and dinners, religious customs, habits, almsgiving, novices, holidays.⁸³ Each heading, in general, ended with explicit questions or considerations on particular matters, suitable for encouraging reflection in the chapter in each house.

In a second step, Don Bosco probably intended to prepare a new edition for the use of members of the General Chapter, taking advantage to some degree of the collaboration of his secretary Fr Berto and less so, Fr Barberis. Some documents remain: 1) A copy of the already

78 Cf. Chap. 26, § 3

79 To Fr G. Berto, 7 July 1877, E III 197.

80 *Capitolo generale della Congregazione salesiana da convocarsi in Lanzo nel prossimo settembre 1877*. Turin, Tipografia salesiana 1877, 24 p., OE XXVIII 313–336.

81 Brief pre–Chapter chronicle drawn up by Fr Barberis as an introduction to the *Verballi* of the Chapter, fol. 1r–2v.

82 Pages 1, 17, 19. not numbered.

83 The printed order was identical to that of the manuscript except for inserting *Libri di testo* immediately after *Studio degli allievi*, while in the original it appeared between *Ospitalità inviti e pranzi* and *Usanze religiose*.

printed booklet with additions to headings written and corrected by Don Bosco,: *Associations, Election of the Provincial*, and others. 2) Two different handwritten manuscripts of Don Bosco's on *The press* and *teatrino*, with corrections. 3) A handwritten manuscript of Fr Berto's with its own further changes, and others by Fr Barberis. 4) Other interventions by Don Bosco and Fr Berto on another printed booklet. 5) On two final pages of the booklet, the appointments to five commissions for studying different groups of topics. In conclusion a further 8 items were added to the earlier 21: *Association* [=subscriptions to booklets or books] *Disseminating books, Association of Mary and the Salesian Cooperators, Press, Election of the Provincial, Provincial Visitation, Teatrino, Adapted material* and *Things to be excluded*. More than half the earlier headings underwent varying degrees of addition. The General Chapter made specific reference to the new *Teatrino* heading.

The minutes of the tenth session on the afternoon of 11 September read: 'D. Bosco had presented some rules in one of his manuscripts; it has been noted that other instructions were printed in the regulations for the colleges, another on a separate sheet. A commission was set up to examine the three items, pull them together and make a set of regulations for *teatrino*, which could then be adopted in all the colleges.'⁸⁴

The printed text of the *Deliberations* also included the unpublished text of Don Bosco's, with modifications and considerable additions.

4. Revealing the preventive system and 'our regulations' (August–November 1877)

The *Sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù* (Preventive system in the education of youth) appeared in 1877. It was the first time Don Bosco had used the formulas which then became classic, 'preventive system' and 'repressive system'. They were certainly not the most felicitous formulas for summing up the entire history of education and pedagogy, infinitely richer and more varied. However 'Preventive system' was not an expression he invented, nor were its contents new.⁸⁵ All his social and educational activity had, from the outset, been essentially on behalf of the young and adults, especially to prevent the worst possible misfortune in Christian terms, the loss of one's soul, eternal damnation, and personal and social ruin in the here and now. He sought recovery and avoiding falling back into sin or better still, that they, the young, be radically protected from it.

At the level of reflection, then, in more or less intentional form, the preventive mentality had been expressed since his earliest writings addressed to young people and workers in the social sector, in education, in ministry, which in turn reflected charitable activity of extremely varied kinds of preservation.⁸⁶ We have already mentioned, for example, the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors* and the classic principle: 'Make yourself loved if you wish to be feared' or 'rather than making yourself feared.' 'The educator among the pupils seeks to make himself loved if he wishes to make himself feared' is also found in the pages on punishments in 1877, punishments which the author encourages the educator to exclude in principle.⁸⁷

84 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* II 148.

85 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*. Roma, LAS 1999, pp. 23–124.

86 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841–1862)*, pp. 255–320; ID., *Breve storia del "sistema preventivo"*. Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 13. Rome, LAS 1993, pp. 59–105.

87 *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare. Scopo del medesimo esposto dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco con appendice sul sistema preventivo della educazione della gioventù*. Turin, tip. e libr. Salesiana 1877, pp. 44–67, OE XXVIII 442–445 (bilingual French and Italian edition), p. 64, OE XXVIII 442.

The 1877 document did not seek to be a ‘treatise’ as we sometimes find written, not even a ‘small treatise,’ terms which Don Bosco never used. As he said in the introductory lines, he was proposing to present a series of ‘thoughts,’ and ‘indications’ which he hoped would be a pointer to what he had ‘in mind to publish in an appropriately prepared small work ... to help in the difficult art of educating the young.’⁸⁸ They were occasional pages, paying attention chiefly to the hospice, but they spelt out principles regarding ends and methods of education such that they became guidelines for an exemplary system of Catholic education.

The *Preventive System* text appeared in August as an appendix to the pamphlet prepared for the opening of the new site for the *Patronage* in Nice, first of all in a bilingual Italian and French edition⁸⁹ then immediately followed by separate editions for the two languages. The central part of the pamphlet was a *sermon de charité* developed around an outline that would become habitual for Don Bosco in the years to follow: origins and early development of the *Patronage*, its purpose, the reward God has in store for its benefactors. The three editions, all produced in Turin,⁹⁰ carried the *nulla osta* for printing, issued on 3 August by the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Canon Giuseppe Zappata.⁹¹ Publication of the booklet with news of the opening and the text of the address given for the occasion had been decided on by Don Bosco in agreement with the Rector, Fr Joseph Ronchail. Back in Turin, Don Bosco was putting final shape to the text of the speech when it suddenly occurred to him to include the pages on the preventive system adopted in his institutes, as an appendix. In the author’s intentions, the added pedagogical material had a propaganda purpose, especially for the French. In his own words they were more open to ‘new things’ and to taking the practical side of things to the level of theoretical discussion. ‘Now we need to get them to know us more closely. The preventive system, especially, will be received and spread by their newspapers. It will make noise.’⁹²

The printed document had nothing new in it by comparison with the original details on educational and social experiences in the youth institutions he had run for decades. Without naming it as such, the preventive system was already there and complete in its basic dimensions: anticipating wrongdoing, regenerating, protecting, preparing for the future, being constructive. Much has been written about the pedagogical content of these few pages. We know how it was laid out: *In what the preventive system consists and why it should be preferred – Application of the preventive system – Advantages of the preventive system – A word on punishments*. Some of its arguments were seen as new in pedagogical terms, beginning with the opposition (which did not exclude either interaction or contamination) between two systems, the repressive and the preventive.

The definition of the preventive system did limit its impact to an all-embracing institutional setting such as a college or hospice, boarding institutions: ‘It consists in making the laws and regulations of an institute known, and then watching carefully so that the pupils may at all times be under the vigilant eye of the Rector or the assistants, who like loving fathers can converse with them, take the lead in every movement and in a kindly way give advice and correction: in other words, this system places the pupils in the impossibility of committing faults.’ Yet there were many statements of universal import running through the document. The foundation was established: ‘This system is based entirely on reason and religion and above all on kindness.’ The reasons for it were specified: the pupil is encouraged by the educator’s ‘friendly preventive warning, which

88 *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in G. Bosco, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, p. 44, OE XXVIII 422.

89 Photocopy in OE XXVIII 380–446.

90 Tipografia e libreria salesiana 1877.

91 Cf. GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, ed. P. BRAIDO, RSS 4 (1985) 171–321; the text of the “system” on pp. 82–91.

92 Conversation on 21 April 1877 with Fr Giulio BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 12, p. XI.

appeals to his reason.’ ‘The primary reason for this system is the thoughtlessness of the young.’ ‘The repressive system may stop a disorder but can hardly make the offenders better.’ ‘In the preventive system ... The pupil becomes a friend and the assistant a benefactor who advises him, has his good at heart and wishes to spare him vexation, punishment and perhaps dishonour.’

In the Catholic world, difficult as it is to determine how far it extends, this view found favourable acceptance especially for its strong Christian and Catholic quality: ‘The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says: *Caritas patiens est, benigna est. Omnia suffert, Omnia sperat, omnia sustinet* ... Reason and religion are the means an educator must constantly apply: he must teach them and himself practise them if he wishes to be obeyed and to attain his end.’ Sacramental life needs to be intense, made likeable by attractive rites, never boring and formal; the setting became more effective if it was suited to allowing the young person to give rein to his vital energy in study, work, leisure activities.⁹³

Don Bosco admitted that the system could be demanding and difficult for the educator but undoubtedly, ‘easier, more satisfactory and advantageous’ for the pupils. On the other hand, educating is a mission: ‘An educator is one who is consecrated to the welfare of his pupils and therefore he should be ready to face every difficulty and fatigue in order to attain his object, which is the civic, moral and intellectual education of his pupils.’ Punishments in the ‘system’ are an extreme measure, rare and based on decidedly psychological and reasonable factors. The principle Don Bosco had always employed came into play here: ‘An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them.’ The written document, then, went well beyond mere propaganda.

At the same time he was putting together these pages on the preventive system, after nearly thirty years of experimentation the moment had come for finalising a printed version of the *Regulations for the Houses*⁹⁴ thanks to the work, as we have seen, of those taking part in the St Francis de Sales Conferences. Perhaps encouraged by one of his closest collaborators it seemed to be the right moment to include what he had written on the preventive system as a kind of entry point to the Regulations, a *lex fundamentalis* to inspire the Salesian activity of educators and pupils.⁹⁵ He had already prepared an entry point with the ten *General Articles*, which now took second place. They became almost a minor summary of the system.⁹⁶ The second article spelt out the principle that ‘each one should make himself loved rather than feared’ with the comment: ‘He will achieve this great end if he makes it known by words and more so by deeds that his concerns are exclusively aimed at the spiritual and temporal benefit of his pupils.’ Most articles gave a summary indication of a differential pedagogy adapted to ‘different characters: good, ordinary, difficult and bad-natured.’ The *Preventive System* with the *General Articles* included gave the *Regulations* a much more profound significance. Don Bosco saw them not simply as a code of community discipline but as an expression of the sum total of duties young people and adults had towards God, neighbour and self: in essence they were a rule and program for a complete, integral human and Christian life.

93 Cf. Chap. 7, § 4 and 16, § 7.

94 Cf. Chap. 24, § 2.

95 *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Tipografia salesiana 1877, 100 p., OE XXIX 97–196: *Il Sistema Preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, pp. 3–13, OE XXIX 99–109; *Articoli generali*, pp. 15–17, OE XXIX 11–113; *Parte prima. Regolamento particolare [degli educatori]*, pp. 19–57, OE XXIX 115–153; *Parte seconda. Regolamento per le case della congregazione di S. Franc. di Sales*, pp. 59–89, OE XXIX 155–185; *Appendice al Regolamento della Casa. Sul modo di scrivere lettere*, pp. 91–98, OE XXIX 187–194.

96 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il “sistema preventivo” in un “decalogo” per educatori*, RSS 4 (1985) 131–148.

We have already said as much of the early manuscripts of regulations drawn up in the 1850s.⁹⁷ These new *Regulations* were divided into two: the first part offered rules for superiors and educators; the second part was for pupils. He thought it especially educational for the boys to know their superiors duties too, through a public reading of them each year, just as it was important for the educators to be *au fait* with their responsibilities and what they should and could ask of their pupils. There was frequent insistence, in *Chapter Conferences*, *Meetings of leaders* and *monthly Conferences* for teachers and assistants at the Valdocco Oratory on the need to know and read the regulations pertaining to their office, even when these were still in manuscript form.⁹⁸

A few days after the printed text of the *Regulations for the Houses* appeared, Fr Lazzero recorded in his diary: 'The regulations of the houses were given a somewhat solemn reading. Almost all the superiors of the house were present. The reading was done in the study from 5.30 to 6.30 over two evenings.'⁹⁹ The authority–freedom connection was based above all on rationality, the reasonableness of the law which everybody had to obey. The other two 'tools', religion and loving–kindness, could constructively support this solid basis. The regulations focused attention on the college form of education: They were, moreover, *for the houses*. The first paragraph in the second part was significant: 'The general purpose of the Houses of the Congregation is to help and benefit our neighbour, especially through the education of youth, raising them in their most difficult years, instructing them in sciences and arts and setting them on the path of Religion and virtue. The Congregation does not reject any social level of individual but prefers to deal with the middle and poor classes, they being the ones most in need of support and assistance. Among the youths of the city and towns, not a few youngsters find themselves in such a condition that it makes any moral means futile without material help. Some of the already somewhat advanced [in the age], orphans, or lacking assistance because their parents cannot and do not want to look after them, and without a trade, without instruction, are exposed to the risk of a sad future if they do not find someone to accept them, prepare them for work, order, religion. For such young people the Congregation of St Francis de Sales opens hospices, oratories, and school, especially in the more populated centres where the need is usually greater.'¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, it seems that Don Bosco was not fully satisfied with the regulations, finding them narrow and unilateral. In the third session of the First General Chapter on Friday 7 September, he hinted at many kinds of works to follow; agricultural schools had not yet been taken into consideration. He went on: 'It is true that my wish would have been to have separate sets of regulations, one for colleges, another for houses with trade students as well. Instead they were all merged together and I do not see that this is good. But now a set of regulations is drawn up and many of the problems have been eliminated. Let us see that they are observed well, each for his own part.'¹⁰¹

The regulations, sometimes dry, were already the result of preventive pedagogical intentions aimed at forming a young man who was diligent in fulfilling his duties, hardworking in gaining knowledge and professional skills which gave him a chance to earn his living through his own work, a disciplined young man capable of an orderly, active social life, a believer actively involved with the Church, inspired by eternal truths, in possession of a concept of the world where he constantly has the 'salvation of his soul' before him as the final goal of life, along with reflective, joyful hope founded on faith made active in charity.

97 Cf. Chap. 10, §§ 2–3.

98 Cf. J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 154, 166, 174, 242, 244, 248, 256, 258.

99 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 60.

100 *Regolamento per le case...*, pp. 59–60, OE XXIX 155–156.

101 G. BARBERIS, *Verballi I* 33–34.

The educational task was further reinforced by the *General Articles*, a small focused version of the preventive system, and even more so by the pages dedicated to this latter, a synthesis of Christian pedagogy oriented more to prevention than repression. It was to this whole complex of elements, not just to the regulations or the few pages on the preventive system, that Don Bosco and his closest collaborators were referring in the years that followed whenever they mentioned 'our system of education,' 'our system,' 'our regulations,'¹⁰² all consisting of a living well-articulated practice long before they were texts, a tradition guaranteed by individuals and communities who kept not only to its precepts but also the founder's life experience and the experience of the communities he animated.

By contrast, the *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesca di Sales* (Regulations ...for externs [meaning mainly day students])¹⁰³ was not given any special attention prior to printing. It was faithful to the original model as already illustrated, reworked and enriched by a handful of innovative elements drawn from Don Bosco's and his collaborators' experience.¹⁰⁴

To contextualise it in the actual history of Don Bosco's works, the 1877 document with its college emphasis almost disappeared in its material sense, becoming a symbol of a much broader reality, no longer just the embryonic form of a handbook for educators in a boarding school context, but a Christian approach to recovery if boys were poor and abandoned. It took on unlimited pedagogical, pastoral and social import. Seen this way, it ended up being accepted in much broader settings closely associated with the world of admirers, friends, co-operators in Salesian work, and an approach to activity among the young which was capable of responding to social and pedagogical demands that were absolutely relevant. It was taken up, therefore, not only as pedagogy but with far more complex social dimensions to the point where it became a manifesto of a working system able to resolve the emerging social question. It was even seen as an anti-socialist response: there were notions that found easy consensus especially in the world of Catholic conservatism open to charitable initiatives rather than reforms inspired by the demands of justice.¹⁰⁵

Yet both could be considered legitimate when one considers the profound potential of the system. Its acceptance by Catholic pedagogy was justified by the text itself. The extension of its significance to social and social welfare contexts found its legitimacy in the Nice text which pointed to its *Patronage* as one of the many incarnations of Don Bosco's overall preventive way of working on behalf of poor and abandoned youth.

As already indicated, this text, was developed in three points: the history of the Nice *Patronage*, the purpose of activities carried out there, the reward which benefactors could expect in the assurance that their donations were well placed.

The history of the hospice had its beginnings in the suffering of a group of members of the St Vincent de Paul Conference in Nice at seeing boys in the city, 'roaming the streets on weekends, wandering through squares, fighting, swearing, stealing.' The members were unhappy that 'after a life of vagabondage, disturbing public authorities, most ended up populating the prisons.' Yet, they reflected, 'so many youngsters ... can be called unfortunate not because they are perverse but just

102 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di don Bosco nel suo "divenire"*, "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 36 (1989), no. 1, January, pp. 30–40.

103 Turin, Tipografia Salesiana 1877, 63 p., OE XXIX 31–93. The work records the "Visto, nulla Osta alla Stampa. Turin, 2 November 1877. Zappata *Vic. Gen.*" on the last page. It is absent from the text of the *Regolamento per le case*.

104 Cf. Chap. 10, § 2.

105 Cf. P. BRAIDO, "*Poveri e abbandonati, pericolanti e pericolosi*": *pedagogia, assistenza, socialità nell'esperienza "preventiva" di don Bosco*, "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni educative", 3 (1996) 183–236.

because they are abandoned.’ It was then that the inspiration to turn to Don Bosco came to them. Agreement was soon reached ‘on the need for a house where workshops can be opened and the most abandoned youth brought together, instructed and prepared for a trade.’¹⁰⁶ The search for a new location was determined by the need for a larger ‘shelter’ and a ‘garden’ [=oratory–playground] able to keep boys coming for weekdays and weekends occupied in pleasant and honest recreation.¹⁰⁷ Hence the twofold nature of the *patronage*: the classic oratory or ‘recreation park’ for outsiders who came ‘to spend the Lord’s day there and attend night classes during the week,’ and also a hospice whose moral, educational and political status was that it existed for boys who were abandoned and in need of everything.¹⁰⁸ All this meant huge financial resources, but it was not something to be afraid of since Providence was watching over and providing. There was a well-founded hope that his listeners would not fail to put ‘the generosity we have so often experienced from you’ into action. This came from the nobility of their hearts and relied on the ‘great reward’ God himself had promised for ‘works of charity’ which the Gospel asked of believers in its demanding words on the serious duty of almsgiving.¹⁰⁹

In this way, Don Bosco’s address integrated the preventive system with more radical social and welfare forms of prevention. It *preceded* education, required it and, in a certain sense *included* it. In fact, the first step for abandoned, at-risk youth was to give them a place where they could come together, have a roof over their heads, food clothing, sustenance, a living community of peers and adults. Secondly there was a stated need not to stop at offering these emergency responses but to go beyond this and work at facilitating their ability to look after themselves: ‘in due course earning a living through cultural and vocational formation, educating them to a moral, religious and social life that would strengthen their inner faculties for leading a dignified, socially productive and joyful life as human beings.’ The pages on the preventive system also responded to the question of method and style when educating.

The Nice address, delivered in confident French and Italian, became the prototype of dozens of charity sermons Don Bosco gave over the ensuing years, and was the basis and motivation for them. We can see the conferences he gave French Cooperators at Marseilles on 12 February, 1881 which he delivered in French. It was along the same lines: a list of work done in the educational works established in southern France, the special need for the St Leo Oratory at Marseilles – it was a theatre of relevant works in expansion and an impressive pile of accumulated debts. However, more serious and of extraordinary moral and social importance were the problems yet to be resolved: ‘Getting so many unfortunate boys off the streets and out of the piazzas,’ ‘poor boys going to perdition without knowing it.’ ‘How many there are who could be removed from prison waiting rooms and relocated at the Oratory!’ ‘So we can make good citizens on earth out of them and good Christians for heaven, and also prepare an auspicious future for civil society.’ Almsgiving was the means, *Quod superest date eleemosynam*, a superfluity which was not to be limited or tamed.¹¹⁰

5. A salutary episode, harbingers of a harsher conflict

Along with the intense work to consolidate the Salesian Society culminating with the First General Chapter in 1877 which kept Don Bosco and his most important European collaborators busy, came

106 G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare. Scopo del medesimo...*, (separate Italian edition), pp. 7–8.

107 G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, pp. 10–11.

108 G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, pp. 13–15.

109 G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, pp. 16–21.

110 The French text of the conference written by Fr Bologna, with additions by Don Bosco has been preserved; MB XV 691–695.

episodes of serious disturbance: disagreements over the religious essence of the Salesian Society and its legal setup, different points of view regarding the privileges and faculties obtained by the Society's Superior, and repercussions which, though insignificant in themselves, gave rise to painful misunderstandings and further mutual distrust.

From the end of 1876, other than matters of jurisdiction, the different events touched more on the character and sensitivity of key players who were at times unwittingly thrust into that role and who originally did not bear direct responsibility. Other than roles and symbols they were real individuals for whom these incidents were the source of astonishment, disorientation, frustration, and passions.

We cannot ignore the health circumstances of the two chief antagonists, with Archbishop Gastaldi subject to more physical and moral suffering. 'After his illness in 1871 [from June to September] his niece, Lorenzina Mazé de la Roche, who was fond of both her uncle and Don Bosco wrote: 'He did not fully recover. He was often tormented by liver pains and gout.'¹¹¹ There was also acute moral suffering at crucial moments (the sudden death of his sister Marianna at Pianezza on 21 November 1876, and of his brother Bartolomeo on 5 January 1879, a professor at Turin University) which could only but have an impact on a very emotional temperament even if he was strongly given to making hidden sacrifices. As a demanding and unaccommodating Pastor 'inclined to demand unconditional obedience rather than facile consent,' his loneliness in the archdiocese, Church and society only increased.

Don Bosco, instead, was widely known at many levels of civic and ecclesial life, as well as being an admired and loved father and teacher at home in Valdocco in the growing Salesian community and the great family of Cooperators, benefactors, admirers and supporters.

The different kinds of loneliness they both felt as a result of their painful misunderstanding could have been counter-productive for them both, though in different ways. Reasons for friction could have been complicated, and difficulties in understanding increased by some of the people around them. On one side there was the fidelity of the Archbishop's closest collaborators such as his secretary, Fr Chiuso, his lawyer Colomiatti and Vicar General Zappata, all supported by a secure legal culture. On the other side was the compulsive Fr Bonetti, the meticulous Fr Berto who collected gossip from Rome and Turin, the narrow-minded views of Fr Lazzero who featured in the case of the Masses denied on 26 August 1877. And then there were the free-wheeling tasteless types, Salesian past pupils coming to the defence of their 'father', and decidedly anti-Gastaldi. Men like Frs. Turchi and Anfossi who ended up compromising the very cause they sought to defend, among them Don Bosco.

The irreverent, anonymous anti-Gastaldi 'slander' – from February 1878 to March 1879 – apart from its authors' intentions, was certainly not a sign of a particular Church Culture and sensitivity as was the case for similar items in books and magazines found in ecclesiastical settings of the time in Milan, Piacenza, Cremona, Rome. Fr Cagliero, in South America for almost two years, appeared to stay out of the matter and only Fr Rua was able to occasionally attempt some thankless mediation.

111 *Di monsignor Lorenzo Gastaldi (memorie intime)*, in the commemorative number *In memoria e ad onore di S. E. Rev.ma Mons. Lorenzo Gastaldi Arcivescovo di Torino nel Centenario della sua nascita 1815–1915*. Turin, tip. Anfossi 1915, p. 10. Fr Paul Albera, Rector Major of the Salesian Society, was also a member of the honorary presidency, and Salesian Fr Felice Cane also stood out among the executive committee, as well as Archbishop John Cagliero, Apostolic Delegate in Central America. 43): the commemorative number contained interesting contributions on Gastaldi's "spirituality", which, while it cannot compete with the many studies dedicated to Don Bosco, nevertheless throw some light on the historiography, psychological or otherwise, dedicated to their relationship, with desirable therapeutic effects. On the general health conditions of the archbishop, Cf. G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815–1883*, Vol. II..., pp. 341–342.

There is no evidence that Don Bosco and the Archbishop, both of similar age and both with strong and tenacious characters, attempted to meet and clarify matters, or reconcile. Perhaps they were already compromised by mutually disappointed expectations, frustrated hopes, prejudices, mistrust. We have two pen portraits from 1877, depicting two men in contention. One is by one of these men, the other by a friend of one of them close to them both and it highlights their consolidated lack of readiness to accept mediation.

Archbishop Gastaldi, in days of grace and peace, described Don Bosco to Bishop Pozzi of Mondovì in a way which might also be a self-portrait. The bishop had asked him for his opinion on the establishment of a Salesian house in his diocese. This was the proposed novitiate at the Mellea Sanctuary at Farigliano, for which Don Bosco had sought authorisation. In his letter of reply on 24 May 1877, Gastaldi wrote of his former friend: 'In some ways he is like a sun, but like the sun, he has his spots. The spirit of autonomy and independence is very much alive in him and he presents himself as equal to the bishop of a diocese. If the bishop does not give him complete freedom to say, print whatever he likes, then he goes on a war-footing ... Nonetheless, how can one oppose him? He has the backing of many cardinals and is in favour with the Holy Father. In any conflict between the bishop and that good soul it is him they believe rather than the other.' 'We are dealing with someone who wants to do good and does so, but he wants to do it *his way* and shouts and struggles furiously against anyone who does not approve of his way of operating. I am proof of it and will be *usque ad ultimum* despite all the good I have shown him and still do.'¹¹²

Towards the end of 1877, a Jesuit from Piedmont, Fr Luigi Testa, unwittingly echoed these thoughts in a letter to Don Bosco. He had attempted an impossible mediation between the two at the suggestion of Fr Felice Carpignano (1810–88), Gastaldi's confessor. He attested that he had heard it said – and he added a personal note – 'I see that your and my thinking on this matter are in agreement. The big question is the practical way to make it work, because, as you know, we are dealing with *two saints* who cannot be shifted from their way of thinking (I interrupted: stubborn types [*testardi*]. I mean, like all Piedmontese). He laughed and then continued: 'However, let's do it this way. We will pray to the Lord a lot, asking him to give us a hand and, wonder of wonders, both believe they are working according to God's will and intentions, and maybe both are partly right and partly wrong. What can we do in this case?' The Jesuit conclude his letter by encouraging Don Bosco in his battles, indicating Fr Rostagno as the man to turn to for tackling the canonical processes in Rome.¹¹³

The situation worried people who felt it was inconceivable for there to be such division in the Church in Turin and who respected both the individuals involved. Some tried unsuccessfully to reconcile them. 'If you can reach agreement,' his friend and peer Fr Roberto Murialdo wrote to the Archbishop 'I am convinced that all good people will rejoice and even the Supreme Pontiff will be pleased to hear that the unpleasantness between the Archbishop of Turin and Don Bosco and whoever else, have entirely ceased, thanks be to God. And would it not remove a large and painful thorn from the Archbishop's heart?'¹¹⁴

Fr Testa stated that he had intervened with Fr Carpignano because the 'matter' seemed to be a scandal to him, 'a cause of astonishment and maybe scandal even for good people.'¹¹⁵ A Catholic militant, a magistrate, Count Cesare Trabucco di Castagnetto (1802–88), Senator from 1848 and in 1877 Minister of State, had expressed the same opinion to the Archbishop. He wrote to Don Bosco: 'I told His Grace that he should reflect on the difficulty of the time and the desire that some sad types had to sow dissension among the clergy. I told him that unity had never been more

112 M. F. MELLANO, *Don Bosco e i vescovi di Mondovì (1842–1897)*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 487–488.

113 To Fr Bosco, 1877 [September], text in MB XIII 345–348.

114 Letter of 18 September 1877, in MB XIII 345.

115 Cited letter to Don Bosco in 1877, in MB XIII 347.

necessary and that conflict between the Archbishop and such a worthy cleric in the Church as the Very Reverend D. Bosco could only encourage the irreligious press and produce sad consequences.¹¹⁶

In such a context, it was not difficult for certain events of limited importance in themselves to degenerate, given the different interpretation the two contenders gave them, as disenchanted and distrustful as they now were: insubordination from one perspective, further exacerbated by recent favours from Rome,¹¹⁷ and a feeling of being persecuted on the other side. These things could also have different resonances in Rome in an especially delicate year for Don Bosco when, as well as having to respond to problems relating to his Society, he was also called to weave between opposing parties in the matter of the Concettini. As we have seen, he could count on certain allies such as Cardinals Nina and Randi and Monsignor Fiorani, but there was no lack of reservation and perplexity, especially in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and with Cardinal Innocenzo Ferrieri as Pro-prefect then Prefect.

It was the latter who asked Don Bosco by letter on 28 November 1876 if he had obtained 'some special dispensation' from observing the *Romani Pontifices* decree from 25 January 1848, which obliged him to request testimonials from the respective bishops for accepting someone into the Congregation. Some complaints had arrived relating to a certain young man 'who had been sent away from the seminary for immoral conduct' and who had nevertheless been accepted into the Salesian Society and presented for holy orders without the proper testimonials.¹¹⁸ Don Bosco replied on 16 December, appealing to faculties granted *vivae vocis oraculo* from the Pope on 3 May and 10 November 1876.¹¹⁹ He then denied any blame regarding young men who had left the seminary in Turin and been accepted by him. Finally, he took advantage of the occasion to beg the Cardinal to please ask the Archbishop 'to show reasons for certain severe measures he had taken with regard to the Salesians.' He was not 'complaining' but hoped that he could be told 'clearly and precisely' about things and then he would promise 'faithful execution.' He was referring to well-circumstanced episodes, though not without dramatising them a little, such as his presumed suspension on organising a retreat for the laity, the refusal to give preaching faculties to some Salesian priests, the negative response to the request for the Archbishop to come and celebrate events at Valdocco and administer Confirmation.¹²⁰ It was unthinkable that such a grab-bag of justifications and counter-accusations could have the effect he desired. They would have benefited the Archbishop.

The first part of the New Year, 1877, went by peacefully for the most part. Halfway through January, Don Bosco provided and in turn asked Fr Rua for news of the Archbishop's health: 'Our Archbishop wrote a long letter in which he provided news on his health.' 'Give me some news on the Archbishop's health.'¹²¹ The Archbishop had been seriously ill in the preceding weeks. In Rome, dealing with the Concettini matter, in reply to a letter in which the Archbishop informed him of his improved health, Don Bosco rejoiced at the 'news of this health which he had prayed for' and took the occasion to express a thought of deferential respect for his ecclesiastical superior: 'As for Chieri, I will do what I can to establish an oratory for girls and another for boys; it is of the greatest encouragement to have the approval and support of the ecclesiastical authority.'¹²²

116 Letter to Don Bosco, 23 December 1877, in MB XIII 383–384: he brought to the archbishop the text of Don Bosco's condemnation of the anti-Gastaldi letter of December 1877, unsuccessfully asking him to approve of it being published in *L'Unità Cattolica*.

117 Cf. Chap. 20, § 5.2.

118 Letter of 28 November 1876, MB XII 394.

119 Cf. Chap. 20, § 4.

120 To Card. I. Ferrieri, 16 December 1876, E III 125–127.

121 Cf. Letter from Rome 14 January 1877, E III 138–139.

122 Letter of 14 January 1877, E III 142–143.

On 24 January, the Archbishop went to Rome with the Rector of the seminary, Canon Giuseppe Soldati (1839–86) He described his stay in the capital in a *Report* to the clergy and people written immediately on his return.¹²³ He referred to two audiences with Pius IX, one on 1 February, the other prior to his departure on the 11th, and he described some of the holy places he had visited. At the end he stated: ‘While we are consoled at seeing these dear and holy memories, once more you can easily imagine how the odd, false comments of a few newspapers with opposite leanings to ours affected us, publishing comments on our visit to the Holy City to our disadvantage.’ He summed up his position as an unshakeable combatant adverse to double dealing and compromise in a statement of principles and reassurance: ‘Today, whoever wishes to be a man of character and reach paradise must resign himself to choosing the path where he hears the roar of the lion and the mastiff’s bark. Therefore dear sons and daughters, heartened by the Holy Father’s authoritative word and blessing, we shall remain in your midst, intent as we always have been in the past on the great, principal work of meriting the grace of Jesus Christ on this earth and the enjoyment of his glory in heaven for ourselves and all of you. We have been following in the glorious footsteps of the perfect model of all bishops, St Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, and we intend to keep following him, asking God to help us so the deed corresponds to the intention.’¹²⁴

So, heartened by his trip to Rome, he had a brief memo printed entitled: *L’Arcivescovo di Torino e la Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales* (The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales). His secretary, Fr Chiuso, signed it and dated it for ‘28 February 1877’. It was then sent to all cardinals and other personalities. He meant it to give the lie to ‘the presumption that the Archbishop of Turin was not benevolent towards the new Congregation of St Francis de Sales,’ recalling a long series of actions and gestures of benevolence and support from him since 1848 until 1875, first at the Oratory then for the Congregation.¹²⁵ Among other things, he quoted a line from a letter [not found] that Don Bosco had written him on 2 July 1873, thanking him for the letter of recommendation he had issued for the approval of the Congregation: ‘You could not have said more or said it better.’ In reality, the letter was written on 10 February and contained several reservations that Don Bosco certainly would not have approved of. It could have been a ‘thank you’ for just the first part of the letter of recommendation.¹²⁶

Writing to the Archbishop, who had just returned from Rome, Don Bosco expressed ‘sentiments of esteem and veneration’: he aligned himself with the acts of homage offered the Archbishop by the Metropolitan Chapter and clergy of the city in protest at what certain newspapers had spread during his time in Rome, that he had offered his resignation to the Pope, with some references to the difficult relationship he had with Don Bosco. *La Libertà*, a Roman paper, had spoken of ‘a bishop resigning’ on 30 January 1877, and the *Gazzetta del popolo* in Turin, even spoke of ‘*sede vacante*’ on the 31st.¹²⁷ Don Bosco promised to pray for his ecclesiastical superior, ‘asking the Lord’s kindness.’ He wrote ‘that he may deign to keep you in good health so you can continue your labours for the good of the Church and our Congregation, which I respectfully recommend to you. Please accept these cordial thoughts both to refute the gossip of certain newspapers, presuming things for which there is no foundation, and to assure you that the Salesians will always be there in anything that can serve you. In the name of them all I have the great honour of professing that I am your most obliged servant.’¹²⁸

123 *Lettere pastorali commemorazioni funebri e panegirici* of Bishop Lorenzo Gastaldi Bishop of Saluzzo then Archbishop of Turin. Turin, Tip. Canonica 1883, pp. 353–362.

124 L. GASTALDI, *Lettere pastorali...*, pp. 360–361.

125 Text found in *Documenti* XVIII 86–88.

126 Cf. Chap. 19, § 6.

127 *Documenti* XVIII 50.

128 Letter of 28 March 1877, E III 161.

On 1 May, Archbishop Gastaldi invited Don Bosco to a meal at his residence where Bishop Dupanloup of Orleans was his guest, *L'Unità Cattolica* also had a news item on the Bishop's visit to Turin and his departure the following day for an important vote in the French Senate, of which he was a member.¹²⁹ The Archbishop wanted it to be a sign of reconciliation and friendship. On 19/28 September he then wrote to Cardinal Ferrieri: 'Last May, in order to show Don Bosco that ... I nurtured no ill will towards him, I wrote him a letter in my own hand inviting him to lunch with me while Bishop Dupanloup, along with another outstanding cleric, was our guest. He accepted the invitation and sat at table with me and the Bishop of Orleans. I was hoping D. Bosco and his priests would not have given me any further grief nor cause for serious distress, but unfortunately I was deceived.'¹³⁰

It came about over a misunderstanding which arose over an event where Don Bosco acted in good faith and the Archbishop was equally upright in following his own austere concept of Catholic piety. Reference has already been made to the publication of graces attributed to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the consecration of the Church at Valdocco.¹³¹ The first part had a brief history of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians and her sanctuary in Turin. The remaining two-thirds of the booklet were dedicated to a report on a hundred and thirty graces attributed to her intercession, and to an outline of the Archconfraternity of devotees of Mary Help of Christians erected in the church dedicated to her in Turin.

This item was reprinted in 1877.¹³² Then, in the May *Letture Cattoliche*, another booklet followed, fully dedicated to a report on 37 graces under the title: *La nuvoletta del Carmelo ossia la divozione a Maria Ausiliatrice premiate di nuove grazie* (The cloud of Carmel, or devotion to Mary Help of Christians rewarded with new graces).¹³³ On the basis of a strict interpretation of a decree of the Council of Trent's 15th session, *De invocatio Sanctorum* (on invoking the Saints), the Archbishop 'officially' asked Don Bosco to tell him 'whether these [graces] were supported by witnesses such that a mature examination of them could be made by my Curia.'¹³⁴ Don Bosco replied, explaining the matter and contents of the two publications in their correct dimensions, noting that the first item had been printed at Sampierdarena with the relevant *nulla osta* and that he had obtained the second *nulla osta* from the Archbishop's Curia in Turin.¹³⁵ In reality, even though the 1877 reprint carried the wording 'With permission of the Ecclesiastical Authority' it had simply been a declaration by Fr Saraceno, the synodal reviewer in Turin, who had found no impediment to its being printed. No one from the Curia had issued the *nulla osta*. On 19 May, the Archbishop insisted: 'I consider it a serious obligation of mine to examine the accounts of supernatural deeds said to have taken place in my diocese.'¹³⁶ Don Bosco, who was leaving for Genoa, replied: 'As soon as I am back I will satisfy what you asked for in your earlier letter and will indicate some facts that seem to me to be suited to a regular examination.'¹³⁷ For the moment he did nothing. But the question, which seemed to have been smoothed over, re-appeared in 1878 and, more significantly in 1879.¹³⁸

129 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 104, Tuesday 3 May 1877, p. 413.

130 *Documenti* XVIII 236–237, 241–243.

131 Cf. Chap. 16, § 3.

132 Cf. G. Bosco, *Maria Ausiliatrice col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consacrazione della chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino per cura del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*. Turin, tip. e libr. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales 1877, 320 p.

133 Ed. Fr Giovanni Bosco. San Pier d'Arena, Tipografia e Libreria di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli 1877, 117 p., "Letture Cattoliche" a. XXV, n° 5, OE XXVIII 449–565.

134 Letter of 17 May 1877, cit. in E III 175.

135 Letter of 18 May 1877, E III 175–176.

136 Cit. in E III 178.

137 Letter of 31 May 1877, E III 178–179.

138 Cf. Chap. 28, § 4.

6. A turn for the worse in disagreements with the Archbishop

The previously quoted letter of the Archbishop to Cardinal Ferrieri, bearing two different dates, beginning on 19 September and concluding on 28 September 1877, which was abundantly documented by letters over the ten days ensuing between the dates, referred above all to two episodes that took place at Valdocco in August 1877.

In the second half of the month, Fr Perenchio, a priest from Ivrea diocese, presented himself at the Oratory asking to be accepted as an aspirant to the Salesian Society. He was accepted on the basis of a certificate from the parish priest and allowed to celebrate Mass. Probably some less than favourable information from Ivrea had reached the Archbishop. On 22 August the Curia in Turin through its secretary, Fr Chiaverotti, put some precise questions to the Director at the Oratory [Fr Rua] or his Vice-director, Fr Lazzero, on the exact situation of the priest with regard to the Salesian Congregation. The reply was that Fr Perenchio had made a request to be admitted to the Congregation and that Ivrea was being asked for testimonials. By letter on Friday 4 August, Fr Chiaverotti communicated the fact that the priest did not have the faculties to celebrate because he had been suspended by his bishop and could not yet be considered as belonging to the Congregation, not even as a novice. 'On the other hand,' he specified 'not even a professed member can celebrate Mass in churches not strictly belonging to the Religious Order without the Ordinary's permission.' This was the 'warning' as worded in the 1877 diocesan calendar which clearly did not concern Religious, including the Salesians who went to celebrate Mass in public churches or religious and educational communities for years and even in recent months around Turin and other dioceses regardless of such a *monitum*.

In the sender's mind, the letter obviously concerned the particular case of a diocesan priest suspended by his bishop or of other religious priests without faculties as contemplated by *Monitum XII* in the *Calendarium liturgicum* 1877: 'We also advise all Regulars that without our faculties they cannot celebrate Mass, not even once, in any church or oratory, even a private one, in our diocese except for churches and oratories belonging to their Order.'¹³⁹ The Vice-director of the Oratory, Fr Lazzero, gave a completely different interpretation in his *Diario*, writing in an oversimplified way: 'August 1877.24. Letter from the Curia in Turin suspending priests of the Oratory from saying Mass outside of churches of their own order. 25. Fr Lazzero asks for an explanation of the preceding item by letter and meanwhile sends a note to all places where we go to say Mass, putting it off for tomorrow unless they present written permission from the ecclesiastical authority. 26. Around thirty choir boys went to Strambino for a sacred ceremony [Fr Lazzero who had a strong voice went with them] When they arrived in Turin a bit late in the evening, Fr Lazzero found a letter suspending him from hearing confessions for 20 days – it was written by the Archbishop. Deo gratias!'¹⁴⁰

In his letter of Saturday the 25th, Fr Lazzero had argued with the curial secretary over the decision regarding the priest from Ivrea, now declared to be a 'novice' in the Congregation, while assuring him of full acquiescence of the prohibition on Masses, 'outside churches not strictly belonging to the Congregation' and that some people had already been forewarned of this. The Salesians at Valsalice and Lanzo Torinese were also invited to comply. His own permission, which he requested on the same day, did not arrive because the office was about to close and the Archbishop was away from Turin. Not receiving a reply, Fr Lazzero sent the rectors of churches a note: 'Due to a severe instruction from His Grace the Archbishop we are prohibited from celebrating Mass outside of churches of our own Congregation. Therefore if you need one of our priests he will gladly be sent if he has written permission from the ecclesiastical authority.' One can

139 *Calendarium liturgicum... servandum Anno MDCCCLXXVII*. Turin, Marietti 1877, p. XIII.

140 J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 59.

imagine the chaos this caused on Sunday, 26 August, and the ire of the Archbishop who ended up looking like the author of an absurd and extravagant decree, with serious and undeserved loss of face. His reaction was swift: suspension of faculties to hear confessions until 14 September, which was extended indefinitely on the 19th. Fr Lazzero was considered to be lacking the balance required for such a delicate ministry.¹⁴¹

Don Bosco was not directly affected, but inevitably involved in any misfortunes that placed his Salesians' common sense or good faith in doubt. No initiative was taken to follow up the two incidents, avoiding their being bound up with more serious questions of principle. In fact, the problem of the testimonials was bound up with Fr Perenchio's personal issues and his legally indefinable temporary belonging to the Congregation. He was later appointed as an elementary teacher at Costigliole di Saluzzo and left the Oratory. The two episodes ended up rekindling tensions between Turin and Rome, not only with regard to testimonials but also other faculties the Pope granted Don Bosco.

Archbishop Gastaldi sent Cardinal Innocenzo Ferrieri two letters over these issues, one on 26 September, the other on the 30th. The first was on the matter of testimonials not being requested and the Perenchio case which only confirmed this. The second focused on the episode on 26 August: 'Unfortunately,' as Archbishop Gastaldi interpreted the behaviour of those responsible for the incident, 'their aim was to present the bishop in a bad light before his diocesans, causing him concern and unpleasantness' out of spite for prohibiting Perenchio from celebrating Mass.¹⁴²

On 9 September, Pro-secretary, Francesco Maffei, wrote to Fr Rua: before replying to the certificate signed by Don Bosco on Fr Perenchio's belonging to the Congregation, the Archbishop 'would like to know if Fr Lazzero and the other superiors involved in the serious disturbance on 26 August, and which obviously was the result of a very serious error, *are sorry for it and ask forgiveness.*' When the Archbishop is assured of this by a letter signed by Fr Lazzero or yourself, or Don Bosco, he will consider the matter dealt with. Otherwise he will do whatever he feels is appropriate to maintain and retain the decorum of the authority he has been invested with by God.¹⁴³

Informed of the Archbishop's letters to Ferrieri by Cardinal Oreglia on 14 September, during the First General Chapter, Don Bosco sent the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars a letter in which he gave the same interpretation as Fr Lazzero's to the 26 August episode. He illustrated some facts and asked some questions. The Archbishop was not admitting Salesians to Orders or the exam for the faculty to hear confessions unless testimonials for admission to the novitiate were presented. 'He indicated' to the Director of the Mother house, that he should forbid Fr Perenchio from celebrating Mass and that Salesians were not to celebrate in churches not belonging to the Salesian Society without the Archbishop's permission. Fr Lazzero had asked why, assuring his 'complete submission to the Archbishop's orders', and the 'only reply' he received was to be deprived of the 'faculty to hear confessions for twenty days.' He asked if Archbishop Gastaldi was able to pass judgement on Perenchio's admission to the novitiate. Was the punishment inflicted on Fr Lazzero legitimate? Could he forbid celebration of Masses as had happened on 26 August? Were not testimonials from the Superior with the Curia's signature sufficient for admission? Could the Archbishop ask for testimonials used for acceptance to the novitiate for admitting people to Orders or the confession exam?¹⁴⁴

141 Cf. Latin decrees on 26 August and 19 September 1877, *Documenti* XVIII 350–351.

142 *Documenti* XVIII 218.

143 *Documenti* XVIII 230–231. Emphasis ours.

144 Letter of 14 September 1877, E III 215–216.

Fr Roberto Murialdo's 'offer to mediate' in the earlier cited letter to the Archbishop had no hope of success in such a climate of opposition.¹⁴⁵ Especially since the Archbishop had followed up the other letter of 19/28 September with one that began by reminding the reader that *Monitum XII* published the 1877 diocesan calendar, had not caused any difficulties for celebration of Masses over seven months' He noted other things: 'no satisfactory reply' had reached him regarding the 'graces' booklet in May; boys from Don Bosco's colleges were discouraged from entering the seminary and encouraged to prefer entry to the Salesian Society; lack of observance of Canon Law in the Perenchio case; insubordination and the mischievous interpretation of Chiaverotti's 24 August letter; 'I received an order that no priest of the Salesian Congregation may go to celebrate ... We regret this severe measure but will abide by it' Fr Lazzero had replied; 'any opportunity is taken to present me in a bad light in front of my clergy' was the Archbishop's interpretation. 'It seems to me that some Religious, vowed to God and striving for Christian perfection in humility, need the basic humility to recognise here that they have made a mistake.' He asked Ferrieri to inform His Holiness of these matters: 'because unfortunately the insinuation has been made to him that I am the adversary or almost an enemy blocking D. Bosco.'¹⁴⁶

For his part, the Cardinal urged Don Bosco by letter on 10 October to understand the Archbishop's instructions on celebrating Masses in churches outside the Congregation in their true sense and reminded him to keep to Canon Law with regard to testimonials.¹⁴⁷ Don Bosco reacted with a letter insisting on what he had written on 14 September, with some more precise detailed references: in particular he renewed his defence of Fr Lazzero's actions. 'Despite the Archbishop saying the prohibition was imagined, it still continues to be in force.'¹⁴⁸ It did seem to be so, as he supported it with an example not quite *ad rem*, where a Salesian, Fr Giovanni Cinzano, visiting his home town Pecetto Torinese, was not permitted by the parish priest to celebrate Mass¹⁴⁹ because (though Don Bosco only found out later from the same parish priest) the instruction from the Ecclesiastical Superior in relation to Fr Cinzano had been clear: 'Remember the warning in the calendar, observe it and see that it is observed.'¹⁵⁰ Fr Cinzano had not asked the Curia for the authorisation demanded by the *Monitum*.

For his part, the Archbishop resurrected the incident and the unresolved argument that followed, on 15 October 1877 in a 'document reserved for the eminent cardinals and some archbishops and bishops' with the title *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*, (known as Salesians, therefore).¹⁵¹ Once more Gastaldi took up the motives in his letter to Ferrieri of September 19/28, repeating the two cases – Perenchio and the 26 August episode. He recalled the request for acknowledgement of the error committed which he made by letter on 9 September and complained: 'There has been no reply up to this point ... Even just Christian humility, without which there is no religious spirit, and in which the life of any regular Congregation and any member of such a Congregation essentially consists, should be enough to recognise that serious mistakes were made in what happened on 26 August and what preceded it. If they were not wilful, they certainly involved intelligence and imagination, and since divine episcopal authority, the Archbishop's authority, was seriously compromised there is a strict duty to make reparation for the offence at least by acknowledging the error and asking forgiveness.'¹⁵²

145 Letter of 18 September 1877, in MB XIII 344–345; Cf. § 5.

146 *Documenti* XVIII 241–243.

147 Cf. text in MB XIII 349.

148 Letter of 12 October 1877, E III 227–229.

149 Letter of 12 October 1877, E III 228.

150 Letter of Fr Giuseppe Perlo to Don Bosco, 22 November 1877, in MB XIII 363.

151 Tip. C. Marietti 1877, 12 p., in *Documenti* XVIII 337–348.

152 *L'Arcivescovo di Torino e la Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 12.

Finally, to re-establish better relations with the local Ecclesiastical Authority, on 4 November Fr Rua felt it was his duty to reply to the request passed on by Fr Maffei on 9 September. 'Firstly' Fr Rua wrote 'I would ask you to notify His Grace, the Archbishop, that *we are very sorry for the unpleasantness His Grace has had to put up with since the problem regarding the Masses occurred last August.*'¹⁵³ This wording seemed to be evading the issue as far as Gastaldi was concerned, and perhaps he had reason to believe this. It did not correspond to what was asked as well as being deplorably late in coming. Fr Maffei passed this opinion onto Fr Rua on 25 November citing the precise wording of the statement required by the Archbishop: *that they say they are sorry for the serious disturbance caused on 26 August last and ask for forgiveness.* 'What your Reverence said 56 days later in no way corresponds to that statement.' 'Anyone with a heart is always sorry for causing displeasure, however deserving it may have been, that tests the one who is justly condemned to suffer for his faults. So it is evident that your Reverence's statement says nothing.'¹⁵⁴

Even more worrying, and leading to negative developments was Cardinal Ferrieri's laconic request of Don Bosco, occasioned by 'some complaints' the Archbishop had presented to the Pope and submitted for examination by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. 'It has become necessary' he notified him 'for you to make known distinctly and precisely the faculties and privileges you have received and enjoy by kind concession of the Holy See so that this knowledge can help guide the careful examination the eminent Fathers will make of this dispute.'¹⁵⁵ From Borgo S. Martino, Don Bosco asked Fr Berto to get someone to help him write out in legible handwriting 'in chronological order' in a 'new exercise book' decrees relating to 'all the privileges granted the Congregation ... beginning from 1864 until today, including Rescripts and Briefs.' 'For the rest' he advised him, 'tell Fr R [ostagno]' his legal consultant 'we will see each other on Friday.'¹⁵⁶ On 6 December, he sent Cardinal Ferrieri 'a genuine copy of all the spiritual favours and privileges of the Holy See' granted the Salesian Congregation. He asked pardon if he need disturb the Cardinal once again since the Archbishop, who 'had already admitted our clerics to the coming round of ordinations,' 'has made it known today that he will not admit any Salesian, but without giving any reason for this.'¹⁵⁷ Legitimately fearing the request could be a prelude to suspension of favours and privileges granted, Don Bosco asked six months later for Leo XIII to confirm them, especially the privilege of exemption from testimonials for pupils who were aspirants to the Congregation. It had been granted *vivae vocis oraculo* by Pius IX.¹⁵⁸ The request was passed on to the competent Congregation which was certainly not favourable to this and other privileges.

It could have been the earlier complaints or others from a letter of the Archbishop's Pro-secretary Fr Maffei on 15 November which were the subject of a letter of clarification from Don Bosco to Archbishop Gastaldi on 22 November: complaints about Fr Angelo Rocco celebrating Mass in the private family oratory at Rivara Canavese, and the publication of indulgences for Co-operators; testimonials requested regarding cleric Angelo Rocca, by now a priest and never received by the Curia. But over and above these complaints, Don Bosco himself posed a disturbing question which maybe the Archbishop would also have liked to put to him: would it not have been better to avoid direct confrontation over matters referred to the Roman Congregations? From the perspective he expressed in all sincerity his own request 'that the matter of prohibiting Masses would not have been dealt with this way and that a printed item [on 15 October], bearing the word 'reserved' had prejudiced the decision. He felt obliged to respond to this item, asking 'pardon in

153 Letter to Fr Maffei, 4 November 1877, MB XIII 356. Emphasis ours.

154 *Documenti* XVIII 385; MB XIII 370.

155 Letter of Card. I. Ferrieri to Don Bosco, 14 November 1877, MB XIII 360.

156 Letter of 21 November 1877, E III 239–240.

157 Letter to Card. I. Ferrieri, 6 December 1877, E III 248.

158 Cf. Letter of 7 June 1878, E III 360–361.

advance' and if some exaggeration was noted he hoped it would be attributed 'to the need for defence and the real displeasure' he felt. He added: 'But why not deal with these problems with paternal measures and the indulgence a nascent Congregation deserves? It certainly wants what is good but it could err through ignorance though certainly not through malice. God will judge Your Grace and his poor servant on our right intentions, the Christian charity and humility with which we have acted, the efforts we have made to find proportionate means for defending and promoting the interests of his holy religion: in Him I trust.'¹⁵⁹ The Archbishop replied: 'The best you can do is to present your Archbishop with no other spirit than one of humility and charity, because then, obstacles to peace for the good of yourself, your Congregation and the Archdiocese could probably be smoothed over.'¹⁶⁰

The following day, Don Bosco confided in the Bishop of Vigevano, his friend from Vercelli, Bishop De Gaudenzi: 'Why can't we have a bishop in Turin like in yours? Matters for us are always like straw on the fire, so in the first half of December I will have to make a trip to Rome.'¹⁶¹

The following day marked the beginning of a tempestuous period measured no longer in days or months but years.

159 Letter of 22 November 1877, E III 240–241.

160 Letter of 23 November 1877, in MB XIII 366.

161 Letter of 24 November 1877, E III 242.

Chapter 26

The First General Chapter amid old and new problems (1877–79)

- 1877 20 June: Cardinal Randi, reference point for the Concettini affair;
 20 July: Redefinition of the Visitor *in spiritualibus*;
 7 August: Don Bosco re–proposes a single Visitor;
 18: re–proposes aggregation to the Salesian Society;
 1 October: Cardinal Randi’s letter exonerating Don Bosco from role as Visitor;
 5: First General Chapter closes;
 25 November–1 December: *Latae sententiae* suspension from hearing confessions;
 29 November: Don Bosco’s letter to Cardinal Bilio;
 18 December: trip to Rome.
- 1878 9 January: death of Victor Emmanuel II;
 7 February: death of Pius IX;
 20: election of Leo XIII;
 21: memorandum to F. Crispi on the preventive system;
- 1881 First biography of Don Bosco by Dr Charles Espiney.

The first part of 1877 had been full of promise and initiative, both within and outside the Salesian Society. The success of the honorary role with the Concettini Congregation, as difficult and resisted as it was from the outset, had given Don Bosco and the Society prestige at the very heart of Catholicism, where he so much wanted to establish his work. It could also have created opportunities for new relationships with Curia members, and possibilities for lowering tensions in Turin. But his efforts to provide internal consistency for his own Society had also been very positive. This came together with the First General Chapter which took place from 5 September to 5 October.

1. First General Chapter of the Salesian Society

In line with the practical spirit of the Congregation and its Chapters, followed by the relevant deliberations on general and particular regulations, Don Bosco’s words addressed to the Chapter members during the afternoon session on 7 September were entirely true to style – precise,

emphatic, significant: 'I want things to move ahead swiftly but calmly. We should not rush anything, because these meetings will create history for our Congregation and its smooth running in the future will depend on them to a large extent. I am not saying that the existence or otherwise of the Congregation depends on them, but that they will be a very firm basis for things going well, and the salvation of so many souls depends on how we can regulate matters over these days.'¹

He drew a suggestion from this for a practical approach: 'Without taking other books to study, we will produce our own on the scheme, rules, regulations for the colleges, circulars sent to all our houses in recent years, and decisions already taken at conferences held both here at Lanzo and in Turin. In a word, these are matters adapted to our needs. The importance of this Chapter lies in the fact that the rules which are only general at the moment [the Constitutions] become practical, that is, that we use very means to indicate how to turn the rules into practice.'²

It followed that the discussions and results – established for the most part as *Deliberations* printed the following year – did not present much that was original by comparison with the tradition created by circulars, the Conferences of St Francis de Sales, the 'To the Salesian Confreres' introduction to the Constitutions. This is evidenced by the sessions and topics dealt with. The most interesting items were the complementary impromptu considerations Don Bosco offered, revealing salient aspects of his thinking and mentality.

1.1 Chapter discussions

There were 26 General Chapter sessions in total, of which two (Saturday, 22 September and Friday morning, 2 October) should be considered as being Superior Chapter meetings: they were dedicated to proposals for some foundations, and determining retreat dates for Salesians in 1878, respectively. Effectively, there were 16 working days, 10 of which had a morning and afternoon session. These were interspersed with two weeks suspension of work, from 15–20 September and 23 September–1 October.

Attendance can be determined from the Minutes, though no names were indicated for some sessions, and ranged from a minimum of 14 to a maximum of 22. Among members reported as present from 7–12 September was Fr Pagani, spiritual director of the seminary at Magliano Sabina.³ Two 'experts' in religious life were present for a handful of sessions, Jesuits Fr Giovanni Battista Rostagno (1816–83) and Fr Secondo Franco (1817–93). The former was there for the sixth to tenth sessions from the afternoon of Sunday, 9 September to Tuesday afternoon of the 11th, and the latter for the sixth to ninth sessions from Monday afternoon to the following day. Their consultation was generally requested for particular practical problems inherent to the daily life of the communities. Questions on essential aspects of the religious state were never posed.

Work proceeded in a scattered order depending on the stage of finality reached in the various issues, thanks to the work of the commissions. The calendar of events is evidence for this.

Wednesday, 5 September, afternoon: organisation of Chapter work.

Thursday, 6 September, afternoon: 5th Commission on *Sacred Studies and preaching*, sacred studies for the Salesians and preparation for preaching, religious customs.

1 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 37; the three exercise books of Minutes written by Fr Giulio Barberis are kept in the ASC D 578.

2 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 5–6.

3 He had been accepted into the Congregation, with Can. Francesco Rebaudi, on Thursday 16 February 1877: cf. G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli Superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 1, 10 December–17 August, fol. 30v.

Friday, 7 September, morning: 4th Commission on *Studies for pupils* in colleges; textbooks and book prizes, publication of book collections, subscriptions; the press and Salesian Cooperators.

Saturday, 8 September, afternoon: 5th Commission on *Studies and preaching* completely dedicated to aspirants, novices, first admission to vows.

Sunday, 9 September, afternoon: 1st Commission on *Common life*, ownership of personal goods; ownership, administration and use of material goods (books, clothing, drink, comestibles, furnishings, looking after one's health).

Monday, 10 September, morning: 1st Commission on *Common life*: use of material goods (as above); journeys.

Monday, 10 September, afternoon: 1st Commission on *Common life*: hospitality, celebrations and invitations. 2nd Commission on *Morality* among Salesians – meditation – jurisdiction for confession.

Tuesday, 11 September, afternoon: 2nd Commission on *Morality* among Salesians and among pupils – *Teatrino* and setting up a special commission for it – Respect for Superiors – *Provinces* and setting up a commission for the provincial.

Wednesday, 12 September, morning: 3rd Commission on *Economy* in provisions and collaboration between providers for provinces to be established at this Chapter.

Wednesday, 12 September, afternoon: 3rd Commission on *Economy* in provisions and use of lighting.

Thursday, 13 September, morning: 3rd Commission on *Economy* in provisions, use of lights, kitchen, bread for the poor, beef, broth, coffee.

Thursday, 13 September, afternoon: 3rd Commission on *Economy* in new buildings, repairs, works, elastic ball, tambourine – the 'monograph' or house chronicle and the Congregation's chronicle – forming a special commission on the topic of the *Nuns or Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* – Ordinary matters: personnel for missions and other houses.

Friday, 14 September, morning: Special Commissions: *Confreres' holidays* and *Teatrino* – 2nd Commission on *Morality* – good habits.

Friday, 14 September, afternoon: 2nd Commission on *Morality*: bad habits – Formation of Special Commission on *Deliberations taken in previous years* – Particular Commission on *Provinces and Provincial's roles*: inspectorates or provinces, appointment of provincial, provincial's relationship with the Rector Major – Observations on minutes, proceedings (Acts), decree of closure of the Chapter.

Friday, 21 September, morning: Special Commission on *Provinces and Provincial's roles*. Division of the Congregation into Provinces – rules for the Provincial.

Friday, 21 September, afternoon: Special Commission on *Provinces and Provincial's roles*, duties of the Provincial and other things pertaining to him.

Saturday, 22 September, morning: Impediments to entering the Congregation – Special Commission on *Nuns or Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*, the relationship between the Sisters and Salesian Houses.

Saturday, 22 September, afternoon: (with appendix on Sunday, 23 September, afternoon): addition to confreres' studies – donations and accepting new works – how to reply to letters of request.

Tuesday, 2 October, morning: Special Commission on *Decisions taken over previous years* to be kept and added to deliberations of the General Chapter.

Wednesday, 3 October, morning: reading of the Minutes, *Confreres' studies*, *Press*, *Association* [= subscriptions to periodical publications], *Books*.

Thursday, 4 October, morning: reading of Minutes, *Pupils' studies*, – the name 'Salesian' and the role of the *Salesian Bulletin* in spreading its true identity – reading of the Minutes – *Common life*.

Friday, 5 October, morning: ordinary matters, Salesian retreats for the coming year given the division into provinces.

Friday, 5 October, afternoon: closing formalities – Don Bosco's brief consideration on the 'preventive system', closure of the Chapter.

In terms of quantity, most time was spent on *Economy*, *Morality*, *Confreres' and pupils' studies*, *provinces*.

Of particular interest and perhaps also an echo of Don Bosco's temporary involvement with the Concettini, was the attention given in the 5th session on 8 September to specifying the category of 'aspirants', and giving greater visibility to the coadjutors and their novitiate period, and to a more solid structuring of the formation of clerical novices.⁴

After receiving the mandate, the Superior Chapter spent several sessions in October and some in November and December reviewing and improving the *Minutes* to turn them into *Acts* (Proceedings), intending to send them to Rome for official approval. It was then thought to be unnecessary and unwise to do so. Work continued on them in 1878 until their publication in a volume called *Deliberations*, reserved to the Salesian Congregation.

1.2 Don Bosco's most significant interventions

Chapter members had great freedom to speak at the Chapter, and this was especially guaranteed in the work of the Commission referred to in the general assembly through discussions which kept to the prepared texts, without unduly altering their content. The tendency rather was to make them more specific and integrate them. Just the same, Don Bosco acted as teacher for his pupils, not only in discussion of individual texts and concluding articles, but also and especially through complementary interventions, calling on them to appropriate his more significant thinking on new and old subjects.

One of his first interventions concerned centralising the management of the Cooperators and the *Salesian Bulletin*, which had just come out a few weeks earlier. The centralisation would be at the Oratory. 'The great effort I have made for these Cooperators,' he explained 'was precisely to find a way to unify everyone around the head, so the head's thinking can reach everyone. For now, we do not have any idea how this work will expand, but when there are many thousands, and I am convinced that in two or three years there will be at least 5 thousand, then great work can be done, and the Holy Father himself, when he sees this bond between the head and them all, them with the head, will say with surprise: "But this is a kind of Catholic Masonry."'

He went on to list the publicity and financial benefits of spreading the *Bulletin*. He stated that Religious and their Institutes could belong to the Cooperators, even 'the Franciscan and Dominican Tertiaries.' He justified the possibility, emphasising perhaps more than he needed to the specific difference between the two kinds of tertiaries: the tertiaries of mendicant Orders which were 'all

4 Fifth session, 8 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* I 58–74.

practices of piety, while we are all practices of charity. Together, so much good can be done and no-one is overburdened with either prayers or good works.' He said that just as the case was with the Salesian Congregation, the Cooperators Association was 'looked upon kindly by everyone because it takes no political stance for one side or the other.' He recalled that Rome had not accepted the Salesians introducing an article into their Constitutions regarding them. Just the same, 'we always hold to the general principle that outside cases of necessity, which could very well happen, we do not enter into political issues and this is of enormous value.'⁵

The thoughts he expressed on 11 September on the state of conscience of boys entering the colleges were pessimistic. Don Bosco started from a principle: 'The key point for being certain to obtain morality, is frequent confession and communion, but really well done.' He then continued: 'It is a pity to see the state of conscience of perhaps 9/10 boys who come to our houses. Nor does having every comfort put things right! We need to be convinced that when a young man has the misfortune to leave his conscience stained, years and years can go by and no solemnity, retreat or another's death has an effect on him.' Still on the question of morality, further on he invited them to study what 'I have been reflecting on for some time,' that the Salesians should sleep in a separate part of the house reserved for them where nobody else should be allowed: 'I would almost call it a kind of cloister,' he explained 'that no one else can trespass on.' 'Especially and absolutely no women of any kind should sleep in that part of the house, not even the Rector's mother or those good women who mend linen in our colleges or do other similar work.' He also maintained that a further look be given to the mixing of people on the occasion of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, something which initially could have been reasonable and positive, but that with the passing of time could have given rise to pernicious abuses. This had also occurred at the Oratory: when they were without a receptionist/doorkeeper and boys were going outside to work 'out of novelty and early fervour,' 'a few abuses had taken place.' Then, 'with the passing of time we saw the need to fence off the courtyard and have a doorkeeper.'⁶

With reference to *economy*, he made a sharp comment on the basis of a clear distinction between college and hospice regarding those who were in arrears with the agreed upon boarding fee. They should not be living off money from charity for boys in the hospices. 'We need to be cruel in a holy sort of way' he said 'with people who are behind in payments. I see no other remedy than sending the boys home to their parents until they are able to pay and can do so promptly when asked. If unable to, they can keep the boys at home. There is just one exception – when the boy shows much promise for the Congregation.' 'It would be good for the colleges to have a fixed fee, and for it to be non-negotiable as far as possible.'⁷

Then came an intervention opening up vistas, as we have already noted, on the mission of the FMA Institute and collaborative relationships between Salesians and the Sisters.⁸

Another intervention which stood out was an impromptu one on the term *Salesian*, which was spreading more and more, and on the *Bulletin*, which he saw as heralding the term's social identity. The word was applied somewhat narrowly in the past, but in recent years it had been inevitable and necessary that also 'the Congregation have a fixed name.' St Francis de Sales was 'a name dear to the Church and society.' He was 'the Saint of meekness' and our principal patron. Nevertheless, it was good to be moderate in applying the denomination 'Salesian', even though 'this name had been adopted for the Salesian Cooperators' Bulletin.' 'It was a brave but considered step. It was necessary to make ourselves known and in our true sense.'

5 Fourth session, 7 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* I 48–55.

6 Tenth session, 11 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* II 140–145.

7 Eleventh session, 12 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* II 158.

8 Cf. Chap. 20, § 8.

He used this as a launching point for outlining the profile of the Salesian as religious and citizen. 'Our purpose,' he clarified 'is to make it known that one can give to Caesar what is Caesar's without ever compromising anyone, and this really takes nothing away from giving to God what is God's. These days, it is said that this is a problem and, if you wish, I could say that it is perhaps the biggest of problems. But it was already solved by our divine Saviour Jesus Christ.' In practice, 'great difficulties' could arise, especially when 'the Government was bad' as was the actual case. But the principle was clear: 'The Lord commands us to obey and respect our superiors "*etiam discolis*", so long as they do not command things that are directly bad.' 'Bad things must not be done, but we continue to respect Caesar's authority.'

Don Bosco then went on with a strong historical judgement on the political and religious situation, probably in special reference to Italy. 'Probably no one better than I' he said 'sees the evil circumstances the Church and Religion find themselves in during these times. I believe that since St Peter until now there have never been times as difficult as these. They [evildoers] have refined skills and enormous resources. Not even the persecutions of Julian the Apostate were as hypocritical and damaging. Is it not so? Despite all that, we seek to act legally in all we do and if extras are necessary they are paid, and if collective ownership is no longer allowed, we will own goods individually, and if they insist on exams, we will sit for them; or if they want certificates or licences we will do what we can to obtain them, and so on. But this requires effort, expense and creates problems. None of you can see it as I do. Indeed, the majority of these tricks and troubles I will not even point out to you, because you would be frightened by them. I sweat and work all day to try to put things right, to overcome problems. So we need to have patience, to know how to put up with things, and instead of filling the air with pious statements, work as much as we can so things proceed well. This is what we want to make known little by little, and in a practical way, through the *Salesian Bulletin*. We will see that this principle prevails, and it will be the source of immense good both for the Church and civil society.'⁹

Before the closing of the final session, Don Bosco recalled that in one of the first conferences, there was talk of writing 'a small treatise of eloquent biblical precepts to be studied in theology classes.' He added: 'The small treatise of precepts should not exclusively concern preaching to young people. It should also be about the education to be given to the group. Our system of preventive education should be embodied in them, and it should insist that education be completely based on that. That is, that it must be love that attracts young people to do good through continual surveillance and guidance, not by systematically punishing their failings, something that mostly leads a young man to hate his educator as long as he lives.'¹⁰

1.3 Printed deliberation (1878)

Don Bosco presented Salesians with the booklet of *Deliberations* on 1 November 1878.¹¹ It contained the following elements: a letter of presentation from the Superior, an introduction with a very brief historical *excursus* on the Congregation, what the Chapter was about, its preparation and opening, a list of participants, the text of the deliberations.¹² The substance of the Chapter discussions and decisions and normative articles that had emerged there remained, but the entire text was more visibly organised and complete.

9 Twenty fourth session, 4 October, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* III 40–44.

10 Twenty sixth session, 5 October afternoon, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* III 55.

11 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel September 1877*. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1878, pp. 96, OE XXIX 377–472.

12 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 3–5, 6–11, 12–14, 15–95, OE XXIX 379–381, 382–387, 388–390, 391–471.

The *Deliberations* became a model for the practical regulation of Salesian religious and active life that would then extend, similarly structured, identical in style, and more clearly expressed, to the *Regulations* added to the Salesian Constitutions until 1972.

Don Bosco write that ‘an unchanging set of regulation’ should, by way of a practical complement, accompany the ‘general articles’ of the Constitutions and other ‘exhortations’ to help with their ‘interpretation in practice.’ The General Chapter had been ‘studious and diligent’ to this end, both in its preparation and celebration, ‘drawing practical applications from the “systematic articles of the Constitutions” for the various roles of the sacred ministry and material administration of our public and private matters.’¹³ The deliberations were divided into groups with appendices: the third group and a further subsection to it on *Teatrino*. The groups brought together all the material dealt with during the work of the Chapter: *Study, Common life, Morality, Economy, Regulations for the Provinces*.

Ecclesiastical studies, essentially theological studies in preparation for the priesthood and the ministry of confession, belonged to the Catechist General. Secular studies, classics and philosophy, were the School Councillor’s concern. First year philosophy generally coincided with the novitiate year.¹⁴ ‘With regard to admitting people to the theology degree’ the Chapter decided that ‘it seems to be appropriate, both to silence those who say we study little and because the degree also serves as a recognition for doing other subjects.’¹⁵ With regard to theology studies, it began from the implicit assumption that there was no study centre for this, and that the time dedicated to classes could be far less than in a normal seminary course. The best achievable ideal was that in the various houses, men preparing for Holy Order – over three or four years – would have ‘no less than 5 hours of class time a week,’ allowing also that they could be ‘admitted to Orders’ before completing the theology course,’ with the obligation of ‘completing studies afterwards.’¹⁶ It was logical that not all of this would be included in the official *Deliberations*. It was reduced to a few lines in ‘Chapter 1. *Studies for Salesians*. Priests and clerics of the Pious Salesian Society will regulate their studies according to Chapter 12 of our Constitutions, and in accordance with the internal Regulations for houses.’¹⁷ What the *Regulations for the houses* prescribed for the Catechist was sufficient for this: ‘He will look after the clerics carrying out some role in the house, seeing that they learn the sacred ceremonies and attend to the study of theology.’¹⁸ At the afternoon session on Thursday 6 September dedicated to discussion of the 5th Commission’s *Sacred studies and preaching*, it was established that priests prepare ‘a triduum for the Forty Hours, a series of meditations and instructions for a triduum and a Retreat series’ all in writing. Lists of authors to draw from were also provided, different ones for meditations, instruction, the Forty Hours.¹⁹ The *Deliberations* ignored this part of the discussion, which was taken up again and became part of the 1880 Chapter, then introduced into those *Deliberations* promulgated in 1882.²⁰

At least partial reference to the studies of Salesian clerics prior to theology was made in an article in Chapter 2, *Studies for pupils*: ‘During the Sacred Pedagogy class established for all our clerics in first year philosophy, the rules to be followed by teachers and assistants will often be read and explained.’²¹ The lengthy discussion by Chapter members on the introduction of Christian

13 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 3–4, OE XXIX 379–380.

14 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 16, 18.

15 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 18.

16 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 10.

17 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, p. 15, OE XXIX 391.

18 *Regolamento per le case...*, p. 27, OE XXIX 123.

19 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 11–12.

20 Cf. Chap. 29, § 2.

21 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, p. 16, OE XXIX 392; cf. G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 30.

authors into classical formation was translated by the *Deliberations* into a rather bloodless article: 'A way will be studied for introducing Christian classics into our houses. In all lower and upper secondary classes there will be at least one lesson a week on a text by those authors, and it will be examination material.'²²

The second group on *Common life* was introduced by a simple theological reference, the *cor unum et anima una* of the early Christians.²³ There was a mixed bag of prescriptions brought together here, which Don Bosco wanted to identify with equality in use of material items: administration of goods. Clothing and linen, food and bedroom. Books, health and associated matters, hospitality, invitations, dinners, customs, change of personnel, respect for superiors.²⁴

The *Morality* group in reference especially to sexual matters reflected the content of lengthy Chapter discussions, including regulating *Teatrino*. Particularly emphasised was the severe prohibition on 'particular friendships be they with confreres or young students' and absolute discretion in dealing with pupils (Chap. 1 *Morality among Salesian confreres*). It insisted on temperance, human caution and, at length, on religious resources: the practices of piety and the '*rendiconto*' or friendly talk with the superior (Chap. 2), 'assistance' to safeguard morality among the pupils (Chap. 3), 'religious customs' (Chap. 4).²⁵

Chapter members spent time on these at the session on 6 September, passing the chapter prepared by Don Bosco with just a few modifications and additions. His were 'Practices of piety not regulated by our Rules' such as 'the brief talk after evening prayer', 'reading at table, triduums, novenas, retreats, solemnities, the altar boys society, the St Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament sodalities and similar'. They were viewed above all for their ascetic value or to help with observance of the Constitutions and morality.²⁶ More complete and better structured was the chapter on *Practices of piety* which would reappear in a reduced version in the *Deliberations* of the Second General Chapter.²⁷

The principle behind observance of the detailed prescriptions on *Economy*, the fourth group, was theological and practical: 'Our life is supported by divine Providence which has never failed us, and we hope it never will. For our part, however, we must use the greatest diligence to make savings in what is not necessary, to lessen expenses and seek benefit from what we buy and sell.'²⁸

In the *Regulations for the Provincial*, the topic of the fifth group,²⁹ the lengthy ranged of normative articles here and there is enlivened by qualitative notations revealing Don Bosco's touch, and his personal experience as a regular visitor to the houses: 'By example he fosters exact

22 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, p. 19, OE XXIX 395; G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 41–43.

23 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 23–25, OE XXIX 399–401.

24 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 28–43, OE XXIX 404–419.

25 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 44–59, OE XXIX 420–437.

26 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali* I 13–15; cf. *Capitolo generale della Congregazione salesiana da convocarsi...*, pp. 17–18, OE XXVIII 329–330; *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 53–56, OE XXIX 429–432.

27 Cf. *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 48–50, OE XXIX 424–426; *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel Settembre 1880*. Turin, tip. salesiana 1882, pp. 51–53, OE XXXIII 59–61. On this topic, see the reports with related discussions by P. STELLA, *Le pratiche di pietà dei salesiani dalle origini della congregazione alla morte di don Bosco*; ID., *Il manuale "Pratiche di pietà" in uso nelle case salesiane (1916). Momenti della sua genesi*, in AA.VV., *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano*; F. DESRAMAUT, *Il capitolo delle "Pratiche di pietà" nelle Costituzioni salesiane*, nel vol. *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano, "Colloqui sulla vita salesiana"*, 1. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1969, pp. 13–32, 185–201, 57–93.

28 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, p. 62, OE XXIX 438.

29 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale...* September 1877, pp. 76–83, OE XXIX 452–459.

observance of the Constitutions and makes himself loved rather than feared.' 'He is a father, a friend who visits to help and advise his confreres and deal with the rectors about matters that need to be provided or renewed for the good of the houses.' 'After receiving the person *rendiconto* of the Rector, and information on all the confreres of the house, he will listen kindly to the moral and material needs of the members.' 'The Provincial will use the greatest prudence and charity in his visit in order not to compromise or diminish the authority of the Rector or other Superiors.'³⁰

The *Appendices* included the *Regulations for Rectors*, the *Regulations for General Chapters*, rules for the *Monographs* (Chronicles) and the *Wardrobe*, *Various Associations* or groups, the *Salesian Cooperators* and finally *The Sisters*.

Among the Rector's tasks we can highlight in particular the last one indicated, bound up with related instructions on the Monographs or Chronicles: 'He will see that the chronicler writes up the chronicle for the colleges and edifying letters.'³¹ A chronicler was established 'for each house of the Congregation,'³² but the Chapter discussion on this had been much more developed, distinguishing between the 'Monograph for each college and one for the Congregation.' The 'matter arose *per accidens*,' the Minutes record 'and took up much of the conference,' demonstrating the great interest of Chapter members in remembering the past as advice and a rule for the future. Everyone admitted that too great a workload had made it impossible up till now, but they were invited to put 'a real effort into it' as also into writing up the lives of deceased confreres.³³ One note is interesting: 'Also to be included in the Monograph: where something was done and failed; history must be faithful but it must also be advice for future occasions.'³⁴

The rules dedicated to *Various Associations* and the *Salesian Cooperators* kep to the Chapter discussions.³⁵ Before 'proposing, supporting and even more so making known' the various Salesian Associations, a rule was to be followed which was very respectful of similar Church groups: 'The Pious Associations, Confraternities, Sodalities already existing in places where we open houses, are always to be encouraged, respected and promoted by us, lending a hand to make them flourish; any bias on our part in their regard is to be avoided.'³⁶ Most space was then devoted to the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators.³⁷

We have already highlighted the extraordinary importance of article 11, the last in the documents in the fifth appendix *On the Sisters*.³⁸

2. The unexpected conclusion to the assignment with the Concettini

Don Bosco's role as Visitor *in spiritualibus* of the Concettini came to an end over the weeks of the General Chapter, not without a spot of drama.

Whether or not he received Don Bosco's memorandum addressed in June to the Pope, who could not be accessed, or more probably was independent of this, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni (1816–92) communicated with Don Bosco on 20 June, indicating that the Holy Father had appointed Cardinal Lorenzo Randi (1812–87), the Prefect of economy for Propaganda

30 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, pp. 77, 81–83, OE XXIX 453, 457–459.

31 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, p. 86, OE XXIX 462.

32 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, p. 89, OE XXIX 465.

33 Fourteenth session, 13 September, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* II 177–184.

34 G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* II 184.

35 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, pp. 91–93, OE XXIX 467–469.

36 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, p. 91, OE XXIX 467.

37 *Deliberazioni del capitolo generale*... September 1877, pp. 91–93, OE XXIX 467–469; cf. Chap. 22, §§ 2 and 5.

38 Cf. Chap. 20, § 8.

Fide 'to establish an examination on agreements to be reached in the individual houses' between the two Visitors.³⁹ The final act in this Roman drama was an epistolary duel between the Cardinal and Don Bosco. The former, on 20 July, informed him that he had read the June memorandum, had spoken with Mons. Fiorani, and confirmed that validity of what had been established by the Sacred Congregation's Decree on 6 February on the role of the two Visitors. Nevertheless, since the details to be followed by the Visitor *in spiritualibus* had not been clearly defined, he was asking Don Bosco to explain what he thought about it and any further observations he intended to make.⁴⁰

Don Bosco was extremely busy with the Argentine pilgrims, and was then in France and Liguria. He was exhausted and unwell in the second half of July, so was unable to reply. By letter on 29 July, the Cardinal insisted on a reply and stated that he had not been nor was he still now 'opposed to recognising' Don Bosco's wish 'to give the Apostolic Visit broader room to operate,' if anything by modifying 'the 6 February Decree,' also by varying the terms, insofar as the importance of the desired outcome requires it.' Finally, he stressed the need to send a priest to Rome to replace Father Scappini who was absent, or to see that he quickly returned.⁴¹

In his reply on 7 August, after noting the anomaly of the double set of Visitors, two heads for one body, Don Bosco once more proposed a single administration for the Institute, obviously Salesian. An alternative could be to adopt 'another measure.' 'Entrust the former administration of the Concettini to His Excellency, the *Commendatore* of the Holy Spirit [hospital] while the Salesians, as chaplains, could look after just the spiritual side of things – catechism, preaching, hearing confessions, and celebrating Mass for the Institute. 'But in this case,' he stressed, 'the Salesians will not have any material or moral responsibility: they would live separately from the Concettini and would go to them only for what concerned their spiritual duties.'⁴²

Mistrust in the ability of the Concettini to self-govern themselves remained – in him, Fiorani and Randi. This totally ignored Luigi Monti's work. He had opened a new era in the Institute's life and the progress it had made, confirmed by an historic audience granted the Brothers by Pius IX on 15 July.⁴³

In his August letter, Cardinal Randi, in agreement with the Pope, conceded the idea of a single Visitor, obviously Don Bosco or one of his representatives, 'holding firm' however, 'to the Rule and distinct existence of the Institute and the continuation of the service the Brothers give to the Holy Spirit Hospital and other establishments.' He sent Don Bosco to Rome 'to negotiate and conclude the matter under discussion,' emphasising the urgent need for a priest at the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ It was a misunderstanding. Don Bosco, who was even more physically and mentally removed from the real course of events, returned to thinking that had inspired him throughout the entire episode, forcing the interpretation of the papal Rescript of 14 November 1876 which, on the basis of a letter from Mons. Fiorani on 5 January, he believed was also a view shared by the other Visitor. The idea of a single, Salesian Visitor was inseparable from his plan to aggregate the Concettini Institute to his Society. 'I simply wanted to say' he declared openly 'that if we want to take a stable step forward, the Concettini need to be aggregated to an Institute recognised and approved by the Holy See. The Concettini can retain their habit, name, purpose and all their Rules needed to achieve it. This was always my way of seeing things to ensure a secure existence that does not deviate from observance of their Constitutions. This seems to me to be the opinion of the Rescript of the 17th [14th?] November 1876,' or rather, the interpretation he gave it through the additional articles. In

39 *Documenti* XVIII 156.

40 *Documenti* XVIII 179–180.

41 *Documenti* XVIII 199.

42 To Card. L. Randi, 7 August 1877, E III 205–206.

43 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, pp. 559–561.

44 *Documenti* XVIII 201–202.

the case where the desire was ‘to hold firm to the Rule and distinct existence of the Institute and the continuation of service in current establishments’ as Cardinal Randi had written in his 14 August letter, he maintained that a unified spiritual and temporal administration was inseparable from that, with the Salesians dedicated exclusively to spiritual assistance for the Concettini as he has proposed in his 7 August letter.⁴⁵

This dialogue simply highlighted the irreconcilability of the two positions: Don Bosco’s was not necessarily the most credible, solid or convincing of the two. Moreover, total silence had not extended over the fate of the Congregation of Hospitaller Brothers of the Immaculate Conception. Brother Monti was no babe in arms. On 30 August, he sent a petition to Pius IX, supported by Bros Girolamo Pezzini and Domenico Manetti, asking him ‘to preserve the Institute as it is, putting it in the same situation as nuns who have a good confessor, which they had been given by Our Blessed Lady [Jesuit Fr Biolchini] while Don Bosco was not looking after them [over summer].’⁴⁶ On 9 September, Fr Scappini told Monti he would be returning to Rome on the 17th of that month. Monti consulted Fiorani who replied some days later, certainly not of his own initiative: ‘Write to Fr Scappini immediately to delay coming until we receive new instructions, since the Holy Father has already given them.’ Fr Scappini sent the letter to Don Bosco who passed it on to Cardinal Randi asking for an explanation.⁴⁷ Communication of the final solution was now inevitable.

On 1 October, in agreement with Pius IX, Cardinal Randi noted Don Bosco’s firm position, and notified him that he was relieved of his role as Visitor. ‘The Holy Father,’ he wrote ‘with the intention of preserving the Institute as it is, has, after mature reflection, resolved to entrust its reform temporarily to clergy of this capital, dependent on the Eminent Vicar to whom he has given the relevant assignment.’ He thanked Don Bosco for having ‘acted prudently in suspending the departure’ from Turin of Fr Scappini, ‘given the current state of things’ and expressed his ‘regret’ for the missing ‘component which I gave you an inkling of in my recent letter.’⁴⁸

The principle of a single Visitor had been accepted, and consequently Mons. Fiorani, too, was relieved of his assignment. On 9 November 1877, Cardinal Simeoni told Luigi Monti of the appointment *ad triennium* of Mons. Ambrogio Turricea as Apostolic Visitor, replacing Mons. Fiorani and Don Bosco. He had exclusive authority over the Institute in direct dependence on the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The Superior General’s jurisdiction was still suspended. The latter, however, still Monti, regained it by delegation from the Visitor, who was so authoritative that he emptied Monti’s role of any real content.

Turricea chose the house in Piazza Mastai as his residence. A year later, following numerous interventions on behalf of the Brothers, coming from various sides, Ferrieri was given the task of definitively freeing the Institute from all external authority. On 21 November 1878, Turricea presented his resignation to the Pope. The Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars became President, in reality guarantor of the Institute, and Luigi Monti was confirmed as Superior General. Following this, after constant pressure, on 18 January 1879, Mons. Turricea and his nephew left the building in Piazza Mastai, and the following day, Monti took up residence there with the novices.⁴⁹

According to Blessed Luigi Monti’s biography, the Institute gained three great advantages from Turricea: ‘It was finally freed of the protection of the *Commendatore* of the Holy Spirit, from the persistent interference of chaplains and the so-called Apostolic Auditor’ and, more radically, from

45 To Card. L. Randi, 18 August 1877, E III 209–210.

46 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, p. 566.

47 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. I, p. 569.

48 Letter of 1st October 1877, MB XIII 916–917.

49 Cf. E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. II, pp. 12–13.

the idea of dependence on the Salesian Society.⁵⁰ His resignation had broken the last chains, and the ship could head out to sea with its captain.

With the Capuchins out of the picture, the Institute's Constitutions needed to be revised, firstly undoing the many legal and spiritual ties with a dissimilar Religious Order and with the *Commendatore* of the Holy Spirit. On 26 April 1880, Luigi Monti, going back over the past, wrote in his *Diary*: 'To be free, how many vicissitudes the Institute has had to endure! Twenty years with the Capuchins, nine months with Don Bosco who wanted a merger with the Salesians, just as the Capuchins wanted to make us their Tertiaries, another nine months with Mons. Turricea who made himself an absolute owner as Visitor, so we had to fight with him, Cardinal Randi and Cardinal Nina, Secretary of State.'⁵¹ Just the same, Jesuit Fr Angelini, spiritual director of the Concettini, was able to tell Cardinal Ferrieri of this testimony of theirs on the position of their Superior with regard to Don Bosco: 'With the Concettini, Father Monti was always submissive. He had the greatest respect for Don Bosco and reached complete agreement with his representative, Fr Scappini.'⁵² Traces of Don Bosco's influence can probably be seen in the 1881 edition of the Constitutions: for example, being 'of one heart and mind with the Superior' and adding 'education of orphans' as the second purpose of the Institute.

On 4 November 1877, Cardinal Bilio wrote to Don Bosco in a way that was less than encouraging, and not completely well-founded. Don Bosco had asked him to speak to the Pope about the imminent missionary expedition and his hope for a little financial aid. Bilio said: 'I am sorry to have to tell you that the Holy Father does not seem to me to be as well disposed as last year. The reasons for this, unless I have misunderstood, are principally two: 1. The Concettini affair, 2. The fact that you take on too many things at once. I tried to disabuse the Pope of any unfavourable impressions of you. I do not know if I succeeded, but it is certain that a trip to Rome for you at the moment would be very helpful, if not even essential.'⁵³ Don Bosco did go to Rome, but was given no opportunity to meet the Pope.

The time for playing games was over, but not entirely, since the resolute negotiator wanted to go back over the whole business with his Cardinal friend who had first intimated the delicate papal mandate a year earlier. Therefore he asked Fr Berto to send him a series of documents, since all he had was a copy of the 6 February Brief.⁵⁴ In his letter to Cardinal Bilio on 29 November, he defended his approach, simply recalling the various stages of the affair within the coordinates he had never shifted away from.⁵⁵ In reality, Don Bosco had been asked for less than his original plan and had never abandoned what he had proposed at the end, as an alternative, in his letter of 7 August to Cardinal Randi: that what was needed was a single Visitor *in spiritualibus*, a collaborator in the religious reform of an Institute with its own Superior. By fully exercising his authority, this Superior could work to achieve real autonomy and new vitality.

It had been thought that Don Bosco was the expert in this, because he was involved in regulating, establishing, empowering his own Congregation: novitiate, religious obedience combined with active life and piety working together. He did not succeed with it, struggling to realistically measure up to the evolving intentions of the Pope and other Romens, and the development of the Concettini situation. They (Concettini) did struggle positively to grow, thanks to the energetic reforming efforts of Monti, and the healthier side of the Institute. It would have been a propitious occasion for a more qualified and less costly involvement of physical energies and

50 E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. II, pp. 13–14.

51 Cited by E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. II, p. 41.

52 Cited by E. PERNIOLA, *Luigi Monti fondatore...*, vol. II, p. 34.

53 *Documenti* XVIII 362; MB XIII 311.

54 To Fr G. Berto, from Sampierdarena 15 November 1877, E III 238.

55 E III 242–244.

financial burdens in the Roman world than what it took in the 1880s to build the Church of the Sacred Heart in stone. Among other things, an action of the kind would have favoured a more positive encounter with the Curia, and in particular with an important personality for the events that followed for himself and the Salesian Society – Cardinal Innocenzo Ferrieri, a great admirer and supporter of the Concettini. On the other hand, busy with a thousand things, Don Bosco did not seem to have availed himself of the advice of old and new supporters, Cardinals Patrizi, Berardi, Bilio, Di Pietro, Morichini, or Fr Giuseppe Oreglia, the Jesuits and yet others who could have kept him better informed of the tangled knot of problems gathered around the Concettini case. Perhaps he did not find confirmation of his ideas in them: especially from Cardinal Randi and the very trustworthy Cardinal Nina.

3. Tensions and hopes as a new pontificate begins (December 1877–March 1878)

Two different and prudent interpretations of ‘charity and humility’ clashed in Don Bosco’s invitation to dialogue on 22 November 1877 and Archbishop Gastaldi’s reply on the 23rd.⁵⁶ The Archbishop could not tolerate what Don Bosco was proposing as a possibility, that is, to respond publicly to what Gastaldi had spread in print on 15 October in his letter *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*.

Don Bosco repeated the invitation ‘to present himself to his Archbishop in humility and charity.’ For the Archbishop, just as he had ‘gladly agreed to erect the Salesian Congregation,’ so he was ‘ready to cooperate in maintaining and spreading it,’ asking only that ‘the Archbishop’s authority and the good of his Diocese be maintained.’ However, ‘should you have any item printed or lithographed or produced by other means which is *unfavourable* to the current Archbishop of Turin, or should you write any letter in your own or through someone else’s hand unfavourable to this Archbishop, and present it to any individual except the Supreme Pontiff and their Eminences, the cardinal members of the Sacred Congregations,’ from that moment ‘the faculty to hear sacramental confessions and absolve’ for Don Bosco would cease forthwith, that is, *ipso facto*.⁵⁷

There were even more serious and restrictive conditions attached to this suspension in a further letter on 1 December, ‘in addition to and correcting’ what was written in the earlier letter. ‘I am telling you,’ Gastaldi explained ‘that if you present or have presented any written item *unfavourable to the current Archbishop of Turin*, be it in your own hand or through others, printed, lithographed or photographed and sent to any individual except the Supreme Pontiff, the Cardinal Secretary of State, the Cardinal Prefects of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and the Council, from that instant I declare that *in such a case* you cease to have the faculty of absolving sacramentally, and therefore of hearing confessions in this Archdiocese. It ceases *ipso facto* without need for any other declaration. As I have stated, it has already ceased should you have ever done this, in view of which it is my intention to revoke the above–mentioned faculty.’⁵⁸

It was in this oppressive atmosphere of repressive prevention that, a few days later, a three page printed item came out, the *Letter on the Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*, addressed to a ‘Vicar’ – such was the pseudonym – who had sent the Archbishop’s printed letter (with the same title) of 28 February 1877 to the anonymous author. Beneath the title and off to the right, ‘a little bit of light’ was printed. It sought to be a critical analysis of the merits advanced by the Archbishop, with ‘things to be rectified and things to adjust.’ It was signed by ‘A past pupil of the Oratory who is honoured to say he is a Salesian Cooperator.’ The author showed he was well–informed about the facts and the problems. The description was

56 Cf. Chap. 25, conclusion of § 6.

57 Letter of 25 November 1877, in MB XIII 371.

58 Letter found in MB XIII 371–372.

precise but would become known only in 1894 from the famous statement on his 'libellous items' by Fr Giovanni Turchi, made to the Congregation of Rites. It was Fr Giovanni Battista Anfossi, not only a pupil of the Oratory but a member of the group that had joined the Society of St Francis de Sales on 19 December 1859, taking first vows on 14 May 1862, and who then left of his own free will in July 1864. In the P.S. he thanked the 'Vicar' for also sending the booklet which came out on 15 October, assuring him: 'As soon as possible I will make a response to it.'⁵⁹

Don Bosco immediately dissociated himself from it with a letter reserved for the Archbishop on 9 December 1877. He gave precise assurances: "1. I did not know and still do not know who wrote it or disseminated it. 2. I had no part in it, neither the printing, nor by my own hand, nor lithograph. It was not written by me or by others dependent on me. 3. I very much regret and reject the indecorous manner with which it speaks of Your Grace. You can be assured you have no enemies among the Salesians, just poor individuals who do what they can for the good of this diocese despite often being hindered by the difficulties opposing them.'⁶⁰

The following day he received a letter of reply from the pro-secretary, Fr Maffei, with the following injunction from the Archbishop: 'You are strictly obliged to publish a vigorous protest in *L'Unità Cattolica* or the *Emporio*, and as soon as possible, signed by yourself and in which your name and that of the entire Salesian Congregation *you condemn and reject* what was written in that infamous piece of libel, in the diocese and beyond it.'⁶¹

Don Bosco was looking ahead. He replied immediately, making it clear that he would not allow himself to be drawn into an indiscriminate condemnation of the contents of the printed item. 'Therefore,' he asked the Archbishop 'be kind enough to tell me, other than its indecorous manner, which things I am *strictly obliged to respect and condemn*. I repeat once again that I had no part whatsoever in the notorious printed item, and that neither I nor the Salesian Congregation intend to accept any responsibility for it. I would very much like to avoid giving new publicity that would seem to be a provocation for further printed material. Nevertheless, I will obey and print what you tell me is in error and thus to be rejected and condemned. I also assure you that I have never had, nor do I now have any animosity towards you.'⁶²

Before leaving for Rome, Don Bosco wrote to the peace mediator, Count Cesare Trabucco di Castagnetto, clarifying the reasons for his journey: 'Finding myself the head of a Congregation denied sacred ordinations for some and faculties for preaching, hearing confessions and even celebrating Mass for others, of necessity I must go to the legitimate and absolute Superior to seek instruction and advice.' But he wanted the Count to assure the Archbishop that he was going to Rome not 'to accuse, but only to respond to complaints that His Grace has decided to present to the august person of His Holiness.'⁶³

On 18 December, he left for Rome where he arrived on 22 December and remained there for more than three months. The year ended with a lengthy memorandum on the missions sent to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, Alessandro Franchi.⁶⁴ Don Bosco was unable to see the venerable old Pius XI, who was in poor health and whose decline was irreversible. But Don Bosco did not leave the city, in the hope of seeing him or, after his death, of establishing initial relations with the new Pope, Leo XIII.

59 Tip. Camilla e Bertolero, text in *Documenti* XVIII 405–407.

60 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 9 December 1877, E III 249.

61 Letter of 10 December 1877, in MB XIII 379.

62 Letter of 12 December 1877, E III 250.

63 Letter of 17 December 1877, E III 251–252.

64 Letter from Rome, 31 December 1877, E III 256–261.

From Rome, on Christmas Day, he thanked a past pupil of the Oratory, Fr Felice Reviglio, parish priest of St Augustine's in Turin, who at a meeting of parish priests in the city, held in protest at the letter 'of a past pupil of the Oratory', had defended Don Bosco: 'You have spoken on behalf of your papa and I thank you for that.'⁶⁵ He came back to the topic with Fr Rua: 'It is a trial the Lord is putting our poor Congregation through. He will help us get through it as he has in so many other matters. Leave it to me to think about it. Silence, prayer, and strict observance of our rules.' He then gave him instructions that the January edition of the *Salesian Bulletin* should have a supplement with a statement deploring the anonymous letter. He then wanted Fr Cagliero to go to Canons Nasi and Pelletta to warn them against being involved in brazen accusations: 'You could find yourself in no little embarrassment should they have to prove what has been written in Rome: *The anonymous sheet is attributed to D. Bosco.*'⁶⁶ On the question of gestures of solidarity with the Archbishop, he wrote to Fr Rua again on 3 January: 'Tell me the day the Cathedral canons met, then the parish priests, then the canons again, then all the clergy. Our silence and prayers will achieve what is for the greater glory of God. However, I have not been inactive.'⁶⁷

But there were also 'freelance' wreckers around. Information and news on what Turin thoughts of the Archbishop was flowing between Turin and Rome, or rather, what those in opposition to him thought, collecting and sowing rumours and judgements, among other things on the 'exaggerated liberalism' of the Ecclesiastical Superior, sending along Turin-based newspapers, inviting people to write and denounce abuses.⁶⁸ Fr Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, was the point of reference.

The main players in this were two manipulating right wing past pupils of the Oratory, the already noted Fr Giovanni Battista Anfossi, and Fr Giovanni Turchi, temporarily resident in Rome at the time with occasional duties as a second secretary for Don Bosco, as Don Bosco told Fr Rua on 3 January: 'A new secretary has been added.'⁶⁹ In a long letter to Fr Berto on 10 February, Fr Anfossi wrote: 'I have received a letter from Fr Turchi ... It would not be out of place to have an article written by the elegant and pleasant pen of Fr Turchi.' And in the conclusion: 'Greet Fr Turchi for me; let him read this letter. Tell him I anxiously await his publication.'⁷⁰ 'New letters from Turin' writes the one collecting all the documents, 'bring news on Archbishop Gastaldi to Rome' and Anfossi told Turchi in another letter on 13 February: 'Your article in *L'Unità* has cheered up good people.'⁷¹

On 7 January 1878, Don Bosco had replied with a very long letter to another very brief one on 21 December 1877 from Cardinal Ferrieri, with whom he had had an audience. In the letter, the Cardinal told him he had received dossiers relating to disputes with the Archbishop, and recommended: 'This Sacred Congregation is keenly interested in you prudently preventing all your members and Cooperators of the Salesian Congregation dependent on you, even indirectly, from printing or publishing writings of any kind relating to the disputes which have arisen with the Most Rev. Archbishop of Turin.'⁷² Don Bosco thanked him for the kind recommendation and assured him: 'Neither presently nor in the past, neither by me nor by any of my dependants has anything been published that in any way could only be interpreted as unfavourable to our Most Revered Ordinary

65 To Fr F. Reviglio, Christmas 1877, E III 253.

66 To Fr M. Rua, from Rome 27 December 1877, E III 254.

67 Letter of 3 January 1878, E III 263.

68 Accusations of tendency to liberalism against Gastaldi had already arrived in Rome on several occasions in 1870, 1871, 1875, and the archbishop had been repeatedly obliged to justify himself with the Vatican authorities: cf. G. MARTINA, *Pio IX (1867–1878)*..., p. 265, n. 62.

69 E III 263.

70 *Documenti* XIX 71–73. The first *Strenna pel Clero... scritta da "un Cappellano"* [Turchi] was dated "Turin, February 1878".

71 *Documenti* XIX 74–76.

72 *Documenti* XVIII 430.

the Archbishop ... Would to God that behaviour of this kind had been maintained by our beloved Archbishop!

Don Bosco then outlined disputes over 1877 up till the 'two threatening letters' of 25 November and 1 December. He spoke of the two meetings, one of canons and two of parish priests, attributing authorship of the incriminating pages to the Salesians 'without any foundation at all' and the most 'mischievous interpretations' newspapers had put on them. He firmly stated that he did not want to do what the Archbishop was asking, that is, to declare the 'falsity' of matters contained in the incriminating *Letter on the Archbishop*. 'I cannot and do not want to lies, because it presents the truth' he said resolutely. He concluded with five sets of complaints about the Archbishop's interventions affecting individual Salesians and the Congregation, causing great spiritual, moral and material harm.⁷³

Victor Emmanuel died, after a brief but sudden illness, on 9 January. Don Bosco wrote to Count Cays about it,⁷⁴ and on 20 January, in a memorandum he sent to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Simeoni.⁷⁵ He also soon set about finding a way to obtain the privileges, entrusting himself on 11 January to the good offices of Dominican Fr Tosa, Consultor for the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He sent him a copy of the *Rescript* with which Leo XIII had granted the Oblates of the Virgin Mary *per communicationem*, the privileges of the Redemptorists. 'Oh, if only these could be obtained for us too! You would be forever our outstanding benefactor.' It was a utopian wish under the circumstances. He concluded with a serious description of the situation in Turin: 'Meanwhile, each day brings more confusion. New matters in the newspapers, priests suspended, agitation in Turin. Do what you can to prevent these evils.'⁷⁶ He referred to 'orders' given in Turin which were 'onerous' for 'religious bodies' and to an exceptional degree for the Salesian Congregation. Since Ferrieri was still ill, he wrote of these matters to the Secretary of the Congregation, Mons. Bianchi. He believed he had found two negative references to the Salesians in the recent pastoral letter on 12 January *On Seminaries*: the reference to moral violence applied to young men who sought a religious vocation, and the omission of Salesian colleges in a list of colleges recommended as encouraging clerical vocations.⁷⁷ He wrote to Fr Rua the following day: 'Cardinal Ferrieri has returned to work, and I hope to leave Rome halfway through the month with matters fixed up, at least *hic et nunc*.'⁷⁸

The *Declaration* on non-involvement with the anti-Gastaldi *Letter* appeared on the final page of a section added to the normal 8 page *Salesian Bulletin*, but it only appeared in a certain number of copies, probably those destined for Turin and surrounds. But *in cauda venenum*. To Don Bosco's faultless text,⁷⁹ the editor, Fr Bonetti, had added something of his own initiative: 'For our part, we thank the good will of the unknown author who decided to come to our defence in the face of the facts, spoken and in print, that have been circulating for some time to the disadvantage of his benefactor. But while it saddens us that the sentiments of his gratitude have been thus provoked, we strongly disapprove of his methods.'⁸⁰

Perhaps this was another reason why Don Bosco reminded him from Rome in February to be calm and prudent: 'Stop fighting, and write pacific words as I have recommended to you so many times.'⁸¹ Bonetti also published an article in the *Salesian Bulletin* on *The Salesian Congregation*

73 To Card. I. Ferrieri, 7 January 1878, E III 264–266.

74 Letter of 12 January 1878, E III 269–270.

75 E III 274–276.

76 Letter of 11 January 1878, E III 268.

77 Letter of 4 February 1877, E III 289–291; cf. L. GASTALDI, *Lettere pastorali...*, pp. 405–406.

78 Letter of 5 February 1878, E III 291.

79 Cf. MB XIII 384–385.

80 Cf. BS 2 (1878) n. 1, January, p. 12.

81 Letter of 14 February 1878, E III 296.

and clerical vocations in which he highlighted the number of priestly vocations from the Oratory for the dioceses, especially Turin Archdiocese.⁸² For his part, the Archbishop remained firmly convinced that the libel or slander was a Salesian initiative, as he stated decisively in his *Relatio secunda status archidioecesis Taurinensis* presented to Rome on his *ad limina* visit on 18 March 1878: 'This Congregation, towards the end of November 1877, saw to the printing of an infamous item of slander against the Archbishop, disseminated throughout the diocese of Turin and also in Rome and other dioceses.'⁸³

However, the Roman ecclesiastical world had not been the same as before for some weeks. Pius IX had died on 7 February. On 12 February, Fr Berto told Turin: 'We entered St Peter's to visit the Holy Father's body. We were able to kiss his feet and touch various items to him. I went with D. Bosco.' The same day, Don Bosco received a letter from Archbishop Pietro Lasagni, Secretary of the Sacred College, with the Brief thanks to which, on 29 January, the Pope had appointed *Cavaliere* Giovanni Frisetti and *Ing* (Engineer) Emanuele Campanella as *Commendatori* (*Commanders*) of St Gregory the Great, on presentation by the founder of the Salesian Society.⁸⁴ On 20 February, Pope Leo XIII was elected by the Conclave. Don Bosco's first contact with him was through a number of petitions and a memorandum,⁸⁵ then personally on 16 March 1878, thanks to an historic audience.⁸⁶ He also met with the new Secretary of State, Cardinal Alessandro Franchi.⁸⁷

Cardinal Gioacchino Pecci's arrival on the papal throne could have created some new problems both for Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi. If the former had lost his most valuable and valid support, the latter too, of Rosminian leanings, could have found more than a few difficulties in the ascent of a convinced Thomist and restorer of a renewed Scholasticism to the papacy. In concrete, the more penalised of the two was Don Bosco, more so because of unforeseen anomalous events in Turin – the dissemination of anti-Gastaldi material from February 1878 to March 1879, and again in May 1879, the beginning of Fr Bonetti's clashes with the parish priest of the *Duomo* (Cathedral) in Chieri. Then in June the 'suspension from hearing confessions' imposed on Bonetti by the Archbishop.⁸⁸ As Superior of the Congregation, Don Bosco willingly allowed himself to be involved, though he worked strenuously to convince people he had nothing to do with the slander. But for the moment, none of that was on the horizon.

For the moment, the transition from one Pope to another went ahead tranquilly. *L'Unità Cattolica*, which was sympathetic to Don Bosco and not enthusiastically close to Gastaldi, gave equal positive emphasis to events they were both interested in. It ran in its entirety the fine and noble *Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop of Turin announcing the passing of King Victor Emmanuel II* to eternity.⁸⁹ It gave plenty of information on Don Bosco's presence at the first Salesian Cooperators Conference in Rome at Tor de' Specchi on 29 January.⁹⁰ It carried most of the 'tender and eloquent' *Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop of Turin on the death of the Holy Father, Pius IX* and the prayers ordered in the parishes for the deceased Pontiff, and the election of his successor.⁹¹ It gave great coverage to the very special treatment reserved for Don Bosco at the

82 BS 2 (1878) n. 2, February, pp. 4–5.

83 *Relatio secunda status archidioecesis Taurinensis*, p. 19, cited by G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815–1883)*, Vol. II..., p. 277, n. 81.

84 *Documenti* XIX 73–74; cf. sulle *Ultime ore di Pio IX*, BS 2 (1878) no. 3, March, pp. 7–10.

85 E III 314, 317–318, 318–319, 321, 323.

86 Cf. letter and report on audience to the Cardinal Protector L. Oreglia, 25 March 1878, E III 325–327, 327–332.

87 Letter o 8 March 1878, E III 313–314; cf. MB XIII 501.

88 Cf. 28, § 5.

89 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 13, Tuesday 15 January 1878, p. 50.

90 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 30, Sunday 3 February 1878, p. 118.

91 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 39, Thursday 14 February 1878, p. 154.

papal audience on 23 February, granted to a 'crowd of devout and illustrious individuals.' On the same page it announced *The funeral Mass for Pius IX in the Metropolitan Cathedral in Turin*, adding: 'The Archbishop of Turin will deliver the funeral eulogy.' 'We will speak of this in a coming issue' but it seems this did not eventuate.⁹² Then on 9 March, under the headline *The Holy Father and the Archbishop of Turin*, it reported that he 'was the only bishop in all of upper Italy who, on 3 March, took part in the solemn ceremony of the coronation of the new Pope, Leo XIII, and was received in private audience by the Holy Father on the evening of the 5th inst.' The Pope had recommended 'with very special warmth' 'instruction and doctrine' for the clergy to be further explored by ongoing initiatives.⁹³ A 'special correspondent' on 18 March gave prominence to 'the special audience of almost an hour' given by the Pope on Saturday 16 March at 6.30 p.m. to a 'very active worker from Turin', meaning Don Bosco.⁹⁴

4. The preventive system as a response to social questions of education

In the days that followed the death of Pius IX, Don Bosco had occasion to meet the Minister for the Interior, Francesco Crispi (1818–1901), who had no difficulty guaranteeing that the forthcoming Conclave would find order, security, unconditional freedom in Rome. As part of their discussion was the possibility of finding a building complex in Rome for the establishment of a youth work. It was logical that they should move on to speaking about the youth situation, especially of those who had migrated to the capital in search of their fortune, the inevitable problems deriving from this, and the most appropriate supportive and educational solutions. In real terms, the situation posed the problem of young people at risk and of risk to others, and the proposal of the preventive system as a remedy, with its social and corrective dimensions more strongly emphasised. Moreover, Don Bosco had already introduced the matter in the address he gave in Rome in January 1878 at the first Cooperators Conference in the capital.⁹⁵ The Salesians did not yet have their own work in the city. But to the large crowd of listeners gathered at the monastery at Tor de' Specchi, with the Cardinal Vicar, Raffaele Monaco La Valletta and Cardinal Enea Sbarretti present, surrounded by archbishops and bishops, he was able to propose more collaboration in the fields of education and recovery. 'The work of the Salesians' he clarified 'aims at good morals, lessening the number of delinquents abandoned to themselves and in great danger of ending up filling the prisons. They instruct them, set them on the path to work, provide the means and, where necessary, also shelter, sparing nothing to prevent them from ruin, indeed, making good Christians and upright citizens out of the so that in due course they can earn their living ...' Among other things they were works that could only but 'be respected, even desired by any government and any side of politics.'⁹⁶

4.1 Memorandum for Francesco Crispi

In order to consolidate the relationship already begun, the day after Leo XIII's election, Don Bosco sent Crispi a memorandum on topics they had touched on verbally. It carried the same title as the pages in 1877, *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*. The content was different, however. The preventive system in this item was not considered for its pedagogical dimension but the two stages that come before it: giving youngsters 'at risk' concrete references and help in life, and seeing to providing assistance, meaning appropriate formative and educational institutions, private rather than public, that the State had a duty to finance. Naturally, Don Bosco did not intend

92 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 50, Wednesday 27 February, p. 199.

93 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 59, Saturday 9 March 1878, p. 234.

94 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 69, Thursday 21 March 1878, p. 275.

95 Cf. Chap. 22, § 6.

96 BS 2 (1878) no. 3, March, p. 12.

coming to the Minister only to offer him a project of moral and social benefit for youth, 'presenting the basis' he wrote 'on which one can regulate the preventive system applied to youth at risk in public streets or in houses and hospices of education.' He was probably even thinking of an entirely utopian operation which could favour his primary objective: for the government to give him a site to use – and possibly grants – for setting himself up in Rome with a youth work 'exclusively for poor boys at risk with minor disruption to government finances.'

He stated this in his letter of presentation, also listing some confiscated religious buildings that the government could have been able to make available to him for educational assistance to poor boys at risk.⁹⁷

Some weeks later, in a memorandum to the newly elected Leo XIII, as in the letter and memorandum to Crispi, he illustrated the situation of youth who were lost and wandering around Rome, and he could only but appeal for moral rather than material support.⁹⁸

In the new Government formed by Benedetto Cairoli, which took office on 24 March, Giuseppe Zanardelli was now Minister for the Interior. Don Bosco had met him on 6 August 1876 at Lanzo. In order to achieve his objectives, expressed or hidden, further ahead Don Bosco would declare to Zanardelli that he was ready to resume discussion on the preventive system and 'the possibility of providing for boys who are not yet perverse but only abandoned, and who are thus at risk in the various cities around Italy, especially Rome.' With this in mind, he had prepared 'a practical memorandum' for his predecessor 'which would not cost the Government much and would be easy to carry out.'⁹⁹

It is interesting to note that the two politicians found themselves on opposite sides in autumn 1878 when the Italian Parliament was discussing the attitude to adopt regarding internationalists, nihilists and socialists. Zanardelli agreed with the Prime Minister, Benedetto Cairoli, who stood for a repressive approach or rather, repression only where public order had been disrupted: 'Let the Government's authority be inexorable in repressing and not arbitrary in preventing.' The authoritarian Crispi sided with the preventive approach, meaning preventive repression: 'Political authority has the right to prevent, just as the judicial authority has the right to repress crimes.'¹⁰⁰

The two positions could highlight the ambiguity of the two statements, given the use of two adjectives which did not sit happily together in the pedagogical field. 'The repressive system' Don Bosco wrote, 'consists in making the law known to the subjects, and afterwards watching to discover the transgressors of these laws, and inflicting, where necessary, the punishment deserved.' It was the more liberal system but one adapted to adults.¹⁰¹ But the instant there was even fleeting reference to the pedagogical and political aspect, Don Bosco preferred to emphasise the social and institutional aspect as well as the educative and pastoral elements involved in the youth problem. He would claim this vigorously on two occasions in 1883, certainly reflecting the climate he found during his trip to France in February–May 1883, and reactions from the press in Piedmont and the rest of Italy.¹⁰²

97 Letter of 21 February 1878, E III 298–299.

98 Letter of March 1878, E III 317–318.

99 Letter of 23 July 1878, E III 366–367; cf. Former letter to Comm. G. B. Aluffi, secretary to the Minister for the Interior, 25 April, E III 335.

100 Cf. Addresses on 15 October and 5 December 1878 respectively, cited by F. CHABOD, *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896*. Bari, Laterza 1962, pp. 435, no. 1 and 436, no. 2.

101 GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù...*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 300.

102 Conference to Cooperators in Turin 31 May, the evening of the day he arrived back from France: BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, p. 104; and address to past pupils, the morning of his Name Day, 24 June: BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, pp. 127–128.

All we have of the memorandum to Crispi is a handwritten draft with plenty of corrections. Following a brief preliminary clarification on the distinction between the repressive and the preventive systems in society, he moved on to a social–moral diagnosis of ‘*children who can be called at risk*.’ Don Bosco’s social critique was certainly not that of a nascent positivist or Marxist sociology which took proper account of the economic, social and cultural structures underlying abandonment and youth delinquency. He indicated four categories of at risk and of risk youth: 1. Boys migrating from country areas ‘to other cities and towns in search of work,’ having little money, and when that was gone, if they were unemployed ‘they run the risk of becoming thieves and beginning a life that leads them to ruin.’ 2. Orphans lacking assistance – ‘a friendly hand, a kindly word’ – ‘abandoned to vagabondage and the company of delinquents.’ 3. ‘Those with parents who cannot or do not want to look after their children, so they push them out of the family and abandon them entirely.’ 4. ‘Vagabonds’ who are not yet delinquents, ‘who fall into the hands of public security’ but ‘could certainly be removed from prison and restored to civil society ... were they to be accepted at a hospice where they are instructed and prepared for work.’¹⁰³

As for *Provision for this*, the writer proposed typical institutions, but seen from a broader and more developed perspective, as evidenced by the terms used: 1. ‘Weekend recreational parks – parks, playgrounds, oratories, recreation areas, youth centres – where a wide variety of leisure activities went side by side with initiatives for literacy and moral and cultural formation at night, Sunday and catechism classes. 2. Identifying the unemployed and giving them work placement, providing assistance ‘at work during the week.’ 3. ‘Hospices and houses for preservation, with arts and trades and also agricultural schools’ for those ‘who are poor and abandoned, have nothing to clothe themselves with, nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep at night.’¹⁰⁴

Don Bosco also put forward proposals on *Government involvement*, which in typical liberal style envisaged that the State did not directly manage works. But according to Don Bosco, without ‘touching the principle of legal charity’ government would need to support them, provide settings, sites, buildings, equipment and financial aid to maintain shelters.¹⁰⁵ Obviously, in the concluding section which he called *Results*, Don Bosco referred to their quantity and quality: recovery of youth who had been in prison, prevention for boys at risk, enabling them for trades, arts, professions at every level.¹⁰⁶

We know of no response from either Crispi or Zanardelli. However, in the case that Crispi did receive Don Bosco’s memorandum, he certainly would not have been in a situation to reply. The letter bore the date 21 February, and it was over those days in Rome that the scandal broke concerning the Minister’s bigamy. This forced his resignation from an already precarious Ministry on 7 March.¹⁰⁷ Already on 22 February, *L’Unità Cattolica* had published an article on him that had come from a correspondent in Rome, and another on 2 March, five days before the entire Ministry resigned.¹⁰⁸

However, despite having no real impact on the two Ministers, the document confirms that to fully appreciate the potential of the preventive system, the pages in 1877 need to be strictly associated with the social discourse prior to and following them.

103 Cf. text in GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù...*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 301–302.

104 GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù...*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 302.

105 GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù...*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 303.

106 GIOVANNI (S.) BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù...*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985) 303–304.

107 On this, cf. Chap. 1, § 10.

108 Cf. “*L’Unità Cattolica*”, no. 46, 22 February 1878, p. 183; no. 53, Saturday 2 March 1878, p. 210.

4.2 The preventive system for families and educational institutions

A special extension of the possibility of using the preventive system was suggested by Fr Bonetti in the *Salesian Bulletin*. The original text, slightly modified, with headings replaced by brief words of introduction to each of the four points, was included in a chapter of the *History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*. Don Bosco certainly knew and approved of it and was in agreement with giving wider circulation and application to a text that had come out as a limited print run in booklet form which had little impact in Italy.

The *Bulletin* editor encouraged practice of the preventive system in all educational institutions and even in families. After recounting Don Bosco's original ploys in dealing with boys during the turbulent 1848 period, he explained them as being resources of the preventive system *ante litteram*.¹⁰⁹ He assured readers that Salesian houses 'flourish better and produce results, because that is where the system is better known and more exactly practised' and concluded: 'It would be desirable for it to be introduced into all Christian families, in all public and private institutes of education, male and female. Then there would be no delay in having a more moderate and pious youth, youth who would be the consolation of their families and a good support for civil society.'¹¹⁰

In the next instalment of the series, Fr Bonetti justified adoption of the preventive system as a response to more modern demands of widespread freedoms in society and culture over the past 40 years. 'It was in those years,' he noted 'that there was a strong outcry throughout Italy and beyond against absolute governments; complaints arose, especially concerning the measures of severity used to control the people generally and when administering justice.' Even rigid Rulers 'believed it was good to bend to popular demand and introduce radical reforms into their States.' Pius IX himself granted amnesty and 'some reforms in governing.' Charles Albert 'bestowed a civil Constitution ... thus changing his government from an absolute to a constitutional one.' 'Now, these popular aspirations for a milder form of government, supported by their respective Princes, meant that even young people demanded a more affectionate and fatherly guidance from their superiors.'¹¹¹ He was aligning himself with contemporaries and others who followed who saw in Don Bosco's preventive system an educational approach of universal import, one which was relevant to new times and its beneficiaries at every social and cultural level.

5. Reactions: biographies, pen portraits

Though often mistakenly thought to be Don Bosco's own creation, the preventive system, inseparable from his own and the Salesians' experience, was quickly championed by publicists of a certain kind for the way it demonstrated the ongoing vitality of Catholic education. This also reinforced Don Bosco's own awareness of the universal significance of the system he had launched. He intended to publicise it through a pamphlet written for benefactors and Cooperators. Contributing to this were the first biographies and other writings on his institutions.

Even before the 1877 description of the preventive system, it seems that this interest began with Count Conestabile della Staffa (1854–81) from an ancient noble family in Perugia, known for his solid Catholic Faith and unconditional fidelity to the papacy. He dedicated the first part of a brief work written in French¹¹² on *Religious and Social works in Italy* to presenting *Don Bosco in Turin*

109 BS 4 (1880) no. 9, September, pp. 6-7.

110 BS 4 (1880) no. 9, September, p. 9.

111 BS 4 (1880) no. 10, October, p. 7.

112 The author knows about the establishment of the Work for adult vocations, foundations in Nice and Vallecrosia, just begun, the first expedition to America, but does not mention the Cooperators Union, he

and *Fr Lodovico da Casoria in Naples*.¹¹³ He had met and interviewed Don Bosco at the Oratory in Turin, the city in which he had met and later in 1876 married young Marchioness Maria di Bernezzo at the Sclopis home. He described ‘the two men, one a simple priest, the other a Religious, whose names will live on in the history of the Church and their country.’ Though not always precise, the author emphasised with obvious admiration and enthusiasm, Don Bosco’s choice of the young from the beginning of his priestly life. What provoked this, according to Conestabile, who was then followed by others in the future, was almost exclusively the sight of young people in Turin’s prisons, ‘drawn into wrongdoing early, sadly locked away and remorseful, expiating for crimes they were not entirely responsible for.’ According to Don Bosco and Cafasso, such depravity of youth ‘had two main causes: the alienation of the children of the people from religious practices on Sundays and Holy Days, and the evil influence of most of their bosses on work days.’ Don Bosco countered this with his first form of educational assistance, the ‘oratory’, which was also a ‘patronage’ run with a very special approach. He ‘loved those children of the people like a tender father, taking the keenest interest in each one’s special needs.’ ‘Not only did he look after them all day on Sunday’s, amusing his young friends in a pleasant way, nurturing their souls with the Word of God, but he acted with loving concern to find them work during the week and to entrust them to upright, Christian bosses.’¹¹⁴ Later came the hospice–cum–boarding house, ‘the early nucleus of the college for the sons of the people’ for apprentices in the city workshops and stores. These then became boarding schools with their own classrooms and workshops, while the oratory for boys from outside continued to function alongside.¹¹⁵

Conestabile then gave particular emphasis to the system of preventive assistance – ‘preventing and avoiding repression’ – adopted in the hospice–college for academic and trade students at Valdocco, a system the Count had understood well in practice without having had the opportunity to read the pages on the preventive system that appeared a year later. ‘The government that this little population made up of such lively youthful elements submits to is a marvellous, almost incredible thing. It is a government of meekness and kindness. It would not be exact to say that no one is punished, but it is very rare: the truth is there are no punishments; there is no penal code to defend the law; the law imposes itself in their consciences and is joyfully accepted because it conforms to human nature, since obedience is exalted.’ At this point, the author dwells on the social and re–educational (rehabilitative) capacity of Don Bosco’s system, incomparable by comparison with the lofty discourse of politicians, jurists, sociologists. ‘Here, we are presented with a meditation on a serious philosophical and social problem’ he notes. ‘While the more violent revolutionaries have written volumes on this topic, while law faculties study it keenly ... in his “republic” he has already put in place the ideal which legislators yearn for: instead of repressing the fault, he prevents it. And while, up till now, this system has been so difficult to apply anywhere else, in this establishment it produces stupendous results.’¹¹⁶ An extraordinary expression of this was the excursion of inmates at the Generala in Turin.¹¹⁷ This was the first time this episode, for which no specific documentation exists, was made public. It found considerable resonance in biographies, and with publicists, films and history lovers No wonder the author’s belief spread: ‘Presently in

cites “L’Unità Cattolica” until August 1876. A brief necrology of him appeared in “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 2, Tuesday 3 January 1882, p. 6; cf. Biographical profile by M. Casella in DBI XXXVII 766-768.

113 *Opere religiose e sociali in Italia. Memoria* by Count Carlo Conestabile. Translation from French.

Padova, Tip. del Seminario 1878, 59 p.: pp. 4-39 are about Don Bosco, and pp. 40-59 about P. Ludovico Casoria.

114 C. CONESTABILE, *Opere religiose e sociali...*, pp. 5-7.

115 C. CONESTABILE, *Opere religiose e sociali...*, pp. 12-14.

116 C. CONESTABILE, *Opere religiose e sociali...*, pp. 19-20.

117 C. CONESTABILE, *Opere religiose e sociali...*, pp. 23-26.

Europe, the value of Don Bosco's methods has been recognised and very often, in difficult cases, people have recourse to him.¹¹⁸

A more concise but similar image of Don Bosco came from the assistant priest at St Joseph's parish in Marseilles, Louis Mendre, in his 1879 booklet *Don Bosco Prêtre*.¹¹⁹ Don Bosco described it as a 'classic work of this kind.'¹²⁰ So he did recognise himself in the portrait drawn by his French admirer: a priest entirely dedicated 'to poor boys whose material misery was a pale image of a much more profound moral misery ... of the children of workers and the poor.' Two paradigmatic occasions for this writer were the encounter with Bartholomew Garelli ('poor orphan lad') in the sacristy of St Francis Assisi Church, and the excursion with inmates from the Generala.¹²¹ His concerns were directed especially to migrant youngsters 'far from their place of origin, completely deprived of family, reduced to turning to strangers, exposed to the sordid speculation of their supposed benefactors and the total ruin of the beauty of their soul.'¹²² In this way he gained deeper understanding of the situation apprentices were in, to the point where he provided them with '*Ateliers Chrétiens*' (Christian workshops), schools of arts and trades, male and female agricultural schools, other institutions for working youth in France to complement the *Oeuvres de Persévérance* of Jean-Joseph Allemand, and Joseph Timon-David's *Oeuvres de Jeunesse*.¹²³

On 16 January 1882, Don Bosco wrote to the Minister for Grace and Justice, Giuseppe Zanardelli, both thanking and asking him for something. He thanked him for having promoted an increase in the stipend for 'poor priests, poor parish priests who will certainly ask God to preserve you from all evil and bless you abundantly.' Then in a particularly amicable tone he asked him for a decoration for 'one of the benefactors of my houses, lawyer Giacomo Borgonovo from Genoa who, among other things, has written a fine book in which he writes about me.' Borgonovo was already 'an officer of the *Corona d'Italia*' Don Bosco continued: 'I can tell you frankly that I would gladly see him promoted to a higher level, and I say this in all confidence. If I am being too bold, forgive me, since even the elderly can make mistakes and out of delicacy, consider that I have said nothing.'¹²⁴ It was not an entirely disinterested request. In 1879, Borgonovo had published a book of a socio-legal nature entitled *Ammoniti oziosi, traviati. Mali e rimedi*. Referring to Don Bosco, he formulated a flattering judgement on Don Bosco's activities on behalf of the young which the book dealt with, 'providing on average for around two hundred thousand boys who without his help would have ended up where all the others we have been concerned with above finished up.'¹²⁵

The interpretation responded correctly to the primary meaning Don Bosco gave to his prevention, and which he tirelessly proposed in his speeches and addresses.

The educational and rehabilitative motives were taken up once more not long afterwards by a Roman priest, Costantino Leonori, who from 1878 was pursuing Don Bosco's causes with the Roman Congregations, replacing Carlo Menghini, who was also looking after Archbishop Gastaldi's interest over the same period. His work, the *Cenni sulla Società di S. Francesco di Sales istituita dal sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*,¹²⁶ was written in the final months of 1881, in the fervour of defending Fr Bonetti's cause at the Congregation of the Council. There was a wealth of material

118 C. CONESTABILE, *Opere religiose e sociali...*, p. 29.

119 L. MENORE, *Don Bosco Prêtre, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Salésiens (Saint-François-de-Sales)*.

Notice sur son Oeuvre. L'Oratoire de Saint-Léon à Marseille et les Oratoires Salésiens fondés en France.

Marseille, Typ. et Lith. M. Olive 1879, 50 p.

120 A. C. GUIOL, 29 March 1879, E III 461.

121 L. MENORE, *Don Bosco Prêtre...*, pp. 3-7, 9-12.

122 L. MENORE, *Don Bosco Prêtre...*, p. 21.

123 L. MENORE, *Don Bosco Prêtre...*, pp. 34-37.

124 Letter of 16 January 1882, E IV 118.

125 G. BORGONOVO, *Ammoniti, oziosi, traviati. Mali e rimedi*. Genova, Stab. tip. del Movimento 1879, p. 166.

126 Rome, Tipografia Tiberina 1881, 63 p.

provided by Fr Bonetti himself and by Fr Berto. As well as this material, Berto also sent him Mendre's booklet, the Regulations for Salesian houses, and the pamphlet on the opening of the *Patronage* in Nice. The author sent his work to Fr Berto, chapter by chapter, asking him to read, correct, modify in complete free Sunday¹²⁷ He confirmed the analyses that had already appeared in Conestabile's and Mendre's work. Lenori found the roots of delinquency and marginalisation of 'young workers' in factors of a religious and moral nature, as did Don Bosco: parental neglect, lack of religious instruction and alienation from practices of piety, ignorance of duty, negative influence of employers at work, in other words, the 'lack of a religious and civic education. Starting with this diagnosis, 'D. Bosco, who was aware of his times and circumstances and noting social transformation' made his life choice, 'convinced that the surest way to prevent crimes is to improve education.' he directed his efforts 'in particular to the children of the people,' urging them 'to virtue through religious practices, teaching literacy, involving them in work, removing them from evil by means of affection and by keeping an eye on the misery and harm that comes to those who are not put on the right path to virtue in time.'¹²⁸

He then wrote of the *Progress of the Salesian Society in France*, a nation in which 'the worker question has taken on the greatest of importance, perhaps more than elsewhere.' He drew attention to Marseilles in particular from this perspective, 'where the working class is exceptionally numerous,' and to St Leo's Oratory, which 'gathers an extraordinary number of boys who are instructed in arts and trades, thus removing them from the evil influence of bad employers.'¹²⁹ 'Considered beneficial and humanitarian in Christian terms' by 'people at every level of society,' the work had succeeded in associating with it a vast crowd of *collaborators* and *cooperators* such as to deserve 'constant requests from city councils and bishops, the benevolence and support of Pius IX and Leo XIII, the respect he enjoys from the episcopate, the appreciation of biographers, publicists and newspapers.'¹³⁰

Again in France, a work was published in 1881 by a doctor from Nice, Charles d'Espiney (1824–91), the first actual biography of Don Bosco. The book found particular fortune, being issued in several editions in its original language, expanded each time towards the end of 1888, and saw a considerable number of translations into other languages.¹³¹ From the outset he indicated the kind of boy who was the object of Don Bosco's concerns: 'Poor and abandoned youth,' 'whose neglect, ignorance, contact with depraved or perverse human beings exposed them without defence to the assaults of evil.' 'Don Bosco went out to gather them up. Give the, shelter, teach them a respectable trade, make them into men who were useful to their towns. But even more did he ennoble them, as we ca say, initiating them into the splendour of revealed truth.'¹³² According to Espiney, the first things that urged Don Bosco to make this youthful choice was when he met young prisoners: 'This early corruption filled him with dismay and pity. The reason was too obvious: as they started out in life, these poor boys had been left in the most deplorable state of neglect, with only examples of vice around them. They fell, and society had to lock them up as being dangerous, but instead of improving them, their stay in prison only made them more corrupt, and on release, they soon found themselves back in for new misdeeds.' from this came 'Don Bosco's determination to encourage preventive action, dedicating himself 'to poor and abandoned boys crowding districts around Turin.'¹³³ This is how he shaped the *preventive method*: 'preventing faults

127 Cf. Letters and information in *Documenti* XLV 69-70, 95-101.

128 C. LEONORI, *Cenni sulla Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 3-4 e 12-13.

129 C. LEONORI, *Cenni sulla Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, p. 27.

130 C. LEONORI, *Cenni sulla Società di S. Francesco di Sales...*, pp. 39-49.

131 C. D'ESPINEY, *Dom Bosco*. Nice, Typ. et Librairie Malvano-Mignon 1881, p. 180. An eleventh edition was translated into Italian, almost twice the size of the first: S. Pier d'Arena, Tipografia S. Vincenzo de' Paoli 1890, 331 p.

132 C. D'ESPINEY, *Dom Bosco...*, p. 6.

133 C. D'ESPINEY, *Dom Bosco...*, pp. 8-9.

so as not to have to punish them.’ ‘Loving the boys and being loved by them so as to obtain everything that contributes to their welfare,’ preparing them for skilled work that guarantees them success in life and ‘contributes to the honour and prosperity of a nation.’¹³⁴

It was a biography and a kind of *festschrift*, popular though inclined to numinous and to legend. It was translated into Italian, Dutch, English, German, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Arabic, and became an extraordinary tool of awareness across the vast expanse of Europe and beyond, presenting Don Bosco the social worker and educator of poor and abandoned youth, including marginalised youth.

After d’Espiney’s death on 13 April 1891, Canon Fabre from Nice recalled in his eulogy ‘the resonance that the *Vie de don Bosco* had throughout Europe and beyond.’ ‘Don Bosco’s work, an eminently humanitarian, social and first of all Christian work, became known and appreciated mostly thanks to Doctor d’Espiney’s book.’¹³⁵

Of a somewhat more elevated, ordered level with a wealth of content, also in Don Bosco’s own view,¹³⁶ was the biography published in 1884 by French magistrate Albert Du Boÿs (1804–89), *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salésiens*.¹³⁷ Don Bosco’s original inspirations were traced back more correctly to two different sources: his contact with ‘young detainees in Turin’s prisons, and seeing the moral needs of poor youth left to roam the streets.’ The casual encounter with Bartholomew Garelli was emblematic of this.¹³⁸

The narrative followed the development of the Oratory, with specific reference to the ‘classes in arts and trades’ and ‘agricultural schools.’ Special attention was dedicated to the ‘preventive system’ which, according to the author, a Catholic conservative, resolved ‘the great pedagogical problem’ much more concretely than the ‘utopian chimera’ proclaimed by ‘gutless revolutionaries.’¹³⁹

Don Bosco likened Du Boÿs to a personal pedagogical encyclopedia which ‘you could call the moral recovery of desperate cases.’¹⁴⁰ It was the ‘correctional system’ that Don Bosco had had cause to explain to Urban Rattazzi in 1854, stating its applicability to penal and rehabilitative institutes, then providing a practical demonstration by the amazing excursion to Stupinigi with hundreds of ‘detainees from a house of rehabilitation,’ the Generala.¹⁴¹ In short, it was as one chapter of the book said, ‘Don Bosco’s poem.’¹⁴²

A great admirer of Don Bosco in Spain was Marcelo Spinola (1836–1906) who from 1881 was the Auxiliary Bishop of Seville (titular of Milo) to Cardinal Joaquim Lluç y Garriga (1816–82) and an admirer and friend of the Salesians.¹⁴³ In 1884 he published a large book entitled *Don Bosco y*

134 C. D’ESPINEY, *Don Bosco...*, pp. 61-63, 74.

135 *Nécrologie. M. le docteur d’Espiney*, in “Bulletin salésien” 13 (1891) no. 5, June, pp. 92-94.

136 Cf. Chap. 33, § 4.

137 Paris, Jules Gervais 1884, VI-378 pp. The Italian edition came out a few months later (S. Benigno Canavese, tip. e libr. Salesiana 1884, VIII-256 p.). Also in du Boÿs book, however, there are chronological and historical inaccuracies and exaggerated figures. Concerning the Italian edition with corrections by Don Bosco, cf P. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco lettore della sua biografia. Osservazioni al volume di A. Du Boÿs, “Don Bosco e la Pia Società Salesiana (1884)”*, “Rivista di Scienze dell’Educazione” 22 (1984), 2, pp. 193-206.

138 A. DU BOÿS, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société*. Paris, J. Gervais 1884, pp. 7-10.

139 A. DU BOÿS, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société...*, pp. 90-93.

140 A. DU BOÿS, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société...*, pp. 93-94.

141 A. DU BOÿS, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société ...*, pp. 100-106.

142 A. DU BOÿS, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société...*, pp. 227-229.

143 Then from 1885, he was Bishop of Coria (1885) and from 1886 of Malaga, and finally, from 1896, Archbishop of Seville and Cardinal. In March 1987 he was beatified: cf. J. BORREGO, *Un gran cardenal hispalense con la Familia Salesiana visto en su correspondencia epistolar a los salesianos*, RSS 14

su obra.¹⁴⁴ His material was drawn from the *Salesian Bulletin* and from d'Espiney, but was written from a rather dark socio–theological outlook on the modern world and the Church. The modern world was infected with ‘Naturalism’, alienated from God and man, and the Church was the bearer of God and Christ and also earthly salvation. According to the author, the thesis of the incompatibility of Catholicism with the modern world was completely without foundation, since it meant opposition between faith and science, authority and freedom. Don Bosco was confirmation of the opposite thesis attested to over the ages by the Fathers, Doctors of the Church, Saints. He had shown by his religious and social work that love of God is inseparable from love for human beings, especially if they are poor and needy, affected by ignorance, error, sin.

Spinola was not backward in heaping praise on the priest from Turin, a modest yet extraordinary magnet for young people, a ‘character’, ‘the most popular man in modern Italy’ whose work as an educator moved between two poles represented by Bartholomew Garelli and the triumph that was Paris.¹⁴⁵ Don Bosco and the Salesian work were proof against dominant naturalism that ‘the supernatural exists.’ The tangible signs of this were the army of transformed youngsters, ‘the creation of the Salesian,’ the schools, trade workshops, agricultural schools where both the material and spiritual interests of the young were fostered.¹⁴⁶

One also needs to bear in mind that already before Spinola, Don Bosco was known in Spain through articles published in 1850 on *Don Bosco y los Talleres cristianos* (Don Bosco and Christian Workshops) in the widely read *Revista Popular*, by well-known priest Felix Sardá y Salvany. The articles were a precursor to the arrival of the Salesians in Spain at Utrera (1881), while Spinola’s book could be added to the ‘socially aggressive’ journal run by Sardá y Salvany in encouraging the extension of the work at Sarriá (Barcelona, 1884), and Don Bosco’s triumphant visit to Catalonia (1886).

Instead, almost exclusively focused on the pedagogical and much less on the social aspects, were presentations by a Salesian, Fr Francesco Cerruti (1844–1917), the first writer to introduce Don Bosco’s preventive system in a school text on the *Storia della pedagogia* (The history of pedagogy),¹⁴⁷ and by Fr Domenico Giordani from Fermo diocese. Fr Cerruti likened Don Bosco the educator to Quintillian and Vittorino da Feltre, associated in the practice and spelling out of the preventive system which Don Bosco had brought to its highest expression in the 1877 description of it. ‘You see brought together here in a few words’ he wrote, not without emphasis, ‘the flourishing of ancient pagan civilisation and the essence of the new Christian–Catholic civilisation, the theoretical wisdom of Quintillian, and the practical level-headedness of Vittorino da Feltre, in a word, the Gospel and what is legitimate in the legacy of the human spirit.’ He did not neglect going back to the origins, besides just pedagogy, reaching the beginnings of the Oratory and then the hospice, also highlighting the ‘humanitarian’, moral and social significance of Don Bosco’s work.¹⁴⁸

(1995) 391-392.

144 Barcelona, Tipografía Católica 1884, 111 p.: the appendix has the title *Talleres cristianos*; R. ALBERDI, *Una Ciudad para un Santo. Los orígenes de la obra salesiana en Barcelona*. Barcelona, Ediciones Tibidabo 1966, writes about this book, pp. 78-81.

145 M. SPINOLA, *Don Bosco y su obra...*, pp. 7-34.

146 M. SPINOLA, *Don Bosco y su obra...*, pp. 83-91, 99-100.

147 F. CERRUTI, *Storia della pedagogia in Italia dalle origini a' tempi nostri*. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1883, 320 pp.

148 F. CERRUTI, *Storia della pedagogia in Italia...*, pp. 269-270. He returned more broadly to the humanistic and Christian contents of the system in his work *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola. Lettere due*. S. Benigno Canavese, tip. e libr. salesiana 1886, 49 pp. He picked up the theme twenty years later: *Una trilogia pedagogica ossia Quintiliano, Vittorino da Feltre e don Bosco*. Rome, Scuola tipografica salesiana 1908, 19 p.

Three years later, the Salesians printed and circulated two books written by Fr Domenico Giordani, from Cardinal De Angelis' diocese of Fermo (Ascoli Piceno), a priest since 1870 and author of books of a religious and pedagogical nature which attest to his involvement in popular education, and his admiration for Don Bosco.¹⁴⁹ In two of these books he included and commented on the preventive system with a comment more often repeated in the first of them: *La carità nell'educare ed il Sistema Preventivo del più grande educatore vivente D. Giovanni Bosco*¹⁵⁰ and *La gioventù e Don Bosco di Turin*.¹⁵¹ 'Charity and love' were the two words by which Giordani summed up Don Bosco's educational and social message. He claimed he is 'the greatest educator I know in our such difficult times, who has been doing good for our dear Italy and the whole world for many years, by his immense charity and his famous preventive system.'¹⁵² Charity was 'the only way that leads to the preventive system' that 'made him famous.'¹⁵³

The relevance of Don Bosco's action and pronouncements under the twin aspects of the social and the pedagogical, was recognised with keen interest in the 1850s, also in Catholic Germany.¹⁵⁴ The first German to write about it was a member of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Johannes Janssen (1883–98), brother of the founder, St Arnold Janssen (1837–1909). Over 1884–86, he published a series of articles in the missionary magazine *Die heilige Stadt Gottes* on *Don Bosko und die Gesellschaft des hl. Franz von Sales*,¹⁵⁵ for which he drew extensively from d'Espiney's biography, which came out in German the same year.¹⁵⁶ They were republished in 1855 in a separate work, *Don Bosko und das Oratorium vom heiligen Franz von Sales Lebensbild eines gottbegeisterten Erziehers der Gegenwart* (Don Bosco and the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. Biographical outline of a God-inspired educator of our times).¹⁵⁷

In 1857, he published an essay in the Cologne diocesan news sheet on *Don Bosco's method of education*, based on the 1877 pages.¹⁵⁸ He illustrated Don Bosco's educational and religious activity with special regard to the needs of the time and the moral, religious, cultural and material needs of young workers. Providing for them were night schools, trade workshops, especially in printing and bookbinding, initiatives for religious instruction and practice. Also highlighted was the elaboration of an educative system that could be extended to families and educational institutes of every kind.

Fr Johannes Baptist Mehler (1860–1930) presented a Don Bosco who was interested in the solution to the social question, especially through academic classes and technical workshops. In 1885 he had been a guest of Don Bosco's at Valdocco, where he had been able to carefully study how the trade workshops functioned. He recalled this in a letter to his champion. He had spoken of Don Bosco and his concern for young apprentices, speaking at the General Assembly of German

149 Cf. C. MONARI, *Domenico Giordani*, "Erre Pi". Supplement to the "Ricerche Pedagogiche" 4 (2002) nos 144-145, pp. VI-VII.

150 S. Benigno Canavese, tip. e libr. salesiana 1886, pp. 36-159 (text of the preventive system with plenty of paraphrase).

151 S. Benigno Canavese, tip. e libr. salesiana 1886, pp. 65-86 (text with brief commentary).

152 D. GIORDANI, *La carità nell'educare...*, p. 4. In *La gioventù e don Bosco* (p. 3) repeated almost literally.

153 D. GIORDANI, *La gioventù e don Bosco...*, p. 4, 23-24, 64, 86.

154 Cf. N. WOLFF, *Viele Wege führen nach Deutschland. Überlegungen zur salesianischen Geschichte der Jahre 1883-1922*. München, Don Bosco Verlag 2000; ID., *Von der Idee zur Aktion. Das Projekt Don Boscos in Deutschland (1883-1921)*, in F. MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale*, Vol. I. Rome, LAS 2001, pp. 255-264.

155 "Die heilige Stadt Gottes" 8 (1885) 158-159, 171-174, 206-208, 222-224, 238-239, 244-247, 270-272, 283-287, 292-295, 312-316.

156 C. D'ESPINEY, *Don Bosco*. Münster, Leinerdruck Leipzig 1883, 190 S.; Münster, Schöningh Verlag (II ed.) 1886, 176 S.

157 Steyl, *Missionsdruckerei St. Michael 1885* (II ed.), 107 S.; 1885 (III ed.), 104 S.

158 J. JANSSEN, *Don Bosco's Erziehungsmethode*, "Pastoralblatt" (Köln) 21 (1887) 137-140.

Catholic held at Münster in Westphalia from 30 August to 3 September 1885.¹⁵⁹ ‘The Congress members,’ he wrote to Don Bosco ‘filled with admiration for such stupendous works, broke into applause and gave thanks to Divine Providence. Having then made known the social work of the Oratories and the great benefits expected of it, the Assembly decided to found associations to save poor and abandoned youth.’¹⁶⁰ It was recorded more precisely in the minutes: ‘The General Assembly recommends the urgent organisation of reception centres for boys and apprentices, Catholic boarding houses and other centres as alternatives to irreligious youth hospices, and calls attention to the extraordinary activity of Don Bosco in these sectors, and encourages belonging to the Salesian Cooperators Union.’¹⁶¹

It was the beginning of other writings touching on the social and pedagogical aspects of the apostle of Turin’s activity and pronouncements.¹⁶² The first of them, bearing the title *Don Bosco und seine sozialen Schöpfungen* (Don Bosco and his social creations) in 1886, was dedicated to the social problem of apprentices.¹⁶³ As in the address at Münster, Mehler considered Don Bosco’s work in the light of the socio-political situation and the system used to form apprentices in Germany, where industrialisation was fully underway. He saw Don Bosco at the origins of ‘a marvellous social movement’ which had extended from the Italian Peninsula one after the other into France, Spain, and even several South American States, even reaching the wild steppes of Patagonia. ‘What Adolf Koplring did for the apprentice category, Don Bosco has done and more for apprentices and young workers, and deserves to be placed alongside St Vincent de Paul.’¹⁶⁴ With his youth institutions, two Religious Congregations, the Cooperators Union, Don Bosco had taken on the threatening ‘hordes of vagabonds, subversives (*Socialdemokraten*) and ruffians.’¹⁶⁵ But also highlighted was the specific pedagogical dimension: ‘Don Bosco is also an eminent educator capable not only of forming able workers, but also of transforming idle and good-for-nothing youth into active members of society, fervent Christians, in brief, into genuine Christian workers.’¹⁶⁶ Then came an outline of the major features of the educational system based on the 1877 document and the regulations in the same year. He understood its central motifs: religion, reason, kindness, assistance, all clustering around love and mild-mannerliness, the core of the spirit of St Francis de Sales.¹⁶⁷

The author then followed up with an interesting observation that not only reflected German sensitivity, but the realistic stance of the preventive system when it had to adopt such a stance – as was often apparent in Don Bosco’s talks¹⁶⁸ – with boys who are really antisocial, difficult, even dangerous, and which has to be integrated with measures close to the repressive system: ‘Only the outstanding educator can judge if it is everywhere and always possible to exclusively adopt the preventive system and not, rather, a wise combination of both. But education must be founded,

159 Cf. *Verhandlungen der XXXII. General-Versammlung der Katholiken Deutschlands zu Münster i. W. vom 30. August bis 3. September 1885. Nach stenographischer Aufzeichnung herausgegeben vom Local-Comité*. Münster, Commissions-Verlag “Westfälischer Merkur” 1885, pp. 218-219.

160 *Don Bosco e l’Assemblea dei cattolici Tedeschi*, BS 9 (1885) no. 11, November, p. 166.

161 *Verhandlungen der XXXII. General-Versammlung...*, p. 398.

162 Then collected by the author in *Don Bosco’s sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen und Erziehungshäuser. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Lehrlingsfrage* (Don Bosco’s social creations, his apprentice associations and houses of education. A contribution to the solution of the problem of apprentices). Regensburg, Verlag-Anstalt G. J. Manz 1893, 120 p.

163 Published in “Arbeiterwohl” (Köln) 6 (1886) 1-17.

164 J. B. MEHLER, *Don Bosco’s sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen...*, pp. 1-2.

165 J. B. MEHLER, *Don Bosco’s sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen...*, pp. 2-9.

166 J. B. MEHLER, *Don Bosco’s sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen...*, p. 15 (cf. 9-15).

167 J. B. MEHLER, *Don Bosco’s sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen...*, pp. 15-21.

168 Cf. Chap. 30, § 3.

everywhere and always, on religion and reason, and the use of kindness and gentleness united with these will be more productive than harshness.¹⁶⁹

169 J. B. MEHLER, *Don Bosco's sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen...*, p. 20.

BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORKS BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC (1877–81)

- 1877 March: early contacts for a work in Marseilles;
 26 April: purchase of paper mill at Mathi Torinese;
 13 May: approval of plans for the Church of St John the Evangelist, work commences;
 Summer: Fr Bodrato, Provincial of Argentina, Uruguay;
 Autumn: beginnings of negotiations for Navarre and Saint-Cyr.
- 1878 15 May: acceptance of work in Marseilles;
 14 August: blessing of foundation stone for the Church of St John the Evangelist in
 Turin;
 16 September: deed of purchase of Ca' Pesaro (Este, Padua);
 10 December: arrival of the first Salesians in La Spezia.
- 1880 15 January: beginning of the mission in Patagonia;
 2 August: death of Fr Bodrato;
 4 August: interim appointment of Fr James Costamagna as Provincial.
- 1881 January: Fr Costamagna appointed Provincial of America;
 October: French Province created, Fr Alberta the Superior;
 28 October: Consecration of the Church of St John the Evangelist;
 8 December: Fr Lasagna, Provincial, Uruguay and Brazil;
- 1883: Autumn: novitiate at St Margaret's (Marseilles)

Beginning with 1875, not only did Don Bosco's institutions expand geographically, but their growth numerically was uninterrupted. There was no year which did not record the birth of one or more works in Europe or Latin America. Of these, we refer only to those in which Don Bosco was personally involved, either bringing them into existence or developing them further. He was still visiting a few of them even when his physical decline was obvious and he stopped doing so only a few months before his death.

In the current chapter we indicate works begun in 1877–78, giving attention to some which opened at the end of the decade. This is accompanied by reminders of Don Bosco's continued involvement in matters concerning works in Latin America, drawn particularly from exchanges of correspondence between him and his overseas correspondents, with special regard to those assuming primary responsibility for government.

1. Works in Italy over 1877 and 1878

Obviously the founder's immediate interest was more visible in Italian institutions and some he personally prepared and established in southern France, an area he visited frequently in search of charity.

1.1 Salesians go to La Spezia and Lucca

Among the works begun in 1877 the one at La Spezia in Liguria stands out, followed six months later by the Holy Cross Oratory at Lucca in Tuscany. Don Bosco summed up the background and early history of the first-mentioned house in a memorandum to Leo XIII soon after his election. He did not hesitate to dramatise the situation, recalling that Pius IX 'bestowed grants on our more serious needs for the missions and other works, and in particular he gave five hundred francs [1,577 euro] a month for La Spezia.'¹ [To be factual, it was per year!]. The city had started out as a small inhabited area but developed rapidly, and from the early 1860s had become a maritime stronghold and the kingdom's most important port and military arsenal. Don Bosco wrote that the city had been 'invaded by Masonry and heresy and its population had increased over a short period' from 5,000 to 25,000 souls with a serious lack of clergy and churches.² Census figures relating not only to the older agglomeration but to the entire municipality gave the following results: in 1861 there were 11,556 inhabitants, 24,127 in 1871 and 30,732 by 1881.

And yet, Don Bosco was not initially encouraging to those asking for the Salesians. 'I have replied in the negative for La Spezia' he told Fr Rua from Alassio around 20 July 1877.³ But consensus soon came. The initiative to turn to Don Bosco came from the apostolic preacher, Fr Giuseppe Persi (1821–87), who then entered the Salesian Society. He had spoken to Pius IX about it after preaching at La Spezia throughout May. The Pope had given an annual grant of 500 lire [1,577 euro] to the Bishop of Sarzano and Brugnato, Giuseppe Rosati, encouraging him to turn to Don Bosco. The latter sent Fr Rua to look for a site. On 10 December, the first Salesians, accompanied by Fr Cagliari, arrived at La Spezia to begin their pastoral and educational activity: the Rector, Fr Angelo Rocca with two clerics and a coadjutor. Don Bosco stayed over there on 20 and 21 December on his way to Rome at the end of 1877. They were humble beginnings: premises they were lucky to find, then a house they reorganised to allow classes during the day and preparation for first communion in the evening for children and older youth. The chapel began functioning from 1 March 1878 and was immediately attended in large numbers.

In Rome, Don Bosco did not delay in appealing to the Minister for the Navy, Benedetto Brin (1833–98) from Turin, a famous naval engineer who restored the Italian navy. Don Bosco stressed the fact that there were 27,000 inhabitants of La Spezia 'almost all working at the Arsenal' and that the place abounded in abandoned boys, and there were no adequate educational institutions there for them. He intended to overcome this lack by offering youngsters 'an education that will help make them good citizens and in due course able to earn a living in an honest way.' He was not asking for money but for any likely furnishing lying around unused in navy stores: 'Church items, chest of drawers, baskets, mattresses, stretchers, tables and benches, credence tables, sofa, standards (flags), small tables, blackboards for classrooms, towels, coppers for the kitchen, clothing items, socks, any kind no matter how worn.' Donations of these items, which happened immediately, was for the 'poor sons of the people' who would go from the streets to 'filling the State prisons' if not provided for.⁴

1 Letter of 15 March 1878, E III 318-319.

2 To Leo XIII, 15 March 1878, E III 319.

3 E III 201.

4 Letter of 16 January 1878, E III 273-274.

But he knew that his Salesians in La Spezia could not live off household goods, so he sent the Rector the good sum of a thousand lire [3,276 euro] from Rome.⁵

He spoke to Leo XIII about La Spezia and other works at a lengthy audience on 16 March 1878, later making reference to the usual mixture of his own and the Pontiff's ideas.⁶ In the March 1879 edition of the *Salesian Bulletin* he published a letter to the Pope from the Rector at La Spezia with information on activities and successes in this first year. For sure it had been written at Don Bosco's prompting. Fr Angelo Rocca sent it on 22 December 1878 with a letter to Cardinal Lorenzo Nina asking him to pass it on to the Holy Father. Nina was Secretary of State. The Cardinal's reply on 2 January was also carried by the Bulletin, in which he expressed the Pontiff's 'keen and sincere satisfaction for the good results obtained' and passed on his 'apostolic blessing' to the Rector.⁷

Don Bosco arrived in La Spezia in the New Year, 1879, on 19 February and remained there for two days. On the 22nd he went to Sarzana to greet the diocesan bishop, and in the evening went on to Lucca where he stayed working there from 29 June 1878, called there by Archbishop Nicolò Ghilardi (1827–1904) following contacts with Fr Barberis and Lazzerio who were on their way to Rome, and later, negotiations with Fr Cagliari. Don Bosco's visit took on special solemnity, especially for the official welcome he was given from the Cathedral Chapter. He made a pilgrimage to the Holy Face, venerated in one of the side chapels.⁸ Considerable prominence was given to the conference he gave on 26 April in the Archbishop's presence. Fr Bonetti published it as a news item in the *Salesian Bulletin*, which then appeared in *Il fedele*, in Lucca.⁹

The most fervent supporter of the work at La Spezia was Giuseppe Bruschi, who ran the postal service and for whom Don Bosco had obtained a papal decoration.¹⁰ He later became a Salesian priest and died at La Spezia in 1901 at 79 years of age. In March 1880, Don Bosco asked pardon of Canon Andenino from Turin for not having succeeded in getting him a papal honour, but assured him: '*Quod differtur, non aufertur.*' He added: 'I am happy about the Lenten practice at La Spezia. It is a good city but much in need of workers.'¹¹

In August, Don Bosco informed the Cardinal Protector, Lorenzo Nina, who had become the Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, of the significant extension of the work at La Spezia. They had foiled the 'snares that only Protestant immorality and impiety knows how to set' he said. The contract had been drawn up for purchase of land on which would be built classrooms, a church with house attached for the Salesians. The letter was followed by a brief memorandum on the 'Church, classrooms and dwellings for the teachers in the city of La Spezia' with a request to the Holy Father for extraordinary financial aid perhaps he could increase the 500 lire annual grant already guaranteed to 100 lire per month?¹² The increase from 1,650 to 3,840 euro would undoubtedly have been of benefit to the recipient but less persuasive for the donor! Less than two months later, he sent out a circular to *Those who love the good of Religion and Civil Society* in the port city, informing them of the activities carried out thus far and the construction in progress, asking them to come to 'the aid with money or building materials.'¹³ He also turned to a priest from

5 Letter to Fr M. Rua, 5 February 1878, E III 291.

6 E III 327-328.

7 BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March, pp. 4-6.

8 BS 3 (1879) no. 5, May, pp. 5-6 (The first conference in Lucca).

9 Letter from Lucca to Fr M. Rua, 25 February 1879, E III 447.

10 Letter to Fr F. Dalmazzo, April 1880, E III 583.

11 Letter from Rome, [28 March] 1880, E III 559.

12 Letter of 20 August 1880, E III 616-617. The construction of the large church dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows was completed after Don Bosco's death.

13 Circ. of 11 October 1880, E III 627-628.

Novara asking him to help him 'look for so many needs.'¹⁴ He stayed at La Spezia again in April 1882 for two conferences to Cooperators, one in the evening of 4 April, the other on the morning of the 5th.

On 6 April, he was in Lucca where he gave an important conference on Holy Saturday, 10 April, marked by its practicality: he wanted benefactors to know how their donations were being used. At Lucca in particular, they were supporting a work which despite the impossibility of further development due to cramped space, comprised a festive oratory 'attended by more than 100 boys,' a hospice with 100 residents.¹⁵ The lack of room for any reasonable development led to the place being abandoned in 1891.

Don Bosco considered further extensions to classrooms at La Spezia in 1883, writing to Cardinal Nina with the hope of obtaining support once more from the Pope.¹⁶ He stayed there a few months later, on 10 April 1884, Easter Sunday, on his way to Rome, giving a lengthy conference in the afternoon. Fr Lemoyne, who was acting secretary, sent a report for the *Salesian Bulletin* to Fr Bonetti.¹⁷ In May 1885 he wrote again to Benedetto Brin, who in 1884 had once more taken on the role of Minister for the Navy, asking him to come to his aid to put classes in place 'for workers at the Arsenal in La Spezia.'¹⁸

The chronicle entry for Don Bosco's final stay at La Spezia on 23–25 April 1887, on his way to Rome for the consecration of the Sacred heart Church, refers to Don Bosco being 'very tired' and surrounded by many civic and military authorities, all deeply moved. He limited himself to giving a blessing after Fr Rua's conference, which was on the morning of the 25th in a church 'packed with people.'¹⁹

1.2 The paper mill at Mathi

In 1877, Don Bosco also bought a paper mill which was opened by Clotilde Varetto, who had been widowed. It was at Mathi, 25 kilometres from Turin. He did this with a view to lessening costs for the paper needed for the two presses at Valdocco and Sampierdarena, to which a third was soon added at San Benigno Canavese. He was also proposing to supply paper for other Catholic printers.

In a private document, he undertook to ensure the proprietor an annual income of twelve thousand lire [37,860 euro]; the public deed, however, on 26 April 1877 had the purchase cost as a hundred thousand lire [315,504 euro]. He was sole owner but to manage it he took on an administrator, a Genoan business man, Dominic Varetti, who had already been involved in the hospice at Sampierdarena,²⁰ and set up a private Bosco–Varetti Society for the paper mill at Mathi.²¹ But Varetti began and continued to act as co-owner, running the factory in his own name without giving account of his management. He ended up creating an unsustainable financial situation.

Intervention and intermediaries achieved nothing. Don Bosco had to adopt stronger measures. Already by January 1878, he wrote to Fr Rua from Albano in resolute terms: 'Be careful not to sign

14 Letter to Fr G. Rusconi, 6 December 1880, E III 638-639; cf. again circ. to rectors, 21 December 1880, E III 643, and to Cooperators, 23 April 1881, E IV 45-47: also in BS 5 (1881) no. 5, May, pp. 1-2.

15 The text of the conference, reported by *Il Fedele*, was published by the BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, pp. 80-82.

16 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 26 November 1883 and to Cardinal L. Nina, E IV 186-187.

17 BS 8 (1884) no. 5, May, pp. 70-71.

18 Letter of 25 May 1885, E IV 325.

19 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco*. From 23 January 1887 to 15 May 1887, pp. 39-44.

20 Cf. letter to Fr M. Rua of 24 August 1871, Em II 362.

21 Cf. Text in MB XIII 661-662.

any more cheques for Mr Varetto [sic]; let him work things out for himself and we will consider our own affairs or at least try to provide.²² On 5 July he withdrew Varetto's proxy given him on the same date a year earlier. Finally, in order to seize control once more of the paper mill he was sole owner of, he had to take the matter to the Commercial Court in Turin, which passed sentence on 30 August 1878, forbidding 'Varetto [sic] from further interfering in any guise in the running of the paper mill.' Having settled with Varetto for 23,000 lire [75,342 euro] following the sentence, Don Bosco was able to personally appoint a manager he could trust, and set up a small Salesian community in Mathi with Fr Antonio Varaja in charge.

On 3 February 1882, there was a serious accident at the mill caused by a steam boiler exploding.²³ Two men were injured. Echos of this were still found in Don Bosco's letters in late summer.²⁴ When the accident occurred he was in southern France. He had damage to the old building repaired and built a new one for the Salesian personnel. Don Bosco would retreat to Mathi sometimes for long periods in the summer of 1885. In the 1883–84 school year, the house at Mathi also became a site for a group of the 'Sons of Mary', with Fr Philip Rinaldi as Rector. The following year, as we will indicate ahead,²⁵ they were finally located at a building adjacent to the Church of St John the Evangelist.

1.3 Salesians at Este

The beginnings of the secondary college at Este were straightforward and swift.²⁶ It came about through the initiative of the parish priest of Our Lady of Graces, Fr Agostino Perin who, along with Don Bosco, 'anguished over the harm that secularism in schools was wrecking on youth.' Following an exchange of correspondence he went to Turin in June 1878 where he found Don Bosco very well disposed. The priest immediately obtained the consent of the diocesan Bishop, Federico Manfredini di Rovigo (1792–1882, bishop of Padua from 1857) from whom the college took its name. There was also warm and charitable support from the archpriest of the cathedral in Este, Mons. Agostino Zanderigo. On 25 June 1878 the contract for purchase of Ca' Pesaro, a grand building belonging to the nobility from the 18th century, was drawn up in Don Bosco's name for 35,000 lire [114,652 euro]. It was an ideal site for the college and classrooms. Don Bosco sent the Economist General, Fr Sala, to undertake the not so difficult adjustments needed. The contract was finalised by notarial deed on 16 September, signed by Fr Perin 'for and in the name of and paid for by Don Bosco' and the owners, Venetian Count and Countess Gradenigo. A wealthy gentleman from Este, Benedetto Peta (1800–83) played his part with outstanding generosity, initially offering 10,800 and then 6,000 lire [34,074 and 18,930 euro] which made negotiations possible. He continued to provide help with considerable sums for the alterations and extensions that followed. The first Rector, Fr Giovanni Tamietti (1848–1920), arrived in Este on 10 October 1878 with a layman who had his elementary certificate. They stayed with private families. On 19 November, when the Prefect Fr Tommaso Calliano, a cleric and two coadjutors arrived, the Salesian community had the possibility of establishing itself on site at Ca' Pesaro.

It was the first Salesian work in the Tre Venezie (Triveneto), the beginning of a flourishing and long-standing college with elementary classes and an excellent secondary level.²⁷ Don Bosco

22 To Fr M. Rua, 22/23 January 1878, E III 277.

23 Cf. BS 6 (1882) no. 3, March, pp. 54-55, *Una disgrazia*.

24 To Fr S. Peronino, 7 September 1882, E IV 171; to Mrs B. Magliano, 8 September 1882, E IV 172-173.

25 Cf. § 1.4.

26 The *Bollettino Salesiano* provided essential information at the end of 1878: BS 2 (1878) no. 12, December, pp. 7-8, *Collegio-convitto Manfredini in Este*.

27 Cf. *Il Collegio "Manfredini" di Este nel primo centenario 1878-1978*. Este, Unione Ex-Allievi 1978, pp. 29-51.

stopped over there on 2 April 1879, on the way from Rome. He was immediately accompanied to Benedetto Peta's home, since the latter was celebrating his 79th birthday. During the meal, Don Bosco stood up and after thanking those who had so kindly welcomed the Salesians, he announced: 'I am happy to be able to greet Mr Benedetto Peta as a Knight of the Order of St Sylvester.' In the request for the honour which he had presented to Leo XIII on 10 March he presented Peta thus: Mr Benedetto Peta, a noble and wealthy Catholic from the city of Este Veneto. He helped the Salesians by purchasing a college in the city. The request is that he receive the Knight's Cross of any Order.²⁸ Prevented from leaving there by strong winds and torrential rain, Don Bosco took advantage of it to give a conference to Cooperators at Este in the palazzo's large hall. He paid his respects to the bishop in Padua on 4 April. He arrived in Milan on the night of the 5th, staying four days as guest of lawyer Comaschi. In a letter to the Rector in August 1880 he also attached a 'letter for *Cavaliere* Peta.'²⁹ The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians arrived in October 1880 to contribute their work to the college.

Don Bosco had wanted to visit the college again in 1881 and 1882 but something prevented him each time.³⁰ At the end of summer 1881, knowing the Rector was concerned about the imminent commencement of the school year due to epidemics the preceding year, he urged him not to delay and gave him advice on preventive medicine both spiritual and physical: 'Let us place our confidence in God and push ahead. Open your college, say an Our Father morning and evening to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, try to avoid the students sweating, protect them from going from cold to hot in the mornings and evenings. Greetings to Mr Venturini and Mr Peta and tell them we shall see each other soon.'³¹ Then in April 1882, 'seeing the growing difficulties for going to Este' he invited him to come to Rome. Also, knowing Mr Peta was ill, he asked the Rector to tell him he was praying for him and had prayed for him, and often asked for and obtained the blessing of the Holy Father.³² He sent him words of faith and encouragement a few months later when floods caused serious damage in Veneto and also to Peta's property. 'Crosses are what lead us to glory,' 'the present thorns will become roses before your very eyes' he told Fr Tamietti to tell the generous gentleman. He added: 'If the swollen waters convince you to make some sacrifice, do not refuse' he recommended to the Rector.³³

The generous benefactor died on 27 January 1883 at nearly 83 years of age. He was buried in a little chapel located at the edge of the college grounds.

1.4 The Church and Hospice of St John the Evangelist in Turin

In 1869 and 1870, Don Bosco began decisive mobilising efforts to build the Church of St John the Evangelist and extensions to the St Aloysius Oratory in the Porta Nuova district in the hope of getting on with it quickly. It was a forlorn hope. He immediately involved benefactors:³⁴ among the most trusted of them were Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, a thrifty donor who committed himself

28 E III 454.

29 Letter of 25 August 1880, E III 621.

30 Cf. letter to Fr G. Cagliero, 6 April 1881, E IV 40-41. He had also hoped to stopover at Este during a long trip that he undertook, accompanied by Fr Rua to "visit houses at Spezia, Florence, Rome and, on return, probably Lucca, Este, Venice etc. etc."

31 To Fr G. Tamietti, from Alassio, 15 September 1881, E IV 82.

32 Letter of 17 April 1882, E IV 128-129.

33 Letter of 12 October 1882, E IV 176.

34 Circ. of 5 May 1869, Em III 81-82.

to 1,000 lire [3.762 euro] to be given in three instalments,³⁵ Countess Carlotta Callori,³⁶ and *Commendatore* G.B. Dupraz.³⁷

In a more detailed circular in autumn 1870, Don Bosco emphasised the religious motivations for the undertaking. They had a strong anti-protestant bias. He provided information on work already completed, highlighted the Pope's and the Archbishop's support and specified the plan of the complex to be completed: 'A church that can be used also by adults with enough building space for a school, hospice, park [oratory], where boys can be amused in recreation on Sundays and kept away from danger, immorality, and introduced to some skill or trade.'³⁸ To achieve greater publicity he also turned to one of the *L'Unità Cattolica* team, Prof. Tommaso Vallauri, asking the paper to inform its readers.³⁹ On 14 December, an *Appeal to the compassion of the people in Turin* appeared in the Italian news section of the Daily, drawing from parts of the 12 October circular and referring to the 'miracle of charity which [was] the pious priest Fr John Bosco.' Among other things it said: 'Work has already commenced, and the surrounding wall is already finished.'⁴⁰

In reality, due to many difficulties in purchasing land from a number of owners including one who was very reluctant, work was only able to begin in 1877. But the preliminary matters kept Don Bosco constantly busy from 1871 either personally, going to city and provincial authorities⁴¹ or by encouraging his closest collaborators, especially Fr Rua and bursars in the Congregation, over the 1870s and 1880s: Fr Angelo Savio, Fr Francis Bodrato, Fr Charles Ghivarello, and Fr Anthony Sala.⁴²

He also went to the management of the Railways in Upper Italy for special terms for transport of materials.⁴³ But the longest and most difficult procedure was expropriating the property, for reasons of public utility, belonging to L. Enrico Morglia, a Waldensian.⁴⁴ The decree freeing it up arrived at the beginning of March 1876. *La nuova Torino, Giornale industriale* no. 65, on Saturday 6 March, spoke of a 'decree of expropriation for public utility against a Protestant in favour of a scheming priest.' Don Bosco was sufficiently thick-skinned against attacks of the kind. He was finally able to get Fr Rua to 'execute the decree for the Morglia expropriation' and 'as for the work to be undertaken regarding the church' 'establish a clear contract document with his trusted contractor, Carlo Buzzetti,' reserving the right to examine it himself.⁴⁵

In expectation of the work's completion, in March 1876, Don Bosco asked the Archbishop to bless a new chapel for the St Aloysius oratory, which he accepted.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Count Edoardo Arborio Mella had prepared the plans for the church⁴⁷ and attached hospice, and in May 1877 Archbishop Gastaldi approved them. Work finally began and proceeded with relative speed. 'Since

35 Cf. *Documenti* XI 312-313 and Don Bosco's letter of thanks for the first instalment of lire 300 [1.128 euro], 23 June 1870, Em III 221; the note reserved for the Baron, which Don Bosco wanted him sent after his death, is expressive: cf. Chap. 32, § 4.2.

36 Letter of 13 July 1870, Em III 225-226; 23 January 1871, Em III 295.

37 Letter of 7 February 1871, Em III 305.

38 Circ. of 12 October 1870, Em III 261-262.

39 Letter of 10 December 1870, Em III 278.

40 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 287, Wednesday 14 December 1870, p. 1159.

41 Cf. Letter to the Mayor, 18 January 1871, Em III 292; to the Prefect, 11 April 1873, Em IV 76-77.

42 To Fr M. Rua, 1 July 1871, Em III 344.

43 Cf. Letter of May 1872, Em III 430-431, 431-432; 12 July 1872, Em III 446.

44 Application to Vittorio Emanuele of 16 April 1872, Em III 425-426; cf. Letter to Count F. di Viancino, 20 September 1873, Em IV 160-161; to Fr M. Rua so that Fr A. Savio would forward relevant documents on proceedings to the Council of State, 16 March 1874, Em IV 260; from Rome to Fr M. Rua in reference to patronage of the cause by Count C. Reviglio della Venaria [= Veneria], February 1875, Em IV 420.

45 Letter from Alassio, 4 March 1876, E III 23-24.

46 Letter of 15 March 1876, E III 29-30.

47 Published in BS 2 (1878) no. 7, July, pp. 7-8.

last year we have been able to lay the foundations of the new church which rises more than a metre above the ground' the *Salesian Bulletin* announced in April 1878.⁴⁸

Some months later, an unexpected dispute arose over the intended link between Pius IX's name and the two churches. In the Sunday 17 February issue of *L'Unità Cattolica*, under the heading *San Secondo e Pio IX* in the Italian news section, support was given to the proposal put forward by 'the very zealous parish priest of San Secondo' who had helped with construction of the church out of respect for the memory of Pius IX. The parish priest had considered writing to him to 'call on his blessing and help.'⁴⁹

The Archbishop had supported the proposal and on 3 March the paper made this public in an article entitled *Il monumento dei Torinesi alla santa memoria di Pio Nono* (The people of Turin's monument to the saintly memory of Pius IX.)⁵⁰ Did Don Bosco know of the initiative? In a letter to Fr Rua five days earlier he had asked Fr Bonetti to prepare an article for the *Salesian Bulletin* on the Church of St John the Evangelist in three issues: "1. A work counselled, blessed, supported by Pius IX. 2. There could be no better monument than to bring to a conclusion a work began by Pius IX, dedicated to his name and which is in accordance with his final piece of advice: Take care of the young. [3.] It is the Cooperators' duty to bring to a conclusion a work begun by the founder of the Salesian Promoters."⁵¹

Perhaps alarmed that there was another proposal of the kind in Turin on 6 March, again from Rome, Don Bosco directly confirmed Fr Bonetti in his task and, wanting to pre-empt any opposition, sought to underline the notion of Pius IX as 'founder of the Cooperators' and that he was appealing to them, near or far, to help with the construction. With regard to the article he said: 'then let me see it.'⁵² It came out in the April issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* under the headline: Salesian Cooperators for the perpetual memory of Pius IX the Great. It illustrated with plentiful reminders and motivations what Don Bosco had suggested to the editor.⁵³

Insistence on exclusive reference to the Cooperators was not enough to avoid a clash between Salesian and diocesan initiatives. It created a storm over a period when there were no other major disputes between Don Bosco and the Archbishop. Gastaldi protested to the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and the Cardinal Secretary of State. Don Bosco explained to the latter, on 8 May 1878, that his magazine was addressed 'only to Cooperators and by that name we mean our ordinary benefactors of our houses in Italy, France, America.'⁵⁴ He wrote to the Archbishop in the same tenor, clarifying that the appeal had been addressed 'only to Salesian Cooperators' in a 'Bulletin printed in Genoa,' assuring him that he had given orders that 'the word "monument"' no longer be used.⁵⁵

He touched on these and other issues in his defence on 28 May and 1 June in letters to Cardinals Franchi and Ferrieri, assuring them that 'except for the item currently being printed' no more reference in future would be made to the church as a 'monument' to Pius IX.⁵⁶ He aimed to put an end to disputes with *A justification on the Church of St John the Evangelist as a monument to Pius IX* published in the June *Salesian Bulletin*, followed by texts from the 12 October 1870 circular and Canon Zappata's *Recommendation* 'by order and in the name of Archbishop Riccardi.'

48 BS 2 (1878) no. 4, April, p. 4.

49 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 42, Sunday 17 February 1878, pp. 167-168.

50 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 54, Sunday 3 March 1878, p. 214.

51 Letter of 28 February 1878, E III 305-306.

52 E III 310.

53 BS 2 (1878) no. 4, April, pp. 2-6.

54 E III 338.

55 Letter of 9 May 1878, E III 339-340.

56 E III 348-349 and 350.

The author of the article, aimed at reassuring readers about the precise questions involved, formally healed the dispute with reassuring words: 'We have removed certain sentences and restricted ourselves to recommending the Work to our Cooperators only.' But unable to resist the seduction of argument, he noted,: 'Yet despite all that, we were soon referred to as having upset someone. It is painful when we seem to upset some people whatever we do ... Etc.'⁵⁷

In April, Don Bosco invited Count Eugenio De Maistre to the blessing of the 'foundation stone' of the church being erected 'in honour of the late Pius IX,' asking him for 'the favour of coming and laying the stone in place and pouring the first slab of mortar.'⁵⁸ The date was postponed to 14 August. Don Bosco asked Archbishop Gastaldi to bless the stone and it was laid by banker Ceriana.⁵⁹ As Don Bosco said, it was a 'resounding success.'⁶⁰ Both the Archbishop and Don Bosco gave a brief speech. The Archbishop highlighted with particular fervour three poles of the Catholic Faith which, of course, Don Bosco agreed with: 'I rejoice,' so the brief speech concluded 'that a church has arisen in this place and to the honour of an Apostle so dear to Jesus Christ, so devoted to Mary, so respectful to the Chair of Peter. May the sight of the church forever warm the heart with devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary most holy, and make us ever more affectionate and devoted sons and daughters of the Pope.'⁶¹

As well as the intense correspondence seeking help to complete all the work, the church in particular, Don Bosco began organising a lottery with valuable paintings and other items left as a legacy by Baron Bianco de Barbania.⁶² In a presentation on 20 August 1880 on Salesian works, Don Bosco wrote to Cardinal Nina: 'With equal zeal we have been working for the church and Institute of St John the Evangelist next to the Protestant church and classrooms in Turin. Next November, the boys' oratory will be transferred there and in January 1881, the whole church will be functioning.'⁶³ The five bells in the tall bell tower above the facade were blessed on 1 December 1881.⁶⁴ The *Placement of the statue of Pius IX* took place in the church on 25 April 1882.⁶⁵ The January issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* published an overview of the church and attached hospice designed by the architect.⁶⁶ Distinguished musicians praised the grand organ in early July (3–6).⁶⁷ On 5 July, Don Bosco wrote to the Archbishop (the 'Concordia'⁶⁸ had been signed on 17 June) suggesting a simple blessing instead of a consecration of the church, fearing a repeat of the upsets that had occurred at the consecration of the Church of San Secondo.⁶⁹ But the Archbishop opted

57 Cf. BS 2 (1878) no. 6, June, pp. 4-6.

58 Letter of 4 April 1878, E III 336.

59 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 6 August 1878, E III 374. To his own letter he included an impromptu one by Fr Bonetti defending his articles published in the *Bollettino Salesiano: I decreti di Urbano VIII, e i miracoli di Pio IX*, BS 2 (1878) no. 7, July, pp. 4-5, and *Una giustificazione sulla chiesa di S. Giovanni qual monumento a Pio IX*, BS 2 (1878) no. 6, June, pp. 4-6; cf. Chap. 28, § 5.

60 To Fr G. Ronchail, 15 August 1878, E III 380.

61 *Collocamento della Pietra Angolare nella Chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista*, BS 2 (1878) no. 9, September, pp. 1-6.

62 Cf. Request for authorisation to the Prefect of Turin, 28 November 1878, E III 418-419; the authorisation arrived on 2 December; the extraction took place on 30 August 1879.

63 E III 616.

64 *Solenne benedizione delle campane per la Chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista in Torino*, BS 6 (1882) no. 1, January, pp. 9-10.

65 BS 6 (1882) no. 8, August, pp. 139-140.

66 *Disegno della chiesa ed ospizio di S. Giovanni e della statua di Pio IX*, BS 6 (1882) no. 6, June, pp. 97-99, 103-104.

67 *Notizie sugli organi in generale e collocamento dell'organo della Chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista in Torino*, BS 6 (1882) no. 8, August, pp. 135-139.

68 Cf. Chap. 28, § 6.

69 Letter of 5 July 1882, E IV 149.

for consecration, suggesting 30 August.⁷⁰ Don Bosco would have preferred the end of October⁷¹ and, precisely, Saturday 28th, the date which was finally agreed upon.⁷² He also invited the Archbishop to lunch at Valsalice that day.⁷³ He issued a circular and personal letters of invitation to the rite of consecration.⁷⁴ On 19 October, lawyer Count Carlo Reviglio della Veneria died, 'one of the most well-deserving individuals of the Church of St John the Evangelist' who had obtained the expropriation of the Morglia property.⁷⁵ Don Bosco then informed a number of benefactors about the church and the rite of consecration,⁷⁶ The Archbishop had officiated 'despite his poor health.' The Bishops of Fossano, Biella and Alba celebrated Mass there during the first three days of the octave.⁷⁷

Work on the hospice continued for another two years. The building had reached the third floor by the end of 1883.⁷⁸ On 22 October 1884, Don Bosco was able to announce to generous Count Colle that the house was finished and that 'entry of the pupils who will number around 150 initially'⁷⁹ was fixed for 10 November. The first Rector was Fr Philip Rinaldi (hird successor of Don Bosco at the helm of the Salesian Society, proclaimed Blessed on 29 April 1990). On 20 February 1885, Don Bosco wrote: 'We have almost completely filled the house of St John the Apostle, but the opening has not yet taken place' and he hoped to celebrate it with a *toast* in the presence of the Count and Countess of Toulon, benefactors and friends.⁸⁰

2. Other establishments in France of Salesians and Daughters of Mary help of Christians. (1877–78)

In the second half of 1877, prospects opened up for the extension of the Salesian presence in France and for establishing themselves in two new agricultural colleges, one of them entrusted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Both were in the Var region in the diocese of Frejus, whose bishop was Joseph Sebastian Terris (1824–85). He had begun his pastoral service there in 1876 and was called on to fix up the situation of two orphanages in a precarious financial state. They were founded by Abbe Jacques Vincent in 1863 at Navarre and Saint Cyr. A school was also requested at Cannes. The General Chapter dealt with these requests, which at its session on 22 September was functioning also as a Superior Chapter. The Minutes record: 'It was decided to reply that we accept in general terms to send two Sisters to Saint Cyr because there are girls there. We will put a priest there for now, or one or two more, and an orphanage at Navarre.'⁸¹

70 It was a clear denial of those who had caused problems at the S. Congregation of Rites: cf. BS 6 (1882) no. 6, June, p. 104.

71 To the Archbishop, 29 July 1882, E IV 158; cf. letter to the Protector of the Congregation, Cardinal L. Nina, 4 August 1882, E IV 159; and to Fr F. Dalmazzo, before 16 August, E IV 162.

72 To the Archbishop, 16 October 1882, E IV 174.

73 Letter of 24 October 1882, E IV 180-181.

74 Circ. of 15 October 1882, E IV 177-178; to Countess G. di Camburzano, 16 October 1882, E IV 179.

75 Circular-invitation to a funeral service in suffrage for his soul, 11 November 1882, E IV 182-183.

76 To Mrs L. Radice, 2 November 1882, E IV 181-182; to Mademoiselle C. Louvet, 2 November 1882, E IV 452; to Marquis Cantono Ceva, 14 November 1882, E IV 184; to Baron G. Ceriana, 7 December 1882, E IV 189; to mademoiselle Lallemand, 28 March 1884, E IV 424.

77 Cf. *Consacrazione della chiesa di San Giovanni Evangelista con altri articoli desunti da giornali cittadini*, in BS 6 (1882) no. 11, November, pp. 173-176; 7 (1883) no. 1, January, pp. 6-17 (Don Bosco's address at the end of sung Vespers on the day of the consecration, 28 October is noteworthy, pp. 8-11).

78 To Count L. Colle, 4 December 1883, E IV 499.

79 E IV 509.

80 E IV 512-513. He thanked him again for a substantial donation in a letter of 14 December 1886, E IV 524.

81 G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* III 14-15.

2.1 Salesians at Navarre and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Saint Cyr.

Two of Don Bosco's letters in October and November 1877 to the Rector at Nice, Fr Ronchail, predicted things would be quickly set up. In the first he promised to study with Fr Rua how to send the personnel requested, authorising him to go ahead 'drawing up the two contracts of St.-Cyr and Navarre to appear as a donation' at a cost not exceeding half of the real value.⁸² In November, he gave rapid instructions for taking over: 'Take Fr Perrot or Fr G.B. Ronchail (The Rector's brother) with a coadjutor, and go to the Bishop of Frejus. Once you have placed these two at St-Cyr, tell them to increase *in multam gentem*. Then note the place for the Sisters and tell me the number needed, and we can soon send them because they are ready *ad hoc*. Then tell me how we can provide for Cannes and Navarre and quickly write back to me. I have already written to the Bishop of Frejus about this.'⁸³

The school at Cannes, negotiated with the parish priest, Fr Barbe, was quickly accepted. In the Salesian membership list for 1878, the 1877-78 school year, Fr Pierre Perrot was listed as the Rector, assisted by two clerics. However, already by mid-January, Don Bosco wrote to the Rector in Nice: 'The Regulations for the school at Cannes are not possible. Agreements need to be clear. If we are not absolutely free and independent it is better to suspend everything and we will go further on, that is, to St-Cyr or Marseilles.'⁸⁴ Withdrawal from there was inevitable. Early in July, Fr Perrot and cleric Enrico Ronchail were already in Navarre. The two schools were co-educational but the boys were gradually brought together at Navarre and the girls at St-Cyr, where they were prepared for domestic work, horticulture and agriculture according to where they came from and where they would be going. On 30 March, Don Bosco left for Nice with Fr Rua and on 5 April 1878 he drew up a contract at Frejus with Abbe Vincent for both houses. Following this he informed Jules Rostard of every detail. Rostard was President of the *Beaujour* Society which legally represented the property and use of Salesian real estate (the Salesians were the effective proprietors) in southern France.⁸⁵

At the beginning of July 1878, the Salesians formally took possession of both houses. Pierre Perrot (1853-1928) was an Italian with a French name (as was the case with Fr Ronchail in Nice) and became Rector at Navarre. Don Bosco gave the twenty-five year old Rector what amounts to a jewel in the art of religious governing: 'I know you are still a boy and will therefore need to study and practise under a skilful master. But so what? When St Timothy was called on to preach J.C., young as he was, he set about preaching the Kingdom of God to the Hebrews and Gentiles. So, go in the Lord's name; go not as a superior but as a friend, brother, father. Let your command be the charity that seeks to do good to everyone and evil to no one. Read, meditate, and practise our rules. That goes for you and your men. May God bless you and bless all those who go with you to Navarre.'⁸⁶

In early October, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians also came to carry out the normal work of assistance in the Salesian house: kitchen, laundry, and wardrobe. The October *Salesian Bulletin* informed Cooperators about Navarre.⁸⁷ In January 1879, in a letter to Fr Rua, Don Bosco added this postscript: 'On Sunday, last the youngsters at Navarre sang the Mass of the Holy Childhood and Dogliani's *Tantum Ergo* at Sollies-Pont, a town close by the hospice, and did it proud; a collection raised 100 fr. Thus the glories of the Oratory are extended to France.'⁸⁸

82 Letter of 26 October 1877, E III 233.

83 Undated letter, E III 239.

84 E III 270.

85 Letter from Alassio, 8 February 1879, E IV 395-396.

86 Letter of 2 July 1878, E III 359-360.

87 *Colonia agricola salesiana ossia Patronato di S. Giuseppe in Navarra*, BS 2 (1878) no. 10, October, pp. 6-7.

88 Letter from Marseilles, 21 January 1879, E III 440.

At Saint–Cyr, the Sisters’ takeover was more laborious. Don Bosco wrote again in May 1879 to Canon Guiol that ‘no document has as yet arrived’ for setting up St–Cyr. ‘Nevertheless, next week some of our priests will go there so we can examine and commence matters of greater concern.’⁸⁹ Fr Carlo Ghivarello, former Economer General of the Salesian Society, went there. He was a good organiser and expert in technical and administrative matters.⁹⁰ The direct administration of the work by the Sisters took place in April 1850 when three Sisters arrived. The Superior was Caterina Daghero who was elected to succeed Mother Mazzarello the following year when the latter fell ill (she was at St–Cyr at the time) and died soon after. Fr Ghivarello remained there throughout 1880 and beyond to see to financial aspects of the school. On 27 February 1887, Don Bosco said, when dictating a letter to Fr Rua with Fr Ghivarello as copyist: ‘I encourage the people in Marseilles to continue their charity and pay Fr Ghivarello’s (the writer) pouf [Piedmontese ‘puf’ = debts] as well as Fr Parrot’s, Fr Ronchail’s etc.’ ‘Fr Ghivarello is suffering thirst for money.’⁹¹ He spoke of Saint–Cyr in a conference to Cooperators at Marseilles on 17 February 1881: ‘We can already see poor girls working as young farmers, busying themselves with the grass and hay, collecting and burning weeds and doing all the work of horticulture. In the morning and evening they receive scholastic instruction, learn catechism, do sewing, knitting and all the domestic chores mothers of families do, but as country women. The running, administration, assistance, in a word the management of the agricultural school is entrusted to the Daughters of Mary help of Christians.’⁹²

2.2 Salesians in Marseilles (1878)

Don Bosco set foot in the great Mediterranean port city on several occasions in search of charity.⁹³ In 1877, he laid the basis for a foundation that began in autumn 1878.⁹⁴ A Salesian Cooperator was active there, Monsieur Bergasse, president of the Maritime Transport Society. Don Bosco had already turned to him earlier to obtain free passage for missionaries.⁹⁵ But the first encouragement for the desired foundation had come from the founder of the *Oeuvre de la Jeunesse ouvrière du sacre Cour*, Canon Joseph Timon–David. Don Bosco replied to him in July 1876 in a letter translated into French by lawyer Michel, stating his full availability on condition he had the ‘prior agreement’ of the bishop and could count on the ‘moral support’ of the ‘Work for Young Workers.’⁹⁶ At the beginning of March 1877 (the opening of the new site for the *Patronage* in Nice took place on 12 November) he was in Marseilles for negotiations,⁹⁷ and wrote to Fr Rua that a meeting was planned for Monday the 5th with Bishop Charles Phillipe Place, Bishop of Marseilles since 1866. He said he was ‘very much in favour.’ ‘I am looking for land and will put the hoe to the most suitable plot.’ A guest of the De La Salle Brothers, he said he had been at ‘a celebration for awarding honourable mentions to their pupils, noting: ‘It seems it could be a guide for us too. Performances of lots of items, singing, playing, some concerts kept the large audience happy,’⁹⁸

89 Letter of 20 May 1879, E III 473-474.

90 Cf. E. CERIA, *Profili dei capitolari salesiani. Colle Don Bosco (Asti)*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana 1951, p. 110.

91 Letter from Roquefort 27 February 1881, E IV 25.

92 The “Bulletin Salésien” 3 (1881) no. 3, March, gave a translation of the article that appeared in the “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 47, Friday 25 February 1881, pp. 186-187; reproduced in Don Bosco’s French in MB XV 691-695.

93 Cf. letter to Mrs Z. Cesconi, 15 December 1876, E III 125; to Fr G. Barberis, 28 February 1877, E III 152; to General A. Lamarmora, 3 March 1877, E III 153-154.

94 Information on this found in BS 2 (1878) no. 11, November, pp. 6-7, *Oratorio di S. Leone in Marsiglio*.

95 Already cited letter to Fr G. Cagliero, 12 May 1877, E III 170; Chap. 21, § 6.

96 To Canon Timon-David, July 1876, E III 77-78.

97 Letter from Marseilles to General A. Lamarmora (1804-1878), who had sent an offering from Biella of 1.000 lire for the Oratory, 3 March 1877, E III 153.

98 To Fr M. Rua, 5 March 1877, E III 154-155.

Canon Clement Guiol hosted the Salesian work within his parish of Saint– Joseph. Don Bosco had to agree with him how to set up and run the *Oratoire Saint–Leon*. He wrote to him on 13 June, from Rome, telling him he had ‘written to the Italian Consul, Annibale Strambio’ (1819–81) who had been a fellow student with him in Chieri, hoping he would favour ‘a fully humanitarian and religious’ project.⁹⁹ Don Bosco did not seem to be in a hurry. In August, the Canon dealt with the *Beaujoir* Society asking them to assume legal ownership in the eyes of civic authorities and for the real estate to be used for a large work which would not be restricted to a festive oratory. He was pressing for an agreement which had been delayed by a number of unforeseen factors, especially on Don Bosco’s part who, as we know, was in Rome when Pius IX died, and for the election of Leo XIII, followed by an audience with the new Pope, remaining there until 25 March 1878. He promised the Canon he would be in Marseilles ‘in the first fortnight in April.’¹⁰⁰

He gave Fr Ronchail a precise date with details of a series of visits: ‘Saturday (3) God willing I will be with you at 2.00 p.m.’ ‘I will remain until after the collection [of monies] and after we will go to Frejus, St–Cyr, Navarre and Marseilles.’¹⁰¹ Fr Rua went with him. General agreement was reached on the establishment [of the Oratory] while they were in Marseilles from 2–11 April, apart from a brief parenthesis at Frejus on the 5th, and agreement was reached in particular with Canon Guiol on relationships between the new oratory and the parish. The Canon then sent Don Bosco the text of the agreement for the approval of the Superior Chapter. Their examination of it was delayed by the influenza Don Bosco caught on his return trip, when he was forced to remain at Sampierdarena from 16–23 April.

The Superior Chapter meeting on 15 May 1878 finally decided to accept Marseilles and at the session on the 17th they examined the details of the agreement, leaving Don Bosco to improve it.¹⁰² Fr Giuseppe Bologna [known as Bologne in France] was appointed Rector of the new ‘Oratory’ in France. He knew French and was considered to have fully imbibed the tradition of the Oratory in Turin.¹⁰³

Don Bosco wrote to Fr Bologna, who had stopped over in Nice, giving him first of all an example in paternal governance: ‘Go *in nomine Domini*, make savings where you can. If need something, ask for it and papa will do what he can to provide. Go as a father to the confreres, as a representative of the Congregation, as a dear friend of Don Bosco’s. Write often in black and white.’¹⁰⁴ Two days later in a letter to Canon Guiol, he not only presented Fr Bologna as ‘experienced with hospices, trade students and festive oratories’ but made an important statement that apparently restricted the terms of the agreement. The commitment to make ‘the number of *auxiliary priests* available that the parish priest wanted *insofar as that was compatible with the duties of the priests at the oratory*’ could have created problems with the parish priest. Too binding also on the *Oratoire Saint–Leon* was the article that established that: ‘Boys in the choir must go to St Joseph’s Church any time the parish priest asks them to.’¹⁰⁵ ‘We need to consider making our Institute stable,’ Don Bosco told Guiol ‘and it will be stable if the Salesian Congregation is independent. At the moment that is hindered, therefore the Salesians can neither run nor jump, only stick with what is and no more. Give some thought to it; it is my desire that the *Maison Beaujour* lasts many years after us.’¹⁰⁶

99 To Canon C. Guiol, 13 June 1877, E III 185. He would write on 15 April 1879 to Consul Strambio to gain support and assistance from the Italian Government (E III 467-468).

100 Letter of 14 March 1877, E III 315.

101 Letter of 27 March 1878, E III 332. He wrote from Sampierdarena, where the Superior Chapter had met to tidy up the Deliberation of the First General Chapter before printing them.

102 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, pp. 1-5, 12-14.

103 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, pp. 4-5.

104 Letter of 25 June 1878, E III 356.

105 MB XIV 687-688. Emphasis is ours.

106 Letter of 26 June 1878, E III 357.

In a letter on 31 July, he spoke of founding a novitiate in Marseilles while also busy about consolidating the 'St Leo hospice' by adding carpentry and tailoring workshops. Don Bosco was dreaming of many vocations: 'We will look after the novitiate. This is a huge but very useful undertaking so that more than half of our students can then go into their respective dioceses as clerics. There will be missionaries and also good lay people.'¹⁰⁷ He promised an increase in personnel in September, but there was a lack of men and money to increase the existing building.¹⁰⁸ In January 1879 he was in Marseilles to farewell a group of departing missionaries and asked a lawyer friend's opinion on the problem of the house's position before the law, though in reality it was Salesian property: 'how to give it perpetuity and avoid cases of succession.'¹⁰⁹

Writing to the novice master about it he predicted a flourishing future,¹¹⁰ and said to Fr Lemoyne: 'I am here and have many serious issues to deal with. You will be amazed when you come to know of them and will see the Lanzo dream come true.'¹¹¹ As we know, in 1876 he had a dream about Dominic Savio who predicted the future of the Congregation: 'With regard to the Congregation, there will be a dawning from north, south, east and west.'¹¹² 'There are already about sixty boys at the St Leo's oratory' he wrote to another Salesian.¹¹³ Instead to Fr Rua he explained 'the absolute need for a master tailor and a domestic who can look after a small garden and other work of this kind.'¹¹⁴ He then assured him: 'Things here are going well for us ... The parish priest of St Josephs is always our friend and protector.'¹¹⁵

Relationships with the parish priest were, in fact, cordial. We also see this from a letter he received from Rome on 4 March. Don Bosco indicated that the Provincial, Fr Cerruti, would be visiting in mid-May and he praised and approved 'the efforts of entrepreneurs managing the extensions to the orphanage' and thanked those seeing to the publishing of the *Notice sur les Salesiens*. He also thanked the *Beaujour* Society for their patience: the many foundations meant he had 'spent all active, passive and neutral funds' but he would soon be selling one holding and this would make 'some hundreds of thousands of francs available' making it possible for him to honour his debts. He stated, finally, his reluctance to take on the institute offered at Auteuil (Paris) by Abbe Louis Roussel.¹¹⁶

The *Notice* was the previously mentioned work of Abbe Louis Mendre, assistant priest at St Joseph's, *Don Bosco Pretre, Fondateur de la Congregation des Salesiens*.¹¹⁷ In a further letter to Guiol he confessed: 'I have received Fr Mendre's work. It is a classic work of the kind. But he often embarrassed me with the great praise he heaped on my poor person. May it all be to the glory of God and the benefit of the Work he seeks to commend.'¹¹⁸

Don Bosco had unsuccessfully sought a papal honour for Guiol on 10 March 1879.¹¹⁹ Further on, when inviting him to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, he even asked him to pass judgement on the first year of the oratory's life: 'I would love to know what you see as good, mediocre or bad. You know I place full trust in you and would like to follow your prudent advice.' He

107 To Canon C. Guiol, 31 July 1878, E III 370-371.

108 To Canon C. Guiol, from Sampierdarena 17 September 1878, E III 385-386.

109 To Lawyer F. Fiore, 9 January 1879, E III 433.

110 To Fr G. Barberis, 10 January 1879, E III 434.

111 Undated letter, E III 435.

112 G. BARBERIS, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp. 27-28; ID., *Cronichetta*, quad. 10, pp. 48 (b. n. of 22 December 1876).

113 To Fr G. B. Branda, undated letter, E III 436.

114 Letter of 11 January 1879, E III 436-437.

115 Letter of 21 January 1879, E III 439-440.

116 To Canon C. Guiol, 4 March 1879, E III 449-450.

117 Cf. Chap. 26, § 5.

118 To Canon C. Guiol, from Florence, 29 March 1879, E III 461

119 To Leo XIII, E III 454.

then expressed his opinion about taking on Abbe Roussel's work: 'The house at Autieul presents too many difficulties for us, therefore, following your advice I have finally dissociated myself from it.'¹²⁰

Abbe Roussel was running a large orphanage in the suburb of Autieul in Paris for working boys, and wanted to entrust it to Don Bosco. Count Cays, who professed as a Salesian on 17 September 1877, and was ordained priest on 20 September 1878,¹²¹ joined Father Rua in negotiations in Paris at the beginning of November 1878. Negotiations went on for a long time, since agreement had to be reached on many issues: ownership, legal representation, management, educational autonomy, and stability. In fact, the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Guibert, was demanding a trial year.¹²² The Superior Chapter had discussed it with Don Bosco on 6 February 1879. He had just returned from France and had told them of the discussions held with Abbe Roussel in Marseilles. He had highlighted certain difficulties which were insuperable for the moment; the technical superiority of the workshops in Paris, the precarious political situation with the coming to power of Gambetta, a 'volcano' ready to erupt in Paris, with the possibility of a new council, the demand that the Salesians go there for a trial year, the request that a novitiate be established there. It was decided 'to pull back from the task and not go' while always being ready to rethink when 'sufficient proof of our capacity had been demonstrated in France' through other works.¹²³

The work in progress at Marseilles was swallowing up lots of money. Don Bosco begged Fr Ronchail to make available at least 10,000 francs [33,162 euro] perhaps with help from Fr Cauvin, and through a loan.¹²⁴ A few days later he tried to calm Canon Guiol: 'The contract for one of the farm houses at Caselle has been concluded and the deed will be signed at the end of this week. Thus I hope to pacify Fr Bologna. But if Fr Ronchail has been able to find the person I wrote to I time, I believe we can pay the required sum.' 'The Salesian Congregation is a baby and therefore its "children" are even more so. But with God's help they will grow and will in good time reap fruit and good balance: patience, constancy and prayer.'¹²⁵

In September, however, the parish priest and the director of the oratory were not seeing eye to eye on the interpretation of what had been agreed between the *Beaujour* Society and Don Bosco regarding pastoral commitments of the Salesians and the choir. Don Bosco reacted with a letter which seemed to ignore what was said in articles in the agreement regarding '*prêtre auxiliaires*' and the '*maîtrise*'. 'It is certain' he wrote 'that in all negotiations with the worthy *Beaujour* [sic] Society there was never any talk of auxiliary priests or of the *maîtrise*.'

Further on in the letter he referred more correctly to educational needs which he believed they must not deviate from, as he had already indicated in his letter on 26 June 1878. The Canon's letter, Don Bosco said, 'presents other bases which overburden our preventive system. Repressive means are excluded for us and to ensure discipline and morality, absolute authority over our pupils is essential, along with educational autonomy. That becomes impossible when all or some have to leave the Institute for business which is extraneous to them.'¹²⁶

120 Letter of 20 May 1879, E III 473-474.

121 Cf. Chap. 28, § 1.

122 Cf. MB XIII 737-746, 999-1002; XIV 24-25, 41, 129; letter to Can. C. Guiol, 17 September 1878, E III 386; 4 March 1879, E III 450.

123 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli generali ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, pp. 68-70; *Documenti* XX 77-78; letter of C. Cays to Fr L. Roussel 13 March 1879, MB XIII 1001-1002.

124 Letter of 14 July 1879, E III 492. Fr Rua solved the problem by paying a substantial fine: cf. Don Bosco's letter to Fr G. Bologna 21 March 1880, E III 553.

125 To Canon C. Guiol, 20 July 1879, E III 497-498.

126 To Canon C. Guiol, September 1879, E III 519-521.

In December, Don Bosco announced a visit mid-way through January, also suggesting a conference for Cooperators.¹²⁷ The financial situation was such that the plan he told Fr Rua about became necessary: 'I will stay the whole month in Marseilles to conclude matters and look for money.'¹²⁸ But Don Bosco also found an extremely tense atmosphere in Marseilles. The meeting with the Canon was a stormy one, he claiming that the agreement had not been adhered to. Don Bosco's calm and Canon's Guiol's compliance reduced the tension in a few days.¹²⁹ The Cooperators conference was particularly fruitful and the Mass for the Feast of St Francis de Sales was very moving. It was celebrated at 8.a.m. with a 'good number of women' among whom the great benefactors, 'mothers' of the work in Marseilles.¹³⁰

Harmony was re-established with Canon Guiol over the following months as attested to by various letters. 'From your dear letters' Don Bosco wrote to him 'I can very well see the concerns and charity with which you look after St Leo's oratory ... Fr Bologna writes that he is very happy with the oratory and the good relations outside, especially with the parish of St Joseph's. I trust that the Lord will continue to keep us firm in the charitable union essential for sustaining works aimed at the public good such as ours. Fr Bologna indicated the results already obtained by the Committee you have zealously set up. May the Lord be praised.'¹³¹ But a much more serious problem, soon resolved, was looming on another front.¹³²

3. Development of works in Latin America

According to the Salesian Society membership list, the situation of works in the South American Province for the 1877–78 school year was as follows: Buenos Aires, the Church of the Misericordia, the St Vincent's Hospice with arts and trades classes, the St John the Evangelist parish at Boca; at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, there was the Holy Angels college; at Colon near Montevideo, the Pius IX college.

Don Bosco was not working there in the field but he was very much present. As Superior General of the Salesian Society he made sure his governing activity was never lacking, assisted by the more directly involved superiors of the Chapter, Frs Rua and Cagliari, the latter almost his Vicar on the American scene. He corresponded with Provincials, Rectors, Church and Civic authorities. He continued carrying out animation and formation activities, advising and supporting Salesian priests, clerics, coadjutors, inspiring and encouraging Cooperators and benefactors and reaching out to communities of young people.

Don Bosco's involvement in Europe promoting, preparing and selecting personnel, encouraging charity, supporting missionary expeditions, animating those departing was a very busy one in view of managing current work and preparing for future developments in Patagonia. His presence was especially strong through reminders, ideas, and in the hearts, lifestyle and activity of the missionaries themselves. This was especially relevant for those holding senior management positions: Provincials Fr Bodrato and Fr Lasagna, and certain Rectors such as Frs Fagnano and

127 To Canon C. Guiol, 22 December 1879, E III 535.

128 To Fr M. Rua, 22 January 1880, E III 545.

129 Cf. *Documenti*, XXIII 104-105.

130 "Bulletin Salésien" 2 (1880) no. 2, February, pp. 3-4; cf. letter to key benefactors, Ms Rostand (consort of the President of the *Beaujour* Society), Jacques, Noilly-Prat, Broquier, Du Gas, 15 December 1879, E III 533-535; 9 and 13 May 1880, E III 586-588; 23 December 1880, E III 645; 27 February 1881, E IV 27; 19 March 1882, E IV 121-122; 16 July 1882, E IV 153; 4 December 1882, E IV 188 (this latter to the Provincial Fr Albera).

131 To Canon C. Guiol, 26 March 1880, E III 557-558. Lengthy and particularly familiar was the letter of 9 May 1880, E III 586-587.

132 Cf. Chap. 28, § 3.

Domenico Tomatis. They had learned their trade as Salesians from Don Bosco and men who were mentally and emotionally close to him, Frs Barberis, Lemoyne, Francesia, Cerruti. By living *and working with him and them* they had become experts at acting with and like Don Bosco.¹³³

In the third expedition in 1877, led by Fr James Costamagna, six Daughters of Mary Help of Christians joined the Salesians.¹³⁴ Don Bosco also referred to them in his *Appeal to Cooperators*. Here, Don Bosco also insisted on the 'lack of necessary means' and recourse to 'the inexhaustible source of the piety of the faithful and especially of the Cooperators.' He hinted at the more negative anti-Protestant tones that he would touch on in his November 7 address,¹³⁵ comparing their 'impious propaganda of errors' with the freely given dedication of the Salesians and Sisters to the material and spiritual welfare of poor and abandoned youngsters.¹³⁶

3.1 Don Bosco during Fr Francis Bodrato's hard-working times as Provincial and Fr Louis Lasagna's activity. (1877–80)

In his three and a half years in South America, three of which as Provincial, as far as we know, Fr Bodrato had received no more than four or five letters from Don Bosco. On the other hand, Fr Bodrato wrote at least 50 letters to Don Bosco.¹³⁷ Basically, Fr Cagliari was supervising in the background from Turin. In the general administration hierarchy he came third after Don Boco and Fr Rua. But now at the centre in Turin, reference to Fr Lasagna seemed privileged. He knew how to maintain more direct and focused relationships with the Superior General than with the Provincial in Buenos Aires with whom he felt less in harmony.

In matters inherent to his office, Fr Bodrato habitually corresponded with Fr Rua, especially for solutions to financial problems involving Turin, and more so with Fr Cagliari from whom he expected, from time to time, the various faculties for admission to religious profession and orders, and mediation to find personnel who were so insufficient in numbers. He also referred to him for appointments of available Salesians, occasionally disagreeing with evaluation of individuals and decisions from on high. He was certainly not lacking in wisdom and prudence, or in judging people, situations and events with realistic and frank views on the present and future of Salesians in America. He shared without reservation the inspirational principle of Don Bosco's 'missionary dream', but with major attention to what was its true historical substance: above all action in response to poverty and youth abandonment in the vast civil world, and then the specific, though limited in numerical terms, work in the missions, even though it had extraordinary resonance back in Europe. 'If I had to guess Don Bosco's feelings' he wrote 'I do not think I would be mistaken in saying that we should be accepting colleges rather than parishes' and more so 'missions among the Indians' and 'by preference, colleges which either for their position or other possibilities would facilitate missions for us among the Indians.'¹³⁸

Naturally, we are not writing here about his governance as such, but only the part Don Bosco played in it. In fact, the founder was his most significant reference person at the centre, and he in turn intended him to be his heartfelt mediator and sure interpreter for the Salesians, benefactors, religious and civil authorities in Latin America. In real terms, the basic characteristic of this former elementary school teacher from Mornese faithfully reflected what he had assimilated and

133 Cf. Chap. 24, § 1.1.

134 Cf. Chap. 20, § 8.

135 Cf. Chap. 21, § 4.

136 Cf. *Appello ai cooperatori in favore di una novella spedizione di Missionari Salesiani*, BS 1 (1877) no. 3, November, p. 2.

137 Cf. F. BODRATO, *Epistolario*. Introduction, critical text and notes by B. Casali. Rome, LAS 1995.

138 To Don Bosco, 29 January 1877, F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, pp. 105-106.

tenaciously preserved from Don Bosco, whom he admired and followed as an exemplary governor, and felt was a fascinating omnipresent inspirer and animator. As a superior, or rather, as a father, what had influenced him – he was a father of two children who had had their own problems – and in turn brought him in, was clearly expressed in the description he sketched in a letter to the novices at the Oratory: ‘Who is D. Bosco?’ He replied on the basis of what he had personally ‘learned’ and ‘heard from others.’ Don Bosco was the ‘tender and loving father’ of his Salesians. For believers he was ‘a man of providence’ sent to act ‘in calamitous times’ of need and unbounded expectations. For those who stopped at a purely rational evaluation he was ‘a man of philanthropy’ who overcame every barrier of thought and action to help everyone with the broadest range of ‘moral and material means.’¹³⁹ For him, this Don Bosco became a rule of life and action: ‘Many times I asked myself,’ he confided in his Superior ‘How would D. Bosco act in this case? What advice would he give me? Then with a glance to heaven and ahead it seems to me he would say or do such and such, and that’s what I do.’¹⁴⁰

Pastoral activity on behalf of Italian migrants came first in order of time and commitment. As we have seen, it began with the extreme self-sacrifice of Fr Baccino and was pursued just as strongly by Fr Bodrato. In order of the Salesian *proprium* [its core mission] what was tenaciously defended in the first place was the popular nature of the institutions, especially the ‘professional’ schools (*escuelas de Arte y Oficios*) and instruction of the poor, at-risk youth of the lower and middle classes. The demands of the work in Buenos Aires initially put the missionary prospects properly so-called in second place, but these too remained part of Fr Bodrato’s mental horizon. Six months prior to his death, he finally succeeded arranging for the entry of the Salesians into Carmen de Patagones in northern Patagonia.

Fr Lasagna, instead, was more inclined to meeting the expectations of Catholics in one country, Uruguay, especially those leaning towards political, economic and cultural revival with educational demands not only at the popular level. Therefore he focused especially on the organisation of secondary schools for youth from the middle and upper classes, with a view to giving them a well-prepared general culture for an active role in society.¹⁴¹ He was also available for developing *Artes y ofices* workshops for the lower classes.¹⁴² He also became very active in and keen on extending missionary activity into areas he felt had a broader and richer future than the Patagonian missions – those inhabited by the indigenous tribes in Brazil.¹⁴³

We have already quoted from Don Bosco’s first letter to Fr Lasagna in America in our possession,¹⁴⁴ and the letter to the pupils at the college, both on 16 July 1877. A cluster of letters to Uruguayan and Argentine benefactors from September 1877 is noteworthy. Their work would ‘never be forgotten’ he assured them. ‘You are in our hearts and will be part of the history of the Salesian Congregation.’¹⁴⁵

In September 1877, Don Bosco replied to a letter sent him via Fr Cagliero from the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Giacinto Vera, in Montevideo. He thanked him for the support given to setting up the college at Villa Colón, informing him that Fr Cagliero’s authority had been ‘conferred on Fr Bodrato [sic], parish priest at Bocca [sic] in Buenos Aires,’ and announced the departure of six

139 Cf. Letter of 5 March 1877, F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, pp. 131-132.

140 To Fr Bosco, 5 January 1879, F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, p. 341.

141 L. LASAGNA, *Epistolario*. Introduction, notes and critical text by Antonio da Silva Ferreira, Vol. I (1873-1882). Rome, LAS 1995, pp. 112-113, 149-150, 166-167, 228-229, 243, 259, 278-279.

142 L. LASAGNA, *Epistolario*, Vol. I..., pp. 124-125, 175, 177, 204, 215, 226, 243, 365.

143 L. LASAGNA, *Epistolario*, Vol. I..., pp. 337, 371-372.

144 Cf. Chap. 21, § 7.

145 Cf. Letters of 13 and 30 September 1877 to Mrs E. Jackson, to Fr R. Yeregui, to Dr E. Carranza, to Mr E. Fynn and R. Finocchio, prior of the Confraternity of the Misericordia, E III 212-214 e 220-223.

Sisters and eight Salesians for Montevideo in November.¹⁴⁶ He also expressed the thanks and perpetual gratitude of the Salesians, the blessing of the Holy Father, his belief in the social and salvific value of the good done for the young, to Mr Enrique Fynn who had given the Pius IX college and attached Rosa Church to Fr Lasagna.¹⁴⁷

In September and October 1877, Bishop Pietro Maria Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro came twice to visit Don Bosco at the Oratory to ask for priests for his diocese.¹⁴⁸

Over the same months, Don Bosco tried many approaches in search of the ever insufficient material means: the Work of Propaganda of the Faith in Lyons, the Secretary General of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the State department in France, to seek free 'sea passages', the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, Franchi,¹⁴⁹ The results were negative. The Lyons Work in particular was unable to help for reasons Don Bosco already knew about: the Salesian institutions in Argentina were not officially missionary ones.¹⁵⁰ This is why it was officially up to Cardinal Franchi from the Propaganda Congregation to recognise the existing and foreseeable works as Missions entrusted to the Salesians, with Fr John Cagliero at the head. In order to obtain this, Don Bosco did not hesitate to anticipate the future by extending and bending the reality of existing works: the college at Villa Colón was presented as 'a college or junior seminary'; the hospice in Buenos Aires was 'for poor boys, especially savages'; 'a house of studies or novitiate had been opened in the same city for preparing students for the missions'; the Salesians had preached missions in the vicinity of the savages, and agreement had been reached with Archbishop Aneiros on two settlements 'nearest to the savages' at Santa Cruz and Carhué.¹⁵¹

Achieving these goals (for now just in his imagination) was still some way off, but Don Bosco continued his diplomatic though unsuccessful efforts with Cardinal Franchi (who became Secretary of State on 5 March 1878 and died on 31 July the same year), Leo XIII, and Franchi's successor, Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda from 5 March 1878, to obtain two things he had dreamed of for some time and which had already been the subject of a *Petition* to Cardinal Franchi concluding a lengthy memo on the 'Salesian Missions.' 'It seems to me,' he had written 'that it is timely and effective to consolidate the presence and spread of the Gospel in a regular way: 1. By erecting the Carhué mission as an Apostolic Prefecture. 2. By erecting S. Cruz as an Apostolic Vicariate.'¹⁵² He was asking for canonical structure for missions that still lay in the future and with personnel that were certainly not overabundant.

'You tell me,' he admitted in a letter to the Provincial, Fr Bodrato 'that you have too much to do. I know, and I would like to be able to come to your aid. Perhaps you can be consoled by knowing we are weighed down here with so much that we don't know any more where to start or where to finish.'¹⁵³ He did not promise concrete help in the short term. More personal and demanding was the exhortation, warning, or 'reminder' he gave him on 31 December 1878 (a New Year *strenna*?). It certainly had its origins in complaints about the recipient's strong character and from a familiar past of inexpressible sacrifices, a man who was heroic in his dedication to a superhuman task. 'A special reminder for you' Don Bosco wrote to him. '1. Make every sacrifice to preserve charity and unity with confreres. 2. When you need to offer correction or give particular advice, never do so in public but always *inter te et illum solum*. 3. When you have offered a correction, forget the mistake

146 Letter of 30 September 1877, E III 220.

147 Letter of 30 September 1877, E III 223-224.

148 The *Diario dell'Oratorio* by Frs Chiala and Lazzerio make reference to it: J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 59-60.

149 Letters of September and October 1877, E III 225-226, 229-233.

150 To the President of the Work, 30 September 1877, E III 225-226.

151 To Cardinal A. Franchi, October 1877, E III 230-233.

152 Letter of 31 December 1877, E III 256-261.

153 Letter of May 1877, E III 172-173.

and be first to show the offender kindness. This is the testament of your friend and father, D. Bosco.¹⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Don Bosco continued his work of persuasion concerning structuring potential missions in Patagonia. However, in a letter on 18 March 1878, he refashioned earlier requests and reformulated his question to Cardinal Simeoni with whom he had dealt personally after speaking of the matter with Leo XIII. He asked that he might 'deign to praise and bless both projects ... concerning missions in South America and India.'¹⁵⁵ 'An Apostolic Vicariate or Prefecture in Carmen, also known as Concepción or Patagones;' 'an Apostolic Vicariate in Mangalore in India or for another mission' for which 'within a year' he would need 'to prepare ten priests and ten catechists.'¹⁵⁶

With the arrival in South America of members of the third expedition, Fr James Costamagna (1846–1921) would also appear among Don Bosco's correspondence. Along with his travel companion, Fr Joseph Vespignani (1884–1932), he became an outstanding figure in the early Salesian history of the Americas and, already by the end of 1880, successor to the deceased Fr Bodrato as Rector of the San Carlo College in Buenos Aires, and Provincial. A daring man, he was soon involved in a risky apostolic voyage, a prelude to many other adventure in life. In May 1878 he left for a mission among the *Indios* with Mons. Espinosa and young Salesian Fr Evasio Rabagliati (1855–1920), but the ship that was to take them to Bahía Blanca was nearly shipwrecked and only returned to base with difficulty.¹⁵⁷ The founder gave a playful response to his detailed and imaginative report: 'Your letter on the storm has been read by everyone.' 'Your name and Fr Rabagliati's will become two European and American celebrities, with the risk, too, of being Atlantic celebrities (ending up in the fishes' mouths).'¹⁵⁸

He showed great deference, instead, to the recently professed Salesian from Lugo, Fr Joseph Vespignani, unusually employing the formal '*lei*' form instead of the '*tu*'; 'I know you are working, but go slowly if you want to achieve much. Work little, that is, no more than your strength allows. However, I want detailed information on the hospice, novices, novitiate, study, etc.'¹⁵⁹

In a circular on 10 March 1879, Don Bosco announced that the Superior Chapter, which met at Alessio on 7 February, along with some of the rectors, had established four Provinces: Piedmont, Liguria, Rome and America. 'Fr Francis Bodrato, [sic], parish priest at Bocca [sic] in Buenos Aires, would continue in office.'¹⁶⁰ The proposal at the Chapter meeting was put in these terms: 'There is nothing more to establish for the American Province; Fr Bodrato has been exercising this office for two or more years already.'¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, believing that 'the current state of our Missions will allow [the Salesians in America] to go among the Indians and Patagonians as soon as possible,' Don Bosco went to Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda, once more to obtain grants of furniture, church books, and 'money' for Salesian works in America and for the missionaries.¹⁶² A few days later, he begged the Pope to intervene with the Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons on behalf of the Oratory, where 'a hospice or seminary has been opened in which Gospel workers were being prepared for the foreign missions,' bearing in mind that various houses 'subsidiary to the seminary in Turin,'

154 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 423-424.

155 Report of audience for Don Bosco, in E III 327-332.

156 To Cardinal G. Simeoni, 18 March 1878, E III 320-321.

157 Cf. *Primo tentativo diretto per evangelizzare la Patagonia. Orribile burrasca*, BS 2 (1878) no. 7, July, pp. 8-12.

158 Letter of 12 August 1878, E III 378.

159 Letter of 12 August 1878, E III 378-379.

160 E III 451-452.

161 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli generali ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, p. 72.

162 Letter of 17 March 1879, E III 456-457.

(meaning the Oratory at Valdocco), existed at Sampierdarena, Nice, at Saint-Cyrc near Frejus, at Marseilles.¹⁶³ A month later, via a new Secretary of State, Cardinal Nina, he addressed a petition to the Pope with four requests: to consider letting the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, rather than the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, be the point of reference for Salesian missionaries; to approve the Salesian missions in such a way that they could validly deal with the Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons; that 'for any dealing concerning money or related matters, reference be made to Fr John Bosco, Rector Major'; to issue a letter of recommendation in favour of the Salesian Society to the Work in question. He finished the letter by exaggerating numbers and areas, saying: Salesian missionaries 'now number more than 100 in Uruguay, the Argentina Republic, and Paraguay.'¹⁶⁴ Regarding Paraguay, some months later he had to justify himself with Cardinal Nina, explaining why the Salesians had not gone to the Republic despite pressure from the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Di Pietro,¹⁶⁵ who ended up calling the Vincentians there. It was only in 1896 that the Salesians established themselves in Asunción.¹⁶⁶

The first temporary Salesian mission among the *Indios* was realised in April 1879. Mon. Espinosa, Fr Costamagna, and cleric Botta were admitted to a military expedition sought by the Minister for War and the Navy, General Julio Roca, which aimed at conquering the Pampas and Patagonia.¹⁶⁷ They made contact with the first *Indios* from peaceful tribes at Carhué. After four weeks on horseback, they arrived at the mouth of the Rio Negro on the border with Patagonia, at Choel Choel. On 1, 2 and 4 June, they administered the first baptisms. On 21 June they arrived at Patagones. The Rio Negro campaign concluded in April 1881, but the missionaries had already returned to Buenos Aires by sea on 9 July 1879.¹⁶⁸ At the end of August, Don Bosco wrote to Fr Costamagna; 'Now take up the question seriously with Father Bodrato and the Archbishop regarding opening a central house for the Sisters and the Salesians at Patagones. Would not one be equally needed at Carhué? If needs be, I will busy myself with finding personnel and all together we can look for material means.'¹⁶⁹ Over those days he received a letter from Archbishop Aneiros that gave him hope. 'The moment has finally arrived when I can offer you the Patagonian mission which you have so much desired, as also the care of souls at Patagones that can serve as the mission centre.'¹⁷⁰ However there was no agreement on erecting ecclesiastical circumscriptions that would be independent of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, a move consistently blocked by the Ordinary.

The Salesians destined for Patagonia for logistic reasons finally left on 15 January 1880, not 15 December as initially planned.¹⁷¹ The group comprised Fr Fagnano as director of the mission and

163 Letter of 20 March 1879, E III 460-461.

164 Letter of 20 April 1879, E III 468-470.

165 Letter of 16 September 1879, E III 518-519.

166 On the failure of the early negotiations carried out by Fr Bodrato see B. CASALI, *Fondazione salesiana a Buenos Aires-La Boca e prime trattative per l'insediamento salesiano in Paraguay*, RSS 17 (1998) 397-406.

167 Cf. BELZA, ENTRAIGAS, BRUNO, PAESA, *La expedición al desierto y los Salesianos*. Buenos Aires, Ediciones Don Bosco 1979. The *Bollettino Salesiano* wrote of a *Secondo tentativo dei Missionarii Salesiani per introdursi nelle terre dei Pampas*: BS 3 (1879) no. 5, May, pp. 4-5; cf. 2, § 8.

168 The *Bollettino Salesiano* meanwhile began publishing various letters written to Fr G. Costamagna, from Monsignor M. A. Espinosa and the Archbishop: BS 3 (1879) no. 7, July, pp. 9-12; no. 8, August, pp. 5-6; no. 9, September, pp. 3-4 ((letter of Monsignor M. A. Espinosa); no. 10, October, pp. 2-6 (in the same number a paragraph entitled *Le porte della Patagonia aperte ai Missionari Salesiani*); no. 11, November, pp. 1-4 (letter of Archbishop F. Aneiros and Fr G. Costamagna).

169 Letter of 31 August 1879, E III 514-515.

170 Letter of Archbishop Aneiros to Don Bosco, 5 August 1879, in A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Patagonia I. Realtà e mito nell'azione missionaria salesiana...*, RSS 14 (1995) 23, no. 42: again, letter of 5 November 1879 and 16 March 1882.

171 Letter to Countess E. Bosco-Riccardi, 3 January 1880, E III 537.

parish priest at Carmen de Patagones, two priests, one of whom was to look after Viedma parish on the other bank of the Rio Negro, a coadjutor and four Sisters. Fr Milanese arrived in December, and a few months later Fr Beauvoir with a coadjutor novice. In Rome, Don Bosco insisted with Cardinal Nina on 22 March 1880, that a canonical structure be established for the Patagonian mission.¹⁷² Following the papal audience on 5 April, Archbishop Domenico Jacobini, Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, and Cardinal Alimonda, Member of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, were appointed to study the question. After meeting with them, Don Bosco forwarded a memorandum to the Pope in which he presented what the Salesians were doing in Argentina and indicated *Things to be done*, among which a Vicariate or Prefecture for Patagonia and a seminary for the Patagonian missions at Marseilles.¹⁷³

Two days later, in a measured letter to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, as the conclusion of 'a commission of eminent persons' in Rome, he presented the proposal 'to erect an Apostolic Vicariate of Patagonia with headquarters at Carmen, embracing the colonies established or in the process of being organised on the banks of the Rio Negro' from the 36th to 50th degree of latitude south. Carmen could become 'the centre of the Salesian missions among the *Indios*.'¹⁷⁴ He presented the same proposal in a letter to Fr Bodrato, which he was to present for the approval of the competent governing authorities.¹⁷⁵ And in another personal letter, he explained how the plan had been shared in Rome, revealing the financial benefits as well that would come from final approval.¹⁷⁶

But relations with the Pope and the Curia were deteriorating due to the quarrels in Turin.¹⁷⁷ The audience on 5 April 1880 was considered very cordial,¹⁷⁸ but in a memorandum given Fr Dalmazzo before leaving Rome, asking him to see to some honours for benefactors, he noted: 'I was unable to, and not allowed to present myself at the audience to which the Holy Father himself had invited me. This left the question of the missions and the Patagonian Vicariate unfinished.'¹⁷⁹

On 6 August, Fr Bodrato died of an incurable illness discovered while the brief but bloody civil war was raging in Buenos Aires, fought by troops loyal to the winner of the presidential election, General Roca, against the troops arrayed in the city in defence of his opponent, Carlos Tejedor, the Governor of Buenos Aires. In his two final letters to Don Bosco on 6 April and 15 May, Fr Bodrato stressed how much the figure of his distant Superior meant for the American Salesians, and highlighted the relevance of the preventive system in the twofold task of assistance and pedagogy. The founder was a living message for the *modus operandi* of the Salesians in America: 'It is from Don Bosco that we live.' 'We need to reverse the sentence that says: *Gloria Patris filius sapiens*; the glory of the children is the wise father!' And after writing about setting up the printing press at San Carlos College he exclaimed: 'Oh! If only D. Bosco were here, how much good we could do with that Press! We are still babes, although I am a good 57 years old.' 'From all this it can be well agreed that D. Bosco's name is a form of prestige, a mysterious *quid* which contains a secret attractive force by which it seems that poor youth are like a spur for us to fill the tents or huts with them wherever there are some of his sons.'¹⁸⁰ In the other letter he begged him: 'Keep me in mind on the auspicious day of your name day celebration. Only God knows of my desire [to be relieved of the task of being Provincial] and you, dear Father, know who Fr Bodrato is – obedient and

172 E III 553-554.

173 Cf. Letter and memoir dated 13 April 1880, E III 567-575.

174 Letter of 15 April 1880, E III 575-576.

175 Letter of 16 April 1880, E III 576-578.

176 Letter of 17 April 1880, E III 580-581.

177 Cf. Chap. 28, §§ 4-6.

178 G. BERTO, *Appunti sul viaggio di D. Bosco a Roma nel 1880*, pp. 198-211.

179 E III 583.

180 Letter of 6 April 1880, F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, pp. 438-442.

affectionate to D. Bosco until death, always available for any indication of yours. You may think of me as one of your veterans and use me for what I am worth.’ He would certainly have wanted to be at the next General Chapter in September, but his huge work-load did not allow it. ‘On the other hand I see a great need to have a chat with D. Bosco regarding matters it is difficult for me to write to you about, matters that are very difficult to make understood, but which deserve discussion.’¹⁸¹

3.2 Fr James Costamagna’s term as Provincial and division of the American Province

On 4 August, the same date as the telegram which brought news of the death of the first Provincial in America, Don Bosco sent out a circular to Salesian houses there and ordered suffrages for the deceased, temporarily appointing Fr James Costamagna as Provincial.¹⁸² He sent an identical communication to Cardinal Nina, describing the American and European works in general terms.¹⁸³ He asked Fr Costamagna to quickly send to Turin all the paperwork referring to Fr Bodrato and imparted some guidelines for governing: ‘Take the rules and do what you can to promote their observance ... meet often with your Chapter and get Fr Vespignani to speak. Also consult the Archbishop.’¹⁸⁴

Don Bosco told Fr Fagnano, a great worker but somewhat independent, that his being sent to Patagonia, which Fr Fagnano felt was a sign of lesser esteem, was the result of ‘everything I have come to know ... urging me to send someone of absolute confidence, and capable of moving things forward, but secure in morality.’ The final quotation, however, was not selected by chance, given some of the administrative problems that had arisen at San Nicolás: *Obliviscere domum et parentes tuos, iacta super eos curas Domini.*¹⁸⁵

Later he sent Fr Costamagna a copy of the letter to the new President of Argentina, General Julio Roca, dated 19 November, related to the planned Vicariate of Patagonia, which would have pleased neither the Archbishop nor the political authorities. In fact, the Vicariate was never officially recognised, not even after its pontifical erection on November 16, 1883. At the end of the letter, Don Bosco did not fail to remind Costamagna of American debts faced by the centre in Turin, already a heavy cross for Fr Bodrato.¹⁸⁶

Other than the first month of 1881, this year and the first part of 1882 saw Don Bosco’s correspondence with America become rarer. He was weighed down by huge problems with the Holy See on delicate issues.¹⁸⁷ But the works continued to develop, thanks to the enterprise and tenacity of the men working there. Don Bosco did not forget them. With real joy he announced to Cardinal Nina the blessing of the missionaries, set for 20 January 1881, who would be departing from Genoa for South America on the 22nd and included in the parcel the envelope of a letter with the first stamp from Patagonia.¹⁸⁸ He also attached two copies of a prospectus of the American Missions, one reserved for the Pope.¹⁸⁹ It was published by *L’Unità Cattolica* on 15 January 1881, under the title *Don Bosco in his missions*, emphasising that ‘supporting Don Bosco is not only an act of Catholic Faith but also of love for the homeland and of true humanity, as the *Diritto* of 7 January indicates.’¹⁹⁰ From the same perspective, with a view to obtaining grants for the imminent

181 Letter to Don Bosco, 15 May 1880, F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, pp. 458-459.

182 Circ. 4 August 1880, E III 611-612.

183 Letter “From the House at Nizza Monferrato, 20 August 1880”, E III 615-617.

184 Letter of 22 August 1880, E III 619-620.

185 Letter of 21 October 1880, E III 631-632.

186 Letter of 12 November 1880, E III 633-634.

187 Cf. Chap. 28, §§ 4-6.

188 Letter of 12 January 1881, E IV 2-3.

189 Cf. text in MB XV 15, no. 4.

190 “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 12, Saturday 15 January 1881, p. 46.

expedition, Don Bosco sent Benedetto Cairoli, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, a memorandum with some brief information on what the Salesians had done in Uruguay, the Argentine republic, and Patagonia.¹⁹¹

On 31 January 1881, Don Bosco signed a bundle of letters addressed to Fr Costamagna and other Salesians: 14 of these remain, plus one to a domestic. They contain elements of spiritual and material direction. He especially encouraged Fr Costamagna to follow up procedures for 'business' that was of 'great importance': erection of an Apostolic Prefecture in Patagonia. He concluded with his official investiture as Provincial: 'The Superior Chapter has finally elected you as American Provincial and the decree will be sent you forthwith. It will be a guide for sanctifying you and for you to sanctify others.'¹⁹² He reminded Fr Fagnano: 'Patagonia is our Congregation's greatest undertaking. You will know about it all in good time but I cannot hide from you the great responsibility that weighs upon you.' He concluded: 'Observe our rules and see they are observed as far as is possible for you to do so.'¹⁹³

He also wrote to Fr Lasagna, including letters to individual confreres in the parcel, and informing him of Salesians about to arrive. 'It was not possible to have printers' he explained, 'Those suitable lack courage and those with courage lack the skill.' He provided news of the many trips he and Fr Cagliariero were making: 'I am also going around the whole world!'¹⁹⁴ He wrote to Bishop Vera about the imminent arrival of 'a small band of Salesians and Sisters,' while thanking him for his protection and charity.¹⁹⁵

Later, various letters concerned the arrival of Fr Lasagna back in Italy for surgery, its positive outcome and his return with news regarding splitting the American province into two, and the problem of the Apostolic Vicariate or Prefecture.¹⁹⁶ 'May God bless us all and make the Salesians saints for me and a great saint of yourself' he wished the Provincial in Argentina.¹⁹⁷

By decree of the founder and Rector Major of the Salesian Society, on 8 December 1881, Fr Louis Lasagna was appointed Provincial of Uruguay and Brazil. The pressing problem of the ecclesiastical circumscription of Patagonia, while always prominent in Don Bosco's thinking, contrasted with the much broader prospects in Brazil at an historical level, and with the gradual relativisation of the missionary activity in the sparsely populated vast region of Argentina, increasingly a land of settlers and civilised groups.

3.3 *Spiritual animation of individuals and the whole group*

While still the confessor and spiritual director in Turin and of the houses he visited in Italy and France, Don Bosco did not give up on carrying out an activity of spiritual animation also with confreres, young people, and benefactors overseas. Those who insist on Don Bosco the 'entrepreneur' lose sight of the truer Don Bosco, ever the priest for young people and those involved with them. Whether he was one or the other, salvation of souls was the greatest 'business' for him.

While the missionaries were still on the way, the Superior concluded his final letter, addressed in 1875 to Fr Cagliariero, with words that testified to how keen was his concern for them, their physical

191 Letter of 16 January 1881, E IV 4-6.

192 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 7-8.

193 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 14.

194 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 14-15.

195 To Bishop G. Vera, 31 January 1881, E IV 16.

196 To Countess C. Callori, 21 July 1881, E IV 70; to Fr G. Costamagna, 1 and 10 October 1881, E IV 83 and 86; to Fr D. Tomatis, 21 December 1881, E IV 100-101.

197 Letter to Fr G. Costamagna, 1 October 1881, E IV 83.

and spiritual life; 'See. If possible, that you read together the reminders I gave you before your departure.'¹⁹⁸ Especially energetic and vibrant was the letter sent from Alessio on 7 March 1876 to Fr Tommatis, to whom he had addressed a stern warning through Fr Cagliari,¹⁹⁹ 'A missionary must be ready to give his life for the greater glory of God, so should he not, then, be able to put with a bit of antipathy from a companion even if he has considerable faults?'²⁰⁰

The most frequent topic was the practice of the monthly Exercise for a Happy Seath: 'This is the key to everything.'²⁰¹ Another key point was insisted on in the postscripts to a page included in the letter to Fr Cagliari on 14 January 1877. He referred to advice given him by Pius IX: 'Recommend from me that they keep a vigilant eye on observance of your rules, *speciatim vero* on morality, which is exposed to consistent risk in those places.'²⁰²

As well as giving rectors and others information, he asked them to pass on greetings and spiritual thoughts to benefactors and friends.²⁰³ After the storm at sea in 1878, he gave Fr Costamagna the task of greeting the prior and confreres at the Misericordia and letting various Salesians know that he remembered them everyday in prayer, as well as entrusting himself to theirs. He then gave him a stern command: 'I am making an appointment with you all in heaven. Woe to the one who does not turn up!'²⁰⁴

He gave real spiritual accompaniment from a distance to young priest Fr Taddeo Remotti (1854–1932), suggesting ways for him to continue with his inner growth: 'By mortification, a brief prayer, and labouring, all for the love of God.' 'I am happy with you. Keep going. Obedience in your behaviour and foster obedience in others.'²⁰⁵ He suggested to Fr Fagnano: 'Always remind all our Salesians of the motto we have adopted: *Labor et temperantia*.'²⁰⁶ To the whimsical but charming Fr Tommatis (1849–1912), as soon as he became Rector at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, he asked him to write to him sometimes: 'See, and I order you to do this, that you are a model of work, mortification, humility and obedience for the ones who have just arrived.' 'However, I want you to write some long letters to me which can be like a *rendiconto* at the retreat, and tell me frankly about your life, virtues, and past, present and future miracles. What do you say to that? Dear Fr Tommatis, love D. Bosco just as I bear great affection for you.'²⁰⁷ Fr Tommatis was not lacking in frankness, and replied with a bubbly letter full of optimism and willingness to work.²⁰⁸

The warning, instead, to a coadjutor who was 'tempted to leave the Congregation' was curt. 'Do not do this. You are consecrated to God by perpetual vows, you are a Salesian missionary, one of the first to go to America, and you are a great confidant of D. Bosco – and you want to return to the world where there is so much risk of perversion? I hope you will not do this silly thing. Write of the reasons bothering you and as a father I will give advice to a beloved son which will make you happy in this life and in eternity.'²⁰⁹ The individual's name, with fatherly and personalised greeting, returned in another spiritual letter to Fr Remotti, who had sent Don Bosco news and greetings.²¹⁰ There was a brief and encouraging letter to young priest Valentino Cassini (1851–1922) whom he

198 Letter of 4 December 1875, Em IV 574.

199 To Fr G. Cagliari, 12 February 1876, E III 17-18, cited in Chap. 21, § 6.

200 E III 27. In summer 1877 Molinari had already left the Congregation.

201 To Fr G. Cagliari, 1 August 1876, E III 81.

202 E III 142..

203 For example, to Fr L. Lasagna, 1 November 1877, E III 235; to Fr G. Fagnano, 14 November 1877, E III 236.

204 Letter to Fr G. Costamagna, 12 August 1878, E III 378.

205 Letter 11 November 1877, E III 235-236.

206 Letter of 14 November 1877, E III 236.

207 Letter of 14 November 1877, E III 237.

208 Letter to Fr Bosco, 4 January 1878, D. TOMATIS, Epistolario..., pp. 118-120.

209 Letter of 1 December 1877, E III 247. Bartolomeo Scavini died as a Salesian in 1918 at 79 years of age.

210 Letter of 12 January 1878, E III 271.

came to know was in 'somewhat poor' health. 'If necessary I will try to have you spend some time in Europe. *Age viriliter, si vis coronari feliciter.*'²¹¹

After the 'terrible storm' in 1878, the message to Fr Costamagna was almost telegraphic: 'Goodbye my dear son. On earth, work and in heaven, eternal enjoyment.'²¹² Similarly brief but complete was the one to Fr Fassio (1853–1936): 'Never doubt my great benevolence for you, and all my dear sons in America. As for conscience matters, continue as you have written. The calm will come after the storm.'²¹³

Some of the short messages brought by members of the fourth expedition were also about spiritual direction for various individuals. There was reassurance and encouragement. 'Continue doing what you can,' 'try to produce many holy novices for me' he recommended to Fr Costamagna.²¹⁴ 'Before anything else, give me news of your health and holiness' he wrote to Fr Vespignani, by now using the 'tu' form. Then tell me what you are doing, how the novitiate and studentate are going etc. For my part I assure you I am happy with your behaviour and the letters you have written me. Do what you can but only what you can. Place full trust in the Lord, saying with St Paul: *Omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.*'²¹⁵ 'I am happy with you and I love you very much in J.C. and pray to the Lord for you every day' he encouraged Fr Fassio, 'Sanctify the others by sanctifying yourself.'²¹⁶ Again, with Fr Remotti he rejoiced at the 'frankness with which you so often have written' and he tendered him some 'advice': '1. Put up with the faults of others even when they are hurtful to us. 2. Cover over other's failures and never mock someone if he is offended. 3. Work, but work for love of Jesus; put up with everything but never be uncharitable. *Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi.*'²¹⁷ He repeated the formula for Salesianity to Fr Cassini; 'Continue being *sal terare et lux mundi* and things for you will go from good to better. Charity and patience with all, observance of our practices of piety.'²¹⁸ 'Humility and obedience will ensure your perseverance in doing good' he reminded Fr Giovanni [Pietro] Allavena (1855–87).²¹⁹

He gave Fr Tommatis, the new Rector at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, 'Some advice I always give rectors' while assuring him: 'We are placing full trust and hope in you: ... 1. Take great care of your health and that of your subjects; see that no one works too hard or is idle. 2. Try to give example in piety and observance of our rules and see that they are observed by others, especially meditation, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, weekly confession, Mass well celebrated and frequent communion for non-priests. 3. Heroism is putting up with others' weaknesses. 4. Much kindness to pupils, much ease and freedom for them to confess.'²²⁰

Other similar instructions were given to Fr Bodrato as Provincial, meant for Salesians, in a letter on 17 April 1880: 'Work as your health allows,' 'but let each one guard against illness,' 'observance of our rules. Woe to us if we study them without practising them!'²²¹

Solidarity, unity, courage were recommended in particular after Fr Bodrato's death. He suggested to Fr Vespignani: 'Patience, prayer, courage; this is our program at the moment. Do everything you can to encourage people and remove discontent. Tell the students and our novices

211 Letter of 12 June 1878, E III 352.

212 Letter of 12 August 1878, E III 378.

213 Letter dated "Anno 1878", E III 379.

214 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 423.

215 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 424.

216 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 424.

217 Letter of 31 December 1878, E IV 425.

218 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 425.

219 Letter of 31 December 1878, E III 425-426.

220 Letter of 30 September 1879, E III 524-525.

221 E III 580-581.

that I expect certain things from them. Morality, humility, study, this is their program.²²² He told Fr Fassio: At the moment, *praebe te ipsum exemplum bonorum operum*. Let no one lose courage at the moment; let no one complain or take a backward step. Courage, God is with us.²²³

The advice and admonishments circulated in the series of letters to individuals dated 31 January 1881 were great in spiritual content. He reminded Fr Costamagna of the significance of being a Salesian: 'I limit myself to telling you: *Tu vero vigila in omnibus labora, sicut bonus miles Christi*. But never forget we are Salesians. *Sal et lux*. The salt of gentleness, patience, charity. Light in all our outward activities *ut videant opera nostra bona et glorificent Patrem nostrum qui in coelis est*.'²²⁴

To Fr Vespignani, to whom he had written many times, he wished that 'God may see that you give me a numerous band of aspirants, then novices, professed, and fervent Salesians.' He also asked him to pass on 'advice for being happy' from 'their friends in Europe.' 'Avoid sin and go to Holy Communion.'²²⁵ To Fr Tommatis, who was always reluctant to write, he reaffirmed his unchanging benevolence and added a recommendation for him: 'Observance of the rules by which we are consecrated to the Lord, especially the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death' and a reminder for the boys: 'Time is a great treasure, so guard against wasting even a moment of it.'²²⁶ 'Write to me more often, but long letters,' he insisted with Fr Remotti, adding: 'However. While you are busy with others' souls do not forget your own. The Exercise for a Happy Death once a month must never be overlooked. 'Work, the reward is ready and heaven awaits us. *Ibi nostra fixa sint corda, ubi vera sunt gaudia*.'²²⁷

He showed even more affectionate concern with cleric Giuseppe Quaranta, giving practical examples of the system of loving-kindness: 'Study and piety will make a true Salesian of you.' 'The Exercise for a Happy Death and frequent communion are the key to everything. Is your health good now? Are you truly good? Are you preserving your vocation? Do you feel you are ready for the ordinations? Here is a subject for a letter which I am awaiting. May God bless you my dear 40 [!]'²²⁸

Very warm and personalised too was the implicit chat with another cleric close to ordination: 'My dear Paseri (1859–85) you have always been the delight of my heart and now I love you even more because you are totally dedicated to the Missions, which means to say you have abandoned everything to dedicate yourself to winning souls. So courage,' 'prepare yourself to be a good priest, a holy Salesian ... do not forget this friend of your soul.'²²⁹

He reserved his customary *Praebe te ipsum exemplum etc.*, from the letter to Titus 2:7, for cleric Carlo Peretto (1860–1923).²³⁰ 'Go ahead with study and piety,' he requested of cleric Bartolomeo Panaro (1851–1919), simply reminding him: 'Obedience, and the Exercise for a Happy Death, constantly. That is all.'²³¹

He said he knew about Fr Valentino Cassino's amount of work but also asked him 'not to forget the study of theology and care of souls. St Paul feared that being busy with others could put your

222 Letter of 22 August 1880, E III 620. "At this moment": on 4 August the Provincial, Fr Bodrato, died.

223 Letter of 22 August 1880, E III 620.

224 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 7.

225 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 8.

226 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 8-9.

227 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 9-10.

228 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 10. He died at 88 years of age in 1947 at Buenos Aires.

229 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 10.

230 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 11.

231 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 12.

soul at risk. *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim ipse reprobus efficiar.* 'The eternal reward is great. Let us earn it at all cost.'²³²

He expected steadiness in vocation from cleric Calcagno (1859–99): 'Do not look back. Let us look to heaven which awaits us. We have a great reward prepared for us there. Work, win souls and save your own for me. Simplicity and obedience are everything for you.'²³³

He wrote to Fr Cipriano (1848–94): 'In particular I encourage you to look after your health and every month make the Exercise for a Happy Death well. But be careful that while you are busy with others' souls you don't forget your own.'²³⁴ 'Good example, especially in obedience' was what he proposed to coadjutor Giacomo Ceva (1851–1916).²³⁵

Finally, he reserved a brief letter of best wishes for the first Uruguayan Salesian cleric who then became a priest: 'May the Lord who called you to be a Salesian, but a fervent and exemplary Salesian, help you to win many souls for him for heaven. You will do that by your good example, and exact observance of our rules.'²³⁶

232 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 12-13.

233 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 13.

234 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 16.

235 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 17.

236 Letter to cleric J. P. Rodríguez Silva (1856-1935), 31 January 1881, E IV 17.

Chapter 28

Freedom of action in civil and ecclesiastical society (1878–82)

- 1876 First notifications regarding legal credentials of teachers in the Oratory's secondary classes.
- 1877 8 December: Count Cays' religious profession.
- 1878 10 October: a forceful warning from the Provincial School Council on the legal position of secondary teachers;
4 December: *sanatio* of Count Cays' profession
- 1879 March: *Report to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales*;
16 May: ministerial decree of closure;
26: appeal to the Minister for Public Instruction, Michele Coppino;
July 6: petition and explanation to King Umberto I;
13 November: appeal to the King to have the decree annulled;
24 December: appeal passed on to the Council of State.
- 1880 February 26: the Council of State examines the appeal and asks for clarification;
30 June: anti-congregation decrees come into force in France;
7 July: Don Bosco provides the requested clarification on his secondary classes.
- 1881 January: Don Bosco ready for a settlement of recent disputes with Archbishop Gastaldi;
27 May: a fleeting understanding between Don Bosco and Canon Colomiatti;
11 June: solution to the problem entrusted to the Pope;
29 November: Council of State rejects the appeal;
15 December: *Presentation to the Cardinals of the Congregation of the Council*;
22 December: the King signs the decree of rejection.
- 1882 31 January: Rome takes over the process regarding the anti-Gastaldi libellous material;
20 May: Fr Dalmazzo delegated as plenipotentiary to deal with the 'Concordia';
17 June: Signing of the 'Concordia' sought by the Pope;
23 June: the 'Concordia' communicated to Don Bosco.

We have seen that almost by way of retaliation against the many voices urging freedom, Don Bosco, with a certain touch of irony, loved proposing to young people that they have the courage to feel free and profess their freedom to witness to their faith and openly act as Christians.

This was the chief motive behind his own activity in civil and religious society, and he had to pay a price for it. What he was asking of various authorities was that he be left free to do good for young people and that this would, above all, benefit society and the Church.

We have also seen how he employed current moral thinking on 'mere penal laws' in good conscience when dealing with conscription or military service, and even, where Canon Law was concerned, did not hold to rigid interpretation when it seemed to be less favourable in matters he considered would promote the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. We have seen a number of cases, and we will see more of them, where he became a punctilious and confident nit-picker in legal matters, though not always rewarded for it as he would have wished. We will find further examples in this chapter, with mixed results. Apart from the varying significance of the events in question, they continue to throw light on significant aspects of his personality: his kind, loving but firm approach, trust in God, his enterprising nature, directness but also opportunism, intransigence but always ready for dialogue.

The letter he wrote on 13 June 1879 to Cardinal Nina, the new Protector of the Salesian Society, was a partial echo of some of the battles he was engaged in at the height of his struggles for freedom for his school, and diocesan conflicts. The link he established between these was hardly a credible one. He wrote that 'opposition from this Ordinary is increasingly connected with opposition from civil and scholastic authorities. Therefore, Your Eminence can easily imagine how much we have had to labour and suffer to start up the Salesian Congregation, sustain and consolidate it without temporal support and material means.'¹ It was a simplistic interpretation of a much more complex situation brought about by very different kinds of episodes, some of them of unforeseen gravity which had ended up creating such a knot that in a particular ecclesial context the Pope felt he had to intervene personally to untie it.

1. The Count Cays case: an irregularity with serious consequences

We have noted that in the first half of 1878, relations between Don Bosco and the Archbishop were substantially peaceful ones. Differences over the matter of the two churches in Turin presented as a monument to Pius IX were quickly smoothed over.²

In May, the Archbishop was in poor health at Eremo, the Seminary's holiday house in the hills outside Turin, but he did offer some peace gestures from there. He informed Don Bosco of coming ordinations and asked him to send along documentation for intending ordinands. He also promised he would probably be available for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, and invited him to agree on a date for confirming the boys at Valdocco. Don Bosco thanked him and passed on information of a non-provocative kind regarding the reference to Pius IX for the Church of St John the Evangelist, and informed him of the Cooperators Conference on 16 May.³

When he found he could not officiate for Mary Help of Christians, the Archbishop then gave his consent for inviting another bishop.⁴ On the following day, Don Bosco asked the Ordinary for authorisation for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to go to Chieri. This was gladly granted

1 E III 475.

2 Cf. Chap. 27, § 1.4.

3 Cf. letter of 9 and 12 May 1878, E III 339-340 and 341.

4 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to the Archbishop 18 May, E III 342-343.

on 19 June.⁵ On 25 May he asked the Archbishop for testimonials for a cleric, renouncing the dispensation obtained *vivae vocis oraculo* from Pius IX which Cardinal Ferrieri declared invalid on 12 April 1876.⁶ Further on, the Archbishop indicated his readiness to celebrate a Mass on the Feast of St Aloysius, transferred from 23 June.⁷ A new request for testimonials for another cleric coming from the Seminary in Turin was forwarded on 4 November, with positive results.⁸

But an extremely unpleasant event soon disturbed this relative calm. Don Bosco was made to feel that his decisions as a Religious Superior could not be trusted, as the result of a discretionary interpretation of a canonical instruction from Rome regarded as sacrosanct. In the Count Cays case, in fact, the decision taken seemed to be legitimate in his view and, moreover, in agreement with the interpretation given by some authoritative canonists.

Sixty four year–old Count Carlo Cays (1813–82) entered the Oratory on 26 May 1877 in order to become a Salesian. Of rock–solid Catholic Faith, he had become a widower with one child, Luigi, back in 1845. He had been a member of the Subalpine Parliament for three years (1857–60) and was always on the front line of Catholic militancy as a member of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences and in all kinds of good works. Educated at the Carmel College in Turin by the Jesuits, he had a degree in Jurisprudence and an excellent religious culture. He had been Salesian in his ideals and mentality since Don Bosco began the oratories, and had been a consultor and mediator in events relating to the *Letture Cattoliche* and the printing press sold to the Bishop of Mondovì. As a Cooperator, right from the outset he shared the vicissitudes, problems, successes and spirit of the Salesian Society.

It seemed obvious to the founder that it was permissible for a novice, who was exceptional from every point of view, to anticipate his religious profession by some months. Don Bosco admitted him to clerical clothing on 17 September, and six and a half months after entering the Oratory, on 8 December, in the presence of the entire Oratory community – professed, novices, young academic and trade students – Don Bosco received his profession of perpetual vows. The rite was celebrated in the Church of St Francis de Sales which the new Salesian had contributed to and in which he had earlier been prior of the St Aloysius Sodality and feast day. Don Bosco said how ‘deeply moved’ he had been, and gave the assembly gathered for the celebrations a long conference on the austere but exultant beauty of religious consecration.⁹

According to Archbishop Gastaldi, the validity of this profession seemed immediately to be in doubt. When the Count was presented for minor orders, he wanted him duly furnished with ecclesiastical patrimony and only then did he grant dimissorials. Similarly, he ordained him deacon on 15 June 1878, but he had already earlier informed the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Ferrieri, of the juridical anomaly of the shortened (halved) novitiate. By letter, on 18 May 1878, the Cardinal informed Don Bosco in general terms that the Roman Congregation was ‘aware’ that he had admitted students of his Institute to profession without them [having] completed the Novitiate year.’ Therefore he was asking him formally to ‘make known if he had obtained and by what means, such a faculty from the Holy See to shorten the novitiate for such students.’ He was awaiting reply ‘by return mail.’¹⁰

On 18 June, Don Bosco limited his reply to the Cays case, and assisted by Jesuit canonist Fr Giovanni Battista Rostagno, he stated that he considered the dispensation granted to be valid and licit. He invoked Bouix to support this view – citing the treatise *De jure regularum* pt. 4, Ch. 5, no.

5 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 19 May, E III 343.

6 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 25 May 1878, E III 347-348.

7 Letter of Don Bosco June 1878, E III 355.

8 Letter of 4 November 1878, E III 407.

9 *Documenti* XVIII 412-417.

10 *Documenti* XIX 166.

11 – according to which the normally strict ruling of the Council of Trent on the integrity of the novitiate year in institutes of simple vows could admit of exceptions in various cases.¹¹ Cays was ‘an individual outstanding for his piety, talents, doctrine, long and active life in God’s service,’ ‘a learned man with a degree *in utroque jure*, and learned too in Dogmatic and Moral Theology,’ ‘who even before beginning his novitiate had spent some months trying out religious life which he was thinking of embracing at the Mother house of the Salesians, renouncing the comforts of life. He was already more than sixty five years old. Hence there was no doubt as to his excellent quality as a novice, or the maturity of his decision, or the firm nature of his holy resolution, or the good he could achieve in the service of religion and the Church.’¹²

Ferrieri replied on 25 June, insisting on the irregularity that had occurred, contrary even to the Constitutions of the Salesian Society. Don Bosco was asked, ‘by which *faculty* he had granted the dispensation, *not the reasons why*.’ The conclusion was a command: ‘You can well see ... that to regularise the status of Count Cays Giletta, who is deserving of every concern, there is a need to have recourse to the Holy See.’¹³

In a desire to salvage his honour as founder and superior of the Congregation, but also to avoid his noble friend, who was unaware of all this, from having the unpleasant task of forwarding a formal request for a ‘*sanatio*’, Don Bosco asked the Cardinal in his reply on 17 July, ‘as a favour’ that he accept the reasons which appeared to legitimate what he could do. With his usual tenacity he gave another summary explanation according to ‘accredited canonists like Bouix, Ferraris’ and ‘an authoritative statement’ of the Pope’s passed on to him by a worthy bishop.¹⁴

This was the least helpful tactic for a quick and painless solution. On 29 July, Ferrieri replied curtly: ‘There is no need for you to insist on justifying your irregular action ... Therefore, according to the earlier letter of 25 June, you simply need to request a “*sanatio*” for the aforesaid novitiate and profession, with a statement in writing from Count Cays Giletta expressing his willingness for the “*sanatio*” to be granted.’¹⁵

Don Bosco put the letter aside without doing anything. Meanwhile, on 20 September, Archbishop Gastaldi ordained Count Cays priest, naturally not with *titulo mensae communis*, and the new priest celebrated his first solemn Mass in the Cathedral in Turin before a numerous gathering of Lords and Ladies, acquaintances and friends from the subalpine aristocracy and a huge crowd of well-wishers. After the ordination, Cays went down to the hospice in Sampierdarena where he celebrated Mass assisted by Don Bosco, who was already down there for a retreat.¹⁶

Probably in relation to this ordination, Cardinal Ferrieri returned to the matter on 25 September: ‘Since until today you have not carried out what has been asked above you are invited to do so quickly so the Sacred Congregation does not omit provisions it believes most appropriate regarding the claimed novitiate and profession.’¹⁷ Don Bosco did not seem to be in any hurry to reply. His friend, the Bishop of Vigevano, Pietro De Gaudenzi, asked him to attend to it, presenting him with a surprisingly positive view of the Cardinal Prefect, suggesting that his concern was for the Superior of the Salesian Society to arrive at a solution that would salvage the principles and be as least onerous as possible. Ferrieri had asked the bishop to insist on the matter with Don Bosco.

11 *Tractatus de jure Religiosorum ubi et de religiosis familiis quae vota solemnia vel etiam simplicia perpetua non habent auctore Dominique Bouix...* Editio tertia, t. I. Parisiis, Apud Perisse Fratres 1882, pp. 577-578.

12 E III 352-354.

13 *Documenti* XIX 192.

14 E III 364.

15 *Documenti* XIX 198.

16 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to lawyer A. Fortis, 22 September 1878, E III 387.

17 Letter to Don Bosco 25 September 1878, *Documenti* XIX 230.

The bishop told him: 'You have nothing to lose and it will be to your advantage and for the good of your Society.'¹⁸

In replying to his friend, Don Bosco once more insisted on his motives, citing 'authors of Canon Law Bouix, Suarez, Ferraris.' He concluded without enthusiasm, even defending himself on the more general matter of testimonials: 'If you think it prudent, then, you could write "mission accomplished." The request for a *sanatio* has been sent in October ...'¹⁹ Clearly his inner conviction about the matter had not been altered. However, Cardinal Ferrieri was gentle in applying the law. By decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, passed, on 4 December 1878, Cays was asked to spend just a month in the novitiate house under the guidance of the novice master and to conclude it with a legitimate profession of vows. The decree ended with a serious warning: 'Moreover, the Congregation issues a serious warning to the Superior General to abstain absolutely from similar steps in the future.'²⁰ When the curial lawyer, Fr Costantino Leonori, sent the document on 12 December, he wrote: 'Be patient. Remember that St Joseph Calasanzio was brought to the Holy Office. Do not be dismayed, then, by the wording of the Rescript.'²¹

The '*sanatio*' was not too demanding, but once again Don Bosco had done nothing to endear himself to the Cardinal who could have been of valuable assistance in the not too remote future. In his responsibility as founder and superior of a canonically approved Religious Institute dedicated to a mission which he felt was constrained by legal quibbles, he felt it his duty to defend it to the bitter end, also comforted by the Jesuit Fr Rostagno's skills in Canon Law. Perhaps others would have thought it more productive to have highlighted the 'persuasions' fed by authoritative canonists which had led him in good faith to take a decision which was contrary to current practice according to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and ask for the *sanatio* required by Canon Law without further delay.

2. The struggle for freedom for his school (October 1878 to December 1881)

There were many motivations sustaining Don Bosco in the tough school battle from 1878–81: Safeguarding the rights acquired in this area by the Oratory which offered secondary education to boys unable to attend public secondary schools, his aversion to bureaucratic legalism, and his claim of freedom for a social activity which the State did not pay attention to. There was also his rational and functional deployment of available personnel, making considerable savings of financial resources by not taking on external teachers who would also be less suited to guaranteeing educational autonomy and homogeneity.

Defence of his secondary classes, which survived despite temporary formal closure, revealed once more his typical pragmatism as a daring 'helmsman'. As was his custom, it led him to playing more than one game at a time, depending on who was his antagonist and what the circumstances were at the time.

Don Bosco's personality and tenacity meant that the local problem almost became a national case, with protracted journalistic polemics and even repercussions in France. For a brief time it was also a battle of principle regarding freedom of teaching. The Oratory secondary classes had to be saved at all costs. It was happening in the Mother house of Salesian work at its administrative and animating centre, and closure could have meant disqualification of a Religious Society which

18 Letter to Don Bosco 27 November 1878, *Documenti* XIX 265.

19 To Bishop P. G. De Gaudenzi, 1 December 1878, E III 420.

20 Decree of 4 December 1878, *Documenti* XIX 278.

21 Letter to Don Bosco 12 December 1878, *Documenti* XIX 277.

had already gained great visibility and renown in Italy for its academic colleges from Lanzo to Borgo S. Martino, Alassio to Varazze, Valsalice to Este, Magliano Sabina to Randazzo (Sicily).'

Don Bosco was personally involved, though assisted by the Director of Studies for the Salesian Society, Fr Celestino Durando (1840–1907) and Prof. Giuseppe Allievo (1830–1913) who from 1861 to 1912 was head of Pedagogy at Turin University. Also joining the fray was the warrior philosophy teacher at the Oratory, Fr Giuseppe Bertello (1848–1910). Backed by *L'Unità Cattolica* and by broad Catholic public opinion, they joined battles with the energy that matched their deep belief that they needed to counter secular and masonic forces with all means available. These forces were aiming to establish a social order protected from clerical and religious influences. Don Bosco had spoken of this at one of the final sessions of the First General Chapter, at which he formulated some damning judgements on the Italian political situation: 'The current aim of the Government and especially the Ministry is to pull down everything that smacks of religion. It has used every pretext to destroy religious instruction; it expressly confuses teaching, changes and switches syllabuses, so that Religious who use approaches developed from ancient times no longer know how to respond to modern thinking.'

2.1 Lead up to decree of closure, defence plans

Don Bosco was already working on plans for defence with his usual flexibility, from the first sounds of alarm when the Left came to power in 1876, and until the decree of closure in May 1879. His plans revolved around various alternative configurations for the secondary school at the Oratory: a *ginnasio privato* (private secondary) or also a *ginnasio privato gestito da una casa di beneficenza* (private secondary school run by a house of charity).²²

The hypothesis of a private secondary school would have been, at least theoretically, the one best responding to the notion of the Salesian Society as an association of citizens possessing all their civil rights, not asking for privileges and showing it was able to operate within the scholastic arena according to law: duly authorised, official syllabuses, certified teachers. Don Bosco stated this emphatically in an historical session of the First General Chapter, outlining the profile of the Salesian in civil society.²³ But it would have required considerable staff numbers who needed to be qualified over time with all the relevant financial burden this implied, staff who would need to be full-time teaching. This would have taken away from management roles much in demand at a time when works were expanding so much.

Hence in relation to the secondary school at Valdocco, which he saw as a charitable hospice rather than a boarding school and hostel like Lanzo, Alassio, Valsalice and the like, qualifying it as a private secondary school was something he did and often presented as something he was forced to do to avoid harassment, and not out of respect for the law but rather for local school authorities who looked upon it as such, providing for it as they did for public secondary schools. Over the course of the battle, it was this recognition that was contested at a certain point.

By imposing absolute and total conformity in organisation, management, syllabuses, timetables, the left-wing bureaucracy ended up denying freedom for non-state teaching, freedom sanctioned by the Casati law. As we will see further on, the defence was mounted in these terms, though unsuccessfully, pushed by Prof. Allievo during the brief advent to the Ministry of Public Instruction of Sicilian Senator Francesco Paolo Perez (14 July –29 November 1879).

22 Cf. Chap. 1, § 8; Chap. 13, § 2.3.

23 Cf. Chap. 26, § 1.2.

When he saw the impracticality of the private secondary school option, Don Bosco took up the alternative position, but one he had adopted back in the 1860s and which he had presented with great clarity to Minister Domenico Berti in 1866: the secondary school at Valdocco had always been run by a charitable work whose director gave his young residents everything a father of a family would normally provide his children with; lodgings, food, clothing, instruction. Therefore it ought to be recognised under law as a *scuola paterna* or home school.²⁴

It was the simplest and least costliest solution. In real terms, Don Bosco did not have the legal structures to give it this configuration. In his case the person running it could only call himself a father in terms of sustenance, assistance and education and for a limited number of orphaned or homeless children, but he did not legally, 'stand in on behalf of the pupils' parents' nor was it possible to imagine dozens or even hundreds of parent 'members' 'keeping an eye on' the instruction given their children as required under the Casati legislation, (art. 251 and 252), which obviously anticipated small numbers of parents known to the school. Don Bosco knew this but was more concerned with fact than formality, meaning the long period of time and presumed acknowledgement and support given his school by Ministers of the Kingdom and the Italian State since 1841 [!] or at least from 1846 to 1876. Don Bosco had likened the idea of a private secondary school run by a house of charity to the home school concept, something not envisaged by the Casati law. According to him there had been *de facto* admission of this by custodians of the law over many years, and it had been of undeniable social benefit.

From the 1876–77 school year, the Provincial School Council invited all directors of private institutes by circular to follow the prescriptions of the law, in particular by seeing that teachers were furnished with proper credentials.²⁵

Don Bosco sent in a list which did not satisfy. When reminded that he needed to abide by the law for the 1877–78 school year, he went to the Ministry for Public Instruction asking for a three year lead-in period to enable him to follow up on the necessary qualifications. The Ministry was not granting privileges to anyone. An identical response was given to a request on 3 September in view of the 1878–79 school year.²⁶ Finally, on 10 October 1878, the Turin Provincial School Council warned that if Don Bosco were to begin the 1878–79 school year without having regularised the position of teachers at his schools, procedures for closing it down would commence. On 1 November 1878, after a first letter was ignored, Don Bosco sent another to the Minister for Public Instruction, Francesco De Sanctis (24 March–December, 1878). In letters of 19 October and 1 November 1878, he had recommended that the usual *Commendatore* Giacomo Malvano forward both to the Minister, but held firmly to the idea that the only legal configuration for the Oratory school that responded to the reality in the past and under the current legislation was the *istituto paterno* or home school. That it was being considered to be a *private secondary school* was only the strict interpretation of the local school authority.

In the first instance, therefore, his request was very simple: that '*classes at this hospice for poor boys be considered to be classes of charity* run by someone who takes the place of the parents, therefore without the need for teachers being obliged to have public certification.' If, instead, it came down to the request of the Superintendent of Studies for 'teachers to be furnished with the respective legal certification' then he was asking that 'current teachers' be 'temporarily authorised

24 Cf. Chap. 13, § 2.3.

25 Cf. for certain information, the open letters on 19 and 29 July to *L'Unità Cattolica* by the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Gioachino Rho, clarifying articles earlier issued by the newspaper and three interventions by Fr Bertello: "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 170 and 178, Tuesday 22 and Thursday 31 July 1879, pp. 678 and 710-711.

26 This can be deduced from the letter to Comm. Giacomo Malvano 1 November 1878, E III 403.

or admitted to undertake the prescribed exams by ministerial decree, despite being under the prescribed age.²⁷

He proposed a very similar though not identical solution to the same Minister ten days later, and while references to the past were not entirely objective they were presented as part of what he wanted to obtain: 'This institution has no fixed income and is sustained by Providence alone. Therefore the School authority treated us kindly, and by looking on these classes as paternal and charitable teaching, which they in fact are, never posed any problems regarding teacher's legal certification.' The Superintendent, however, wanted 'all teachers to be furnished with the respective legal certification' meaning he was treating classes at the Oratory as a *private secondary school*. Therefore the writer was forced to 'beg' the Minister 'to grant the favour of current teachers being recognised as suitable because they have been teaching for some years and be authorised for at least three years to continue their freely organised role in their respective classes. Over that period these same teachers will reach the prescribed age for public exams and can gain the prescribed certificate.²⁸ The Prefect and the President of the Provincial School Council, De Amicis, replied that the Ministry did not admit of exceptions to the law.²⁹ All Don Bosco could do was to send the Superintendent of Studies, Gioachino Rho, the list of five teachers duly qualified. He did this on 15 November.

From two inspections he had personally carried out in December 1878 and at the beginning of March 1879, the Superintendent had noted that only two teachers with qualifications could be found at their post during the first visit and only one on the second. When the Superintendent pointed this out on 2 January after his visit, Don Bosco or someone else replied on the 15th, simply sending in a second list of five accredited teachers, adding some replacement teachers.

Alarmed by the second visit and the impending closure, Don Bosco turned to the Prime Minister, Agostino Depretis, whom he had met at Lanzo on 6 August 1876, – the Minister for Public Instruction was Michele Coppino once more – insisting on the charitable purpose of his institute and stressing that the Government 'had never created any problems regarding teachers offering their work for free' while now, instead, they did not want their regular teachers replaced by supply staff. He asked him 'to have a word with the Minister for Public Instruction so our boys can be considered as coming under the Paternal Authority, and so allow current teachers to continue with their charitable teaching of the pupils, or be admitted to the relevant exams' despite not being 'of prescribed age for legal certification.'³⁰ In an attached Memorandum, he summed up the many recognitions given, and reasons in defence submitted via letters and petitions.

The recognitions had nothing to do with the demands of the Casati law on the secondary classes Don Bosco had opened in 1855 and completed only in coincidence with the coming into force of that law. What he wrote as his fourth point was certainly true: 'The cost of having teachers legally qualified would cause serious harm to the Institute.' Less precise, if one considers the issues he had with the School Authority in the 1860s, was his call that the Oratory 'had benefited under previous Ministers' from support 'as a hospice of charity or a paternal institute' run by Don Bosco who 'was taking the place of the fathers of boys given shelter there, only out of a spirit of charity.' Finally, he offered the Minister the statement which would allow the Turin School Council to give special treatment to the Oratory's secondary classes: 'This Ministry ... authorises Fr Don Bosco to give or see that secondary instruction is given to the poor boys in his pious institute without the obligation of putting legally recognised teachers in the secondary classes.'³¹

27 To Comm. Giacomo Malvano, 19 October 1878, E III 395.

28 To the Minister of P. I., 1 November 1878, E III 402-403.

29 *Documenti* XIX 253.

30 Letter of 15 March 1879, E III 457-458.

31 *Promemoria*, E III 458-459.

Based on the Superintendent's report on 25 March, the Provincial School Council's response to all this was to propose to the Ministry that the institute be closed, and having heard the Superior Council's opinion, the Ministry issued its decree on 16 May. The secretary of the School Council gave unofficial notice of this to Don Bosco who, after meeting with the Prefect, sent him a lengthy memorandum. In the *historical presentation* to it he summed up the origins in 1841 and the development of his oratory work with the various kinds of educational initiatives for 'so many unfortunate boys' up until the time of Umberto I. Still maintaining his mixed bag of an historical thesis, he wrote that 'these classes were always considered by the School Authority to be a charitable work, a shelter, a paternal school in conformity with the Casati law on public instruction (articles 252–252).' The Royal Superintendent and the Minister for Public Instruction, even Umberto I himself, had always been 'his most outstanding benefactors through advice and pecuniary assistance.' Difficulties had arisen with the current Superintendent who had 'ordered that certified teachers be put into classes under threat of no longer allowing ... secondary classes to remain open.'

He continued with his own version of the most recent interventions by the Turin Superintendent and debated freedom of timetables, supply teachers, supplementary days and hours dedicated to teaching, which did not need to adhere strictly to those of State secondary schools. Nevertheless, respectful of the school authority he was asking for a favour, that he might be granted 'a period of time' whence to 'provide for what the current laws required.' He asked him to intercede with the Provincial School Council and, if needs be, with the Minister for Public Instruction, saying that he was ready just the same and on his boys' behalf, to restructure the management of the Institute so that appropriately credentialed teachers 'could regularly be in their classes.'³²

To the request for help addressed to his friend Fr Pietro Barico, an authoritative city councillor and member of the School Council, Barico replied on 18 June, advising him to regularise the situation of his teachers as soon as possible. The Minister had been insisting for some years, in fact, that Provincial Councils remind all private institutes of the need to observe the law, he said.³³ It was the right moment for Don Bosco to practise what he had put in theoretical terms to the First General Chapter: 'If exams are required of us we will sit for them; if certificates or qualifications are required we will do everything possible to obtain them and thus push on.'³⁴

He followed the advice, and on 20 June sent the Prefect of Turin the list of teachers who would be teaching in the remaining weeks and, with 'some changes' in 1879–80: Salesians Celestino Durando, Michael Rua, John Bonetti, Joseph Bertello and diocesan priest Marco Pechenino.³⁵ 'The personal friendship that binds us over many years,' he wrote more realistically the same day to Superintendent G. Rho, his 'dear friend,' 'obliges me to advise you that with resignation I accept the decree and will carry it out faithfully,' that is, without the subterfuge of ongoing replacement teachers.³⁶

The letter to the Prefect, however, was unable to cancel a decree signed over a month earlier. The decree was officially handed to Don Bosco by a public safety official on 23 June.³⁷ The Superintendent was charged with carrying it out by 30 June.

2.2 A 'dispute between this Oratory and the Royal Superintendent'

32 Letter of 18 May 1879, E III 471-473.

33 *Documenti* XX 216; MB XIV 157-158.

34 Twenty-fourth session, Thursday 4 October 1877, G. BARBERIS, *Verballi* III 44.

35 To G. Minghelli Vaini, 20 June 1879, E III 477-478.

36 *Documenti* XX 218.

37 Prefect's letter of 20th and certification of delivery on 23rd: *Documenti* XX 218-219.

Official communication of the decree of closure made defence even more pressing. The old triple strategy had not completely disappeared despite the *istituto paterno* thesis prevailing. Obviously the bureaucracy, inspired by a more radical idea of legality, had to address itself solely to the secondary school as subject to the Casati law, and regulations controlling its application already illustrated in relation to problems that had arisen in the 1860s.³⁸

By contrast, perhaps, with what he had recommended to his Salesians in the manuscript on *Le perquisizioni* (The searches), which Fr Bonneti had published in the *Salesian Bulletin* from 1884–86, in this case Don Bosco saw that more important than personal encounters was the battle over documents, legal arguments flanked by a brief but intense journalistic campaign. The special target of this was the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Gioachino Rho and his brother, Fr Angelo, former schoolmate in Chieri and faithful ‘friend’.

Don Bosco appealed to the Prefect, President of the School Council, asking for a delay in the suspension for a number of reasons: exams could not be sat for in four days, the decree lacked any ‘legal foundation,’ he had decided to appeal to a higher authority.³⁹ The Prefect first refused,⁴⁰ then granted the request on 2 July.⁴¹ On 26 June, Don Bosco appealed to the Minister for Public Instruction, Michele Coppino, who promoted the law *on the obligation of elementary instruction* in 1877, in line with the principle which opposed State monopoly of schooling. Coppino was a Mason but ‘more believer than liberal thinker’ and a ‘supporter of the social mission of religion.’⁴² The decree was illegal, Don Bosco maintained, because ‘the various teaching assignments in my Institute are entrusted to teachers with qualifications,’ and because, ‘none of the serious reasons mentioned in art. 247 for closure of an institute existed,’ that is, ‘the preservation of moral order and safeguarding of principles governing State public order on pupil safety.’ He ignored or overlooked the conditions posed by art. 246, section 1 and 2, and the regulations for applying them. He waited for a reply so he could make moves to look after his pupils, using means provided by the law as laid down by art. 248 of the Casati law which, in practice, was appeal to higher bodies including, ultimately, the Council of State.⁴³

But the third Depretis Ministry lost the confidence of the House on 3 July and was obliged to resign. *L’Unità Cattolica* announced: ‘Don Bosco is ready to carry out the decree, reserving the right due to him of having his reasons against such an abuse of power evaluated.’⁴⁴ In fact, Don Bosco had sent the King a defence of his secondary classes that necessarily would have been passed on to the Ministry for Public Instruction. He began by presenting Umberto I with ‘an institute that had often been charitably supported, and’ he stated daringly ‘an institute we could say was founded by four elders and generously subsidised by Your Majesty’s charity.’ He informed him that ‘a ministerial decree communicated on the 23rd of last month ordered the closure of classes that had been in place for 35 years.’ Therefore he was begging the King ‘to have the attached clarification looked at,’ clarification with which he ‘faithfully explained the state of things.’⁴⁵

More than half of the attached document was dedicated to an *Historical presentation* with the usual sequence of dates and facts tending to demonstrate the uninterrupted approval and protection from authorities up to the time of Umberto I for the Oratory classes ‘always considered

38 Cf. Chap. 13, § 2.2 and § 2.3.

39 To G. Minghelli Vaini, 26 June 1879, E III 479.

40 Cf. letter of Don Bosco to the Prefect, 30 June 1879, E III 48.

41 Cf. Letter to Minister M. Coppino, July 1879, E III 490.

42 M. SOLERI, *In memoria di Michele Coppino*. Alba, tip. Cooperativa 1923, p. 35; cf. v. *Coppino, Michele*, DBI XXVIII 625-631.

43 To M. Coppino, 26 June 1879, E III 478-479; cf. Chap. 1, § 8 and Chap. 13, § 2.2.

44 *L’ultima gloriosa impresa del ministero ossia le scuole di D. Bosco ed il ministro Coppino*, “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 158, Tuesday 8 July 1879, pp. 629-630.

45 Letter of 6 July 1879, E III 490-491.

to be a charitable work, a shelter, under the guise of a large family where the writer takes the place of the father.' This meant it complied with art. 251–252 of the Casati law.

The thesis was clear enough: his was a *scuola paterna* or home school. But the reconstruction of history involving the previous two years obliged him to include requests he had put forward regarding a private institute as part of the picture: respecting the Superintendent's orders concerning the secondary classes being credentialed and replacement teachers, inspectors of doubtful correctness, the request to the Prime Minister for a lead-in period to be able 'to provide not only for what the laws prescribe but what the Superintendent himself wanted.'

Instead, the reply he received on 23 June was the decree of closure. His *Some Observations on this decree* was followed by two firm accusations: *The illegality of the decree*, which did not observe articles 248 (closure procedure) and 247 (the causes), and the *Turin School Council's error* in having an obvious lack of foundation for its motives: 'Lack of legal suitability of teachers, and Fr John Bosco's attempt to hoodwink the School Authority by sending a list of certified teachers while actually using uncertified ones.' In fact there was no law excluding the use of replacement teachers in case of need, and private institutes enjoyed 'full liberty to establish the timetable that best suited the teachers.'⁴⁶ The Minister for the Royal House, Count Visione, telegraphed that Don Bosco's case was 'under consideration by the Minister of Public Instruction.'⁴⁷ The presentation to the King was extensively and liberally utilised by *L'Unità Cattolica*, which also gave information on the appeal and Visione's telegram.⁴⁸ Coppino replied to the Sardinian Senator Giovanni Siotto Pintor's letter in support of Don Bosco: Don Bosco 'can present his case to the School Council according to the rules, as is his right, since he wants the closure order revoked.'⁴⁹

On 14 July, the second Ministry headed by Benedetto Cairoli came into office. Francesco Paolo Perez (1812–92) took the Public Instruction portfolio. He was a determined advocate of freedom of teaching, obviously regulated by the Casati law.⁵⁰ It seemed to be a propitious moment for a more fruitful campaign of defence. An article published by *L'Unità Cattolica*, 'The Law and closure of the Oratory's secondary classes' was probably written by Allievo, 'a transparent individual, neither cleric nor non-cleric.' The newspaper suggested sending the article to Minister Perez in the hope that 'in the first instance he might repair an enormous injustice and not allow such a perversion of law and morals to occur.' In fact, according to Allievo, the Casati law intended to provide ample room for the liberal principle. Leaving 'the broadest freedom to paternal authority' and asking 'those running private institutes for adequate though not absolute guarantees.' That is, it was not 'given to the executive power to prescribe word for word what had to be done in private schools.' 'The law does not tie the principal of a private college to any timetable (because otherwise where would be the freedom of teaching?).' Articles 258 and 259 of the law concerned public junior and senior secondary schools.⁵¹ The defence agreed perfectly with the broadly liberal thinking of a recent essay.⁵²

46 July 1879 statement, E III 486-490.

47 *Documenti* XX 237, cit. in E III 491.

48 *La chiusura delle scuole nell'Ospizio del sac. D. Bosco*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 162, Saturday 12 July 1879, p. 646.

49 *Documenti* XX 241.

50 Letter of Don Bosco to the secretary of the Minister for the Interior, Comm. G. B. Aluffi, and to the ministry: 20 July 1879, E III 495, 495-496; to the Minister for P. I. He also indicated the names of certified teachers at the Valdocco secondary school, 20 July 1879, E III 496-497.

51 *Una domanda di giustizia al nuovo ministro della pubblica istruzione*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 165, Wednesday 16 July 1879, p. 658.

52 *La legge Casati e l'insegnamento privato secondario* per Giuseppe Allievo professore dell'Università torinese. Torino, tip. Salesiana 1879, pp. 12-13.

Don Bosco was thinking of integrating it or rather a new contribution on the topic by Prof. Allievo, in a letter he wrote over these days in reference to it to his friend the Bishop of Vigevano.⁵³ 'Our school disturbances are suspended' he wrote, in an unusually polemical tone, but I am pushing ahead with things so these abuses of power can be known and, as you say, so we can have a guide for others who find themselves in the same situation. I am now studying and getting others to study the matter closely, and will then print a separate booklet to send to all the bishops. They can legally free themselves of much harassment by Superintendents.' Then almost by association of ideas, he went on to point out the troubling situation in Turin: 'The usual P [relate] is in the sulks with me. Our relations are strictly at official level. Patience. I hope to be able to pay my respects to you one way or another in person, and so be able to speak calmly of these things and many other matters. However, it is impossible for this diocese to go on with the way things are.'⁵⁴

The thesis of the Oratory school being a *private secondary school* perfectly in line with the law returned once more in a reply Don Bosco gave on 20 July to two letters from Fr Angelo Rho, the Superintendent's brother. In the first, Fr Angelo had written to his 'dear and good friend, Don Bosco' from his 'very affectionate old friend.' 'You would have done very well to support the Superintendent, who has been asking, pleading with you for three years to bring things into line with the law.'⁵⁵ The other letter, passed on to Don Bosco by its recipient,⁵⁶ had been addressed to Fr Giacomo Margotti, the editor in chief of *L'Unità Cattolica*, accusing him of only listening to and supporting 'one side' and lacking in charity to his brother, the Superintendent, 'father of a large family' and simply being faithful to his duty.⁵⁷ Don Bosco protested: teachers at the Oratory were accredited; the Superintendent had 'note of their names, surnames, and legal qualifications,' 'private institutes' had 'freedom regarding timetables,' and thus teachers were not bound to be there at the time decreed by whoever was carrying out the inspection; the Casati law determined precise reasons for closure and these – 'social order, moral order or pupil safety' – were not compromised at the Oratory. If the Superintendent wanted the same hours as public schools, the director could have done everything to see that this was the case. 'All Superintendents, all Ministers for Public Instruction have always praised, approved, helped and subsidised this institute over more than thirty years. It took a friend, a schoolmate to suggest closure, one that forced me to comply with the law with no minor disturbance to ourselves!'⁵⁸

Don Bosco sent Fr Durando and Prof. Allievo to Rome with two letters of presentation, one to Perez, the other to the Minister for the Interior, Tommaso Villa, a member of Parliament from Castelnuovo d'Asti, asking them to intervene on behalf of the Oratory.⁵⁹ He also included with the letter to Perez the list of accredited teachers already presented to the Superintendent on 15 November 1878.⁶⁰ 'Good promises' Fr Durando said by telegram on 22 July.⁶¹ But the Ministers response, in reference to a note on 15 July, was not so encouraging: 'The college administration would have better ensured the value of studies and pupils' benefit by suggesting accredited teachers for secondary classes, complying with the law, which is what the Minister wants.'⁶²

53 Cf. Further ahead, § 2.3, no. 86.

54 Letter of 16 July 1879: due to mistakenly reading the date – 1873 instead of 1879 – the letter was included by Ceria in E II 292; on the new contribution of Prof Allievo, cf. Further on, § 2.3.

55 Letter of 13 July 1879, *Documenti* XX 248-250.

56 Note by Fr G. Margotti to Don Bosco, 18 July 1879, *Documenti* XX 265.

57 Letter to Fr G. Margotti, 17 July 1879, *Documenti* XX 261-262.

58 E III 493-495.

59 Cf. Letters to G. B. Aluffi (1846-1938), from Agliano Monferrato, employed by the Minister for the Interior, 20 and 26 July 1879, E III 495 and 500.

60 Cf. Letters of 20 July, E III 495-497.

61 *Documenti* XX 271.

62 *Documenti* XX 278.

The battle raged on over July and August, including in the press, *L'Unità Cattolica* at the forefront, with *L'Emperio popolare* and *Il Baretti* from Turin, *Lo Spettatore* from Milan in favour of the Oratory and the liberal press, *Gazzetta del popolo*, *Il Fischietto* in support of Gioachino Rho, the Superintendent. At this stage of the struggle the main arguments in play were legal and historical ones in reference to the Casati law. Seeing himself as the main target of columnists from *L'Unità Cattolica*, the Superintendent sent in an article of clarification to the paper on 19 July. In essence he said the decree did not come like a lightning bolt from heaven but as an inevitable measure to deal with the lack of adherence to repeated legitimate requests to the person running the *private secondary school* at the Oratory, beginning with the 1876–77 school year.⁶³

On 24 July there was still blow for blow going on between Fr Angelo Rho and Don Bosco: for the latter it was pointless to continue this discussion with deaf ears while remaining, of course, 'always the best of friends.'⁶⁴ The same day *L'Unità Cattolica* began publication of three letters from Fr Bertello. As a poorly informed newcomer to the scene, he tended to demonstrate the radical illegitimacy of the decree of closure for the simple fact that the Oratory secondary school was anchored within scholastic initiatives that Don Bosco had been promoting 'for thirty or more years,' and the founder had never made 'formal requests for a *private secondary school*.' It had come into being as a school of charity and developed as such, and had always been recognised as such by school authorities: as a *paternal institute* or home school but also a legally run one. Even though it might have wanted to be considered as a private institute, the Superintendent had not demonstrated 'in any way that this Institute lacked approved teachers.'⁶⁵

'Justice demands that we provide a place for the following reply from the royal Superintendent of Studies,' the paper's editor stated, publishing a detailed reply by Prof. G. Rho on 29 July, *Closure of the private secondary school attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*.⁶⁶ The paper announced that Bertello, for his part, would counter the 'flimsy defence'. But before his other two articles came out, Don Bosco sent the editor of the *Gazzetta del Popolo* a clarification on 2 August, asking him to publish it, 'out of courtesy and if needed, also for legal purposes.' The 'True account of the facts' came out on 4 August. Once again the two-pronged approach appeared, highlighting the primacy of the paternal institute over the forced private institute. The three hinges of his consistent argument were there too: 1. 'Over every period, this house has been seen as a charitable hospice, a shelter for poor boys, and never as a private secondary school.' 2. The Bon Compagni and Casati laws favoured these classes and the Royal Superintendent and Minister for Public Instruction 'have cooperated for the good of this hospice,' over 35 years 'regarding it to be a shelter for poor boys, a paternal institute under the Casati law (articles 251, 252, and 253,' where 'the pupils receive their instruction totally *gratis*.' 3. Nevertheless, out of 'respect, not for the law, because it does not apply in our case, but for the Authority demanding it of us,' in compliance with art. 246 of the law, teaching was entrusted to 'five accredited teachers.'⁶⁷ Presenting Don Bosco's letter to the *Gazzetta del Popolo* which he also published, Margotti rather pompously took sides: 'Don Bosco is a man of life-giving charity; his enemies are men of the letter [of the law] that kills. The same cry was raised against Jesus Christ himself: *Nos legem habemus et secundum legem debet more*.'⁶⁸

63 *Chiusura del Ginnasio privato annesso all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales in Torino*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 170, Tuesday 22 July 1879, p. 679.

64 Cf. *Documenti* XX 276-278; E III 499-500.

65 *Lettere sulle scuole di D. Bosco*, "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 172-175, Thursday, Friday, Sunday, 24, 25, 27 July 1879, pp. 686, 690, 698. We know that Don Bosco had requested and obtained legal recognition of his secondary classes on 21 December 1862; cf. Chap. 13, § 2.3.

66 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 178, Thursday 31 July 1879, pp. 710-711.

67 Letter of 2 August 1879, E III 501-503.

68 *La questione delle scuole don Bosco*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 182, Tuesday 5 August 1879, p. 726.

'Regarding the not-so-historical 'secondary classes' that had been running for 'thirty five years' 'on behalf of the poor boys gathered' at the hospice, Don Bosco insisted with the Minister for Public Instruction in a presentation on 2 August: 'No law on Public Instruction touches charitable shelters' such as his was, where 'teachers lend their service for free and only so.' 'At best,' he argued 'charitable institutes should be seen as Institutes where the superior takes the place of the father, since he has to provide lodgings, clothing, bread and instruction. Is that not taking the father's place in real terms? (See attached work by Prof. Allievo).' 'This institute' he insisted, with supposed historical veracity, 'was never thought of as a private secondary school' by Superintendents and Ministers 'over a period of 35 years.'⁶⁹ The attached pamphlet, *The Casati law and private secondary teaching*, was dedicated to the Minister by Allievo: 'I address these pages to the Minister for Public Instruction, Francesco Perez, a powerful proponent of free teaching, asking him to kindly give his attention to them.'

In the spirit of the Casati law, Allievo, who had taken the freedom and variety of school systems in vogue in the US as his model, claimed greater room for autonomy for 'scholastic institutes supported by Christian charity,' and 'secondary instruction institutes' which had 'the character of charitable hospices or private charity.'⁷⁰

Two new contributions by Fr Bertello in response to the Superintendent drew their inspiration from these ideas. In the first of them, he supported the *istituto paterno* concept with radical intransigence; in the second, he included as a subordinate notion the hypothesis of an *istituto privato*, finally drawing drastic conclusions from somewhat tenuous premises: '1. Giving the nature of things good consideration, Don Bosco's institute can be situated well within the order of paternal institutes. 2. For thirty years, those controlling instruction in Piedmont have regarded it as such and applied the law on paternal institutes to it. 3. In order to set up a private institute, the Casati law demands certain formalities which Don Bosco has never fulfilled in regard to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.' And finally, 'even if it were a private institute, the reasons adopted by the Superintendent did not legally prove, as would have been correct to do so, that accredited teachers were lacking.' All in all, if it was a paternal institute then Don Bosco had been 'the victim of unjust harassment.' If it was a private institute then the decree of closure had to be 'illegal and unjust'.⁷¹

2.3 From journalistic polemic to legal approaches

Things had gone too far in Don Bosco's view. In a letter to Fr Margotti on 9 August, he asked that there be an end to the fight over 'the dispute between this Oratory and the Royal Superintendent. 'The legal issue' had been discussed more than necessary and things were sliding towards personal attacks. Therefore he was asking the newspaper's editor to refrain from further debate on the matter 'to make way for the active charity that should reign among citizens of all kinds.'

This did not prevent him from re-affirming his thesis: 'The idea has been that there was a private secondary school attached to the Oratory. It never was the case.' What there was, instead, was 'free classes' offered 'out of charity to a select group of boys at the hospice' whom he looked upon as his 'adopted children.'⁷² So his was an *istituto paterno* as Margotti described it in his newspaper headline.⁷³

69 To Minister F. P. Perez, 2 August 1879, E III 503-504.

70 G. ALLIEVO, *La legge Casati...*, pp. 20-23, 27-28.

71 Cf. G. BERTELLO, *Sulla chiusura delle scuole di don Bosco. Risposta al R. Provveditore degli studi*, "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 181 and 184, Sunday and Thursday, 3 and 7 August 1879, pp. 722 and 734.

72 E III 508-509.

73 *Una lettera di don Bosco ed il suo Istituto paterno*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 187, Sunday 10 August 1879, p. 746.

By this stage, Don Bosco had requested the Minister to pass on to the Council of State his appeal against the 'illegal' decree to close the Oratory secondary classes.⁷⁴ While awaiting the result he went back to the Minister once more in September, asking that the Oratory be allowed to continue with its charitable work for boys who wanted 'to pursue the path to knowledge and virtue.' He attached two documents which he later printed when appealing to King Umberto I, and which were sent to the Council of State. He reworded things: 'Over 36 years, the Minister for Public Instruction and the Royal Superintendent have consistently encouraged and subsidised these classes without ever requesting legal teachers.' He then begged the Minister 'to regard the Oratory as a house of charity, a shelter for poor and abandoned boys and allow its director, while acting 'as a father, to provide bread and whatever was needed for upbringing in a material sense' to also be able 'to give, through himself or others, secondary instruction to the boys who needed it so they could be prepared for an honest way of earning a living.' He also asked him to regard the secondary school at the Oratory as an *istituto paterno* which, moreover, had fully respectable teachers as demonstrated by 'good results of the pupils in public exams.'⁷⁵

In October, Don Bosco told the Minister he had provided 'legal teachers' for his classes, not because he thought of his institute as a 'private secondary school' but because he was yielding to 'the insistence and threats of the School Authority.'⁷⁶ The Minister, availing himself of the collaboration of Prof. Allievo, gave approval from the perspective of a private secondary school: 'You have provided teachers furnished with the regular certificate for your secondary classes at the college. This means you can reopen the aforesaid classes without delay and as a result you may go to the School Council.'⁷⁷

But Don Bosco was not satisfied with approval under this category. What he wanted was the right, once and for all, to have the secondary classes at the Oratory recognised as the home schooling of a house of charity. Professor Allievo had encouraged this line of thinking. Already, prior to Perez' reply, he had written from Rome on 25 October to Fr Durando that he thought it 'better' for Don Bosco to put the matter to the Council of State by dividing it into two questions: 1. Cancellation of the Coppino decree of closure on 16 May. 2. Recognition of the Institute as a work of charity.⁷⁸

Don Bosco avoided the ordinary bureaucratic route, and to make things more secure, preferred to go directly to the King, carefully preparing the text of the appeal by attaching a memorandum dated 13 November entitled *Le scuole di beneficenza dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales davanti al Consiglio di Stato* (The charity classes at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales before the Council of State) by John Bosco,⁷⁹ supported by an earlier pamphlet, *L'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales Ospizio di beneficenza. Esposizione* (The Oratory of St Francis de Sales' Charity Hospice. Explanation) also by Don Bosco.⁸⁰

The arguments that ran across various letters and petitions were picked up once more: 1. 'The Salesian Oratory is a charitable hospice.' 2. 'It had always been regarded as such by authorities in the Kingdom.' 3. 'Its classes are *an integral part of it*, as they are aimed at the education of boys living within.' 4. 'A private secondary school had never been attached to the Oratory.' 5. In

74 Letter, August 1879, E III 504.

75 Letter, September 1879, E III 516-517.

76 To Minister F. P. Perez, 19 October 1879, E III 527-528. He had expressed the same reservations to the Superintendent on 29 November, presenting the list of teachers for the current year, amongst whom Bartolomeo Fascie in place of Prof. Pechenino: E III 530.

77 Letter to Don Bosco, 28 October 1879, *Documenti XXI* 427.

78 *Documenti XXI* 424-425; MB XIV 737-738.

79 Torino, tip. Salesiana 1879, 32 pp., OE XXX 449-480.

80 Torino, tip. Salesiana 1879, 44 pp., OE XXX 257-300. It precedes the other, *Le scuole di beneficenza...*, which it quotes (p. 9, OE XXX 457).

conclusion, 'The Salesian Oratory of Turin, both by its nature and for its past relationships with various State Authorities, should be regarded as a hospice of Christian charity and had been allowed to exist as such over thirty years or more,'⁸¹

In the second part of his explanation, he dwelt on arguments against the decree of closure of the institute as a *private secondary school*.⁸² Two requests ensued: to cancel the decree of closure and 'declare the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin a charitable Hospice, granting its director the faculty of giving or providing for under his vigilance and responsibility the elementary, technical and literary instruction he deemed necessary for the needs of the boys staying there, without the obligation of accredited teachers.'⁸³

Minister Perez ceased to hold office on 24 November and was replaced from 25 November 1879 until 2 January 1881 by Francesco De Sanctis, a member of the second Cairoli Ministry. On 27 November the appeal was officially passed on to the Ministry for Public Instruction.⁸⁴ An article was published in *L'Unità Cattolica* on 16 December which was strongly critical of the less than liberal interpretation given the Casati law, beginning with Minister Natoli in 1865 and up to Ministers of the Left, except for Perez. In essence, it reproduced the content of the *Appendix* introduced by Prof. Allievo in the second edition of his pamphlet on the Casati law and private secondary teaching.⁸⁵ The *Appendix*, which took up the last 13 pages of the pamphlet, was also published by the Salesian Press as a separate item. The intention was clear – to see that it went out to the widest circle of readers as Don Bosco had foreseen in his 16 July letter to Bishop De Gaudenzi.⁸⁶

The appeal was forwarded by the Minister for Public Instruction to the Council of State on 24 December, with negative opinion: 'The secondary school was closed because it contravened the law on schools which imposes the obligation of accreditation for teachers in private schools.' 'It is not correct to say that the secondary school [in question] is a pious work, though one can rather say it is maintained by a charitable association, which does take away its private character.' A number of documents went with it: 'Two minutes of the School Council and two reports by the Superintendent of Studies in Turin and the opinion of the Superior Council of Public Instruction.'⁸⁷

The Council of State examined it on 26 February 1880, ordering that new clarification be asked of Turin. Following reserved information on the contents of this request, in order to prevent an unfavourable report from the Superintendent of Studies, Don Bosco went to Cairoli as Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior asking him to have the Council of State sent the arguments he had outlined in the attached Memorandum. His aim was to contest items of erroneous information which, as far as he could see, were being applied to the Oratory classes: 1. That the Oratory was 'a true private secondary school' with fees. 2. That 'the boys at the Institute were destined for the religious or clerical state [and therefore also being given a structured classical or 'secondary school education']. Before 'a decision' was reached, it ought to be clear that this did not respond to the reality and he said he was 'ready to provide documents and proof' of this.⁸⁸ Only on 7 April 1880 did Superintendent Rho pass a report on to the Ministry insisting above all on the vocational

81 G. BOSCO, *Le scuole di beneficenza...*, pp. 14, 17-18, 19, OE XXX 462, 465-466, 467.

82 G. BOSCO, *Le scuole di beneficenza...*, pp. 20-24, OE XXX 468-472.

83 G. BOSCO, *Le scuole di beneficenza...*, p. 25, OE XXX 473.

84 Cf. Letter of private secretary of His Majesty, 11 December, *Documenti XXI* 475.

85 *La tirannia dell'insegnamento in Italia ed opportuni ricordi del professore Allievo*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 292, Tuesday 16 December 1879, pp. 1165-1166. *L'Appendice* of the work in new edition took up the last 13 pages of the professor's work and was published, again by the tipografia editrice salesiana, including separately: it was clear that the intention was to disseminate it more broadly, as Don Bosco had told Bishop De Gaudenzi in his letter of 16 July: cf. § 2.2.

86 Cf. § 2.2.

87 *Documenti XXI* 487-488.

88 Undated letter but after 26 February 1880, E III 548-550.

(religious) aims of Don Bosco's Institute.⁸⁹ The Council of State Commission asked to examine the appeal met again on 28 April. It decided on further suspension of judgement, asking Don Bosco, through the Prefect in Turin, to provide information on five points: the nature of the Oratory, the number of academic and trade students, what secondary classes were free or to what extent the number of boys presenting each year for the lower secondary certificate exams and how many had passed the year before, the number of boys who in the last five years had completed year 5 and then gone on to philosophy courses in order to dedicate themselves to the clerical ministry and join the 'Salesian fellowship.'⁹⁰ Don Bosco replied promptly to the request of the Prefect, Bartolomeo Casali, on 18 June 1880, taking much care, and not without some reticence, in putting together his 7 July reply: the purpose of the Oratory was a charitable one, as established by the guidelines for acceptance. The aim of the classes was to 'carry out an important branch of education and satisfy the needs and diverse callings of the boys staying there,' trade or academic students. Among those boys some did become clerics. As for monthly boarding fees, many were exempted, others paid a modest amount according to their families' possibilities. Members of the St Francis de Sales Association were 'free citizens' dependent on the 'laws of the State' in everything, but it would be erroneous to believe that classes were kept open 'especially for the benefit of the Pious Salesian Association.'⁹¹

Everything went quiet for months, so much so that in early April 1881, Don Bosco wrote to the Prefect of Turin: 'For the second time the Secretariat of the Council of State has asked me why I have not sent in clarification on the closure of our classes. In summer last year I promptly passed these on to Your Excellency as I had been requested to do.' He stated he was willing to do them again if needed.⁹² He also went to the Minister for the Interior, Agostino Depretis, expressing his fear that the reply had been lost either at the Prefecture in Turin or at the Ministry of Public Instruction. He attached, 'for good measure' 'another copy of the above-mentioned classifications, and asked the Minister to 'please follow up this procedure' so he could return to a 'normal situation in the eyes of public authorities and for the benefit of the poor boys' entrusted to him by Providence.'⁹³

Meanwhile the new Superintendent, Denicotti, at the Prefect's request passed on the observations which were unfavourable to Don Boco. Casalis said he would share them. The Report sent to the Council of State summed them up in three points: 1. Don Bosco has continued to send the Superintendent lists of teachers who were front men with accreditation, while the actual teachers were effectively not accredited. 2. Before the decree, he had never invoked articles 251 and 152 of the law for his classes. 3. He was subject to the relevant requirements of the law for these which were neither classes of a paternal institute nor seminary, and his nonobservance of the law made the decree of closure a legitimate one.⁹⁴

The dossier finally arrived at the Council of State on 7 June via the Minister of the Interior. Don Bosco sent a letter of explanation to the President regarding the section in the Council of State dealing with the problems relating to Public Instruction, attaching his reply to the five queries from July the previous year. He reduced it to three points: 1. The educational institute established at the Oratory in Turin 'ought to be regarded either as a true paternal institute or a charitable one. 2. Given but not conceding that as a private institute it would be subject to the current law, it could not be closed because only in cases of necessity were accredited teachers replaced. 3. 'All of the past

89 *Documenti* XXII 105-107.

90 *Documenti* XXII 161-162.

91 E III 596-601.

92 Letter of 5 April 1881, E IV 37-38.

93 Undated letter but close to the previous one, E IV 38-39.

94 *Documenti* XXIII 157-158.

argues in favour of the present, since school authorities had never asked for notification of accredited teachers.⁹⁵

The Commission met on 29 November. A telegram from Benedetto Viale the same day, who as 'a very old friend' of Don Bosco's had constantly kept him updated in absolute confidence, on proceedings, informed Fr Rua: 'Today it gives me great displeasure to pass on that the cause has been lost.'⁹⁶ Don Bosco was able to have the Commission's decision in hand: the appeal was rejected but the decree of closure on 16 May 1879 did not prevent the manager from being able to reopen his classes if he complied 'exactly and sincerely with the law.'⁹⁷ On 2 December, the King, 'in compliance with the opinion of the Council of State, and at the prompting of the Minister for Public Instruction 'was signing the decree approving the action of the School Council of the Turin Province in closing the Oratory classes.' 'The Appeal was not granted.'⁹⁸

But fundamentally, although the validation of the decree of closure had bought to nothing the battle to have the Oratory secondary school declared a 'home school' and meant that discussion in the broad liberal sense went nowhere, it had not caused any harm at a concrete level. Between letters and petitions, applications and defence, replies and appeals, Don Bosco had gained a good four school years (1878–82) and staked a claim for the future. The battle he had posed over alternatives, that is, either recognising the Oratory as a paternal institute or granting him three years so his teachers could gain their accreditation for a private secondary school, led in fact to a victory for the second alternative, but this was a more credible, stable and fruitful one. It responded to demands of the irreversible processes of secularisation of society and schooling, and allowed the Salesians to concretely realise their quality as free citizens. It encourage the formation of a better prepared teaching staff, one able to critically confront thinking beyond the small world of Valdocco and *L'Unità Cattolica*. The Oratory classes themselves gained in validity and legal and cultural respectability.

3. A looming storm in France but eventual dead calm

Two decrees on 29 March were implemented in France at the end of June 1880: the first concerned the expulsion of the Jesuits and closure of their institutes; the second was the obligation for Religious Congregations to request authorisation if they did not have such, the case for almost all of them.⁹⁹

Don Bosco showed sincere interest in the first of these. In a letter to Fr Ronchail on 9 April 1880, he told him he had written to the Jesuit General offering him in 'this common disturbance' his own houses in whatever way they could be useful.¹⁰⁰ Fr Pierre–Jean Beckx (1795–1887) replied gratefully from Fiesole on 5 April in admiration of Don Bosco's and his men's truly 'Salesian' charity, saying: 'I do not know if the time will come to take up your generous offer, but I promise you we will never forget your generosity.'¹⁰¹

Regarding the second decree, Don Bosco gave very precise directives inspired by the same skill with which he attempted to conduct the secondary school affair at the Oratory. He condensed them into six points in a letter to Fr Ronchail, the Rector in Nice, points he was to insist on with the authorities. He also asked him to pass these on to the rectors at Navarre and Marseilles, Frs Perrot

95 Letter of 2 July 1881, E IV 66.

96 *Documenti* XXIII 234.

97 *Documenti* XXIII 237.

98 *Documenti* XXIII 250-251.

99 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9.

100 E III 562.

101 *Documenti* XXII 104; MB XIV 595.

and Bologna, respectively; 1. The Salesians were not a 'religious corporation but a society whose individual members exercised all their civil rights' and that having been 'called' to France by the bishops, they gave their service freely to look after 'the poorest and most abandoned boys.' If the Constitutions were requested, the Latin text was to be given. 2. The main house could be said to be the one in Nice. In the other two, the Salesians were only 'renting, and servants of the *Société Beaujour*.' 3. It was not a case of taking refuge in the Principality of Monaco. Should it become impossible in France, he wrote, 'Spain, Uruguay, the Argentine Republic and Patagonia await us.' 4. Delay in responding to the request for authorisation. 5. Keep him informed on how the situation evolved. 6. As for other houses in France, he recommended: 'Keep firmly to the idea that we are for agriculture, arts and trades. If any student receives technical education and also grammar [Latin], it is to form *supervisors*, teachers, master tradesmen, especially printers, copper engravers, type-makers.'¹⁰² He had given the same justification for literary studies being purely a function of certain skills in the earlier cited memorandum to the Prefect of Turin on 7 July 1880, when replying to the Council of State's queries: 'Certain boys naturally inclined to some of the more noble and elevated arts and trades (printing, engraving, photography, type-making etc.) would not be able to learn these as well or carry them out fruitfully unless they had learned some Latin, Greek, French, Geography, Arithmetic etc.'¹⁰³ He gave particular instructions for the work in Marseilles to Canon Guiol. In case the Government 'asked for or rather drew up a list of Religious Institutes in France, they could question the *Beaujour Society* and it would be better if Frenchmen Fr Taulaigo and a certain Fr Brogly, a diocesan priest, were seen as the head of the house and its administrator. As for classes, only names of people from the parish *maîtrise* [skilled teaching body] headed by the Canon himself were to be given, in other words, accredited teachers. 'This is by way of foresight' he concluded, since *lacula praevisa mimus ferient*.¹⁰⁴ He attached an outline of a statement to be sent, if needed, to the University Inspector. As was the case for the secondary courses at the Valdocco Oratory, he insisted on the purely charitable nature of the Institute. It had the purpose 'of gathering poor and abandoned boys' to skill them in a trade. Some people who lives within or came from outside made up the *maîtrise* and also lent their services to the parish: they did 'primary teaching and some also the classical course.'¹⁰⁵

As for handing over the text of the Rule, writing to Canon Guiol from Rome on the day he had an audience with the Holy Father, he gave him the opposite order to the one he gave Fr Ronchail, since the Pope did not want the Latin text given to anyone who asked.¹⁰⁶

The situation did not stop Don Bosco from including plans in a *Memorandum on the Salesian Missions*, in Lyons, for a college or junior seminary to be opened, preferably in Marseilles, the purpose being 'to prepare Gospel workers for Patagonia.'¹⁰⁷ He explained the project more broadly to Canon Guiol in a letter on 9 May, also thinking of buying around 2,000 m² of land adjacent to the St Leo's Oratory.¹⁰⁸

As for requesting authorisation of the Salesian Society from the Government, Don Bosco had given instructions to Fr Ronchail to follow the other Religious Congregations who, to be honest, were somewhat reluctant, and also to consult the bishops.¹⁰⁹

We can admire the lucidity of all these pointers given from Rome, Florence, Turin by a man besieged by other no less pressing issues over and above the French problem: the school issue,

102 To Fr G. Ronchail, 23 March 1880, E III 554-555.

103 E III 598; cf. § 2.3.

104 To Can. C. Guiol, 26 March 1880, E III 557-558.

105 E III 556-557.

106 To Can. C. Guiol, 5 April 1880, E III 560-561; he said the same to Fr Ronchail on 9 April, E III 562.

107 E III 574.

108 E III 586-587.

109 To Fr G. Ronchail, 26 April 1880, E III 584.

problems with the Archbishop, the Sacred Heart Church, missions in South America with plans for an Apostolic Vicariate, without taking into account the daily concerns in finding support for his many works, and looking after his benefactors.

He also indirectly involved the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Benedetto Cairoli, in the situation in France, with a letter he had Fr Dalmazzo pass onto him, and another to the all-powerful Secretary General, Giacomo Malvano.¹¹⁰ He informed Cairoli that already some years earlier, he had revealed to the then Minister for Foreign Affairs the state of abandonment in which 'many children of Italian families living in the South of France' found themselves in, most sent back to Italy if found 'guilty before the civil authorities.' Therefore he had opened two hospices for working boys in Nice and Marseilles and 'an agricultural school near Frejus and another at Toulon.' In April 1879, 'backed by the Italian Consul in Marseilles' he had renewed an application for aid to help with the many costs involved in extending the various institutes. He was now renewing his request.¹¹¹

He was given an annual grant of 1,000 lire [3120 euro] as part of an overall amount sent by the Consul on behalf of Italians.¹¹² It could also have been a way of attracting attention to his works in this difficult circumstance. The Consul, whom he named in his letter, was a school friend from Chieri days, Annibale Strambio, whom he advised to have a memorandum drawn up in response to slanderous accusations against the Italian Religious and the *Oratoire Saint Leon*. Don Bosco congratulated the writer, Fr Louis Mendre, who sent him the text to look at. He suggested a few things to add and said: 'You could ask the Consul to publicise it if he thinks it appropriate.'¹¹³ The vigorous protest was presented to the City Prefect by Strambio.¹¹⁴

The political storm, aggravated by the clear refusal of Congregations to request authorisation, a lethal refusal for most of them, was overcome without harm done to the Salesian work, partly perhaps due to acknowledgement of the legal status peculiar to Don Bosco's institutes, but especially because Government authorities did not want to press implementation of the law with everyone everywhere.¹¹⁵ On the contrary, the work in Marseilles, the house in Nice, even though run by an 'unauthorised Congregation' was not seriously disturbed.¹¹⁶ On 26 December 1880, the Consul told Don Bosco: 'I believe any risk to your St Leo's Oratory has been averted.'¹¹⁷

His generous friend died on 19 January 1881 at 62 years of age from a cerebral haemorrhage.¹¹⁸

4. 'Nulla osta' for Marian pamphlets.

In 1880, there was a renewed controversy over Marian pamphlets recounting 'prodigious favours and miracles' (as Archbishop Gastaldi had written) wrought through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. It seemed to have quietened down in 1877,¹¹⁹ but in May 1880, Fr Lemoyne published a brief item entitled *La città di rifugio ovvero Maria Ausiliatrice* (The City of Refuge or Mary Help of

110 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 18 October 1880, E III 630.

111 Letter of 18 October 1880, E III 631.

112 Cf. letter of Fr F. Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, 7 November 1880: E III 631, no. 1.

113 Letter of 25 November 1880, E III 636.

114 Cf. MB XIV 610 and 813.

115 Cf. A. DANSETTE, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*. Vol. II. *Sous la Troisième République*. Paris, Flammarion 1952, pp. 81-83.

116 F. DESRAMAUT, *Don-Bosco à Nice...*, p. 62.

117 *Documenti* XXII 307.

118 Cf. "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 20, Tuesday 25 January 1881, p. 78.

119 Cf. Chap. 25, § 5.

Christians) in the *Lettere Cattoliche*.¹²⁰ The Archbishop reported its publication to the Pope and included the other works published in 1877, asking that 'the Salesians be strictly forbidden from publishing' in future, 'accounts of any miracle worked in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, without prior permission from the ecclesiastical authority' and that they be ordered 'to withdraw and suppress the ones already published.'¹²¹

At the invitation of Cardinal Domenico Bartolini (1813–87) Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, to whom the letter had been passed on, Archbishop Gastaldi sent the Congregation a copy of the incriminating pamphlet, accompanied by an even more severe letter than the previous one.¹²² The Cardinal passed the package on to the Promoter of the Faith, Archbishop Lorenzo Salati, with the note: '1 July 1880. If the Promoter of Faith looks at the enclosed booklets he will see that the Archbishop of Turin is not mistaken. Card. Bartolini. Pref.'¹²³ But the letter he sent Don Bosco on 16 July as an 'Instruction', expressed the Promoter's mild opinion, recommending he submit any future booklets on 'graces' obtained for ecclesiastical review.¹²⁴

Don Bosco had a lengthy memorandum drawn up for Fr Rostagno with some 'clarifications'¹²⁵ on 'the unpleasant dispute' which he maintained was 'without any foundation.' However, he stated that he would be 'obedient, and submit to any order, advice or counsel' coming from Rome.¹²⁶ The Cardinal jotted the following note on the back of the envelope: '23 August 1880. The very Rev. Counsellor can well observe how Don Bosco has sought, or so it seems, to teach the Sacred Congregation of Rites a lesson by his many acts of humility, with the support of his Consultor, so it would be best for the Ministry to give him a stern reply. Card. Bartolini. Pref.'¹²⁷ On 26 August, Archbishop Salati replied very respectfully to a letter from Don Bosco, which has not been found, encouraging him wisely and tactfully to reach an understanding with the Archbishop: 'What he is asking is that the booklets not be published without his *nihil obstat*, and this is correct. Loving union with him is, in every respect, necessary for the survival and fruitfulness of the valuable Salesian institutions, so it should be sought at all costs and it will certainly be one of the most beautiful graces the sublime Virgin Help of Christians can bestow on you.'¹²⁸ The case was dismissed. It was revisited however, during the apostolic process for Don Bosco's beatification and canonisation.

5. A Conflict explodes (December 1878–December 1880)

Processes of another kind, though, were already underway at the beginning of the 1880's. Summer 1880 found Don Bosco already caught inextricably in a tangle of much more serious woes. A first inkling of these had occurred in May 1878.

At the beginning of that month, an anonymous item slandering Gastaldi had come out in Turin: the *Strenna pel clero ossia rivista sul calendario liturgico dell'archidiocesi di Torino per l'anno 1878 scritta da un Cappellano* (A message for the clergy or a review of the liturgical calendar of the Turin Archdiocese for 1878, written by a chaplain).¹²⁹

120 S. Pier d'Arca, Tip. e Libr. Salesiana 1880, 134 pp., L.C. a. XXVIII, no. 5, May.

121 Letter quoted in MB XIV 523-524.

122 Letter of 26 June 1880, in MB XIV 795-797.

123 Cit. by MB XI 453.

124 *Documenti* XXII 186-190.

125 *Documenti* XXII 205-208.

126 Letter of 17 August 1880, E III 613-614.

127 Cit. in MB XI 454.

128 *Documenti* XXII 208-209.

129 Turin, Tip. G. Bruno e C. 1878, 87 pp.

This was the first of a series of pamphlets which unexpectedly brought about a dramatic and lengthy deterioration of relationships between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi. Fr Giovanni Turchi would claim authorship, but only sixteen years later and, as we have already indicated, pointed to Fr Giovanni Anfossi as the ‘Salesian Co-operator’ author of the *Letter on the Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St Francis de Sales*.¹³⁰

The anonymous ‘*strenna*’ writer – an intransigent priest who had spent ten years as a pupil at the Oratory – appeared there and then to be casting aspersions on the liturgical calendar but he was really attempting to discredit all of Gastaldi’s pastoral ministry. The appendix contained the phrase ‘it is said that ...’ twenty two times – two of them in reference to punitive relations with Don Bosco – and a devastating picture of the Archbishop resulted, each ‘it is said that’ followed by an apparent denial. All in all, it was a violently defamatory piece of slander inciting the diocesan clergy to rebellion. Not only the Archbishop but those who supported him were convinced the slander had Salesian origins.¹³¹ Don Bosco was already suspected of being behind the ‘Salesian Co-operator’ letter.

Relationships with the Archbishop deteriorated incurably toward the end of 1878, and early 1879, due to an incident featuring Fr Bonetti. For sure, Don Bosco would have been concerned about nipping this in the bud with quick action had he been able to foresee the complications and had he borne in mind the less than pleasant precedents in the Fr Bonetti–Archbishop relationship.

The pugnacious editor of the Salesian Bulletin had sent Don Bosco a letter on 1 August 1878, though it was signed the *editors* and additions and alterations by Don Bosco are visible in the draft version. The letter contained snide ‘observations on complaints made by Archbishop Gastaldi against the *Bulletin*.’¹³² Don Bosco passed it on to the Archbishop, justifying himself thus: ‘I sent the gist of your letter to the editor of the *Bulletin* as you wrote it to me, and having received a confidential reply, I am passing it on, also in confidence, not because I approve of it but just for mutual understanding.’¹³³ All this did was to strengthen the negative impression the Archbishop had already received over the *Bulletin*’s role in linking the Church of St John the Evangelist with the memory of Pius IX.¹³⁴ However, Fr Bonetti’s impulsiveness and complications by further slanderous items in which there was at least one explicit reference to the Bonetti case in Chieri, ended up involving Don Bosco as well.

The remote event was an official letter on 24 September 1878 with which Don Bosco had entrusted Fr Bonetti with ‘the management and spiritual administration’ of the girls’ public festive oratory in Chieri.¹³⁵ The coincidence of religious ceremonies on Sundays at the well-attended oratory, with parish ceremonies had soon created tensions with the parish priest at the Duomo (cathedral), Canon Andrea Oddendino (1829–90), an austere priest very much conscious of his pastoral responsibilities for the flock entrusted to him. There were proposals and resistance to them, including some exaggerated comments typical of Fr Bonetti. On 28 December 1878, the parish priest felt constrained to protest at the tone of an article on the St Teresa Oratory in Chieri, published in the Bulletin. The editor saw the occasion as a battleground for his own journalistic

130 Letter to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 25 October 1895. The text is found in MB XIX 403-412: it is much more than a simple statement; it is a self-defence that turns into an acrimonious indictment against the deceased archbishop, in which the contents and spirit of the famous libels of the years 1877-1878 and of the materials collected and used by Fr Berto and Fr Bonetti to put together the *Exposé to the Cardinals of the Congregation of the Council of 15 December 1881* are reproduced: cf. Chap. 25, § 5; 26, § 3; 28, §§ 5 and 6.

131 G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, Vol. II..., p. 278.

132 *Documenti* XIX 208-210; MB XIII 592-594.

133 To Archbishop L. Gastaldi, 6 August 1878, E III 374.

134 Cf. Chap. 27, § 1.1.

135 Text in MB XIII 702-703.

warfare. 'To conclude the picture,' the author of the article had written 'we should still mention certain opposition recently raised against the oratory by a certain individual, but if necessary we will come back to this again later.'¹³⁶ He had also sent the parish priest a letter, encouraging him to cease his hostility, but again the tone and language was rather strong. The parish priest passed it on to the Archbishop, letting Fr Bonetti know he had done so, on 21 January 1879.

It was the prologue to the new drama that would only be solved three or more years after direct papal intervention. Fr Bonetti was called to the Archbishop's office and invited to ask the Provost's forgiveness. This act was delayed in coming and Fr Oddenino informed the Archbishop, who did not hesitate on 12 February to temporarily suspend Fr Bonetti's faculties for hearing confessions. The following day, Fr Bonetti wrote to the Provost asking for forgiveness, and informed the Archbishop in more words than he needed to. He expressed the hope that the suspension would be revoked immediately, also suggesting that if it were not, then in his own defence and to protect the honour of the Congregation, he would not be adverse to appealing to Rome. The Archbishop relied by confirming the suspension, no longer temporary but absolute and unconditional, depending on the Ordinary.¹³⁷

On 26 February, Fr Bonetti reached Don Bosco in Lucca, on his way from France to Rome, and on 6 March he presented his appeal to the Congregation of the Council. This gesture brought pain and suffering to both of them, only to be finally surmounted with the Archbishop's death in 1883.

Don Bosco became officially involved in the case personally in February, with a letter to Cardinal Ferrieri. Fr Bonetti, he began, was the third Salesian priest whom the Archbishop had suspended 'from hearing confessions of the faithful without observing canonical form.' The first had been Don Bosco himself, the second Fr Lazzero, over the Mass incident, and now the third, Fr Bonetti. He assured him that if the letter to the parish priest and the Archbishop had been 'lacking in due respect,' 'which nevertheless has to be looked at,' he explained 'he [Fr Bonetti] would be immediately dealt with once the Superior of the Congregation was advised.' It was no small thing he was asking of the Cardinal: to invite the Archbishop of Turin 'to apply the rules prescribed by the Holy See for similar steps, and before inflicting serious ecclesiastical penalties he should first examine whether the facts merited such, and as far as possible avoid public scandal,' since 'someone who was preaching zealously in the city of Chieri had had to abandon his confessional, which was surrounded by a multitude of penitents, and remove himself from the Archdiocese in order not to draw public attention to himself.'¹³⁸

In May, given the Archbishop's poor health, it seemed the dispute had been smoothed over, but the prohibition on Fr Bonetti returning to Chieri and the renewed appeal to Rome, brought the matter back to its starting point. Don Bosco was persuaded to turn to Cardinal Nina, Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, stressing the need for the Salesian Society to be given the privilege enjoyed by 'the Passionists, Redemptorists and Oblates of the Virgin Mary.'¹³⁹ But the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars gave the Pope a negative opinion, He then made a request for mediation to Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda. But the procedure had to pass through the competent Congregation.¹⁴⁰

In 1879, Don Bosco presented the Holy See with a printed copy of eighteen pages entitled *Esposizione alla S. Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel Marzo del 1879*. (A report to the Holy See of the moral and material state of the Pious Society

136 BS 3 (1879) no. 1, January, p. 9.

137 Cf. *Documenti* XLV 1-14.

138 Undated letter (end of February?) of 1879, E III 445-446.

139 Letter of 13 June 1879, E III 475.

140 Cf. MB XIV 236-244.

of St Francis de Sales in March 1879).¹⁴¹ It was the first three-yearly report after the approval of the Constitutions. *Brief news on the Congregation from 1841 to 1879* was followed by the list of works classified under four Provinces: the Piedmontese (24 plus the college and boarding house at Este), the Ligurian (12 plus the 4 in France), the Roman (5), the American, in Argentina and Uruguay (14 with 100 Salesians). With some exaggeration he listed institutes that were close to being founded in Milan, Cremona, Lugo, Brindisi, Catania, Randazzo, Challonges, Paris–Auteuil, Santo Domingo, Brazil, Paraguay, etc. He also included 21 houses or works run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the list, three of which were in America. This was followed by brief *Observations*, opening these with the statement: ‘The houses the Sisters live in all belong to the Congregation but with a Salesian as head.’

He added to the *Report* with brief items of information on the *Moral state of the Salesian Congregation*. One indication of his resolute intention to defend the institutions in a precise chronological context was a text referring to the Archbishop without actually naming him. ‘We are in excellent relations with parish priests and diocesan ordinaries’ he stated and we can say that they act as fathers and benefactors to us. We find problems with only one Ordinary and have never known the true reason for this. With patience, the Lord’s help and by working in submission in his diocese we hope to gain the benevolence we experience in all other dioceses.’¹⁴²

On 5 April, a number of criticisms of the *Report* were passed on by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars related to various items: 1) Nothing is said about the financial state of the Congregation and the novitiate. 2) It speaks of Inspectorates or provinces but not of their canonical erection. 3) It refers to ‘some shelters for women being entrusted to the sacred ministry of the Salesians’ – St Joseph’s Workshops, Family of St Peter, Good Shepherd Institute – but it does not say that this role has been assigned by Episcopal Authority or ‘what the said sacred ministry consists of.’ 4) It does not say whether the colleges and schools have been opened with due canonical authorisation. 5) There is no precise definition of the relationship between the Salesian Congregation and the Institute of Mary Help of Christians. 6) It does not bear in mind that the Holy See does not allow the services of the Sisters in seminaries and male hospices. 7) Printing the Report is contrary to practice and privacy.

Don Bosco replied point by point, more by way of defence than acceptance.¹⁴³ It was obvious that the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was unhappy, and it replied that the Salesian Society was not following Canon Law in the matters indicated. Don Bosco replied once more by letter on 12 January 1880. He was more available to accept what had been observed and provide clarification on four of the points: ownership of the Congregation’s goods, the novitiate in Marseilles for which procedures were in progress, division into provinces, the FMA Institute.¹⁴⁴

But already in March 1879, when Fr Bonetti had appealed to the Pope to regain his faculties for confession, two new anti-Gastaldi items came on the scene in Turin darkening the horizon once more: The *Questione Rosminiana e l’arcivescovo di Torino. Strenna pel Clero compilata dal Cappellano. Anno II* (The Rosminian question and the Archbishop of Turin. *Strenna* for the clergy written by the Chaplain. Year II),¹⁴⁵ and, at the height of the anti-Rosminian debate, a *Piccolo saggio sulle dottrine di Mons. Gastaldi Arcivescovo di Torino, preceduto da una Introduzione e seguito da alcune appendici* (A short essay on the teachings of the Archbishop of Turin, Mons. Gastaldi, preceded by an introduction and followed by some appendices).¹⁴⁶

141 S. Pier d’Arena, tip. Salesiana 1879, 18 pp., OE XXXI 237-254.

142 G. Bosco, *Esposizione alla S. Sede sullo stato morale e materiale...*, pp. 17-18, OE XXXI 253.

143 Cf. letter of 3 August 1879, E III 505-508.

144 Cf. E III 540-544.

145 Tip. G. Bruno e C. 1879, 144 pp.

146 Turin, Tip. Alessandro Fina 1879, 155 pp.

The Rosminian Question focused especially on Gastaldi's Rosminian leanings. With the advent of Leo XIII, a Thomist and restorer of Scholasticism in his Encyclical *Inscrutabili* on 21 April 1878, and especially *Aeterni Patris* on 4 August 1879, even the Archbishop found himself partly wrong-footed and without defence in Rome, as Don Bosco did when Pius IX died. But in this new pamphlet too, the 'Chaplain' did not hesitate to include Don Bosco's opposition to the Archbishop.¹⁴⁷

Particularly explosive were the *Introduction* and an appendix to the *Brief essay*, apparently referring to speculation on a number of issues. 'The Chaplain' showed he was more interested in finding an opportunity to include a lengthy series of serious accusations against Gastaldi's episcopal governance: his removal of Bertagna from teaching Moral Theology at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto Ecclesiastico*), the closure of the selfsame College subsequent to that, the collapse of the Seminary, the persecution of a priest and a Congregation that was only doing good (Don Bosco!), surrounding himself with the worst kind of collaborators, and worst of all, the fact that Gastaldi was a liberal, Rosminian and rigorist 'unworthy of the position he was holding' and it was therefore necessary to rise up against him.

Of the four appendices, one was even dedicated to *A little bit of history, or, the St Theresa Oratory in Chieri*.¹⁴⁸ It anticipated by a few weeks the appearance of yet another piece of anonymous slander at the end of May which was even more compromising for Don Bosco and the Salesians and especially for Fr Bonetti's cause: *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Fr Oddenino or some humorous, serious and sorrowful facts as told by someone from Chieri*. The *Prelude*, signed by 'A head of family', sought to be a defence of Fr Bonetti, Don Bosco and the Salesians against Fr Oddenino and the Archbishop.¹⁴⁹ In fact, it deeply offended the Archbishop and harmed his presumed victims since the facts were reported in such detail that only familiarity with a Salesian at the Oratory could explain it. 'The avalanche of anonymous slander,' it was correctly noted 'not only damaged the Archbishop and his pastoral activity but it did no service to Don Bosco and the Salesians. It was not the most suitable way of disposing the Archbishop towards them and even less so for facilitating reconciliation. Indeed, it brought their relationship to its most critical point.'¹⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had sought to preempt new legal problems for the Congregation, first with a formal request to Leo XIII to renew 'the favours and privileges' granted by Pius IX on 21 April 1876, which had elapsed,¹⁵¹ then by stating in a more developed letter to the Cardinal Protector, Lorenzo Nina, that 'the communication of privileges' was 'especially necessary at present,'¹⁵² [those which ecclesiastical Congregations approved by the Holy See enjoyed]. Also to facilitate relations with Roman Ecclesiastical Dicasteries, he appointed Fr Francis Dalmazzo in January 1880 as Procurator of the Salesian Society.¹⁵³ As Rector for eight years of the aristocratic College at Valsalice, Fr Dalmazzo had been able to acquire considerable flexibility in social relationships which, to Don Bosco's way of thinking, made him suitable to be part of the demanding Roman World both ecclesial and lay. He became a valuable collaborator in years that promised many tasks: gaining the privileges, the difficult creation of the missionary circumscription in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, the solution to the final controversies with the Archbishop of Turin. Also, with

147 *La Questione rosminiana e l'Arcivescovo di Torino...*, p. 106.

148 Cf. *Piccolo saggio sulle dottrine di Mons. Gastaldi...*, pp. 145-155; G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, Vol. II..., pp. 280-281.

149 Turin, Tip. G. Bruno e C. 1879, pp. 3-8.

150 G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi 1815-1883*, Vol. II..., p. 282.

151 Petition of 7 March 1879, in MB XIV 707.

152 Cf. letter of 13 June 1879 to Cardinal Nina, Protector of the Salesian Society from 26 March, E III 475.

153 Cf. Letter to Cardinal L. Nina, 12 January 1880, E III 539-540.

foresight he could not have known, the appointment anticipated by two months the beginning of negotiations for construction of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome.

As for the tensions with Archbishop Gastaldi, it was not long before there was another occasion of disagreement when, around March or April, the Archbishop wanted the Salesians to accept an offer of land and a building he owned to manage an elementary school for poor boys and an oratory at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Negotiations were not handled directly by Don Bosco, who was first of all in France then Rome over those months, but by Frs Cagliero and Rua. The unsuccessful, negative result greatly displeased the one making the offer. He let Cardinal Nina know how unhappy he was.¹⁵⁴ Don Bosco excused himself from the affair, sending him a memorandum prepared by Fr Cagliero. In his accompanying letter Don Bosco regretted the distortion of facts, recalling other less than favourable behaviour towards the Salesians, in particular the well-known suspension of Fr Lazzero, Fr Bonetti and himself, still suffering under the letters of suspension *latae sententiae* of 25 November and 1 December 1877.¹⁵⁵

More worrying still was something else that cropped up a few days later, which some see as connected with the publication of defamatory material. On 18 August, the police raided the Oratory Press, taking away proofs of the *Salesian Bulletin*. When Don Bosco was informed, he wrote from Nizza Monferrato to Fr Rua, explaining in detail the nature of the press and its assumed legal status, and invited him to come to Nizza. On his return he sent the King's Prosecutor clarification on the link between the printing operation at Valdocco and the one at Sampierdarena, especially for composition and printing of the *Salesian Bulletin*.¹⁵⁶ We know nothing of the follow-up.

6. Hopes for an agreed settlement, and a forced 'Concordia' (1881–82)

Don Bosco's relationships with Leo XIII, as extremely correct as they were, could not have the emotional charge of those with the deceased Pius IX. There was too great a distance and difference of temperament, acquaintance, habit, culture, style of government, but also of time and ecclesiastical politics. He could certainly not have done better than the clever homage of his *Il più bel fiore del Collegio Apostolico ossia la elezione di Leone XIII con breve biografia dei suoi elettori pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco*. (The most beautiful flower of the Apostolic College or the election of Leo XIII with a short biography of his electors, by Fr John Bosco).¹⁵⁷

Certain aspects of the ecclesial scene in Italy were also evolving. Something necessarily had to change also with regard to the situation of bishops who did not feel they were adequately supported by Rome in their dealings with priests and laity who boasted ostentatious fidelity to the Pope and thus felt authorised to argue against their Ecclesiastical Superiors, even publicly. In 1881, 1882, Bl. Giovanni Scalabrini, Bishop of Piacenza (1876–1905) and his friend the Bishop of Cremona, Geremia Bonelli, fell victim to this, targeted as they were by an aggressive and protected form of Catholic journalism headed by *L'Osservatore Cattolico* in Milan, run by the intransigent Fr Davide Albertario.¹⁵⁸

Behaviour of this kind and protests to the Holy See, besides indicating profoundly different attitudes to the modern world, reflected two different ecclesiologies at all levels, which had

154 Letter of 23 June 1880, *Documenti* XXII 170-171; MB XIV 534.

155 Letter of 10 July 1880, E III 604-605. The two documents did not come into the Cardinal's hands so, when he complained, Don Bosco sent him a copy on 3 September.

156 Letter of 31 August 1880, E III 622-624.

157 Turin, Tip. e libr. salesiana 1878, 288 pp., OE XXX 1-288.

158 Cf. M. FRANCESCONI, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini vescovo di Piacenza e degli emigrati*. Rome, Città Nuova Editrice 1985, pp. 491-620.

flourished but were left unresolved at Vatican I. One of these was tendentially a vertical view also followed by Don Bosco, the other more inclined to a certain episcopal collegiality.¹⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, Archbishop Gastaldi was close to this view, thanks to the evolution of his original theological thinking and his Rosminian culture, which he had profoundly assimilated, beginning with the *Cinque piaghe della Santa Chiesa* arriving, as we have seen in his defence of papal infallibility, at a more systematic view of papal power and episcopal jurisdiction.¹⁶⁰

In 1880, Cardinal Prospero Caterina asked the Secretary of the Congregation of the Council, Archbishop Isidoro Vega, to arrange to conclude Fr Bonetti's cause within a month.¹⁶¹ But a trivial error led to further delay. Communication to Archbishop Gastaldi was done by a letter passed on through Don Bosco and rejected by its intended recipient because the one person who delivered it demanded a receipt from him: a formality sought by prejudiced and mistrustful people. The Archbishop explained it to Cardinal Caterini by letter on 5 December. He exploited the opportunity to refer to new incidents, the kindness he had shown Don Bosco, thus demonstrating respect and benevolence in his regard. He said, finally, that he would have been able and indeed wanted to encourage a process with the Congregation of the Council regarding Don Bosco and Fr Bonetti as the ones responsible for printing the defamatory material against the Archbishop. He had not done so through civil or ecclesiastical courts in order not to cause scandal.¹⁶²

In a report to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Council on 8 January, Fr Bonetti stated his cause. It was not about Don Bosco though he was profoundly and willingly involved. It was the explicit support given by the Superior of the Salesian Society to one of his religious who was quarrelling with his ecclesiastical superior that the Archbishop had taken issue with in a lengthy letter to Cardinal Caterini on 30 December 1880, attaching documentation against the complainant.¹⁶³ Canon Colomiatti, in turn, sent a refutation of Fr Bonetti's report on 9 February, accusing him of being the co-author of the pamphlet on *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Fr Oddenino* (March, 1879).¹⁶⁴

On 10 February, Cardinal Nina invited Don Bosco to agree with the Archbishop's representative on a 'settlement *de bono et aequo* in the cause of his religious.'¹⁶⁵ Don Bosco felt he could not consent to this, since reconciliation had to cover all outstanding or impending issues. The request for a solution to a particular matter regarding Fr Bonetti seemed to him to be a form of blackmail. 'If Don Bosco does not agree to a settlement' was his interpretation, writing to Fr Rua from Roquefort in France, 'the Archbishop will begin a process against Don Bosco for the defamatory material published against him.' He was still suffering under the suspension of *ipso facto incurrenda* imposed on 25 November and 1 December 1877. Besides, he added, it was essential to hear the view of the interested party, Fr Bonetti. As for his own position, he offered this reflection: 'Does he want to judge Don Bosco as having such a wayward conscience and busying himself with publications of this kind after such serious threats?' He asked the recipient to pass on his thoughts to Canon Colomiatti.¹⁶⁶ He told Cardinal Nina that in agreement with Fr Bonetti he keenly wanted 'everything to be settled in a friendly manner.' But believing he did not see the same readiness on the Archbishop's part, he explained the problem he had told Fr Rua about and concluded: 'I see no easier way than to return to how things had already been established, meaning to remove Fr

159 Cf. J.-P. TORRELL, *La théologie de l'épiscopat au premier Concile du Vatican*. Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf 1961, where of particular interest is the second draft of the Constitution *De Ecclesia ad opera* J. Kleutgen (pp. 247-279).

160 Cf. Chap. 16, § 9.

161 Cf. *Documenti* XLV 46-48.

162 *Documenti* XLV 49-50.

163 *Documenti* XLV 55-64.

164 *Documenti* XLV 72-73.

165 *Documenti* XLV 73-74.

166 Letter of 27 February 1881, E IV 27-28.

Bonetti's suspension and then everything will be over,' noting, however, that he continued to be burdened with 'the threat of suspension *ipso facto incurrenda*.'¹⁶⁷ He received a letter at Alassio written by Colomiatti on 29 March, once again inviting him to reach a settlement.¹⁶⁸

Don Bosco suggested cancelling Fr Bonetti's suspension and revoking the accusations brought against him in Rome.¹⁶⁹ The Archbishop too would have wanted general peace: it was enough to recognise that the Archbishop had been wronged, and ask forgiveness.¹⁷⁰ There were personal negotiations between Colomatti and Don Bosco with the signing, on 27 May, of a draft 'friendly' 'confidential' settlement that also included withdrawing documents from Rome relating to the dispute between Fr Bonetti and the Archbishop. But the latter, once he had the document in hand, without further details and formal mutual agreement, sent it to the Prefect of the Council asking that all documents relating to the dispute be returned to him. Don Bosco, instead, was thinking of an agreed understanding on all pending problems. Therefore, once he came to know about this he immediately asked Mons. Verga, the Secretary of the Congregation of the Council, 'to hold matters on the dispute at the point they were at.' He said that the Archbishop's action 'does not correspond to what was agreed with his lawyer, meaning that Fr Bonetti's suspension would be withdrawn, and that not only would complaints relating to him be withdrawn but also all letters aimed at defaming Don Bosco and his poor Congregation.'¹⁷¹ The same day he invited Canon Colomiatti to the Oratory to resume discussions so he could be better understood.¹⁷² At the meeting that followed, Colomiatti denied that the 27 May understanding included all the conditions put forward by Don Bosco. Some days later Don Bosco reconfirmed his position explaining: 'I am more convinced than ever that the Archbishop's action does not correspond to our understanding; it leaves Fr Bonetti in the state he is in and in no way revokes the letters sent to Rome against the writer and our poor Congregation ... In this state of things I see no other way than to let the Holy See establish my wrongdoing and its reasons, which I fully accept beforehand, whatever they may be. I believe that Monsignor will also be happy with this because he is a Higher Authority who grants and restricts powers and controls their use.'¹⁷³

A brief pause brought some partial benefit. Fr Bonetti was able to present the Pope with a detailed memorandum on his situation, and when eighty-four-year-old Cardinal Caterini died, Cardinal Nina, Protector of the Salesian Society, was appointed the new Prefect of the Congregation of the Council on 10 November 1881. But the overall situation deteriorated considerably when, in the curia in Turin, they set about looking for proof and witnesses to incriminate Fr Bonetti as the author of the anti-Gastaldi material and Don Bosco as his accomplice.

Among the leading accusations – and these continued to surface even during the process for Don Bosco's beatification and canonisation – was the testimony of a former Jesuit priest, Fr Antonio Pellicani. It was forced and twisted from a deposition by Scolopian, Fr Leoncini, regarding a conversation he had had with Fr Pellicani. According to this testimony, Don Bosco had invited the priest to prepare to send to Rome a memorandum on Archbishop Gastaldi's style of governing the diocese. The invitation was interpreted by the diocesan lawyers as an encouragement to write a book or books against the Archbishop. Such an interpretation remained, notwithstanding the correction made by Pellicani himself following clarification from Don Bosco.¹⁷⁴ When asking

167 Letter at the beginning of 1881, E IV 29-30.

168 *Documenti* XLV 78.

169 To Can. E. Colomiatti, 5 April 1881, E IV 39.

170 Letter to Don Bosco 10 May 1881, *Documenti* XLV 82.

171 Letter of 2 June 1881, E IV 57-58.

172 Letter of 2 June 1881, E IV 58.

173 To Can. E. Colomiatti, 11 June 1881, E IV 59.

174 To Fr A. Pellicani, 14 October 1881, E IV 87-88.

Pellicano for a clarification that was more in line with the truth of the conversation, Don Bosco reminded him; ‘You came to the Oratory to have some of your own books printed, or because some were in the process of being printed [on Christian education of the young and the enemies ensnaring them: bad companions, books, reading]. During the conversation we came around to complaints relating to our Ecclesiastical Superior. You said that it would be very useful to pass these on to the Holy Father. I replied: “You could do that since you have the time and ability.” That was it. Maybe it was in different words, but the gist of it was clear.’¹⁷⁵

In mid–October, Colomiatti went to Rome where he was encouraged to prepare the information process against Fr Bonetti, Don Bosco and the famous defamatory items. Don Bosco became aware of this and wrote to Leo XIII about it while ‘busy preparing a new expedition of missionaries for America and especially Patagonia.’ He asked the Pontiff that the matter of the pamphlets not be dealt with by the Congregation of the Council on 17 December, which was set aside to examine Fr Bonetti’s appeal against the suspension imposed on him. He justified the request in these terms: ‘Since I cannot have a correct understanding of the allegations and since I have been assured it is all supported by conjecture and certain claims, I cannot therefore provide due clarification and am thus unable to defend either myself or my Congregation as my conscience obliges me to do.’ He then went on to state firmly that he had absolutely nothing to do with the pamphlets and condemned their content to the extent they were subject to condemnation and disapproval by the Holy See.¹⁷⁶

Archbishop Gastaldi also went to Rome to be present for canonisations carried out by the Pope on 8 December, while his lawyer, Menghini, was preparing his defence in his name for the Bonetti cause. He was aiming to involve Bonetti, Don Bosco and the Salesian Society in the matter of the defamatory pamphlets. Don Bosco had a copy of this from Lawyer Leonari, and asked Cardinal Nina what he had asked of Leo XIII. He went further, weighing up the worth of Pellicani’s testimony and other arguments against him, among them the incident that occurred in 1869 with Archbishop Riccardi, relating to the ordination of Fr Giuseppe Cagliari at Casale.¹⁷⁷

The Congregation came to a decision on 17 December, which was passed on to Don Bosco on 22 December: *Dilata et ad mentem*. The *mens* being that the matter, before being dealt with legally, could be settled honourably *de bono et aequo* by both parties. There followed instructions for Don Bosco on the procedure to adopt, in requesting Fr Bonetti’s reinstatement for hearing confessions: it need to be done with appropriate words asking forgiveness for anything that might have upset the Archbishop, even if it went beyond Bonetti’s intention to do so. The Archbishop received a similar document to Don Bosco’s, but also suggesting how he should act in Don Bosco’s regard currently and in the future.¹⁷⁸

The announcement of the text of the Congregation of the Council’s decision was also made to Don Bosco by Archbishop Boccali, the Papal Chamberlain.¹⁷⁹ He did this by letter, in the Pope’s name on 27 December. In his reply on 30 December, while fearing ‘some difficulties on the Archbishop’s part,’ Don Bosco asked Boccali to assure the Pope of his readiness to act as had been requested, ‘to follow not only his commands but also his wishes.’¹⁸⁰ Instead, on 31 December, Archbishop Gastaldi sent Cardinal Nina a strong protest. He felt that the Congregation’s decision was an imposition that favoured Fr Bonetti and Don Bosco, while the Archbishop was ‘put down and annihilated’ without any sense of ‘decorum.’ ‘The Salesians,’ he noted ‘will do as they want in

175 To Fr A. Pellicani, 14 October 1881, E IV 87.

176 To Leo XIII, beginning of December 1881, E IV 95.

177 Letter to Cardinal L. Nina, 10 December 1881, MB XV 242-246; cf. 16, § 8.

178 *Documenti XLV* 135-137, 141-142, 145; MB XV 721-722, 722-723.

179 *Documenti XLV* 144-145.

180 To Bishop G. Boccali, 30 December 1881, E IV 106.

future with such a decision and even more so if they are to have the very special privileges of certain Religious Orders.’ Towards the conclusion he said: ‘Eminence, as Cardinal Protector of the Salesian Congregation, you have done well as their advocate.’ ‘I should, then, complain that the Protector himself is acting as judge against me, given his quality and authority as Prefect of the Congregation of the Council in imposing an order that would never come from the full Congregation of Eminent Fathers; that is how the justice of my cause stands for me, according to how the Prelates have collectively decided.’ He drew his conclusion: ‘Thus I demand that the Sacred Congregation decide on the doubt *iuris ordine servato* with the *nihil transeat*.’¹⁸¹

Days earlier, however, the situation became further complicated. On 20 December, Fr Bonetti was summoned to appear within a month before the ecclesiastical court in Turin to respond to the crime of defamation by printing the libellous item *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Fr Oddenino*.¹⁸² Without yet knowing what had been decided on 17 December by the Congregation of the Council, Don Bosco informed Cardinal Nina of the new crisis on 22 December.¹⁸³ To the letter he attached a compromising anti-Gastaldi memorandum prepared by Fr Bonetti and Fr Berto and with his signature: *Esposizione del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco agli eminentissimi cardinali della Sacra Congregazione del Concilio* (Presentation by Fr John Bosco to the eminent cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council).¹⁸⁴ The letter was addressed to Cardinal Nina and the Pope. It is true that in the concluding request he said: ‘By this *Report* I do not intend to accuse anyone nor defend myself.’ But in fact it looked like a merciless closing argument for the prosecution, an impassioned legal harangue against the recipients.¹⁸⁵ The Cardinal noted that if the item were to receive publicity, ‘no right moment could be chosen.’¹⁸⁶

The report or presentation was the condensed result of a meticulous collection of documents seen to by Fr Berto and Fr Bonetti and showed Don Bosco’s lack of faith in any friendly settlement of the disputes with the Archbishop. But it could hardly make his statement to Cardinal Nina, a few days later, sound at all credible when he wrote: ‘At any rate, I was and still am ready to make any sacrifices so long as it brings an end to an affair which has made me lose so much time.’¹⁸⁷

In its structure and formulation, the document could hardly be objective. It listed for every year from 1872 to 1882, a series of acts, stances, behaviours, excerpts, comments suggesting the Archbishop’s inspirations, purposes, qualities of very different kinds, but they were all lumped together under ‘harassment and disturbance.’ It revealed ideas and contributions of a theological and legal nature regarding the Salesian Constitutions, a way of thinking about religious life and the formation of consecrated individuals, especially if they were clerics. It was all completely plausible and they were ideas shared by the Roman Curia and most of them introduced into the fully approved Constitutions. It was a similar case with privileges which Gastaldi felt should be limited, not only with regard to the Salesian Society but for all religious Institutes. Recorded were disciplinary measures a bishop intent on the vigorous reform of his diocese could believe were fully legitimate. It adduced events and episodes against him that were suggested to come from imprudence, lack of awareness, preventive measures not imputable to just one side. It sided entirely with Fr Bonetti. It overlooked the fact that the devastating phenomenon of the defamatory pamphlets had taken place within a context of suspicion, an atmosphere of mistrust and tension in which everyone was directly or indirectly involved as both cause and victim. Rather than a *Report*, what was needed was a well-considered reflection, if not direct contact between the parties, high

181 Letter of 31 December 1881, *Documenti* XLV 147-149, MB XV 723-726.

182 *Documenti* XLV 136; MB XV 731.

183 Letter to Cardinal L. Nina, E IV 103-104.

184 S. Pier d’Arena, Tipografia di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli 1881, OE XXXII 49-124.

185 *Documenti* XLV 138-140; MB XV 249-250.

186 To Don Bosco, 25 December 1881, *Documenti* XLV 141-142.

187 Cf. letter of 28 December 1881, E IV 104-105.

level mediation, timely awareness of the opportunity for a settlement without waiting for a verdict from on high, from courts belonging to the Roman Congregations, or from the Supreme Authority in the Church. The Report, finally, presupposed and created the 'Gastaldi case', the 'Don Bosco vs Gastaldi conflict' as a single block item. There and then it was counter-productive as well as being historically unfounded and historiographically misleading.

Don Bosco, too, was summoned by the Turin curia on 5 January, accused of being the instigator behind the writing and publication of the five defamatory items, and the investigator and supplier of materials used in their publication: '1, mandans fieri et publicari libellos adminus iniuriosos,' *Message from the clergy 1878, Brief essay on Archbishop's teaching, The Rosminian Question, The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Fr, Oddenino* '2. quaesitor et provisor documentorum pro dictis libellis.'¹⁸⁸ Don Bosco asked Cardinal Nina if he was 'obliged to appear while the dispute was *sub iudice* in a higher court for accusations forwarded to the Congregation of the Council on 29 December 1880 and 21 June 1881.'¹⁸⁹

At the end of the month, the Archbishop sustained two defeats: on the same day, 31 January 1882, he received a stern warning ('*severe moneatur*') for his letter to Cardinal Nina on 31 December, and it was also passed on to him that Fr Bonetti's cause – he had appealed successfully to Rome against the summons from the Turin church court – had been discussed by the Congregation with the conclusion that the 'suspension or local interdict was invalid in this case.'¹⁹⁰ The Congregation forbade the curia in Turin from proceeding against Fr Bonetti and Don Bosco in the matter of the defamatory pamphlets *given the contiguous nature of the causes*.¹⁹¹ It appointed the Archbishop of Vercelli, Archbishop Fissore, to prepare the process on the defamatory material and send it to Rome.¹⁹² Having gone to Turin, while Don Bosco was in Rome, Archbishop Fissore, instead of limiting himself to preparing the cause, made a new attempt at settlement, and on 15 April obtained from Fr Bonetti and Fr Rua a signed statement denying involvement, waiting for Don Bosco to do the same.¹⁹³ Instead, Don Bosco wrote to Cardinal Nina, reminding him of the failure of earlier attempts and the pointlessness of proceeding further down this path. He suggested the solution he had put forward on a number of occasions, which fundamentally was equivalent to surrender on the Archbishop's part: Fr Bonetti's reinstatement and recall of the letters from 25 November and 1 December against him. He distanced himself again from the famous libel without, however, arriving at a pure and simple condemnation of it: 'Neither I nor the Salesians have ever been mixed up in this as far as I am aware up to now. I have always criticised this inappropriate manner of speaking about the Ecclesiastical Authority and I still do. I am also very ready to condemn the material contained in it when the things to be criticised before the Church have been specified for me.'

If we go back to the clear examples of anti-Rosminian content, it seems he found nothing to condemn, since those who read it were in agreement that it agreed 'fully with the principles and thinking recommended by the Holy Father ... most recently.'¹⁹⁴

The Cardinal asked for a more extensive report which was compiled and signed by Fr Bonetti on 17 May 1882,¹⁹⁵ and for a retraction by Scolopian Fr Leoncini and from Fr Pellicani. Only Pellicani did so on 30 May.¹⁹⁶ Matters in Rome, however, were complicated, since Colomiatti, an

188 *Documenti* XLV 155-156; MB XV 733.

189 Letter of 7 January 1882, E IV 113-114.

190 *Documenti* XLV 207; MB XV 727.

191 *Documenti* XLV 207-208.

192 *Documenti* XLV 208.

193 *Documenti* XLV 242.

194 To Cardinal L. Nina, 8 May 1882, E IV 132-134; cf. letter of 7 January 1882, E IV 114.

195 *Documenti* XLV 267-270; MB XV 734-736.

able and discreet man who was in the capital from 11 May,¹⁹⁷ was working to introduce a new cause to defend the Archbishop from the unfortunate *Report* from the previous December.

Don Bosco asked Fr Bonetti to send Cardinal Nina some clarification. They arrived late and were not so helpful. He wanted to separate his own cause from the pamphlets and the *Report*. This was a legitimate defence against the Archbishop's complaints which had been made public in print. The matters described there were true and Colomiatti should have made any likely counter conclusions known in writing.¹⁹⁸ In reality, the *Report* was a serious tactical error, which even Leo XIII thought inappropriate, and it impacted negatively on the conclusion to the controversy, including the moment in history it was presented and read.

It was precisely on 25 January 1882 that the Pope issued an encyclical *Cognita Nobis*, addressed to the archbishops and bishops of the ecclesiastical provinces of Milan, Turin, and Vercelli, a theatre for similar conflicts, 'so that once the causes of these disputes have been removed, peaceful agreement of minds and wills may be maintained.' In the first instance, the Pope said, love for truth which is praiseworthy and something the Holy See also sees as praiseworthy, should be accompanied for their part by private individuals, Catholic newspapers and those in charge of them in obedience and respect for the bishops' higher authority and this meant it was not permissible to question the steps they took in the doctrinal and disciplinary order of things. With regard to the harsh dissent between Catholics who follow different philosophies – meaning, concretely, Thomism and Rosminianism – he invited them to moderate the tone of their arguments and hoped that editors and those responsible for Catholic newspapers would abstain from writing about such matters, leaving it to the Holy See to exercise its role of vigilance and intervention with the prudence that rightfully leaves any Catholic feeling at ease.¹⁹⁹

It was a position that Archbishop Gastaldi, as a fervent supporter of Rosmini's thinking, could only but appreciate and also feel confirmed in his lofty concept of episcopal authority. Archbishop Gastaldi reminded people who struck out at the principle of authority, in his Pastoral Letter for Lent 1882 on 13 February, of ... *the divine authority of the Roman Pontiff*. He deplored the fact that too often 'in the bosom of the Catholic Church there are individuals who in God's hands are manifestly instruments of sanctification but who nevertheless fall for some of Satan's snares.' He lists two significant examples of this in the Church's history: St Jerome sought peace in the grotto at Bethlehem 'because elsewhere the cursing tongue of some clerics did not allow him any rest.' 'St Charles Borromeo was persecuted to death by a group of religious.'²⁰⁰ It certainly was not esoteric language.

There seemed to be no way out for the controversy in Turin. In May, Leo XIII himself decided to handle the matter of a settlement which the Archbishop now wanted. In the most recent days of the affair, Don Bosco was absent from Rome for health reasons and maybe also diplomatic ones.²⁰¹ This could only have been to his disadvantage although he recalled Fr Dalmazzo to Turin to receive instructions. On 27 May, Cardinal Nina wrote to the Procurator that it 'was necessary in order to follow up on the Holy Father's intentions' for Don Bosco to give him in writing 'full power to

196 Cf. E IV 88; *Smentita un'accusa contro D. Bosco*, Torino, 30 May 1882 and *Osservazioni*, 1° June 1882. S. Pier d' Arena, tip. dell'Ospizio di S. Vinc. de' Paoli 1882, 4 pp., *Documenti* XXIV 156-159; The text is also in MB XV 256-257.

197 Cf. letter of 10 May from Archbishop L. Gastaldi to Cardinal L. Nina, *Documenti* XLV 264-265.

198 To Cardinal L. Nina, 22 May 1882, E IV 137.

199 Cf. ASS 14 (1881) 289-291; G. ASTORI, *Mons. Bonomelli, mons. Scalabrini e don Davide Albertario. Note storiche con documenti inediti*. Brescia, Pavoniana 1939; M. FRANCESCONI, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini...*, pp. 491-570 (*Le prime polemiche con "L'Osservatore Cattolico"*).

200 L. GASTALDI, *Lettere pastorali...*, p. 545.

201 Letter to Fr F. Dalmazzo and to Cardinal L. Nina, 20 May 1882, E IV 135-136, 136, following an exchange of telegrams between Rome and Turin from 10 to 22 May (*Documenti* XLV 270-272, 275).

arrive at an agreement to be made with the Archbishop' accepting 'willingly, all the instructions His Holiness, in his enlightened rectitude, thought to establish, glorying in the fact that he and his Institute were obedient sons of the Holy See.'²⁰²

Don Bosco followed through with this, though what he wrote to the Pope and to Cardinal Nina was not exactly the same – more generic for the former, more formal and precise for the latter: 'I have given our confrere Fr Dalmazzo the faculty of acting in my stead in everything Your Holiness sees fit'²⁰³ he wrote to the Pope, and to Cardinal Nina: 'I confer full authority on our confrere, Prof Fr Francesco Dalmazzo, Procurator General of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, Parish Priest of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, with the faculty to deal with, conclude and approve whatever pleases His Holiness.'²⁰⁴

Negotiations between the two plenipotentiaries were taken in hand by the Cardinal Secretary of State, Ludovico Jacobini, who acted as Cardinal Nina's delegate and referred directly to the Pope. Seven articles were presented for the settlement from both Canon Colomiatti and Don Bosco.²⁰⁵ Following this, the 'Concordia' was arrived at, signed by order of the Pope on 17 June by Canon Colomiatti and Fr Dalmazzo. But Fr Dalmazzo did ask Cardinal Nina that he hear him out regarding the Bonetti affair²⁰⁶ and complained to Don Bosco that he had been kept on the margins of the negotiations.²⁰⁷ On 23 June, Cardinal Nina sent the authentic text of the 'Concordia' to Don Bosco with a confident comment, 'The great faith I have in your virtue and good balance makes me confident about the good results of the procedures to be followed.'²⁰⁸

The text had come from the conviction that above all, the preeminent episcopal authority had to be safeguarded, as the Archbishop understood perfectly well. He thanked the Pope warmly on 24 June.²⁰⁹ For Fr Bonetti there was substantial reinstatement, while for Don Bosco and the Congregation, tranquillity and peace were granted in relation to the irritating issues of the defamatory material and the *Report*. Don Bosco's dignity as a priest and his authority as Superior of the Salesian Society remained intact and freed of any further opposition. Indeed, the way was cleared for a quick solution to the problem of privilege and new relationships with Rome.

Fundamentally he was asked for an act of deference which was also an expression of wise policy: 1) Don Bosco would write a letter to the Archbishop expressing his regret for 'any incidents' that would have caused 'bitterness and asked for 'forgiveness'. 2) The Archbishop would reply to Don Bosco expressing his comfort and readmitting him to good grace. 3) Fr Bonetti's faculties for confession would be restored and Don Bosco would agree to send him to Chieri for a year. 4) Don Bosco would also commit to recalling copies of the *Report* he had sent the cardinals.) The Archbishop would recall and destroy the letters from 25 November and 1 December 1877. 6) As for the incriminating pamphlets, Don Bosco would declare that he 'had always been critical of the manner and form in which they spoke of the Ecclesiastical Authority and was so now. He was ready, as often as he was asked, to formally put that in writing.' He was ready to condemn the content which the Church was critical of.²¹⁰

There was an unfortunate after-effect. Having received the text of the signed document, Don Bosco wrote briefly to Cardinal Nina on 27 June, saying he thought it was about a 'plan' around

202 Text in MB XV 264.

203 To Leo XIII, 30 May 1882, E IV 140.

204 To Cardinal L. Nina, 30 May 1882, E IV 140 and 140-141.

205 *Documenti* XLV 285-286, 287-289 (observations by Fr Bonetti in Don Bosco's name); cf. MB 266-268, 739-741.

206 *Documenti* XLV 300-301.

207 *Documenti* XLV 301-303.

208 *Documenti* XLV 305-306; MB XV 270-271.

209 *Documenti* XLV 309-310.

210 *Documenti* XLV 306-308; MB XV 269-270.

which certain 'clarifications' were still allowed.²¹¹ He wrote to Fr Dalmazzo, forgetting he had given him full authority, with evident disappointment and undisguised concerns; 'Things are a real mess. I have received the famous communication. I am preparing some observations, but your signature is on it. If you have an observation to make tell me immediately. Cardinal Nina is waiting. We will deal with this the best we can.'²¹²

Fr Dalmazzo's reply on 30 June allowed no prevarication. The Pope himself had read the text and made his own adjustments and it was his firm wish that the 'Concordia' be signed as it was.²¹³

The reply from the Cardinal Protector on 5 July was one of amazement and insistence: the letter written on 27th came as 'no little surprise,' indeed' caused him 'deep regret.' To open discussion once more on legitimately signed articles would be equivalent to betraying the Pope's wish, since he was waiting to be assured that what was agreed was acted upon and he wanted it to be 'a *fait accompli*.'²¹⁴ Don Bosco immediately sent the Archbishop the letter indicated in the 'Concordia' and informed Cardinal Nina the same day, 8 July.²¹⁵ Then, by letter on 18 July, he handed the Archbishop the letters of the threatened suspension from 1877 and also informed the Cardinal Protector of this..²¹⁶

In 1883, following the Archbishop's death on 25 March, Easter Sunday, the Congregation of the Council declared that '*post arceiepiscopi funus*' the instruction limiting Fr Bonetti's return to Chieri only '*in aliqua circumstantia*' no longer applied.²¹⁷

The April *Salesian Bulletin* came out with a page dedicated to the *Death of Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin*. It began: 'The current issue of the *Bulletin* was already prepared when the sad news reached us obliging us to provide this last page of the magazine as a death notice.' It then gave news of the death and the second half of the page offered a brief biographical outline, stressing in particular the good he had done from the early days of the Oratory, showing 'kindness and affection, more than many others had' to the Salesians, including after his return from England. 'He was like a friend and brother to Don Bosco, just as his outstanding mother was like a second mother to our boys.' It concluded: 'Our late beloved Archbishop cooperated in various ways for our benefit, as history will show in time. Therefore we recommend him to everyone's prayers and we would very much like the first indulgences you can gain to be applied in suffrage for his soul.'²¹⁸

211 Letter of 27 June 1882, E IV 146.

212 Letter of 28 June 1882, E IV 147.

213 *Documenti* 326-328.

214 *Documenti* XLV 329-330; MB XV 272-273.

215 E IV 151-152.

216 Letter of 18 and 25 July 1882, E IV 154-155.

217 Decree of 11 July 1883, MB XV 750.

218 BS 7 (1883) no. 4, April, p. 72.

Section Three

THE MISSION MATURES AND INCREASES IN VITALITY (1878–88)

INTRODUCTION

The last period of Don Bosco's life, rooted in the fertile four years of legal, regulatory and doctrinal consolidation from 1874–77, was one he dedicated to maximum effort in spreading and strengthening his youth mission works in Europe and America, as well as strengthening the Religious Institute and Associations he had founded from within. This development took place while serious opposition and crises were weighing on him and his Congregation. From the end of 1882, the direction became more single-minded. The final four years were marked, then, by his growing physical decline, physical and moral suffering, but within himself he was serene and at times even exultant.

His welfare and pedagogical activity were enriched by social and educational references that went beyond the concrete experiences of the Salesians. As we have seen, journalists, publicists and biographers contributed to this, following his setting out of the formula for the preventive system. No less intense were the efforts he contributed within the Salesian Society and for the benefit of the FMA Institute and the Cooperators Union.

Other than the image of Don Bosco as the one responsible for and managing youth works and the Superior of Religious Institutes flanked by a large Association, his image as a promoter of public opinion and as a miracle worker continued to emerge, already confirmed during the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. His personality as a man of God, of intense spirituality and active charity, became more refined.

This was supported by journeys and speeches, *sermons de charité*, individual and group letters of animation to a social and apostolic way of thinking. Especially symbolic of his growing mindset of openness to the world were his two trips to Paris and Barcelona in 1883 and 1886 respectively, the construction of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, his concern to expand and stabilise missionary activity.

Chapter 29

EXPANSION OF SALESIAN ACTIVITY AND FINAL ORGANISATION OF THE FMA INSTITUTE (1878–88)

- 1878 FMA Mother house transferred to Nizza Monferrato
- 1878–79 First printed text of the Institute's Constitutions
- 1879 Summer: Opening of Salesian house at S Benigno Canavese;
Autumn: Salesians to Brindisi, Challonges, Cremona,
Randazzo and the FMA to Catania
- 1880 June: Opening of house at Penango Monferrato;
29 August : Re–election of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello;
September: Second General Chapter of the Salesian Society
- 1881 14 May: Death of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello;
12 August: Election of twenty five year–old Sr Caterina Daghero (1856–1924) as
Superior General;
October: Birth of the French Province with Fr Paul Albera as Superior
- 1882 *Deliberations of the Second General Chapter of the Pious Salesian Society*
- 1883 Autumn: Opening of Salesian novitiate in Marseilles
- 1884 11–22 August: First General Chapter of the FMA Institute
- 1885 Summer: Final printed text of the FMA Constitutions while Don Bosco was still alive
- 1886 Second General Chapter of the FMA Institute

It is clear that at the heart of Don Bosco's activity was the urge to reach the young in the greatest numbers possible and by ranging as widely as possible. This drove the growth of works where they could be brought together to be formed in religious, moral, civic terms. The only limitation was the lack of personnel. Hence the parallel effort to increase numbers and to improve their quality in order to guarantee solidly founded and well formed religious structures. This is what lay behind the effort to put the final touches to the FMA Constitutions and improve the norms for applying them, as well as the Salesian Constitutions, without overlooking the persevering practical and spiritual animation of members of the Religious Institutes of which Don Bosco was the founder, to one extent or another.

1. Expansion of works (1879–80)

In 1879, Don Bosco and his Council decided to respond to at least some of the many requests for taking on works, first of all in Italy. They leaned towards ones that seemed more suited to the

purposes of the Salesian Society and which guaranteed a more certain beginning, modest though it may be and that promised development. Nevertheless, despite the caution, some of these were short-lived.

1.1 In Italy

During meetings of the Superior Chapter held at Alassio from 6–8 February 1879, and to be exact, on the afternoon of the final day, members decided that Frs Durando and Cagliari should take a trip as soon as possible throughout Italy to examine requests *in loco* for works considered most achievable, and to draw up agreements for some of those nearing conclusion, i.e. ‘Randazzo, Brindisi, Cremona.’¹

The two travellers returned to Valdocco on 5 April and informed Chapter members of the results on the 15th and 16th: 1. ‘An agreement similar to the one at Alassio has been concluded and signed at Randazzo in Sicily.’ ‘It was agreed that for the first year (1 November 1879) we will open only elementary and 1st Year lower secondary’ 2. It has been agreed and confirmed that our Sisters will take over an existing girls institute at Catania, also in Sicily, and not far from Randazzo.’ 3. The bishop at Brindisi is full of good will and has a Salesian soul ... giving up part of his own building to use as an oratory. It is agreed that this year we will go there just to open the festive oratory.’ 4. Everything has also been concluded and confirmed at Cremona. The learned and holy Bishop Geremia Bonomelli wants us and loves us immensely. Again for this year we are to go there to open a festive oratory with private classes.’² Don Bosco confirmed these in a circular to Cooperators at the beginning of 1880, adding the work at San Benigno Canavese. The two most important and enduring foundations were San Benigno Canavese and Randazzo.³ Two were rather like a meteor flashing across the sky, Brindisi and Challonges. A little longer in existence but unpredictably and traumatically interrupted was the work at Cremona.

The Bishop of *Brindisi*, the erudite Barnabite Luigi Maria Aguilar (1814–96), had been in contact with Don Bosco already since 1877, wanting a workshop in his diocese for young apprentice craftsmen. Negotiations were carried out with Fr Rua, who suggested instead ‘a festive oratory and night classes, and perhaps even classes for day students.’ On 23 April 1878, Fr Durando told the Archbishop of their acceptance. The Archbishop visited the Oratory in October 1879 and met Don Bosco. The work – an oratory and night school – was opened on 8 November.⁴ The component of the branch at *Brindisi* or ‘the Archbishop’s Palace’, as it was listed in the 1880 Year Book, were ‘the Oratory of St Alphonsus Liguori’ with night classes, a twenty-four-year-old Rector who was culturally versatile and active, Antonio Notario (1855–1942), a cleric, with another added midway through the school year (but already by 1881 neither was listed in the Congregation’s Year Book), a coadjutor and an aspirant, the only one of the group with his elementary teacher’s certificate.

They were probably not the best choice for setting up a rather precarious work and for understanding a context requiring courageous and enterprising pioneers. In less than a year, at the request of the bishop himself, a faithful Salesian Cooperator who offered the opening of a hospice

1 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, pp. 61-62. Fr Durando was one of the listed teachers not found in class during the inspection made by Superintendent Rho in March 1879: cf. Chap. 28, § 2.1.

2 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, pp. 89-91.

3 BS 4 (1880) n. 1, January, pp. 1-2.

4 Cf. F. CASELLA, *Il Mezzogiorno d’Italia e le istituzioni educative salesiane*. Rome, LAS 2000, pp. 52-57, 435-438.

at S. Vito dei Normanni with more adequate staff as an alternative, the Salesians withdrew.⁵ The opportunity had been lost for a promising establishment in a region with rich future possibilities.

The work at *Cremona* had an excellent start. It was accepted at the request of a bishop who had been bishop of the Lombard city since 1871, and for pastoral reasons had shifted from his former intransigent stance after the advent of Leo XIII.⁶ On 25 September 1879, seven Salesians arrived with two capable men in charge, Fr Stefano Chicco (1846–81) as Rector, and Fr Faustino Confortola (1871– 1913), to run the oratory and boarding house of St Lawrence with four elementary classes and a public church.⁷ The work was carried out in a setting influenced by substantial secular and anticlerical forces. However, it was much appreciated in the Catholic world and by families. Unfortunately, the Rector died on 16 September 1881 Present with him was the Rector of Sampierdarena, Fr Belmonte, sent expressly by Don Bosco. ‘See that he lacks nothing,’ Don Bosco had recommended, ‘and assure him that as well as praying for him morning and evening, I send him a special blessing. If I were not caught up in a thousand things, I would like to visit him. Perhaps I can do that at the beginning of next week.’⁸

Don Bosco did get to comfort him. Fr Chicco’s death and the departure of the mature Fr Confortola, called to run the new house in Florence, were fatal for the work, except for the kindness of the Rector, Fr Domenico Bruna (1850–1911) who was rather inexperienced. In a brief letter at the beginning of the year, Don Bosco expressed his gratitude to Bishop Bonomelli asking his continued protection and resolving to support him in everything that could be ‘for the glory of God and the good of souls,’ with the hope that if need be he would give the Salesians ‘all the fatherly advice but also reproach them if that was necessary.’⁹ Some of the less balanced members would need that.

In February 1882, the Catechist of the house, Fr Ermenogildo Musso, was accused of ‘brutally applying stinging nettles to the bare flesh of two boys and had offended the decency of one of them.’¹⁰ The priest may have only remotely offended decency but without doubt had adopted an improper manner of penitential therapy, so much so that the Court ended up sentencing him *in absentia* to three months prison, ten days detention and a fine of 200 lire [700 euro].¹¹ As soon as the matter was reported, however, Fr Musso fled to France. The appeal to the Court of Appeals in Brescia, seen to beg the legal office of the Honourable Tommaso Villa, a layman and Freemason from Castelnuovo, did not take place since the period of time had elapsed for continuing a first degree sentence. The anticlerical newspapers of course, contradicted by the Catholic press, found material for the most malevolent falsification of what had occurred,¹² which did not justify any discussion of *de re turpissima*, as Archbishop Gastaldi would have it, or the need for an Apostolic Visit to the Salesian Society, as someone in the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had suggested.¹³ However, with reference to the Casale law, the Prefect of Cremona and President of the Provincial School Council had already decreed on 5 March that the school ‘be temporarily closed as a matter of urgency.’¹⁴ To bring calm to a prejudiced and over-heated situation, the

5 Cf. Archbishop’s letter of 4 July 1880 and Fr M. Rua’s letter of the 18th (F. CASELLA, *Il Mezzogiorno d’Italia...*, pp. 438-440).

6 Cf. C. BELLÒ, *Intransigenti e transigenti nel movimento cattolico cremonese (1870-1895)*, “Bollettino dell’Archivio per la Storia del movimento sociale cattolico in Italia” 3 (1968) 32-59.

7 Curriculum in *Documenti* XXII 211-213.

8 Letter from Nizza Monferrato 8 August 1881, E IV 73.

9 To Bishop G. Bonomelli, 30 December 1881, E IV 107.

10 *Documenti* XXIV 68; MB XV 813-815.

11 *Documenti* XXIV 68.

12 *Documenti* XXIV 69, 74-86.

13 Cf. letter of Fr F. Dalmazzo to Don Bosco of 15 May and 25 October 1882, *Documenti* XLV 265-267; XXIV 243.

14 *Documenti* XXIV 70-73.

Salesians withdrew from the city for reasons of advisability and with full agreement between the bishop and Don Bosco.

The work at *San Benigno Canavese*, 20 kilometres north of Turin, with its technical classes and festive oratory, became a classic in the Salesian experience. In Don Bosco's intention, it was above all the site for the clerics' novitiate, and from 1886 for coadjutors, when the clerical novices moved to Foglizzo. Procedures were initiated in 1878 and already concluded by autumn.¹⁵

In January 1879, he wrote to Fr Rua: 'Send someone to take a look at the building at S. Benigno and see that things are ready for it to be habitable by May.'¹⁶ Naturally, given what Don Bosco had guaranteed the Mayor of the town, and highlighted in his annual letter published in the January 1889 *Salesian Bulletin*, the house was also to be used for educational and social purposes on behalf of the young. This was the condition the Prefect of Turin had put when granting the use of a heritage building, the almost thousand-year-old Fruttuaria Abbey – State property entrusted to the Municipality. He asked that the abbey building be destined to a work 'of public utility.' In fact day classes were established there 'for students of the town,' 'night classes for adults,' leisure activities 'on Sundays' for 'young workers of the town,' 'a hospice for poor trade students' 'a studentate' and practical training site for future educators of the young.¹⁷

The curriculum was put in place and gave rise to continued development, especially the various workshops – tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, printing, bookbinding – and became a place for the religious and technical formation of Salesian Brothers for the many arts and trades school around the world. The first residents arrived on 5 July 1879 for the summer holidays, young clerical aspirants from Valdocco. The activities indicated above saw gradual beginning from autumn onwards.

1879 was also an historic year for the Salesian Society. Two initial works, one of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in *Catania*, the other 70 kilometres away at *Randazzo* for the Salesians, came into being. They were the beginning of hundreds of works on the island, and the flourishing of thousands of vocations of men and women who followed Don Bosco. One was the origin of three provinces of women religious, and the others, the origin of one of the best qualified and most numerous Salesian provinces in Italy.

The Municipal College at *Randazzo*, in the recently established diocese of Acireale (1872) began operation in autumn 1879, through the initiative of some admirers and benefactors of Don Bosco and his enterprises, with *Cavaliere* Giuseppe Romeo Vagliasindi at the forefront.¹⁸ Negotiations took place quickly, led by Frs Durando and Cagliero, who arrived in Randazzo on 3 March 1879, and stayed six days. The Alassio model rather than the more rigid Varazze one was preferred for the agreement, with its larger overall contribution. It was drawn up with the City Council on 7 March and approved by the Provincial School Council on 29 April.¹⁹

The first ten Salesians arrived on 24 October 1879, headed by the learned and creative Fr Pietro Guidazio (1841–1902) who the year before, as indicated earlier, was responsible for secondary studies at the Seminary in Montefiascone. The staff were of top quality, with young versatile and gifted teachers. From the first year there was Fr Giovanni Battista Rinaldi (1855–

15 Cf. letter to Baron C. Ricci des Ferres, Oratory of San Benigno Canav. 3 October 1878, E III 390.

16 Letter from Marseilles, 11 January 1879, E III 436.

17 To the Mayor of San Benigno, 10 March 1879, E III 453.

18 BS 4 (1880) no. 1, January, pp. 11-14, *La prima casa salesiana in Sicilia ossia il collegio di S. Basilio in Randazzo* and two letters of the Salesian Rector and the Archbishop of Messina, Servant of God Giuseppe Guarino; no. 2, February, pp. 8-9, *Gratitudine di un padre e il Collegio di Randazzo*; 5 (1881) no. 8, August, pp. 6-8, *La festa di S. Basilio e l'Arcivescovo di Messina in Randazzo* and a letter of the Archbishop to Don Bosco.

19 Cf. text in MB XIV 781-782.

1926) who soon became the dynamic initiator and rector for twenty years of the Salesian foundation at Faenza; Fr Stefano Trione (1856–1935), an exceptional organiser and leader; clerics Eusebio Calvi (1858–1923) an educator and writer of rare finesse, and Francesco Piccollo (1861–1930) a man of great spirituality and governing ability (Rector and Provincial in Sicily and Visitor for various Provinces), Ernesto Vespignani (1861–1925), a clever architect and later much appreciated throughout South America.

The first boarders arrived on 12 November. Fr Trione immediately organised the festive oratory next to the college and was able to make use of a church that had been deserted up till then. The first welcome to Salesians was given by the Archbishop of Messina, Servant of God Giuseppe Guarino, who later was made Cardinal. The Salesians visited him there. A few days later, Archbishop Guarino wrote a moving letter to Don Bosco, hoping he would come to Sicily, but Don Bosco never succeeded in going any further than Naples where he stayed briefly for two days on Easter Monday and Tuesday, 29–30 March 1880, also meeting Archbishop Sanfelice and Fr Ludovico da Casoria. During the first year, Archbishop Guarino lived with the Salesians for a week – Randazzo is on the border between Messina and Arcireale dioceses. They also had a visit from diocesan Bishop Genuardi.

'*Vae soli* says the Holy Spirit' as Fr Cagliero wrote to Fr Rua from Randazzo on 24 October, 1883 'and I say the same about the college at Randazzo, which has absolute need for a companion in the volcanic land.'²⁰ The recommendation was followed up in 1885 with the opening of a festive oratory with night classes at *Catania* 'entitled St Philip Neri.'²¹ It had a resplendent future.

There was a modest beginning for a work established in the Monferrato town of *Penango*. It started out as a boarding school with elementary classes, almost as a branch of the college at Borgo San Martino. Then for a century it became the peaceful centre for formation of clerics and religious vocations. A first hint of the college at Penango can be found in a letter of Don Bosco's to Fr Rua from Marseilles. 'I have received Fr Bonetti's letter in relation to the house at Penango. If you think it appropriate I am not against it. You can begin by offering 20,000 lire [around 64,000 euro].'²²

Solemn possession took place on Sunday, 6 June 1880, with all of Borgo San Martino present and the bishop of Fossano, Bishop Manacorda, a native of Penango. Don Bosco visited for the first time in October 1881, at the beginning of the first year of full activity. Writing from Pinerolo to Count and Countess Colle in 1886, he noted with satisfaction that the local bishop, Bishop Filippo Chiesa, was destined for Casale diocese where the two houses at Borg San Martino and Penango were.²³

1.2 *In France*

Autumn 1879 brought a new, though short-lived, foundation in Savoy at *Challonges*, in Annecy diocese, the birthplace of *Commendatore* Dupraz, promoter along with his wife, Angela Giusiana, of the work at Trinità. This came about at the beginning of the crisis following Fr Guanella's departure. On 21 July 1879 *Commendatore* Dupraz had drawn up a very simple agreement, offering a house and financial support for opening a 'private elementary school and festive oratory.' It was on this basis that on 13 November, the Salesian Rector, Fr Carlo Cays, provided a written

20 Cit. in MB XVI 400.

21 BS 10 (1886) no. 1, January, p. 2.

22 Letter to Fr Rua, 22 January 1880, E III 545.

23 Letter of 25 July 1886, E IV 522. The bishop died a few months after the translation of the diocese from Pinerolo diocese (4 June-5 November 1886).

statement of the handover of the work, all duly equipped,²⁴ but the Rector and perhaps also Fr Durando did not appear to be fully *au fait* with the strict provisions of French legislation regarding the opening of a school run by private individuals,²⁵ a forerunner of the much more restrictive regulations which came into force in 1880.²⁶

But maybe the mistake at Challonges was due to the ambiguous reference to 'a private elementary school' used in the agreement: was it what was determined by the official French school regulations or just an informal popular school as Don Bosco imagined it to be? Not without foundation, the new Rector as well as Dupraz and some of the superiors in Turin chose the first of these. Count Carlo Cays, ordained just one year, was assisted by a coadjutor from Nice who had only recently become a Salesian. The opening took place on 10 November. In Turin the thought was to ensure the legality of elementary teaching – French nationality and accreditation – by asking Fr Vincent to run it. He came from Saint-Cyr, the priest who had given the Salesians the two agricultural schools at Navarre and Saint-Cyr. But the prescribed authorisation had not been requested, and this prevented two Italians from managing the school. It was already closed by administrative notice on 8 December, the formal decree following on the 27th.

Don Bosco suggested some prudent interim solutions to guarantee a more secure future and which, more immediately, would not compromise the other works in France. He wrote to Fr Cays on 12 December: 'However, had we kept to *Commendatore* Dupraz's first idea, perhaps we would have avoided this clash. That idea was to establish a festive oratory and night classes for the year, then we could have seen what we had to do. It is a serious business when it affects the sensitivities of the local municipalities (their Councils). We are in an almost identical position at Trinità di Mondovì. There the teachers are doing everything to uplift the pupils and the City Council is supporting this. At any rate let us await the Magistrate's decision which we must abide by. But I think it would be good to keep strictly to the festive oratory with 'charitable classes' in the basic strict sense of that term. Fr Rua will write to you concerning other matters. As for our other schools they will not be disturbed, because at Nice, Navarre, Marseilles they are teaching only internal classes to the trade boys boarding there. In Marseilles they are teaching boys from the *Maîtrise*, but under the responsibility of the parish priest.'²⁷

Toward the end of January, *Commendatore* Dupraz contacted a French lay teacher, a good Catholic, Jean Baptiste Ronchail, who accepted.²⁸ Don Bosco agreed with the solution, suggesting the Rector yield for now 'to the power of authority' and 'entrust the teaching' to the suggested teacher with the appropriate salary, in the hope of improved arrangements the following year which would allow them to do whatever was needed 'to fulfil the obligations of the law.' That was so much the more necessary at 'a time of agitation throughout France' where 'there is opposition especially against Religious Congregations.'

Don Bosco insisted above all that events at Challonges not end up 'damaging the other houses in France' that were being supported 'with many personal and financial sacrifices in order to do a bit of good.'²⁹ Government authorisation was also needed to open the chapel.³⁰

The school continued under Ronchail's personal management until the end of the school year, but the lack of available French Salesians to support it led to the decision to withdraw. When they returned to Italy for the retreat over summer, the Salesians at Challonges did not return.

24 *Documenti* XXII 294.

25 *Documenti* XXII 293-294.

26 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9 and Chap. 28, § 3.

27 Letter to Fr C. Cays, 12 December 1879, E III 532-533.

28 *Documenti* XXII 51-52.

29 To Fr C. Cays, from Marseilles 4 February 1880, E III 546.

30 *Documenti* XXII 76-77: letter of C. Cays to the bishop and vice versa.

Commendatore Dupraz's disappointment was enormous. According to him, he had spent 90,000 francs [ca. 300,000 euro], three quarters of what he had, on construction and equipment, and there was also the moral and spiritual harm that this abandonment meant for the children at Challonges. He stated this in a lengthy note to Turin on 16 November 1880 hoping the decision could be reconsidered.³¹ His death, which occurred before the end of the year, made the situation even more difficult. Finally, at the beginning of the new year, Don Bosco decided to formally abandon the work, returning it to Dupraz's widow as he wrote to Fr Rua from Roquefort in the south of France: 'I have no news of matters discussed with Madam Dupraz. I think it would be good to accept what she wants to give and leave it all in her hands, meaning, let go of the house at Challonges.'³²

Apart from this unpleasant episode, the path to consolidation and juridical autonomy of the Salesian work in the south of France was tangible. They had survived the terrible 'hurricane' in 1880. The centre was shifting ever more from the mother house in Nice to the house in *Marseilles*. With its *Oratoire Saint-Leon* it aspired to and copied the Oratory at Valdocco. In preparation for a visit to Marseilles in mid-February 1881, Don Bosco asked Fr Bologna in December for information and details on the work: state of construction works, number of boarders and day students, results gained, works planned, credit and debt, the work of the support Committee, 'all the details that could help with a report I would like to give at the Cooperators' Conference. I hope will take place a few days after my arrival. Send it to me in French as well, because it will help me.'³³

Don Bosco arrived in mid-February 1881 with Fr Durando who was to see to class syllabuses. On the 16th they had a solemn celebration for St Francis de Sales with Mass celebrated by the diocesan Bishop Jean Robert, and on the 17^h, Don Bosco held a Conference in French in the presence of the Archbishop of Aix, Théodor Forcade (1816–85) from the Paris Foreign Missions. He had been a missionary in Macau, Vicar Apostolic in Japan, Bishop of Guadeloupe and from 1873, Aix-en-Provence.³⁴

As Don Bosco wrote to Cardinal Nina, 'St-Cyr, Toulon, Frejus, Cannes, Nice attended the Conference.'³⁵

He indicated other stopovers to Canon Guiol from Nice as he carried on his tireless efforts to find resources: 'At Aubagne, Roquefort, St-Cyr, Toulon, Hyères, God continues to bless us and we have good reason to thank him spiritually and materially.'³⁶ He wrote to Guiol from Nice, protesting at his reputation as a 'miracle worker', which had spread among the devout in Marseilles, correcting the view by saying: 'Many believe poor Don Bosco gains special graces from God through his prayers. It is not so. God blesses our works, favours and protects them, but since we do not have the means to support them, God helps us with graces and favours including extraordinary ones for those who give us material aid.'³⁷

He did not return to Turin but headed for Rome, accompanied by Fr Rua who was also with him for the visit to houses at Sampierdarena, La Spezia, Florence.³⁸ Thus he wrote to his secretary to bring Fr Rua up-to-date with the main 'disputes in Rome, with letters relating to the novitiate in Marseilles, the three favours sought – parish rights, the *extra tempus*, dispensation from

31 *Documenti* XXII 290-293.

32 Letter of 27 February 1881, E IV 26.

33 To Fr G. Bologna, 23 December 1880, E III 644-645.

34 The news item was published by "L'Unità Cattolica" and the French *Bulletin* did its own: BS 2 (1881) no. 12, March, pp. 15-16.

35 Letter to the Secretary of State, 27 February 1881, E IV 29.

36 Letter of March 1881, E IV 31.

37 Letter mentioned in the minutes of the meeting of the Committee of female benefactors, 10 March 1881, E IV 30-31.

38 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, from Alassio, s. d., E IV 41.

testimonial letters – and the Sacred Heart Church.³⁹ He was also busy with Cooperators and charity, delegating Fr Pietro Pozzano in particular to be in charge of propaganda, especially through the *Salesian Bulletin*.⁴⁰

Towards the end of October 1881, works in France were brought together under an autonomous Province. Fr Paul Albera was appointed Superior, based in Marseilles. Don Bosco wrote to Fr Bologna. 'I was not able to give Fr Albera a letter to present to the Bishop of Marseilles. So tell me how are the Sisters going? The parish priest and new personnel? I have written to Madame Jacques, today I will write to Madame Prat-Noilly.'⁴¹ Some days before Christmas, he told Fr Ronchail of his planned stopovers for his next trip to France with Nice the final goal: 'My departure from Turin will be next 10 January, *si Dominus dederit*. Chambery, Lyons, Valence, Aix, Marseilles, Aubagne, Toulon, Hyères, Frejus, Cannes, Grasse, Nice to end with. I hope to be with you in mid-February.'⁴²

During his stay in Marseilles, Don Bosco drew up a set of regulations for Fr Bologna, describing the distinct responsibilities, his and the Provincial-Rector's for managing the work. Until then Fr Bologna had been the Rector. They were less restrictive of the authority of the Vice-rector than those given a year earlier to Fr Luigi Rosca, appointed Vice-rector when the Rector, Fr Cerruti, was appointed Provincial of houses in Liguria and France.⁴³

In autumn 1883, the *Oratoire de la Providence* came into being at Santa Margherita near Marseilles as the novitiate house for the new Province. The Provincial, Fr Albera, was its Rector and Fr Cesare Fasani the Vice-rector and Novice Master. The following year he was replaced by twenty-four-year-old Savoyard Louis Cartier (1860–1945), a figure of great prestige in the subsequent development of Salesian work in France.

The Marseilles work, along with others in France, developed into a fertile autonomous unit under the wise and steady guidance of one who would soon be known as 'le petit Don Bosco', Fr Paul Albera, his second successor in governing the Salesian Society. Don Bosco, however, continued to feel at home in France as a tireless beggar and miracle worker. Before his death he was able to lend his contribution to opening other works. In addition to Lille and Paris,⁴⁴ in 1886 the *Orphelinat Morgant* opened, with a workshop at Guînes (Pas-de-Calais), and in 1888, the *Orphelinat Villemot* at Gevigny (Haute Saône), These were entrusted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesians respectively.⁴⁵

2. The Second General Chapter of the Salesian Society 1880)

The Second General Chapter of the Salesian Society took place at Lanzo from 15 September 1880.⁴⁶ It appeared to substantially complement the first, adding and pursuing topics through

39 To Fr G. Berto, 6 April 1881, E IV 42-43.

40 Letter to Fr P. Pozzan from Alassio, 8 April 1881, E IV 43.

41 Letter of 28 October 1881, E IV 92.

42 Letter of 22 December 1881, E IV 101-102.

43 Letter to Fr G. Bologna, 19 March 1882, E IV 121-122; and to Fr L. Rocca, April 1881, E IV 44-45, *Norme per il vice-direttore del collegio di Alassio*.

44 Cf. Chap. 31, § 5.

45 On the brief life of the orphanage at Gevigny, which then continued on a better site, there are interesting pages by Y. LE CARRÈRES, *Les colonies ou orphelinats agricoles tenus par les salésiens de don Bosco en France*, in F. MOTTO (Ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia. Atti del 2° Congresso-Seminario di storia dell'opera salesiana*, Rome, 1-5 November 1995. Rome, LAS 1996, pp. 145-150.

46 There are the minutes by Fr Marengo on these sessions, ASC D 579, but they began from 5 September. Complete and more widespread are the ones by Fr Barberis, in 2 exercises books of 132 unnumbered

Chapter members' study and in the appointed Commissions, topics left hanging by the First General Chapter, especially the problem of studies for clerics, and other matters of new relevance such as the existence of parishes, which could create some difficulties for colleges and schools, as happened at Marseilles.

They also had to elect Superior Chapter members, except for the Rector Major, Don Bosco, who was Rector Major for life *ad personam*. The letter of convocation addressed to rectors had explained the elections as the Chapter's purpose, then had simply invited the recipients to collect the 'observations and proposals' of confreres which were thought to be 'for the good of the Congregation', and once these were sorted out, to bring them with them to the Chapter.⁴⁷ However, the Chapter arrived at significant and structured deliberations. The discussion on various topics, though, did not proceed in direct fashion. Don Bosco was partly responsible for this, and was indisputably at the forefront, concerned as he was to draw the attention of Chapter members to the spirit informing the discussion and the binding nature of the decisions they came to.

Following the usual ritual and procedural session at 7 p.m. on 3 September,⁴⁸ the afternoon session on the following day, 4 September, was immediately fundamental, since it was given over to electing members of the Superior Chapter. There was completely new discussion of a preliminary nature on whether Salesian laymen, coadjutors, could be elected. Don Bosco's negative reply to this was accepted without debate. Having read the first article of the Constitutions on the makeup of the Society – priests, clerics, laymen – it seemed obvious to draw the simple conclusion: 'Certainly, clerics can never be in charge of priests and even less so laymen.' Therefore, 'we conclude that coadjutors cannot be elected as members of the Superior Chapter.'⁴⁹ But the most forceful element in this session was Don Bosco's consideration, a renewed summary of his thinking on Salesian religious life: 'Some things to be fostered in our Congregation.

The first was *obedience*, which he had called a virtue in the Introduction to the Constitutions, along with St Jerome and St Bonaventure, but especially through personal conviction. It was '*summa virtutum clausa est, tota religionis perfectio consistit*. He deplored a certain cooling down in its observance and said it was 'intolerable' that there were individuals who 'without saying anything do not do what they are tasked to do.' The Superior was calm, convinced that something had been done, only to find that 'it hadn't even been started,' and then found out that it ended up ruined and in disorder due to carelessness or because the job was left undone.. 'This does huge damage to the Congregation' he commented. Obedience needed to be 'absolute' beginning with the Superior Chapter, and from there 'extends to rectors, prefects, every member of the Congregation.'⁵⁰

Another thing to be fostered was the *spirit of charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales* which he maintained was in decline, especially in the school: pupils seen in bad light, 'not treated well,' neglected, removed from the classroom and then disagreement between the teacher and the superior when the latter tried to soften the repressive actions of the former. He concluded: 'I really recommend that this true spirit of kindness and charity be exercised by you and that you do everything to propagate it among confreres in your houses and especially among the teachers.

pages all up, ASC D 579, which record word from 2 September. Other materials are also available: the circular of convocation, proposals by confreres, other communications to the Congregation.

47 Letter of 27 June 1880, E III 593-594.

48 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 5-9.

49 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 10-11. Elected were: Michele Rua, Prefect; Giovanni Cagliero, spiritual Director; Carlo Ghivarello, Economist; Celestino Durando, School Councillor; Giuseppe Lazzerio, Councillor; Antonio Sala, Councillor. In the Year Book listing members of the Congregation, tow names followed members of the Superior chapter: Giovanni Bonetti, Prefect of the Clergy, and Giulio Barberis, Novice Master.

50 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 13-14.

Encouraging each other this way in charity and kindness will always be the support of our houses.⁵¹

Don Bosco dwelt at greater length on *promoting vocations*, something he saw 'diminishing fearfully.' In contrast to 'days of yore' he noted that Salesian colleges are now 'giving in like the others', meaning they do not reveal to pupils 'that urge we once saw for good things and religion and religious individuals.' He suggested some remedies for reawakening this attitude, beginning with what was indicated earlier: 'Firstly I see it as essential that we *treat each other with much charity and kindness* and treat all our confreres the same way.' Secondly, '*this kindness of ours* should also be shown especially to our pupils' who 'will be electrified by it ... we will very much earn their affection and thus influence their vocation.' Some of the superior's faults – rough treatment, impatience – can be a reason for pupils distancing themselves from them and from any thought of following them in their choice of a vocation. 'So I say and I repeat: kindness, charity among ourselves and with them are the most powerful way of educating them well and nurturing vocations.' He then went on to press an extremely sensitive and fundamental button where vocations are concerned, *morality*. Don Bosco presented a pessimistic diagnosis of his times in this regard, typical of conservative settings distrustful of infant schools. He deplored the spread of immorality 'in our times', naturally in *re turpi*, as he used say, and returned to the notion of damage to health brought about by masturbation. 'This vice is dominant' he explained. 'Now we see boys commencing a chain of immorality from 4, 5 years of age, even picking it up in infant schools. I could never have believed that these infant schools could produce such evil. At 8, or 10 years of age they get to have a precocious vice that in other times they did not have at 18 or 19. This produces a general weakening of energy and health in young people. As a result, more robust and manly activity and effort becomes rare and they cannot dedicate themselves to these without harming their health.' As a consequence, in institutes of education we feel ourselves constrained 'to yield to the times,' softening our demands regarding rest, food 'effort.' This is the source of immorality, and where this is, he insisted, 'there is no longer a sense of vocation, indeed there is contempt for everything sacred.'⁵² He then listed some ways of *promoting vocations*, the ones he had always suggested: '1. Always speak well of priests. 2. Constantly keep away from bad companions. 3. Keep bad books well away' or books that 'heighten imagination or stimulate the passions.' 4. 'Speak frequently of vocations, to everyone, also from the pulpit, and get them to understand how this is the main 'cog on which life depends.' 5. 'See that our little books are read, for example, the lives of Dominic Savio, Magone, etc,' since a Congregation that has produced such good boys can only but attract vocations. 6. 'We have to work hard.' Everyone knows that Salesians do not only preach and hear confessions but 'teach, give catechism lessons, sermons; they are everywhere and do everything.' He drew insistent exhortation from this: 'So we need to work hard in every way, everywhere,' preserving 'what is good in people and youth.' He quoted Pius IX but they were really his words: 'We are in a materialistic century. Good people's prayers, practices of piety, sacraments are of no value alone. There is also a need for outward works and for us to counter works of mere philanthropy with works of charity, like gathering boys, visiting prisons and the like. This makes us acceptable to God but also well thought of by bad people who will let us work and even help us in our works of charity.' Even 'outstanding liberals,' he added 'admire and appreciate the Salesians' because 'they do well and are deserving of society.' He concluded in a liberal spirit: 'We cannot counter an evil world with Our Fathers, not even miracles. It requires works. We need to gather up many boys' therefore 'let us work hard and the Congregation will be blessed.'⁵³

51 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 14-15. The same reason would have been forcefully stressed in letters on 10 and 14 August 1885 to Fr G. Cagliero and Fr G. Costamagna in Argentina: cf. Chap. 33 § 2.

52 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 15-18.

53 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 19-21.

Discussions among Chapter members revolved around topics connected with Don Bosco's considerations, beginning obviously with the main item, *morality*. The chronicler recorded that 'discussions turned to bad reading and complained especially about some of our clerics ... huge harm done to our boys just like to some of our clerics.' Certain books were beginning to be read, maybe 'without real consideration, just love of novelty ... But then they reflect, think about it and then it ends up with ideas about religion emerging which are incorrect and not good for morality.' Rectors 'especially' were reminded to keep 'Ariosto, Metastasio, d'Azeglio and Giusti' away from pupils and Salesians. 'Nor should they ever suggest novels that are not bad in themselves and some even written in a truly good spirit, but fill heads with empty thoughts and reasoning etc., like *Promessi Sposi* and books by Bresciani, Franco and the like.' Don Bosco criticised the 'craze' that 'teachers and young priests' were going through, asking him for 'permission to read forbidden books' and he invited them to avoid books in which more bad than good was found, describing them as 'puddles' 'filth' that 'lessen devotion' and 'result in great indifference towards religion.' He cited the case of Machiavelli in particular, since some praised his language and style without highlighting the limitations and dangers. In this context someone suggested the Oratory bookshop should no longer sell the boys books by Manzoni, Bresciani etc, but only sell them to outsiders. Don Bosco was even more drastic. What harms young people harms anyone, so they should simply not be sold, full stop. He also thought of a possible positive measure, 'a library of pleasant reading' [meaning a collection] which could be tackled after completion of the collection of Italian classics. It should include 'Fr Lemoyne's stories, others like the style of Tommaso Moro etc., but no romances etc. etc. etc. to be part of it.' He finished with reflections on corrections to be suggested to a list of authors they intended publishing through the Salesian Press.⁵⁴

When the first four commissions were established, in the afternoon session on 4 September,⁵⁵ Don Bosco insisted on the opportunity to maintain a link with previous printed Chapter deliberations, also seizing the opportunity to resume discussions on the confreres obedience, especially to the superiors. He thought it 'culpable' that that they were not proceeding 'according to a simple principle' but 'different individuals wanted different things.' He recommended that rectors should begin by 'giving good example in this area, seeking to carry out every instruction and wish of the Superior or see that they were carried out, and then doing all they can to see that their subjects did the same.'⁵⁶

Two commissions looked at philosophy and theology studies for the clerics. In the afternoon session on Sunday, 5 September, discussion on these two issues led to unanimous agreement about the persistent lack of fulfilment of prescriptions regarding *clerical studies*. Among other things, the threat was that Salesian priests would cut a poor figure. The most serious abuse was admitting people to priesthood who had not completed their four years of theology, and despite repeated reminders, no longer pursued them after ordination. Reining in Fr Cagliero, who was against the practice of the incomplete four years, Don Bosco said that it was a practice followed by other Religious Orders and bishops who needed clergy. The solution was to guarantee ordinands the time needed to complete the theological studies they had not done. According to Don Bosco, there were a number of useful reasons militating in favour of possible anticipation of ordination: '1. The individual is given greater means of perfection. 2. Greater graces are obtained from the Lord for the whole Church, the Congregation, for us. 3. We can do more good in our houses because as soon as they are priests they have greater authority over the boys. 4. It frees up rectors who can have Mass said more freely. 5. We are poor. There are Mass stipends. 6. 'It provides greater facility for the population' to go to Mass.'⁵⁷

54 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 22-25.

55 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 28-29.

56 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 30-31.

His conference included matters Don Bosco had insisted on before, that each Rector try to form his own personnel.' He also dwelt on another of their tasks, 'finding a way to assign work to individual members so everyone had time to study, and so work did not fall to some who were a bit more capable, while others less so were left out.' At this stage, they thought of choosing 'a Commission charged with studying a way to relieve the Rector of each house from work so he could look after the staff better and help each member to carry out well the duties entrusted to him.'⁵⁸

At the two sessions on the morning and the afternoon of 6 September, the problem of sacred studies was discussed once more. Fr Durando's report was approved after a few clarifications in the morning session.⁵⁹ It took up a number of deliberations already considered in the 1877 Chapter. On 7 February 1879, the Superior Chapter had studied the way to find teachers for several houses but had to note that it was difficult to take someone from other houses. 'There would be several capable individuals in Turin but ... some are only in their second philosophy, [the year following the novitiate], and we want to hold to the principle of not touching them if they are not allowed to finish philosophy.'⁶⁰

On the margins of discussion on the curriculum for the pre-novitiate, Don Bosco defended the reorganisation of studies for the so-called 'Sons of Mary.' Regarding articles on philosophy studies, he temporarily limited their importance for this group. It was necessary to establish 'rules' that he said could become 'like our code, like the basis on which we must move forward, also for the Congregation's future.' 'But for now it is clear that not every rule can be implemented. We need to begin implementing them as best we can and introduce their observations little by little into the houses.'⁶¹

When the articles on *sacred studies* were approved, Don Bosco suggested, with the assembly's unanimous consent, that they respect the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 4 August 1829, adding an article on fidelity to St Thomas {Aquinas} in philosophical and theological disciplines.⁶² His comment on confirming the two year preparation for the confession exam stood out: 'The more we delay the confession [exam for gaining faculties as a confessor] the happier I am and I believe it would be of great benefit for the priests themselves and for souls, if we go slow in giving faculties for hearing confessions.'⁶³ In the afternoon session, again on the topic of *sacred studies*, there were marginal observations exclusively focused on attention to culture gained from school. An added article prescribed: 'Clerics will take the greatest care to attend to their school duties, therefore they are forbidden to keep or read books that have nothing to do with their studies, or newspapers, without the Rector's express permission.'⁶⁴

Don Bosco followed up on Fr Bonetti's report on ways of promoting and nurturing vocations to the clerical state with some familiar observations on vocational pedagogy. He said there was no need to put direct invitations to the boys to 'become priests' or 'enter the Congregation,' but simply

57 On the occasion of publication of the book by C. M. CURCI, *La nuova Italia ed i vecchi zelanti* (Firenze, Fratelli Bencini 1881), in which the author criticised the conformist, closed and poor formation of the clergy, the *Gazzetta d'Italia* in Florence, on 7 June 1881, made reference to Don Bosco who, with this system, was churning out hundreds of youngsters to be sent to the "infidels": cf. *Documenti* XXIII 152-156.

58 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 36-38. Fr Barberis version has been combined with Fr Marengo's, *Verbali*, pp. 2-7.

59 Cf. G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 38-40.

60 G. BARBERIS, *Capitoli superiori ossia verbali...*, quad. 2, p. 71.

61 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 40-42.

62 Cf. Chap. 2, § 7.

63 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 44-46.

64 This would be art. 16, capo. II, dist. IV of the printed *Deliberazioni*.

'make the obligation of following one's vocation well understood, then let them do it without further ado. He added: 'Then insist that they don't go and ask advice from many people, and if they feel a desire to embrace religious life, not to discuss it with secular priests. Many good priests do not understand the point of great importance, that is, that the religious state is the state of greater perfection. Discussion came to a close with comments on drastic limits to be imposed on reading and subscribing to newspapers.⁶⁵

The question of coadjutors was not yet one which was clear for members of the Chapter Assembly and even for members of the study commission on *Directing Coadjutor aspirants, novices, and professed*, with Fr Ronchail as speaker. The chronicle entry for the afternoon session on 7 September reveals this: 'The subject is of the greatest importance and the need is felt to deal with it especially for the Oratory in Turin. But there is real difficulty in establishing things precisely, since various articles are still on hold to give time to study them better and the whole project ended up being thought of as a simple draft to be used as a guideline for another occasion when someone can study the matter more maturely.' No systematic program emerged, either, on their formation. It was replaced instead by some rather simple pointers: 'Concerning the coadjutors novitiate it was noted that almost all Congregations try them out with plenty of work; if they are found capable of working well and are of constant good will, they do the novitiate and are admitted to vows if they are seen to be good, or they are sent away after a month or two. But among ourselves, the coadjutors need more instruction, given that various one are engaged in important and delicate matters. Generally speaking, the best trial, without an ascetic novitiate, is to see if they work willingly and well at the same time, and show a decisive willingness to work honestly.'

For the novitiate formation to follow, they were entrusted to the Rector, who was presumed to be prepared and available to receive their '*rendiconto*' (monthly talk), give them conferences, and grant them the main permissions. He could in turn entrust the coadjutor aspirants and novices to the trade boys' catechist if there was one. The latter 'will receive their '*rendiconto*' and give them the appropriate conferences etc.' 'The insistence is made once more with Rectors of houses where there are trade students, that they see to a truly solid religious instruction for them ... With solid explanation of the catechism' such that when they leave the Institute 'they have the faith well planted in their hearts and thus do not run the risk of soon being seduced by bad companions and the world's scandals.' Obviously, it was also necessary to give them the best instruction possible in their trade and that they know how to write and keep proper records. Also to see that they can then find work in a good place and are not forced just to go to any old workshop.'⁶⁶ It was nothing earth shattering. All this was taken up and worked on again in the Third General Chapter and completed in the Fourth.

The morning session on 9 September was fully taken up with a lengthy reflection by Don Bosco on the unity of administration and spirit which was essential for a Congregation in rapid expansion. Classic topics were touched on: authority focused on the Rector, familiar rapport of members with the Rector, union of heart and action for all, monthly '*rendiconto*', harmony with the spirit of St Frances de Sales, fortnightly conferences, obedience, the goodnight. It was a stream of thoughts and feelings *ex abundantia cordis*: every Rector was to 'remain in harmony in everything with the Provincial, and Provincials with the Rector Major.' Rectors and Provincials were to see themselves 'as one family with one single task of making sure it runs well.' Every member should see 'the Rector as an affectionate father or older brother' and should not hide 'good or bad' from him 'but present things as they are.' Let everyone be convinced that matters concerning the Institute 'will only go well when everyone works as if members are of one heart and one soul.'

65 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 50-54.

66 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 65-68.

In a Congregation no longer as small as it was decades ago when ‘everything referred to him,’ Don Bosco found the perfect ‘feature of union’ ‘in the monthly *rendiconto* ... carried out in a convenient way.’ It would be ‘a huge result’ if the Chapter were to define ‘rules’ to see that the *rendiconto* was always made by everyone and if it indicated ‘how to do it well.’ He was particularly insistent with the rectors on the importance that the formation of those in charge had for the Oratory and that, ‘rectors of houses’ be ‘priests who are educated’ in this. ‘I find that almost without noticing it, these are the ones who more easily ‘inspire and instil the spirit of St Francis de Sales’ in confreres. He even went to the extent of saying: ‘It would be good if various Chapter members of the first houses were educated at the Oratory. When we cannot have rectors among them who have been educated at the Oratory we should at least see that they in turn are educated by someone who has had his education at the Oratory.’ He also drew attention to the *rendiconto* and conferences. ‘We should quickly set up some special regulations for the *rendiconto*; it is not so difficult in itself’ so long as ‘the one hurdle’ is avoided, which is ‘entering into strictly conscience matters.’ He indicated the preferred topic for conferences: ‘observance of the rules’ and obedience. He finished up by speaking of the ‘evening talk’ [goodnight] and its characteristics: not a sermon and ‘very short’ unless for exceptional cases.’⁶⁷

During the afternoon session on the same day, Fr Barberis introduced the topic of regulations for the novitiate but it was seen to be impossible for the Salesian Society to model this ‘on what is done by other’ Congregations. Rather than trying to describe the new configuration proposed by the Constitutions, ‘there were still many things to adjust and others almost needing to be studied anew. Some things could be left undecided so thinking could mature.’ Nevertheless, it was discussed and Don Bosco had the opportunity to express his opinion on two rather delicate problems: carrying out the decrees of the Congregation on the state of religious, *Romani Pontifices* and *Regulari disciplinae* regarding procedures for admission to the novitiate, clothing, and religious profession, and the formation of Provincial Commissions to examine vocations. The second issue was individuals wishing to change from coadjutor to cleric.

With regard to the first problem, he offered the usual pragmatic solution, recommending gradual observance which he justified with words he had heard from Pius IX himself: ‘As long as you are alive I leave everything to your prudence. Meanwhile, when you can put the Congregation on a regular footing.’

With regard to the problem of a possible transfer from professed Salesian coadjutor to cleric he suggested a more nuanced reformulation of art. 12 of the *Acceptance* text, and Chapter members focused discussion on this. According to the suggested text, it would not ‘ordinarily’ be allowed for someone to enter the clerical state who had been admitted to the Congregation as a coadjutor. Don Bosco recognised that this was wise as a principle but, he noted, ‘at the same time we should not be so rigid, because from time to time we find some who have real qualities for becoming a good priest and why deny them this consolation and the Church another minister?’⁶⁸ The approved *Deliberations* show that this solution was accepted: ‘Ordinarily, whoever was accepted into the Congregation as a coadjutor will not be admitted to the clerical state. The Rector Major will make exceptions he judges best for the greater glory of God and the good of the Congregation.’⁶⁹

There were just a handful of observations made in the afternoon session on 10 September: not accepting small houses, seeing to the protection of boys in the colleges by clearly keeping them separate from outsiders, controlling visits in the parlour. The concern was to ‘study every way of increasing good order and morality, and maintaining vocations.’ To better achieve this aim, Don

67 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 1, pp. 70-77.

68 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. I, pp. 81-83.

69 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. IV capo II, art. 2, p. 69, OE XXXIII 77.

Bosco recalled some of the old recipes: as far as possible avoiding boarders mixing with outsiders, and unity among educators.⁷⁰

The afternoon session on 11 September was dedicated to improving the functioning of central government through marked concentration of authority in the Superior General, flowing down through the lower levels of the hierarchy. The chronicle records: 'Don Bosco will set up a Commission to study the way to distribute roles belonging to each member of the Superior Chapter,' basing it on the principle of 'extending the authority of the Rector Major to the various members of the Superior Chapter as they relate to provincials and these to rectors.'⁷¹

When the Chapter was over, and since there would be some delay before the deliberations were printed, Don Bosco brought together eight points worthy of more urgent observance – Fr Rua made some respectful suggestions to improve them⁷² – and issued them in a printed circular in Latin addressed to *Directoribus aliisque Superioribus cuiusque domus Salesianae in D.S.P.*, dated 29 November. Issues of structure and functionality were not touched on, but spirituality was: 1. Deliberations from the First Chapter should be re-read and those relating mainly to morality and economy are to be called to mind. 2. Rectors should show the greatest diligence in seeing that members open their hearts freely and with ease. They will also see that the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death is done as a community or individually. 3. Many serious reasons urge that no one, unless it is medically prescribed, should go swimming at the beach. 4. Superiors are to be obeyed in matters concerning the Constitutions, their respective role, and in particular leaving the house and using money. 5. Superiors should see to closing off the source of all evils which is time spent with family and friends. 6. Let each one show the example of good works, and carefully avoid scandal of any kind. 7. Let them stand out for patience, charity and gentleness in word and deed such that they fulfil Christ's word in everything: *Vos estis sal terrae, vos estis lux mundi*. 8. By February, March each year, each member should write a letter to the Rector Major in which he describes his state of health and vocation. Rectors will make these topics the subject of conferences to Salesian members.⁷³

The *Deliberations* came out in 1882.⁷⁴ In the letter of presentation, Don Bosco reduced the work of the Chapter to two main issues: 'The deliberations taken in 1877 were reviewed, introducing modifications which experience prompted, and adding some others that seemed appropriate for promoting the glory of God and the good of souls.' In this new text, then, 'deliberations from both General Chapters 'would be brought together and coordinated under one title.' In particular 'the aim was to broadly explain the roles of the various members of the Superior Chapter, which are only briefly referred to in the Constitutions.'⁷⁵ The contents were in five groups: *Special Regulations* – for the General Chapter, Superior Chapter and its members, provincials, rectors of houses, Director of the Sisters, *Common life, Piety and morality, Studies, and Economy*.

Articles came into force entrusting the School Councillor with 'general care of what concerns literary and scientific teaching in the Houses of their Congregation, regarding both members and pupils.' It was 'his concern to establish the syllabus for philosophy and theology classes for each year, and to receive the results [marks] gained by the clerics in the exams' and pass these on 'to the Spiritual Director.' The Spiritual Director was to: 'Keep a specific or overall note on the results

70 G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 2, pp. 8-12.

71 G. MARENCO, *Verbali*, p. 17; cf. G. BARBERIS, *Verbali*, quad. 2, p. 14.

72 Cf. A. AMADEI, *Un altro don Bosco: il servo di Dio don Rua (1837-1910)*. Turin, SEI 1934, pp. 154-156.

73 *Documenti* XXII 311-312; E III 637-638.

74 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, VIII-88 p., OE XXXIII 1-96.

75 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, pp. III-IV, OE XXXIII 3-4.

of exams in theology held on three occasions a year. He will receive this from the School councillor.⁷⁶

The figure of the Rector as formator and animator was reinforced: he was to hold regular conferences, receive the *rendiconto* from Salesians, keep in touch with the Provincial, promote the festive oratory, see that the chronicle of the college was written up.⁷⁷

But the most relevant novelty were the four completely new chapters on *Means for nurturing vocations to the clerical state, Clerical studies and Philosophical and literary studies, General Articles* relating to the Economy.⁷⁸ The Chapter on vocations was entirely inspired by Don Bosco, partly drawn from the introduction to the Constitutions in 1877 (*Importance of following our vocation*) and partly from observations he had made over various Chapter sessions. The deliberations were very generous in prescriptions of principle regarding *Studies of members*. We note the influence of the commissions and their presidents, Fr Durando and Cagliero. However, Don Bosco's pragmatic approach, which had already emerged in Chapter discussions, and above all the absence of operational indications, would not have allowed them to arrive at effective practical conclusions.

The prescriptions that foresaw a very large number of theological students was ambitious but unrealistic compared to the real state of things and, frankly, quite incredible: 'There will be a studentate for theological students in every province.' Nothing was said, though, about teachers and structures, nor how they would take clerics away from houses where their work of assistance and teaching was indispensable. The solution would only be found twenty years later, when the three year 'practical training' period was introduced.⁷⁹ For the time being the general rule, which seemed to be an exception in the Deliberations, remained in force: 'In houses where there cannot yet be a regular studentate, no fewer than five hours of class a week are stipulated.'⁸⁰ From the minutes of the First General Chapter they drew articles relating to priests preparing talks and sermons for the Forty Hours, and retreats, and instructions for catechism lessons.⁸¹

The arrangements established for the two years of philosophy were more flexible and in keeping with the reality: 'As far as possible all students of philosophy will remain in the studentate.'⁸² Twelve General Articles were intended to create uniformity and centralised administration.⁸³

3. The FMA Institute – from printed Constitutions to the death of Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1878–81)

The 21 'Works of charity on behalf of poor girls' run by the FMA, which appeared in the list included with the *Report to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales* in 1879, were run by 18 communities: Mornese, Nizza Monferrato, Turin, Chieri, Lanzo, Biella, Borgo S. Martino, S. Pier d' Arena, Alassio, Nice, Lu Monferrato, Quargnento (Alessandria),

76 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. I, capo III, § 5, art. 1 and 11; § 3, art. 5, pp. 14-15 e 12, OE XXXIII 22-23 and 20.

77 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. I, capo V, art. 11.13. 20. 22-23, pp. 23-25, OE XXXIII 30-33.

78 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. III, capo IV; dist. IV, capo I and capo II; dist. V, capo I, pp. 56-59, 65-69 and 69-71, 77-79, OE XXXIII 64-67, 73-76 and 77-79, 85-87.

79 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Un "nuovo prete" e la sua formazione culturale secondo don Bosco*, RSS 8 (1989) 48-55.

80 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. IV, capo I, art. 2 e 3, p. 65, OE XXXIII 73.

81 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. IV, capo I, art. 19-24, pp. 67-68, OE XXXIII 75-76.

82 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. IV, capo II, art. 5, p. 70, OE XXXIII 78.

83 *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. V, capo I, pp. 77-79, OE XXXIII 85-87.

Vallecrosia, La Navarre, St. Cyr, Villa Colón, Las Piedras, Buenos Aires.⁸⁴ There was a vast range of structures and activities: postulancies, novitiates, public schools, workshops, oratories, looking after the kitchen and laundry in various Salesian houses, infant schools, female youth associations. Alongside the Salesians, the Institute shared its purposes and development processes to a great extent while pursuing some of its own, in harmony with neatly differentiated types of mission, especially regarding the age levels of its target group, often small children in infant schools. At the same time it pursued initiatives that would give the Institute increasingly better defined and solid spirituality and norms.

Beginning with the promulgation of the new text of the Constitution in September 1879, the Institute was no longer guided by copies of manuscripts reserved for superiors and only indirectly known by novices and professed. The cover and frontispiece of the printed edition, Don Bosco's preface *To the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians* and the approval, all bore the date 1878.⁸⁵ In reality, the text was completed in late 1877. In fact, some notable modifications echoed 'Observations' regarding the Institute brought to Don Bosco's attention by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in April 1879. In the 'Presentation,' they noted 'there was a report on an Institute of women under the title of Mary Help of Christians yet it says nothing about whether this Institute has a Superior General on whom the Sisters depend, and if it is fully independent, as it should be, from the Salesian Institute.' Don Bosco replied on 3 August 1879: 'The Institute of Mary Help of Christians depends on the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society in temporal matters, but in whatever concerns the exercise of religious worship and administration of the Sacraments, they are fully subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary.'⁸⁶ Months later, to the question as to whether the Institute had a Superior General on whom the Sisters depended and who was fully independent from the Salesians, Don Bosco replied: 'In matters relating to the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians only interfere in spiritual matters within the limits and in the manner allowed and prescribed by the ordinaries in whose dioceses their houses exist.' As for their Constitutions, there had not yet been a request for approval put forward. The Institute had a 'Superior General and its own Superior Chapter.'⁸⁷ A Superior of its own meant something quite distinct. Dependence on the Rector Major of the Salesian Society remained, but the printed text introduced the notion of 'aggregation' into the title.

Don Bosco's inventiveness was inexhaustible when it came to avoiding solutions that in his view might become binding.⁸⁸ On 10 November 1881, to avoid one of the problems with the Archbishop related to the Bonetti cause, lawyer Fr Constantino Leonori advised Don Bosco to ask for papal approval of the Institute's Constitutions. Don Bosco did not agree, because he knew that in this case the Congregation of Bishops would clearly decide to impose 'separation of the two Institutes.' This was already in the 3 October 1879 letter with 'Observations' on the Report, since it would never be 'approved, especially in recent times, for female Institutes to depend upon male Institutes.'⁸⁹ Don Bosco claimed that he had not yet given final shape to the Institute he had founded and for the moment preferred to follow the example of the Vincentians.⁹⁰

84 G. BOSCO, *Esposizione alla S. Sede dello stato morale e materiale...*, pp. 14-16, OE XXXI 250-252 (letter of accompaniment in E III 462-464): cf. Chap. 28, § 5.

85 *Regole o Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società Salesiana*. Turin, Tipografia e libreria salesiana 1878, 64 p., OE XXX 291-354.

86 To Cardinal I. Ferrieri, E III 507.

87 To Cardinal I. Ferrieri, 12 January 1880, E III 543-544.

88 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 145, 148-149, 154-156.

89 Cf. text quoted in E III 543.

90 *Documenti* XXIII 254.

It was this intention which later urged him to ask a Vincentian, Bro. Stella, for a booklet he had written on the dependence of the Daughters of Charity on the Vincentian Superior.⁹¹ The separation would be approved in 1906 with papal approval of the Institute's new Constitutions.

Don Bosco justified the first printed edition of the FMA Constitutions with the fact that 'while the Institute was focused on the mother house in Mornese, some copies of the manuscripts of the Rule were sufficient for each Sister to be aware of them, but now that Divine Providence had multiplied houses and Sisters living in them, they were no longer sufficient.'⁹² Initially, the text of the presentation was sent to Fr Lemoyne, the Rector at Mornese, so the 'Mother Superior' and/or himself could read it through and make appropriate 'observations.' Don Bosco would also be 'happy for a copy to be sent' as a circular 'to all the Sisters' houses.'⁹³

For the variations it offered, the printed text takes on special importance for understanding the decisive though not exclusive role Don Bosco played in shaping the Institute. In fact it depended on *ms G* and corrections to it made by four different hands, among which Don Bosco's and Fr Rua's. It also assumes an intermediary document with further changes made by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians themselves, on the basis of decisions made at the Superiors' meeting in August 1878.⁹⁴

There were some demanding new items involving 'juridical elements' which can be thought of as almost certainly coming from Don Bosco because of their importance.⁹⁵ Section 3 on *The internal regime of the Institute*, art. 1, was significantly modified by Don Bosco under pressure from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars: 'The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is governed and directed by a Superior Chapter made up of the Superior General, her Vicar, Bursar, and two Assistants, dependent on the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation.'⁹⁶

An article on the *General Chapter* to be held every six years was the result of his intervention in *ms G*, Section 5. It said that 'matters of general interest' would be dealt with there 'and it could also modify articles of the Constitutions but according to the spirit of the Institute.'⁹⁷ In art. 3 of Section 6 on the *Mistress of Novices*, one variation and an addition can be found, once again from the founder: 'They are to be a model in everything so they can fulfil all the prescriptions of the Rule. They are also recommended to inspire the spirit of mortification in the novices but to use great discretion in order not to weaken them beyond their strength and thus make them unable to carry out their roles in the Institute.'⁹⁸

Section 9 on *Principal virtue* ... was restructured, these being fundamental for the Institute's spirituality: '1. Patient and zealous charity, not only with little children but also with older girls. 2. Simplicity and modesty; spirit of mortification inwardly and outwardly, strict observance of poverty. 3. Obedience of will and judgement, willingly accepting advice and correction without comment, and roles entrusted to them. 4. The spirit of prayer with which the Sisters willingly attend to works of piety, remain in God's presence, and abandon themselves to his sweet Providence. 5. 'These virtues must be well-tested and well-founded in the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, because they must go in step with the active and contemplative life, emulating Martha and

91 Letter of 13 June 1885, E IV 325-326.

92 *Regole o Costituzioni per le Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società salesiana...*, p. 3.

93 Letter from Marseilles January 1879, E III 435.

94 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 152-153.

95 Cf. G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 153-160.

96 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 259.

97 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 265.

98 G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 266.

Magdalen.⁹⁹ The text was officially consigned to the Sisters on 3 September 1879, not by Don Bosco but by the Director General, Fr John Cagliero.

Meanwhile, various events followed one another as rapid expansion began. On 12 April 1880, the Mornese house closed down to the great disappointment of the Mothers. Procedures for its sale created some hostility and much displeasure among the people at Mornese. Don Bosco set things in motion with an order to Fr Rua: '3. *Idem*, a *tiletto* [Piedmontese for poster, notice] for the house at Mornese and send it to all the notaries, lawyers, main businesses in Genoa.'¹⁰⁰ In 1880, the six year term of the Superior General and her Council elapsed. In accordance with the 1878 Constitutions, elections were called for Mothers on the Council and Superiors of houses. The retreat began on 20 August. Don Bosco was at Nizza Monferrato at least from 20–22 August, as we see from letters sent over those days. In the first, to the Cardinal Protector, he spoke of Vallecrosia.¹⁰¹ Then on the 21st he invited Fr Rua to stop over at Nizza Monferrato to confer with him, taking advantage of his trip to Marseilles where he was going to preach the retreat.¹⁰² Don Boco also wrote to Fr Tamietti at Este, since his sister was with the FMA at Nizza Monferrato.¹⁰³

The elections were held on 29 August with the Director General, Fr Cagliero, presiding. Mother Mazzarello was unanimously re-elected. Mother Caterina Daghero was elected Vicar, while the Bursar, Giovanna Ferrettino, and the two Assistants, Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone, were confirmed in office. The minutes of the election concluded with the following text signed in Don Bosco's own hand: 'Having viewed them, I approve what is contained in the minutes above and confirm the election of the Mother Superior and the Sisters making up the Superior Chapter of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians and I pray to God that he will infuse the spirit of charity and fervour in them all so that this humble Congregation of ours may grow in members, spread to more and more remote countries on earth where the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians can win many souls for God, save themselves, and one day be with the souls they have saved in the Kingdom of Heaven to praise and bless God forever. Turin, 1 September 1880. Fr J. Bosco, Rector.'¹⁰⁴

The Second General Chapter of the Salesian Society took place at Lanzo from 3–15 September. Nothing was said about the FMA Institute and in the text of the Deliberations, rules of behaviour (regarding the Sisters) which had already appeared in the Deliberations from the First General Chapter, were republished with some modifications making certain prescriptions more realistic.¹⁰⁵

1881 began with great concern at the declining health of Mother Mazzaeallo. On 20 January, she went to Turin with the missionary Sisters for their farewell function. She then reached them at Sampierdarena on 1 February and went on board ship with them as far as Marseilles (2–4 February). Don Bosco also arrived there on the 5th by train. He met her and invited her to go to St. Cyr for a rest. The doctor found her condition to be serious. On 19 March, she undertook the return journey and was at Nizza Monferrato by the 28th. On 25 April, her pleurisy worsened. Don Bosco was in Rome. On 10 May, Fr Cagliero, coming from Spain, arrived at the mother house. Mother Mazzarello died at dawn on 14 May. The funeral saw a large crowd of people from Nizza, Sisters, pupils gathered around her coffin, all deeply moved. Fr Cagliero accompanied the funeral hymns on the harmonium.¹⁰⁶ *L'Unità Cattolica* offered an article (eulogy) on 21 May and the *Salesian*

99 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 270.

100 Letter of 12 April 1880, E III 566.

101 Letter of 20 August 1880, E III 616.

102 E III 619.

103 From Turin, i25 August 1878, E III 621.

104 MB XIV 815; P. CAVIGLIÀ and A. COSTA (eds), *Orme di vita...*, p. 310.

105 Cf. *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale...*, 1880, dist. I. *Regolamenti speciali*, capo VI. *Direzione generale delle suore* (12 articoli), pp. 26-27, OE XXXIII 34-35.

106 Cf. *Cronistoria* III 403-404.

Bulletin, following a death notice and brief article in June,¹⁰⁷ published her life in five instalments written by Fr Lemoyne, from September 1881 to June 1882.¹⁰⁸ It was republished in the Institute's *Elenco Generale* or Year Book, in 1883.

Mother Mazzarello left an Institute spread across four nations with 26 houses, 139 professed Sisters and 50 novices.¹⁰⁹ It was not her only or principal legacy. Her final voyage with the missionaries, her visit to France, her trepidation in the face of her final illness, were all testimony which spoke of a total embodiment within the history of the Institute. Hers was a presence and identification with the life of her Sisters and 'daughters' in a communion of Spirituality where the Constitutional virtue of the Novice Mistress and the 'principal virtue' of the Institute were hers above all, possessed and passed on by her. Mother, teacher, guide of a Religious Family, it was hers in deed more than in words. She was Co-foundress with Don Bosco, calling herself his 'most humble Daughter' 'first-born Daughter,' just as she also called herself the 'most affectionate Mother' of the Institute's 'Daughters.'¹¹⁰

4. FMA presences in 1881–88

In the final period of his life, Don Bosco's involvement in the daily affairs of the FMA Institute was gradually decreasing, given the more pronounced efforts of the Director General, Fr Cagliero, then Fr Bonetti and local rectors, Fr Lemoyne and Bussi. Just the same, there were significant moments when the founder was present still, in 1884 and 1885, the years of the Institute's First General Chapter and the final edition of the text of the Constitutions while Don Bosco was alive.

4.1 1881–84

In 1881, on his return from Rome after four months absence, Don Bosco established with Fr Cagliero that the election of the new Superior General of the Sisters would take place on 12 August. He was already in Nizza on 4 August with Fr Bertello and Count Cesare Balbo to take part in an evening offered by the Catholic Workers Union, whose president was a past pupil of the Oratory, Carlo Brovia.¹¹¹ Don Bosco's intention, essentially, was to be at the retreat for a mixed group of men and women. Among the retreatants was his grand niece Eulalia Bosco, daughter of Francesco, his brother Joseph's son. A year later she was at Nizza to become a Sister.

On 12 August, assisted by Frs Cagliero and Lemoyne, Don Bosco presided at the session at which twenty-five year-old Caterina Daghero was elected Superior General. On the 14th there were elections for superiors on the Council. Sr Enrichetta Sorbone was elected Vicar and was replaced as second Assistant by Elisa Roncallo. Don Bosco had prepared two boxes, one with sweets, the other with *amaretti*, with a note to 'Rev Mother Superior General' which ran thus: 'Here are some sugared almonds to give to your daughters. For yourself, keep up the sweetness to be practised all the time with everyone, but always be ready to receive the *amaretti* or rather, the bitter mouthfuls when it pleases God to send them your way. May God bless you and give you the virtue

107 *La Superiora Generale delle Suore di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 5 (1881) no. 6, June, p. 8.

108 *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, BS 5 (1881) no. 9, September, pp. 11-13; no. 10, October, pp. 6-8; no. 12, December, pp. 15-17; 6 (1882) no. 3, March, pp. 50-51; no. 6, June, pp. 105-107.

109 MB X 646-647.

110 Cf. M. E. POSADA, A. COSTA, P. CAVIGLIA, *La sapienza della vita. Lettere di Maria Domenica Mazzarello...*, pp. 48, 79, 84, 129, 132, 135, 143, 146, 176; M. E. POSADA, *Maria Mazzarello: il significato storico-spirituale della sua figura*, in *La donna nel carisma salesiano*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1981.

111 Cf. BS 5 (1881) no. 9, September, p. 10.

and courage to sanctify yourself and all the community entrusted to you. Pray for me. I remain yours in J.C. Nizza Monferrato, 12 Aug. 1881. Your humble servant Fr John Bosco.’¹¹²

Don Bosco returned to Nizza Monferrato in August 1882 for the retreat for ‘school teachers and other women.’ The July *Salesian Bulletin* gave notice of it, then the September issue spoke of its results, also providing information on what Don Bosco said: ‘Don Bosco, too, gave a talk one day, showing a practical way of doing good in the world, beginning with one’s family and school.’¹¹³

At the goodnight on 5 August, Don Bosco reminded the Sisters of the 10th anniversary of the Institute’s foundation, and explained why he had undertaken this: Our Lady wanted it to fully carry out the program of *Da Mihi anima cetera tolle*, and Don Bosco simply obeyed.¹¹⁴

Unable to be at the retreat in 1883, he gave the following justification to Fr Cagliari: ‘I would have liked to spend some days at Nizza Monferrato, but a series of telegrams means that I must leave for Florence tomorrow morning.’¹¹⁵

On 25 December, replying to best wishes from the Sisters in Nizza, he thanked them with a brief letter to the Superior General whom he pacified with some clear words regarding certain criticisms doing the rounds ‘about our houses’, perhaps also presumed to be criticisms he himself had made. ‘They are vague comments,’ he reassured her ‘not understood and spoken with different intent. So if somebody wants something then the person should say so and speak up clearly. Do not be concerned. When I believe something is needed I will not send someone else to tell you, but will tell you myself or put it in writing.’¹¹⁶

At the beginning of 1884, he saw that the circular for the Epiphany was also sent to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in reply to the Salesians and, with necessary adjustments, the Sisters for their Christmas and New year’s greetings: ‘As a father, I simply reply by saying that I thank you with all my heart and *that you will do the dearest thing in the world if you help me to save your soul*, especially by observing the rules.’¹¹⁷ Months later, resting at Pinerolo over July and August, he felt obliged once more to write a lengthy letter to Fr Cagliari, asking to be excused for not being at Nizza Monferrato for the retreat for lay men and women. He rejoiced that there was ‘a good number of them despite discouraging rumours of cholera threatening our towns.’ He suggested ‘the usual antidote to remove any fear of illness, the Mary help of Christians medal with the invocation: Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. Frequent Communion. That’s it.’ Eventually, in agreement with the Mother Superior, he seized the occasion to suggest a collection among the girls for the Sacred heart Church in Rome. He put words into the Blessed Virgin’s mouth, perhaps addressed especially to the Sisters’ postulants, novices and professed when he strongly exhorted them to: Consecrate yourselves generously to my Son Jesus – all you have, your health, your heart, let them be now and always for Jesus at the cost of whatever great sacrifice.’ Then by way of farewell he told them: ‘We will see each other again one day in heaven with Jesus and Mary, Amen. May God bless you all and may Mary help us take the path to Heaven.’¹¹⁸

The Institute’s First General Chapter was held from 11–22 August 1884. Fr Cagliari presided, and there was the occasional participation of the retreat preachers, Frs Bertello and Bonetti. A few months later, Fr Bonetti replaced Fr Cagliari as Director General when the latter was appointed bishop. The Chapter ran over 15 sessions.¹¹⁹ At the first session, Fr Cagliari read a letter in which

112 E IV 76.

113 BS 6 (1882) no. 7, July, p. 116, and no. 9, September, p. 156.

114 *Cronistoria* IV 163.

115 Letter of 7 August 1883, E IV 231.

116 To Mother C. Daghero, 25 December 1883, E IV 244-245.

117 E IV 248-250.

118 To Fr Cagliari, 6 August 1884, E IV 282-283.

Don Bosco sent his blessing and promised prayers.¹²⁰ The second to fifth sessions were dedicated to revising the Constitutions, a revision made directly on the 1878 text and not the intermediate manuscript (*ms K*) between that and the 1885 printed edition.

Analysis of the minutes makes it clear what the contributions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were to their constitutional text: introduction of new headings and articles, transposition of already existing ones, modifications, corrections, and additions.¹²¹ Also, in the two sessions that followed, disciplinary and organisational topics were dealt with that found echo in variations to the 1885 Constitutions: common life, a monograph (chronicle) for each house, admission to vows in the houses, health risks for the Sisters cleaning stoves in the many colleges.

From the afternoon session on 14 August until the afternoon session on Thursday 21, the Deliberations from the First and Second Salesian General Chapters were read, adapted and included according to the Institute's needs.¹²² At the beginning of the afternoon session on 20 August – as recorded in the minutes – 'Fr Cagliari announced another letter from our good Father, D. Bosco.' Discussion continued on the topic of reading. What was said about novels, Manzoni and *Promessi Sposi*, simply echoed what Don Bosco had said in the Second Salesian General Chapter.¹²³

The letter announced by Fr Cagliari was a brief message sent by Don Bosco to Fr Bonetti from Pinerolo on 16 August: 'Tell our Sisters that obedience with humility will make saints of them all. If that is lacking, all efforts will be in vain. During your lifetime, always preach not to reform our rules but to put them into practice. Whoever seeks reform deforms her way of living. Constantly recommend the exact observance of our Constitution. Maintain that *qui timet Deum nihil negliget et qui spernit modica paulatim decedit*.'¹²⁴

Sessions finished on the morning of 22 August without the Chapter having been able to finish examining the Salesian Chapter Deliberations. 'The above mentioned Director General,' the minutes record 'addressed some words to us full of charity and zeal for the good of our souls and the Congregation in general.' They faithfully reflected Don Bosco's sentiments and thinking: 'As a memento he left us humility and obedience, virtues so much recommended by our Very Reverend Father D. Bosco as the secure basis of our religious life. He also said to always keep an open heart with the Superiors and in this regard he let us see how fortunate we are to have the support of the Salesians, and especially to have a member of the Salesian Superior Chapter as Director General of the Institute. He will always be a Father to us, taking the place of our common Father D. Bosco. Let your confidence in the Very Reverend Mother General be unbounded – woe to the Superior or Sister who begins hiding things! Experience tells us that the smooth running of the Institute and perseverance in religious vocation depend essentially on confidence and frankness with our Superiors. Let the local superior instil this openness of heart with Superiors in the Sisters, and then be assured of the smooth running of the house she is appointed to. If the Congregation has thus far prospered, thanks be to God it is precisely because of the great confidence placed in the Superiors. If some unfortunate Sister has left the Institute, it must be because she remained

119 The minutes were passed on in three versions: One in *ms orig.*; *Prima copia delle adunanze del capitolo generale del 1884*, *ms orig.*, with corrections and additions; *Verballi del primo capitolo generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società salesiana*. Nizza Monferrato, 11 August 1884, *ms orig.*, complete and revised transcript of the *Prima* copy, published in *Cronistoria* IV 362-377.

120 Attested by *Verballi* of the Chapter, in *Cronistoria* IV 364-365.

121 Cf. G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 173-179.

122 *Verballi del primo capitolo generale...*, in *Cronistoria* IV 369-375.

123 *Verballi del primo capitolo generale...*, in *Cronistoria* IV 374.

124 E IV 288.

silent or spoke too late. He ended by recommending that the Superiors be kind, zealous and patient in forming the personnel.¹²⁵

Mother Daghero made a brief and deferential report to Don Bosco the same day the Chapter closed. Among other things she wrote: 'In the last of the conferences we sought to adopt for ourselves the beautiful and important deliberations of your worthy son's and our brothers the Salesians' General Chapter. By observing these deliberations, I hope for an excellent outcome for the smooth running of our beloved Congregation. The Acts [Minutes] that will result and the deliberations taken will be sent to you as soon as possible, along with the Holy Rule. You can do what you wish with them *in Domino* and put your seal of approval to them if you believe it useful for your Daughters in Jesus.'¹²⁶

The letter that Don Bosco sent his grandniece Eulalia over those days, expressed his pleasure and affection. She was admitted to clothing as a Religious at Nizza at the end of the retreat. The letter was similar to the one sent to Sr Maddalena Martini on 27 June 1883 in that it proposed an essential outline of the woman consecrated in the religious state.¹²⁷ Drawn up with a lucid mind and great warmth it was a portrait of Don Bosco himself and a spiritual testament. 'I blessed the Lord when you made a decision to become a Religious' her uncle wrote in affectionate and inspired words. 'Now I thank him with all my heart that he preserved your great willingness to break definitively with the world and consecrate yourself totally to the good Jesus. Make this offering gladly and reflect on the reward which is a hundredfold in the present life, and the real reward, the great future reward. But, my good Eulalia, that is no joke. It is serious. And remember the words of Chantal's father when she was in a similar situation: what is given to the Lord is never taken back. Consider that the religious life is a life of constant sacrifice, and that each sacrifice is greatly rewarded by God. Only obedience, observance of the rules, hope in the heavenly reward are our comfort during our mortal life. I have always received your letters with pleasure, though I have not replied for lack of time. May God bless you Eulalia, and may Mary guide you and be your comfort until you reach heaven. I hope we see each other again in this life, otherwise farewell and we shall see each other to speak of God in blessed [eternal] life. Amen.'¹²⁸

Later, there was an important direct intervention by Don Bosco on behalf of the work at Nizza Monferrato, given the desire to expand it. While the local spiritual director Fr Luigi Bussi, was in charge of following up the necessary bureaucratic procedures, Don Bosco sent the request to the Mayor and City Council in Nizza for authorisation to alter two roads so as to gain a plot of land which would allow extension to the existing building by around 30 metres. The extension was justified by moral and hygiene reasons other than the desire to extend the educational activities: 'A workshop and recreational yard for the exclusive benefit of the most needy girls of the city, it being the supplicant's intention to open a vocational school to teach sewing each day for free to girls ages 12 –15 and also have an oratory to gather them on Sundays for moral, civic and religious instruction.'¹²⁹

A faithful reflection of the Institute's rapport with the founder can be found in what Fr Cerruti wrote to the FMA Superior General on 5 November 1884: 'I myself passed on your letter to our beloved Don Bosco, who quickly asked me about its contents and what I knew about your holy Congregation. Naturally, my replies and information were in accordance with what I had already heard from you when we spoke. He was sad to hear of the poor health of the Sisters at La Navarre

125 *Verbali del primo capitolo generale...*, in *Cronistoria* IV 376.

126 Cf. text in *Cronistoria* IV 307-308; MB XVII 730-731.

127 Cf. Chap. 20, § 6.

128 Letter from Pinerolo of 20 August 1884, E IV 289-290. Eulalia Bosco (1866-1938) for decades she was a General Councilor of the Superior Chapter of the Institute.

129 Letter of 16 October 1884, E IV 296-297.

and the condition of Fr Varaja at St. Cyr. He assured me he would keep the letter in his memory to recall these situations. I noted that he was pleased you had addressed these matters to him since, as he told me with much feeling, the Sisters too depend on the Superior General of the Salesian Congregation who is D. Bosco. I found him very well, relatively speaking, and in good cheer.¹³⁰

4.2 From the 1885 Constitutions until the founder's death.

The final stages of Don Bosco's efforts for the FMA Institute began with the new printed text of the Constitutions published in 1885, the last ones he saw and approved.¹³¹ The booklet comprised a preface, introduction, the text of the Constitutions. The introduction was more or less identical to the 1885 Salesian Constitutions, with the necessary changes of gender and omission of its beginning and conclusion.

Among the available documents preceding it were the intermediate manuscript following the General Chapter in 1884 (*ms K*), the minutes of that Chapter which had modified the 1878 text, the revision of the 1878 text by the Salesian Superior Chapter, which had made use of a Commission made up of Frs John Cagliero, John Bonetti, and John Baptist Lemoyne. All these Salesians influenced the text, with particular contribution by the local Rector, Fr Lemoyne. He had a specific role above all regarding the bond between the Sisters and the Salesians, and conditions for admitting postulants and novices. Don Bosco, too, wanted the text read to him and made some adjustments, but it is not possible to establish which ones can be attributed to him.¹³² What is certain is that 'from analysis of the 1885 text it emerges that certain changes further reinforce the dependence of the FMA Institute on the Rector Major of the Salesian Society.' From an examination of the variants, one can see that the Sisters also made a contribution.¹³³

Compared with the 1878 printed text, the new one had two extra headings, making earlier less developed topics more explicit: section X on the *General Chapter* and XVI *On silence* (already found in *ms K* and somewhat corrected both by *Ks* (the Sisters) and *Kc* (Fr Cagliero), which follows the section *On Cloister*. The General Chapter section is spelt out in three articles with some variations, the preceding material concentrated in art. 6 of section V. The variants concern the role of the 'Major Superior' in the General Chapter: 'If the Major Superior does not take part personally in the General Chapter, all its proceedings must be submitted to his examination, and will not oblige before his approval.' (art. 3).¹³⁴ Section 11 came into line with the section on the *Form of the Institute* in the Salesian Constitutions. The three sections relating to the vows follow immediately, while the subject of Section VI became *Internal government of the Institute*. Articles 1, 2 and 5 of section XIII, *Essential virtues*, were enriched: '1. Patient and zealous charity not only with children but also the older girls and any individual, in order to do the greatest good possible for souls. 2. Simplicity and modesty with holy cheerfulness ... 5. Emulating Martha and Magdalene, the life of the Apostles, the life of the Apostle, and the angels.'¹³⁵

This text regulated the Institute until 1906.

130 AGFMA 412 111, handwritten original 2 pp.

131 *Regole o costituzioni per le figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società Salesiana approvate da varii vescovi tra cui l'eminentissimo cardinale Gaetano Alimonda arcivescovo di Torino*. Torino [= S. Benigno Canavese], Tipografia salesiana 1885, 120 pp.

132 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 184-193.

133 An analysis of the variants could be helpful *Ks* (= Sisters) and *Kc* (= Cagliero) introduced to complement the text of the 1885 Constitutions: G. Bosco, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, pp. 169-172 (placement of the text in the overall development of the Constitutions), pp. 289-353 (text published with relevant variant references).

134 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 311.

135 G. BOSCO, *Costituzioni per l'Istituto...*, p. 316.

Don Bosco did not forget the Superior General's Name day in April 1885, sending her greetings from Nice, France: 'Sister Cat. Sup. General etc. May 'God bless you and all the Congregation that Mary H.C. has entrusted to you. May she protect and guide you through perils, keep you firmly on the road to Paradise. Amen. Nice, 30 April 1885.'¹³⁶

In the letter mentioned previously to Vincentian Bro. Stella¹³⁷ on 13 June 1885, following the new edition of the Constitutions Don Bosco made his position clear on the dependence of the FMA Institute on the Superior of the Salesian Society. 'In our Congregation,' he stated 'we have the category of the Sisters known as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and I would like them to have much the same dependence on the Superior of the Salesians as the Daughters of Charity have on the Superior of the Vincentians.'¹³⁸ This was what the Constitutions said. As in the 1878 Constitutions, the Institute was 'in immediate dependence on the Superior General of the Society of St Francis de Sales', (art. 1, section 11), while internally it was 'governed and directed by a Superior Chapter made up of the Superior General, her Vicar, Bursar, and two Assistants, dependent on the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation' (section VI, art. 1), and the Superior Chapter was 'presided over by the Major Superior or Director General or the local Rector delegated for that purpose.' (art. 2). It seems evident, then, that the formula 'Confreres and Sisters [*Consorelle*] which he used did not only have emotional significance but was also a strictly juridical one. It appears in various letters to his Salesians: 'Distribute the letters you receive from the hands of our confreres or *consorelle*.¹³⁹ 'Jealously keep the secret confided to you by confreres or *consorelle* and give them complete freedom and secrecy for their letters as our rule prescribes.'¹⁴⁰

Don Bosco's final visit to Nizza Monferrato was an historic one, keenly requested by the Director General, Fr Bonetti, who was there for the retreat for lay women followed by the retreat for the Sisters. '300 Sisters coming from all over' he wrote to Don Bosco.¹⁴¹ Fr Viglietti's chronicle for 22, 23, 24 August, is extremely concise, limiting itself to Don Bosco's movements from Pinerolo to Nice, Valdocco, S. Benigno for Salesian retreats.¹⁴² Don Bosco was very weak. He was collected by Fr Bussi, the local Rector at Nizza Monferrato, on 22 August, and accompanied by clerics Viglietto and Festa. The following day, he celebrated Mass for the Sister' community and in the morning assisted at the clothing and profession of vows ceremonies. In the address that followed he introduced himself by referring to his old age and the inconveniences that went with it. Since the professed had received their crucifix from his hands he continued by speaking of the cross and the joy of carrying it. At the end, he left them with several reminders one after the other: 'Do good, do good works; work, work hard for the Lord and do it all with good will. Oh! Do not waste time, do good, do much good and you will never regret having done so. Then he immediately added: 'Would you like another one? Practise the holy Rule! Put your rule into practice and once again I say you will never regret it. Our Rules, you see, dear daughters, are infallible and they give us many advantages, but the most important of all of them is the certain salvation of our soul. Do not be surprised by the word "infallible" because our Rules are approved by the Roman Pontiff who is infallible, so every article of the Rule approved by him is infallible.' Then further on he gave them one more implicit 'memento'" 'Be happy, my dear daughters, healthy and holy, and always agree among yourselves. And here I will need to start all over again, but I am already tired and you will need to be satisfied with this little bit.'¹⁴³ Then, speaking to Chapter members in the parlour, he

136 E IV 324.

137 Cf. § 3.

138 Letter of 13 June 1885, E IV 325.

139 To Fr Bodrato, 31 December 1878, E III 423.

140 To Fr Fagnano, 10 August 1885, E IV 335.

141 Cf. letter of Fr Bonetti to Don Bosco, 5 August 1885, MB XVII 821-822.

142 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885 al 14 April 1886*, p. 41.

143 MB XVII 555-556; cf. Handwritten text in ASC A 0250215, *Ultima conferenza fatta da D. Bosco. Nizza Monf.to 23 Agosto 1885* [6 fol.].

spoke of Our Lady's presence in the house in such a way as to make her almost physically present: 'Our Lady is truly here, here among you! Our Lady walks through this house and covers it with her mantle.'¹⁴⁴

When the retreat was over, the superiors and teachers in the infant and elementary schools stayed at the house since they were invited by the Mothers to take part in conferences on their respective pedagogical and teaching activities. Fr Bonetti gave one of these about looking after their health and ways of doing so. One novelty was the lessons on pedagogy Fr Cerruti gave the teachers. He gave the infant school teachers the booklet he had written, probably with the collaboration of Mother Emilia Mosca,¹⁴⁵ *Regolamento – Programma per gli asili d'infanzia delle Figlie di Marie Ausiliatrice preceduto da un Cenno storico sull'origine e Sulla istituzione degli asili in Italia* (Regulations and syllabus for the infant schools run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, prefaced by an historical outline of the origin and institution of infant schools in Italy).¹⁴⁶

On his return from Spain on 24 May 1886, Don Bosco signed the letter of convocation for the Second General Chapter of the FMA Institute, held to elect members of the Superior Chapter whose six year term elapsed in August 1886.¹⁴⁷ For her part, the Mother General invited superiors to Nizza Monferrato for 14 August when Sisters were arriving from all over for the retreat. The house was full, including the new wing. Don Bosco, who was at Pinerolo for a necessary break, returned to Valdocco on 13 August, though his health was precarious as always. But he was able to take part in prize-giving and celebrations for his birthday. He was represented at the General Chapter by the new Spiritual Director of the Salesian Society, Fr Bonetti. Sessions began on the morning of the 14th. Fr Rua, now legally Don Bosco's Vicar, arrived on the afternoon of the 15th to preside at the meetings. He brought a brief hand-written message from the founder on the back of a holy picture of Mary Help of Christians: 'May Mary bring you all the blessings of the good Jesus, enlighten and guide you in the current elections so that in both affliction and consolation you will always be able to carry out the Lord's holy will. Fr J. Bosco.'¹⁴⁸

In the afternoon session on 16 August, before they went ahead with the elections, Fr Rua read a letter Don Bosco had signed from Pinerolo at the Archbishop's house on 8 August 1886. The letter granted Fr Rua 'all the necessary faculties for the election of the Superior General and other Superiors and for any other decisions' and he added: 'I am half blind and my health is failing. Also pray for me that I will always be your affectionate Father and friend, Fr J. Bosco.'¹⁴⁹

All were re-elected, from Mother General to second Assistant. On the following day, Fr Rua left for Turin and the Chapter continued. In a circular letter on 8 September, Our Lady's birthday, Fr Bonetti gave all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians the results of the elections, telling them that 'before and after the elections a range of matters dealing with the development of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the work entrusted to them were dealt with in general and special conferences, including the correct observance of the holy Rule.' He told them that in due course 'decisions taken' would be passed on after being 'reviewed and approved by the Major Superior.'¹⁵⁰ The Sisters who took part in the retreat held in Turin from 24 August to 1 September were more fortunate. Don Bosco's secretary recorded the following in his chronicle: 'This morning at 10, Don Bosco took Viglietto with him and went to the Sisters gathered for their

144 MB XVII 557.

145 Cf. P. CAVIGLIÀ, *Il primo regolamento degli asili infantili istituiti dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1885)*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 35 (1997) 17-46.

146 S. Benigno Canavese, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1885, 32 pp.

147 The text of the letter mentioned by G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo*, Vol. I *Dalle origini alla morte del Fondatore*. Rome 1972, pp. 131-135.

148 Found in *Cronistoria* V 105.

149 Found in *Cronistoria* V 105-106; E IV 359.

150 Found in *Cronistoria* V 235.

retreat. He gave them his blessing and some mementos and went to Valsalice' where the Fourth General Chapter of the Salesians began that afternoon.¹⁵¹

On 2 December 1886, six missionary Sisters (it was the sixth FMA expedition) took part in the farewell in the Church of Mary help of Christians at which Cardinal Alimonda presided. Don Bosco was present and received them in audience over the following days.

Towards the end of 1885 and the beginning of 1886, the FMA Institute was included more substantially in the final parts of the *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884–5–6*. Don Bosco made brief reference to the faithful observance by Salesians of their General Chapter deliberations concerning relations with the Sisters. He also spelt out in some detail topics regarding the internal life of the FMA Institute: prudence in accepting postulants, the major importance of forming novices since, 'virtues not acquired during the time of novitiate are for the most part not acquired later,' reserve in dealing with 'individuals of the other sex.' He recommended, in this regard, that the Superior General, superiors of houses, do not allow any familiarity with lay people of any kind.' There were pointers regarding observance of the vow of poverty. In matters of poverty, building repairs and the like, reference to 'advice', 'orders', 'an understanding' with the Rector Major was obligatory. Interesting guidelines were provided concerning holding General Chapters – the same for Salesians and Sisters – granting 'more freedom of speech, on matters *pro* and *con*, 'use of secret votes' in deliberations, punctual implementation of matters decided on, 'avoiding novelty in suggestions made at conferences or Chapters,' without reference to 'things approved earlier, or traditions, rules, General or Special Chapters.'¹⁵²

During the final stages of Don Bosco's illness, on 5 January 1888, the Director General. Fr Bonetti, sent the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians a very reassuring letter: 'By now there is no doubt that the Lord and Our Lady have heard your prayers and those of many thousands of individuals for the preservation of the precious life of our wonderful Father.' He was referring to the real improvement which had begun on 30 December, and continued through the first twenty days of January. The Director continued: 'Meanwhile I take the opportunity to refer to the reminder dear Don Bosco gave the Sisters in particular, on the painful evening of 29 December, when it seemed we were facing an irreparable loss. After recommending what was already indicated in the circular letter to the Salesians, he added in almost a dying whisper: "*For the Sisters; obedience, practise it and see it practised.*"'¹⁵³ Heartened by this, Mother Daghero left for Spain. But the end came. At the announcement of Don Bosco's death, the Vicar, with Mother Mosca, left immediately for Turin. Mother Daghero arrived on 2 February, shortly before the funeral but still in time to view Don Bosco's body. The announcement Fr Rua made on 31 January had also gone to the Sisters, a brief message full of emotion, while Bishop Cagliari sent them a personal letter of encouragement and exhortation.¹⁵⁴

Mother Daghero was present with Mother Mosca on 4 February for the burial at Valsalice, and on return to Nizza, sent Fr Rua a letter in the name of the Institute in which she renewed her condolences, expressed her consolation at having him as Superior and promised complete solidarity and collaboration. 'After God' he would be considered to be 'our Father, guide, support and everything!' She then concluded: 'With this letter, then, dear Father, I put myself and all our poor, dear congregation, in your hands. I applaud your election and profess our complete filial obedience and servitude and implore you to also think of us as your daughters.'¹⁵⁵

151 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886 al 12 gennaio 1887*, p. 34.

152 Cf. *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1885) 121-123.

153 Letter mentioned by G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo I...*, pp. 163-165.

154 Mentioned by G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo I...*, pp. 169-171.

155 Mentioned by G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo I...*, pp. 172-173.

Don Bosco's words, letters from Fr Rua and Fr Cagliari, the letter to Fr Rua from Mother Daghero are testimony to the well-rooted conviction at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century of the precise historical and juridical rapport between the FMA Institute and the Salesian Society. Things continued in this climate along a common path of inner growth and quantitative expansion. For the FMA too, the decade preceding Don Bosco's death had been marked by extraordinary development which was in no way slowed by the loss of the founder.¹⁵⁶

156 Cf. G. MAINETTI, *Madre Caterina Daghero prima successora della beata Maria Mazzarello nel governo dell'Istituto "Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice"*. Turin, SEI 1940, pp. 113-144, 257-318.

Building, expanding and consolidating youth works (1880–87)

- 1880 5 April: Leo XIII entrusts Don Bosco with building the *Sacro Cuore*, Sacred Heart Church in Rome;
 11 December: agreement for church and hospice signed.
- 1881 February 16: opening of first Salesian work in Spain at Utrera;
 4 March: opening of Salesian work in Florence;
 November: opening of Salesian work at Farnza.
- 1882 November 18: opening of Salesian work at Mogliano Veneto.
- 1883 27 August : Propaganda Fides approves the Vicariate Apostolic and Prefecture Apostolic in Patagonia;
 November 16: Brief and relevant decree;
 November 20: Brief appointing Fr Cagliariero as Provicar.
- 1884 30 October: Fr Cagliariero appointed Vicar Apostolic and Bishop;
 7 December: episcopal consecration of Fr Cagliariero.

1882 saw the conclusion of events which, while not connected in themselves, made a heavy impact on Don Bosco's rhythm of life. He told the Cardinal Protector, Lorenzo Nina, amid the confusion of the most recent controversies in Turin: 'At any rate I was and still am ready to make every sacrifice on condition that it can bring an end to an affair that makes me lose so much time.'¹ A few months after the 'Concordia', the consecration of the Church of St John the Evangelist took place and the school issue was settled. Yet Don Bosco had never slowed down in his commitment as educator and founder. Negotiations continued for the opening of new youth works, the prestigious responsibility came his way from Leo XIII to undertake the onerous construction of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, and his charitable promotion of it and search for funds intensified. Obviously, nothing had been able to interrupt his normal activity of overall government, including spiritual direction of youthful communities and the two Religious Institutes. Such efforts were facilitated, something he could not have foreseen, from 9 August 1883, by the transfer of Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda (1818–92) to the episcopal see of Turin.

1. Inter-regional development of youth works in Italy, and arrival in Spain (1881–82)

While remaining the key player, Don Bosco increasingly involved qualified collaborators from the periphery, provincials and local rectors, as well as the Superior Chapter, in expanding his youth works. Colleges with their classrooms and hospices with their arts and trade workshops were among the works that emerged. However, the concern was always there to see that the original

1 Letter of 28 December 1881, E IV 105.

and classic work, the festive or daily oratory, would not decline. It would become the object of particular attention and regulations at the two General Chapters in 1883 and 1886.

The first two years of the 1880s were interesting because of the consolidation of the Salesian presence in important regions like Tuscany, where the significant work at Lucca was already to be found, though with little possibility of development, then Veneto, the extension into Romagna, full of problems and possibilities for the specific Salesian commitment to education. There was also the entry to the Iberian Peninsula which soon became a twin Salesian area to Italy for the number and quality of the works, a parallel flourishing of Salesian vocations, and a readiness to spread out through the metropolitan area and the foreign missions.

1.1 Italy: Florence, Faenza, Mogliano Veneto

Don Bosco's connections with Florence in the 1860s and 70s had been intense, given the extraordinary acceptance he constantly found in the Florentine ecclesiastical world from Archbishops Gioacchino Limberti and Eugenio Cecconi (1857–74, 1874–88 respectively) and among many lay Catholics and benefactors. Yet he had little or no contact with local municipal or provincial administrations or with charitable bodies or educational institutes there.

Don Bosco only established a work of his own in Italy's second capital in March 1881, despite there being occasional requests since 1867, set in motion especially by the threat of Protestant proselytism.² There appeared to be a glimmer of an initiative in 1877, but only in May 1880 did a Committee lease then make a modest building in Via Cimabue available for the Salesians, but for Don Bosco, this offer seemed to have had too fragile a basis. He made a move only when the Archbishop made a heartfelt appeal. 'Given your Grace's moving letter,' he replied on 25 January 1881 'I am ready even to do the impossible as the Piedmontese say.' Now that he was dealing directly with the Archbishop he would do everything asked of him. He gave the Rector of the work at Lucca, Fr Giovanni Marengo, the mandate to go to Florence 'to arrange matters such that future Salesians' might find what they need, 'to cook the macaroni' – 'a priest, cleric, coadjutor' – to begin the work 'within a few weeks' to be restricted 'for some time, to just a festive oratory and recreational park.'³

Fr Faustino Confortola arrived on 4 March 1881 from Cremona, with a cleric and coadjutor and immediately opened the oratory. In a letter to Fr Cagliari who was in Utrera, Don Bosco wrote from Alassio: 'The house in Florence was established on 4 March last and Fr Confortola is *working wonders*.'⁴ The chapel was blessed on 19 March. It was created from two ground floor rooms and adorned with a large oil painting donated by a woman who wanted to remain unnamed. The oratory went from 20 to 200 boys in just a few weeks. On the afternoon of 15 May, Don Bosco held the first Salesian conference in Florence on his way back from Rome. He wrote in the invitation circular that it was especially important 'more so because we are not talking about works, which have nothing to do with this city but about founding a stable Institute for poor orphans,'⁵ It was held in the Philipian Fathers Church. Don Bosco spoke for more than an hour, thanking people and asking, with his usual insistence on the Gospel's '*Quod superset date eleemosynam*.'⁶ He had

2 Cf., for what would be said, A. MISCIO, *Firenze e don Bosco 1848-1888*. Florence, Libreria Editrice Salesiana 1991.

3 To Bishop E. Cecconi, 25 January 1881, E IV 6.

4 Letter of 6 April 1881, E IV 41.

5 Circular May 1881, E IV 54; cf. letter F. Confortola 10 May, E IV 53.

6 Cf. report by Fr F. Confortola on the promising beginnings of the work, helped by the "most loving and encouraging" welcome by the Florentines, and on the conference of 15 May, in BS 5 (1881) no. 7, July, pp. 7-9.

support from 'Mama' Uguccioni,⁷ but also sought to broaden the circle of charity through a circular in which he denounced the 'huge damage' caused by Protestants and asked for the 'zeal and charity' of the Florentines for 'a work aimed at the good of religion and public and private morality.'⁸

When the one year lease elapsed, a larger building was found in Via Fra Giovanni Angelico in an area with much more potential for Salesian activity. Some re-adaptation work soon saw a hospice develop to which the Archbishop entrusted a number of boys he had personally selected, guaranteeing payment of their boarding fee. The oratory restarted its activities at the new site on 2 November, and the hospice opened on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, from whom the house took its name.

Don Bosco returned to Florence on 9 April 1882, Easter Sunday. The following day he gave a conference to Cooperators, speaking about the new oratory and hospice already in place and classes for day students still being planned.⁹ Fr Confortola fell seriously ill in August: he was assisted by Fr Bruno who had come from the misfortune at Cremona. Don Bosco told him: 'I will see that you have the people you need but nurture the festive oratory or see that this is done. It is so much needed in that city.'¹⁰

Fr Confortola publicised the work as a whole in preparation for the 1884–85 school year, providing information on the different kinds of activities: the oratory and Sunday school for day boys, a hospice for young orphans and abandoned boys, where they were instructed in arts and trades, and again, for residents, four elementary classes in preparation for secondary education.¹¹ At the beginning of the next school year, Fr Stefano Febraro from Castelnuovo was appointed as Rector. In the same city, fifteen years later, he would suffer a serious personal and vocational crisis. A few days after he became Rector, Don Bosco wrote to him: 'It was with real pleasure that I read your letter. It gave me much consolation to know you are happy with your position in Florence. I will always be happy when you are at peace and can help me save souls other than your own.'¹²

During his rectorship there was a notable conference for Florentine Cooperators on 6 March 1886 from the Auxiliary Bishop Donato Velluti Zati di San Clemente (1845–1927), a renowned orator who used the occasion to offer praise of Don Bosco – a prelude to the eulogy he gave after 31 January 1888. 'This name' he said with deep respect 'by now known throughout Europe and America, rings so dearly on my lips, and struck with admiration for what he has been able to achieve under the banner of charity, I can only exclaim: oh charity, how powerful you are! You transform the humble and the little ones into apostles and heroes before the world; you know how to enliven everyone with your flame; you can do everything.'¹³

No less significant and productive, but much more opposed by certain secular and anticlerical forces, was the arrival of the Salesians at *Faenza* in the Romagna, with a work humble in origins but with a solid and busy future. Unfortunately it closed in 2000. The initial site was a former convent situated in a suburb known as Urbecco and the first work was an inter-parish oratory with night classes. The extraordinary figure of Cooperator Fr Paolo Taroni had supported and prepared for the arrival of the Salesians. He was the Spiritual Director of the diocesan seminary and was helped by a no less zealous priest, a correspondent of Don Bosco's, Canon Giuseppe Cavina.

7 Cf. letter of 6 October 1881, E IV 84; 27 January 1883, E IV 200; 28 November 1884, E IV 304-305.

8 Circ. October 1881, E IV 84-85.

9 Information on the visit and Don Bosco's conference are provided in a letter by Fr Confortola of 3 May 1882, published in the BS 6 (1882) no. 7, July, pp. 119-121, *Notizie sull'Oratorio di Maria Immacolata e conferenza dei Cooperatori in Firenze*.

10 To Fr F. Confortola, 28 August 1882, E IV 165.

11 *Istituto Salesiano dell'Immacolata in Firenze*, BS 8 (1884) no. 9, September, pp. 134-135.

12 To Fr S. Febraro, 30 October 1885, E IV 344.

13 BS 11 (1887) no. 6, June, p. 71: letter of Fr S. Febraro and much of the text of the address by Bishop D. Velluti Zati, pp. 69-72, *Conferenza salesiana in Firenze*

They established the basis for an agreement in June 1880. Difficulties in renovating the building and getting authorisation to occupy it posed by the State Property Authority and the Province meant some months went by. The first Salesians arrived in November 1881, accompanied by Fr Cagliero. The Rector was Fr Giovanni Battista Rinaldi, with a cleric from Faenza, Enrico Foschini, and a coadjutor, Paolo Bassignano, the popular 'Paolino.' On 20 November, Fr Cagliero presided at the solemn opening of the oratory.¹⁴ To increase activities, a commission was established in 1882 made up of Cooperators, all of them clergy including Bishop Giovanni Strocchi, Bishop of Cesena. The Provicar General, Achille Emiliani, presided and invited each member to subscribe with shares of L. 25 each for three years to help with a larger work aimed at the education of the young in a century when people were divided 'into a hundred parties more or less adverse not only to religion but even to civilisation and order.'¹⁵

The Bishop of Faenza, Angelo Pianori, a member of the Observant Friars Minor, wrote a letter on 6 March 1882 recalling the encyclical of 15 February, which urged 'protecting and honouring the *Society of Youth*' and supported the planned subscription.¹⁶ Don Bosco visited Faenza on 13 May 1882 and gave a conference on the Sunday afternoon in one of the public churches. While on the scene he became aware that it would be necessary, for the work to develop, for it to be relocated in a more spacious area at the centre of the city. On 1 January 1883 he drew up an agreement with the ecclesiastical commission in which he hoped that the typical oratory workshops would be flanked by a hospice with arts and trades workshops.¹⁷ There was a virulent reaction from political forces and 'democratic' newspapers.¹⁸ Don Bosco wrote to Canon Giuseppe Cavina, once again manifesting his indomitable willingness to overcome difficult situations for the cause of God and souls: 'Sadly I have understood the matters which make it difficult to establish a work aimed at the good of the poor and at-risk youth. Should we abandon the field and leave it in the enemy's hands? Never. In the face of huge difficulties we need to redouble our efforts and sacrifices. We will gladly give all that we have got, but it is also essential for you and your friends to give a real hand in opening a hospice for poor boys. Study how and let's see that it happens. Fr Rinaldi will better explain my thinking.'¹⁹

The oratory was located nearer the city centre, with night classes and varied activities including elementary classes. During 1885, a church and small theatre were built following approval by the Superior Chapter on 29 May 1885, while according to Don Bosco's claim 'some workshops need to begin, but little by little.'²⁰

Opposition translated into violence and threats and the city's republican administration was ambiguous in its position. In April 1884, it had supported the establishment of a *secular recreation area* clearly in opposition to the Catholic oratory.²¹ Don Bosco explained the work's development and held to his original thinking at a session of the Superior Chapter on 14 December 1885. This was that Faenza should follow the same path as the Valdocco Oratory in the 1840s through to the 1860s: first the oratory and night classes, then a boarding school and hostel for secondary and trade or vocational students.²²

14 Regarding establishment of the Salesians in Faenza Fr P. Taroni wrote in a letter of 23 November 1881, published in the BS 6 (1882) no. 1, January, pp. 8-9, *Una casa salesiana nella città di Faenza*.

15 *Documenti* XXIV 98-100.

16 *Documenti* XXIV 101.

17 MB XV 758.

18 Cf. materials in *Documenti* XXV 332-337.

19 Letter of 17 September 1883, E IV 234.

20 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 57r-v, ASC D 868.

21 *Documenti* XXVII 119-121.

22 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 90R.

On the occasion of the first Salesian Conference held on 2 June 1887, Catholics in Faenza were able, via the more outstanding clergy, to express their thoughts on Don Bosco and the Salesian work in their city. The Rector sent a report on this to the *Salesian Bulletin*. The occasion was a celebration of victory of Catholic efforts over opposition and sectarian aggression. Since for health reasons Don Bosco was unable to be there, he sent Fr Francesia, his trusted pupil from the early days, to represent him.

Diocesan Bishop Gioacchino Cantagali presided at the conference. The official address was given by Fr Filippo Lanzoni a close friend of the Salesians. The Vicar general, Mons. Francesco Baldassari also spoke, and the Bishop put his seal on things with an erudite sermon of his own, followed by the singing of the *Te Deum*. Contributions were very much of an antisocialist nature: work lay at the heart of Salesian education, in an ordered and stable society where Christian uprightness was practised and people were content with their state in life, free from the destructive and foolish aspirations of revolutionaries. The Salesian Work, then, was 'of benefit not only to the young but to the whole of society' Fr Lanzoni proclaimed. The Vicar General insisted: 'Young people raised with religious principles by the sons of Don Bosco say 'Blessed is the time spent working!' In fact 'when the young worker knows and puts these principles into practice, he learns to love work, is happy with his state in life and does not envy people who are said to be rich, and is not convinced that revolution brings wealth to anyone, only discord, hatred, and ruin.' In his affectionate concluding talk the bishop, himself from Faenza, manifested his consolation at seeing how, as always happened throughout history, Providence had sent 'the man for his times', Don Bosco, to society which included youngsters reduced to an unhappy state. 'This man' he explained 'with his Houses and Oratories, enriches the souls of the young with study, kindness, love and thus raises them in true wisdom. Nor is manual work overlooked. In this House you see the blacksmith and ironmonger, the carpenter and tailor. He takes the heart of the worker, who loves his work, as he takes the heart of the student who loves study. The worker educated by Don Bosco, an affectionate son of the Church, sees the rich person but is not jealous, sees work and feels consoled, sees misfortunes and feels resigned.'²³ This was the interpretation given the 'good Christian and upright citizen' which a large swathe of Catholics who were moderately 'social' but substantially conservative gave. It was not the first nor would it be the last such interpretation.

The origin and events of Salesian work at *Mogliano Veneto* were much more peaceful. This was a town in the province and diocese of Treviso, 13 kilometres from that city and 19 from Venice. In a letter from Rome on 16 March 1880 to Fr Durando, who was asked to examine proposals for a foundation there, Don Bosco wrote: 'I replied immediately to Mrs Astori that Fr Sala would go. I enclose the letter that will be a guide for him.'²⁴ Two eminent personalities in the Work of the Congresses had been encouraging the foundation since the previous year. They were lawyer Giambattista Paganuzzi (1841–1923) and engineer Pietro Saccardo (1830–1803). It was made possible by an elderly benefactor from Venice, Elisabetta Bellavite, the widow, since 1876, of the generous Vincenzo Omobono Astori. He had wanted to make land available and 150,000 lire [492,382 euro] to construct the required buildings for an agricultural school.²⁵

With a view to involving Don Bosco, she had gone to Turin for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians in 1879. On 20 September 1880, the Superior Chapter meeting at Sampierdarena accepted the proposal. Mrs Astori confirmed the donation by letter on 19 October. Fr Sala left to put his signature to the agreement and set work in motion. Work began in spring 1881, and was rapidly and masterfully completed by capable and honest workers under the supervision of Pietro

23 *La prima Conferenza dei Cooperatori e Cooperatrici a Faenza*, BS 11 (1887) no. 8, August, pp. 90-92.

24 EIII 551.

25 Cf. re the whole affair see G. POLO, *Don Mosè Veronesi e la fondazione dell'Astori a Mogliano Veneto (Treviso)*, in F. MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale*, Vol. II. Rome, LAS 2001, pp. 51-63.

Saccardo who kept in constant touch with Fr Rua.²⁶ The consent of the diocese was signed on 24 March 1880 by the Capitular Vicar, Canon Giuseppe Sarto, the future Pope Pius X, who had known Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1875, a few weeks from his appointment as Chancellor of the Curia at Treviso. 'I grant the widest faculty and permission for the aforesaid foundation and lend my fullest assent' he wrote, foreshadowing more ample development than that of a modest agricultural school.²⁷

Don Bosco sent a warm message from Alassio on 26 September 1882 to *My very dear Fr Apollonio and Reverend Excellency*. This was the newly appointed Bishop of Treviso, Giuseppe Appolonio. Don Bosco had been his guest in Venice on his first trip to Veneto in 1865.²⁸ But it seems that God really wants us in your hand' he began informing him: 'We have just founded a house in Mogliano and you have just been made bishop of that diocese. I will celebrate Mass with all my heart and will say a Hail Mary according to your pious intentions. I also have a special intention that God will keep you in good health *ad multos annos*.' He then apologised: 'I write badly. I am 67 years old and I still don't know how to write. Will I learn better in the future?'²⁹ The house was opened on 18 November 1882 with Fr Mosè Veronesi as Rector, accompanied by another priest and two coadjutors.³⁰ However, from 1883–84 the agricultural school was also accepting young academic students and the following year had fully established both elementary and secondary classes.

1.2 Spreading to Spain – Utrera in 1881

The entry to Spain was aided by the revered and very Catholic Marquis Don Diego Ulloa, who wanted to open a hospice for needy boys at Utrera, 30 kilometres from the archiepiscopal see of Seville. In 1879, the Archbishop, Gioachino Lluich y Garriga, turned to Don Bosco. He was given some broad hope by way of reply. Fr Cagliero, along with Brother Giuseppe Rossi, were sent to explore the situation in January 1880. Fr Cagliero would become the principal actor in bringing the enterprise to completion, naturally with the guidance of Don Bosco and Fr Rua. He was immediately offered Our Lady of Carmel church and an attached building. Informed of the negotiations underway, Don Bosco wrote a very cordial letter from Nice to Marquis Ulloa, adding a postscript: 'I confirm what my envoy *Dottor Cagliero* has concluded for the house to be opened in the city of Utrera, and I hope that with the Lord's help, everything will be ready for next October and that my and your Salesian sons will be able to depart at that point for the workplace which Divine Providence has prepared by your hand.'³¹

The Salesians arrived in Utrera some months after the proposed date. Writing to Fr Lasagna, Don Bosco announced: Fr Cagliero, our perpetual courier, is going to Spain, then Lisbon and Oporto and will return to Turin when he can.³² Fr Cagliero had accompanied Fr Giovanni Branda, the Rector, to Spain with two priests, a cleric and two coadjutors, opening the house on 16 February. In a letter to Fr Cagliero, still at Utrera, Don Bosco wrote: 'Greet Fr Branda, Fr Pane, Fr Oberti (in 1884 the latter replaced Fr Branda who was sent to start the work at Sarriá in

26 Cf. *Astori 1882-1982*. Mogliano Veneto, Collegio Astori 1983, pp. 15-17.

27 Cf. G. POLO, *Don Mosè Veronesi e la fondazione dell'Astori...*, in F. MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922...*, Vol. II p. 59; complete text of Bishop Sarto in MB XIV 819.

28 Cf. Chap. 14, § 7.

29 E IV 175.

30 The *Bollettino Salesiano* December informed Cooperators of this: BS 5 (1882) no. 12, December, pp. 201-202, *Colonia agricola in Mogliano Veneto* (letter of Economist General, Fr A. Sala, 19 November 1882).

31 Letter of 26 February 1880, E III 547.

32 Letter of 31 January 1881, E IV 15. Fr Cagliero returned to Turin after the trip in early May.

Barcelona), the music teacher and kitchen master Goitre ... Pay our respects to Marquis Ulloa and family, and also to the Archbishop whom we await in Turin.³³ At the end of June, Don Bosco wrote a letter of thanks to the Archbishop in proficient Latin, asking him: '*Tamquam pater nobis semper dicito.*'³⁴

The work was reinforced the following school year with a church, oratory, classes for poor day students, as we can gather from the following letter to the Provincial in France, Fr Paul Albera: 'You will have received guidelines from Fr Cagliariero on how to arrange for four or six Salesians travelling to Spain.'³⁵ On the feast of St Francis de Sales in 1884, the new Archbishop Cefirino González, wanted to take part in the celebration and was solemnly welcomed at the Vigil. He gave Benediction in the evening and assisted at Solemn Pontifical Mass on the Feast day. In the afternoon he presided at a conference for Cooperators. The Auxiliary Bishop, Marcelo Spinola, took part in the evening ceremony where there was a large crowd, and spoke at it. The following morning he celebrated Mass in suffrage for the souls of deceased Cooperators, leaving a generous donation.³⁶ On the Feast of St Francis de Sales the following year, Bishop Spinola, 'zealous pastor and outstanding Cooperator,' played the leading role as the recently appointed Bishop of Coria. The new Rector, Fr Oberti, wrote that, 'It is impossible to return the love he shows for us, the warmth with which he treats us and the familiarity with which he wished to be treated,' showing himself to be 'father, friend, counsellor and our help from every perspective.' After the meal prepared by the Cooperators he also gave the Conference prescribed by the Regulations.³⁷

2. Construction of the Sacred Heart Church and attached hospice in Rome

Don Bosco's more than seven year involvement in building the church and attached hospice in Rome – or was it, for him, a hospice with an attached church? – is an ideal observatory from which we can once more glimpse the true significance aimed principally at the young. This appears in a clearer light within the framework of the relevant social and economic transformations the Capital was experiencing in the 1870s and 1880s: strong immigration, tumultuous growth, a building explosion and rapid crises in 1886–87. Such phenomena had a particular impact on the area around Termini station next to which a church was about to arise and a parish grow.³⁸

The adventure began on 24 March 1880, when the Cardinal Vicar, Raffaele Monaco La Valletta (1827–96) spoke to Don Bosco about the impasse the building, so much desired by Leo XIII, had reached. Four days later he spoke of it again in more demanding terms. During his brief sojourn in Naples on the two days following, 29 and 30 March, Don Bosco met Ludovico da Casoria,³⁹ who was putting up a church in Via Milazzo and had built a temporary chapel then followed by a school and, thanks to a new opening in Rome in June 1882, had also obtained permission for his own institutions.⁴⁰ Finally on 5 April 1880, Leo XIII personally invested Don Bosco with the onerous task.

33 Letter from Alassio, 6 April 1881, E IV 41.

34 To Bishop G. Lluch y Garriga, 30 June 1881, E IV 65.

35 Letter of 26 November 1882, E IV 185.

36 BS 8 (1884) no. 3, March, pp. 40-41, *Festa e Conferenza in Utrera (Spagna)* (letter of the Rector, Fr G. Branda 31 January 1884).

37 BS 9 (1885) no. 5, May, pp. 73-74, *Conferenza in Utrera* (letter of the Rector Fr E. Oberti 1 April 1885).

38 Cf. C. CONIGLIONE, *Presenza salesiana nel quartiere romano di Castro Pretorio (1880-1915)*, RSS 3 (1984) 3-91 (bibliography, pp. 90-91); G. ROSSI, *L'istruzione professionale in Roma capitale. Le scuole professionali dei salesiani al Castro Pretorio (1883-1930)*, in F. MOTTO (Ed.), *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia...*, pp. 63-135.

39 Cf. Chap. 29, § 1.1.

40 Cf. LUDOVICO DA CASORIA, *Epistolario*, Vol. I *Introduzione, raccoglitori*. Vol. II. *Lettere sciolte, scritti, Notizie delle pie Opere della Palma, necrologio delle Elisabettine*. Naples, Provincial Curia of the Friars Minor 1989, Vol. I, pp. 334 e 549; vol. II, p. 846.

Don Bosco made the first public announcement of it in January 1881 when he began urging the involvement of public charity. His role came to an end on 7 November 1887, when he wrote the final letter to the Pope's private secretary, begging him to offer a substantial grant to wipe out the debt contracted for the church's facade.

This final reckless adventure reveals in privileged form the extent of his faith and courage: over these years 'the stones would cry out' (Lk 19: 39–40) with sounds that were pretty much universal. His acceptance of this weighty commitment in all probability stemmed from the fifteen-year-long desire and failed attempts to establish himself in the Capital of the Catholic world, after Vigna Pia (1867), S. Caio, S. Giovanni della Pigna, S. Sudario, the S. Michele a Ripa hospice (all during the 1870s), to give the Congregation a world face and at the same time give it new dignity and prestige.

When Don Bosco took on the responsibility conferred on him by the Pope, the church's construction, already begun under Pius IX and continued under Leo XIII, had already reached ground floor level and the threat of being blocked for lack of funds.⁴¹ Nevertheless, already on 2 February 1879, the parish had been canonically erected, and on 28 March 1880, civil recognition granted. On the evening of 10 April, Don Bosco presented Cardinal Monaco La Valletta with a provisional note which was the first basis for an agreement between the Vicariate and the Salesian Society.⁴² Having been asked to build a church, he immediately associated the construction of a hospice and oratory with it, analogous to what he had attempted in Turin with the Church of S. Secondo. Nor does it seem mere chance that on 13 April he followed up with a petition to Leo XIII to erect an Apostolic Vicariate or Prefecture in Patagonia.⁴³

Once he had the plans for the church in hand, Don Bosco wrote to Fr Dalmazzo, giving him 'every power to modify and conclude matters in the sense and according to the limits his Eminence judges best.' But he added two important notes: one concerned the size of the church, which was to go from 400 to 900 metres, and the other was a note on the discount for loans from the *Banca Tiberina* from which he intended to purchase adjacent land, 5,500 square metres on the south-east side, so he could extend the church and build the planned hospice next to it.⁴⁴ In the area purchased, at the corner of Via Porta di S. Lorenzo (today's Via Marsala) and Via Marghera, there was a small two-storey building which became the first residence for Salesians in Rome during construction works.

Two days later, Don Bosco wrote to his Procurator, Fr Dalmazzo: "As soon as the deed is completed for transferring the *Sacro Cuore* Church to us, tell me immediately. Everything read at the Chapter was approved."⁴⁵ The formula Don Bosco proposed for ownership of just the church and the parish house was agreed upon: 'The church and parish house on the property belong to the Ordinary of Rome in perpetuity, but the usufruct of such well belong in perpetuity to the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.'⁴⁶

Payment fell due in November 1880, for some 40,000 lire [127,986 euro] borrowed from the *Banca Tiberina* for the land, house and building materials. On the other hand, since the contract had not yet been signed, Don Bosco did not intend making public appeals for charity. So he mobilised Fr Dalmazzo to look for money: 'Because of the financial crisis, everyone is crying out and closing their purses. Is there someone in Rome we can depend on? Think near and far then let me know. It is urgent to find money for S. Cuore but until matters have been finally resolved it

41 *Documenti* XXII 87-88, 90-92, 99.

42 E III 564-566.

43 Cf. E III 567-575; cf. further ahead, § 4.1.

44 Letter of 7 July 1880, E III 601-602.

45 Letter of 9 July 1880, E IV 602.

46 Cf. letter F. Dalmazzo, 14 and 15 July 1880, E III 606-607, 607-608.

seems we cannot go public. We are also out of money. So bring this to a conclusion.⁴⁷ This was the beginning of the 'building craze' which lasted till 1887. Cash was scarce and people went ahead with stacks of bills.⁴⁸ In a following letter, Don Bosco suggested delaying or paying the debt with the *Banca Tiberina* in instalments, while pointing to difficulties with the signing of the agreement among which a dispute over the length of time building works would take, and the appointment of the parish priest for life.⁴⁹ In order to complete the construction of the church it was broadly agreed that six years were needed, though this could be extended, and that the presentation and appointment of the parish priest would be in accordance with the usual canons. The agreement was signed by Don Bosco on 11 December 1880, and after approval by the Pope and Cardinal Vicar on the 18th it was finally recorded by the Chancellor of the Vicariate on the 29th.⁵⁰

The way forward was now open, and now that he had a free hand to give construction a greater push, in January a circular in a number of languages was distribute in many directions.⁵¹ It was integrated with other special circulars to archbishops and bishops in Italy and, in Latin, those outside Italy. He did similarly, using Latin, Italian or another modern language for Italian and foreign Catholic journalists.⁵² He also brought 'Collectors' together and gave them rules for their work.⁵³

The first circulars touched on all the motives that characterised his tireless propaganda and search for aid in so many different settings. The very nature of the sacred building demanded it. The architectural plan, probably by renowned architect Virginio Vespignani (1808–82), official representative of Roman architectural culture in the final years of [papal] temporal power, was overladen with decorative elements by his son Francesco (1848–99), an emerging engineering personality in the Catholic movement in Rome, who carried out the plan.⁵⁴ Don Bosco provided ideas suited to touching the minds and hearts of 'Christians all over the world.' The church and attached works were 'proposed by the enlightened mind of Leo XIII,' the church had to serve not only for pastoral assistance to a rapidly expanding suburb but also as a 'monument to the immortal Pius IX.' He also described the state of construction works (figures reflecting peak numbers of employees) with 'around 160 workers including stone masons, brick layers, machine operators.' Naturally he indicated the two basic ways to help: 1. Financial aid and building materials. 2. Prayer and encouraging 'well-off individuals to become benefactors.' He also addressed Cooperators, spoke of duly authorised and stringently identifiable collectors, inviting archbishops, bishops and rectors of churches to become such. He ended by listing the spiritual benefits now and in the future for donors and collectors.⁵⁵

In real terms the building was exceptionally expensive, more than 5 million euro. No doubt a number of management anomalies played their part in this, leading Don Bosco to complain about harmful delays, undue interference, and doubts about the contractor's honesty. He eventually replaced him. Executive responsibility and financial burden all fell on Don Bosco's shoulders. As a consequence, there was no lack of strong involvement on Don Bosco's part, tireless effort begging for the Sacred Heart Church in France and Spain as well as in Italy, while he wanted his Vicar, Fr

47 Letter of 24 November 1880, E III 635.

48 Cf. I. INSOLERA, *Roma moderna. Un secolo di storia urbanistica 1870-1970*. Turin, Einaudi 2001, pp. 52-60.

49 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 9 December 1880, E III 639; to the Card. Vicar, 11 December 1880, E III 640-641.

50 See text in MB XIV 807-810; cf. C. CONIGLIONE, *Presenza salesiana nel quartiere romano di Castro Pretorio...*, RSS 3 (1984) 31-32.

51 Text in E IV 18-20.

52 Texts in E IV 20-22.

53 Text in E IV 22-24.

54 Cf. G. SPAGNESI, *L'architettura a Roma al tempo di Pio IX (1830-1870)*. Rome, Edizioni Studium 2000, pp. 122-123.

55 Circ. from Turin, January 1881, E IV 18-20.

Rua, with him to share perspectives and decisions when concluding agreements.⁵⁶ Obviously he did not leave Fr Dalmazzo in peace. The latter was not accustomed to begging. 'Prepare the ground,' he asked him 'for the possibility of getting aid from Rome City Council for the Sacred Heart Church and Institute as well as from the Ministry for Finance, our parishioners [the Finance building which Quintino Sella had built within parish boundaries], the Ministry for the Interior, Grace and Justice, and Economy.'⁵⁷ He also mentioned Canon Colomiatti and Fr Bonetti's suspension in the letter. He would speak about it in Rome where he was heading to directly from France. He had been in France over February and March collecting money for S. Cuore.

During the journey, Don Bosco had come into contact in Toulon with lawyer Fleury Antoine Colle and his wife. Their sixteen-year-old son Luigi died on 3 April. On 16 June 1881, Don Bosco petitioned Pope Leo XIII to appoint this French lawyer as a Roman Count, listing his various charitable efforts, among which an early donation of 40,000 franc [136,837 euro], for the Sacred Heart Church and hospice.⁵⁸ He also sent a letter to the Cardinal Vicar to support the request or see that it was supported. He noted in the same letter: 'I am working ceaselessly to find money. God is on our side and is finding some, but Fr Dalmazzo is spending it all for me and never says enough.'⁵⁹ Procedure's for Colle's title as Count had a rough passage, with various things going wrong. The Brief conferring the title arrived, following an earlier one with incorrect wording, on 19 July, 1882. The Count ended up being the best of the benefactors for the Sacred heart Church and hospice as well as for other Salesian works, and was absolutely the most generous of all Don Bosco's benefactors: 'There is only one Count Colle in all of France and Italy' he wrote to him on 29 December 1884.⁶⁰ A huge contribution also came from Don Bosco's triumphant journey through France, especially to Paris, in 1883 (18 April–26 May).⁶¹

Don Bosco arrived in Rome from France on 20 April 1881 and on the afternoon of the 23rd was already at an audience with the Holy Father. He referred to it the same day in a letter to the Cooperators: the Pope was keenly interested in the undertaking and had offered 5,000 lire [17,104 euro], an example and encouragement for Cooperators and benefactors.⁶² On 1 May, again from Rome, he asked the Cardinal Vicar to allow a Cooperator Conference and on 9 May invited him to come. He also told him: "I am already in the new house on the Esquiline. Construction work is going ahead quickly. How is the money going? Up till now we have been able to push ahead; for the future we hope in the Lord's kindness."⁶³ The Conference took place at the Oblate Sister's place in Tor de' Specchi on 12 May. Don Bosco spoke, mentioning Salesian works and highlighting the construction of the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice, beginning with initial efforts under Fr Maresca up until he took on the responsibility himself. Cardinal Alimonda gave the Conference.⁶⁴

The enterprise was on track in the early stages, throughout 1881. Donations also flowed in sufficient amounts to meet the financial commitments. 'We have already brought around ten thousand lire to the Savings Bank. Do not lose sight of the request to the Rome City Council' he reminded Fr Dalmazzo, probably for authorisation of the lottery he had in mind, since he was already talking about the printed forms to be sent out to collectors.⁶⁵ Work proceeded quickly and

56 Letter Fr M. Rua, 4 April 1881, E IV 36, no. 7; to Fr F. Dalmazzo, April 1881, E IV 41; to Fr G. Berto, 6 April 1881, E IV 42.

57 Letter from Alassio April 1881, E IV 41.

58 E IV 60-61.

59 Letter of 14 September 1881, E IV 81.

60 E IV 510.

61 Cf. Chap. 31, § 1.

62 Circ. 23 April 1881, E IV 45-47.

63 E IV 50.

64 BS 5 (1881) no. 6, June, pp. 5-7: the text was taken from a news item on the event which appeared on 13 May in the Roman *L'Aurora*, no. 109 entitled *A Tor de' Specchi*.

65 Letter of 31 May 1881, E IV 56-57.

while keeping an eye on it and encouraging everyone involved he was travelling, speaking, writing to provide money to support it. From Turin on 15 July he was able to tell Fr Dalmazzo: 'All is going well. May God be blessed in everything we do. I am not wasting a moment, but work is being blessed by God, so courage.' He also spoke of a 'series of undertakings' in progress, meaning initiatives for finding money. 'We are also working at sending you priests and cash.'⁶⁶ He even sent a letter of request to Princess Clotilde of Savoy, 'the saint of Moncalieri', wife of Prince Girolamo Bonaparte.⁶⁷ He mobilised Salesians and boys at the colleges,⁶⁸ sent Frs Pozzan and Febraro out begging, preceded by a circular of presentation:⁶⁹ they spent a month in Trentino asking for donations,⁷⁰ then over the final months of 1881 and the first few months of 1882 they went through the dioceses of Belluno and Feltre, Ceneda (Vitorio Veneto today) and Udine.

On 10 July 1881, the Cardinal Vicar blessed a temporary chapel for the parish built next to the new church. The decree appointing Fr Francis Dalmazzo as parish priest was issued on the 12th. Don Bosco went to the Pope and Cardinal Vicar regarding the stipend.⁷¹ The Vicar saw to things by providing 2,100 lire [7,184 euro] a year.

Midway through September 1881, Don Bosco wrote to Fr Dalmazzo about reprinting forms for several languages for collectors, also giving him encouraging news on donations coming in, including for the huge pillars, each costing 2,500 lire [8,552 euro].⁷² At the beginning of 1882 the *Salesian Bulletin* published an encouraging summary report on the state of building works at the end of 1881, written by Fr Angelo Savio, former Economist General of the Salesian Society and now delegated by Don Bosco to follow up the building.⁷³

But in 1882 there were more pronounced disagreements with the earlier commission headed by Marquis Mereghi, aggravated by the interference, irregularities, disparity of views on interpreting and executing contracts and plans and related compensation, especially as claimed by contractor Gaetano Andolfi. Work was suspended for nearly a year.⁷⁴ Mediation by engineer and architect G. Squarcina was useful. He was a member of Parliament⁷⁵ and felt that a good basis for resolving matters was the letter in which Don Bosco had sought to clarify and reformulate the mutual roles shared with the architect, Count Francesco Vespignani: '1. Fix up past issues so as not to have to keep going over and discussing them. 2. Establish principles and a clear basis and thus present plans and a clear contract with related costs for each master tradesman' and 'resume work on the church immediately.'⁷⁶ At the same time, through Fr Dalmazzo, he requested papal recognition for some benefactors, also asking: 'And Mr Vespignani?'⁷⁷ There was a hint of irony in the dealings with Curial officials: 'We need a pinch of *Sun* (refined snuff) from Spain to hurry up the completion of Briefs (taking an exorbitant amount of time) for our decorations.'⁷⁸

66 E IV 69.

67 Letter of 24 July 1881, E IV 70-71.

68 Offerings also came from colleges in America, e.g. from San Nicolás de los Arroyos, cf. BS 5 (1881) no. 12, December, pp. 8-9.

69 Circ. 10 August 1881, E IV 74-75.

70 To the Bishop of Trent, 15 August 1881, E IV 76-77; *L'ospizio e la chiesa del Sacro Cuore in Roma e la diocesi di Trento*, BS 5 (1881) no. 11 and 12, November and December, pp. 4-6 and 10-12; 6 (1882) no. 3, March, pp. 48-50.

71 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 18 October 1880, E III 630.

72 E IV 80-81.

73 BS 6 (1882) no. 3, March, pp. 43-45.

74 Cf. C. CONIGLIONE, *Presenza salesiana nel quartiere romano di Castro Pretorio...*, RSS 3 (1984) 34-36.

75 *Documenti* XXIV 169-170.

76 Letter of 9 May 1882, E IV 134-135.

77 Letter to Fr F. Dalmazzo, 11 May 1882, E IV 135.

78 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 19 June 1882, E IV 144.

Just a few days after the 'Concordia' had been passed on, Don Bosco was especially vigorous in claiming exclusive responsibility for the Congregation in managing construction and the related financial burdens. He wrote resolutely to the procurator and parish priest: 'Are works still suspended? I see it as essential that the Cardinal Vicar is no longer breaking his head over material things and that he leaves it to the parish priest to pay and deal with matters.'⁷⁹ He was no less clear and direct with His Eminence Benedictine Cardinal Raffaele Monaco La Valletta: 'Fr Savio is sending me a copy of disputes on construction of *Sacro Cuore*, the Sacred Heart Church. I see they want to complicate things and not recognise any authority, not even Fr Dalmazzo's as parish priest.' He was quite frank about it. 'To get things on the move I believe it essential that Your Eminence keep out of these disputes and pass on any arguments to the parish priest who has to find the money and pay. I wanted to try an adjustment. I have written twice to Count Vespignani but he has not come back to me with a reply which I was waiting for in Rome. I want work to continue and am making incredible efforts to find money. But if things go like this when will we see the church finished?'⁸⁰ He informed Fr Savio of the letter to the Vicar, stressing the inconvenience of having to feel like a 'foreigner' in a world that had been asked for such a huge effort but did not seem supportive of or particularly warm towards what he was tackling through superhuman sacrifices: 'I have written a letter to the Cardinal Vicar in which I have asked him to leave any disputes to the parish priest and yourself, and that until such time as they recognise us as the owners they will just cause problems for him and we will achieve nothing.' 'Time and money are being wasted and we are encountering upsets. We are foreigners, therefore ... He added a postscript: 'You can consult some lawyers.'⁸¹

In July he came back to Fr Dalmazzo with a string of questions: 'We have no news. Tell me, then, or get someone to tell me, how are things going with *S. Cuore*? Have works resumed or can they resume? Can I do something from here? Is there still some money? Are letters *chargées ou recommandées* continuing?' 'Greet Fr Savio and tell him no fooling around and bring the church to conclusion despite all the claw marks from Satan.'⁸² There was a touch of sarcasm: 'Instead of blaming what we are building in Rome I want certain gentlemen to give us some money.'⁸³ '*Alii alia dicant* about our things in Rome. I take no notice because we are sure about what we have done. Just the same, if you can tell me in confidence about our relations with the Holy Father, the Cardinal Vicar, the Church of the Sacred Heart etc., you will be doing something of great use to me.' He ended by suggesting a style of approach that he certainly wanted to be his own: 'Dear Fr Dalmazzo, work, but always with the gentleness of St Francis de Sales and the patience of Job.'⁸⁴ He wrote again to the Procurator in December: 'Is there not some way of putting an end to the dispute with the contractor? Between you and Fr Savio *in camera caritatis* perhaps you can do something?'⁸⁵ For Christmas, he wished Fr Dalmazzo and the Salesians in the community 'every spiritual and temporal happiness' and recommended 'exact observance of *Poverty, Chastity, Obedience*' and, mixing the sacred with the profane, went on to write: 'It will be a wonderful day for us when we have charity reigning supreme among you, when matters are settled with the contractor and we can resume our work on the *S. Cuore* the Sacred Heart of Jesus church. Has the lottery gone to sleep? Prepare things down there so we can give you a hand from here?'⁸⁶

Further ahead, on the eve of his great journey through France, the goal being Paris (he would be away from Valdocco from 31 January to 30 May 1883) he informed the Cardinal Vicar of the

79 Letter of 28 June 1882, E IV 147.

80 Letter of 5 July 1882, E IV 149-150.

81 Letter of 6 July 1882, E IV 150.

82 Letter of 29 July 1882, E IV 156-157.

83 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 27 August 1882, E IV 165.

84 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 26 November 1882, E IV 186.

85 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 6 December 1882, E IV 189.

86 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 18 December 1882, E IV 192.

fact, asking him to do something 'to cut the embarrassment by half' which was tying up the building works: 'I am making a trip to Lyons and Paris, collecting money for S. *Cuore* and recommending Peter's Pence.' 'I am even prepared for less reasonable sacrifices so long as work can resume. It has been delayed far too long.'⁸⁷

By letter on 31 January – but just as Don Bosco was catching the train for Liguria and France – Fr Dalmazzo told his Superior that the matter was close to a solution and that the economist, Fr Savio, was dealing with the financial issues connected with 'completely liquidating the contractor's work.'⁸⁸ On 20 February, Fr Savio told Fr Rua that the winding up of the previous contract had been signed on 6 February, among other things paying the contractor 40,000 lire [144,807 euro] and purchasing all plant and building equipment and materials.⁸⁹ Don Bosco wrote to Fr Dalmazzo again from Marseilles, sending money and asking him to look for more in Rome: 'I am doing what I can. But you and Fr Savio need to go looking for money. You have been sent f. 3,000 [10,860 euro] from Cannes ... A further f. 2,000 were sent from Hyères. You will receive no more this week. I will do more after I have left here but you also need to pay off heavy debts for our own houses.' After a number of indications regarding the American works he ended with the same requests: 'Take courage: there is no lack of money in Rome. I will write as soon as I am away from these scuffles here. *Quaerite et invenietis*.'⁹⁰ But in all probability, come 20 September and the dissolution of the Papal States and its bureaucratic structures, the occupation, confiscations and the already mentioned 'building craze' and all the money involved, any availability of money in Rome had to be considerably diminished by comparison with the 1860s.

Work resumed at the end of the winter freeze, under the new contractor from Bielle, *Cavaliere* Giacomo Cucco. On his return from France, Don Bosco immediately contacted Fr Angelo Savio, insisting on acceleration in construction works: 'Providence will not fail to help us, but we need to see many men at work, much work completed. You understand. Next winter I want to be able to use at least part of the church which is usable. Help me with this undertaking. If you have any problems tell me, but let's push ahead.'⁹¹ But in summer, the sudden resignation of the architect who was directing works, because he felt he was being over-ruled by Fr Savio's roughshod approach, risked causing a new stoppage. Don Bosco intervened immediately with Fr Dalmazzo and the Cardinal Vicar to smooth ruffled feathers.⁹² Vespignani understood the situation and continued in his role, assisted by engineer Valentino Grazioli. Don Bosco facilitated the collaboration, recalling Fr Savio and sending the Economist General, Fr Sala, to Rome with full power to act. Fr Sala was gifted with excellent administrative ability and great practical sense (He used to manage a spinning mill before arriving at Valdocco) in being able to follow up the work in an authoritative way. Don Bosco wrote to Fr Dalmazzo, also thinking of the hospice: 'He is coming to Rome with money and full powers to see how to manage things in such a way that we don't find ourselves in trouble every time. You need to prepare what is needed to commence the hospice in time for next spring. If you come to the next General Chapter, prepare your reflections: either bring them with you or send them.'⁹³

87 Letter of 30 January 1883, E IV 210-211.

88 *Documenti* XXV 17.

89 *Documenti* XXV 27-28; cf. C. CONIGLIONE, *Presenza salesiana nel quartiere romano di Castro Pretorio...*, RSS 3 (1984) 36-37.

90 Letter of 19 March 1883, E IV 214-215.

91 Letter of 9 June 1883, E IV 219.

92 To the Card. Vicar, 31 July 1883, E IV 227-228.

93 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 3 August 1883, E IV 229-230.

By the early months of 1884, work had reached such a stage that part of the church could be used for worship. On 23 March, the 4th Sunday of Lent, the Cardinal Vicar, Lucido Maria Parocchi, blessed and opened 'the long, wide choir and sanctuary' as *L'Unità Cattolica* informed readers.⁹⁴

The plans for building the hospice were first presented, then discussed and approved at the two sessions of the Superior Chapter on 11, 12 September 1884.⁹⁵ This work, too, was entrusted to contractor Giacomo Cucco. The construction began with the first wing along Via Porta S. Lorenzo, today's Via Marsala, following plans by engineer Vigna from Turin.⁹⁶ Don Bosco wanted Count Colle to be present for the laying of the foundation stone.⁹⁷

His attention, by this stage, was more focused on launching the lottery than on construction works, beginning with the difficult task of getting authorisation. He was still looking for benefactors and requesting honours for the most deserving and outstanding of them. As for the lottery, already conceived in 1882, Don Bosco complained at the Superior Chapter meeting on 26 February 1884 about the 'inertia of those in charge' since the initiative had not yet started. He left for France 'to find money' as he had said at the meeting on 28 January, and returned with 250,000 francs [922,979 euro]. He wrote to Fr Dalmazzo from Marseilles on 19 March: 'If you can't do so yourself, get someone to write to me, but with a positive answer. Can I bring Count Colle with me to lay the foundation stone for our hospice next April or the first fortnight in May? He will bring an offering of 50,000 francs [184,598 euro] with him. Are there problems with the lottery or can you find another form of charity? These are the two items of greatest importance for us at the moment. Fr Sala wrote me a letter which indicated neither yes nor no. This is not enough to make money.'⁹⁸ The laying of the foundation stone had to wait until 8 December 1885 and both Don Bosco and the Count were absent. The Bishop of Fossano, Mariano Manacorda, did the blessing, and Count and Countess d'Ancieu de la Bâtie represented the Colle family.⁹⁹

When he arrived in the capital on 14 April 1884, Don Bosco moved heaven and earth both for the lottery and the granting of privileges, and arranged for Fr Rua to put all the money from France for the church and hospice into the Banca Tiberina. Meanwhile, gifts for the lottery were pouring in and the catalogue was being drawn up: there were more than 7,000 per 200,000 tickets from 1 lire [3.7 euro] each. Don Bosco asked Brother Giuseppe Buzzetti to come from Turin and asked for procedures to begin for the Prefect [Rome] to authorise the lottery and find a recognised body to take on legal representation for it. Things went back and forth for some time between the City Council and the Congregation of Charity,¹⁰⁰ until finally the matter was taken up and approved by the Council.¹⁰¹ On the same day Don Bosco and Fr Lemoyne arrived back in Turin, Buzzetti was able to send a postcard stamped 17.5.1884 with the following long-awaited announcement:

94 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 74, Wednesday 26 March 1884, p. 295; cf. *Parte della chiesa del S. Cuore inaugurata al divin culto*, BS 8 (1884) no. 5, May, p. 67.

95 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol 30r-31r.

96 Of two floors (the third was built decades later), the building had to link the ambulacrum on the right side of the church with the little square on the corner with via Marghera.

97 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 31v-32r, MB XV 762-764.

98 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 19 March 1884, E IV 254.

99 Cf. *Bénédiction de la pierre angulaire de l'Hospice du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus à Rome*, in "Bulletin Salésien" 8 (1886) no. 1, January, pp. 9-10.

100 Cf. Letter of Fr G. B. Lemoyne to Fr M. Rua, 19 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO – R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 143; cf. Letters of the same on 23, 24, 28 April 1884, pp. 146, 149, 151.

101 Letter of Fr G. B. Lemoyne to Fr M. Rua, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, 5 and 9 May 1884, RSS 7 (1988) pp. 152 e 155: the mayor of Torlonia "with the approval of the Committe has finally put the question in his name to the Prefect"; the 9th is the day of the audience granted by the Pope to Don Bosco: "Today the official communication also arrives that the Mayor of Rome in the name of the Municipality has formally requested the Prefect for a license for the lottery".

'Today, finally, we received the following from the Prefecture: the decree allowing a Lottery to be held for poor boys has already been sent to the Mayor bearing the No 15558 on 17 May.'¹⁰²

The Mayor was Leopoldo Torlonia, a solid Catholic. All that remained was to sell the tickets, and Don Bosco also got personally involved in that.¹⁰³ While getting his men mobilised, beginning with Fr Dalmazzo as usual: 'Everything is ready for tickets to be sent out, but send them to us.'¹⁰⁴ 'No one knows why tickets have not be distributed and meanwhile the Lottery is coming to an end. Patience. At this point put everything else aside and see that you send us stamped tickets at whatever cost. Buzzetti will write along similar lines.'¹⁰⁵ The draw took place on 31 December 1885. In the January 1886 circular to Cooperators, he attributed the merit of capping off the Lottery and 'bringing the *Sacro Cuore*, Sacred Heart Church in Rome to a conclusion' to their 'alms' and 'patient and solicitous zeal.'¹⁰⁶

He was no less assiduous in pursuing his activity to obtain decorations, honours, be they ecclesiastical or civil, a temporal reward for charity which Don Bosco felt was not incompatible with the hope of eternal reward, since 'God the father of goodness, when he knows our spirit is willing and our flesh so weak, wants our charity to have a hundredfold in this present life too.'¹⁰⁷ There are many letters, for example, regarding honours, addressed with a degree of impatience to Fr Dalmazzo in June and July 1884: 'You write a beautiful letter but have not replied regarding mine to Bishop Masotti on our privileges, and the one I wrote to Cardinal Nina on decorations. You need to note the individuals receiving them are ones that have done a lot for *S. Cuore* and are well disposed to doing so. But presenting them without the decorations I have announced in the Holy Father's name does not look good.'¹⁰⁸ 'For the decorations I have indicated it is good to note that they are all people who have given and are ready to give for *S. Cuore*' and he repeated, warning him: 'I understand we have debts and we have to use every means possible to continue the work but currently the only source of money is the above-mentioned decorations.'¹⁰⁹

The vast work of charity would deserve a lengthy discussion to be able to highlight the incredible spread and network of activity through letters, conferences, *sermons de charité*. Especially in France, accompanied by information on progress of work, debts, difficulties, but especially religious and social motivation. We can note some privileged foreign correspondents to whom Don Bosco wrote in French. They were women, generally, who functioned as ministers of charity in their respective families with the warm consent of their husbands.¹¹⁰ Names we have

102 P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 156.

103 Don Bosco prepared the way with a circular to Cooperators and improved it with another to them and the purchasers, dated 31 May 1884 and 10 November 1885, E IV 270-271 and MB XVII 541-542.

104 Letter of 8 June 1884, E IV 272.

105 Letter of 14 March 1885, E IV 317.

106 BS 10 (1886) no. 1, January, pp. 3-4.

107 Address at the opening of the Patronage Saint-Pierre a Nizza 12 March 1877, in G. BOSCO, *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...*, pp. 36, 38, OE XXVIII 414, 416.

108 Letter of 15 June 1884, E IV 274. it was about five French benefactors for who, he had put a petition to Leo XIII: Count L. Colle and Baron A. Héraud (Commendam of St Gregory the Great), A. de Montigny (Roman Count), Dr. C. d'Espiney (Knight of St Gregory the Great), Fr. M. Guigon of Fréjus Diocese (Confidential Servant of His Holiness.) (letter to Leo XIII, 7 May 1884, E IV 260-261); he came back to this in a letter to Leo XIII on 10 July 1884, while assuring him he had received the Knighthood of St Mauritius for Dr. Grindo from Nizza Marittima (E IV 277-278).

109 Letter of 10 July 1884, E IV 277-278; cf. cf. also 18 October 1884, E IV 298.

110 Cf. Letter to Mrs Z. Cesconi, 4 July 1881, E IV 67; to an anonymous woman, a collector for *S. Cuore*, 21 September 1881, E IV 399; to Mrs A. Lacombe, 1^o July 1881, E IV 416; to Mrs Quisard, 14 April and 28 November 1882, E IV 436-437; 13 June 1883, E IV 437; to Ms C. Louvet, 17 June and 18 December 1882, E IV 449 and 453-454; to Count. L. Colle, 30 August 1881, E IV 483; 16 April 1884, E IV 503; 10 May, 18 August and 27 September 1885, E IV 515, 517 and 518; 15 January and 14 December 1886, E IV 521 and 524; 8 April 1887, E IV 526; to the Duke of Norfolk, 13 January 1888, E IV 407-408.

already noted reappear from Italy and other new ones, people who also paid attention to local works like Sampierdarena, Vallecrosia, Florence, Valdocco, and Faenza.¹¹¹ Don Bosco did not hide his unhappiness at how slowly work was proceeding.

He wrote to Countess Callori about work 'almost at a standstill'¹¹² and thanked her for her spontaneous donations,¹¹³ but his priority was always to be attentive to them as individuals. He wrote to Clara Louvet, the already noted French benefactor from Aire, one of his collectors of donations for the church and hospice, who was concerned about the agricultural crisis in 1884: 'Do not let the agricultural crisis worry you ... if returns diminish then you will lessen your good charitable work ... But no, never. God assures us of a *hundredfold on earth, so give and it will be given to you!* Be generous with your share farmers and tenants. God is all powerful, God is your Father, God will provide you with everything you need for yourself and them.'¹¹⁴

During his stay in Rome, Don Bosco had an audience with Leo XIII on 8 May 1884. Referring to the Cooperators he announced that the Pope had taken the cost of the facade on himself, 'the walls, ornaments, windows, and the three doors,' trusting that other Catholics would help him with this and other works.¹¹⁵ On 15 January 1886, he made a further dig at Rome, writing to the Colles: 'Fr Rua will send you information on the orphanage in Rome. Rome is an eternal city. It says a lot, does little and is happy to do things very slowly. Patience.'¹¹⁶

Also promoted over 1884 and 1885 at the suggestion of Count Cesare Balbo and actively supported by Cardinal Alimonda and Don Bosco, and publicised on 9 August 1885 by *L'Unità Cattolica*, was the initiative of the *National vow of Italians to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*. On 16 July, Cardinal Alimonda had sent a letter about it to the Metropolitan Archbishops of Italy, attaching an appeal to the Catholic people of Italy in which he did not stint in his praise of Don Bosco's zeal, and promoted the collection of funds to complete the facade, the cost of which was estimated at 250,000 lire [922,978 euro].¹¹⁷ In a few months, 172,000 lire [635,009 euro] had been collected.

There was some theft by workers around the building site at *S. Cuore*, material carried away. At the Superior Chapter meeting on 12 June 1885, Don Bosco read out four warning notices provided in spring 1884: '1. Check who comes in and who goes out. 2. Keep an eye on fixed prices. 3. Keep an eye on materials that could be taken elsewhere, since the chief builder has begun construction elsewhere: things like carts, bricks, mortar etc. 4. Check that some items, especially tables, are not ruined or stolen.'¹¹⁸ On the night of 29 September 1885 there was a fire, probably of suspicious origins, but it was quickly overcome without serious damage being caused.

111 Cf. Letter to Princess C. of Savoy 24 July 1881, E IV 70-71; to Countess C. Callori, July 1881, E IV 71-72; to Mrs S. Saettone, 7 August 1881, E IV 72-73; to Countess Bonmartini Mainardi, October 1881, 4 February, 23 April, 13 August and September 1884, E IV 93-94, 253, 257, 286-287 and 293; a d. O. Pariani, 22 March 1883, E IV 215; a d. T. De Agostini, 4 and 12 January 1884, E IV 248 and 250-251; to Mrs Losana, 1 August 1884, E IV 280-281; to Cavaliere G. Salomoni, 22 December 1884, E IV 307.

112 Letter of 24 April 1884, E IV 257; and on the same date to Sister M. T. Medolago, E IV 258.

113 To Fr T. De Agostini, 13 August 1884, E IV 286-287.

114 Letter of 20 December 1884, E IV 466.

115 Circ. 31 May 1884, E IV 271.

116 E IV 521.

117 *Voto Nazionale degli italiani al Sacratissimo Cuore di Gesù* was the title that stood out on the first page of the "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 185, Sunday 9 August 1885. Following was an article on *Una dimostrazione dell'Italia cattolica per la Chiesa e pel Papa Leone XIII and a letter on 16 July* by the Card Archbishop of Turin to Archbishops throughout Italy, an *Appello al popolo cattolico dell'Italia e una serie di Documenti e Schiarimenti* (pp. 737-738).

118 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 60v; MB XVII 530. He gave a similar reminder to Fr Dalmazzo before leaving for Turin after the consecration of the Church (MB XVIII 351-352).

Over these years, however, Don Bosco's interest was not limited to stones. Already since 1882 he had appointed some priests, including aspirants to the Salesian Society, Salesian clerics, and coadjutors to look after religious functions and some oratory activities initially in any sites they could find. His first concern, naturally, was to support and encourage Fr Dalmazzo, Procurator of the Salesian Society, Rector of the community, parish priest, works supervisor, and immediate reference point in the Roman ecclesiastical and secular world. In one letter to him covering ten points the ninth was for him: '9. Tell me also if you can still breathe amid all your work, and what I can do to relieve you.'¹¹⁹ Obviously he was often asked to greet 'our confreres'.

The parish went from 6,000 to 15,000 souls between 1881 and 1887, and as we can gather from the Annual List of members of the Salesian Society, Don Bosco did not skimp on personnel for the religious community involved in traditional pastoral activities.¹²⁰ Fr Dalmazzo wrote a triumphant report at the end of Easter 1885. Everything seemed like a celebration: confessionals overflowing with penitents hours on end; retreats for communicants; assisting dozens upon dozens of the sick and dying. In the same letter he asked Don Bosco to come to Rome where people were wanting to see him, 'coming from Poland, France, Spain and Portugal.'¹²¹

In the conference to Cooperators on 8 May 1884, the last given in Rome with Don Bosco present, before the talk from the Cardinal Vicar, he gave copious information on the result of pastoral activity in the parish and oratory: the 'people coming to the sacred ceremonies frequenting the sacraments, adults and children.' 200 young people were coming to religious and recreational activities; 300 girls were taking part in religious instruction; thousands of individuals were turning up at morning and evening events during May.¹²²

The date for the church's consecration was approaching, with Don Bosco in noticeable physical decline after his enormous efforts and anxieties. He told the past pupils of the Oratory on 17 July 1884: 'This colossal undertaking has tired me out with its serious and constant concerns, and I am bowing under the weight of the enormous expenses.'¹²³

3. The Social and Charitable Question in the 1870s and 1880s in public conferences (1877–82)

Don Bosco had no precise awareness of the totality of problems – especially economic and social ones, posed by the industrial revolution, nor in any strict sense could he be considered a protagonist of 'social Catholicism' which sought a solution to the 'social question' properly so-called, through the profound reforms it demanded, including structural reforms.¹²⁴ But it does seem legitimate to state that the teaching on almsgiving which he followed and proposed presented features integrating charity with true expressions of strict justice. As well as his activity on behalf of

119 Letter of September 1881, E IV 81.

120 Cf. C. CONIGLIONE, *Presenza salesiana nel quartiere romano di Castro Pretorio...*, RSS 3 (1984) 51-52.

But statistics and information, including those relating to the hospice, must be rigorously re-checked with more reliable sources than those indicated, which date back to celebratory publications. We can say the same about some data offered by G. ROSSI, *L'istruzione professionale in Roma capitale...*, in F. MOTTO (Ed.), *Inseguimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco...*, p. 65.

121 Letter of 27 April 1885, MB XVII 816.

122 BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, p. 88.

123 BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, p. 115.

124 A number of historical, generic and specific notes on this topic are helpful, found in the essay by F.

DESRAMAUT, *L'azione sociale dei cattolici del secolo XIX e quella di don Bosco*, in *L'impegno della famiglia salesiana per la giustizia*, Jünkerath Cologne, 24-28 August 1973. "Colloqui sulla vita salesiana", 7. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1976, pp. 21-87, especially pp. 46-77 (*L'azione e il pensiero sociali di don Bosco*).

young workers, this was demonstrated by the considerable number of conferences and Salesian propaganda talks he gave which were naturally in support of the expansion and consolidation of his works, especially from 1877 onwards.

We have texts of some of these – such as the ones in Nice in March 1877 and Rome at the end of January 1878 – checked or added to by him or even in his own handwriting. We have summary outlines of others. For many there are reports and summaries by secretaries or local rectors. For the most part, reports can be found in the *Salesian Bulletin*. We can see Fr Bonetti's intervention as editor in many of these, at times extensive. But the content is trustworthy, since Don Bosco is so direct and unswerving, whether he was speaking or writing, that it is impossible to betray his thinking. It could only be amplified at the expense of its original essential style but not at the expense of its content.

3.1 *Words of old in changed times but with much more dramatic reference.*

Compared to the moral and social framework of the world of young people and the society Don Bosco worked within between 1840–77, the world and society of his final fifteen years was much more complex. There were historical changes at every level: moral, religious political and cultural. But his works were also open to much broader areas as his perception of the 'youth situation' grew. It, at the beginning of his apostolate in Restoration times, Don Bosco saw young people at and of risk, moving within a rigid and reassuring society belonging to the *ancien régime*. He had learned over the decades to see the conditions of life as much more contradictory and difficult in a society which had become far more perilous.

According to Don Bosco, this degradation had begun in 1848 with abuses arising from the different 'freedoms' – conscience, press, worship, propaganda – brought about by the unstoppable 'liberal revolution.'¹²⁵ It was no longer just a case of decline in religious meaning but also one of agnosticism, even straight non-belief and declared atheism with political and cultural programs aimed at the extinction of the papacy and Church – at least by some fringe groups – and repudiation of the traditional, moral and religious basis of society.¹²⁶

At first glance, it could seem that Don Bosco's language was not up to so many profound changes. As the years passed, his vocabulary did not undergo significant change when it came to his repeated denunciation of the gravity of the problem of young people 'at risk' and 'of risk'. It is curious to note that the diagnosis of the state of faith in the Church which drew up in the 1854 edition of his book on the *Jubilee*, returns once more, unaltered in its terminology, in additions he made to the 1864 and 1865 editions. The other character in the dialogue objects that such a state of things might not be so disastrous, and the author admits the undeniable successes of the Catholic Religion, for example, the flourishing of the foreign missions and the many conversions.

But he also highlighted some of the more serious 'diabolical machinations.' 'Precisely because of the progress made,' he noted 'the devil makes every effort to support and spread heresy and impiety. And then, see how many ways religion today is despised in public and in private, in speeches, newspapers, books! There is no holy and venerated item not targeted, censored or mocked.' To confirm what he was saying, he took the example of the encyclicals proclaiming each of the three jubilees between 1854 and 1875. The denunciations became more alarming each time.¹²⁷ Compared to 1854, the encyclical *Quanta Cura* in 1864 had a much longer list of errors

125 Cf. Chap. 1, § 4, 5, 7; Chap. 8, § 6 and 7; Chap. 9; Chap. 10, § 1; Chap. 13, § 2.1.

126 Cf. Chap. 2, § 6, no. 36.

127 Cf. G. Bosco, *Il giubileo e pratiche devote...*, pp. 30-31, OE V 508-509; ID., *Dialoghi intorno all'istituzione del giubileo...*, pp. 46-47, OE XVI 120-121; ID., *Il giubileo del 1875. Sua istituzione e*

and heresies, with explicit reference to their dangerous nature, including for youth. Their adherents were using every means 'to ruin all minds and hearts, lead the unwary astray, especially immature youth, to corrupt and lead them into error and finally tear them away from the bosom of the Catholic Church.'¹²⁸

The Pope did not repeat or add to the list of evils afflicting the Church in 1875, but stated that a 'filthy flood' of them was everywhere: 'So many efforts of [the Church's] enemies aimed at rooting out faith in Christ from souls, adulterating healthy doctrine and spreading the poison of impiety: so many scandals presented to true believers everywhere, corruption of habits and customs on the increase, vile tampering with divine and human rights so widely spread, such proliferation of ruin ...'¹²⁹ At the end of 1870, in the 'New improved and enlarged edition' of the *Storia ecclesiastica* and also almost certainly with the aid of his warrior Fr Bonetti, justified the convocation of Vatican Council I by recalling the many moral, religious and political problems facing the Church at the time.¹³⁰

While the words Don Bosco used remained virtually unchanged, it is clear that the usual terms were enriched with new meanings. In the awareness and thinking of Don Bosco, who continued to employ them, we can presume precise reference to the real and increasingly more serious circumstances he wrote and spoke about. So, the old words were not stuck in past realities but were made new through the inevitable huge range of new problems which the times posed. For sure, his listeners, too, immersed in those problems, perceived them as appropriate to their diverse experiences and concerns, old and new: in Turin, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Rome and in France: Nice, Marseilles, Lyons, Paris. Then in Barcelona, Spain. On the other hand, the breadth and varied opportunities to be sensitive to the concerns and needs of relevant and qualified men and women of his day: popes, cardinals, bishops, politicians, administrators, benefactors at every social level: cooperators, businessmen, entrepreneurs in the industrial and agricultural areas, and other professionals. Nor was information on and denunciation of the periodical press outside his realm either, beginning with what could be read 'at home' in the *Salesian Bulletin* of which he was more than just the nominal manager, and the *Letture Cattoliche* or Catholic Readings.

Only from this perspective will it be possible to have an exact understanding of what Don Bosco began to often say from 1877 onwards in his many conferences, circulars and individual letters. 1877 was the year the Cooperators Union was finally established and the *Salesian Bulletin* founded.

Referring to the new St Leo's Oratory in Marseilles, the editor wrote that it came into being due to the need to gather and educate neglected or orphaned boys who would otherwise have become 'the refuge of society,' ending up one day as 'Communist recruits.'¹³¹ Among other evils to be found at La Spezia were 'Masonic lodges and Protestant houses.'¹³² Other Institutes of his had been opened in Italy 'in areas most under threat from Protestant heresy.' There was also talk of Don Bosco's intentions to establish a house in Rome, more so, as the Cardinal Vicar stressed for listeners at one of his Salesian Conferences, because with the Italian occupation of the city 'for reasons which you cannot ignore, these works which cost our Fathers so much have been largely ruined or corrupted,'¹³³ by which he meant secularised.

pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese. Torino, tip. e libr. dell'Orat. S. Franc. Di Sales 1875, pp. 68-69, OE XXVI 254-255.

128 G. BOSCO, *Dialoghi intorno all'istituzione del giubileo...*, pp. 7-8, OE XVI 81-82.

129 G. BOSCO, *Il giubileo del 1875...*, pp. 10-11, OE XXVII 196-197 (with some adjustments to the Italian translation).

130 Cf. Chap. 1, § 10.

131 BS 2 (1878) no. 11, November, p. 7.

132 BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March, p. 5.

133 BS 3 (1879) no. 4, April, p. 4.

At Faenza in 1884, the Salesians would experience opposition to the oratory which Don Bosco wanted and firmly supported, from the *Secular Recreation Centre*. This opposition had appeared earlier in general terms, as presented in an article in the *Salesian Bulletin* with the eloquent title: *God's Oratories and Satan's Recreation Centres*. The latter did not exist as such but were well represented by *Masonic Recreation Centres*, where, the article said 'hatred is sown in the hearts of children and older youth through lessons, books, pages full of pestilence; hatred of the Church, family, and society. They create sectarian groups, communes and worse.'¹³⁴

A year later, *Il Fedele* in Lucca, referring to a Conference Don Bosco gave to local benefactors, stated that it was a blessing, 'while so many who are filled with the spirit of Satan are using every trick to mislead children' that there were even greater numbers in Don Bosco's houses promoting education to belief, knowledge, action.¹³⁵

A few weeks later, speaking in identical circumstances in Sampierdarena, Don Bosco highlighted the Salesian Congregation's involvement in the press, aimed at instruction in Catholic truths and preventing people, especially young people, from drinking 'from the poisoned springs of pages filled with heresy, corruption, impurity.'¹³⁶ The holistic education of the young, he stated a month later at San Benigno Canavese, was much more realistic than education inspired by the three mythical words bandied around by the well-known and dominant ideologies, closed within their narrow earthly horizons: the productive *work* of purely material progress, school *instruction* which filled the head but ignored the soul and the inner person, and vague anthropocentric *humanitarianism*, which ignored God as preached and worshipped in the Church, and replaced *charity* with *philanthropy*.¹³⁷

Old and new motives appeared in Rome in May 1881 during the Salesian Conference, where the two main speakers were Don Bosco 'worn out by the years but vigorous for the fire of his zeal' and Cardinal Alimonda. Among other things, Don Bosco quoted the saying of Dupanloup, since he was familiar with him, which said that 'youth and the future [of society] are the same thing,' drawing from this that 'a serene future' would be assured for Italy too if there were an increase in 'charitable works of educating and saving the youth.' The Cardinal, almost catching the ball on the rebound, exclaimed in his address: 'Poor Italy, full of *tribunes of the plebs* [an ancient Roman institution], demagogic passions, atheists corrupting hearts, and novelists, gazetteers, sowing error and disharmony.' Not only this: 'Protestants come and sow dissension. They have reached the point of sowing schism among our brethren while materialism, communism and socialism are invading society.' 'Once upon a time, the working classes had their societies, a saintly protector ... now the saint had been replaced by other meetings, the congregation replaced by the sect.'¹³⁸

The September *Salesian Bulletin* denounced another plague, taking its cue from Leo XIII's letter to the Cardinal Vicar at the end of June 1878, in which he deplored the secular education given young people, an education of the will. Evil results flowed from this, the article commented, citing cases of suicide by disillusioned students as found in news reports, which attributed the cause to strict examiners. 'It is neither the exams nor the examiners,' the article said 'but the system of instruction in vogue today. It is [the result of] imparting atheistic teaching. The true cause of this breakdown is the nine or more months of the year spent talking to students about anything and everything but never of God, Jesus Christ, never about a happy or unhappy eternal life, nor of the means to achieve one and avoid the other ... here is the cause of all our ills, here is the enemy of

134 BS 3 (1879) no. 9, September, pp. 1-3; cf. Chap. 30, § 1.1.

135 BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, p. 10.

136 BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, p. 11.

137 BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, p. 12.

138 BS 5 (1881) no. 6, June, pp. 6-7.

studious youth in out day: *instruction without religion*.¹³⁹ On the same wavelength, in autumn 1882 the *Bulletin* again deplored with rather forced over-simplification that in the 2nd and 3rd Congress of elementary teachers in Italy, it was decided first to remove catechism from the list of school subjects, making 'the school *secular*, as they say, that is, atheist, without God,' and secondly it was suggested 'making the primary schools *anticlerical*, meaning openly irreligious and impious,' raising pupils who would be 'not only ignorant but enemies of Religion, God, enemies of Jesus Christ, the Church, the Pope,' anticlerical children, atheist children.¹⁴⁰

The *Lettere Cattoliche*, too, sometimes touched on topics of a similar kind. The August 1878 issue stands out. It had a fanciful title, the creative effort of Fr Antonio Belasio, a dear friend of Don Bosco's and the Oratory, who some months earlier had published a hefty volume with the Salesian Press on *Catholic truths presented to the people and the learned, explaining the Creed and the confused modern lack of belief of modern sciences*. According to the presentation by Count Cays (by now a Salesian) in the August issue, pantheism and Darwinism, 'abstract systems of the physical sciences, eternal matter, spontaneous production and reproduction ultimately led to irreligion and unbelief,' destroying 'any idea of the existence of a Creator God' and 'misunderstanding all the laws of the moral order.'¹⁴¹

The issue which was also the *Strenna*, in December 1884, dedicated a number of pages to Free Masonry, represented in very grim tones in connection with Leo XIII's encyclical of 20 April 1884. It emerged from the same issue that they were talking about communism and socialism at Valdocco, and how both were a kind of 'utopia' vaguely in the ascendancy, but mocking them without seriously trying to understand the reasons for their existence or their importance. In essence it was all at the level of Catholic conservatism represented by the elderly E. Avogrado della Motta, *Saggio intorno al Socialismo ed alle dottrine e alle tendenze socialistiche* (Essay on Socialism and socialistic doctrines and tendencies) republished at Sampierdarena in 1880.¹⁴² Also in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, a magazine followed at Valdocco, there was frequent controversy, over 'liberalism as the generator of socialism,' establishing 'consanguinity in general between liberalism and socialism, of which communism is just one of its many forms.' In every case, this engendering was attributed to liberalism which was both arbitrary and iniquitous in violating the right to ownership and a system that extinguished any religious sense in the people and authorised the spread of all kinds of corruption.¹⁴³

More interesting is what *Il Galantuomo* said in 1884 of Don Bosco's intention of taking part in the National Expo in Turin. The first great Expo for mankind, he said, was God's at the creation. This justified his intention to take part. So it is appropriate for man 'to give glory to God by discovering the strength God has hidden in nature, improving it and ordering it to human needs, since an exhibition of works of man's hands and ingenuity in the end is a hymn of praise to God.'

139 *Il giudizio di Salomone rinnovato nella educazione della gioventù*, BS 5 (1881) no. 9, September, pp. 1-2.

140 *Dionigi il tiranno e i maestri irreligiosi*, BS 6 (1882) no. 10, October, pp. 157-158. The writer could have discovered some points in *L'Unità Cattolica*: cf. *Le bestemmie di Guido Baccelli [ministro della P.I.] al Congresso dei maestri in Milano*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 215, Friday 16 September 1881, p. 858; *Il Congresso degli insegnanti a Napoli e la scuola anticlericale*, *ibid.*, no. 211, 12 September 1882, p. 842: "Since," – the new item noted – "an anticlerical schools means a school without God, like elementary teachers last year proclaimed in the Congress of Milan, and currently repeat unashamedly in Naples".

141 Fr. BELASIO, *Dio ci liberi! Che sapienti! ... Ci vorrebbero far perdere la testa!* Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1878, pp. 4-6.

142 Cf. San Pier d'Arena, tip. e libr. editrice di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli 1880, 2 vols.; two tiny humorous sketches, both in the "*Galantuomo*" per l'anno 1884: Torino, tip. e libr. salesiana 1883, pp. 65-66.

143 Cf. "La Civiltà Cattolica" 22 (1871), Vol. II 257-275 and 524-531; Vol. III 16-27.

'Moreover, I have been working for about forty years and if something is worth the effort I too would like to exhibit it.'¹⁴⁴

3.2 *Increased fervour of practical involvement and multiple appeals*

It was worth this sensitivity, then, in the last part of his life on behalf of youth 'at risk' in this kind of society, that Don Bosco never tired of using the spoken and written word to encourage the involvement of the greatest number of men and women of good will.

Conferences were aimed firstly at Cooperators to clarify who they were, their mission, possibilities for action, their spiritual perspectives.¹⁴⁵ The central and ever present theme, naturally, was poor and abandoned youth in an increasingly broader sense, including those at risk, on the margins or excluded, and the necessary efforts to preserve them from greater risk still, or to recover them. Undoubtedly, Don Bosco brought discussion back to his own works in particular: those occupied with young people, the enormous sums of money this required, pressing debts, the urgent need for aid, and the many and substantial duties of charity and its rewards. In order to obtain this he did not hesitate to stress the number and needy circumstances of boys taken in by his institutions, the dangers threatening them and the harm that could befall individuals and society if nothing was done by those who could ensure that boys 'at risk' did not end up becoming boys 'of risk'. This was no mere rhetorical expedient, but a precise desire to stir consciences and call on the responsibility of those who had [money] and could [act], to arouse sentiments of piety and compassion as well as fear of now and of eternity in people who might run the risk of believing they had clean hands because they didn't kill or steal and faithfully observed the Church's precepts. Finally, he sought to move believers' hearts and open them to active, practical charity.

This was the kind of language we find over the 1870s and 1880s in the celebrative type of literature presenting Don Bosco's preventive system as the solution to the entire gamut of youth problems, pushing it beyond the limits of primary prevention and extending it to preventive assistance and 'correctional pedagogy.' When it was integrated with the professional promotion of young Christian workers and their resulting quality involvement in the world of work, industry especially, it was considered capable of resolving the emerging 'social question' or the more specific 'worker question' without recourse to revolutionary movements.¹⁴⁶

In any case, by the 1870s and 80s, the wider reality of the youth world was part of Don Bosco's thinking and pastoral concern for their salvation and charitable efforts. It was no longer just the world he knew within his own institutions. This wider world, which he had already directly experienced or considered, even imagined, was more seriously 'at risk' in a profoundly altered, less propitious society. So he was suggesting a wider range of real or potentially real possibilities for the preventive system. Indeed, theoretically it ended up being thought of as universally applicable under certain conditions: families, schools, educational institutes, and social work, be it in protection, recovery, correction or initiatives aimed at moral, religious, civic regeneration or defence. It resulted in his firm belief that he needed to promote the widest variety of convergence of the greatest number of people: clerics at every level, political and civil authorities, administrators, the wealthy, bankers, believers and non-believers.

Nevertheless, such were the needs of the works he already had in place or was planning, that of necessity he had to begin with these. We find an echo of this in the essential, effective and exemplary words of the journalist from *Le Citroyen* on 21 February 1880 in reference to the

144 *Il Galantuomo. Almanacco per l'anno bisestile 1884*, pp. 72-75.

145 Cf. Chap. 22, §§ 6-8.

146 Cf. Chap. 26, § 5.

conference Don Bosco had given the previous day: 'Come to the aid of the poor youth exposed to risk, offer them shelter in the countryside and the city, remove them from vice, educate them in a Christian way, teach them a trade so they can earn a living, such is the scope proposed by D. Bosco, inspired by God.' 'Every year, thousands of boys leave these institutes and go to serve society in many different careers. If they had been abandoned to vice they would easily have become good-for-nothings and disturbers of the peace; instead here they are, transformed into useful, hardworking, good Christians workers. Some have even become industrialists, others have gone into fine arts, and fulfilled honourable positions.'¹⁴⁷

There was also frequent reference to the action of containment and reconquest in the face of Protestant proselytism. Various works had arisen in Italy, France, and South America 'with the principal aim of providing some protection from the invading heresy of the Protestants.'¹⁴⁸

The normal sequence of topics reappeared in the conference at Lucca on 29 April 1880: the dangers threatening 'poor boys,' the Salesian as 'loving fathers setting them on the proper path of Faith and Religion,' the 'cultivation of the mind' and a trade that would pay, the urgent need for alms to help support this work, a duty 'imposed absolutely by God, else suffer exclusion from eternal life.'¹⁴⁹ Don Bosco followed a similar scheme a few days later, on 5 May, in the first conference to Cooperators at Genoa, a city with greater financial possibilities. He spoke of the beginning of the Cooperators Association, the beginning of the oratories and the happy results they had obtained, the birth of the Salesian Congregation and the institutions it ran or which had developed from them, the colleges, hospices, schools, workshops, agricultural schools, the FMA Institute and its work for girls, the Work of Mary Help of Christians for adult vocations, the Missions, the material means requested, almsgiving, using the strict Gospel interpretation about surplus. He was not backward in being forthright on this point. 'A good Christian, man or woman,' he said 'will always find something surplus at home, in furniture, clothes, dinners, extras, parties, pleasure trips and so on.' And whoever has nothing to offer 'can pray for those who could give alms and don't, that is, pray that the word will enlighten them and let them see that they will take none of their possessions into the hereafter.'¹⁵⁰

On 4 June, he spoke for the first time to Cooperators at San Benigno Canavese, a year after the beginning of Salesian work there. He described the Cooperator, the modern tertiary, called on to be in harmony with the three great 'terms' the modern world was so proud of: '*Work, Instruction, Humanity*.' He drew an imperative from this that could not be declined: 'Work, and work tirelessly' unless you want to 'see the complete ruin of the present generation.' Thanks to the response of the many Cooperators the Salesians were at work with all their strength in workshops of every kind, agricultural schools, colleges for boys and for girls, day schools, night and Sunday schools, and oratories with Sunday recreation. They open hospices, orphanages and *patronages* for hundreds and thousands of orphans and abandoned children, bringing the light of the Gospel and civilisation even to the barbarians of Patagonia, working in such a way that "humanity" is not just a word but a reality.' Naturally the appeal to cooperate followed.¹⁵¹

The intense round of conferences to Cooperators continued, with one of the largest of them held at Borgo San Martino on 1 July in the diocese of Casale Monferrato governed by his friend Bishop Pietro Maria Ferrè who was present for the huge occasion. There were also 'illustrious

147 BS 4 (1880) no. 3, March, p. 6.

148 *Cenni sulla 3ª conferenza dei Cooperatori della città di Roma [5 April 1880]*, BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 8-9.

149 *La conferenza a Lucca*, BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 9-10. The text is taken from the *Lucca Il Fedele* 8 May.

150 *Prima conferenza dei Cooperatori tenuta in Sampierdarena*, BS 4 (1880) no. 6, June, pp. 10-11.

151 *Conferenza dei Cooperatori Salesiani tenuta in S. Benigno Canavese*, BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, pp. 12-13.

members of the clergy from Casale and Alessandria, many men and an even greater number of women from nearby cities and towns.' To begin with, Don Bosco rehashed an address by Pius IX, stressing the conquering solidarity of combatants in the battle. Even more decisive was his *vis unita fortiori* for 'promoting good and fighting evil.' He spoke once again of the origins of the Cooperators and Salesian youth institutions, describing the vast array of 'works of charity' to which every Cooperator, according to his or her possibilities, was called to dedicate him or herself to. It was a lengthy series of works which went well beyond the classic Salesian ones.

The final, extended part of the conference was dedicated to material cooperation, God's inexhaustible 'bank' and the obligation of almsgiving. Don Bosco was insistent in rejecting presumed difficulties in this: poverty, the unpredictable future. 'If a poor person is a Cooperator, if he wants to he will always be able to help a work of charity, even materially.' 'So many people whinge about their poverty when invited to do a good work.' But money appears 'whenever it's a case of a dinner, a party, a pleasure trip, a ball, extras and the like.' Others, 'are always afraid they will lose the ground beneath their feet' so they are forever scavenging, storing up, keeping something in reserve' and they die without having done anything good, leaving their possessions to greedy and quarrelsome relatives. He assured them: God is a good banker and guarantees a hundredfold to those who give, now and in eternity. 'The fatal deception' was to think that the precept of almsgiving was merely advice. Whoever does not observe it 'does not sin against advice but against charity' the primary result of which is works of justice.¹⁵²

He took up another range of topics on 12 May 1880, at the earlier mentioned conference to Cooperators at Tor de' Specchi in Rome. He introduced it himself with a brief overview of the many works opened and run by Salesians. Then came a more pressing reference to *S. Cuore*, the Sacred Heart Church, and erecting a 'refuge to gather and educate at least five hundred boys.' The Romans, who up till then had been generous in helping 'do good in other Italian cities' were now called on to provide aid to help build an institute rising up in their city to ward against Protestant proselytism and preserve the faith. Then, in more eloquent language, Cardinal Alimonda pleaded Don Bosco's cause. 'You have understood the needs there are. May there be a growing number of Cooperators for this work which is God's work. Let us give of ourselves for the salvation of souls. God has given us so much, so give of yourselves to rescue the children of the populace from impiety and error.'¹⁵³

As we know, Don Bosco was in Florence on 15 May, holding a similar conference in the church run by the Philippian Fathers. The incipient Salesian oratory there was certainly unable to respond to the demands of the youth situation as Don Bosco had described it. However, it did respond to the philosophy of 'doing what was possible' and this was one that was so dear to him. The impossibility of doing everything or much, was not authorisation to do nothing. Fr Confortola told the *Salesian Bulletin* that he 'pointed to the purpose of the conference, which was to make the Salesians known, what they did, what they had done elsewhere, what they came to do in Florence and how much they needed the support of the Cooperators and all good people to succeed in their intentions.'

The drama of young people in Florence as put to the Cooperators by speakers at the conference to encourage their charity, had given even more serious cause for thought to the Salesians: 'So many poor abandoned youth roaming the streets of this city of yours today; barefoot, tramps, living like beggars, and then going to pubs in the evening to behave badly, without anyone taking pity on their body and soul and looking after them. They grow up ignorant of things to do with God, Religion, their moral duties, and they curse, steal and are indecent and engulfed in every vice, capable of doing anything, including the most wicked things. Many of them

152 *Una memoranda giornata nel collegio di Borgo S. Martino*, BS 4 (1880) no. 8, August, pp. 7-11.

153 *La conferenza dei Cooperatori a Roma*, BS 5 (1881) no. 6, June, pp. 5-7.

will end up badly or in the hands of justice, who will march them off to prison. Or what is worse, they will end up in the arms of the Protestants who by now have opened many dens in Florence where poor youth are enticed by the glint of gold and a thousand false promises. They have lost everything else that is good, trampled on every virtue, and make a deplorable mess of their Faith as well.¹⁵⁴

Don Bosco painted a less localised picture in the conference held on 17 November 1881 in the Church of St Philip at Casale Monferrato, where Bishop Ferrè was once more in attendance.¹⁵⁵ He chose to speak of works undertaken in various parts of the world and the Missions, the establishment of numerous hospices and workshops for teaching arts and trades to neglected youngsters so they could be capable of earning an honest living; the founding of agricultural schools to teach young peasant boys and girls how to cultivate the land, and this way keep them from heading to the city where they easily become shipwrecked in faith and customs; the opening of colleges with low fees to give a greater number of youngsters with intelligence the opportunity to receive an education and where, in due course, they either became good priests or courageous missionaries or wise fathers of families; the establishment of festive oratories and recreation parks with which to attract boys to Catechism, keep them from being idle and help them fulfil their duties of piety and religion.'

He then dwelt on the topic of 'alms' and specifically on its material and spiritual, temporal and eternal 'benefits,' enriching the positive developments he had indicated in Nice on 12 March 1877. In the Casale conference, however, he introduced new references to what Jesus Christ and St James had said about 'troubles of a material and spiritual kind that would befall heartless rich people.' More troubles were threatening today for people who were insensitive to so much poverty. 'Today,' he said frankly, 'we complain of major robberies, fires, graft and worse. These are evils, painful disorders, but let us also say this: a good number of these ills are also the result of people who could but do not give alms. If some well-off or wealthy individual would extend his hand more to Institutes of charity, if he would spend some of his money on youngsters who are almost abandoned, he would remove so many who of them from the risk of becoming thieves and evildoers. If these men and women with possessions would give alms, they would remove many individuals for a miserable existence and in the meantime would be loved by the poor, be even more respected in their campaigns, businesses, and possessions. This way we would have no need to deplore so much crime. Instead, avarice, charging interest, miserliness, hardness of heart allows many evil doers to wander the streets and leaves many families languishing in the depths of poverty, putting them in a situation where they need to provide for themselves by hook or by crook what has been denied them through charity. This causes ill-will and hatred, and in the event of any uprising, the [ones who did not care] will be the first to pay.'¹⁵⁶

The bishop's talk followed, on the three main activities of the Salesians at this historical point in time: '1. Good education of youth. 2. Evangelisation of unbelievers. 3. The construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome.'¹⁵⁷

The matter of the *obligation and rule of almsgiving* was taken up in another conference to Cooperators held in Genoa in the Basilica of S. Siro on 30 March 1882, in the presence of Archbishop Salvatore Magnasco. But it was only the final point of a more developed address than the earlier one. He exhorted his listeners by describing the youth situation and then dealt with

154 *Oratorio festivo di Maria Immacolata*, BS 5 (1881) no. 7, July, pp. 7-9 (letter of the Rector, Fr F. Confortola to Fr Bonetti, 24 May 1881).

155 Cf. Chap. 22, § 7.

156 *La diocesi di Casale Monferrato e la prima Conferenza dei Cooperatori*, BS 5 (1881) no. 12, December, pp. 5-6.

157 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

'some ways of helping young people' and 'the St Vincent de Paul Hospice in S.Pier d'Arena.' The first part was dedicated to an even more dramatic description of 'poor boys sometimes orphaned, often left to their own devices, without religious instruction and moral education and surrounded by bad companions.'

'Now we see them roaming the squares, along the beaches, growing in idleness, gambling, learning obscenities and blasphemies. Then later we see them become thieves, rascals and evildoers and finally, often in the fullness of youth we see them fall into prison, a disgrace to their families, birthplace, of no use to themselves and a burden to society.' But if they were removed from danger they would have been able to become 'good Christians, wise citizens and one day be the fortunate inhabitants of Heaven.

He went on to review the means to use 'to impede the ruin' of 'needy young boys at risk'; 'Festive oratories with parks or places for honest recreation,' 'night school for poor working boys,' 'day school, free classes for those boys,' 'Sunday Catechism lessons, also daily ones,' also 'charitable hospices for the most needy boys' with workshops, schools, institutes for vocations to the Church. The Salesian Hospice at Sampierdarena was an example.

The strict duty of almsgiving by those with possessions was preceded by a typical comment familiar to all upright people at the time who were marked by a formation received in the climate of the Restoration: 'God made the poor person so he could earn heaven through resignation and patience, but he made the rich person so he could be saved through charity and almsgiving.' To keep everything for oneself went against God's order of things as well as being a serious infraction of Christ's precept, illustrated graphically by the 'Parable of rich Dives and poor Lazarus.' If anyone objected that 'these are very serious, frightening words' Don Bosco replied: 'You are right, and I regret having to remind you, since perhaps you do not deserve it. Instead, I would much more gladly remind certain ladies and gentlemen who are not here and who waste money buying and maintaining fine horses. They could have saved their money and not lost any of their decorum; and other ladies and gentlemen who spend and lavish money on dinners, suppers, clothing, evenings, balls, theatre and so on. When, with a little more of a Christian lifestyle, they would have been able to come to the aid of so much poverty, dry so many tears, save so many souls. These are the ones who need to hear Jesus Christ's terrifying words: and the rich man died and was buried in hell.' He finished by saying that whoever gave away his possessions, God placed a key in his hands with which he could open or close 'drawers, caskets, treasure troves,' and open either heaven or hell for himself.¹⁵⁸

Don Bosco went even further: it could happen that one day those drawers and caskets, hermetically sealed, might be opened by someone in less pleasant circumstances. This was part of an address he gave in Lucca a week later, 8 April, Holy Saturday, when asking for financial help for the proposed expansion of the local Salesian work, which was too small. 'By removing young people at risk from their situation, instructing and educating them, he said, without holding back, 'you are doing good for all of society. If youth is well educated, over time we will have a better generation. If not, very soon it will be made up of men of unbridled vice, theft, drunkenness, wrongdoing. These youngsters are now appealing to you, cap in hand, through their superiors. With your help you can provide them with bread, teach them to live honestly and with hard work, give them a future. Instead, left to their own devices, one day they may present themselves before you and demand your money with a knife at your throat.'

As he moved to conclude, he replied to objections: 'But how should we act? There are so many taxes and everyone is asking for something.' There was just one demanding answer and it came from Christ: *Quod superat date eleemosynam.*' To anyone who asked if this was a precept or

158 *Prima conferenza dei Cooperatori in Genova*, BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April, pp. 70-73.

advice, 'without entering into the theological question' Don Bosco had them note: 'Jesus Christ says that whoever does not give what he has left over in alms will not enter the kingdom of heaven.' 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle etc.' He gave an example: 'I come into your home. There I see very much sought-after furniture, a table all laid with fine table cloths and crockery, items of silver and gold, shiny ornaments, gold coins in a drawer.' These were all in the category of 'surplus'. 'You are obliged to take that money which is not helping anyone and do what Jesus Christ commands.'¹⁵⁹

After reading a report from the conference in the *Salesian Bulletin*, a priest from Emilia wrote, expressing his doubts as to whether Don Bosco's ideas were in accordance with traditional moral thinking.¹⁶⁰ On 30 June, Don Bosco thanked the priest for 'the kindness, indeed charity' of his views and promised he would respond with 'an article or perhaps several articles to be published in the *Salesian Bulletin*.'¹⁶¹ An essay was published in July – certainly not one he wrote – entitled *Reply to a courteous observation on the obligation and amount of almsgiving*. It made plentiful use of a quotation from St Thomas Aquinas, Laymann, Sporer, Billuart, Alphonus Liguori, Gossuet.¹⁶²

On 10 April 1882, Don Bosco addressed Cooperators in Florence once more on the problem of poor and abandoned boys. It was in the Philippian Fathers' church as usual. The Catholic paper *Il Giorno* captured the real essence of the youth project he described, in a news item. It began with the bare facts of the pitiful reality of very poor youth, meaning those left entirely to their own devices, and on the way to deprivation, who would soon become the scourge of society and end up in eternal damnation. He then explained the purpose of the Salesian Work which did as much as it could to remedy this social scourge through festive oratories, schools and hospices. He concluded by asking moral and material aid from everyone who sincerely loved their religion and their country. There was a new factor in this: young people from the Catholic Youth Club gave a hand after the conference to collect alms, and they all turned up at the railway station to farewell Don Bosco as he left for Rome.¹⁶³

The annual Cooperators conference in Turin on 29 January 1883 was held in the Church of St John the Evangelist. In front of 1500 people 'including many members of the clergy and Turin's nobility,' as the news item read, 'the holy man briefly described in simple terms the miserable state thousands of young people were in today. He noted the constant requests of Salesian houses everywhere, especially the house at Turin, to take in poor children at risk and worthy of the greatest compassion. He expressed the real sorrow he felt when they were forced to reply that there was no more room ... and at having to leave so many boys in their state of abandonment and on the road to perdition. If they could be removed from danger and prepared for a career, they would be a most consoling success.' He also pleaded the cause of the Valdocco Oratory so he could put up a new building on the western side of the Church of Mary Help of Christians: in by now well-known terms of his it would make it possible 'to take in a greater number of neglected boys teach them arts or a trade, enable them to earn an honourable living, to instruct and educate them in religion and morals and thus, once they were either removed from poverty or from bad companions, prevent them from being given over to vice and wrongdoing and perhaps ending up in

159 *Conferenza dei Cooperatori di Lucca*, BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, pp. 80-82. Text taken from *Il Fedele* 15 April 1882. The "knife at the throat" would be repeated in reference to the Guillotine in France a year later: cf. Chap. 31, § 1.

160 Letter to Don Bosco from Fr R. Veronesi, 26 May 1882, MB XV 526.

161 To Fr R. Veronesi, 30 June 1882, E IV 148.

162 BS 6 (1882) no. 7, July, pp. 109-116.

163 *Notizie sull'Oratorio di Maria Immacolata e conferenza dei Cooperatori in Firenze*, BS 6 (1882) no. 7, July, pp. 119-121.

prison and as a dishonour to their families and a disgrace to their country.' To give support meant 'helping good habits and religion today.'¹⁶⁴

Two days later, passing through Liguria, he began his long journey through France, reaching the final, triumphal stage in Paris.

4. Salesian and ecclesiastical restructuring of works in South America

The great effort to have an Apostolic Vicariate or prefecture decreed for Patagonia in Rome did not find official recognition in Buenos Aires, either from the Church there or the Government. Yet Salesian Missionary work had a significant and lasting impact in this vast region and in Latin America generally, not only or so much in the relatively confined world of the indigenous peoples but in the wider world of migrants, colonials, inhabitants of Argentina, Chilean cities and cities elsewhere with parallel missionary perspectives. Nevertheless, the Patagonian enterprise, though re-dimensioned in quantity and quality, was unequalled as a beginning of the missionary projection for Don Bosco's two Religious Institutes, conferring on them a singular note of novelty and completeness in ends, methods and character.

4.1 Goal achieved in Argentina, entry into Chile

On Sunday, 9 October 1881, Leo XIII gave a special audience to 23 Argentine pilgrims led by Mons Antonio Espinosa, Vicar General in Buenos Aires. In his address, the Pope praised 'the zeal of their pastors who leave nothing to chance in their concern to lead the savage tribes remaining in Patagonia to a life of Christianity and civilisation and among whom, thanks to the arrival of zealous missionaries, new missions are being established for this purpose.'¹⁶⁵ The Pope was not only referring to the Salesians but they were certainly included. The *Salesian Bulletin* reported on some of the encouraging words the Pope said about them to Mons. Espinosa: 'When we understood that Don Bosco's pupils would be taking on the Patagonian mission, our heart jumped for joy and hope for the future of those poor savages.'¹⁶⁶ As the *Oratory Diary* kept by Fr Chiala and Luzzero indicate, Mons. Espinosa arrived at Valdocco with two other Argentine priests on Christmas Eve, 1881: on 3 January 1882 they visited the house at S. Benigno, and left the Oratory on the 4th.

With the help of the Provincial, Fr Albera, in Marseilles, Don Bosco prepared a document on the Salesian Missions in Patagonia. In March 1882, it was translated into French and sent to the Work of Propagation of the Faith in Lyons. It then came out in the 24 July issue of *Les Missions Catholiques* and, in Italian, in the 3 November booklet of the Milan-based *Missioni Cattoliche*. Don Bosco outlined there for the umpteenth time his South American mission plan, ending with a description of the *state of the Salesian missions* and the *difficulties to overcome*: lack of personnel, scarce financial means, menacing competition from the Protestants who 'went there to put up their tents in Catholic colonies' and 'under the appearance of offering medicine, surgery, pharmacy with prodigious sums of money' they were a huge obstacle to the activity of Catholic missionaries.¹⁶⁷

In the final days of the events leading up to the 'Concordia', he resumed a discussion already begun with Propaganda Fide in 1876 (and continued, as we have seen, with Frs Cagliari, Bodrato and Costamagna)¹⁶⁸ to arrive at the foundation of 'one or three Apostolic Vicariates or Prefectures

164 *La festa di San Francesco di Sales e la Conferenza in Torino*, BS 7 (1883) no. 3, March, pp. 43-44.

165 "La Civiltà Cattolica" 32 (1881) IV 358.

166 BS 5 (1881) no. 11, November, p. 9.

167 E IV 123-127.

168 Cf. Chap. 21, § 6 e Chap. 27, §§ 3.1 and 3.2.

in Patagonia: the first from Río Colorado to Río Chubut, the second from Río Chubut to Río S. Cruz, the third from Río S. Cruz down to Tierra del Fuego including the Malvinas [Falkland] Islands.' He interpreted the Bishop of Buenos Aires' and perhaps the Pope's thinking on the true reality of the missions in his own manner: 'Now the Work of Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood, and the Archbishop of Buenos Aires are asking for these projects and supporting them. The Holy Father is expressing a keen desire and said precisely that the boundaries of three Vicariates could be established, but to begin by establishing one, i.e. from Río Colorado to the interior of Patagonia. They are all savage areas where we already have fifteen colonies established ... Mons. Gioanni Zonghi has all the relevant documents and is up to date with the proceedings.'¹⁶⁹ The matter was complex and needed time and consideration. In a disappointed second letter Don Bosco said in a few words: 'I regret this Propaganda business a lot. This delay could ruin everything. I will write to Archbishop [Domenico] Jacobini.'¹⁷⁰

At the same time, Don Bosco was seeking to restrain suggestions of expansion which the Provincial felt was inevitable, faced with so many requests. He assured Fr Costamagna that the Superior Chapter would examine the projects, since they were 'all agreed on putting them into practice within the limits of possibility.' But he did not hide the two main obstacles: 'The scarcity of personnel and the immense amount of work weighing upon us.'" During the General Chapter in September 1883, there would be a possibility of providing information and reaching agreement, while by the end of that same year he was already preparing 'what is needed for a regular expedition.'¹⁷¹

The tenacious hammering away at things through the preceding years made it easier, during 1883, for procedures to be set in motion by the Prefect of Propaganda to reach their conclusion. According to a letter to Archbishop Domenico Jacobini on 7 April 1883, Don Bosco has 'sent His Eminence Cardinal Simeoni all replies [to the question] he had about Patagonia.' The Cardinal had written to him on 7 July, indicating that since he had to submit the request to erect three Vicariates in Patagonia to the General Congregation, he should fill out the attached questionnaire regarding inhabitants in the region and propose three candidates for office. In reply, Don Bosco presumed the Congregation already knew 'Patagonia's geographical and historical details' based on the atlas and the report he had already sent on 23 August 1876.¹⁷² 'Here' he explained 'I will keep solely to matters requested by Your Eminence.' He was more realistic, reshaping the earlier request and reducing it to 'One Apostolic Vicariate only in Northern Patagonia and an Apostolic Prefecture in Southern Patagonia.' For the moment, a central Patagonian Vicariate did not seem realisable, it being a region 'not yet adequately explored' in parts and the part that was known was 'almost entirely in the hands of the Protestants,' migrants from Wales: the Vicariate for Northern Patagonia based in Carmen de Patagones could look after it. His preference for the Apostolic Vicariate based in Carmen with temporary jurisdiction over the Central Vicariate was Fr John Cagliari: 'He knows those areas palm by palm and has excellent relationships with all the bishops in the Argentine Republic, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile.' As an alternative, he gave Fr James Costamagna's name. For the Vicariate or Prefecture of Southern Patagonia he proposed Fr Joseph Fagnano: 'He has a Herculean constitution and does not know either fatigue or fear in difficult undertakings.' He continued; 'This Prefecture could depend on the Carmen Vicariate unless the Holy Father decides it would be better to actually establish an Apostolic Vicariate.'¹⁷³

169 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 29 July 1882, E IV 157-158.

170 To Fr F. Dalmazzo, 27 August 1882, E IV 165.

171 To Fr G. Costamagna, 9 August 1882, E IV 160-161.

172 For precedents, cf. Letters quoted in earlier chapters to Cardinal A. Franchi, 23 August 1876, E III 88-89; to the Secretary of Propaganda Fide, 22 November 1876, E III 118-119; to Cardinal A. Franchi, 31 December 1877, E III 256-261; to Cardinal G. Simeoni, 15 March 1878, E III 320-321; to Leo XIII, 13 April 1880, E III 567-575; to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, 15 April 1880, E III 575-576.

173 To Cardinal G. Simeoni, 29 July 1883, E IV 225-227.

He informed the Cardinal Protector, Lorenzo Nina, two days later of the project now underway, in the terms indicated by Cardinal Simeoni: 'Currently the Congregation of Propaganda is dealing with the question of the missions in Patagonia being divided into three Apostolic Vicariates. I will have a copy prepared of all the paperwork and will see that it arrives in Your Eminence's hands. He added his satisfaction at the elevation of Cardinal Alimonda to the archiepiscopal see of Turin.¹⁷⁴ Cardinal Alimonda's move to Turin, as a member of Propaganda, was also a guarantee of a happy outcome for the Patagonian matter. The solution was also facilitated by the report on the work of conversion already underway, which Fr Fagnani sent Propaganda in 1883: the two colleges in Patagones had 69 boys and 93 girls. In four years, 5,328 baptisms had been administered and the missionaries had reached the Cordigliera, running along the banks of the Limay as far as Lake Nauél-Huapí and the banks of the Nequén as far as Norquin. They had already explored the Río Colorado, the Balcheta desert and both banks of the Río Negro: in short, all of Northern Patagonia over an area of more than 250,000 square kilometres.

The General Congregation met on 27 August 1883. Present were the Cardinals Pitra [ponenti], Simeoni [Prefect], Franzelin, Parocchi, Nina, Hassum and Sbaretti. Approved were the Vicariate of Northern Patagonia with jurisdiction also extended to Central Patagonia, and the Apostolic Prefecture of Southern Patagonia, the Malvinas [Falklands] and Tierra del Fuego. In order to realise it the Salesian Society was asked to make twelve priests available for ministry. Fr John Cagliero was accepted as Provicar with the faculty of sub-delegating for Confirmations and Joseph Fagnano was accepted as Prefect Apostolic. The Pope gave his approval at an audience on 2 September, and Archbishop Domenico Jacobini, Secretary of Propaganda, wrote up the Minutes. Official communication was given Don Bosco by Cardinal Simeoni by letter on 15 September. On 25 September, Don Bosco replied that the priests requested were already in Uruguay and Argentina and available to work in the assigned territories. Besides, another expedition of twenty missionary priests and ten Sisters was imminent.¹⁷⁵ On 16 and 20 November 1883, two Briefs were issued by Leo XIII, one to erect the Vicariate, the other appointing Cagliero as Provicar. On 16 November, the Decree erecting the Apostolic Prefecture was issued.¹⁷⁶

Meanwhile, on 31 October, Don Bosco sent a letter to General Roca, President of the Argentine Republic (1880–86), which the recipient might have found less than acceptable. Attempting a sterile *captatio benevolentiae* which did not work at the level of legal definitions of the Mission, he began: 'The Pampas and Patagonian desert which have cost Your Excellency so much effort and which you were often pleased to recommend for evangelisation by Salesian missionaries, seem to be at the point of taking a steady direction with regard to both civilisation and religion.' Having described the work of the Salesians over four years, he went on to express his appreciation, notably forced, and a hope: 'The active part you have played in the civilisation of those savages and the great sacrifices the Argentine Government has made for the social good of the State and especially on behalf of Salesian institutes, orphanages and schools lets me hope for your help.' He then added rashly in regard to the Argentine political situation and difficult diplomatic relations with the Holy See: 'This trust of mine grows so much more over these days in which the Holy Father has decided to establish the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy in those areas which I have just had the honour of mentioning to Your Excellency in his name. The Holy See will soon provide official communication of everything.'¹⁷⁷

174 To Cardinal L. Nina, 31 July 1883, E IV 228-229.

175 ASCPF, Roma, *Acta S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide*, vol. 252-II (1883), fol. 1007r-1007v; *Ibid.*, lett., Vol. 379 (1883), fol. 523v-524r; *Ibid.*, *Nuova Serie*, Vol. 75 (1895), rubr. 151, fol. 652: cf. C. BRUNO, *Los salesianos y las hijas...*, vol. I, pp. 330-331.

176 Cf. texts in MB XVI 582-584.

177 Letter of 31 October 1883, E IV 238-239. We have already spoken of the earlier letter to Gen. J. A. Roca on 10 November and to Fr G. Costamagna on 12 November 1880 (E III 633-634).

But he had failed to take account of the deeply rooted *Patronato* [Patronato: royal patronage allowing Spanish rulers to appoint Church officials in the colonies] which had morphed into secular jurisdictionalism, nor did he bear this in mind when he asked for the episcopal dignity to be conferred on Cagliero to give greater effectiveness to the activity of the future Provicar. It would mean the Provicar would be promoted to Vicar. Cardinal Alimonda asked for this promotion by letter to Leo XIII on 26 September 1884, at the same time asking Cardinal Nina to support the request. The latter in turn intervened with the Prefect and Secretary of Propaganda, Cardinal Simeoni and Archbishop Domenico Jacobini respectively. The request was granted 'in view of Don Bosco's merits' and to 'make Fr Cagliero's work for the good of his mission more effective.' The Brief relating to this was issued on 30 October 1884.¹⁷⁸ On 3 December 1884, Don Bosco sent a circular (which was also an invitation) to friends and benefactors of the Oratory and the Salesian Missions for the consecration of the first Salesian Bishop. This took place on 7 December.

In the usual circular at the beginning of the year (1884), Don Bosco dedicated a paragraph to the Apostolic Vicariate and Prefecture in Patagonia,¹⁷⁹ announcing Fr Cagliero's elevation to the episcopate and stressing not so much the costs for personally fitting him out but the fact that the new prelate would not find in his field of work 'anything he needed to exercise his pastoral ministry and formation of Christianity – no churches or chapels, no colleges or seminaries.' 'He will only find numerous savage tribes abandoned to inertia and squalor because they are deprived of the benefits of religion, sciences, arts, agriculture, commerce and everything to do with civil life.'¹⁸⁰

One can only presume that this sort of publicity would not find consensus in America. The Archbishop maintained an ambivalent position. He looked favourably on the Salesians operating in Patagonia but was against ceding the Vicariate's territory from the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires. Archbishop Matera, the Apostolic Delegate in Argentina from 1880 to 1884, was on his side in this. Therefore the expulsion and return to Rome of the papal delegate would have made Bishop Cagliero's office as Vicar Apostolic in Patagonia easier to exercise and would have perhaps urged the Archbishop to support the Roman decision. He probably would have done so had the erection of the Vicariate been officially communicated, which it wasn't. But opposition from the political authority would have remained impassable.¹⁸¹ Archbishop Aneiros wrote to Don Bosco on 2 January 1885 saying, among other things: 'At any time, but now more than ever, our Government will never approve of a Vicariate being erected in its dominion without its permission. I would like you to ask the illustrious Cagliero to present himself without the title of Vicar of Patagonia. For my part, I will give him all the faculties needed to exercise all his episcopal powers, both here and in Patagonia, and I will see that he is honoured and respected as bishop.'¹⁸² Don Bosco sent Cagliero a copy of the letter. He was awaiting departure from Marseilles, delayed because of cholera which had closed American ports. Don Bosco advised him: 'Count very much on Fr Lasagna's prudence and the prudence of our elder confreres and the bishops who love us in Jesus. But be wary of taking decisions relating to the civil authorities.' He added a little pearl from his educational system: 'Encourage all our men to direct their efforts to two points on which everything hinges: to make

178 Cf. C. BRUNO, *Los salesianos y las hijas...*, vol. I, pp. 331-333. On pp. 333-334 we find the text of letters sent by Don Bosco to Bishop D. Jacobini il 7 April, 27 August and 19 December 1883; and Cardinal G. Simeoni on 25 September 1883, 12 May 1884 and 16 April 1885.

179 BS 8 (1884) no. 1, January, p. 3.

180 BS 9 (1885) no. 1, January, p. 3. Don Bosco's letters at the beginning of 1886 and 1887 dedicate much room to *La conversione della Patagonia e alle Residenze e centri di Missione*, but cannot be reasonably attributed to him, since he was already physically very weak: cf. BS 10 (1886) no. 1, January, pp. 4-6 and 11 (1887) no. 1, January, pp. 3-5.

181 Cf. Repeated information by Fr Cagliero and Fr Costamagna to Don Bosco in A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Patagonia: I - Realtà e mito nell'azione missionaria salesiana...*, RSS 14 (1995) 16-17, 24-29; letter of 4 June 1878 to Don Bosco from F. BODRATO, *Epistolario...*, p. 292.

182 *Documenti* XXIX 12.

themselves loved and not feared; to make every personal and financial sacrifice in order to promote religious and clerical vocation.’ There was also a note of warning about reports of dreams (especially from Frs Lemoyne and Riccardi) circulating between Europe and America: ‘Once again, I recommend no great store be placed on dreams etc. If they help with understanding moral issues or our rules, well and good. They can continue. Otherwise give them no value.’¹⁸³

In his reply to Archbishop Aneiros on 9 February 1885, Don Bosco completely avoided the problem posed in the 2 January letter and limited himself to renewing the invitation to visit Turin.¹⁸⁴ Instead, to help calm the Salesians in Argentina and Uruguay at a time of legislative actions unfavourable to religious corporations, he sought to draw attention of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry to Salesian Schools in Latin America. The Minister replied to Don Bosco, praising ‘the superb civic work’ they were doing.¹⁸⁵ It had a positive effect on authorities who came to know of it.

For his part, Bishop Cagliari acted with exemplary prudence throughout his mandate (1885–1912). In fact he was able to carry out his mission as Vicar Apostolic without any restriction, but he could not nor did he wish to officially claim his title, either before the Archbishop who continued to exercise jurisdiction by right over Patagonia, nor before civil authorities, though he enjoyed their unconditional respect as he also did from the ecclesiastical world.¹⁸⁶

4.2 From Uruguay to Brazil

From letters and information crossing the Atlantic, from his geographical awareness, and from chats with Fr Lasagna, Don Bosco became aware that Salesian Uruguay was becoming the springboard for launching new undertakings, even bigger ones than had departed Buenos Aires for Patagonia. He was renewing his earlier planetary dreams but with eyes wide open. His spirit of enterprise was still very much alive and his passion for the salvation of souls, of the young especially knew no bounds. Despite his increasing physical frailty ‘his faith was alive, his hope firm and his charity on fire.’

On 8 September 1882, Don Bosco wrote to Fr Dalmazzo, seeing and anticipating a development in Brazil: ‘If you see Cardinal Nina again ... you can tell him that the two Mission houses in the dioceses of Parà and Rio Janeiro in Brazil have finally been established according to the Holy Father’s desire as expressed to me by the Cardinal Secretary of State. Building works and refurbishment have already begun ... Everything is finished in Río Janeiro, and our house is a short distance from the city in a pleasant spot known as Nichteroy ... Yesterday, I sent approval of the contract drawn up to that effect between Mons. Lacerda and Fr Lasagna and a property owner.’¹⁸⁷

After formal contact with the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro in January 1882, Fr Lasagna opened the first work in Brazil at Niteroi. In July 1883, he accompanied the Rector, Fr Michele Gorghino, and two priests, a cleric and a coadjutor to the place, where they opened the S. Rosa hospice and oratory. They found great acceptance in the Catholic world beginning with Emperor Pedro II and especially Princess Isabel Cristina and her husband Gaston d’Orleans, the Count d’Eu, whom Don Bosco had met in Paris two months earlier.¹⁸⁸

183 To Bishop G. Cagliari, 10 February 1885, E IV 313-314.

184 E IV 312.

185 Letter to Comm G. Malvano, Secretary General of the Ministry, 9 February 1885, E IV 312-313.

186 Cf. A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Patagonia: I - Realtà e mito nell'azione missionaria salesiana...*, RSS 14 (1995) 34-43.

187 Letter of 8 September 1882, E IV 172..

188 To Princess I. Braganza, who had asked for prayers through the family chaplain, Don Bosco replied in French on 19 August 1883 (E IV 402-403).

Another work was opened in June 1885 in Sao Paolo, the Sacred Heart secondary school. Fr Lorenzo Giordano, former Vice–rector at Villa Colon with Fr Lasagna, was appointed Rector.

Naturally, Don Bosco intuited the promising future this offered, but also understood the endless need for personnel. He wrote to the new Rector in Sao Paolo: ‘You will certainly face no little difficulty, especially at the beginning of such an extensive mission as S. Paolo, true?’ He also concluded from this that the recipient had the job of ‘finding companions’ through local vocations, inviting him to eventually send ‘some hundreds’ to Turin for formation. ‘We will instruct them and send them back to you capable of helping you in the Mission as far as Mato Grosso.’ Meanwhile they were doing what was needed in Turin to provide Gospel workers, ‘as many as needed.’¹⁸⁹

In March 1886, he wrote to Princess Isabel, thanking her for the kindness and charity she had shown the Salesians in Brazil, recommending them to her and her father, promising the prayers of their pupils for all the imperial family.¹⁹⁰

There were a good number of American references in 1886, 1887 to Don Bosco’s plans and announcements to further moves, other than consolidation of existing works, in the peaceful conquest of Latin America.¹⁹¹

189 To Fr L. Giordano, from S. Benigno, 30 September 1885, E IV 341-342.

190 Letter to Princess Isabella, March 1886, E IV 353. The letter, brought personally by Fr Borghino was followed up by a visit of the Emperor and Empress to the house at S. Paolo.

191 Cf. Chap. 31, §§ 2-3 and 6.

MIRACLE WORKER IN PARIS AND FROHSDORF AND FOUNDER IN TURIN (1883–84)

- 1883 31 January–31 May: journey to Liguria, France (14 February–30 May), Paris (18 April–26 May), with brief stopover in Lille (5–15 May);
- 31 May: Conference to Cooperators in Turin;
- 24 June: Address to past pupils on educational politics;
- 2–7 September: Third General Chapter of Salesian Society;
- 29 October: Conference on the Salesian Coadjutor.
- 1884 24 January: Salesians go to Lille;
- 15 February: Salesians go to Sarriá, Barcelona;
- December: Salesians in Paris.

We have arrived at a point where we see two sides of Don Bosco's life. On the one side we see him still showing great mobility, sustained by exceptional strength of will which overcomes his physical fragility. The struggle to keep his youth institutions afloat and stay on top of the costly construction of *Sacro Cuore*, the Sacred Heart Church, made him feel there was no other alternative than to take to the road and meet old and new benefactors, go begging for money as laborious as that may be. He felt he would be crazy not to. His physical energy was draining and old ills were re-emerging more seriously with new ones, too, at times endangering his life. Nevertheless with a few breaks here and there he was always at work. This was the period of the greatest structural and juridical consolidation for the two Religious Institutes, for significant journeys, expansion of works, depth of understanding of his spirituality, liveliness of animation and growing visibility.

But there was another side where the biographical picture changes radically. Don Bosco's life will be seen to be increasingly marked by times of closure. His life will be largely spent within the ambit of 'family events', even while constantly surrounded and enriched by spiritual extension, his broader impact, and the projection of his educative, missionary and spiritual messages.

1. Don Bosco the educator, social worker, miracle worker during the trip to Paris (1883)

As a tireless beggar, Don Bosco had known for some years which direction to turn to with greater profit – France where he built up a huge family of benefactors, men and women. As a country, France was much more consistent in terms of financial resources than Italy, which had only been seeking political unity and an acceptable economic structure for about two decades and had only been partially drawn into the beginning of industrialisation. Agriculture still lagged behind over vast

areas and huge numbers were feeding a colossal migrant outpouring into Europe, France itself, and overseas.

Even before the end of 1882 and early 1883 Don Bosco was forewarning some charitable individuals: 'If France remains calm,' he told Claire Louvet 'I will leave on 20 January next for Genoa and Nice, the Alps, Cannes, Toulon, Marseilles, Valence, Lyons and be due in Paris at the end of March.'¹ A few days before departure, which was 31 January, he indicated a more detailed itinerary: Sampierdarena, Varazze, Alassio, Ventimiglia, Nice, Toulon, Marseilles from 31 January to 1 April, between arrival and time spent in each of these places.² From Marseilles he indicated the stages to follow: Lyons and Paris and his residence in the French capital: 'I will leave for Lyons on 1 April and hope to arrive in Paris on the 15th ... Address in Paris: Chez Mme. De Combaud, 34 Avenue de Messine.'³

In this his most extensive journey to France and triumphal time in Paris, there was no mention of the political problems with Italy caused by the French occupation of Algeria, which became a French Protectorate in May 1881 or, from Italy's side, with the signing of the Triple Accord with the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires on 20 May 1882, news of which filtered out at the beginning of 1883. Nor did there appear to be any notable effects from the political, social and cultural shift provoked by the republican, secular and anticlerical revolution which took place in France in 1879, reinforced by rapid and drastic school legislation in 1880-1882.⁴ In some respects, Don Bosco's journey seemed to be outside history. Other than the usual people he spoke with in the south, in the north he seemed to be surrounded by people who represented the past more than the future: legitimists, monarchists, pretenders to the throne or their supporters. Just the same, he was also able to 'create history' in the Catholic world as the spokesman for hope in God who was involved in human affairs, and for confidence that charity could bring about the eternal kingdom of God rather than human kingdoms. However, his journey to France was not actually an apostolic or missionary pilgrimage. His long stay in Paris, as in Nice, Marseilles, Lyons and elsewhere, had the purpose of meeting benefactors and encouraging charity for Salesian works and to build the Sacred Heart Church in Rome.

The itinerary was substantially adhered to with one or two days delay. Having left on 31 January with Fr Durando and French Salesian Fr De Barruel, he made brief visits from 31 January to 14 February to houses in Liguria from Sampierdarena to Varrazze, Alassio, Vallecrosia. He arrived in Mentone towards midnight on the 15th where he was the guest of an English Lord. On the 16th he was in Nice at the *Patronage Saint-Pierre*. He began the intense activity of money collection at that point, speaking in public and in private, visiting and receiving people, blessing them, collecting donations for the various works.

He remained in Nice until the end of February, then went on to Cannes, Toulon, La Navarre. On 16 March he was in Marseilles where he remained until 2 April. He was certainly informed of Archbishop Gastaldi's sudden death, which happened on 25 March, Easter Sunday. We do not know any of his reactions. It was Fr Rua's decision, in agreement with his absent superior, that at 10.00 am. on 5 April, as reported by *L'Unità Cattolica*, 'the Salesian Congregation' celebrated 'a solemn funeral Office' in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in the presence of some of the deceased's family.⁵

Friends and benefactors in Marseilles were invited by a circular, dated 22 March, to take part in a Mass celebrated by Don Bosco, the blessing of a statue of Mary Help of Christians and a

1 To C. Louvet, 5 December 1882, E IV 453.

2 To C. Louvet, 18 January 1883, E IV 454.

3 To C. Louvet, from Marseilles 2 March 1883, E IV 455-456.

4 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9.

5 Cf. "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 79, Wednesday 4 April 1883, p. 515.

conference for Cooperators followed by Benediction.⁶ It was a day of celebration at the *Oratoire Saint-Leon*. The diocesan Bishop, Jean Robert, was present in the evening, as well as Canon Clement Guiol and his brother Mons. Louis, the Rector of the Catholic Faculties in Lyons. Don Bosco gave a lengthy address. The first part was dedicated to a review of works undertaken and needing support 'for the benefit of religion and civil society.' He dwelt in particular on French works he had visited a few days earlier at La Navarre, Saint-Cyr and the *Oratoire Saint-Leon*. He drew his listeners' attention to this latter, especially the chapel that had been built, and land that had been purchased for a third building under construction which would allow them to go from 300 to 400 or more boys. But debts had also increased by some 200,000 francs worth overall. Moreover, the boys' appetites were excellent. How can we meet all this? Simply by making a profession of very concrete charity, recalling the 'words of the Gospel: *Date et dabitur vobis*.' Whoever offers his neighbour charity is lending it to God and will be sure of a hundred percent interest: the best paying bank of all.⁷

On 2 April, with Fr Barruel as his secretary, he left for Avignon and stayed there on the 3rd as guest of Michel Bent, a religious items and furniture merchant. On the 4th he went to Valence. During the trip from Valence to Lyons he stopped over at Tain at the home of Albert Du Boÿs, his important biographer as we have seen. He was guest of Mons. Louis Guiol in Lyons from 7–16 April. On the 8th he visited the Sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, where he was received by Benedictine Dom Pothier and the Superior General of the Sulpicians. On the 15th he returned to Fourvière to visit the Sisters of the "Société de N. Dame de la Retraite du Cenacle," blessing a sick sister and the co-foundress Thérèse Couderc (1791–1885) who was also ill. On 11 April he was invited to dinner at the seminarian's holiday house, addressing them with words of advice and encouragement.

A certain Fr Boisard had founded the *Oeuvre des ateliers d'apprentissage* in the suburb of Guillotièrre in Lyons. In 1882, he had spent a month at the Oratory and was inspired to introduce the preventive system and spirit of piety he found there in his own work. Don Bosco visited him and addressed his educators and co-workers 'in picturesque language.' He prefaced his words by saying that children are God's delight and developed his thesis on the relationship between the education of youth and the good of society: 'Society's salvation, gentlemen, is in your pockets,' he told them in his well-known words. 'These boys taken in by the *Patronage*, and the boys sustained by the *Oeuvre des ateliers* await your help. If you hold back now, if you allow these boys to become victims of Communists theories, the benefits you refuse them today they will come and demand from you one day, no longer with cap in hand, with your goods they will also want your life.' When a journalist asked him who he was referring to he replied: 'These are works that not only Catholics should support *viribus unitis*, but all people who have the morality of childhood at heart. Humanitarians no less than Christians need to get involved. It is the only way to prepare a better future for society.'⁸ In Lyons, Don Bosco obtained an audience with the Central Council of the two Works, the Propagation of the Faith, and the Holy Childhood. He pleaded passionately for the Patagonian Missions. At the headquarters of the *Société de Géographie* on 14 April, he also gave a conference on the 'progress of Christian civilisation' in Patagonia, thanks to the religious, moral and humanising activity of the Salesians among the *Indios*.⁹ On 16 April he wrote to Fr Albera from Lyons, sharing out money, one of the results of his stay in Avignon: 'We are leaving for Paris, but with a day's stopover in Moulins. You will receive 5 thousand francs from Mrs Duros of Avignon,

6 Text of invitation with order of rites in MB XVI 466-467.

7 *Festa e conferenza dei Cooperatori nell'Oratorio di San Leone in Marsiglia*, BS 7 (1883) no. 5, May, pp. 78-80; "Bulletin Salésien" 5 (1883) no. 6, June, pp. 70-73; cf. Chap. 22, § 7.

8 Echo de Fourvière, 12 April 1883, in *Répertoire analytique des lettres françaises adressées à don osco en 1883*, ed. F. DESRAMAUT, "Cahiers Salésiens", no. 8-9, April-October 1983, pp. 112-115.

9 *Don Bosco à la Société de Géographie de Lyon (14 avril 1883)*, "Cahiers Salésiens", no. 8-9..., p. 115-117.

half of which is for you and half for S. Isidore or Saint-Cyr. Our address in Paris: Countess de Combaud, Avenue de Messine 34.¹⁰ Keep praying. Things are going well.¹¹

On arrival in Paris, late in the afternoon of 18 April, Don Bosco immediately asked Turin for items both sacred and secular: 'Tell me quickly: 1. An address for getting medals, holy pictures of Mary Help of Christians. 2. If they can't be found here in Paris, send them to me from Turin. Avenue Messine 34.' He wrote to Fr Berto: 'Send me my summer coat.'¹²

Since Countess de Combaud's apartment where Don Bosco was staying was on the fourth floor, and not convenient for audiences, the Paris community of the Oblate Sisters of the Heart of Jesus in Rue de la Ville l'Evêque made part of their premises available to receive the many people who came to visit Don Bosco in the afternoons. He continued to see visitors from Friday, 20 April to Monday the 30th. Between letters, various documents among which a memoir of a 'Former Magistrate' from Paris,¹³ and especially an interesting diary of events kept daily by young Oblate Charlotte Bethford, we have an almost live picture of the throng that crowded in hour after hour to see Don Bosco.¹⁴ People came from every level of society, seeing the saint and miracle worker in him. They came to ask him to pray for them, bless them, be their spokesman with the Virgin Help of Christians, mediatrix of spiritual and material graces, healings, solutions to personal, family, and business problems. Sometimes the diarist thought she could identify some traces of superstition as well as expressions of sincere devotion. Don Bosco welcomed and listened to them all with 'incredible' kindness and patience, advising, handing out a medal or holy picture of Our Lady, receiving alms, thanking and farewelling them with an exhortation to faith and Christian hope. His hosts had to work 'firmly and kindly' to control who came in. There was an endless queue of visitors, and they needed to extend the hours initially planned for.

However, it was just one side of Don Bosco's exhausting daily commitments. Before and after the protracted chore of audiences, the day was packed with meeting large groups in public churches and private chapels, religious celebrations in monasteries in male and female communities, Catholic educational institutes; conferences, visits to the sick and families under particular stress.

The day following his arrival he went to the Archbishop's palace, where he was met by the Coadjutor Bishop with right of succession, François-Marie Richard (1819-1908), and in the afternoon by eighty-year-old Cardinal Archbishop Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert OMI (1802-86), who invited him to preach and ask for money at the Church of the Magdalene. On the 21st he visited the work at Auteuil, which abbé Roussel had offered him without hesitation three years earlier. He returned there on the afternoon of 20 May, when he spoke to the boys and prayed with hem.¹⁵

On 22 April, Don Bosco dined with the Assumptionists. Among other things it seems he encouraged them to turn the periodical *La Croix* into a daily paper.¹⁶ Since he was just coming away from a lengthy battle on behalf of the Catholic school, he was able to understand and share the vehement defence of the Church's rights and of Catholicism which the Assumptionists had vigorously mounted, led by their resolute founder Fr Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810-80).¹⁷ But Don Bosco, who belonged to no party and was looking for money, probably had to remain outside the

10 E IV 216.

11 To G. Rossi, 19 April 1883, E IV 216.

12 To Fr G. Berto, 19 April 1883, E IV 217.

13 *Dom Bosco à Paris*, par un Ancien Magistrat, 5ème édition. Paris, Ressayre 1883.

14 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco, rue de la Ville l'Evêque, à Paris en avril, in April 1883*, RSS 7 (1988) 9-34.

15 "France illustrée", 26 May 1883 and in E. GUERS, *Une grande oeuvre à Paris. L'orphelinat d'Auteuil et l'abbé Roussel*. Paris-Auteuil, Librairie de la France illustrée, s. d., pp. 238-239.

16 Cf. *Le Pèlerin* 12 May 1883 and *La Croix* del 1 December 1934. *La Croix* became a daily on 16 June 1883; reference to the visit in E. LACOSTE, *Le P. Vincent de Paul Bailly Fondateur de "La Croix" et la Maison de la Bonne Presse - 2 décembre 1836 - 2 décembre 1912*. Paris, Bonne Presse 1913, p. 79.

intransigence of the feisty group behind the newspaper which was at the heart of Catholic intransigency. In contrast to a 'viscerally realist and counter-revolutionary' France, Don Bosco represented 'the efficient action of the regenerating preservation of society.'¹⁸ *Le Pèlerin* which the Assumptionists had been publishing for years, gave a more earnest theological interpretation of Don Bosco's presence in Paris on 12 May: 'As for us, we believe Don Bosco's arrival in Paris, at the heart of France, uplifting souls as he does, is one of the most impressive results of the prayers and penances at the beginning of the year, and of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The sentiment involving all of Paris, which seems indifferent to the passing through of a priest, religious, saint, so shortly after the expulsions, and which throws money into his hands almost as if it were a ransom, is certainly a supernatural deed of the first order and we believe that Don Bosco, an old man shuffling along, gently supported by the arm of a friend, failing in eyesight and who reads no newspapers, provides France with nothing more or less than the solution to the worker question.'¹⁹

On the evening of 23 April, Don Bosco visited the St Sulpice Seminary. He gave the clerics a brief talk on *Erat lucerna ardens et lucens* and stayed for supper. On the 28th he celebrated Mass in the parish church of Our Lady of Victories.²⁰ In January, Don Bosco had sought hospitality from the parish priest there during his Paris sojourn, stressing the coincidence of the two Marian titles: Our Lady of Victories and Mary Help of Christians. But because the presbytery was just too small, Fr L Chevojon, much to his regret, had to tell him it was impossible to take him in and that he had found no other solution.²¹ It was the day for the Archconfraternity Mass. Don Bosco 'spoke of charity and Mary Help of Christians.' He 'explained the purpose of his works, asked for alms for his poor orphans.' The collection resulted in the considerable sum of 2,000 francs.²² Sunday 29th was full of commitments. It began with the celebration of the Mass at the Church of St Thomas of Villanova with a nearby community of Sisters whom he visited. He then went to a church adjacent to the St Sulpice parish, which was the headquarters of the 'catechism of perseverance' for women, run by Fr Sire. Don Bosco spoke 'slightly hesitant' French 'with a quaint Italian accent,' giving a short talk which was listened to with bated breath. The talk was included in the meeting's minutes. He said he was happy to be in a chapel where Pius VII had been, and to be in communion of heart and spirit with his listeners. He gave them some advice: 'Above all be good Catholics, preserve the fear of God which alone can make you very happy in this life and after death. Spread this around. May God give you the grace to infuse it in your parents, your friends and enemies. I bless you. May you be the honour and glory of St Sulpice and the support of the Church.' One of the women who later became a sister, gave a description of him in her diary, highlighting his imminent physical decline: 'Don Bosco still has dark hair. He is of ordinary stature, slightly bent over, with a long thin face. He walks very slowly, since his labours have weakened him so; he also sees very poorly. How good is it to be in contact with a saint.'²³

At 3.00 pm. he gave a comprehensive conference in Paris's most aristocratic church, La Madeleine. We have a shorthand version of the text of the conference which was advertised beforehand and had an extraordinary effect.²⁴ 'We are going to talk to you about young people' he

17 Cf. Emmanuel d'Alzon dans *la société et l'Église du XIXe siècle. Colloque d'histoire sous la direction de René Rémond et Émile Poulat, 4-6 décembre 1980*. Paris, Éditions du Centurion 1982.

18 F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*. Turin, SEI 1996, pp. 1172 e 1175.

19 "Pèlerin", 12 May 1883, "Cahiers Salésiens", no. 8-9, p. 119; "Bulletin Salésien" 5 (1883) no. 5, May, p. 64.

20 Cf. Chap. 2, § 2.

21 Cf. letter undated [January 1883], MB XVI 460-461.

22 *Documenti* XXV 146-148, 166-167.

23 MB XVI 187-189, 498-499.

24 Published in the *Gazette de France*, supplement on 30 April 1883, taken up by the Ancien Magistrat from Paris and, with some variations, by L. AUBINEAU, *Dom Bosco. Sa biographie, ses oeuvres et son séjour à Paris*. Paris, A. Josse [1883], pp. 21-31; brief news items and summary in BS 7(1883) no. 6, June, pp.

said. 'According to the words of one of your most illustrious prelates, Bishop Dupanloup. "society will be good if you give its youth a good education. If you leave them prey to evil, society will be perverted.' 'When you speak to me about youth,'" a holy priest said, "I don't want you telling me about projects, plans; I want to see the results that ensue." This is why I simply explain to you what divine providence has allowed us to do for youth; your hearts will be touched by it.' He then went on to speak of the purpose and the importance of his work, explaining that he intended to refer to 'abandoned boys who run around through the streets, squares, lane ways, and who, if ignored, will sooner or later become the scourge of society and end up populating the prisons.' He told them about the beginnings and developments of his work in Turin, first the Oratory then the hospice, how it spread throughout Italy, France and later Latin America, the founding of the FMA Institute. He told them that 'Today the number of houses we have founded and run has reached the huge figure of 164. They take in more than 150,000 boys and each year around 35,000 to 40,000 enter and leave. Every year we have the consolation of having co-operated in the salvation of souls we have enabled to serve God, religion, their country, family and society.' It had been very difficult finding the money required, nevertheless 'here is the great mystery' that up until now we have succeeded despite being 'poor and without means of sustenance.' It was the 'secret of God's merciful goodness. He has been pleased to favour my work because the good of society and the Church lies in the good education and upbringing of youth. For us the Holy Virgin has really been Our Lady Help of Christians; we owe the success of our labours to her' and 'She blesses those who busy themselves with the young.' He finished by thanking his listeners, and Our Lady Help of Christians, who would not fail them with her heavenly assistance. 'As a reward for your charity to the orphans,' he said 'she will protect your interests, your families and be the guide and support of your children. I ask her to always be our Mother and to be our supreme protector at the hour of our death. May She be our strength and hope here below as we wait to be able to praise and bless Her in Heaven.'²⁵ When the conference was over, Don Bosco was picked up by Fr Pietro Gasparri (1852–1934), future Cardinal and Secretary of State for Benedict XV and Pius XI, who went with him to the Catholic Institute where Gasparri had been Professor of Canon Law for a number of years.

The following day, he returned to the Madeleine to celebrate Mass for the collectors at the vigil – the night before they had collected the considerable amount of 15,000 francs – and for benefactors of his work.

On Tuesday, 1 May, he celebrated Mass at the church of St Sulpice, 'the queen of parishes' in Paris, with a crowd of faithful as many as for the largest of solemnities. After the Gospel reading the two assistant priests accompanied him to the communion rail where he spoke for ten minutes before a public which listened in profound silence. 'Religion' he said 'softens the miseries and afflictions of our exile. Only religion can assure us of happiness after our exile on earth. Persevere in your tradition of generous charity for all good works. The most important one is the Christian education of youth. Begin at home, bring your children up well.' 'I am sorry I cannot talk to you about the work I am asking alms for. It consists at gathering orphans and vagabonds to instruct them, make good citizens and Christians out of them. Your donations are used to develop this good work. This way you will attract God's blessing on yourselves.'²⁶ In the afternoon Don Bosco was taken to the Vincentians, and spoke to the assembly at the *patronage* about the orphans. The group included the *Dame Patronesse* and the committee of founding members.²⁷ On 2 May, Fr

87-88.

25 *Documenti* XXV 167-172. The text is taken from *Gazette de France*; also the case in MB XVI 526-530.

26 *Dom Bosco*, "Le Rosier de Marie", 12 May 1883; cf. L. AUBINEAU, *Dom Bosco...*, pp. 35-36; *Documenti* XXV 184-186.

27 Cf. L. AUBINEAU, *Dom Bosco...*, pp. 37-42; *Documenti* XXV 189-191; MB XVI 538-540.

Rua arrived from Turin to help Don Bosco and Fr De Barruel. On 3 May, Don Bosco celebrated Mass and spoke at the Church of St. Chlotilde.²⁸

With regard to the first stage of Don Bosco's stay in Paris, Leon Aubineau, in his *Dom Bosco*. Asked himself: 'Why so much emotion surrounding Don Bosco in Paris? A fortnight ago Don Bosco's name was barely known, yet all of a sudden countless Christians surrounded him in acclamation, flocked to the churches where he was celebrating Mass to pray with him and receive his blessing. He is close to their hopes and sorrows, consoling, blessing, encouraging. He is a priest of works, in France too, and spokesman for Divine Providence which supports them; a messenger of a living, spontaneous, joyful piety; on the one hand there is wealth that gives and charity that abounds, and on the other there is the poverty that gratefully receives.'²⁹

Don Bosco was away from Paris for ten or so days. On 5 May, he went to Lille, the *département* in the north on the border with Belgium, where he remained until the 14th as guest of Mr de Montigny. He visited and accepted the orphanage of St Gabriel.³⁰ Archbishop Alfred Duquesnay of Cambrai, the diocese Lille then belonged to, thanked him for his visit to the city and for accepting the work, in a letter on 18 May.³¹

Particularly touching was the Mass he celebrated at the Sacre Coeur Sisters Institute and his meeting with the Sisters and their pupils. He visited other religious communities and celebrated Mass in some parish churches, and went to bless the sick. On the return trip to Paris he spent two days at Amiens asking for money from some charitable families; he said Mass and spoke in the cathedral. Perhaps it was not by chance that Don Bosco declined the invitation of the 12th Catholic Congress, which began in Paris on 9 May, to preside at one of the sessions,³² and he returned to the capital when the congress was over. He probably wished to avoid the risk that Christian philanthropy would be seen to be in collusion with political aims.

On return to the Avenue Mesine on the 16th he remained there a further ten days. On Thursday 17 May, he gave a conference to a packed public audience in St Augustine's church. Among other things he expressed the hope that the pious men and women of Paris who were so open to charity would help him found a work like the ones in Marseilles, Nice, Turin, a house to accept poor boys and vagabonds, a simple place that would not create a stir.³³ The following day, 18 May, he celebrated Mass at the Hotel Lambert where Prince Ladislao Czartoryski was staying, and which members of the d'Orleans family attended. The Count de Paris belonged to this family and was next in line, as pretender to the throne, to the Count de Chambord. After Mass, Don Bosco spent time with the thirty or so people there, including Augusto Czartoryski who served at Mass, and who would later take his vows in the Salesian Society after a brief but difficult journey.³⁴ On 21 May, he visited the Mathilde refuge for incurable patients where he celebrated Mass and blessed the sick.

In the early afternoon that same day he resumed audiences at the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and gave a conference in the church of Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Cailou. The first to speak was Cardinal Lavigerie, Bishop of Carthage, who dearly wanted to meet the 'Italian Vincent de Paul'. He seized the opportunity to invite him to go with his religious family, 'half Italian, half French' to Tunisia: many Italian families had established themselves there, he said, and 'there was a need

28 *Documenti* XXV 198-200.

29 L. AUBINEAU, *Dom Bosco...*, pp. 6-18, 38-42.

30 Cf. § 5.

31 Text in MB XVI 555.

32 Cf. *Il Congresso Cattolico di Parigi*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 113, Tuesday 15 May 1883, pp. 450-451.

33 *Don Bosco...*, par un Ancien Magistrat, pp. 103-105; *Un discorso di don Bosco nella chiesa di S. Agostino di Parigi*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 119, Tuesday 22 May 1883, p. 474.

34 J. DU BOURG, *Les Entretiens des Princes à Frohsdorf*. Paris, Librairie Académique Perrin et Cie 1910, pp. 134-135; MB XVI 226-227; cf. Chap. 34, § 5.

to gather up the orphans and all the children without essential support.’ He concluded by calling on the ‘Father of orphans in Italy. Come. I am appealing to your heart which has already responded to the voice of Europe, America; now it is Africa presenting you with its abandoned children reaching out their arms to you. Your charity is so great that it will be able to accept them.’³⁵ Don Bosco declined much of the praise he heard, thanked him and said he was open to the possible involvement in Africa. Then once again, he asked for ‘French charity, Parisian charity,’ help for works that relied on charity.³⁶

On the afternoon of the 22nd, at the invitation of the President of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences, he met with the Central Council, giving them a brief address. According to the minutes for 22 May, signed by J. Josse, Don Bosco, ‘as a long-standing member of the St Vincent de Paul Conference’ highlighted ‘all the good that had come from the Society of St Vincent de Paul working with parish clergy for works of charity.’ He then spoke of his foundations, saying he had come to Paris ‘to establish a new house here for poor abandoned boys.’ The principle of education is to win the hearts of children and obtain their good behaviour and work through the affection they show their teachers,’ Don Bosco was offered 1,000 francs.³⁷

There was a reception held on the 23rd by many men and women to farewell Don Bosco. It was held at the hôtel Fauchier belonging to Madame de Combaud’s brother. Various visits to communities and families filled in the final two days in Paris. A notable one was to the Collège Stanislas, run by the Marianists, where he spoke to pupils and superiors. Don Bosco then went to bless the girls staying at the hostel run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion. The Carmelite sisters of the Sacred Heart in Avenue Messine later sent him affiliation to their monastery.³⁸

On 26 May, accompanied by Fr Rua and Fr De Barruel, he left Paris. In an extensive article in *L’Univers*, Leon Aubineau wrote up a condensed summary of Don Bosco’s stay in the ‘Ville Lumière’.³⁹ On the way from Paris to Dejon and Dole, during the stop at Reims to catch the second train, he met Léon Harmel, friend of Val des Bois. He remained in Dijon from the 26th to the 29th as guest of the Marquis of Saint-Seine. On the 27th, accompanied by Fr Rua, he celebrated Mass at the Carmelite Sisters’ Monastery and blessed the Prioress, Maris della Trinità, who was ill, praying for her recovery. On 28 May she thanked Don Bosco and sent him a donation of 700 francs, then sent him a further 509 francs, taken up in a collection at their chapel, through the chaplain.⁴⁰ The month of May preacher at Notre Dame de Dijon sent him a donation of his own, recommending a long list of intentions for his prayers.⁴¹ In Dijon, Don Bosco visited the Jesuit college where first communions were being celebrated and various families were in attendance. On the afternoon of the following day he gave a conference at Our Lady of Good Hope. On 29 May, the De Maistre family was waiting for him at Dôle. He left there on the 30th and, passing through Modane, arrived in Turin towards 9.00am. on Thursday the 31st.

On 2 February 1884, during an address on the social question to the French House of Representatives, the Bishop of Angers, Charles-Émile Freppel, recalled Don Bosco’s visit to Paris thus: ‘Yes, Religion! In reality, only St Vincent de Paul brought a solution to the workers question in his day, more than did all the writers in Louis XIV’s century, and now today, Don Bosco, a Religious in Italy who visited Paris, succeeds in preparing the solution to the worker question better than all the speakers in the Italian parliament. This is the truth. That is undebatable!’⁴² The miracle worker had also been seen through socio-political eyes: principally, as he had said himself at so many

35 Text in MB XVI 253.

36 Italian and French text in MB XVI 254, 549.

37 *Documenti* XXV 264-265; MB XVI 208-209, 499-500.

38 *Documenti* XXV 260-261.

39 *Documenti* XXV 280-283.

40 Text of the letter reproduced in MB XVI 563. The prior died on 4 November 1889.

41 MB XVI 563-564.

conferences, because of the strict connection between youthful educative assistance, regeneration and social peace. But also, according to some of the press, because of some of the hidden motives Don Bosco's trip to Paris had in supporting Catholic conservatives, candidates for the coming political elections. In effect, looking at the circle of admirers and benefactors around Don Bosco, for those who were unaware of his true personality, he could have appeared to be allied with the enemies of the new Republic.⁴³ This impression could have been reinforced by his trip to Frohsdorf. It was, of course, unthinkable that the exhausting chore of audiences in July only be interpreted as a gesture of forced condescension to friends and of clear pastoral value.

Don Bosco returned home during the novena to Mary Help of Christians, and celebrated the Feast with his Salesians and boys on 5 June. His arrival at Valdocco on 31 May was especially joyous. A large banner had been prepared which read; *Dear Father, France honours you, Turin loves you!* He stood on a podium and addressed a few words to the large group of Salesians and boys, calming them, telling them it was still him even if his hat was a French one: he was 'still your most affectionate friend so long as God leaves a little bit of life in me.' Then he went on to celebrate Mass in the Church of Mary Help of Christians.⁴⁴

In the evening he gave a conference to the Cooperators, telling them of the central theme of his *tour de France* involving both Salesian works and the collaboration of Cooperators in an activity of undoubted relevance and success. He put his habitual message to them once again, reconfirmed many times over in the proceeding weeks: 'Work on the good education and upbringing of youth, especially the poorest and most abandoned, who are in the greater number, and you will easily succeed in giving glory to God, procuring the good of Religion, saving many souls and effectively cooperating in the reformation and well-being of society. Reason, religion, history, experience all demonstrate that religious and civil society will be good or bad according to whether its youth are good or bad.' He added, though, that the activity of the Cooperators, in fact and by right, was not only aimed at supporting Salesian works but also 'according to their purpose' procuring 'the moral and religious well-being of your own towns.' He knew 'how everyone' was working for 'the noble purpose of nurturing young people ... in their families, school, parishes.' Finally, in keeping with the spirit of their *Regulations* he indicated practical means and methods 'to use to help youth.'⁴⁵

On the evening of 4 June he gave a conference to female Cooperators, touching especially on looking after 'boys and girls'. The maternal side of their sensitivity. He applied the following Scripture passage to the Virgin Mary: *Si quis est parvulus veniat ad me Venite filii, audite me: timorem Domini docebo vos.* 'She is a mother' and mothers have children of a tender age more than adults. 'Mary loved little children both because they are innocent and more easily seduced and also because they are more worthy of compassion, help, defence.' They also see Jesus in them 'who went from childhood all the way to being a young man under her very own eyes.' 'Therefore Mary loves and favours people who see to their spiritual and bodily well-being,' obtaining 'special and even extraordinary graces' from God. He assured them they would never lack the 'reward' promised by the Saviour. He demonstrated this by recalling recent events. 'Most recently in France, in all the places I went to, Nice, Saint-Cyr, Toulon, Marseilles, Lyons, Amiens, Paris, Lille, Dijon and many other cities I heard people tell me about favours reported, unexpected recoveries, the cessation of squabbles and discord, the end of confusion and long-awaited conversions achieved, and so many other graces obtained through the intercession of Mary Help

42 "Journal officiel de la République française". Chambre. Débats parlementaires, 3 February 1884, p. 280 (session on 2nd); cf. *Mons. Freppel, Don Bosco e gli operai nella Camera dei deputati francesi*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 36, Sunday 10 February 1884, p. 142.

43 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1172-1176.

44 BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, p. 103.

45 BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, p. 104; cf. *Arrivo di D. Bosco a Torino e la conferenza dei Cooperatori salesiani*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 129, Sunday 3 June 1883, p. 514.

of Christians as told by people who had been benefactors of poor youth.' *Date et dabitur vobis* was his final appeal.⁴⁶

The feast of Mary Help of Christians was an exceptional one. The Coadjutor Bishop of Ceneda (Vittorio Veneto today) presided, Bishop Sigismondo Brandolini Rota (1823–1908) of an ancient noble family. He stayed four days at Valdocco, thoroughly charmed by Don Bosco, the Oratory, the life led by the Salesians and boys. He expressed his astonishment in evening talks (goodnights) given to the student section on 7 June and the trade boys section on the 8th, the eve of his departure. 'I am leaving you very much moved, profoundly impressed by what I have seen,' he said. 'I will go to Veneto and speak about D. Bosco everywhere, about his wonderful institute, the majestic ceremonies I have been at, his boys' 'Ah! How I would love to stay with you, live your life!'⁴⁷ It was not just wishful thinking. In August he asked if he could be accepted among the Salesians, put aside any episcopal signs and carry out any pastoral service assigned him.⁴⁸ Don Bosco replied positively⁴⁹ but the Pope did not give his assent. As Coadjutor with right of succession, in 1885, the bishop, who remained very affectionate towards the Salesian Society, replaced his predecessor, Bishop Cavriani.

2. From Paris to Frohsdorf: Don Bosco's religious, social, and educative politics

Don Bosco also recalled events in France for the past pupils when they came to pass on their best wishes on 24 June. The argument had already been broached the year before in his usual meeting with the Oratory past pupils. At Valdocco on 23 July 1882, Prof. Alessandro Fabre had read a speech which was then published on *Don Bosco's politics*.⁵⁰ At the time, Don Bosco did not pick up on it in his own address,⁵¹ but he did so on this 24 June occasion, with explicit reference to the French experience .

'Recently, as you know, I was in Paris and gave talks in various churches to plead the cause of our works and, let us be frank, to get money to provide bread and soup for our boys, who never lose their appetites. Now, among the listeners there were some who came along only to hear D. Bosco's political ideas.' But his words were enough to dissolve their presumptions. With the past pupils he both denied and affirmed the social and political worth of educative and social work. It was the kind of activity that society would never threaten and indeed would strengthen. 'No, really' he stated 'we do not do politics with our work,' meaning party politics and, ultimately revolutionary activity. 'We respect constituted authority, observe laws that should be obeyed. Pay taxes.' But politics could also be understood in constructive terms, and he did not shrink from this. 'If you like, we also do politics, but in an innocuous way, indeed a way that benefits any Government.' In fact 'the work of the oratories' in its broadest sense tends to 'reduce the number of unruly types, vagabonds, by coming to the relief, especially, of the most needy youth.' 'It lessens the number of little miscreants and young thieves.' 'It empties the prisons ... forms good citizens' who will support authorities in 'maintaining order in society, tranquillity and peace.' 'This is our politics' he concluded, revealing his moderation and confirming his political neutrality, which he ended up recommending to the past pupils themselves.⁵²

It was not affected by the episode in which Don Bosco was the main character three weeks later. An unforeseen event, experienced and interpreted differently, took Don Bosco away from the

46 BS 7 (1883) no. 7, July, pp. 104-105.

47 *Documenti* XXV 306-308.

48 Cf. text in MB XVI 567-568.

49 To Bishop S. Brandolini, 16 August 1883, E IV 232-233.

50 A. FABRE, *La politica di don Bosco*. Turin, Tip. G. Derossi 1882, 16 p.

51 BS 6 (1882) no. 9, September, pp. 149-150.

52 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, pp. 127-128.

relative quiet of Valdocco: the quick but exhausting trip to Frohsdorf Castle in Austria to be at the bedside of Count de Chambord. Apart from the person he was invited to visit and what he meant politically, and to whom he was to bring the blessing of Our Lady, it was a case like too many others for Don Bosco, to whom many turned in time of hardship and need. He felt he was simply a priest who, despite some resistance due to health and probably also political opportunity, believed in the saving power, as well as its therapeutic value, if it were God's will, of the Blessed Virgin's intercession in the order of temporal and eternal salvation if someone asked for protection. This was not the case for many who saw in the Count de Chambord, the legitimate pretender to the French throne and the guarantee of a new political, moral and religious restoration. What they were looking for from the miracle worker, his prayers and blessing, was a miracle in favour of the Count's health and along with this, the Catholic cause in France and the Church. Similar expectations, because of their intimate bond with their father, were shared by the small world closest to Don Bosco, the Salesians at the Oratory and in the neighbouring houses, as well as by moderate Catholics in Turin, readers of the *L'Unità Cattolica* or those who sympathised with it.⁵³

The event was closely followed by various secular and anticlerical or irreligious newspapers, but for quite the opposite reasons. The main spokesman for a range of 'anti' views in Turin was the *Gazzetta del popolo*, which ran articles on 20 and 22 July.

Four telegrams came to Don Bosco on 1 July regarding the state of health of the Count Henri de Chambord (1820–1883), resident at Frohsdorf Castle in Nieder-Österreich, 40 kilometres from Vienna, close to the station at Wiener-Neustadt.⁵⁴ After letters and insistent requests, Count Joseph Du Bourg from Toulouse arrived at the Oratory on 13 July, sent by the man who was ill, and with the support of Baron Ricci des Ferres they convinced Don Bosco to go. He left the Oratory that same evening with Fr Rua, arriving after an interminably long journey across Lombardy, Veneto and Friuli to the Wiener-Neustadt station at 5.00 am. On 15 July, the memorial of St Henry, the Count's name day. Don Bosco went immediately to pay his respects to the patient and then went off with Fr Rua to celebrate Mass. He then had a long conversation with the sick Count, preparing him prayerfully to receive the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. The meal was at dusk, during which the patient made a brief appearance in the dining room in his wheelchair.

The Count had a brief period when his illness subsided. On the 16th, the Feast of Our Lady of Carmel, he wanted Don Bosco to say Mass in his room and to receive communion from him. On the morning of the 17th the two travellers celebrated Mass, one at 5.30. the other at 6.00, and left for Turin where they arrived towards midday on the 18th. The patient had apparently improved over time. The interviewer for *L'Unità Cattolica* referred to the details of the occasion he had heard from Don Bosco and commented: 'He is far from speaking of miracles, but whatever the reason, it is certain that before D. Bosco's arrival in Frohsdorf, the Count de Chambord was pretty much given up on by the doctors and had no further hope of recovery. The Italian papers used the headline *Dying Man from Frohsdorf* as the headline for news on the Count, saying 'Now he is much better: we certainly cannot say he has recovered and he might get worse and still die, but the latest telegrams from Frohsdorf tell us that the improvement continues.'⁵⁵

53 Cf. among the dozens of articles and notices dedicated by the magazine to the sickness, death and memory of the Count from 4 July to 8 September, *D. Bosco a Frohsdorf presso il Conte di Chambord, La festa di S. Enrico e D. Bosco al castello di Frohsdorf, D. Bosco a Frohsdorf, I trionfi di Maria Ausiliatrice da Torino a Frohsdorf*, "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 165, 167, 168, 169, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 17, 19, 20, 21 July 1883, pp. 658, 666, 670, 673.

54 Cf. Chap. 2, § 9. For reconstruction of the whole event there is an interesting account by the Count's chaplain, ab. Curé, sent to Bishop Serafino Vannutelli, Papal Nuncio at the Court of Vienna (text in MB XVI 571-575); *Viaggio di D. Bosco a Frohsdorf*, handwritten ms by Fr Rua with an incomplete report, published by A. AMADEI, *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua*, Vol. I. Turin, SEI 1931, pp. 326-329; J. DU BOURG, *Les Entretiens des Princes à Frohsdorf...*, pp. 112-169.

Back at the Oratory, Don Bosco resumed normal work. He had to abandon the meeting with lay past pupils of the Oratory on 15 July but was not missing on the 19th for the past pupil priests. Probably also because of controversies that had arisen over his journeys to France and Frohsdorf, he took a firm stance on what was being said about his miracles in various parts. 'For some time' he noted 'they have been saying and publishing in newspapers that D. Bosco works miracles. This is a mistake. Don Bosco has never pretended to nor even said that he works miracles. And none of his sons should agree to propagating this false notion. Let us say clearly how things stand: Don Bosco prays and gets his boys to pray for people, with a view to obtaining this or some other grace and many times God, in his infinite goodness, grants the grace that is asked for, including sometimes extraordinary and miraculous ones. Our Lady Help of Christians: there is the miracle worker, the worker of graces and miracles through the power she has received from her Divine Son Jesus.' She does so in particular on behalf of Don Bosco and his works, bestowing graces on those who helped him—For example, She says: "Do you want to be healed? Well, do something charitable for those poor boys, lend a hand to these works, and I will do you the charity of healing you."⁵⁶

At the beginning of August, Don Bosco sent a message in the form of a prayer to Frohsdorf, written in French on the back of a holy picture of Mary Help of Christians: 'O Mary in honour of your Assumption into heaven, bring a special blessing to your son Henry and his charitable spouse, and grant them good health and perseverance on the road to Paradise. Amen. Turin, 4 August. 1883.'⁵⁷

But the illness, a malignant cancer, followed its inexorable course. On 14 August, Don Bosco wrote to the Count's wife, Archduchess Maria Teresa Este, assuring her of his prayers and a memento in his Mass 'to obtain this earnestly desired grace: the complete recovery of the Count de Chambord. These prayers of ours, joined with so many others for the same purpose in almost all of Europe must undoubtedly be heard, unless God in his infinite wisdom sees it better to call our august patient to enjoy the reward for his charity and other virtues. In this case we humbly say: Let it be done as God wishes. But I am convinced we have not yet reached this moment.'⁵⁸

The Count de Chambord, Henry V of Bourbon, died on 24 August.⁵⁹ A summary of the events involving Don Bosco can be found in one of his detailed complaints against *Il Secolo*, a Milan newspaper which, with many others, had flagged a presumed deed of corruption at the Oratory and then wriggled out of it with a forced, miserable retraction.⁶⁰

But August held in store an unexpected gift for Don Bosco which made his final years more serene. 'I cannot adequately express the enthusiasm with which the appointment of Cardinal Alimonda as Archbishop of Turin has been received' he wrote to Cardinal Nina on 31 July.⁶¹ 'It will make history in this diocese.' On 2 August, he sent his personal congratulations and those of the Salesian Congregation to the new Archbishop, who replied on the 5th from Castellamare with great

55 *D. Bosco a Frohsdorf, e I trionfi di Maria Ausiliatrice da Torino a Frohsdorf e viceversa*, "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 165 and 169, Tuesday 17 and Saturday 21 July 1883, pp. 658 and 673. The text of the interview was also published in the *Bollettino Salesiano* in August (pp. 130-131).

56 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 129; cf. Almost identical expressions in *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 103: see also Chap. 32, § 4.

57 *Documenti* XXVI 462-463.

58 E IV 232.

59 Beginning from 14 August "L'Unità Cattolica" informed readers about the worsening situation of the Count's illness until his death: "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 189, Tuesday 14 August 1883, p. 754, *La salute del Conte di Chambord*; no. 190, Wednesday 15 August, p. 758, *Notizie del Conte di Chambord*; no. 192, Saturday 18 August, p. 767, *Le preghiere di Francia per il Conte di Chambord*; no. 199, Sunday 26 August, p. 793, *Morte del Conte di Chambord*.

60 "*Il Secolo*" di Milano e l'Istituto di don Bosco a Torino, BS 7 (1883) no. 9, September, pp. 141-145.

61 E IV 228.

affection: he asked for prayers for the arduous task, signing off as, 'Your most affectionate servant and friend.'⁶²

Over those days, through the Capitular Vicar General in Turin, Don Bosco expressed his availability to the Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Sanfelice, to immediately take two boys orphaned by the disastrous earthquake which struck on 28 July 1883, at Casamicciola on the island of Ischia.⁶³

On Cardinal Alimonda's name day, he offered him a few words and some books and 'the respectful homage of the whole Salesian Congregation,' adding a prayer to St Cajetan which he wrote himself: 'May the Lord give him good health, but may he soon come among us where his flock earnestly awaits him, and we offer ourselves and place ourselves in his hands to do and say what he decides best for the greater glory of God – Don Bosco's and all the Salesians' prayer. Turin. 7 August 1883.'⁶⁴

Then, on the 8th he made a quick trip to Prato to bless a man who had been struck down with a severe mental illness.⁶⁵ Over the days that followed *L'Unità Cattolica* wrote much about the new Pastor, the 9 August Consistory, and the imposition of the pallium on the 10th.⁶⁶ Cardinal Alimonda's entry to the Archdiocese took place on 18 November in a fully religious solemnity, since the Cardinal, while grateful for the intention of the Mayor and Council to welcome him officially, and knowing the journalist' 'controversies over this, wanted to be 'a minister of peace, harmony and love' and forestall the 'risk of any disorder or unpleasantness.'⁶⁷

The celebration of Don Bosco's birthday on the conventional 15 August date was an especially festive occasion. Fr Rua had sent out a circular and invitation to the academy at 6.00 pm. The Father's birthday was 'solemnised by his sons with singing, instruments and literary compositions' and distribution of prizes to the trade boys. In the lively address of thanks, Don Bosco wanted to point to the example of a crowd of 200 or more boys, solid in their faith and without any human respect who, at the initiative of a past pupil of the Oratory, Carlo Brovia, had established a Society of young workers at Nizza Monferrato, which 'is a model today for the whole city,' he assured them as an eye witness.⁶⁸

3. The Third Salesian General Chapter (1883)

From reading documentation on the work of the Third Salesian General Chapter held at Valsalice from the afternoon of 2 September to the afternoon of 7 September 1883, we gain the distinct impression that it had not been prepared for with adequate study of the proposed topics.⁶⁹ Fr John Bonetti had been appointed moderator, He announced that the Chapter would be held from 1–9 September, the latter date brought forward later,⁷⁰ The letter of convocation invited rectors of houses to meet with the local chapter, not all the confreres, and together formulate proposals to be

62 *Documenti* XXVI 464.

63 To Mons. A. Vogliotti, 4 August 1883, E IV 230.

64 Letter of 7 August 1883, E IV 231.

65 Cf. letter to Fr G. Cagliari, 7 August 1883, E IV 231.

66 Cf. "L'Unità Cattolica", nos 185 and 186, Thursday and Friday 9 and 10 August 1883, pp. 737 and 741.

67 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 269, Sunday 18 November 1883, p. 1074.

68 Cf. BS 5 (1881) no. 9, September, pp. 8 and 10-11; Chap. 30, § 3.

69 Cf. *Verballi del terzo Capitolo generale tenuto al Collegio Valsalice nel Settembre del 1883* by Giovanni Marengo, unnumbered pages, ASC D 579, FdB 1863 and 7 – 1864 B 3 and *Note pel Cap. Gen. tenuto nel Settembre 1883* by Fr Giulio Barberis, unnumbered pages ASC D 579, FdB 1864 C 10 – D 8. Also preserved in the ASC are documents relating to the time of preparation and the work of Chapter Commissions: cf. in total on General Chapter III, FdB 1859 B 4 – 1864 D 10.

70 Draft and printed copy, in ASC D 593, FdB 1859 B 5-7.

sent to the moderator no later than August. To facilitate this work, 'topic outlines' were attached to the letter, as 'main topics for discussion.'⁷¹ They were simple headings rather than outlines, eight in all: *1. Regulations for retreats. II. Regulations for novices and their studies. III. Regulations for parishes run by Salesians. IV. Culture of Coadjutor confreres. V. Directions to give the workers section in Salesian houses and ways of developing the vocation of the young trade students. VI. Rules for sending members away. VII. Establishing and developing festive oratories in Salesian houses. VIII. Revision and modification of the Regulations of the houses.*⁷²

Given material from the House Chapters, personal proposals from confreres, the commissions set up within the General Chapter whose work we have the relevant documentation for, there was plenty of preparatory material, including dozens of proposals, most of them signed. But it was improbable that in the brief space available between one general session and the next they would be able to draw up documents that could be voted on adequately. Chapter members soon realised this from the rough state of texts to be discussed and approved, as of the afternoon session on 4 September: 'It was noted that since things have not been sufficiently prepared earlier, none of the topics can be complete. Don Bosco said: 'We are here for this now, however, and we will not leave until we have done all we can do. The entire Congregation is interested in this.'⁷³

The number of problems to be dealt with and resolved was disproportionate both to the time available and the preparedness of the men dealing with them. Some headings, IV and V in particular, on the coadjutors and formation to be given to young trade students, had been aired in the previous Chapter, but treating them as topics in their own right was quite new. Six working days could certainly not exhaust discussion, one of those being Sunday, anyway, bearing in mind the unforgettable impromptu interventions by Don Bosco and the frequent change of direction: in fact, he spoke at length on the *Salesian Bulletin* and 'monographs' or house chronicles. He even took up almost a complete session recounting a dream. Hence the Deliberations were not published. Discussion of the important topics IV and V was taken up once more in the Fourth General Chapter, 1886, which could be seen as completing the preceding one.

Nevertheless, the Third General Chapter is notably significant for Don Bosco's biography thanks to the active role he played and the ideas he passed on to the Salesians as founder and superior regarding issues he thought essential for the spirit of the Congregation. They were spread across all the sessions. His presence at the Fourth and final one, while symbolically significant, was relatively poor in terms of his specific contribution to the problems that were debated there.

The first session on 2 September was taken up with preliminary matters: selection of two secretaries, Frs John Marengo and Giulio Barberis, appointment of members of the eight commissions, establishing the schedule for meetings: from 9.00–12.00, 1600–20.00⁷⁴ At Don Bosco's suggestion at the morning session on 3 September, a further commission was added to study *ways of fostering morality among members*. He also spent time offering 'clarification on the spirit of the rules' concerning the novitiate. As we know, some articles were missing from the Italian translation of the Constitutions which the Salesians had. Don Bosco explained things already spoken of: 'The Holy Father said on several occasions that in forming Salesians we aim to make our novices good; as an exemplary priest should be in the midst of the world so should they be too, and therefore there needs to be works of piety conducive to this. At the same time, it is good for them to carry out their duties so we know how ready they are.' Yet care needed to be taken so these duties did not get in the way of their 'practices of piety.' 'Regarding the novitiate for the coadjutors' the Minutes record: 'D. Bosco still considers the basics to be what has been done up till

71 Letter of Don Bosco 20 June 1883, E IV 221-222.

72 ASC D 579.

73 G. BARBERIS, *Note...*, fol. 2v.

74 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 1-2.

now, that is, to make them good Christians. And he says: a novice must put the rules of the house into practice, as well as the general rules of the Congregation, and fulfil his religious duties. That is enough. What is important is to find someone to think seriously about them and to help and guide them.⁷⁵ The morning session on 4 September was mostly taken up by Don Bosco telling his dream about America which he had the night before the feast of St Rose of Lima on 30 August.⁷⁶

He also spoke at the beginning of the afternoon session on ideas relating to separation between Salesian Religious and the men and women outside, the motivation being: 'The Congregation needs to be purged.' 'No one from outside,' he recommended 'should be admitted to the common table, so there needs to be an appropriate refectory.' For reasons of personal morality and social honour he gave indications to be taken into 'serious consideration' regarding 'closing the house to women: 1. No woman should sleep in the house, none. The laundry should also be separate from the house.' 2. What has been established for keeping the Sisters separate should be carried out 'as soon as possible' 'because it is of the greatest importance.' To reinforce this recommendation, Don Bosco referred to an apostolic visit' to the Congregation averted due to the Pope's intervention but suggested by some people, and more precisely by Cardinal Ferrieri following a report to Rome on presumed improper behaviour by one Salesian with a Sister when visiting the Sister's workshop. He then went on to remind the rectors of their duty to see to the 'monograph' or house chronicle. Among the various proposals that emerged during the session was that of 'writing a letter when a confrere dies.' By way of closing, Don Bosco resumed a reflection harking back to the First General Chapter on the importance of the discussions under consideration: 'One of the things we must aim at is that matters we deal with should be a guide 10, 20, 100 years on; we must be like an artist: *aeternitati pingo*.'⁷⁷

At the afternoon session on 5 September, dedicated to the festive oratories, the chronicler noted:

'D. Bosco insists on carrying out the old regulations already printed separately; that if it requires too many people, one person could cover several roles: clerics or boys could be involved: the rectors could also be helped by laymen from outside but the said regulations should be carried out as far as possible.'⁷⁸

In the morning session on 6 September, dedicated to topic IV, *Culture of coadjutor confreres* the Minutes record: 'D. Bosco and many others are of the view that we should change the name "Coadjutors", but it would be better not to call domestic servants coadjutors.' And further on: 'D. Bosco noted that it is appropriate to preserve the terms adopted by the Congregation of Bishops and regulars in their entirety: *Fratres Coadjutores*.' The canons regarding the *Culture of the Coadjutors* were approved with various modifications, though we do not know the precise voting, and they moved on to reading studies on topic V, *Direction to be given to the workers section*.⁷⁹ Though the Third General Chapter did not arrive at any document capable of being voted on regarding this issue as well, just the same, prior to the Chapter in 1880, a Coadjutor had presented a *Plan for a well-regulated administration according to the current needs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in the trade/working boys section* and the Councillor for the group had highlighted *various requirements of the trade boys to be proposed at the Gen. Sup. Chap*. During the Third General Chapter or following it, someone had developed it into *Proposals on the direction to be*

75 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 3-4.

76 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 6-7; cf. C. ROMERO, *Sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 79-93: the three remaining manuscripts of Fr Lemoyne bring corrections and additions from Don Bosco; on the content, cf. Chap. 34, § 6.

77 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 8-9.

78 G. BARBERIS, *Note...*, fol. 3v.

79 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 11-12.

given the trade boys and means for developing and cultivating vocations among them. Over various drafts it became the document that would be approved at the Fourth Chapter in 1886.⁸⁰

On the afternoon of 6 September, after some discussion on development of the workshops, they went on to deal with regulations for the novices. Don Bosco took up the matter once again, since it was dear to him, of the name and nature of the novitiate, claiming the authority of Pius IX and Leo XIII in support of his own thinking: 'The Holy Father, Pius IX, recommended it not be called a novitiate but by some other name, because the world is not ready to accept this name.' He 'gladly allowed the novices to do studies during their trial year, and have some other occupation.' In the first audience he had with Leo XIII, the Pope had confirmed 'Pius IX's concessions.' Further on 'regarding the aspirants' the Minutes record that 'D. Bosco warned everyone in confidence: never accept anyone as an aspirant to the clerical state if you are certain or even fear that he has had the misfortune to be involved in cases of wrong-doing.' Decision instead, was 'suspended' on opening 'a novitiate for trade boy novices' while seeking 'to set something up at S. Benigno.'⁸¹

In the morning session on 7 September, since 'the question of parishes was left in abeyance because it had not been studied sufficiently,' discussion began on a Rule for the Salesian Cooperators Association. As we have seen, Don Bosco prefaced this with wide-ranging explanations on the nature of the Cooperators and ways to promote awareness and animation in their regard, and on the function of the *Salesian Bulletin*.⁸² Finally he recommended that everyone, rectors especially, understand the purpose of the Cooperators, make it known and promote it.⁸³

Don Bosco had many reflections to offer at the final session on the afternoon of 7 September. According to the Minutes he 'recommends: 1. Understanding and adapting ourselves to our times, that is, respect for people and, where possible, speaking well of authorities or otherwise remaining silent if there is no reason to offer an opinion in private. And what I have said about civil authorities I say *a fortiori* regarding Ecclesiastical Authority. Let us see that it is respected and that we get others to respect it even at some sacrifice. These sacrifices will be rewarded in time, with patience by God. 2. Up till now we have been able to hold our heads high for morality. But due to someone's imprudence we have been somewhat compromised. Our good name has been re-established, but let rectors make every effort to preserve morality, because they are responsible before the public. The means are the Rules and our Deliberations which they and their dependants must observe. Therefore, they need to know them. Let these be known through the two monthly conferences. There is no need for learned conferences; it is sufficient to read the items and give a brief exhortation and explanation. The basic things that must be instilled most of all are morality etc.' To safeguard this, he recommended 'absolute silence from night until morning' and caution in relationships with outsiders. And again: 'Remind the confreres that if they are lacking in morality they compromise the House and the Congregation not only before God but also the world. Before God we lose our soul; before the world, our honour. 3. *Nemo repente fit summus, nemo fit malus*. So, attend to these principles. 'Avoid 'letting go of meditation, practices of piety,' and avoid certain newspapers, particular friendships with the boys. 'They are small, they do not speak, but they do when they are with their families and they expand on things to the detriment of respect etc. and God's glory. For the boys, certain innocent acts of affection can be shown by the superior but not by others, and only to encourage them to be good.' He then suggested 'the preventive system' once again, regarding use of punishments, and vocations and the good outcome of all their education: the teacher can scold, upbraid them, but corporal punishment? Never. This refers to the Rector who will practise the preventive system. It often happens that boys are less guilty than we

80 Cf. J. M. PRELLEZO, *La "parte operaia" nelle case salesiane. Documenti e testimonianze sulla formazione professionale (1883-1886)*, RSS 16 (1997) 355-368, 373-391.

81 G. MARENCO, *Verbali...*, pp. 13-16.

82 Cf. Chap. 22, § 7.

83 Cf. G. MARENCO, *Verbali...*, p. 17.

believe, as experience shows.’ ‘The Rector can advise, but never in public, never in front of all the other boys. One on one it is very easy to get them to bend to the will of the superior and to the preventive system. Benefits: 1. You gain the boy’s confidence. 2. We will increase the number of vocations. 3. They will be friends when they leave, otherwise enemies. 4. They will never become worse. They will give good example, not bad example. 5. The Superior of the house cannot pretend to have all perfect confreres. Be fathers to them, help them, urge them to perfection.’ ‘The Rector should keep to the rules and never be brusque in his treatment: do this or out! Be charitable, and if someone does not seem to fit into the house, write to the Superior General etc. etc., who will fix everything. Finally came the farewell: ‘When you go to our houses greet the confreres and all the boys. Carry with you the thought that the glory of the Congregation goes with you. It is all in your hands. God’s help will not be lacking. You have a Father and friend in Turin. Pray for him, and he will not forget to pray for you at Mass.’⁸⁴

It was the Don Bosco of always – concrete, given to practical morality, attentive to human situations small and great which can assist or hinder even the most audacious undertakings. These were what occupied him at the core of his being, mind, faith and heart. It is no accident that in an otherwise ‘underwhelming’ Chapter, he told the dream of a recent August night, the second dream on the American missions. There were ‘thousands and millions’ awaiting help and the faith from Salesians.⁸⁵

4. A follow-up on Coadjutors

For active and attentive coadjutors, as well as for priests more sensitive to their problems, the Chapter’s discussions on the Salesian layman could have seemed fundamentally rushed. We can also argue this from an analysis of the expectations seen from the proposals which came to the moderator prior to the Chapter from coadjutors and priests working alongside them in technical schools or administration roles.

The moderator could have read a number of complaints in response to Don Bosco’s circular on 30 June and his own, requesting proposals on 30 July.⁸⁶ ‘Word is around among coadjutor confreres’ the vice administrator of the Oratory wrote ‘that they are held as people of no consideration in the Congregation. Some even go further and say that Salesian Coadjutors are regarded as simple servants. So it seems useful to me to prove that this is erroneous and that they are regarded as people of great consideration in the management of the Congregation’s affairs, equal to the priest in many things. Although they cannot hold certain positions ... They can be involved in other more or less important roles, for example as Director of workshops, Provider and other roles where it is better for a layman to be in charge to be able to deal more freely with the world. Then, the Lord equally rewards in Heaven the one who holds a high position and the one whose life is spent in menial tasks, indeed, the former has more to fear than the latter.’⁸⁷

‘It would be better,’ urged the Catechist for the trade boys ‘to find a way of increasing the little esteem for them on the part of some young confreres, priests or clerics.’⁸⁸ An authoritative Rector touched on the question of their qualifications and spiritual uplifting: ‘Ignorance generates suspicion and murmuring;’ to overcome these two faults in the Coadjutor confreres by instilling

84 G. MARENCO, *Verballi...*, pp. 18-21. The text of Fr Barberis’ minutes is similar, G. BARBERIS, *Note...*, fol. 6v-7r.

85 Cf. C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, p. 88.

86 *Capitolo generale III*, ASC D 579 FdB 1859 B 6. Observations and proposals from particular houses and, in particular, from the artisans section of the Valdocco Oratory are offered in a comprehensive review by A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore nel 1883*, RSS 13 (1994) 169-180.

87 Fr S. Fumagalli, ASC D 579, FdB 1859 E 2.

88 Fr A. Ghione, ASC D 579, FdB 1859 E 11.

great piety and obedience to the rules in their hearts, hold a conference every week instructing them on the religious state.⁸⁹

Others suggested: 'Let them be given importance on certain occasions to break down the barrier there is imagined to exist between the layman and the priests.'⁹⁰ For one Rector and teacher of literature, the separation of Coadjutors from ordinary laymen took on a less benevolent meaning: 'The Coadjutors should be totally separated from outside service people, otherwise they are more a hindrance than of use, like people who usurp authority to be members of the Congregation and easily dispense themselves from their duties.'⁹¹

One of the most qualified of them, the brother of Don Bosco's preferred building contractor, hoped for a good basic culture for lay Salesians and as a consequence, further specification of what it meant to say that one was a Coadjutor. 'It would be good' he explained 'if he did some hours of schooling, principles; some even struggle to write their own name.' 'The word "Coadjutor" does not sound good among us. For example, a poor prisoner is accepted in a house and is called a coadjutor ... There is too much difference in clothing among us. Someone with more panache dresses as he wants; what he can't get from one superior he gets from another etc. Meanwhile we see many dressed in the latest fashion with watch-chain dangling, gloves, gold buttons etc. etc.'⁹² This was supported by the Prefect or Administrator and Vice rector of the Oratory: 'The word "Coadjutor" sounds base to them because service people are called that too. It seems they need much courage and there is need for someone to take very special care of them in each house. In the workshops they should always have the upper hand even over outside bosses and possibly it not so well-known that a workshop assistant is superior to them. It would be wonderful if every Rector were to give them a conference to hear their needs and complaints from them themselves.'⁹³

We have seen that Don Bosco had insisted at the Chapter on why the term 'coadjutor' not be extended to domestics. Weightier still were the considerations of a very balanced coadjutor, Andrea Pelazzo, in charge of the printing press, and the very active and concerned Pietro Barale, in charge of the bookshop, who had originally considered the structure of government of the Salesian Society as a 'clerical-lay Society.'⁹⁴ Fr Lemoyne, an almost blue-blood traditionalist, had mostly negative views on the matter, perhaps shared by others: '1. Most of them only entered the Congregation to change their status and were prompted by pride. 2. The main cause of their ruin is keeping money. 3. The lack of a regular Rector or someone to look after them, so they completely ignore the rules. This is at the Oratory. 4. In particular cases they are regarded as servants without conferences adapted to them and without making a *rendiconto*, thus making them almost a separate category.'⁹⁵

It is in this context that we can locate and understand a brief family-style talk Don Bosco gave on 29 October 1883 to coadjutor novices gathered at San Benegno Canavese at the beginning of the school year.⁹⁶

89 Letter of Fr D. Belmonte, Rector at Sampierdarena, to Fr G. Bonetti, 11 August 1883, ASC D 579, FdB 1862 A 2.

90 Fr G. B. Branda, Rector at Utrera (Spain), ASC D 579, FdB 1860 B 10.

91 Fr P. Guidazio, Rector at Randazzo, ASC D 579, FdB 1861 C 5.

92 Bro. G. Buzzetti, ASC D 579, FdB 1859 C 9 e 11.

93 Fr S. Marchisio, ASC D 579, FdB 1860 A 5.

94 Bro. P. Barale; Bro. A. Pelazza, and a further document of his on 1 September 1883, ASC D 579, FdB 1859 C 1-7; 1860 A 8 and D 1-8.

95 Fr G. B. Lemoyne, ASC D 579, FdB 1860 E 8.

96 On the conference and its authenticity, cf. A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, pp. 143-224.

As we have seen, the Oratory and hospice at S. Benigno Canavese came into existence as a festive oratory with elementary classes initially, and technical classes from 1881, but above all it was a novitiate for clerics who were already numerous in 1879–80 and numbers continued to grow in subsequent years. The second year of philosophy was also introduced from 1881–82. This meant that between trade students whose numbers grew with the development of workshops (typography, limited just to printing, began in 1883), the many Sons of Mary, novices and post-novice students in 2nd year Philosophy, the house had 300 residents.

From 1881–82, Fr Eugenio Bianchi helped Fr Barberis as *de facto* novice master for the clerics, since the latter was also Rector of the house. From 1883, Fr Luigi Nai was delegated for the coadjutor novices.⁹⁷ The ratio of cleric/coadjutor novices from 1880 to 1886 was as follows; 50/2 (1879–80), 54/6 (1880–81), 55/6 (1881–82), 63/11 (1882–83), 69/25 (1883–84), 57/25 (1884–85), 87/24 (1885–86).⁹⁸ The coadjutors, still being formed in poor workshops, were really a '*pusillus grex*' by comparison with so many clerics, novices and post novices.

We do not have a text drawn up immediately on the basis of notes taken as Don Bosco spoke, but a summary drawn up in November by the titular novice master and Rector of the house, Fr Giulio Barberis. But Fr Luigi Nai was there as Prefect of the house and delegate of the novice master for the coadjutor novices. He assured members at the General Chapter in 1922 of the authenticity of the talk and explained the reasons 'which moved D. Bosco to speak in the way he did. In that conference, D. Bosco gave a precise concept of the Salesian Coadjutor and sought to lift the spirit of these confreres due to the little regard some held them in.'⁹⁹

Don Bosco seemed to want to compensate good, hardworking Salesians whom he loved and respected, but whose role he had not clearly defined until then. He emphasised in his talk that it was the first time he had gone to S. Benigno since the coadjutor novices had come there. He wanted to explain 'two ideas.' The first was to refine the portrait of the coadjutor within the Salesian Society. Their twin apprenticeship in 'skills' and 'religious and piety' obeyed a precise mission. 'I am in need of helpers. There are things priests and clerics cannot do which you will do. I need to be able to take to some of you and send you to a printing works and tell you: this is yours to look after and make it progress well; or send another to a house and tell him: see that this workshop or these workshops run in an orderly way and lack nothing. See that they have whatever they need so the work succeeds as it should. In other words, you are not the ones who do the work directly or tire yourselves out with it, but the ones who run it. You must be the employers of the other workers, not servants. All done, however, in a regulated way and within essential limits, but the management is all yours. You are in charge of everything in the workshops. This is the idea of the Salesian Coadjutor.'

Their position and behaviour had to respond to the dignity of their function. They had to be 'dressed appropriately and cleanly,' with proper beds and cells' 'because you must not be servants but masters, not subjects but superiors.'

He then explained his second idea, related to their more essential inner nobility. 'Since you need to help with large and delicate works, you need to have many virtues, and since you are presiding over others you first of all have to give good example. I need there to be order, morality, good, etc. etc wherever one of you is ; that if *sal infatuatum fuerit* ... etc. ...' 'So let us conclude as we have begun. *Nolite timere pusillus grex*: do not fear, your number will grow. But it needs to grow especially in goodness and energy and then you will be like lions, invincible, and you will be able to

97 Cf. A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, pp. 186-192.

98 A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, p. 195.

99 Minutes of session on 29 April 1922, cit. by PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, p. 146.

do much good. And then: *complacuit dare vobis regnum* – kingdom, not servitude, and you will have an eternal kingdom etc. etc.”¹⁰⁰

It was mostly a description of functions, offered by a practical operator rather than a theorist. Nor was any significant progress evident in two interventions he made at the Superior Chapter in the following years. According to the minutes of a session on 6 September 1884, Fr Rua wanted two categories of coadjutor to be established, claiming it did not work to put qualified professionals on the same level as coarse and ignorant individuals, good though they may be. Don Bosco said he was decidedly against this, suggesting the latter group not be accepted as coadjutors and be employed as domestics without vows instead.¹⁰¹

Further on he was even hesitant about the name. ‘D. Bosco suggests that instead of calling coadjutors lay brothers we find another term like employees in the Bursar’s office or the Prefect’s, bookstore etc. etc. This is something that needs to be looked at.’¹⁰² The conceptual foundation at various levels followed gradually over the years, especially after the death of the founder, thanks to the increased presence of coadjutors in the Salesian Society with their extraordinary enrichment in qualities, works and ideals.¹⁰³

5. Salesians go to Lille, Paris

In August 1883, Don Bosco told his great benefactor in the Aire *département* near *Lille*, property owner Miss Claire Louvet: ‘The St Gabriel orphanage in Lille has been accepted by the Salesians and I hope we can see each other more often.’¹⁰⁴ Further on he specified: ‘The house in Lille will be in our hands beginning from next year.’¹⁰⁵ The early contacts were directly with Don Bosco during the visit he made to Lille from 5–15 May as guest of Mr de Montigny, whom he had put in touch with lawyer Michel.¹⁰⁶ Don Bosco then asked the Pope to bestow the title of Roman Count on Montigny, presenting him in these terms: ‘Rich and generous Catholic from Lille in France, a powerful promoter of Catholic works, he opened a hospice for poor boys for the Salesians ... The Bishop of Cambrai has sent Your Holiness a special letter of recommendation.’¹⁰⁷

In Lille, Don Bosco was given a festive welcome at the Saint Gabriel orphanage where the St Vincent de Paul’s Sisters of Charity had looked after sixty or so children for years. When they reached 16 or 17 years of age they needed education adapted to their age and gender. On 21 December 1883, Don Bosco was able to tell Louvet: ‘Fr Albera and Fr De Barruel are in Lille at the moment to fix the day for opening the St Gabriel orphanage. We will go there in the early days of the year. For the moment, don’t worry about setting up bursaries at the orphanage. All in good time. We currently have many debts to pay, especially for building our church and orphanage in Rome, and then there are the enormous costs we have to face for our missions and missionaries in Patagonia among the savages.’¹⁰⁸

100 A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, pp. 221-222.

101 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 27v, session on 6 September 1884.

102 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 66r, afternoon session, 24 August 1885.

103 Cf. A. PAPES, *La formazione del salesiano coadiutore...*, pp. 212-215.

104 Letter of 19 August 1883, E IV 457.

105 To C. Louvet, 15 November 1883, E IV 459.

106 Cf. *La nouvelle maison salésienne à Lille et quelques renseignements sur nos maisons de France*, “Bulletin Salésien” 6 (1884) no. 4, April, pp. 31-33; *L’orphelinat St.-Gabriel à Lille*, *ibid.*, no. 12, December, pp. 119-120; v. § 1.

107 Petition from Rome, 7 May 1884, E IV 260.

108 Postscript of letter of 21 December 1883, E IV 460.

The agreement with Lille was reached on 19 December 1883 with the Provincial in France, Fr Albera, and was discussed and approved at the Superior Chapter meeting on 16 January 1884.¹⁰⁹ On Monday, 24 January, the new Rector, Fr Joseph Bologna, arrived in Lille with two clerics. They took up residence in the house on 29 January.¹¹⁰ Don Bosco told Louvet of their arrival: 'You asked me when our religious will be in Lille. They began on Monday [24 January] this week and any time you pass by the city you can stop there or spend some time as you wish.'¹¹¹

At the Superior Chapter meeting on 27 September 1884, Fr Rua read out a letter from Fr Albera, who had visited the work and seen that Fr Bologna was working 'miracles in progress.'¹¹² Really, he had brought the spirit of Valdocco to Lille.¹¹³ Louvet created five free places for orphans. Don Bosco immediately went to work on public opinion to found the establishment of arts, and trades workshops which were built two years later.¹¹⁴

Don Bosco's lengthy time in Paris was also decisive for establishing the Salesians there.¹¹⁵ Two individuals, men with considerable social awareness and prestige, were enthusiastic and very active supporters of a future establishment there: Count Amable–Charles Franquet de Franqueville (1840–1919) and Mons. Maurice Le Sage d'Autreroche de Hulst (1841–96), founder in 1876 and Director until his death of the Catholic [University] Institute in Paris and from 1875 Vicar General of the Paris Archdiocese and Archdeacon of St Denis. The Count de Franqueville had already begun in June 1883. Encouraged in general terms by Don Bosco, he presented a number of proposals. Plans for a possible site between Saint–Omer and Saint–Denis were examined by the Superior Chapter at their meeting on 5 May 1884. Having made some observations, Chapter members asked the Economer General, Fr Sala, to go there to explain some details, but no conclusion was arrived at.¹¹⁶ Don Bosco's wishes and those of his Parisian friends were supported by Fr Paul Joseph Pisani (1852–1933), who wanted to guarantee continuity for the youth *patronage* he founded in 1877 in the popular and difficult suburb of Ménilmontant. 200,000 francs [738,382 euro] was the asking price for purchase of the property with 4,600 metres squares of land, and to establish an anonymous society comprising Don Bosco, the Count de Franqueville and other French friends. Don Bosco explained the project at the Superior Chapter meeting on 12 September 1884. Fr Durando was invited to go to Paris with Fr De Battuel and after a positive meeting with Mons d'Hulst and Fr Pisani on 23 September, matters were referred to the Superior Chapter at its 29 September meeting. The project was accepted.

The Count de Franqueville was not lacking in his support and English Countess Georgiana de Stackpoole made 40,000 francs [147,676 euro] available as well.¹¹⁷ With pressure from Fr Ronchail

109 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 5r, session in Don Bosco's room on 16 February 1884; il text of the agreement in MB XVII 771-772.

110 Cf. Letter of Fr G. Bologna and A. de Montigny to Don Bosco, MB XVII 772-774. Another letter, a fortnight later, was published by the "Bulletin Salésien" 6 (1884) no. 3, March, p. 25.

111 To C. Louvet, 26 January 1884, E IV 461.

112 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 53r, session on 28 December 1884.

113 Cf. Letter to Don Bosco of 1 August 1885 and article *Lille. Une promenade générale de 100 orphelins de St. Gabriel* published by the "Bulletin Salésien" 7 (1885) no. 8, August, pp. 101 and 104-105; *La distribution des prix à l'Orphelinat Saint Gabriel de Lille*, *ibid.*, no. 9, September, pp. 120-121; *L'orphelinat Saint Gabriel à Lille (Nord)*, *ibid.*, 8 (1886) no. 2, February, p. 22.

114 Cf. *Bénédiction des nouveaux bâtiments et ateliers de l'Orphelinat S. Gabriel rue Notre Dame 288 à Lille, le 5 Juillet 1886*, "Bulletin Salésien" 8 (1886) no. 8, August, pp. 91-93.

115 Cf. On the events leading up to the taking up of the *Patronage Saint Pierre* by 'abbé Paul Joseph Pisani and his quick renaming as *Oratoire Saint Pierre et Saint Paul a Parigi*, Y. LE CARRÉRÈS, *Don Bosco et les salésiens à Paris: de l'Oratoire Saint Pierre-Saint Paul au Patronage Saint Pierre (1884-1945)*, in F. MOTTO (ed.) *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, Vol. II..., pp. 239-256.

116 Cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 11r, session on 5 May.

117 Cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 32v-33r, session on 12 September 1884. Don Bosco would give a grateful acknowledgement to Countess de Stackpoole, 5 April 1885, from Marseilles: "Through your efforts there

who wanted matters concluded, as well as Fr Pisani, the Chapter examined and approved the contracts at its sessions on 1 and 5 December 1884, giving Fr Albera the mandate to go to Paris to sign the agreement, and to immediately call the Rector to go there, French Salesian Fr Charles Bellamy, who arrived with a very young novice, Léon Beissière (1869–1953).¹¹⁸ They were warmly welcomed, especially by Mons. Maurice d'Hulst. Don Bosco thanked him in a letter of acknowledgement, asking him to 'consider the Salesian houses as totally yours' and inviting him to Turin. He concluded: 'I ask you to continue your efficient protection of the house recently opened in Paris and to help it with advice and the means which, in your enlightened wisdom, you judge best for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.'¹¹⁹

Just as content was Fr Pisani, who now saw his *patronage* in trustworthy hands. It had begun with so much zeal and been managed in collaboration with a well-prepared young layman.¹²⁰ A week later, Don Bosco sent Fr Bellamy the text of a circular to Parisian Cooperators to review then send back: Don Bosco would see to its printing. Among other things he wrote: 'We are limited for now to a Sunday *patronage* and to taking in some of the poorer and more abandoned boys. But with the good God's help and the support of your charity, I hope we can see an increase in the number of pupils and help a great number of the dear youth of this great capital. We have already bought a reasonable dwelling with a devout chapel, a site for classrooms and a courtyard or recreation, but much is still to be paid for.'¹²¹ Six months after beginning, the Rector Fr Bellamy, wrote a flattering picture of the activities. Bellamy was an outstanding Salesian mystic in action. He spoke of the boys at the *patronage*, or hospice, the Thursday classes for students and Sunday ones for trade boys, the Congregation of the Blessed Virgin, the 'little conferences of St Vincent de Paul,' the daily night classes for young workers and finally, 'evening catechism lessons for adults.' He also mentioned the varied recreational activities, finally, dedicating a fleeting passage to the orphanage 'which we have taken on and where we work with great consolation.'¹²² In fact, the first residents were added to day students with the opening of the workshops in 1886, 1887 in carpentry, shoemaking and tailoring, to a total of 30 boys.

Meanwhile, as a sign of recognition for the great benefactor Countess Cessac-Montesquiou, who had lost her son Paolo, the *Patronage*, called an Oratory like the one in Turin, was placed under the twin patronage of Sts Peter and Paul.

6. The second Salesian work in Spain: Sarriá in Barcelona

As we have seen, the founding of an Institute of *Artes y Oficios* at Sarriá, close to Barcelona, had been prepared for at a distance by the learned and feisty editor of the *Revista Popular*, Fr Felix Sarda y Salvany, who had already published four lengthy articles on *Dom Bosco y los Tallereres cristianos* in 1880.¹²³ He said he was satisfied with the favourable acceptance shown the presentation of Don Bosco's work and especially the 'admirable institute of the *Talleres cristianos*.' He was convinced that faced with an apocalyptic social situation dominated by selfish, self-focused wealthy people, it was urgent to cooperate in spreading these institutions which were a true anti-*internationale*, a new reality, a different and relevant one. A work of this kind would find an

is a house in Paris" (E IV 322).

118 Cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 47v-49v, session on 1 December 1882. On the important figure of Charles Bellamy, a man of action, apostle and mystic, cf. Y. LE CARRÉRÈS, *Fidèles en amitié. Les lettres de Charles Bellamy à Julien Dhuit (1883-1911)*. Paris, Maison Provinciale Salésienne 2002.

119 Letter of 10 January 1885, E IV 309.

120 Cf. *La première maison salésienne à Paris*, "Bulletin Salésien" 7 (1885) no. 1, January, pp. 5-6.

121 Circ. of 29 January 1885, E IV 311.

122 Cf. *Lettera parigina* (del 12 May 1885), BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, pp. 98-100.

123 "Revista Popular" 10 (1880) nos 517, 519, 521, 525, pp. 297-301, 329-333, 361-364, 401-404.

excellent place in a region like Catalonia where a flourishing textile industry was in full development.

The *Revista Popular* continued to support the Salesians, using the Italian and French *Salesian Bulletin* and, in 1882, echoing d'Espiney's *Don Bosco* in 1881.¹²⁴ The Barcelona Catholic Association decided on accepting Don Bosco as a member in 1882. He replied, accepting gratefully and thanking them.¹²⁵

The same year, the aristocratic Dorotea de Chopitea de Serra came on the scene to make his wishes and dreams a reality. She had been widowed in 1882 after 50 years of marriage and wanted to remember her husband with a work dedicated to teaching poor and abandoned orphans a trade. Having known about the Salesians in Utrera through Marquis Ulloa, she wrote to the Rector of the college there, Fr Branda, to get information on Salesian works. When she had this she wrote to Don Bosco on 20 September 1882, explaining her suggestion of contributing to founding an institute of *artes y oficios* in the Barcelona area run by the Salesian Society. She wrote again on 12 October, asking Don Bosco to come personally or send another Salesian able to deal with the project.¹²⁶ Frs Cagliero and Albera were sent. Matters were quickly concluded. Chopitea bought a large piece of land at Sarriá near Barcelona and had the previous owners' existing home changed into a building used as a hospice with some *Talleres* which were initially humble ones but showed promising development.

Fr Branda spent a month in Barcelona seeing to these works and returned on 15 February 1884 as the Rector with two Salesians taken from the house in Utrera. Don Bosco spoke of it at the end of an earlier mentioned letter on 31 January 1884: 'There are repeated requests from Barcelona to open the house, which is already ours, because they have seen that a considerable number of poor boys are already knocking at the door for it to be opened. The only thing lacking is the Salesians to take care of them. As you see, we can delay no longer. In a few days I will split the people at Utrera and with a sufficient group will go and open a house in Barcelona. I will write in due course.'¹²⁷

The Superior Chapter gave its approval on 28 February.¹²⁸ Halfway through the first year of activity the Rector, as well as providing news, explicitly invited Don Bosco to visit Sarriá. 'Our house of *Niño Jesús*,' he wrote on 16 February 1885 'has continued to develop in a normal and gradual way. The boys are keen, intelligent and very active and show promise of unexpected progress in literature and skills. Piety is flourishing and increasing daily in their ardent souls, along with the desire to finally see you come to Barcelona. It is a powerful stimulus for them to progress in virtue. They hope Don Bosco will come and visit this house of his sometime or other. They are saying: it is not far from Marseilles to Barcelona and we are praying to the Lord so that Don Bosco can make this journey without his health being affected. If Don Bosco comes he will see how many happy celebrations [there are] and how, without having known him personally, these youngsters love him.'¹²⁹

In August 1885, concerned about the cholera spreading to Spain, Don Bosco encouraged Fr Oberti at Utrera and Fr Branda at Sarriá and invited them to open their houses to possible emergencies. 'While we submit to the Divine will,' he wrote 'let us not lose heart. God is always

124 Cf. R. ALBERDI, *Una Ciudad para un Santo...*, pp. 70-73; R. ALBERDI - R. CASASNOVAS, *Martí-Codolar. Una obra social de la burguesía*. Barcelona, Obra Salesiana Martí-Codolar 2001; su Ch. d'Espiney, cf. Chap. 26, § 5.

125 R. ALBERDI, *Una Ciudad para un Santo...*, pp. 115-116.

126 Text of this latter in MB XVII 770-771.

127 BS 8 (1884) no. 3, March, p. 41.

128 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 8r, session on 28 February 1884.

129 BS 9 (1885) no. 4, April, pp. 52-53.

with us and all the Salesians are ready to make any sacrifice to help you. If you ever find the need to help children orphaned by cholera, tell me and we will find a way to help them. We intend to do the same for France and Italy where up till now, thank heavens, we are unharmed, at least so far, by this terrible scourge.¹³⁰

Although physically resting at Mathi Torinese, Don Bosco was as vital as ever in heart and mind. The following year, his health even more fragile, he willingly accepted the invitation from Spain to visit them.

130 To Fr E. G. Oberti, 10 August 1885, E IV 330-331; cf. Letter to Fr G. B. Branda on the same day and to Fr P. Albera, Provincial in France, the day before: 9 and 10 August 1885, E IV 329-330, 331-332. Over the same days he also wrote important letters to Bishop G. Cagliero and Fr G. Costamagna: cf. Chap. 33, § 2.

Chapter 32

CONSOLIDATING THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS OF HIS SALESIAN WORKERS (1883–85)

- 1884 January: begins writing the *Memorie dal 1841*;
February: Don Bosco's illness;
1 March–3 April: in southern France;
April: the *Salesian Bulletin* on Don Bosco's health;
14th: departure from Rome;
28 June; decree granting privileges;
July: interventions at Superior Chapter meetings;
Interventions with past pupils on the preventive system;
19 July–22 August: resting at the Bishop's house in Pinerolo;
September: a switch in style in the *Memorie dal 1841* – a testament, prediction of death;
24 and 28 October: the Pope's wish concerning appointment of a successor or Vicar;
27 November: papal rescript appointing Fr Rua as Vicar and successor.
- 1885 24 March–27 April: journey to southern France;
6 May: returns to the Oratory;
8 December: official communique of papal appointment of the Vicar and successor.

Despite health problems, 1884 continued to be a productive year for Don Bosco regarding the two Religious Institutes he founded and, to a different extent, the youth works. It was also productive for the spiritual and pedagogical animation of the Salesians. He presided at and carefully moderated a good thirty–one Superior Chapter sessions in 1884, only missing ones in the second half of September when he was indisposed. Fr Rua presided at those. The other exception, obviously, was the one held on 5 May, while he was in Rome. He was forever active in the governing of the Congregation, though with diminished intensity particularly during his thirty–day holiday at Pinerolo, asked questions and was supported by his collaborators. Evidence of his activity can be found in the most important events over this period: the two trips to southern France in the early months of 1884 and 1885, the final achievement of the privileges, the gradual and ultimately non–traumatic process for appointment of a Vicar, the structural and juridical

consolidation of the FMA Institute,¹ discussion on founding new youth works, the constant reaffirmation of the educative spirituality of the Salesians, both consecrated Religious and Cooperators.

1. Forewarning of physical decline in 1883–84 and new 'Memoirs'

Don Bosco's peak physical vitality was coming to an end over 1883, and by early 1884. From then on, though, it varied: there was a gradual physical decline, diminished energy, though in inverse proportion to this fact, his fame spread even wider through demonstrations of respect and veneration for the priest educator, social worker, and saint. Fr Michael Rua, soon to be Vicar with full powers, a devout and submissive son and a man of absolute trust, was a discreet, efficient support to him. Until the end and without the least disagreement, he acted in such a way that the founder was always seen by everyone as the Major Superior in the fullness of his fatherly authority. Don Bosco remained that, too, for Cooperators, benefactors, admirers as well as civil and religious authorities. On the other hand, as far as his physical strength allowed, he continued to maintain warm, ongoing personal relationships and kept in touch by letter.

Over the final four years, references were more frequent to the physical discomfort and tiredness that were the result of work and illnesses endured in earlier decades, especially his serious collapse in 1846, but this was known for the most part only by the inner circle, including certain benefactors.² His new physical ailments – anaemia, liver dysfunction, bronchial infection, circulatory problems – were added to failing eyesight and curvature of the spine, which had already begun to manifest itself at the beginning of 1883 and by 1885–86 had obliged him to use a walking stick. By 1887–87 he would always have someone with him to lean on, among others his strong, robust secretary Carlo Viglietti. However, there were many more frequent occasions when Don Bosco seemed far more concerned with the health of other people rather than his own.

He kept up certain family-style presences in particular: the goodnights for the boys, though more rarely, involvement with the Cooperator conferences, meeting with past pupils, meetings with the fourth and fifth year secondary students for whom he loved being their special confessor and experienced adviser on vocational choice. He was also the key player in certain special events, some old, some new, of particular importance. There are some diary fragments that became more detailed from when Carlo Viglietti, still a student of theology, was asked on 20 May 1884 to come to Turin as Don Bosco's secretary and factotum. The previous one, from summer 1883, was Fr Lemoyne, brought from Mornese to fulfil the delicate role of secretary to Don Bosco and the Superior Chapter.

From time to time, the *Salesian Bulletin* provided news of him and sometimes, though minimally, regarding his state of health. News of this began filtering through, especially after the journeys in February and July to France and Frohsdorf. Moreover, he himself admitted to it after a period of considerable tiredness and some discomfort toward the end of 1883 and beginning of 1884: 'I'm coming up a bit short because my stomach is very tired' he wrote to a priest at the beginning of January.³ Writing to a benefactor he said: 'My health is not bad, but nor is it very good. I am always very tired.'⁴ The problem of Don Bosco's health emerged clearly at the Superior Chapter meeting on 28 February 1884. The Chapter secretary, Fr Lemoyne, noted: 'D. Bosco has asked Fr Bonetti

1 Cf. Chap.29, § 4.

2 Many confidences shared with correspondents have already been listed in the study by P. BRAIDO, // *sistema preventivo di don Bosco*. Zürich, PAS-Verlag 1964, pp. 114-116.

3 To Fr T. De Agostini, 4 January 1884, E IV 248.

4 To Countess Bonmartini, 4 February 1884, E IV 253.

to write to Fr Dalmazzo letting him know that since he cannot even remain standing due to his infirmities, he needs to go to France to look for aid for his works.⁵

However, fortunately for Don Bosco and his Salesians, January 1884 saw some consoling and reassuring events, ones he had only been able to dream of over many years.⁶ Cardinal Alimonda had already been at the Church of St John the Evangelist on 27 December, the Apostle's feast day, to celebrate the morning Mass and address 'brief but fervent words' to the people in preparation for Holy Communion.⁷ On the morning of 15 January, he gave Don Bosco and the Oratory the gift of a visit, as affectionate as it was unexpected.⁸ On the 24th he was at Valsalice for the anticipated Feast of St Francis de Sales.⁹ His demonstration of sincere friendship towards Don Bosco and his Congregation reached a peak on the 29th when he dedicated pretty much the entire day to Valdocco. Having celebrated a communion Mass at the Visitation Sisters monastery (the Sisters founded by St Francis de Sales), the Cardinal assisted pontifically at Solemn Mass in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, where the *Schola Cantorum* at the Oratory provided supporting music by Luigi Cherubini. He was feted at the end of lunch with songs, addresses from the boys and a toast from the prior of the festivities, Col. Rocca, and a priest Cooperator. Don Bosco also spoke, his heart filled with gratitude for the Archbishop, and invited everyone to come to dinner for his own Jubilee Mass in June 1891. Carlo Gastini told jokes. In the afternoon, the Cardinal gave solemn Benediction, wanting Don Bosco beside him. The latter agreed, though had difficulty 'walking, and climbing the steps to the altar.' The Cardinal also accepted the invitation to the theatre performance, leaving the Oratory at night amidst lights, and hurrahs from the boys.¹⁰ In his appointments book, called *Ricordi di gabinetto*,¹¹ trustworthy Fr Lemoyne noted for the 29th: 'For me, every minute of this day has been a triumph and a consolation. D. Bosco has not had a heartfelt friend like Alimonda since Franson's death.'¹²

Over the same days, however, there was a noticeable decline in Don Bosco's health, and in February, a sudden collapse. In the depths of winter, on the afternoon of 31 January, utterly exhausted, he had gone to visit the novices at S. Benigno. Given his physical state he could not have found a worse enemy than the damp cold of Canavese. He was unwell on his return to the oratory.

Beginning with these days, Don Bosco's life was spent with growing intensity between grateful recognition of the past and meditation on his death, a testament projected towards the future for his disciples. He himself helped interpret it in this sense, via a document he probably began writing at the beginning of the new year and continued intermittently over the months and years to follow. His secretary had often seen it in his hands, as emerges from what he told him. Four years later, on 24 December 1887: 'Fr Viglietti' he whispered at 11.30 pm., shortly before receiving the Sacrament of the Sick, 'look, on my table there is a booklet of memoirs, you know the one I am talking about. See to getting hold of it and give it to Fr Bonetti so it does not fall into just anyone's hands.'¹³ It was the manuscript entrusted to a notebook–diary–accounts book with 308 pages, its

5 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 8r, session on 21 September 1884.

6 The February *Bollettino Salesiano* recalled it in: *La benevolenza dell'arcivescovo di Torino onore e conforto dei salesiani*, BS 8 (1884) no. 2, February, pp. 21-22.

7 BS 8 (1884) n. 1, January, pp. 6-7.

8 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 16, Friday 18 January 1884, p. 62.

9 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 23, Saturday 26 Jan. 1884, p. 90.

10 Three valuable visits of Card. G. Alimonda, BS 8 (1884) no. 2, February, pp. 22-27; "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 29, Saturday 2 February 1884, p. 114.

11 In ASC A 0060803. The heading *Ricordi di gabinetto* has nothing to do with the contents; it is simply the title of the agenda recovered by Fr Lemoyne for his notes.

12 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Ricordi di gabinetto...*, p. 37.

13 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di Don Bosco. Dal 23 December 1887 al 31 January 1888*, pp. 8-9.

original title being *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884* (Memoirs from 1841 to 1884), then extended to ... 1884,–5–6: 7 had not been added.¹⁴

Variation in context, ink, handwriting, many pages left blank (pp. 94, 105, 106, 116, 129–266) for possible additional assertions which never happened, also suggest varying intentions as suggested by life's unpredictable events. In fact, in the early pages, which were also complementary to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco wrote briefly of his priestly ordination and the resolutions he took at the time, offering pointers on hearing the confessions of children and caring for vocations. He then recalled benefactors in general and some 'outstanding' ones. But as he went on and his health grew more precarious, he became more concerned with listing many particular benefactors, assuring them of his gratitude and prayers even after death. This was the first change in tone which was then further accentuated in September. For the earlier notes there was a precise date: 'These are the names of some of the most outstanding benefactors up until today, Feb. 8, 1884,' later adjusted to 1885 when he corrected the text.¹⁵

The change in tone can be noted in facts and documents. Don Bosco returned from Canavese with serious bronchitis, accompanied by some disturbing spitting of blood. From 9–12 February he was practically confined to bed all day. His heartbeat was weak and he had trouble breathing.¹⁶ (16) 'My chest feels a bit laboured, pray for this poor priest' he confided to Claire Louvet.¹⁷ We find a note on 18 February that Don Bosco had prepared the circular which his successor would have to send to Cooperators following his death, but we find no actual trace of it.¹⁸ However, it seems that the planned trip to Côte d'Azur was not hindered by his health circumstances. Indeed it could have even been medicine for it: 'My health is a bit upset' he wrote to Count Colle 'and I am still a prisoner in my room, but the doctors tell me that I can and would do well to make a trip to the south of France.'¹⁹ And on another occasion: 'The doctors have told me to go to our houses in the south, and on Saturday, God willing, I will leave for Nice with Fr Barberis.'²⁰

Nevertheless, before undertaking this new journey to beg for money in Liguria and France and back through Liguria then on to Rome, given the concerns of the doctor attending him, Dr Giuseppe Albertotti, he dictated his will on the afternoon of 29 February.²¹ He left the following day with Fr Barberis as his secretary, and travelled as follows: 1–3 March to Alassio, staying overnight at Mentone; 4–12 Nice, 12–13 Cannes, 13–15 Lyons, 15–25 Marseilles. He then returned to Italy, passing through Toulon on the 26th, then Navarre from the 27th to the 30th, Castille and Castello della Bastide on the 30th and 31st, Antibes on 1 April and Nice on the 2nd. By evening on the 3rd he was again at Alassio in Liguria.

On his way to France, the conference to the Cooperators on 2 March at Alassio was given by the Rector of the college, Fr Cerruti, since Don Bosco was indisposed. News of it was published in the *Salesian Bulletin* with a note on the Superior's health: 'This is a propitious occasion for us to recommend our beloved D. Bosco to the Cooperators' prayers. For some time now he has felt his life ebbing away. There is nothing to be alarmed about at the moment, but a good doctor who visited him before he began his journey said we should not rejoice too much. Taking into account the labours he has endured, he added that Don Bosco be thought of today as being a 100 years old even though he is not yet 70. Let us pray then, with all our hearts so he may live for many

14 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 73-130.

15 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 97, no. 1.

16 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Ricordi di gabinetto...*, pp. 49-52.

17 Letter of 14 February 1884, E IV 462.

18 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Ricordi di gabinetto...*, p. 57; *Documenti* XXVII 56.

19 Letter of 20 February 1884, E IV 502.

20 To Count L. Colle, 27 February 1884, E IV 503.

21 Cf. *Documenti* XXVII 79-80; on his physical ills from January to February, cf. *Documenti* XXVII 22, 33, 45, 53-55, 78, 82-83.

years still, despite his weakness and the fact that in natural terms he should succumb, and so he may help and comfort us by the grace and in virtue of Almighty God.²²

In Nice, Don Bosco was immediately visited on 5 March by his biographer there, Dr Charles d'Espiney. On the basis of his diagnosis – ‘congestion of the liver’ – which differed from the one in Turin, he gave him what he thought would be more suitable prescriptions.²³ His health improved, and on the evening of the 10th he wanted to give the conference to the Cooperators. The Chronicler noted: ‘All the best in Nice and the foreign colony, for their intelligence and heart, were present.’²⁴

In Marseilles, the event that stood out was the Mass celebrated on the 24th, preceded by the baptism of a young black boy who then made his first communion, and in the afternoon, the conference to Cooperators, attended by the diocesan Bishop, Jean-Louis Robert, who lavished praise on the ‘holy’ orator.²⁵ The following day, renowned Dr Paul-Matthieu Combal, Professor at the University of Montpellier, visited Don Bosco and gave him a thorough medical examination. The detailed diagnosis he wrote up is the most exhaustive we have of Don Bosco’s illnesses: general weakness, with anaemia, congestion of the respiratory tract, nervous hypertension, possible after-effects of marsh fever, slight swelling of the liver. The treatment: a teaspoon of ‘vino di Vial’ [a potion with no connection with wine!] morning and evening before meals, and during meals half a glass of mineral water from Vals mixed with wine. He was to loosen the bowels with a teaspoon a week of laxative powder from Vichy, dissolved in a quarter of a glass of water, a mixed diet of meat, cooked legumes, soft-boiled eggs, dairy products, and some rest from normal work habits and especially from prolonged mental effort. A practising Catholic, not only did Combal not accept a fee, but he made a significant donation.²⁶

On the evening of the 26th, still with Fr Barberis and accompanied by Count Colle and his wife, Don Bosco arrived in Navarre. The solemn blessing of the new chapel at the orphanage took place on Thursday the 27th before a large number of distinguished benefactors: from Marseilles, Mr Jules Rostard, President of the Société Beaujour, Canon Guiol. Mr de Grouling, the widow Jacques; from Nice there were Baron Héraud de Chateauneuf and Chevalier Levrot. Don Bosco performed the rite of blessing assisted by the Vicar General de Terris, various parish priests, the Provincial, Fr Albera, and the Rectors from Nice and St.-Cyr. He then gave a conference to Cooperators. Next day was the solemn feast of St Joseph, patron of the orphanage. Don Bosco celebrated a general communion Mass early at which the two children of the Viscounts of Velleneuve, Jeanne and Alexis, received Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time. At the Solemn Mass at 10.00 a.m., the boys sang Fr Cagliero’s Mass of Mary Help of Christians.²⁷ Fr Barberis gave detailed news in his letters of the various return stages. Don Bosco left Navarre on Sunday 30th and with a brief stop at the Castille farmstead and an overnight stay at the castello della Bastide and a further stop at Antibes on the 31st, arrived back in Nice.

On 3 April he was in Alassio, and on the early afternoon of 4 April, arrived at the hospice at Sampierdarena, where members of the Superior Chapter arrived from Turin around the same time, holding a meeting with Don Bosco on the afternoon of the 5th. Fr Lemoyne had already met him at Alassio.²⁸ From Sampierdarena, Don Bosco, who was not feeling well, wrote to Fr Berto who had

22 BS 8 (1884) no. 4, April, p. 58.

23 *Documenti* XXVII 87.

24 *Dom Bosco à Nice*, “Bulletin salésien” 6 (1884) no. 4, April, pp. 29-30.

25 *Fête et conférence à Marseille*, “Bulletin salésien” 6 (1884) no. 5, May, pp. 43-44.

26 *Documenti* XXVII 107-108; MB XVII 56-59. The original text of the “Consultation” by Dr. Combal is found in ASC A 0240501.

27 *Bénédiction de la nouvelle Église et fête à l’Orphelinat de la Navarre*, “Bulletin salésien” 6 (1884) no. 5, May, pp. 44-45.

28 *Documenti* XXVII 116, 123-125.

been with him many times on his trips to Rome, almost apologising for having chosen Fr Lemoyne as secretary: 'They tell me your health is not as you would like it to be still, I am sorry. Take all necessary care of yourself. I will pray for you. Fr Lemoyne is coming to Rome with me. I do not know yet if I will need papers; I will let you know if I do. I hope to be in Turin from 12–15 May. My health is a bit better but I very much need prayers.'²⁹

Don Bosco visited some benefactors, including the widow Cataldi and Baroness Podestà, wife of the Mayor of Genoa. On the 8th Fr Dalmazzo arrived in Rome to inform Don Bosco on Roman opinions regarding the privileges, preparing him for any difficulties he might encounter with Cardinal Ferrieri. The same day, Fr Lemoyne wrote to Fr Bonetti in Turin with some interesting news on Don Bosco: 'Our beloved Father cannot give talks without calling to mind the heroic times of the Oratory,' 'Don Bosco's health is always at the same point. Hopefully he can be a bit calmer in Rome.'³⁰

On 9 April, Wednesday in Holy Week, Don Bosco took the train to Rome with Fr Lemoyne. They stopped at Rapallo with a noble family he had met in Paris, Count and Countess Riant, and stayed overnight. He was 'very tired.' 'The next day,' Fr Lemoyne wrote to Fr Rua 'the Count's children went to confession to him then we all celebrated Easter in the chapel. The two Riant boys served D. Bosco's Mass.'³¹ At 1.30 pm he was at La Spezia, where he stayed until the early hours of Easter Monday. There was immediately a crowd of visitors. 'Although tired,' on Easter Sunday he gave a lengthy talk to a crowd of listeners. It was an appeal to charity. To the presumed question 'How long will you keep asking?' he replied: As long as there are souls to save, until young people are no longer surrounded by snares and deception, and until they have arrived at the gates of eternity and have entered Paradise, since only then can they be safe from being ambushed by their enemy.' There were also the missions, and the Sacred Heart Church in Rome was very much current. He then spent time replying, in ways we have already noted, to the usual objections to request for 'alms': difficult times, money is scarce, numerous requests, the sacrosanct duty of thinking of the future. He finished with Christ's warning on helping 'the poor': 'What you did for the least of them you did for me.' 'Look how many poor boys there are in the world. Betrayed, fooled, without religious education they fall into vice and are lost! Can you remain unmoved at such a heart-wrenching spectacle?'³²

From La Spezia until his sojourn in Rome, news on Don Bosco's health as provided by himself but especially Fr Lemoyne acting as secretary, came thick and fast: 'It seems his health is better than than what it was at Sampierdarena.'³³ 'We arrived in Rome, happily at 2 a.m. We were alone from La Spezia to Rome, all the way, in the carriage, so enjoyed the peace very much. Though he was feeling a bit tired, our beloved D. Bosco nevertheless did not suffer much. Friday the 15th, he feels much better and asked me to write and tell you.' 'D. Bosco has set to work quickly. Organising and seeking approval for the lottery, and also the eternal matter of Privileges.'³⁴ 'D. Bosco has asked me to tell you officially that problems with the liver and the eye infection have gone.'

29 Letter of 6 April 1884, E IV 255-256.

30 *Documenti* XXVII 126-127.

31 Letter from La Spezia, 10 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 137.

32 *Conferenza a Spezia e D. Bosco a Roma*, BS 8 (1884) no. 5, May, pp. 70-71 (letter of Fr Lemoyne to Fr Bonetti).

33 Letter of 10 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 138.

34 Letter of 16 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 139-140.

The improvement allowed him to receive visitors and make visits, especially to Cardinal Consolini and Cardinal Angelo Jacobini at the Holy Office.³⁵ Information that then followed regarding his health was at times contradictory: 'D. Bosco is not too bad. This morning he told me he felt very tired in the head.' 'He can't keep his head up,' he had written a few lines earlier. Don Bosco asked Fr Rua or Fr Durando to look into a foundation at Penne (Pescara); 'nevertheless he continues to look after matters to do with the Congregation.' He was giving orders through Fr Lemoyne, in fact, approving important matters in Turin, following up 'procedures for the lottery.' He received a visit from a group of students from the Gregorian University and visited the Cardinal Vicar.³⁶

Information from Don Bosco himself regarding his health was mixed in with that provided by his secretary: 'His health is not too bad, but fever has returned the last two mornings. The bottle of China [quinine?] medicine for this has arrived.'³⁷ 'My health is slowly improving, but it is better.'³⁸ 'My health is struggling.'³⁹ 'D. Bosco's health is going rather well,' Fr Lemoyne wrote on a number of occasions. 'He will arrive in Turin on the 18th of this month in the evening but it seems he wants to arrive without anyone knowing so he can rest.' 'D. Bosco's health is progressing well enough.' 'D. Bosco is much better, and from when he left Sampierdarena he has improved a lot especially over these last few days.' 'D. Bosco is still going well.'⁴⁰ He confirmed this himself on 8 May at Tor de' Specchi, with the clear-headed introduction he gave to the conference given by the Cardinal Vicar, Lucido Maria Parocchi. He provided news on works completed over the two years since the last Roman Conference, spending a little more time on the Sacred Heart Church, the flourishing activity in the attached oratory, and the lottery he was organising. The Cardinal's address was an enthusiastic demonstration of a thesis of extraordinary interest: the purpose, distinctive nature of the Salesian Congregation was 'charity exercised according to the needs of the century: *nos credidimus charitati; Deus Caritas, est,*' and was revealed 'through charity' exercised in new forms and spirit in a changed world.⁴¹

It was within this context in Rome that the final stages took place for procedures to obtain the privileges.

2. Juridical Consolidation of the Salesian Society

With regard to the privileges, after the frustrations in 1875–76, difficult years continued. There were new requests, denials and expectations. At the audience with the Pope on 13 April 1881, Leo XIII told Don Bosco he was 'against privileges for Religious as a system.'⁴² By the end of that same year, the mediation which Don Bosco had requested on 30 November 1881, and which was promised him and Fr Dalmazzo by the Archbishop of Messina, Giuseppe Guarino, had had no positive effect as indicated by Cardinal Ferrieri.⁴³ From 1883, the scene changed in Don Bosco's favour. From March 1882 until November 1884, Cardinal Ferrieri, a strict guardian of Canon Law

35 Letters of 19 and 22 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, 7 (1988) 142-145.

36 Letters of 23 and 24 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 146-149.

37 Letter of 28 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 151.

38 D. Bosco to Count L. Colle, 24 April 1884, E IV 504.

39 D. Bosco to Card. G. Alimonda, 3 May 1884, E IV 259.

40 Letters to Fr M. Rua of 5, 6, 9, 12 May 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 152, 153, 155, 157.

41 *Conferenza dei Cooperatori a Roma*, BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, pp. 88-91.

42 *Documenti* XXII 101.

43 Cf. Letter of 1 and 14 December 1881, *Documenti* XXIII 9-11; cf. MB XV, 428-429.

while he was Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, had a new secretary, Mons. Ignazio Masotti (1817–88). But above all, as we know, the consistory held on 9 August 1883 appointed Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda as Archbishop of Turin, while the kindly Cardinal Lorenzo Nina remained as Protector of the Salesian Society.

Don Bosco soon went into action. Once he had organised the reasons why he was renewing the request for privileges, he sent the Cardinal Protector and the Archbishop a copy. Encouraged by them, he sent a petition to the Holy Father on 20 January, attaching the memorandum he had sent the the two Cardinals. Prefacing it with a brief clarification in Latin, he asked to be granted the privileges that had been granted the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary founded by Pio Brunone Lanteri.⁴⁴ The Archbishop supported the request with a letter of recommendation on 29 February. As an expert in the Roman Curia, he lavished praise on the Salesian Congregation, for 'its exemplary discipline,' the great good' it was doing and the rapid extension of its 'residences.' He concluded with a general consideration and a flattering comparison: 'There is a distressing loss of Religious from other Orders in our city and diocese,' therefore, ' it matters greatly that the Holy See adds prosperity and solidity to a Congregation offering shelter to so many lost individuals, and one which has the advantage of escaping the blows of civil legislation.'⁴⁵ As well as the Archbishop, Cardinal Nina gave energetic support. He was aware of the 'extrinsic difficulties' blocking concession of privileges up till then, and assured Alimonda that he would put a serious proposal to the Pope. With singular determination he added: 'Nor will I fail to tell His Holiness, that should he believe he needs to persist in refusing them, I would feel obliged to resign as Protector of this deserving Congregation in order for it not to see that I connived in some way or was indifferent to a refusal that can only be arbitrary.'⁴⁶ For Don Bosco, the granting of privileges and faculties for dimissorials was the most agonising result he was looking for, even though more immediately he had the completion of the Sacred Heart Church at heart and commencing work on the hospice, as well as organising the last big lottery.⁴⁷

Over the same days, Don Bosco's secretary, Fr Lemoyne, was writing the texts we know as the two famous 'Letters from Rome' dated 10 May 1884 on the 'old' and 'new' Oratory, on how love must be demonstrated, and on sacramental piety, Marian devotion, which guaranteed the constancy of his educative style. There is no question that the contents of these letters were inspired by Don Bosco who signed them and saw that the one meant for the boys was sent to Valdocco.⁴⁸

At the beginning, the road to the privileges seemed to be full of obstacles. Initially, the response he got was that it was no longer practicable to grant privileges given another Religious Institute by cumulative concession *per communicationem*. The possibility remained of presenting a detailed list of privileges granted other Congregations. The difficulties were of a technical nature. Through the Procurator, Fr Dalmazzo, who was by now the principal actor in the matter, supported by Fr Constantino Leonori, the Curial lawyer, Don Bosco sent a request on 1 April for 'certain privileges and spiritual favours' granted the Passionists, Redemptorists and Vincentians.⁴⁹ The request, according to the reply from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 2 May, was incomplete. Each privilege had to be 'supported by genuine documentation' showing which ones were granted to whom. On 3 May, Don Bosco told Cardinal Alimonda of the impasse in a heartfelt letter from

44 Cf. MB XVII 125-127 and 710-711 (petition to the Pope, motivations and replies to repeated objections), 711-712 (memo).

45 MB XVII 713.

46 Letter of card. L. Ninato Card. G. Alimonda 7 March 1884, MB XVII 129.

47 Cf. Chap.30, § 2.

48 Cf. P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*. Rome, LAS 1997, pp. 344-390.

49 Cf. Text of petition with list of privileges requested, among which the faculty for dimissorials, in MB XVII 714-719.

Rome which was pessimistic about the final outcome: 'That means to say that I must put my heart at peace for now and no longer speak of this request.'⁵⁰ The new Cardinal wrote back immediately and encouragingly: 'After the period of combat, comes victory.'⁵¹ Meanwhile, at the audience on 9 May, Leo XIII renewed Don Bosco's faculties for dimissorials granted *ad decennium* by Pius IX on 4 April 1874. On 12 May, Fr Lemoyne wrote triumphantly to Fr Rua: 'D. Bosco is still fairly well. The Pope has granted him everything ... Meanwhile, until the formal decree is issued, the Pope has allowed D. Bosco to continue providing dimissorials.'⁵²

The petitioner left Rome on 14 May, when the situation was improving also with support from the friendly Mons. Ignazio Masotti, who was much appreciated by the Pope. He was made Cardinal on 10 November. While writing to Cardinal Nina to get him to intercede on behalf of decorations he had promised benefactors, and for some financial help, Don Bosco told him he had written the same day to Mons. Masotti.⁵³ He was unaware that the matter had already been resolved, and sent two further letters to Rome. The first was to Fr Dalmazzo on 15 June and showed some concern: 'You write me a beautiful letter but you did not reply to the one I sent Mons. Masotti on our privileges.'⁵⁴ The following day, 'having thought over the matter calmly on the advice of a prudent and authoritative man' he sent a request to the Pope, once again in asking him to grant the privileges given the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁵⁵ It could not be done since the Oblates had themselves gained these *per communicationem* from privileges granted the Redemptorists. Instead what could be done was direct granting of the Redemptorists' privileges to the Salesian Society. This was agreed upon. On 13 June, at the customary audience for the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Mons. Masotti, the Pope gave permission for the decree, which the Congregation issued on 28 June.

For some time at Valdocco, for those particularly sensitive to these matters – Frs Lemoyne, Bonetti and Berto – the event which they learned of in the late afternoon of 9 July was interpreted within the realm of the 'supernatural'. They felt it was a more than ordinary 'sign' when four lightning bolts struck the Oratory 'out of the blue' 'accompanied by such a clap of thunder that the whole Oratory shook as if it were about to collapse.'⁵⁶

The text of the decree seemed rather dry to its beneficiaries, devoid of all praise of the Congregation as it was, and simply pragmatic. That is how Don Bosco felt. He was almost done in by the long journey and for the moment limited himself to a quick word of thanks passed on with a number of other matters in a letter to the Procurator, Fr Dalmazzo: 'I have also received the decree on our privileges. The trimmings are missing but the substance is all there; and if you see Mons. Masotti, pass on my humble thanks and that of the Congregation.'⁵⁷ The decree simply said that His Holiness, Leo XIII, wishing to reward Don Bosco, founder and superior of the Salesian Society, and its members, with special favours and graces has 'kindly deigned to grant, extend and bestow in perpetuity, all and each of the indulgences, privileges, exemptions and faculties granted the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer with all necessary and appropriate clauses and decrees.'⁵⁸

50 To Card. G. Alimonda, 3 May 1884, E IV 259.

51 Cf. MB XVII 135.

52 Letter of 12 May 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 157.

53 To Card. L. Nina, 8 June 1884, E IV 272-273.

54 E IV 274.

55 Cf. the text in MB XVII 719-720.

56 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884 al 31 December 1884*, pp. 9-14, 9 July; MB XVII 140-142 expand on and further dramatise it.

57 Letter of 10 July 1884, E IV 277.

58 Cf. *De Privilegiis Congregationis SS. Redemptoris directe concessis e Decretum pro Congregatione Salesiana circa Communicationem Privilegiorum cum Congregatione SS. Redemptoris, in Elenchus privilegiorum seu facultatum et gratiarum spiritualium quibus potitur Societas S. Francisci Salesii ex S.*

Naturally, Don Bosco's thanks to the Cardinal Protector, Lorenzo Nina, on 10 August and to Leo XIII on the 17th were much warmer, seizing the occasion in both letters to offer them best wishes for their respective name days. Both letters were written from the Bishop of Pinerolo's place where Don Bosco was staying for a period of rest. He attached an *album* to both with 'descriptions of the houses of the Congregation, both in Europe and America.' He thanked the Cardinal for the 'many benefits' bestowed through the year, emphasising: 'The greatest favour was certainly the granting of the Redemptorists' privileges. This concession has placed our humble Congregation in a normal state and my heart in such peace that I can sing the 'Nunc dimittis.' In fact it 'brought completion to the lengthy list of tasks for the final approval of our Congregation and its ability to sustain itself in the various dioceses and more especially still in the foreign missions.'⁵⁹

The letter to the Pontiff was somewhat more expansive. On the 'most auspicious day' of St Joachim the Salesians felt 'a serious duty to express their profound gratitude this year' toward their outstanding benefactor and promised to carry out their work in total union of mind and heart with the Church. He attached a precise list of houses and residences where they were working for young people and adults. As he had been able to express to the Holy Father at the audience on 9 May, the Congregation lacked 'a marked favour' that is, 'a strong bond which would bind it unalterably to the Holy See.' The Pope had done this 'by agreeing to grant the Redemptorists' Privileges.' 'Now nothing else remains but for us, Your Salesians, to be united in one heart, one soul, in working for the good of Holy Church.' While still a '*pusillus grex*' they were putting themselves completely at the disposal of His Holiness to use them in any way he wanted 'for the greater glory of God in Europe, America and above all in Patagonia.'⁶⁰

3. Choice and appointment of a vicar who would be his successor

Fr Rua's presence alongside Don Bosco – along with other members of the Superior Chapter – had never been purely representative or just for executive tasks. But nor had there been a canonically appointed Vicar as replacement. Over 1883–84, this latter role was felt to be more appropriate, even essential. Just the same, although the Holy See's appointment of the Vicar had been made at the end of 1884 and communicated by Don Bosco a year later, a number of tasks tied to that role were already happening with a degree of frequency after the exceptional exertions during 1883.

3.1 Early indicators

Don Bosco himself had given clear signs of the gradual passing of the baton to Fr Rua. At the end of 1884 he did something new by comparison with previous circumstances. The minutes of the Superior Chapter meeting on 28 January records that 'D. Bosco announced that he will leave for France on 1 March. He established that while he was absent the Chapter should meet at least once a month. He gave Fr Rua full power to preside at it. He recommended to members that they continue to love one another. It needs charity in order to do what they are doing better.'⁶¹

Sedis Apostolicae concessionibus directe et Congregationis SS. Redemptoris communicatione in usum presbyterorum eiusdem Societatis. S. Benigni in Salassis, ex Officina salesiana MDCCCLXXXVIII, pp. 11-16. regarding the ongoing validity of the privileges – including the 'exemption' - given *per communicationem* in 1884, relating to various indications in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, cf. i *Praeliminaria dell'Excerptum ex compendio authentico praecipuorum privilegiorum nostrae societatis.* Ad usum superiorum domorum. Augustae Taurinorum 1949, pp. 15-24.

59 Letter from Pinerolo, S. Lorenzo [10 August] 1884, E IV 285.

60 Letter dated from Turin, 17 August 1884, E IV 288-289.

61 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 8v, session in Don Bosco's room on 28 February 1884.

In one of the first letters to Fr Rua from Rome in 1884, Fr Lemoyne, along with a long list of jobs handed out by the Superior, said: 'D. Bosco says: Fr Rua is at the helm, Bishop Cagliero is generally in charge of foreign affairs.'⁶² Don Bosco seemed to be describing his relationships as head of state with a prime minister and foreign minister.

The Vicar's tasks as Prefect General depended on the Superior's health situation. Having left Rome on Wednesday 14 May, after a full day and overnight journey with many interruptions, Don Bosco arrived in Florence. Despite this, Fr Lemoyne wrote to Fr Rua: 'D. Bosco is fair enough, all things considered, and luckily today he had a better appetite than usual. He ate a half slice of bread more than before!!!'⁶³

On 17 May he was back at the Oratory. On 20 May, student of theology Carlo Viglietti, became the Superior's regular accompanier, and his diary, which he kept as a faithful son, became a valuable and wonderful journal of information of his 'father's' life right up until 31 January, 1888.' On 1 June 1884 he recorded precise notes on what the doctor had suggested to preserve his patient's health: 'Almost every evening, by doctor's orders, D. Bosco should go for a walk. Fr Lemoyne and I will go with him.' He also shed some light on religious practices other than Eucharist celebration: 'I read spiritual reading and meditation with D Bosco.'⁶⁴ However, D. Bosco did not abandon the scene. He took an active part in, and made clear decisions regarding the work of the Superior Chapter. On 5 and 30 June, then on 4 and 7 July⁶⁵ the Chapter was dealing with the 'smooth running' of the Oratory and various provisions, as he insisted at the first of these meetings, 'to ensure morality among the boys and nurture vocations.' '1. By regulating which boys are accepted. 2. Purging the house. 3. Sharing, distributing, adjusting roles, boys, courtyards, etc.' They also looked at stepping up vigilance, reducing contact of the boys with a range of settings (parishes, oratories, female religious houses and hospitals) which differed from their protected world, reshaping study programs by excluding Greek and mathematics in the senior classes to make them almost inaccessible, in the short term, for the secondary certificate.⁶⁶

During the festivities on 24 June and in the presence of the Colle family, the Count was presented with his decoration as Commander of the Order of St Gregory the Great. Cardinal Alimonda arrived for the open-air academy in the late afternoon, likening Don Bosco to John the Baptist: one preached on the banks of the Jordan, Don Bosco between the Po and the Dora.⁶⁷

At the Chapter session on 4 July, to 'reform the Oratory house' Don Bosco insisted strongly on unity of direction, the principle of authority: a concept taken up again at the session on the 7th. At this session he highlighted some of Fr Rua's special functions while working alongside him: 'Fr Rua is being massacred by work and material matters and payment disputes' and 'D. Bosco is at the stage where he is physically and mentally tired and can no longer go on ...' So the conclusion was: 'He needs Fr Rua alongside to replace him in many matters and help him with what he struggles to do. So Fr Rua will have no further direct work in the house and where the Salesian Society is concerned he can give many of the jobs he does, and that would be properly those of a bursar, to others.'⁶⁸

62 Letter of 19 April 1884, in P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 143; cf. p. 116.

63 Letter from Florence, 15 May 1884, P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 159.

64 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 5.

65 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 May 1884*, RSS 3 (1984) 353-374; J. M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 273-307.

66 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 13r-14r, 18r-v, sessions on 5 June and 7 July 1884.

67 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, pp. 6-7.

68 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 17r e 18r-v, session on 4 July 1884.

After a final Chapter session on 19 July, 'for the first time,' the young secretary recorded 'D. Bosco has been reduced to spending summer outside Turin due to the terrible heat. His country trip to Pinerolo, to the Durazzo villa as guest of Bishop Chiesa, Bishop of Pinerolo. Fr Lemoyne and Cleric Viglietti are keeping D. Bosco company there.'⁶⁹ They remained there until 22 August, with Viglietti absent for some days, 'sent to do a job at S. Benigno.'⁷⁰

Before leaving for his unaccustomed holiday, Don Bosco invited the Oratory past pupils for the traditional annual encounter – this was the fifteenth anniversary – with lay men on 13 July, and priests on the 17th. Professor Germano spoke, offering moving reminiscences. Particularly touching was the reference to the health of their revered educator, who was listening attentively: I recall the years long ago when D. Bosco was in the bloom of youth; when we boys would hang around him and he was part of all our joys, sorrows, our comfort, our love, our father ... I recall, I say, the old days and I think of the present: I see D. Bosco, and my heart tightens with inexpressible tenderness. How much he has changed from when we knew him as boys! His body is bent over. His hair is going grey and his step is slow and hesitant. May the Lord still keep that day far from us when he must receive the reward for his many labours on our behalf. May he remain among his children until he celebrates his solemn golden jubilee of ordination. But the years press on inexorably.⁷¹

Bits and pieces came out of Pinerolo, mixed in with some of his own letters. He told Count Colle: 'At the moment I am at the Bishop of Pinerolo's villa; the intense heat in Turin was disturbing my health. It is almost cold here and I feel much relieved. I have Fr Lemoyne with me and the bishop gives me plenty of attention ... Right at the moment the cold is bothering me and I need to get up from the desk to put a jacket on. What a change over just a few hours, but I am up a mountain.'⁷² His principal secretary confirmed that 'D. Bosco is benefiting a lot from this air; he has an appetite and peace and quiet. He sends a special blessing to Fr Bonetti, whom he speaks about often, expressing his real regret at the illness affecting him.'⁷³ 'Every morning I help D. Bosco celebrate Mass,' Viglietti records 'and mornings and evenings I accompany him on a walk through these pleasant hills. D. Bosco is well, is stronger and gladly sings, teaching me and Fr Lemoyne some nice songs. He sits in the fields without any support and then continues his walks for two hours.'⁷⁴

On 8 April, Don Bosco wrote to the Prefect of Turin to clarify an incident that had occurred at the house at S. Benigno where a cavalry unit had been temporarily stationed. He let it be known how inappropriate it was to turn the porticos into a stable, at a time when there was a threat of cholera, with horse manure making a mess, as well as the risk of spoiling a building considered to be a monument.⁷⁵

In August, he moved to Valsalice for the Salesian retreats. 'He presided at the retreat,' his secretary wrote 'and spent much of the day hearing the confreres' confessions. I read out letters to him, spiritual reading and meditation.'⁷⁶

69 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 14.

70 D. G. B. Lemoyne to Fr M. Rua, July 1884, P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 161.

71 BS 8 (1884) no. 8, August, p. 112.

72 To Count L. Colle, 20 July 1884, E IV 506.

73 D. G. B. Lemoyne to Fr M. Rua, July 1884, P. BRAIDO - R. ARENAL LLATA, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, RSS 7 (1988) 160.

74 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 15.

75 E IV 284-285.

76 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 17.

But after a few days he had to give this up. 'In September,' Lemoyne tells us 'the Salesian retreats continued.' 'For the first time this year D. Bosco stopped hearing retreatants' confessions, leaving this to Fr Rua. His strength was no longer sufficient.'⁷⁷

On 9 September, after returning from a visit on foot to Count and Countess Boncompagni, who were holidaying on the hill (Valsalice), Don Bosco found that his left leg was giving him pain and had become swollen overnight. The secretary alleviated the pain by applying ointment to the leg. Dr Giuseppe Fissore visited him on the 14th. He found him in poor shape and prescribed that he should return to the Oratory and go to bed. There were probably bronchial and cardio-circulatory problems. 'The fever is constant,' his secretary noted 'his breathing laboured, heartbeat abnormal.' Some restrictive bandages on the leg helped, along with an anti-arthritic analgesic lotion which Fr Berto applied with mistaken determination, deaf to his patient's mild invitations to desist. The doctor ordered him to keep away, and the same evening he was 'evicted' from the room near Don Bosco. Fr Rua immediately moved in there and Fr Berto's role as secretary, preserving material and being responsible for the archives, was by then officially over.⁷⁸

The patient's condition seemed so serious that at the morning session on 19 September at which Fr Rua presided, at his initiative, members of the Superior Chapter openly discussed a burial place in the event of the founder's death. The minute taker recorded: 'Fr Rua says that given D. Bosco's illness, there was need not to overlook reflection on a painful possibility. They needed to think of a likely funeral and how things should be managed.'⁷⁹ The discussion did not go far and would only be resumed on the morning of 31 January 1888. Fr Cerutti, Provincial, who was at the meeting on the 19th looking at distribution of personnel, wrote from the Oratory to Fr Luigi Rocca, his Vice-rector at the college at Alassio: 'D. Bosco is in bed with fever always more or less for the whole day. The fear is the illness becomes chronic and serious. We need to pray a lot. This morning I said Mass in his room and gave him communion. He is always serene and smiling like an angel ... This morning we began speaking of what had to be done in the sad eventuality [of death] and I assure you, my heart broke hearing Fr Rua having to deal with this topic in detail. We hope and pray that Mary Help of Christians, obtains the miracle of his preservation this time.'⁸⁰

A few days went by, however, and foreseeing that cholera might seep its way into Turin, the patient was already at his desk writing a letter to the Mayor, Senator Ernesto Balbo Bertone, Count of Sambuy. He recalled what he had done during the cholera epidemic in 1854, and said he was 'ready to take in all the 12-16-year-old boys at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, who were orphaned and abandoned due to the epidemic and who were in the physical condition required by the Institute.'⁸¹ In a letter the following day the Mayor said that in case of necessity the city authorities would certainly avail themselves of the 'generous offer,' and addressed 'words of deserving praise and recognition' to Don Bosco 'in the name of the Council, too, for your new act of philanthropy.'⁸²

On 2 October, he was able to tell Mrs Luigia Dufour that he was 'out of bed' and could thank her with a 'few lines' for her charity.⁸³ On the 3rd he went to S. Benigno and presided at a meeting there of the Superior Chapter. The following day he received the profession of vows of those who had finished the novitiate. At the Chapter meeting he told them of the decision that from January 1885, rules would be applied for admission to vows that were issued in the 1848 decree *Regulari*

77 *Documenti* XXVII 395.

78 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, pp. 18-21.

79 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 35r., session on 19 September 1884.

80 Letter of 19 September 1884, ASC F 381, original 2 ff.

81 E IV 294-295.

82 *Documenti* XXVIII 417.

83 To L. Dufour, 2 October 1884, E IV 295.

disciplinae, as desired by Pius IX.⁸⁴ He returned to Turin the following morning, Sunday the 12th. The same day he assured Claire Louvet: 'My health is progressing slowly but always a bit better.'⁸⁵ He also wrote to his most recent biographer, Albert Du Boÿs,⁸⁶ to thank him for the 'noble, learned and important work.' 'Often while reading it' he confessed 'I covered my face in confusion.' He considered it an honour given by you to the humble [Salesian] Congregation.' He introduced his corrections in an Italian copy of the book, some with a view to refashioning his image: for example, the 'holy priest' became the 'poor priest.'⁸⁷

A worsening of his health in the second half of September probably led Don Bosco to make a change to content in the notebook containing his *Memoirs from 1841* which he had put aside since February. He took it up once more, writing at least from page 23 to 42 of the manuscript. We find there a series of things to be done by the Superior Chapter and especially the 'Vicar in agreement with the Prefect' after the writer's death: inform all Salesians by letter of the Rector's death, recommending prayers for the deceased and for a good choice of successor; send out a letter after the burial which the founder had already prepared. Some of this material was already part of these *Memoirs* to his *dear and beloved sons in J.C.* The Vicar was to establish the day for the election of the new Superior. Instructions then followed on various points: *election of the new Superior*, things to be done by the *new Rector Major*, and another *reminder for the Rector Major*, duties of the *Rector of each house*, and finally, special notes for everyone.⁸⁸ Later, when he re-read what he had written about things to be done, 'by the Vicar in agreement with the Prefect' and on the prayers to be said for the choice of successor, Don Bosco corrected it with the following note: 'Remember that these pages were written in September 1884 before the Holy Father appointed a Vicar to succeed, therefore what he needs to do needs to be modified accordingly.'⁸⁹ If the notes and corrections by the author corresponded to how things played out in fact – and there is no need to doubt this except for the arbitrary possibility of a reversal of dates – then it is of extreme interest. The notion of a Vicar, though not yet conceived of in precise juridical terms, would have matured in Don Bosco's thinking before the suggestion or request came from Rome. The idea could only have come from an awareness that his health was deteriorating, further reinforced by the impressions exchanged between himself and Leo XIII at the audience on 9 May.

The formal appointment of Fr Durando as Prefect General took place at the Chapter meeting on 24 September 1885, but Don Bosco had already given it thought prior to 28 October 1884, when he spoke to members of the Superior Chapter about distinguishing the two roles of Vicar and Prefect General, and it was mentioned in a 'memorandum' he sent the Pope a few days later. Moreover, the hypothesis of a new asset at the top level of government of the Congregation, including the appointment of a Vicar with full powers, had already been mentioned to him by the Pope at the 9 May audience.⁹⁰

3.2 Appointment of the Vicar and delay in official announcement

No initiative was taken by the Superior Chapter or any of its members or by other Salesians to officially substitute or supply for Don Bosco in governing the Society. In any case, it was Rome who began to take this initiative. It could be that Don Bosco and Fr Rua preferred a more flexible and functional solution with a *de facto* rather than a legally appointed Vicar. Between Don Bosco and

84 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 42r-v, session on 3 October 1884.

85 Lett. a C. Louvet, 12 October 1884, E IV 464.

86 Cf. Chap.26, § 5.

87 Cf. P. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco lettore della sua biografia...*, pp. 193-206.

88 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 97-102.

89 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 97, no. 1.

90 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 45v and 82v, sessions on 28 October 1884 and 24 September 1885.

his co-workers, all of whom had been educated by him, the exchange of ideas and actions was such that it made succession and canonical replacement unnecessary. Don Bosco had such prestige before a vast public, and such a unique capacity to attract trust and charity, that Fr Rua could have even felt intimidated by solutions of surrogacy and succession, whichever way this was to be configured. On the other hand, he was such a mature Salesian, so expert in governing and so close to Don Bosco that he would not have had any difficulty operating as *de facto* Vicar without formal, official investiture. Nevertheless, there remained problems of a juridical nature that could encourage this circumstance being given official regulation as a condition of the indisputable validity and clarity of acts of government.

This mixture of circumstances sufficiently explains why Don Bosco was convinced of the value of Rome's suggestions, and having chosen the least traumatic and painful of them, then kept it reserved to the Chapter on 24 September 1885 and only told the Salesian Congregation on 8 December that year, even after having accepted the notion of a Vicar and having acted on it at the end of 1884. It also appears that nobody in the Chapter had put any pressure on him to hasten the announcement, a formality which left the real situation intact.

The passage to the new top-level configuration – founder and Rector Major flanked by a Superior and Vicar with plenipotentiary powers conferred by the Pope and with right of succession – was suggested on two occasions by Don Bosco at sessions of the Superior Chapter on 24 and 28 October 1884. It had been personally set in motion with the Cardinal Protector, Lorenza Nina. Halfway through October, a letter came to Cardinal Alimonda (9 October) from Archbishop Domenico Jacobini, Secretary of the Congregation of Propaganda. He was close to Don Bosco in mentality, pastoral interests and friendship, and the initiator, guide and soul of lay Catholic action in Rome. He was also an apostle of Rome's Catholic university students and ecclesiastical assistant to the *Circolo di S. Pietro* from 1868 to 1880 and founder in 1871, of the Primary Catholic Arts and Workers Association for Mutual Charity.⁹¹

The letter said that the Pope would like the Cardinal to speak to Don Bosco 'and introduce the idea of appointing an individual whom he thought suitable to succeed him or to take the title of Vicar with right of succession. The Holy Father would reserve to himself the choice of one or other approach, depending on what he thought most prudent.'⁹² From what Don Bosco told members of the Superior Chapter, it seems his preference was the second possibility. The Minutes Secretary wrote: 'D. Bosco wanted the confreres to exercise their authority according to the Rule for selecting a Superior, but after the Pope's letter he does not know how to choose otherwise.' He also said that the Pope had expressed a similar opinion at the audience on 9 May, and asked if the name to be given the Pontiff should come from a consultation among Salesians. The Chapter thought not: 'Let D. Bosco choose his Vicar administrator with right of succession and as the Pope stated, send the name of the one chosen to the Pope, who will approve it.'⁹³ Don Bosco held to this solution and told them on 28 October: 'I have had a letter written to the Supreme Pontiff in this sense, entrusting myself fully to his decision.' He also said he had drafted a 'memorandum' on another sheet and sent it off. He summarised its contents in the following terms: 'I suggested a Vicar General with right of succession to the Holy Father, but leaving everything in the Holy Father's hands. I will give all powers to this Vicar but I want to be responsible since, I repeat, up till now this responsibility has not existed. This Vicar will be another Prefect. Then I will withdraw. I will see and speak to my Vicar and he will speak to and command the other confreres *ex officio*.' He had already explained earlier why he had excluded the first responsibility which would see him withdraw completely, then

91 Cf. M. CASELLA, *Il cardinale Domenico Maria Jacobini (1837-1900)*, "Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento" 58 (1971) 557-617. Earlier presidents of the Primary Catholic Association were Marquis Girolamo Cavalletti, then from 1876 Count Francesco Vespignani, the architect of Sacred Heart Church.

92 *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*. Turin, Tip. S.A.I.D. "Buona Stampa" 1910, p. 7.

93 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 44r, session on 24 October 1884.

a successor would be appointed. 'If I remain at my post before the world, unless I am deceiving myself, I can still do some good for the Congregation. If I remain Rector Major also in name, that will be enough for France, Spain, etc.'⁹⁴

A brief exchange of correspondence between the Superior Chapter and the Holy See after Don Bosco's death intended to overcome Fr Rua's hesitation regarding the legitimacy of automatic succession. Cardinal Lucido M. Parocchi, Protector of the Salesian Society from 17 April 1886, understood that it was an authoritative decision of the Pontiff's as explained at an audience granted Cardinal Nina on 27 November 1884. This is what he passed on to Cardinal Alimonda by letter on 30 November. 'At that audience,' he wrote 'I personally presented Don Bosco's letter to the Holy Father, along with Your Eminence's letter. His Holiness was fully satisfied and happy to understand that the future of the Salesian Institute was sufficiently provided for by entrusting it to Fr Rua when Don Bosco died ... Therefore I would be pleased if Your Eminence would let Don Bosco know of this when the occasion presents itself.'⁹⁵

The authoritative resolution to the problem was precisely understood by Alimonda, who replied to Cardinal Nina on 6 December: 'First of all I must thank you for your most recent letter in which you were kind enough to let me know how pleased the Holy Father was with the appointment of the excellent Fr Rua as Vicar General of the Very Reverend Don Bosco with the right to succeed him in governing the Salesian Congregation. Don Bosco and his religious are very happy with the good news and much more so with the apostolic blessing Your Eminence communicated, and they express their gratitude to their beloved Protector.'⁹⁶ In fact, Cardinal Nina's letter to Cardinal Alimonda was the official document stating the Pope's pleasure, expressed authoritatively at the audience granted Cardinal Nina on 27 November and then officially passed on to Cardinal Alimonda and through him to Don Bosco. Cardinal Parocchi confirmed this in reply to the query put by members of the Superior Chapter after Don Bosco's death:⁹⁷ 'From the audience with His Holiness on 11 February 1888, "Leo XIII, having heard the report from the undersigned Cardinal Protector of the Salesians, confirmed the decree issued on 27 November 1884, given to His Eminence Cardinal Nina, the then Protector of the said Congregation, by which decree His Holiness had seen to the appointment and succession of the Rector Major of the self-same Society, (in place of the worthy founder, to whom His Holiness wished a long life and good health) in the person of the Very Reverend Fr Michael Rua, a professed priest in the Salesian Congregation. His Holiness also wanted the aforesaid Father Michael Rua to hold both the title and office of Rector Major in accordance with the Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation, the twelve years to begin from today, and that this title and office thus accepted be so unique that it can no longer be taken up by way of example. Finally, His Holiness ordered that the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars as well as the one elected along with his councillors in the Salesian Society be informed of the confirmation and renewal of this decree." L.M. Parocchi, Protector of the Salesian Society.'⁹⁸

94 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 45r-v, session on 28 October 1884. The "Memoria" of which Don Bosco speaks has not been found.

95 *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua...*, p. 9.

96 *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua...*, pp. 9-11.

97 In the question we find a profile of Fr Rua that can be considered the best of the ones that have been formulated: "Although it happened at the time of an election which followed the Rule, it is nevertheless a common feeling that Fr Rua would be the one chosen with complete votes, and this in deference to Don Bosco who always had him as his first confidante and right arm, and also for the esteem that everyone has for his distinguished virtues, for his particular ability in governing the Institute, and for his singular dexterity in handling business, of which he already gave shining proof, under the direction of our unforgettable and dearest Founder and Father "(*Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua...*, pp. 11-12).

98 *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua...*, pp. 14-15.

As well as Don Bosco, then, also Fr Rua and the Chapter members had to be aware of the Pope's decision in the form of a rescript, a term used by Don Bosco himself at the Chapter session on 28 October. We know this both from the text of Leo XIII's 'rescript' of 11 February 1888, entrusted to Cardinal Parocchi, and Cardinal Alimonda's letter to Cardinal Nina on 6 December 1884.

Before the change, however, Don Bosco showed flashes of real vitality on a number of occasions. On 25 October 1884, he sent a strongly worded letter to the Executive Committee of the General Italian Expo in Turin for consideration by the Office for Jury Review. He thought that the silver medal awarded the Printing works and the merit certificate first grade for himself were inadequate, given the trade student's section of the Oratory's display at the Expo of publishing and bookselling activities – 'the ingenious work showing wood chips to paper, type-making, printing, binding to produce a book.'⁹⁹ His request was for them to arrive at a 'verdict which conforms more to the merit,' saying that were the reply to be contrary he would renounce '*any prize or certificate whatsoever*,' asking that there be '*no indication given in the press of the verdict, prize and certificate*.'¹⁰⁰

Some days later, he replied warmly to a letter from the President of the Catholic Club at Prato, who had praised his social activity and asked for a blessing for himself and his members. Don Bosco seized the opportunity to explain his whole life's program once again. He expressed his satisfaction 'at the news you give me about establishing the Catholic Club for workers, whose moral and material well-being had always been at the top of my thoughts and affections. Therefore, I thank you and all Club members for having wanted to dedicate one of their first thoughts to my person.' Further on he said: 'I entrust that the Catholic Club will continue to expand and gather many other workers of good will to itself, thus rescuing them from the snares of the enemies of religion and civil society. Under the pretext of improving their lot, they make it much worse instead, robbing them of peace of conscience and the hope of achieving the imperishable goods awaiting them beyond the grave.' He noted, then, that among the titles given him was the one of 'father' and stated: 'I reject all titles except this one, and as their father I will be really happy if I can be of use to them in some ways as I would be to my sons.'¹⁰¹

On the other hand, his health remained precarious, though it did not prevent him from continuing some of his habitual activities at the Oratory. On one occasion, finishing off one of the founder's letters for him, Fr Rua wrote: 'Since our dear D. Bosco is unable to finish this letter he has given me the honour of doing so. Unfortunately, his eyesight is not good, although his health has not worsened ... But his legs and breathing struggle.'¹⁰² The November *Salesian Bulletin* reported that 'Father John Bosco cordially thanks the Cooperators for their public and private prayers offered for his recovery.'¹⁰³ The chronicler also wrote that Don Bosco, his health having much improved, 'had made himself available to hear confessions of boys in the top two secondary classes on Wednesdays as well as Saturdays.'¹⁰⁴ Then, on 13 December, he gave the traditional conference for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception to the Salesians, insisting on 'Love one another, help one another charitably.'¹⁰⁵ He concluded the year on 31 December with the last

99 Cf. *Esposizione Generale Italiana in Torino 1884. Premi conferiti agli espositori secondo le deliberazioni della Giuria*. Turin, Paravia 1884, pp. 301 and 485. Murialdo came out better: the Artigianelli College was given the gold medal for the valuable work of its various workshops and the agricultural school at Bruere near Rivoli the silver medal ("L'Unità Cattolica", no. 270, Sunday 16 November 1884, p. 1079, *Gli artigianelli di Torino*); cf. G. DOTTA, *La nascita del movimento cattolico Torino...*, p. 348, no. 127.

100 E IV 299-301.

101 Letter of 31 October 1884, E IV 302-303.

102 A C. Louvet, 6/7 November 1884, E IV 464-465.

103 BS 8 (1884) no. 11, November, p. 153.

104 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 27.

105 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, pp. 36-38.

strenna but, as he confided to his secretary Viglietti, he did not want 'to play the prophet as usual.'¹⁰⁶ He continued to recount nightmares and dreams, but to a restricted circle of listeners.

4. Educative spirituality: Salesian religious and Cooperators

Don Bosco's concern for the future of his beloved creation on behalf of youth, the Salesian Society, inclusive of the FMA Institute, meant that over the final years his anxiety grew for instilling and spreading his spirit, the 'Salesian spirit', in his men and women religious. The term held rich significance, it certainly indicated the spirit of St Francis de Sales, converted into the spirit of the Salesians with substantial new features, that is, the spirit of St Francis de Sales as modified and reshaped by the particular field of application in Salesian activity, following the model offered by the founder's life story, activity, magisterium, with very specific points of reference: poor and abandoned young people, the choice to educate and assist with welfare, his special preventive way of working. He had reflected on all this and written it up in the meditations in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, written at the height of his spiritual maturity.¹⁰⁷

As for their quality as apostles of youth, generally the primary reference of the 'Salesians of Don Bosco' was to be method, the various modalities of their activity, which boiled down to precise elements such as reason – religion – loving kindness, love before or rather than fear, cheerfulness and study/work and piety. However, absolute priority was given to the end which summed everything up, the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He wrote to the director of the Oratory community's student section: 'Tell our dear boys and confreres that I am working for them and will do so until my last breath. Ask them to pray for me, to be good, to avoid sin so that we can all be saved in eternity. Everyone *Que Dieu nos bénisse et que la Sainte Vierge nous protège.*'¹⁰⁸

4.1 Salesian religious

Naturally, he wanted the basis of the Salesians' mission to be the keen awareness of their consecrated state. This was the subject of an important circular written in his own handwriting at the beginning of 1884. He rejoiced at the dedication and solidarity he had found in the Salesians at the colleges he had recently visited. 'I am telling you then that I am very happy with you, with the care with which you tackle any kind of work, also committing serious effort to promoting the glory of God in our houses and among the boys who Divine Providence entrusts to us daily.' This was a prelude to much more binding considerations on their vocational choice: the 'grand project' could be none other than ensuring their 'eternal salvation.' The way to realise this was evident: 'Observe the Rules,' 'the object of our promises, and the vows by which we are consecrated to the Lord.'

He went on to respond to those who might oppose the weightiness of observance, cutting this short with an insistent recall to the nobility and austerity involved in the imitation of Christ in consecrated life. This was no novelty for those who recalled the tone of the circulars in the 1860s.¹⁰⁹ 'My dear sons, do we perhaps wish to go to paradise in a carriage? We became religious not to enjoy ourselves but to suffer and win merit by the other path; we are consecrated to God not to command but to obey, not to attach ourselves to creatures but to practise charity towards our neighbour moved only by the love of God; not to have a comfortable life but to be poor with Jesus Christ, to suffer with Jesus on earth and be worthy of his glory in Heaven.' 'Let us move ahead,' he insisted taking up some deeply rooted concepts once more. 'It will cost us effort, hardships,

106 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 May 1884...*, p. 39.

107 MO (2010) 134 ff.; cf. Chap. 6, § 5.2.

108 To Fr G. B. Francesia, Marseilles, 12 April 1885, E IV 323.

109 Cf. Chap.15, § 11.

hunger, thirst and also death. Our reply always is ... *Si delectate magnitudine premiorum, non deterreat certamen laborum.*¹¹⁰

He spoke more frequently of the method, with the preventive motive at the heart of it. This returned in various contexts, especially the educational one, most of all in the scholastic and college context, but always open to every possibility: General Chapters, meetings of the Superior Chapters, particular problems that may arise, meeting with Cooperators and past pupils.

At the lengthy morning sessions of the Superior Chapter on 12 September 1884, discussion focused on the Salesian coat of arms. Fr Sala presented a draft version. Discussion focused particularly on the motto. One suggestion seemed to be too generic and common to other Congregations. *Sinite parvulos venire ad me*. Don Bosco suggested *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*, in use since the early days of the Oratory.¹¹¹ At the afternoon session on the same day, he added the idea of the purpose or end, with precise reference to prevention as a system: 'I recommend another thing, study and effort to introduce and practise the preventive system in our houses. Let Rectors give conferences on this very important point; the advantages are incalculable for the salvation of souls and God's glory.'¹¹² As discussion went on he introduced the topic of prevention in the area of reading, with the inflexibility we have already noted. He recommended 'trying to keep every forbidden book from our pupils even when they are prescribed for schools, much less to sell them. When D. Bosco wrote the history of Italy he wrote a little bit of Alfieri's authors. But renowned Professor Amedeo Peyron scolded him saying: never mention forbidden authors, because if you do you encourage the boys to read them. Let them be ignored. This is what we must do: not mention, introduce or quote forbidden authors or ones with anti-Catholic principles. There can be exceptions, but only for people who have to sit for public exams. But in these cases, too, make use of purged (censored) authors. Yet even purged forbidden authors are not to be put into the hands of boys in the lower classes. That only gives them a fatal curiosity to verify the corrections. Also, be slow to speak about them. If rectors and teachers happen to have some, keep a close eye on them. I never thought there would be such a craving for forbidden books as there is today. Just like there is a craving to waste time and ruin the souls with novels. Instead we should read and get others to read the lives of our boy, and all the other books of the *Letture Cattoliche* and the books from our *Biblioteca della gioventù*, Cesari, Mattei [Maffei] etc. We seem to have very little esteem for our own literature. We are even afraid to include our own books on the list of prize books to be given to our colleges. It seems to be a humiliation for some to give religious books to 4th and 5th year secondary.'¹¹³

It was no fleeting *excursus* but an idea rooted in native conviction and years of experience. Don Bosco insisted on it in a circular on 'books that should be removed from our boys' hands and books to be used for individual or common reading.' Fr Lemoyne wrote this, based on an outline provided by the Superior, who reviewed the text. Dated 1 November 1884, it was sent to all the colleges. An inspection of trunks and parcels brought in by the boys at the beginning of the school year was prescribed as, well as the obligation for the boys to write up a 'conscientious list of every book, and hand it to the superiors.' During the year there needed to be vigilance by everyone to prevent bad books and papers coming into the houses. 'Unexpurgated' dictionaries were to be got rid of. Loving persuasion of the boys 'from the pulpit, in the evening, in class,' should help. It was also necessary 'to keep an eye on certain other books which, though good or even indifferent in themselves, could also present a risk because unsuited to the age, place, studies, tendencies, nascent passions, vocation of the boys. These books, too, should be got rid of.' The same rules applied to reading in public 'in refectories, dormitories and the study hall,' excluding in particular 'novels of any kind'

110 *Circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua...*, pp. 20-22.

111 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 31v, session on 12 September 1884.

112 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 33v, session on afternoon of 12 September 1884.

113 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 33v, session on afternoon of 12 September 1884.

which were not published by the Oratory Press. The austere Lemoyne knew how to interpret Don Bosco's thinking very well. In the refectory, they were to fall back on all-Salesian reading: stories written by Don Bosco, the *Salesian Bulletin*, the *Letture Cattolice's* religious booklets, and lives of the saints.¹¹⁴

Another circular was attached to this one. It too was written by Lemoyne and sent to Salesian houses with Don Bosco's signature, dated 19 March 1885. To guarantee healthy reading within and beyond college boundaries there was a need for the intense work of distributing good books 'for the glory of God and the salvation of souls' among the young and people in general. 'This was one of the most precious undertakings entrusted to me by Divine Providence' he stated. Not only that but 'it is one of the principal ends of our Congregation.' It was not enough to circulate them among the boys, but they themselves were to be involved 'as apostles spreading good books.'¹¹⁵

4.2 Salesians by choice

In the 1880s, meetings with Cooperators and past pupils became more familiar, and they were included under the common denomination of 'Salesians.' As such, Don Bosco intended to infuse a common spirit in them all. For Cooperators, this had to be rooted in the identical commitment to the young and their solid involvement in financial concerns that resulted from this. Although not all Cooperators would be benefactors, large or small, they were explicitly or implicitly Cooperators.¹¹⁶

Solidarity with the Salesian family – consecrated men and women, Cooperators, young people of both genders, beneficiaries of the missions – ¹¹⁷ became a total commitment for some, their entire meaning of life, true communion in charity and grace. Don Bosco told Claire Louvet that he intended to write to Salesians in America, asking them, when baptising catechumens, to give the name Claire to at least one baby girl in each of the fifteen colonies.¹¹⁸ It was a guarantee of the prayers that would contribute to giving her what she particularly needed: serenity of spirit, 'peace and tranquillity of heart.'¹¹⁹ She cooperated with an essential program of spiritual life drawn up by Don Bosco in a clear and sure manner with expressions of Christian piety – for happiness now and in eternity – crowned by discreet insistence: 'Do the good works that are possible'¹²⁰ unless, as he suggested on another occasion, she might want to entrust her 'valuables' 'to Don Bosco's bank.' He would make use of them immediately, thus removing them from any likely thieves.¹²¹ In the context of good works, he also referred to a possible religious vocation for Claire: 'Up until now you do not have a vocation to become a religious, but you do have a vocation to become a saint. By doing what you do, you are on the way to paradise. In expectation of that be calm, nurture good works.'¹²² 'Farewell Miss Claire' was his message at the beginning of 1887, not yet the final farewell. 'May God preserve peace of heart in you, tranquillity of soul and perseverance until Paradise.'¹²³ A month earlier, he had pointed out the conditions: 'What goes on in the world is very

114 MB XVII 197-200; *Cronistoria* IV 379-383.

115 E IV 318-321.

116 Cf. Chap.22, §§ 6-8; on 'Salesians' past pupils, Chap. 23, § 6.

117 For the formula "famille salésienne", cf. Letter to C. Louvet, 22 November 1884, 20 October 1886, E IV 465, 473; to Count L. Colle, 10 June, 23 December 1883, E IV 496, 500.

118 Letter of 15 July 1882 and 15 November 1883, E IV 450 and 458; on the basis of a letter of Bishop G.

Cagliari the information that the bishop had given the name "Clara Louvet" to a young "savage" from Rio Negro in Patagonia: letter of 7 October 1885, E IV 470.

119 Cf. letter of 2 November and 21 December 1883, E IV 452 and 459.

120 A C. Louvet, 17 September 1883, E IV 458.

121 A C. Louvet, 26 January 1884, E IV 461.

122 A C. Louvet, 6 November 1884, E IV 464.

123 Letter of 16 January 1887, E IV 475.

dark, but God is light and the Holy Virgin is always the *Morning Star*. Trust in God, and in Mary; fear nothing. *I can do everything in him who gives me strength*, Jesus Christ. Patience. Patience is absolutely necessary to conquer the world, assure one of victory, and enter Paradise.¹²⁴

No less profound was the rapport with Count Colle, who ended up becoming Don Bosco's volunteer cashier and, as we have seen, *Commendatore* or commander The one who was commanded.¹²⁵ 'Commander fully prepared to be commanded by Don Bosco' he signed of in one of his letters. He was at the orders of ... the principal.¹²⁶ Don Bosco knew how to do things with the greatest respect and finesse in dealing with these generous benefactors, husbands and wives, and was no less concerned with their physical and spiritual health. The Count's physical health was precarious. When writing to Count Colle, Don Bosco told him things, greeted him in the name of the 'Salesian family' and never spoke of 'his' problems but of 'our affairs,' his own and the Count's. In every case, 'they concern the glory of the good God and eternal happiness of "our souls"'.¹²⁷

There were two letters in August and September 1882 in which he explained to the Count his great need of money for those 'preparing for the priesthood and to become missionaries abroad:' and to help missionaries already in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. But he asked him to reply with the same confidence with which he was asking: *oui ou non*, in absolute freedom. He also mentioned the amount needed, 12,000 francs [42, 049 euro].¹²⁸ A brief letter he sent him on Our Lady's birthday began, without further preamble, with a prayer to the Virgin: 'O Mary, our good mother, on the day on which the Catholic Church celebrates your birth, bring a very special blessing to your children, the Count and Countess Colle. This morning, with all my heart, I celebrated Mass for them and our boys received Holy Communion for their spiritual and temporal benefit.'¹²⁹ When her husband's health worsened he told the Countess: 'Countess, you are not looking after your health. Look after our dear patient but do not forget yourself ... O glorious St Anne, obtain from the good God health, health and perseverance until paradise – paradise – paradise. I am your affectionate son, Abbé Bosco.'¹³⁰ When he received news of an improvement, he rejoiced and told her: 'I have written and said many times that if it is God's will, let him call me to eternity but to still give time to his son Count Colle so he may continue his protection of the missionaries and our nascent Congregation.'¹³¹ The Count's appointment with death, however, was a month before his own.

'The souls of the savages will, without doubt, be your legacy before God,'¹³² he wrote to husband and wife Blanchon from Lyons. From 1880 to 1884, they responded constantly to his needs: the boys, 'orphans', new foundations, youth institutions and in particular the Sacred Heart Church and in a very special way the Missions.

Another great friend and benefactor of Don Bosco's was architect Vincent Leviot in Nice, who, as we know, had put him up during his first stay in the city on the Côte d'Azur. He sent him at least 9 letters (two in Italian, the others in French) and referred to him in various other letters to Fr Ronchail, describing him as 'an eminently Catholic man, tirelessly dedicated to works of charity.' Don Bosco obtained a papal honour for him as a Knight of the Order of St Gregory the Great.¹³³

124 A C. Louvet, 9 December 1886, E IV 474.

125 Cf. Chap.22, § 9.

126 To Count L. Colle, 5 July 1884, E IV 505.

127 Cf. letter of 10 June and 25 August 1883, E IV 496 and 497.

128 Letter of 28 August and 6 September 1882, E IV 491.

129 Letter of 8 September 1886, E IV 522.

130 Letter of 26 July 1887, E IV 532.

131 To Countess L. Colle, 14 August 1887, E IV 532.

132 Letter of 28 October 1880; 21 May 1881; 23 March and July 1883, E IV 426-429.

133 Cf. Petition to Leo XIII, 9 May 1881, E IV 52-53; letter to Fr G. Ronchail at the end of 1881, E IV 98 and 25 December 1882, E IV 193 (he asked for news of "Cav. Levrot").

From Frohsdorf, he wrote to him for his name day on 16 July 1883.¹³⁴ He also advised him beforehand of his trip to France in spring 1885, wanting to deal with him *personally* regarding his works.¹³⁵ Although 'eyesight and vital strength were much diminished' he did not fail, afterwards, to thank 'Sir' for 'the special protection' given his 'orphans.'¹³⁶ One of Don Bosco's final letters was to him.¹³⁷

In 1884, cholera had resurfaced in Piedmont, and he calmed a benefactor with: 'Our antidote is a secure one,' prayer and the guarantee of Our Lady is protection.¹³⁸ He gave a longer reply to Countess Bonmartine who had put her name down for a pillar in the Sacred Heart Church in Rome and had sent the last instalment of 1,053 lire [2,888 euro]: 'All is going well; let us try to win souls. God will bless our efforts and give us strength, will and grace ... The Cholera is about, but until now God has kept it away from us. May the Holy Virgin continue her assistance and her protection over us.'¹³⁹ He thanked Mrs Luigia Dufour similarly for '[her] charity' praying that the Virgin Help of Christians would defend and protect her and her family against the cholera threatening towns around.¹⁴⁰

He did not forget one of his early benefactors, Marchioness Frassati, widowed in 1878, and her daughter Azelia, wife of Baron Carlo Ricci, who had remembered him with a 'charitable donation.'¹⁴¹ He also sent the Marchioness bunches of grapes which had matured 'beneath the shade and protection of Mary Help of Christians,' that is, from the vines that climbed up as far as his bedroom.¹⁴²

In this context of deeply human and spiritual relationships, the pages of the *Memorie dal 1841*, which are dedicated to benefactors, take on increased significance, including the brief individual letters to be sent out after his death. He also sought substantially to inculcate two great loves, in a few brief words, in these people too: faithful and wise administration of the talents they had received – life, time, material goods, wealth – and hope in the reward that was the most important one of all, eternal life, without under-valuing life here on earth. He also promised them prayers, his and the Salesians' the boys', for the twofold purpose: that the Lord would guide them 'on the way to paradise' to reach him, the 'house' of Mary and God where there was eternal happiness. All these messages to benefactors sang the hymn of active charity: 'that they may always be the support of the Salesian Congregation and a help for the Salesian Missions,' and that they may 'continue to protect his apostolic work and have many souls saved by Salesian missionaries who will bring their benefactors to heaven.' He entrusted the Sisters and his orphans to some benefactors – Miss Rosa du Gas, Mrs Jacques, Marchioness Fassati. 'Perseverance in doing good' would assure them of the 'true reward in heaven.' He addressed a heartfelt appeal to the elderly Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, a benefactor from way back, supported by his son Carlo and daughter-in-law Azelia Fassati: 'Baron, you absolutely must save your soul, but you must give all the surplus the Lord has given you to the poor, an extraordinary grace.' He invoked eternal happiness on the entire extended family of three privileged charitable individuals, well-known to him, Count Eugenio De Maistre, Countess Carlotta Callori and Countess Gabriella Corsi.¹⁴³

134 E IV 224.

135 Letter of 8 March 1885, E IV 317.

136 Cf. letter of 21 November and 13 December 1885, E IV 345 and 350; from Pinerolo, 19 July 1886, E IV 356; in French, on 1 August 1886, E IV 409-410.

137 Letter of 28 October 1887, E IV 410.

138 To Mrs Magliano, 16 August 1884, E IV 287.

139 Letter of September 1884, E IV 293.

140 Letter of 2 October 1884, E IV 295; again another letter on 19 February 1885, E IV 314-315.

141 Letter of 27 November 1884, E IV 304.

142 Letter of 4 November 1885, E IV 345.

143 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 112-115, 121.

Among things the newly elected Rector Major had to do – as we know, he wrote this before the formal appointment of Fr Rua as Vicar but not before he was signalled as such by the Pope himself – after writing to the Pope, the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, was ‘another letter’ to benefactors and Cooperators to thank them in his name for what they had done while he was still alive, and ‘asking them to continue their help in support of Salesian works.’ With ‘firm hope of being welcomed into the Lord’s mercy’ he would continue to pray for them. He recommended: ‘But always point out, say and preach, that Mary Help of Christians has obtained and will always obtain particular graces, even extraordinary and miraculous ones for those who help provide Christian education to youth at risk through works, advice, good example, or simply through prayer.’¹⁴⁴

5. Social worker and miracle worker still, in France

‘My health is much improved, but I am not sure of making a trip this spring as far as Lille. We will see,’ Don Bosco told Claire Louvet in December.¹⁴⁵ The uncertainty continued for a few days: ‘I am much better but I do not know yet if my health will allow me to go with him [Bishop Cagliari] as far as Marseilles, which I keenly want to do’ he wrote further on to his French patron, Count Colle.¹⁴⁶ On 22 January 1885, at the Cooperators conference in Turin with Cardinal Alimonda and his auxiliary, Bishop Bertagna present, ‘Bishop John Cagliari spoke in place of Don Bosco, who was present.’¹⁴⁷ We see from some letters that his health was precarious: ‘My health is always very weak, but I am out of bed and busy about things.’¹⁴⁸ ‘I have grown very old but I fully trust I will still be able to see you on this earth before the Divine Mercy calls me to eternal life.’¹⁴⁹

In fact, he did not feel up to going to Marseilles to farewell Bishop Cagliari, who was departing with Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for South America. He was represented by Fr Bonetti, who carried an official letter from him for the bishop. Don Bosco’s words for Cagliari, one of his first pupils, were tender and prudent and presented a neatly encapsulated action program: ‘Fr Bonetti brings you the hearts and greetings of all the Salesians in Europe which you will pass on to our confreres in America ... All the Cooperators in Europe are praying and will continue praying for a good voyage and a continuation of your work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls: God is with us. Do not fear.’¹⁵⁰

He stressed his gradual improvement in other letters: ‘I am better again and out of bed and I am able to write this letter’ he told Count Colle¹⁵¹ and told others: ‘My health is better, but improving slowly. I place much hope in your holy prayers’;¹⁵² ‘My health this year had not been so good as perhaps you know. Now it is better and I have already been able to go for two short walks.’¹⁵³ Fr Viglietto noted in his diary on 13 March 1885: ‘For a few days the newspapers have been announcing Don Bosco’s death. Instead D. Bosco had been enjoying better health for some time.’¹⁵⁴ It was the *Corriere della sera* from Milan that had mentioned him, and it was picked up in

144 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 101.

145 To C. Louvet, 20 December 1884, E IV 466.

146 Letter of 18 January 1885, E IV 511.

147 “L’Unità Cattolica” gave an extensive report on this, no. 21, Sunday 25 January 1885, p. 82, *La*

Conferenza dei cooperatori salesiani a Torino e un discorso del primo Vescovo della Patagonia; cf. BS 9 (1885) no. 2, February, p. 23.

148 To C. Louvet, 1 February 1885, E IV 467.

149 To the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, 9 February 1885, E IV 312.

150 Letter of 10 February 1885, E IV 313-314.

151 Letter of 11 February 1885, E IV 512.

152 To C. Louvet, 21 February 1885, E IV 468.

153 To Count E. De Maistre, 1 March 1885, E IV 317.

154 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 1° January 1885 al 23 March 1885*, pp. 43-44.

Turin on 14 March by the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*. According to one rather odd information agency, Don Bosco had been asked by his missionaries to leave for America and had 'died' in the missions.¹⁵⁵

Don Bosco had anticipated the optimism of the chronicler by announcing a less imaginative journey to Count Colle: 'Your letter has urged me to resolve to make a trip as far as your place despite my poor health.'¹⁵⁶ He left on 24 March 1885 with Fr Bonetti only as far as Sampierdarena, and Viglietto as usual accompanied him to France via Genoa–Sampierdarena–Alassio. From 27 March to 1 April, he was in Nice, in Toulon with the Colles from the 1st to the 5th, and in Marseilles from 5–20 April.¹⁵⁷ 'From Nice Fr Cerruti, who went with him from Alassio, informed Fr Rocca of his own and the Superior's health: I am not very well but well enough. D. Bosco is also reasonably well despite the strains his condition and our needs are putting him under. But the Lord is recompensing him for these strains with a considerable influx of money.'¹⁵⁸

Cerutti pointed out Don Bosco as a tower of strength to the Salesians at the college in Alassio. 'Let us not tire, never let our labours, displeasures, lack of gratitude, opposition, get us down. All for Jesus. One look at D. Bosco worn out, failing, often in a state that would make stones cry out, and yet he is still spending his life begging for God and his children, consoling, suffering in a thousand ways, instead of resting. He is an example and spurs us on.'¹⁵⁹

He provided similar news, by separate delivery, in an attached letter addressed to the boys at the college: 'D. Bosco, whom I left yesterday in Nice and will see again the day after tomorrow to go with him to Marseilles on Saturday, leaves you an unforgettable reminder: *frequent communion*. The enthusiasm and veneration he arouses everywhere is indescribable; everyone wants to see him, speak to him, hear even just a word from him. His suffering, his constant loveability, and the miraculous recoveries which are being worked through his blessings and prayers this year too, have increased the notion every day that here was a great saint, and everyone said so.'¹⁶⁰ A week later he wrote to Fr Rocca from Marseilles: 'My health is not going too well, I am offering suffering and a lot, because I have to work too much, and yet on the other hand, D. Bosco suffers much more than me ... D. Bosco does not let me go willingly and wants to keep me busy in *foro interno et externo, plene et absolute* with things, personnel, Salesians, Sisters etc.'¹⁶¹

Don Bosco found himself in Toulon during the Easter Triduum (2–4 April), and on Holy Thursday he received the Eucharist in the cathedral. On Easter Sunday, 5 April, he celebrated Mass at the Colle home where he was their guest. From 'Marseilles, le '12 April 1885" he wrote a reassuring letter to Fr Francesia, who was the director of the student section and felt not a little concerned for recurring problems posed by a rather risky experiment. It did not continue beyond 1884–86. 'I cannot write to others' he wrote 'but, at least some words to Fr Francesia, pupil of my eye. Above all, try not to create difficulties or troubles for yourself where they do not exist. And when you do meet them, know you can deal with them with the Lord's holy hand.'¹⁶²

The address given by Mr Bergasse, president of a refinery, a navigation company and other societies, is revealing of what benefactors thought about Don Bosco's works. It was given at Marseilles on 13 April at the end of a banquet, in the presence also of the Colle and Rostand

155 Cf. A. AMADEI, *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua*, vol. I. Turin, SEI 1931, p. 341.

156 To Count L. Colle, 6 March 1885, E IV 513.

157 Regarding the trip to France – there and back – Fr Viglietti's chronicle provides much information, in his notebook from 24 March to 6 May 1885, pp. 4-78.

158 Letter of 27 March, ASC F 3810256, orig. 2 ff.

159 Letter from La Navarre, 1 April 1885, ASC F 3810273, orig. 2 ff.

160 Letter of 1 April 1885, ASC F 3810274, orig. 2 ff.

161 Letter of 9 April 1885, ASC F 3810258, orig. 2 ff.

162 E IV 323.

families and others of the same social status. The secretary noted: 'This Mr Bergasse presides at almost all Catholic society gatherings.' As a good Catholic entrepreneur, Bergasse offered his own 'social' interpretations of Don Bosco's welfare activity which others present might well have shared. Viglietti tells us that 'he spoke of the efforts he [Bergasse] had made to cooperate for the good of the Congregation and of the good that all the societies he was president of did to help it.' Presenting 'a generous donation' from one of them, 'he spoke of the sorrow felt in seeing society go to ruin and of the consolation at seeing this society so powerfully assisted 'by D. Bosco in being restructured.' He applauded and 'very much praised the education of the youth he had removed from the piazzas.' Bergasse concluded: 'Oh! It is not true then that everything is going to rack and ruin. We have a Don Bosco! May God preserve him for a long time yet, bless him. May he prosper. France, the whole world needs him.'¹⁶³

On 17 April, Don Bosco gave a brief conference to the Cooperators in Marseilles. On 12 February, a more solemn one had been given there by Bishop Cagliero for the feast of St Francis de Sales.¹⁶⁴ Don Bosco 'said he no longer climbed into the pulpit to give them a talk since his health did not allow that, and that someone far more eloquent had already done that. He was here only to thank God first of all, then the Cooperators' for their generous charity. He promised his 'eternal gratitude.' He added 'that he did not know if it was the last time he could be among them,' but however, in heaven, 'his first thought' would be to ask Jesus and Mary and all the Saints to bless and protect all those who cooperated for the good of souls.'¹⁶⁵

He was besieged everywhere by people who asked him for prayers and blessings, expecting graces from recovery with results which the chronicler noted carefully, describing Gospel-like scenarios with evident exaggeration of events and numbers in these and other contexts: 'By now it is impossible for me to record all the graces that occurred instantaneously. Everyone who came had a story to tell of them through the blessings they had received over these days. They brought him cripples who now walk, blind who now see, sick and dying who now enjoy perfect health.' 'In two or three days they carried away all the pens that were constantly replaced on D. Bosco's table and seven dozen were taken. His biretta was taken three or four times.' There were plenty of donations, too, which helped wipe out debts and support poor works like La Navarre and Saint Cyr, while Count Colle gave substantial contributions for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, and more besides. At the house in Marseilles, the chronicler tells us, 'they left up to 13,000 lire [46,955 euro]' 'in alms provided by the visitors.' Weeping and requests for blessings were mixed in with farewells.¹⁶⁶

For his part, Fr Cerruti gave Fr Rocca further information and impressions: 'Count Colle is preparing a truly fabulous amount for Fr Rua, beyond what he has already given, and that means the Sacred Heart Hospice can very soon come close to being finished. Add to this the constant spiritual graces, healings, family reconciliations, conversion of individuals who abandoned God, and lots of others ... But how much has all this cost poor D. Bosco? His sacrifices are incredible, his self-denial, suffering! There are moments when it seems a miracle he is still alive.'¹⁶⁷

On the way back to Italy, Don Bosco stopped over at Toulon on 20, 21 April, and at Nice from the 21st to the 28th. On the 27th he took part in a family banquet at the Catholic Club. 'More than fifty were invited ... All the nobility in Nice,' the chronicler noted, very pleased. 'Many presidents of other clubs were there, from Lyons, Marseilles, Mentone, Cannes etc.' 'Counts, Marquises, Dukes,

163 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885 al 14 April 1886*, pp. 39-43.

164 *Monseigneur Cagliero à Nice e La fête de Saint-François-de Sales à l'Oratoire Saint-Léon et Conférence des Coopérateurs salésiens*, "Bulletin salésien" 7 (1885) 25-30.

165 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885...*, pp. 50-51.

166 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885...*, pp. 57-59.

167 Letter of 15 April 1885, ASC F 3810259, orig. 3 ff.

and other eminent gentlemen were there, university professors, famous lawyers, and doctors.' In the afternoon, Don Bosco attended an academy with speeches and refreshments. The enraptured secretary once again recorded: 'In those speeches they even divinised D. Bosco, calling him an angel sent from heaven, St Vincent de Paul revived.'¹⁶⁸

On the 28th he was at Alassio where he remained until 2 May, then left for Varazze and Sampierdarena, where he stayed until 6 May.¹⁶⁹ At Sampierdarena, too, there were no lack of visits, individual or groups besieging Don Bosco, asking for blessings and graces.¹⁷⁰

The journey seems to have been of benefit for both the Pilgrim of Providence's purse and health. Even before his arrival in Turin the *Salesian Bulletin* gave good news: 'Our kind Cooperators showed keen concern at hearing news of D. Bosco. We are happy to be able to announce that having visited Salesian houses in France and Liguria, D. Bosco will return to Turin on 6 May, (this month) very much improved in health.'¹⁷¹

168 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885...*, pp. 66-69; Dom Bosco à Nice, "Bulletin salésien" 8 (1885) 78-79.

169 "D. Bosco was here almost the whole week, he left for Varazze-Sampierdarena in good health and warmly greets you", Fr Cerutti told Fr Barberis on 2 May (ASC 272.31 Cerruti, orig. 3 ff.).

170 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 March 1885...*, pp. 73-75.

171 BS 9 (1885) no. 5, May, p. 61.

PHYSICAL DECLINE, INDOMITABLE VITALITY (1885–86)

- 1885 15 July–22 August: resting up at Mathi Torinese;
December 8: official communication to Salesians of Fr Rua as Vicar.
- 1885 Madrid foundation does not eventuate.
- 1886 24 March–15 May: Journey through Liguria, France, on to Spain;
8 April–6 May: at Sarriá, Barcelona;
15 July–August 13: resting at the Bishop's house at Pinerolo;
1–7 September: Fourth General Chapter of the Salesian Society.

Don Bosco was blessed with a fundamentally robust physical constitution, but just the same, he was subject to various illnesses and physical upsets, including serious ones, going back to the physical collapse he suffered in the summer of 1846 due to overwork. Old ailments and more recent ones¹ were more strongly felt over the final years. With increasing regularity they began to lay low a man who, though elderly, had an indomitable will and resistance but was now physically challenged by so much work. And yet there were signs of unexpected vitality, almost brief 'resurrections' and overall continuity in government expressed more in terms of animating presence within and beyond the two Religious Institutes. In the proper sense of the word, his governance was being supported and more frequently supplanted, but with extreme discretion and filial adherence. He had the cooperation and availability of his closest co-workers but in such a way that nothing or very little appeared to cloud the founder's and superior's public and private image. This was the situation as it emerged in 1885–86.

1. At Mathi Torinese

The secretary and chronicler noted on 7 May: 'D. Bosco is very tired.'² Nevertheless, that day and the following one he was able to receive Henry Fitzalan-Howard, 15th Duke of Norfolk, for a lengthy visit, The Duke (1847–1919) had been a pupil at Newman's Oratory and was the indisputable head of the English Catholic laity. He was accompanied by his wife Flora, and their five-year old son, born blind and an epileptic. The Norfolks had been in contact with Don Bosco by letter since 1882 and came to ask for their son to be healed, trusting in Don Bosco's prayer and the intercession of the Virgin Mary but also trusting, whatever the case, in God's will. The healing did

1 Cf. Chap.32, § 1.

2 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 79.

not take place. The Duchess died in 1887 and the Duke remarried in 1904. In 1908 he was given the desired heir, Bernard, 16th Duke of Norfolk.

During their visits and their regular presence at the Oratory and the Church of Mary Help of Christians, both prior to their departure for Rome on 10 May and on their return on 25th, the simplicity cordiality, faith and piety of the couple made a profound impression. They were admirers of Don Bosco and his works.³ Don Bosco wrote to Count Colle on 10 May regarding some aspects of their visit: 'The Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians has finally been set for 2 June, but the Duke of Norfolk cannot remain with us till then. He has now left with his family (18 of them) for Rome. But after the Holy Father's blessing he will return to Turin to continue with their morning practices of piety in the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians.' 'My head now feels very tired.'⁴ On the 26th he told him: 'The Duke of Norfolk and family left yesterday for Germany. They were all extremely happy with their stay among us and the improvement of the sick child.'⁵

At the Cooperators meeting in Turin on 1 June, vigil of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, 'D. Bosco appeared in the pulpit. He looked a very tired man and his voice was rather faint.' But he was able to explain his idea of the Cooperator and describe the works most in need of support: the missions in Patagonia, the Sacred Heart Church, the house in Paris. He ended up reminding them of the reward promised by the Lord to the merciful, and recommending that they pray for one another.⁶

For the celebration of his name day on 23, 24 June, the Superior and Father's physical decline seemed almost unstoppable to everyone. It was a very solemn celebration. A painting of Mamma Margaret was among the gifts he was given. In the morning (24th), speaking in the name of the past pupils, Fr Antonio Berrone read an eloquent address to *Fr. John Bosco, stealer of hearts*. He took his cue from Napoleon's admiration for Jesus while exiled on Sant'Elena, since Jesus was the only one to attract humanity through love alone, through his great miracle of 'making himself loved.' 'You too, D. Bosco, can rightly boast of mastering hearts.' 'You are a thief, an incorrigible thief because you have always stolen and continue to steal the hearts of all who get to know you. The Lord's hand is manifested through you by giving you the heavenly gift of subjugating hearts and making yourself loved.' He concluded with a profession of faith: 'I love you' along with a million hearts beating 'in Piedmont, Italy, Europe, America, the world.'⁷ Among those present was German priest Johann Mehler who later, in September, spoke of Don Bosco at the 32nd Annual Assembly of German Catholics at Munster.⁸ He wrote to Don Bosco about it signing himself as 'priest and Salesian Cooperator at Ratisbonne,' assuring him: 'The Germans loved and will love Don Bosco like they love a father.'⁹

The physical exhaustion continued. They were waiting for him in the countryside at Mathi, 27 kilometres from Turin, at the house built near the mill. 'Tomorrow, he told Count Colle, 'God willing I will leave for Mathi to recover a bit from my weakness or rather, if possible, slow my ageing down a bit.'¹⁰ He went there on 15 July. The chronicler recorded that 'the superiors wanted him to spend some time resting there and also because his diminished strength cannot manage the city heat.'¹¹

3 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 79-81; "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 124, Wednesday 27 May 1885, p. 493, The Duke of Norfolk in Turin.

4 E IV 514-515.

5 E IV 515.

6 BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, pp. 94-95.

7 *A D. Giovanni Bosco rapitore dei cuori nella faustissima ricorrenza del Suo Onomastico gli antichi suoi alunni - 24 Giugno 1885*. Turin, Tip. Salesiana 1885, 12 pp.

8 Cf. Chap.26, § 5.

9 *Don Bosco e l'Assemblea generale dei Cattolici Tedeschi*, BS 9 (1885) no. 11, November, p. 166.

10 Letter of 14 July 1885, E IV 516.

11 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 83.

The following day Viglietti noted: D. Bosco is relaxing, telling us about some beautiful times in his life, walking in the garden and gaining in health and strength. He is eating with a better appetite.¹² He was clearly pursued by memories of his anxiety for the salvation of the young, since on the night of 16 July, he dreamt that someone in Turin was inviting him to found a girls' oratory near Piazza Vittorio.¹³

He interrupted his break on 26 and 30 July to be in Turin for the annual meetings with lay and priestly past pupils, and the usual fraternal meal. We are informed that on 26 July, 'Don Bosco spoke at the end but kept it brief due to lack of strength.' 'My Life is drawing to a close,' he said among other things. 'If I go eternity before you I assure you I will never forget you in my prayers.' But if life here must go on 'be sure I will continue to love you and help you in the little that I can.' His speech to the priests on 30 July was longer, completely dedicated to the work for adult education.¹⁴

Viglietti described the first of these two days in just a few words: 'The feast was beautiful, splendid ... Toward 6.30 we left for Mathi. D. Bosco is very tired from the day.' Of the second he wrote: 'The past pupils' celebration was beautiful and topped off by a group photo of all the past pupils with D. Bosco in the middle. At 6.00 p.m. we left for Mathi.'¹⁵ He was unable to return to Turin on 3 August for the solemn memorial service at the church of Mary Help of Christians for Cardinal Nina, who died on 26 July. Cardinal Alimonda presided.¹⁶ The secretary noted for 7 August: 'D. Bosco's health over these days is a worry: constant headaches, dysentery, eyes aching, but he seems cheerful and does not complain.'¹⁷ Don Bosco partly confirmed this when writing to Count Colle three days later: 'Over these recent days, my health has been a bit worse. Now however, thank God, it is much better. May God be blessed.' He added: 'On Sunday (15 August) I will be in Turin and on Monday I will go to the retreat at S. Benigno. But you will regularly receive our news.'¹⁸ 'As for me, I would very much like to see you but I am not sure, because for a whole month at Mathi my journeys have been from my room to the garden near the paper mill.'¹⁹

The chronicler gave plenty of space to the initiative by Count Balbo and Cardinal Alimonda to involve the Italian episcopate and Catholics in financial support for the construction of the Sacred Heart Church, advertised on 9 August by *L'Unità Cattolica*.²⁰ Meanwhile, Don Bosco's health was not improving. 'This year too,' the chronicler wrote 'due to ill health D. Bosco had to be absent for his birthday celebrations – the prize distribution and, from now, from being at the retreat.'²¹

During the month's rest, however, Don Bosco was not left alone. Other than frequent visits from Fr Rua, various others came looking for him to ask for 'graces and prayers for the sick, or to pay their respects, like the boarders and a group of Sisters from Lanzo just 7 kilometres away. Some others came from France to bring assurances of friendship, and donations, such as the Olive family from Marseilles who had many children and were people of great faith, and the school inspector from Nice who marvelled at the paper mill and told Viglietti: 'Truly D. Bosco is a man of his times and has resolved the worker and social question.' Don Bosco also posed for an artist from Brescia who wanted to make live adjustments to a portrait he had painted based on a small

12 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 83.

13 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 83-87; Cf. Chap.34 § 6.

14 *Festa di famiglia*, BS 9 (1885) no. 9, September, p. 131.

15 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 89-90.

16 Cf. *Il cardinal Nina*, BS 9 (1885) no. 9, September, pp. 130-131.

17 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 95.

18 Letter of 10 August 1885, E IV 516-517.

19 Letter of 18 August 1885, E IV 517.

20 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 96-99; Cf. Chap.30, § 2.

21 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 102.

photograph.²² He remained at Mathi until 21 August. From 22 August until 12 October, he was at Nizza Monferrato²³ then S. Benigno Canavese and Valsalice. In one or other of these places but especially while resting at Mathi, some of the best expressions of his spiritual government reached maturity.

2. Extraordinary spiritual vivacity in letters of animation

In real terms, this man who was in such poor health, suffering a variety of ailments, could surprise people, when needed, for his extraordinary vivaciousness of heart and spirit. Two sets of letters written in his own hand over summer and autumn 1885 mark some of the most powerful occasions. They are full of clear spiritual and pedagogical direction. They were addressed to Salesians, most of whom were working in South America, though some were closer, in France and Spain.

Very precise reasons in August 1885 spurred him to write important letters to Salesians in America.²⁴ According to reports that had reached Fr Rua and other members of the Superior Chapter, repressive measures had out-weighed preventive ones in some of the colleges: strict discipline and punishments in place of rules and reminders inspired by reason and friendship, repression instead of persuasion. Fr Rua had wanted to spare Don Bosco news that could cause him to suffer. But having received a reliable report on the situation from Bishop Cagliero, he felt it was his duty to inform the Superior. The reaction was swift and entrusted to three clear letters which he wrote himself to Bishop Cagliero, the Provincial, Fr Costamagna and the Rector at San Nicolás, Fr Tomatis. Moreover, he knew that strong-arm tactics in education could also take over in Europe if, on any number of occasions, he found himself having to remind people to practise the well-known trio of 'reason, religion, loving-kindness.'

As well as touching on the preventive issue with Bishop Cagliero, something he wrote about to Fr Costamagna at greater length a few days later, he also dealt with problems of governance. The letter was dated 6 August. As part of it he also provided precise pointers on how to go about getting aid from the Work of the Propagation of the Faith and the Work of the Holy Childhood: by using the appropriate forms, giving information on missionary travels, providing data on the newly baptised, noting 'journeys, business, discoveries.' He also spoke of possible coadjutor bishops to be appointed within the huge area of the Buenos Aires archdiocese. He then came to the most pressing issue, the 'Salesian spirit,' chiefly from an educational perspective. He told them: 'I am preparing a letter for Fr Costamagna, and for your information I will be touching on, in particular, the Salesian Spirit we want to introduce into the houses in America. Charity, patience, kindness, never humiliation, rebuffs, never punishments; doing good to whoever we can and ill to no one. That goes for the Salesians among ourselves, the pupils, others internally and outside. Employ much patience in relations with our Sisters but be strict where observance of their Rules is concerned.'²⁵

The letter to Fr Costamagna was deliberately pragmatic so it could 'serve as a guide to becoming true Salesians' for him and for the other confreres. With this in mind, he offered an 'outline' of what would need to be preached during the coming retreat. He wrote that 'I myself would like to give everyone a sermon or rather a conference on the Salesian spirit that should animate and guide our actions and everything we say. Never penal punishments, never humiliating words, never severe rebuke in front of others. Let kind words be heard in class, and charity and

22 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 88-106.

23 Cf. Chap.29, § 4.2.

24 Cf. F. MOTTO, *Tre lettere a salesiani in America*, in P. BRAIDO (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 39-452.

25 To Bishop G. Cagliero, 6 August 1885, E IV 327-329.

patience be shown. Never biting words, no blows, light or heavy. Make use of negative punishments and always and in such a way that those who are warned become even more our friends than they were before and never leave us discouraged.' He established his thinking in two clear statements: 'Let every Salesian be a friend to everyone; never ever seek revenge. Let him easily forgive and never remind people of things already forgiven.' 'Kindness when speaking, acting, advising earns you everything and wins over everyone.' But the Salesians had to make this their personal experience and the superior was to encourage this by giving 'everyone much freedom and much confidence.' Fr Vespignani, the novice master, was invited to be 'clear about these things' and explain them to aspirants and novices. The Provincial was to see that all the rectors were trained in them through conferences in which he would 'read and encourage the reading and knowledge of our rules, especially the chapter that speaks about the practices of piety, the introduction to our rules which I wrote, and deliberations taken at our special or 'General Chapter.'²⁶

On the 10th he wrote a long and detailed letter to the Prefect Apostolic of Southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, Fr Joseph Fagnano, with pastoral indications for carrying out his role, and some binding spiritual advice as his religious Superior. They were words that came from the mind and heart of a man who was physically tired but with exceptional clarity of thinking. 'It could be' he began 'that these are the final words from a friend of your soul.' Because of his ministry, he was far from his community and Don Bosco recommended to him, as a man of frenetic activity, that 'You must meditate ceaselessly and keep in mind the great thought: God sees me.' With regard to his ministry he warned him: 'Never think of temporal advantage in your journeys, long or short, but only of God's glory. Remember well that your efforts are always to be aimed at the growing needs of your Mother, *Sed mater tua est Ecclesia Dei*, says St Jerome . Wherever you go, try to found schools, and also found junior seminaries in order to nurture or at least find some vocations for the Sisters and the Salesians.' As a religious and a superior, he insisted, 'Let your daily reading be: our rules, especially the Chapter on piety, the preface I myself wrote, the decisions taken at Chapters held on various occasions. Show much love for and try to support those who are working for the Faith.'²⁷

Writing to Fr Tomatis, first of all he renewed his warning on the duty he had of providing the Superior General with information on how the college was running. Then he went on: 'Since my life is fast drawing to a close, the things I wish to write in this letter are the ones I would want to recommend to you in my final days of exile. My will and testament for you.' They were thoughts of mature Salesian religious spirituality: 'Keep firmly in mind that you became a Salesian to save yourself. Preach and recommend the same truth to all our confreres.' 'Remember that it is not enough just to know things but you need to practice them.' 'Try to see matters that concern you with your own eyes. When someone neglects something or does things badly, advise him promptly so that the wrongs do not multiply.' 'By your exemplary manner of life, your charity in speaking, commanding, putting up with others' faults, you will win many over to the Congregation. Constantly recommend frequent use of the sacraments of confession and communion. The virtues that will make you happy now and in eternity are: humility and charity. Always be a friend and a father to our confreres. Help them in any way you can, in spiritual and temporal matters, but know how to use them for everything that is for the greater glory of God.' He encouraged him, finally, to develop each thought expressed in his letter.²⁸

He also sent letters to the men in charge of Salesian works in France and Spain, where cholera had appeared. On 9 and 10 August he wrote to Fr Paul Albera, Provincial in France, Fr Ernesto

26 To Fr G. Costamagna, 10 August 1885, E IV 332-333.

27 E IV 334-335.

28 To Fr G. Tomatis, 14 August 1885, E IV 336-337.

Giovanni Oberti, the Rector at Utrera, Fr Giovanni Branda, Rector at Sarriá in Barcelona. There was a combination of references to the epidemic and the already well-known spiritual preventive medicine with pressing invitations to take in boys orphaned by the cholera, as many as they could, at the same time stating the readiness of the superior at the centre, Fr Rua in the first instance, to provide for what was needed. He told Fr Albera in particular: 'My health has been deteriorating over some time but now, as I write to you, I feel perfectly healthy. I believe this may be the result of the great pleasure it gives me to be writing to you.' He was also interested in the precarious psychological condition of Fr De Barruel, which he understood in the terms and categories of a man of his times: 'Tell me if our dear but poor Fr Barruel continues with his fixations, or even if he shows remote improvement.' Shifting attention to another front he then added: 'Offer to take in orphans, like last year: God will help us.'²⁹ He encouraged the new young Rector of the college at Utrera similarly: 'If you ever find yourself in need because you are helping children orphaned by cholera, tell me and we will look at ways to help them.' He also suggested a 'powerful antidote against cholera,' carrying a medal of Mary Help of Christians, frequent communion, and saying '*Maria Auxilium Christianorum ora pro nobis*' daily.³⁰ He suggested the same antidote to the Rector at Sarriá, also telling him about his own health: 'My health is improving and I am able to take up some more special matters.'³¹

Another set of letters of a spiritual and pastoral nature were addressed to Salesians in America between 24 September and 5 October, from Valsalice, S, Benigno Canavese and the Oratory in Turin. The recipients were Fr Giovanni Allavena, Rector and parish priest of the work at Paysandu, (Uruguay), Fr Louis Lasagna, Rector of the college at Villa Colón (Montevideo, Uruguay) and Provincial of Uruguay and Brazil, Fr Lorenzo Giordano, Rector of the college at Sao Paolo, Brazil, cleric Giovanni Beraldi at the college at Almagro, Buenos Aires. In these letters we find the distinctive traits of his religious and Salesian spirituality expressed economically and persuasively, and permeated by intense fatherliness.

'I consider it timely to write at least one letter to you,' he reassured Fr Allavena 'reminding you of the affection this father of yours has always has for you and will always have ... Before your departure for America I warmly recommended that you observe our rules.' 'As well as the text of the rules you will draw benefit from frequently reading the decisions taken at our General Chapter.' 'As parish priest, show all charity to your priests to keep them zealously in their sacred ministry. And take special care of the children, the sick, the elderly.' 'Any care, any effort, any expense is never too much to succeed in a vocation.' *Praebe teipsum exemplum bonorum operum*, but see that this good example shines forth in the queen of virtues, Chastity.'³²

To the trustworthy and dynamic Fr Lasagna he offered, as a 'testament', a summary of what he had said earlier in letters to Salesians in Argentina. 'I have been wanting to write to you for a number of months but my old age and lazy hand have made me put off this pleasure. Now it seems to me that the opportunity has come, so I have thought of leaving you with some written thoughts as a testament of one who has always loved you and continues to do so. You have followed the Lord's voice and dedicated yourself to the Catholic missions. You have chosen well. 'We want souls and nothing else. Make that thought echo in our confreres' ears.' He then moved on to the matter he had already given the Provincial in Argentina as a topic for reflection at the retreats: 'Insist on the charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales whom we must imitate, and on the exact observance of our rules, constant reading of Chapter deliberations, meditating carefully on the particular regulations of the houses. Believe me, dear Fr Lasagna, I have had to deal with certain of our confreres who actually ignore these deliberations, and with others who have never

29 Letter of 9 August 1885, E IV 330.

30 Letter of 10 August 1885, E IV 330-331.

31 To Fr G. B. Branda, 10 August 1885, E IV 331-332.

32 Letter of 24 September 1885, E IV 339.

read the parts of the rule or discipline regarding the duties entrusted to them. Another scourge threatening us is forgetting, or rather, overlooking the rubrics of the Breviary and Missal. I am convinced that a series of retreats would bring excellent results if it led the Salesians to exact recital of the Mass and Breviary. What I have warmly recommended to those I have written to over these days is to cultivate vocations to both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Study, make plans, do not worry about expense so long as you gain some priests for the Church, especially for the missions.' 'Let us also take courage. May Mary bless and protect our Congregation; help from heaven will not be lacking. Workers are increasing, it seems fervour is too, and while material resources are not abundant they are sufficient.'³³

He did not forget a young cleric at Pius IX College at Almagro (Buenos Aires), who had written to him in August, opening up about some of his conscience concerns and resolutions. He almost apologised for being late in replying, speaking of his poor state of health: 'Do not be concerned if I do not write; it is now almost impossible for me to do so with my bodily ailments. I am almost blind and almost unable to walk, write, speak. So what? I am old and may God's holy will be done.' 'However, every day I pray for you and for all my sons and I would like them all to gladly serve the Lord in holy cheerfulness, even amid difficulties and diabolical disturbances – these can be sent fleeing with the sign of the cross and *Jesus, Mary, have mercy, long live Jesus* and above all by despising them, by *vigilate et orate*, and by avoiding idleness and any occasion like it. As for scruples, only obedience to your Rector and superiors can make them go away. Therefore, do not forget that *vir oboedians loquetur victoriam*. I approve of your fostering devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and in due course, through patience, *Deo iuvante*, you will work wonders.' His farewell line mirrored his state of mind at that moment: 'Also pray for your elderly friend and father.'³⁴

3. The inevitable announcement of Fr Rua as Vicar and successor

On 23 August, at Nizza Monferrato, Don Bosco celebrated the community Mass and was present for the clothing and religious profession of many Sisters. He left the following morning and after lunch at the Oratory went on to S. Benigno, immediately making himself available to those making the retreat.³⁵

The chronicler noted how Don Bosco was often overcome by weeping, especially when celebrating Mass and giving the final blessing: 'Even when speaking, he needs to skip the topics that made him emotional to avoid crying.'³⁶ Don Bosco stayed at S. Benigno after the retreat as well, and on 30 August, his secretary recorded: 'Because of both exhaustion and bad weather, at times Don Bosco suffers serious inconvenience ... On a few occasions I have seen him suffer very much.'³⁷ Don Bosco offered partial confirmation of this in some of his letters: 'For some days my health had prevented my writing to you. Today it is a little better.'³⁸ 'I am here at S. Benigno Canavese. Very tired.'³⁹ Confirmation also came from Fr Cerruti, writing to Fr Luigi Rocca, the Rector at Alassio: 'News of D. Bosco, delayed at S. Benigno, is not good. There is doubt he will go

33 Letter of 30 September 1885, E IV 340-341. The same letter to Fr L. Giordano on 30 September has already been quoted at the end of Chap. 30.

34 To Cleric G. Beraldi (1864-1940), 5 October 1885, E IV 343.

35 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 108.

36 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 109.

37 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 110.

38 To Count L. Colle, 2 September 1885, E IV 518.

39 To Fr T. De Agostini, 2 September 1884, E IV 338.

to Lanzo, etc. Let us pray.⁴⁰ Twenty days later, he was able to tell him that Don Bosco was 'reasonably well.'⁴¹

Don Bosco stayed at Valsalice from 4 to 28 September, where the Salesians were taking part in various retreats. He had two personal visits from Cardinal Alimando, on 14 and 24 September, accompanied on the 14th by Fr Margotti, the editor of *L'Unità Cattolica* and Canon Forcheri, secretary of the *Voto degli italiani* Commission, the group supporting construction of the Sacred Heart Church. On the 24th he was accompanied by Fr Margotti and other 'eminent individuals.' They stayed for lunch and for some time afterwards.⁴² There was news of his health over these words too. The secretary noted on 14 September: 'We are still here, where D. Bosco's health has much improved.'⁴³ He told the same individual he was half blind, finding it hard to write.⁴⁴

'I have become very old and half blind.'⁴⁵ 'As you can see I am half-blind and you will find it difficult to read my letter. Forgive me. Have patience.'⁴⁶ 'I can no longer write. I hope to let you know other things by Fr Rua's hand,' he wrote once more to Count Colle on 27 November.⁴⁷

Evidently, even though it was an inner battle for him, Don Bosco reflected on the idea of clearly and definitively resolving the matter of a Vicar successor, a situation which had remained officially in a strange sort of limbo. The final solution was anticipated by his not always unambiguous statements. At the Superior Chapter meeting on 22 June 1885 he spoke of Fr Rua's role alongside him. Also, without hinting at the fact that his closest collaborator had already been appointed as plenipotentiary Vicar by the Holy See, and as successor, he said: 'There is need, then, for Fr Rua to be free from everything and serve Don Bosco alone, be attached to him, because D. Bosco could rely on Fr Rua for everything once he is free of any other problems, he can help with his experience, and then [D. Bosco] can still go on a bit. There is need to look for charity through letters, visits, not only in Turin but in Genoa, Milan, Rome. Up till now D. Bosco has done that, but he cannot do it any longer and there is need for another to do it in his name.'⁴⁸ Strangely, in the early cited letter to Fr Costamagna on 10 August, without any reference to Fr Rua he had put forward a special possibility: 'As far as possible, I want to leave the Congregation without any embarrassments. Therefore, I have in mind establishing a Vicar General who can be an *alter ego* for Europe, and another for America. But you will receive appropriate instructions about his in good time.'⁴⁹

It seems that up till then he had not thought it urgent to provide official communication to the Salesian Society of the Appointment of the Vicar, also because during 1885 his health had not been so poor that it prevented him from carrying out most of his official acts of government. Of the 47 Chapter sessions that year he presided at a good 37 of them. 8 were listed for 1886, all of which he presided at and he even presided at 12 of the 42 listed for 1887. On the other hand, in the eyes of the public, and in particular benefactors and Cooperators, he continued to seem relevant and pretty much irreplaceable as Superior General.

It was at the Chapter meeting on 24 September 1885 that he finally announced his resolve to carry out the papal decision regarding his Vicar and successor, a decision already in force for ten

40 Letter of 1 September 1885, ASC F 3810261, handwritten original, 3 pp.

41 Letter of 18 September 1885, ASC F 381, handwritten original. 2 ff.

42 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 114 and 116. There would be another, longer one on the afternoon of 3 November at the Oratory (*Ibid.*, p. 122).

43 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 114.

44 To Mrs F. Maggi, 15 September 1885, E IV 339.

45 To Fr G. Allavena, 24 September 1885, E IV 340.

46 To Count L. Colle, 27 September 1885, E IV 519.

47 E IV 519.

48 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 62r, session in Don Bosco's room, 22 June 1885.

49 E IV 333.

months. The minutes of the meeting record ‘D. Bosco took the floor: “What I have to tell you comes down to two things. The first concerns D. Bosco who by now is half spent and needs someone to take his place. The other regards the Vicar General who takes over what D. Bosco was doing and takes charge of everything needed for the smooth running of the Congregation, although in dealing with things I am sure he will always gladly accept D. Bosco’s and the other confreres’ advice, and in accepting this role will intend none other than to help the pious Salesian Society. Thus, when I die my death will not affect the order in the Congregation. The Vicar, then, must see that the traditions we have by now are kept intact ... My Vicar General in the Congregation will be Fr Michael Rua. This is the Holy Father’s thinking. He wrote to me through Archbishop Jacobini. Wanting to give D. Bosco every possible help, he asked me who I thought could stand in for me. I replied that I preferred Fr Rua because he is one of the first in the Congregation, also chronologically speaking; because for many years he had been carrying out this role; and because this appointment would meet with the approval of all the confreres. His Holiness replied soon afterwards through His Eminence Cardinal Alimonda: ‘That is good,’ thus approving of my choice. From here on, therefore, Fr Rua will take my place in everything. Whatever I can do he can do. He has the full powers of the Rector Major: acceptances, clothing, choices of secretary, delegations, etc. etc. But in appointing Fr Rua as Vicar it means he needs to be totally available to help me, so he needs to renounce his role as Prefect of the Congregation. So, using the faculties that the rules grant me I am appointing as Prefect of the Congregation, Fr Celestine Durando, until now School Councillor. Fr Cerruti is appointed to replace Fr Durando as School Councillor.” He concluded by asking ‘the secretary of the Chapter to prepare the circular announcing the appointment of the Vicar General, to be sent to all the houses of the Congregation.’⁵⁰

On 4 October, Don Bosco went to S. Benigno Canavese, where he assisted at the religious profession of 45 novices, and on the 11th, gave the clerical habit to 60 young men.⁵¹ He returned to Turin the following day. Further on, Fr Rua replaced him in a visit to benefactors at Nice and Toulon, while he provided news of his health by letter: ‘I believe Fr Rua will have already passed on to you the thanks I owe you, dear Mr Levrot and charitable Mr Montbrun. My eyesight and other vital strengths are much diminished and it is very hard for me to be of much help.’⁵² ‘Fr Rua will return in a few days and will certainly bring us your news.’⁵³ ‘I will always be content when you are at peace, and because you can help me save souls, as well as your own,’ he reassured a Salesian who came from his own area of origin, the new Rector in Florence. ‘You can easily understand how many things I would like to write to you about this, but I even struggle to hold the pen in my hand.’⁵⁴

There were any number of visits from important people over the weeks that followed. Cardinal Alimonda on 3 November, Bishop Francesco Sogaro (1839–1919) on the 15th, successor to Bishop Comboni and Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa, who had fled from El Mahdi’s Egypt, and Bishop Pierre–Hector Couillié (1824–1912) of Orleans, future Cardinal. Then Cardinal Alimonda again on 10 December.⁵⁵ They were days of renewed vitality. ‘I passed on your information to our beloved D. Bosco this morning. He is quite well,’ Fr Cerruti told Fr Rocca on 8 November. And later he confirmed: ‘D. Bosco is very well. He comes to lunch and supper with the Chapter, hears confessions including of the boys in 4th and 5th year secondary in his room, receives visits etc. *Deo gratias.*’⁵⁶

50 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 82v-83r, session on 24 September 1885. Fr F. Cerruti also gave news of this to Fr L. Rocca, who thus became “The complete Rector in name and deed”: letter of 25 September 1885, ASC F 3810263, handwritten original. 4 pp.

51 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 121-122.

52 To Mr V. Levrot, 21 November 1885, E IV 345.

53 To Count L. Colle, 27 November 1885, E IV 519.

54 To Fr S. Febraro, 30 October 1885, E IV 344.

55 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 122, 124, 130.

56 Letter of 8 November 1885, ASC F 3810267.

On 8 December, the secretary recorded the confreres' joy at having Don Bosco at lunch and to give Benediction in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, something he did very rarely. 'You could see the whole population flocking to see him, and you saw more than one shed tears of emotion at seeing the venerable old man drag himself around, all worn out for the good of youth.' 'Towards evening he gave a conference to the confreres. The circular creating a Vicar General for the Congregation was read out as part of it. Then Don Bosco spoke,' reminding them, among other things, of the Hail Mary said 'with the young man over at the Church of St Francis (Bartholomew Garelli).'⁵⁷

In the circular to Salesians on 8 December 1885, drawn up by Fr Lemoyne and corrected by Don Bosco, there was a good summary of what was contained in the minutes of the Chapter meeting on 24 September. However, Don Bosco intervened in the draft with corrections that tended to reduce the considerable interval between the Pope's decision and his announcement. Archbishop Jacobini had written to him only 'some time ago'; 'a few weeks ago' the Pope had expressed 'his pleasure' at the proposal of Fr Rua as Vicar. He softened the wording 'with full powers' regarding the Vicar, the twin leadership found in the draft, with: 'All that I can do, he can do, having full powers *with me*.' Toward the conclusion he added a whole paragraph in his own hand about his 'somewhat improved' health saying he would dedicate his remaining 'strength and days totally for the benefit of our humble Congregation and the profit of our souls.'⁵⁸

Brief end of year news followed: on the afternoon of 10 December, Cardinal Alimonda visited and spoke 'at length with him.' On the 13th, Don Bosco gathered the boys from 4th and 5th Year secondary in the library and spoke to them about vocation, distributing lots of nuts among them. On the 29th, Fr Cerruti informed Fr Rocca that Don Bosco was very happy with the greetings from young members of the Blessed Sacrament and Immaculate Conception sodalities at the college in Alassio: 'He regrets he could not write a few words of thanks himself due to poor sight and tiredness.' He added nevertheless: But his health is generally okay. and it seems that his affection for his sons grows in him with the years, such that if I have to leave him for some days, even though he knows, you can see he is suffering.'⁵⁹

Finally, Don Bosco gave the usual *strenna* for 1886, predicting 'disasters and calamities and six deaths at home' for the coming year.⁶⁰ The usual meeting with secondary students took place on 3 January, with a further distribution of nuts, miraculously multiplied according to the chronicler, and the same again on the 31st for the boys who missed out on the 3rd. This deed, according to the chronicler, had led Don Bosco to tell the story of 'the miraculous multiplication of hosts and chestnuts that occurred on another occasion.'⁶¹ The chronicler and boys were greedy for such miraculous things.

The Feast of St Francis de Sales on 29 January 1886 was a very solemn occasion. Pontifical Mass was celebrated by Bishop Valfrè di Bonzo, of Cuneo, assisted by Cardinal Alimonda and accompanied by the splendid Haydn Mass. Vespers were just as solemn. The homily was given by the Bishop of Ivrea, Davide Riccardi, who eventually succeeded Cardinal Alimonda in Turin. There was also a play performed, written by Fr Lemoyne, *Vibio Sereno*, with some interludes of 'cheerful buffoonery', *L'Aio in imbarazzo* and *Grispino e la Comare*. Don Bosco was present for lunch, 'reasonably strong in health,' 'more jovial and serene than we have seen him for a while,' and he

57 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 128-130.

58 E IV 348-349. Emphasis is ours.

59 Letter of 29 December 1885, ASC F 3810272, handwritten original. 2 pp.

60 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 130-132.

61 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 138-140 e 143.

was also present with the Cardinal and Riccardi at the evening entertainment which ended at 9.30 pm.⁶²

In the morning, Don Bosco celebrated Mass for the first time at an altar placed in the small room next to his bedroom. In the later afternoon, the Cardinal, accompanied by the Bishop of Ivrea, blessed the little chapel. 'It was a very beautiful ceremony.'⁶³

The chronicler recorded on 1 March: 'D. Bosco has been saying these days that hunger drives the wolf from his lair ... So, he now finds himself forced to undertake a new journey, though failing in health, and go perhaps as far as Spain. He has already decided on the departure date.'⁶⁴ Fr Cerruti was less negative: 'Don Bosco is going well,' 'Don Bosco continues to be reasonably well,' he wrote to his special friend Fr Rocca.⁶⁵

As part of this journey were the final stages of negotiations in view of a foundation in Madrid, negotiations begun in August 1885. We will talk about this before providing a general description of Don Bosco's final trip outside Italy.

4. Madrid Foundation – a final 'no'

As we have seen, especially in conferences over past decades, Don Bosco tended to paint a grim picture of the circumstances of poor and abandoned, at-risk and of-risk youth potentially heading for crime and prison, and therefore in need of assistance and preventive education.⁶⁶ It is no surprise, then, that many people thought of him as someone who ran reform and recovery works, or in other words, houses of correction. Among such people were members of a Commission in Madrid who had taken the initiative of founding an *Escuela de reforma para jóvenes y asilo de corrección paternal* named after St Rita. At the end of negotiations, Don Bosco and his Salesians would have ended up betraying, in fact, their institutional commitment by taking on the rigid correctional approach fashionable at the time.⁶⁷

While they were building the place, the Madrid group came to hear of the hospice and *Talleras* the Salesians had recently opened in Barcelona. Francisco Lastres y Juiz (1848–1918) was sent to gain information on the educational approach adopted there. Fr Branda, as he himself told members of the Superior Chapter in the morning session on 22 September 1885 at Valsalice, had given him D'Espiney's book to read, provoking the reaction from Don Bosco that it would have been better to give him Du Boys' book in this instance. 'He makes our system known and has correctly understood the spirit of our Society,' Those who came from Madrid, Fr Branda said, confirmed that they were talking about a reformatory, while he insisted on telling them 'this is not our purpose.' 'If we are talking about correction it is not our aim.' Then 'they returned: they spent a whole day at the hospice to see how it ran, the rules, the customs of the house and concluded that they needed to write to Don Bosco.'

A month later, Branda was invited to Madrid and went there at the insistence of the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Mariano Rampolla. He said that Deputy (MP) Lastres and Senator Manuel

62 *La festa di S. Francesco di Sales a Torino*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 26, Sunday 31 January 1886, p. 102.

63 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 133-135.

64 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 149-150.

65 To Fr L. Rocca, 19 February 1886 (ASC F 3810309) and 3 March 1886 ASC 38 Alassio.

66 Cf. Chap.30, § 3.

67 Cf. M. F. NÚÑEZ MUNOZ, *San Juan Bosco y la educación de los jóvenes descañados, en España. Un episodio (1885-1887)*, in "Educadores" 24 (1982) 501-516; F. RODRÍGUEZ DE CORO, *Los salesianos en Madrid. En la entraña del parlamentarismo español (1875-1902)*, in F. MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922...*, Vol. II, pp. 163-175.

Silvela (1830–92), who signed the letters of request, were waiting for him at the station.⁶⁸ The following day, Fr Branda attended a meeting of the Commission which discussed entrusting the work to Don Bosco. To the objection that their thinking did not correspond to what he described as ‘our system’ came the reply that ‘so long as the purpose was achieved, they would allow freedom to act as they wanted. ‘Their intention is that the youth be saved.’ This is how they wrote to Don Bosco.⁶⁹

Chapter members had different views on the matter. Fr Durando was all for putting a brake on new foundations. Fr Cerruti invited them to reflect on the compatibility of the project with what he described as ‘our system’, which those making the request in Madrid needed to be told about. Fr Rua noted that the people in Madrid were ready to make concessions, and Fr Branda reminded them that ‘the Nuncio and Silvela were waiting for an answer.’ Don Bosco, who was substantially in favour of discussing the issue, reminded them of how much unforeseen good had come about directly or indirectly from works that had begun almost by chance, and invited them to study ‘the possibility of carrying this out’ and then ‘sending someone to Madrid to spend time there, get to know the place, look, and then draw conclusions.’ So he decided to set up a commission made up of Frs Durando, Cerruti and Branda ‘to examine the Madrid project and how to bring it into line with our system.’ Finally, so the minutes tell us, ‘Don Bosco says that we be agreeable to everything that does not concern the substance, and that funds were not an obstacle. Fr Rua concluded by saying that we should hold firm to our custom of having the two categories of academic and trade students.’⁷⁰

At the Chapter meeting on 24 September, Fr Cerruti ‘read out the letter of reply to the Madrid Commission.’ The Chapter approved it, establishing that it be ‘kept in the archives’ to serve as a ‘guide for similar cases.’ Don Bosco signed this and another letter to the Nuncio, attaching a copy of the letter to the Commission.⁷¹ The letter encouraged continuation of negotiations, and on 11 October, the Nuncio wrote to Don Bosco: ‘Since I see with pleasure from the communication with Mr Silvela that there is harmonious agreement between the wishes of the Commission for the ‘Patronage’ and the wise guidelines from the worthy Salesian Congregation, I trust that in a short time it may be able to extend the field of its labours to Madrid.’⁷²

When construction of the future correctional institute had been completed, a renewed request came to Don Bosco from Madrid on 5 March 1886, without any substantial variations.⁷³ Silvela recalled his meeting with Don Bosco in November when he went to Rome with Lastres for the International Penitentiary Congress, and attached a memorandum in French with a history of the work, the text of the Spanish legislation of 4 January 1883 on correctional institutes, and a list of founding patrons. He was clearly writing about the management of a correctional institute without any reference to the reservation expressed by Turin. Don Bosco signed a letter of reply, agreed on with Fr Cerruti, which was a resolute negative: ‘Apart from the shortage of personnel for current commitments, the nature of this Institute and its form of discipline does not allow me to support this mutual desire. Despite all our willingness to do good, we cannot move away in practice from what our Rule lays down, a copy of which I sent you September last. What would be possible for us is an Institute modelled on the *Talleras Salesianos* at Sarriá in Barcelona, but it could not be a reform school at the same time, based on St Rita’s.’ However this was not the final word, since in view of

68 From 1863 to 1883 he was a Deputy (MP) at the Cortes and from 1883 Senator for life.

69 Cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 79r-80r, session on 22 September 1885.

70 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 80v-81r, session on 22 September 1885.

71 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 82v, session on 24 September 1885.

72 Cf. text of letter in MB XVII 828.

73 Text in MB XVII 828-829.

his trip to Barcelona in April, Don Bosco expressed the hope of seeing both Silvela and Lastres again on that occasion.⁷⁴

There was a meeting between Lastres and Fr Rua on 18 April at Sarriá. Lastres brought with him a letter of recommendation from the Nuncio.⁷⁵ The Vicar informed him of conditions he then presented to the Superior Chapter when it met on 25 June. We find a special version of this in Viglietti's chronicle, reflecting the impressions in the small world around Don Bosco over those days. The information referred to 20 April, when 'the Bishop of Barcelona, who is a very honourable Prince' visited Don Bosco with his sizeable retinue: 'The letter was read out to the Bishop and everyone gathered there which the Archbishop, the Apostolic Nuncio in Madrid, had written to Don Bosco supporting Minister Silvela, who was still insisting that Don Bosco put a house in Madrid, and that a building had been built. Silvela sent his secretary, who is a Member of Parliament, so that it might be agreed and settled on. D. Bosco seems, in fact, to have decided to accept so long as they accept all of D. Bosco's conditions.'⁷⁶ In the letter of reply to the Nuncio on 22 April, which he dictated to Fr Rua, Don Bosco indicated some degree of readiness: 'In speaking with the Honourable Mr Lastres, we have found a way to overcome any difficulties that might subsequently arise, such that now it only remains to draw up an agreement between our Pious Society and the Commission promoting this work. On our return to Turin, this will be one of our first concerns, drawing up an agreement and sending it to Mr Manuel Silvela to submit to the examination of the aforesaid Commission. For now, the truly serious difficulty we have is the shortage of personnel. But we hope that with the help of Providence, this too can be overcome.'⁷⁷

The Superior Chapter dealt with the matter for the last time on 25 June 1886. Don Bosco presided at the meeting but the minutes do not record him saying anything. In reality, Fr Rua moderated the discussion and presented it on the basis of what Lastres had been told in Sarriá. The Vicar reminded them of the three categories of boys foreseen by the Madrid Commission: boys at risk brought together directly at the house, others who had served their prison sentence as imposed by the courts and others again from well-off families whose parents had put them there because they were incorrigible. He then read out the Nuncio's letter of recommendation from 17 April. He concluded by accepting the work so long as the principles was honoured of giving the Salesians full autonomy to run and administer the work. The conditions which Fr Rua had given Lastres in Barcelona were then presented: 1. Removing the name and appearance of the house as a correctional institute. 2. Limiting care for the present to the first category, boys at risk. 3. For the present, not accepting boys referred by the police. 4. Only accepting boys from 9 to 14 years of age. 5. Being free to direct boys deemed suitable to take up studies. Fr Durando suggested attaching the text of the agreement drawn up for the orphanages in Trent, with some adjustment he himself would attend to. Fr Rua suggested establishing the fees to be paid by each boy, and salaries for the director, teachers, service personnel. Fr Durando suggested instead leaving the exact amounts open for the other party to indicate. Everything seemed to have been approved. Fr Rua took on responsibility for pulling all these ideas together and replying.⁷⁸

The letter to the Commission in Madrid, signed by Don Bosco on 8 July 1886, was aimed at explaining the terms of the agreement.⁷⁹ The signatory first presented considerations of an educational nature, ones that would not have encourage a continuation of negotiations. Even he realised that the project would meet with difficulties from the Commission's point of view, beginning with the condition included in the second part of article 2 of the agreement. In fact, it suggested

74 To Senator M. Silvela, from Alassio, 17 March 1886, E IV 354.

75 Letter of 17 April 1886, in MB XVII 829-830.

76 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886 al 16 maggio 1886*, p. 11.

77 Letter from Barcelona-Sarriá on 22 April 1886, E IV 354-355.

78 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 92v, session in Don Bosco's room on 28 June 1886.

79 The text of the agreement is found in MB XVII 830-831.

they would not be taking on an institution that did not correspond to the request: 'The Institute will open by providing shelter for young orphans or boys abandoned by their parents *but who are not subject to sentence for faults committed.*' 'Let me explain this' he commented: 'Our wish would be that the boys who come out of the new Institute, which is aimed at their civic and Christian education, do not have to carry any signs of infamy with the. If they are said to have come from a house of correction, a reformatory, this could mark them for the rest of their lives. We want to remove any trace which could make the public believe it is a house of correction. In our opinion it should be called a Hospice or Institute and not a Reformatory or Patronage etc. We also want no boy under sentence to be admitted for at least five years, precisely to accustom people to not thinking of it as a house of correction. We also want this so it is easier to build up a good foundation of normal boys which will make it easier to guide others that follow on the path to work and virtue. After the first five years we also hope to be able to boys under sentence a few at a time, but even then, it would be good to do whatever is possible so it does not leak out into the public. They would await the Commission's proposals regarding financial aspects. As for the name for the Institute the suggestion was to replace St Rita with a male saint, for example St Isodore. The final comment made 'with great regret' would only have increased the Commission's already negative impression: 'And given the present scarcity of my personnel, it will not be possible to adhere to your and my desire for some years yet. Perhaps it will need to wait until 1888 or 1889 before I can have personnel available for such an undertaking.'⁸⁰

It seems that there was no reply to the letter and that Don Bosco must have informed the Nuncio of the fact since the latter wrote: 'I do not know why you have not received a reply to the letter you sent Senator Silvela about the requested project. I believe that over these days I will have an opportunity to meet up with some of the gentleman's family and you can be assured I will not let the opportunity slip for confirming my particular benevolence toward the Salesian Congregation.'⁸¹ In the end, the Reformatory was taken on and run by members of the Third Order of St Francis of Assisi.

At a conference held on 12 March 1888, Lastres did ultimately implicitly acknowledge the Salesian's motivations. The choice of early prevention had come from Don Bosco's experience as a young priest among prisoners. He had understood from this that it was of much greater benefit to prevent them from falling into error than remedying the situation with repressive measures. The successful application of the preventive system and its many benefits could be seen in the 'first Salesian workshop in Spain' at Utrera, and the workshops at Sarriá, and Barcelona. It was natural that, having been asked to take on the *Escuela de Reforma de Santa Rita*, which was correctional in nature, Don Bosco regretfully would not have wanted to move away from the system adopted in his own institutions. The boys in these were spontaneously subjected to a discipline which was not incompatible with kindness, as serious as it may be.⁸²

5. Catalonia's warm embrace

On 2 March, Fr Cerruti sent his successor at the college in Alassio a sensational piece of news: 'D. Bosco continues to be going fairly well. Halfway through the month he may be leaving for Barcelona, then Paris, Brussels, Lille, thence to Marseilles and the houses there. May the Lord be with him! But he resolved to do this because he also wants to finish the Sacred Heart work and he

80 Letter of 8 July 1886, MB XVII 604-605.

81 Archbishop M. Rampolla to Don Bosco, 5 January 1887, MB XVII 832.

82 Cf. *Don Bosco y la caridad en las prisiones. Conferencia pronunciada en el Ateneo de Madrid el día 12 de Marzo de 1888* por Francisco Lastres, Doctor en Derecho individuo de la Comisión de Códigos extranjeros, del Consejo Penitenciario y Diputado à Cortes por Mayagüez. Madrid, Tipografía de M. G. Hernández 1888, pp. 9, 13-14, 17.

know that this means travel, pain and tiredness for him. What a sublime example of holy and dynamic activity! But we need to pray!!!⁸³ Some days later he explained: 'D. Bosco will leave on Thursday the 10th of this month [11th] from S.Pier d'Arena and will be there the following Monday, remaining until Nice. Fr Cerruti will go with him as far as that, or rather until his stay in Nice is over toward the 23rd, when by that time I believe Fr Rua will arrive.'⁸⁴

In fact, Don Bosco's journey, accompanied by cleric Viglietti and, for the first stage, Frs Cerruti and Sala, began at 2.30 pm on Friday 12 March, with stops at the houses in Liguria and southern France, after which he headed for Sarriá, Barcelona. During the trip his young secretary, still a student of theology, with his unconditional sense of devotion, ended up giving particular emphasis to the numinous and miraculous in Don Bosco's activity. On the other hand, militant Catholics – clergy and laity – more representative of Barcelona, with an eye to the new Salesian *Talleras*, praised him as an educator and social worker, even the man to resolve the social and worker question.⁸⁵

Don Bosco presented himself as always in Barcelona, as the beggar wanting to involve new groups of people who shared his worldview in the same movement of faith and charity: to work for their own temporal and eternal salvation by cooperating through charity in the common salvation of the young, of all young people, not just workers and craftsmen but academic students too and other youth who had emigrated, and those in the missions. Nor did he overlook those called to the ecclesiastical life in its many forms. His hope was not so much to resolve the social question as such but to forge individuals with human, moral, religious qualities – 'good Christians and upright citizens' – who would guarantee a society which could reflect those qualities. This was the key motif of his appeals to charity for institutions aimed at transforming poor and abandoned, at-risk and of-risk young people into worthy members of a threefold citizenship: heaven, church, civil society. It was for them that he was going to all the trouble of looking for financial aid, and this was even more needed at the moment to finish the Sacred Heart Church and attached Hospice. And if money was essential to achieve these salvific causes, it was no less necessary for the salvation of the donors themselves, given the insistent Gospel precept (not merely advice) weighing on them of almsgiving, social charity. It was the highest reward guaranteed by God's promise which, through the intercession of the Help of Christians could also be integrated with the granting of the most prodigious material and spiritual graces. They knew what they had to do: appeal to the priest's blessing, go to the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, say certain prayers, make a donation for works on behalf of the young.

Don Bosco had recently written about the presumed 'miracle' phenomenon in his still secret *Memorie dal 1841*, indicating who the true players were. He certainly did not deny the inseparable presence of the miraculous in Salesian charity; 'We always note, say and preach that Mary Help of Christians has obtained and will always obtain, particular graces, even extraordinary and miraculous ones for those who help provide a Christian education to youth at risk through works, advice, good example or simply by prayer.' But he warned readers not to mistake the identity of the miracle worker. 'I warmly recommend to all my sons that they be careful when they speak or write and never say, or claim that D. Bosco has obtained graces from God or had worked miracles in some way or other. Whoever says this commits a harmful error. Although God in His goodness has been very generous in my regard I have nevertheless never pretended to know or do supernatural things. I have done none other than pray and get other good souls to ask the Lord for graces. I have always found the prayers and communion of our boys to be effective. The merciful God and

83 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 2 March 1886, ASC F 3810311, handwritten original 4 pp.

84 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 5 March 1886, ASC F 3810312, handwritten original 3 pp.

85 Cf. quoted monograph by R. ALBERDI, *Una Ciudad para un Santo: los orígenes de la obra salesiana en Barcelona*.

his Holy Mother have helped us in our needs. That has been proven every time we needed to provide for our poor and abandoned boys and even more so when their souls have been at risk.’⁸⁶

Don Bosco's health varied on the relatively quick approach to Catalonia's capital along the western riviera. 'D. Bosco had a very bad night' the chronicler noted on the first day and said a few hours later: 'We have noted D. Bosco's clarity of mind, witty remarks etc.' It was much the same the following day: 'Don Bosco is very tired ... it seemed D. Bosco could no longer breathe but he is content, at peace, and seems to be okay.' In Genoa, after a number of visits to charitable individuals he was 'dead tired' yet it did not prevent him later in the evening from recounting his improbable adventures and passing witty remarks to those present concerning his first or second trip to Rome. There was also a fruitful, well-attended conference on the 13th. At Varazze, the welcome was extraordinary, people crowding around him as far as his room and at the Salesian conference. People were very emotional.⁸⁷ 'My health is sufficiently good' he told Claire Louvet from Alassio. 'God willing, I will leave for Nice etc. as far as Barcelona, and I hope to be back in Turin in early May.'⁸⁸

The scenes at Varazze and Alassio were repeated in Nice, where he arrived on 20 March. At the Cooperator's Conference (24 March) 'he spoke with emotion but was very clear-headed.' Visits 'multiplied'. 'D. Bosco does not have a minute's rest,' but 'as well as the visits, donations also multiplied.' The secretary recorded. He also met charitable individuals, mostly of the nobility, from Germany and Russia, pushing on as far as Cannes and Toulon, eventually staying with the Colle household.⁸⁹ He had announced his visit beforehand from Nice on 26 March: 'Thanks be to God I am still alive. On Monday evening, God willing, I will be at your place, and we can discuss business at our leisure.'⁹⁰

At the end of the visit to the Queen of Wurtemberg on 27 March, as noted by the chronicler 'all along the halls the women were taking a peep and showed their sorrow at seeing how D. Bosco suffered from walking.'⁹¹ By 31 March he was in Marseilles, once more taking on the weighty but profitable onus of making and receiving visits, accompanied by blessings and healings. The secretary noted: 'D. Bosco is very tired. Newspapers announced his arrival in Marseilles and then there was a huge crowd wanting to see D. Bosco. The reception area, corridors and everywhere else was full.'⁹² On 2 April, the Vicar of the Congregation, Fr Rua arrived. The following day Viglietto noted: 'Fr Rua has spent two days studying, or rather, reading, the work by the Bishop of Milo [Marcelo Spinola], *D. Bosco y su obra* and already knows how to speak some Spanish, with difficulty, but he will know it very well, for sure, before we arrive in Barcelona.'⁹³ On the 5th, in the presence of the nobility and local financiers, including Rostand and Bergasse, there was a Conference on charity, an unmistakably conservative approach in which the speaker, in the chronicler's opinion, 'Spoke very well of D. Bosco and his work, which is the work for our time. Working society rejects God, rebels against sovereigns and the nobility. D. Bosco educates his boys to Christian religion, the Catholic Faith' therefore (it was implied) to respect for the social order. Don Bosco also spoke 'amidst bouts of sobbing, his and his listeners, who then crowded around his room to seek his blessing.'⁹⁴

86 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 105 and 103. Substantially, it is the address to priest past pupils on 19 July 1883: Cf. Chap.31, § 2.

87 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885 al 14 aprile 1886*, pp. 57-63.

88 Letter from Alassio, 19 March 1886, E IV 472.

89 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 65-72.

90 Letter of 26 March 1886, E IV 521. On the 27th Fr F. Cerruti returned to Italy.

91 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 68.

92 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 73; cfr. pp. 72-74.

93 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 74.

94 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 76.

Having left Marseilles at 5.00 p.m. on the afternoon of 7 April the travellers arrived at Port Bou, the first Spanish station at the border, at 4.00 a.m. the following day. Waiting there for them were Fr Branda and Mr Sùñer, who had reserved a saloon carriage on the same train, where Don Bosco could refresh himself (Fr Rua did not want to break his fast so he could celebrate Mass). At Mataro, the elder of the Pascual brothers, Narciso María, 'boarded the train. He was the son-in-law of Doña Chopitea, and brother-in-law of Luis Martí-Codolar, the connecting link between the families closest to Don Bosco, the Serra-Chopitea family, the Martí-Codolar family, the Morgas and Jover families. As well as their blood relationship, they also shared their Catholic and militant Faith and elevated social and economic status.

Welcoming Don Bosco at the station in Barcelona were representatives of the most important Catholic Associations, led by the Vicar General of the diocese in the name of the Bishop, Catalá Albosa (1833-99) who was away on pastoral visitation. Don Bosco and he had already had a brief exchange of letters prior to the founding of the *Talleras Salesianos* at Sarriá.⁹⁵ Among the 50 carriages available – or so says the chronicler! – the winner was the one belonging to Doña Dorotea Chopitea, who brought guests to the Serra home for breakfast, then towards 4 in the afternoon to the hospice at Sarriá, a district of some 7,000 inhabitants 5 kilometres from the centre of Barcelona, becoming part of the city in 1921.

Over the following days, 9 and 10 April, there were two entries by Viglietti that tell us much about the context in which the visit took place, the tireless search for friends and the mentality of the chronicler, who belonged to a middle-class family in Turin and was clearly selective in recording the people who flocked to see Don Bosco. 'Little Navarre' as Sarriá was described, was surrounded by small communities of people very much like those at Sarriá, traditionally religious, involved in agriculture, horticulture crafts. As well as the villas of well-to-do Barcelonans, there were quite a number of religious communities. However, 'many people came that evening' the chronicler noted for the 9th. 'What is noticeable is that it was not the minor folk who came to speak to Don Bosco but all the great nobility. The room was filled with the most important gentlemen and nobles from Barcelona.'⁹⁶ 'There is never the ordinary people, they are all nobility' he remarked the following day. 'Here we are only waiting for the conference so D. Bosco can be known in all his aspects, since here he is only known as a great humanitarian who has set up many houses of charity to take in boys, but they don't know D. Bosco as a saint who works miracles, as a great and learned literary man etc.'⁹⁷

But awareness of who Don Bosco was, was perhaps better understood in Barcelona than it was in Paris among lay people and clergy. He was seen in relation to the foundation at Utrera, the Archbishop of Seville, Luch y Garriga, his Auxiliary, Spinola y Maestre, both Salesian Cooperators, *Dom Bosco y su obra* by Spinola, the negotiations regarding Madrid, the tireless propaganda on Don Bosco's behalf in the *Revista Popular* by Fr Sardá y Salvany, and the establishment at Sarriá itself. Nor was Barcelona a huge city like Paris, but a more compact regional capital with closer interrelationships. A city of 170,000 inhabitants (Paris had more than two million), it was quickly filled with the presence of the educator, social worker, man of God, Saint. This was echoed not only in the Catholic press but the independent lay and anticlerical press as well.⁹⁸

95 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, p. 78.

96 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 80-81.

97 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 81-82.

98 For echoes in the press, with controversy from the secularist side, which sees and evaluates from the bottom up with its own social sensitivity, cf. R. ALBERDI, *Una Ciudad para un Santo...*, pp. 99-112 (for the middle class and conservative press), 146-178 (for arguments between Left and Right wing) and 198-201 (on Don Bosco's 'miracles' as seen from the leftist workers side).

Supported by the Salesians in France, he had been invited to visit families and individuals of solid Catholic Faith and ready to offer charity, many of them members of Catholic Associations and St Vincent de Paul Conferences, people belonging to the world of culture and finance.⁹⁹

The much-revered Doña Dorotea de Chopitea (1816–91) very much took charge of Don Bosco's stay. Helped by other women who were respected and authoritative within their respective families, and by their daughters, they surrounded Don Bosco with delicate and attentive concern – Don Bosco's ordinary residence, however, was at the simple hospice at Sarriá where audiences also took place. Besieged as he was, there were visits and public activities which saw him taken to family friends, admirers, devotees, people who had great affection for him. He spent a day of rest at the Pascual family villa on Holy Saturday, 24 April, and on 3 May, at the splendid homestead and grounds belonging to Luis Martí–Codolar with its botanical gardens.

On 10 April, Don Bosco gave a conference to the 'Dames of the Committee' representing the female Salesian Cooperators. 'They are all Countesses, Marchionesses, Baronesses etc.' the secretary noted once more, obviously delighted; 'all very kind, good and charitable women, all Countesses, Marchionesses, and noblewomen.'¹⁰⁰

The chronicler also gave plenty of space to the dream about expansion of Salesian evangelical activity from the extreme west, Valparaiso and Santiago in Chile, to the extreme east, Peking [Beijing] which Don Bosco had on the night of 9/10 April and which he recounted with much emotion (on his and his listeners' part) to Fr Rua, Fr Branda and his secretary Viglietti.¹⁰¹ Viglietti immediately sent the text to the person at the oratory who would be most interested, Fr Lemoyne. On the 12th Fr Rua wrote to the novice–master Fr Barberis, about it: 'I will not give you other news, knowing that this task is well carried out by dear Viglietti who plays his part very well and who will, among other things, write to you about the beautiful dream D. Bosco had last Friday night.'¹⁰² Fr Cerruti was a bit more reserved about it, sending the text from Turin on 16 April to Fr Rocca, the Rector at Alassio: 'You will have received a book of rail tickets,' he wrote 'and a letter with Fr Rua's stamp and signature, to which I have added a copy of a so-called dream which you can read to the confreres, but it might not be appropriate for the boys.'¹⁰³

The same day, the Mayor and entire Sarriá Council came to pay their respects, along with a crowd of other people, while over the days that followed there were delegations from the Barcelona section of the Catholic Association and the St Vincent de Paul Conferences. Many people came to ask Don Bosco for blessings, to be healed, and he visited families of benefactors and the sick.¹⁰⁴

The 15th was the day for a grand reception at the new site for the popular schools promoted by the Catholic Association. This was the result of the flourishing Catholic entrepreneurial middle class in Barcelona. The President gave an address followed by conferral of the Association's gold medal on Don Bosco. As a member, he had already received a certificate in 1884. Don Bosco spoke amid loud applause, repeating his customary warning about charity as an objective form of defence (among other motives) of one's own property against revolutionary threat: 'We have stripped the

99 On the role of Catholic associations in Barcelona and especially the "Association of Catholics", in "interpreting Don Bosco and expanding on and defending his public image", see R. ALBERDI, *Don Bosco e le associazioni cattoliche in Spagna*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 177-204.

100 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 82-84.

101 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 84-87.

102 FdR 3850 B 2-3.

103 ASC F 3810317, original 4 pp. The text of the dream, sent by Viglietti to Fr Lemoyne, is in the ASC in signed copy as well, dated 16 January 1917, by Fr Luigi Versiglia (1873-1930), who in 1906, headed up the first missionary expedition to China, and was in Italy from 27 June 1916 to 25 January 1917, and from 1921 was Vicar Apostolic of Shiu-chow and Bishop. He was killed on 25 January 1830 together with Salesian priest Callisto Caravario, both proclaimed martyrs on 1 October 2000: cf. ASC B 331.

104 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 87-88.

streets of young thieves, good-for-nothings' he stated 'who are now the consolation of their families and an honour to the city. They are boys who, having been helped over time by your charity, will save your wealth before God instead of demanding it one day with revolver in hand.'¹⁰⁵

The number of people by now being admitted in groups, wanting to see Don Bosco, had increased. He was 'not very well ... Without breath and strength; only with effort could he impart blessings and say *Dios bendiga*.'¹⁰⁶ On the 20th he received the Bishop of Vich, José Morgádes y Gili and the Bishop of Barcelona, Jaime Catalá y Albosa. He returned their visit the following day.¹⁰⁷ Fr Cerruti wrote to Fr Rocca on 23 April: 'We had fairly good news of D. Bosco yesterday but he is still not talking of his return. He is still in Barcelona where Fr Rua writes that he is half dead from the many and constant audiences, preaching, confessions. Let us pray for him. Here we feel D. Bosco's and Fr Rua's absence but with God's help and some sacrifice we push on well enough and what is more important, without charity [donations] being interrupted, even gaining a little more each day.'¹⁰⁸

Celebrations in Barcelona reached their high point on the historic afternoon of 30 April, dedicated to the Salesian Conference. A selected public filled the Church of Our Lady of Bethlehem, while a crowd gathered outside hoping to see the saint and receive his blessing. Present were the diocesan bishop and the abbot of the Trappist monastery at Tolosa, surrounded by other illustrious clerics and high civil and military authorities in Barcelona. Before the Blessed Sacrament exposed there was a succession of music and choirs, an address by José Juliá, professor at the Seminary, words of thanks spoken by Don Bosco from the balustrade, and solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament given by the diocesan bishop.¹⁰⁹

On 3 May, there was a picturesque visit to the villa and castle of Luis Martí–Codolar at San Juan de Horta. As well as Doña Chopitea, members of the various families, parents and children, other invited guests including the boys from the hospice at Sarriá were present. The natural and artificial scenic setting was magnificent. There was music from the bands made up of trade boys, and a small orchestra of three young women from the Pascual and Martí–Codolar families. There was a very solemn launch during which lawyers Manuel María Pascual, Mrs Martí–Codolar's brother, announced the owner's intention to give Don Bosco the hilltop overlooking Barcelona known as the *Tibidabo*. The donation was then officially announced by the donors on 5 May, at the foot of the altar of the Church dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, Protectress of Barcelona.

The country visit to the Granja Vella has come down through history, thanks to a large group photo taken in the park at Luis Martí–Codolar's villa, and is one of the most significant testimonies of Don Bosco's trip to Spain.¹¹⁰ The best scholar of Don Bosco's photographs has commented that his appearance is serene, smiling. One can see his 72 years of age but it is the vigorous old age of an active man who lives life intensely ... His eyes are alert, penetrating, his mouth ready to smile spontaneously. His countenance gives an impression of gentleness, amiability, kindness.'¹¹¹

On 5 May, Fr Cerruti told Fr Rocca: 'Tomorrow D. Bosco leaves for Gerona, Montpellier, Valence, Grenoble, then by way of Modane, he will be here on Saturday evening, the 15th inst. Unless there is some slight unforeseen change. The news sent by Fr Rua (who is no poet) is quite

105 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886 al 16 maggio 1886*, pp. 1-6; the quoted words, p. 5; Cf. Chap.22, § 8.

106 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 7-12.

107 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 10-11 and 15.

108 Letter of 23 April, ASC F 3810319, handwritten original 4 pp.

109 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 33-37.

110 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 43-46 e 50-51; cf. R. ALBERDI - R.

CASASNOVAS, *Martí-Codolar. Una obra social de la burguesía...*, pp. 158-165.

111 G. SOLDÀ, *Don Bosco nella fotografia dell'800 1861-1888*. Turin, SEI 1987, pp. 196-197.

extraordinary. He assured us that never before, not even in Paris was such enthusiasm seen, such huge success. *Deo Gratias* and let us pray!¹¹²

5 and 6 May were days spent in farewells which the sensitive chronicler overlaid with much emotion and tears. Toward midday on Friday the 6th the three travellers – Don Bosco, the silent and discreet collaborator Fr Rua, and cleric Viglietti – left Sarriá, accompanied by many friends whose numbers grew by the final tram stop. Many representatives of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, associations and families were present for the final official farewell at Barcelona station.¹¹³

6. Return home in short stages

Given Don Bosco's state of health, the journey home was accomplished in short stages. By late afternoon the travellers were at Gerona, guests at the sumptuous home of a recent fortuitous acquaintance, the Carles de Herrer family. The following morning there was a visit from the Bishop of Gerona, Tomás Sevilla y Gener (1817–1906). At 8.30 am they left for Port Bou. A change of trains left time for lunch with a benefactor. Further on there was an hour's stop at Cette where they went to see a wealthy family. At 6.30 pm the three travellers reached Montpellier where they were met by the Rector of the Seminary, Monsieur Dupuy, who ran the seminary with his Vincentian community and was happy to have Don Bosco as a guest for almost three days. De Combal visited him the same evening and made two other visits of a professional kind but also as a friend, on the 8th and 9th. After the final and more detailed examination he told those who came with him: 'I regard D. Bosco's greatest miracle to be the fact that he is still alive.' Here is a man who is dead from all his labours yet he keeps working every day, eats very little yet is still alive. This is a great miracle!¹¹⁴ Late in the morning of Saturday the 8th Don Bosco visited the girls' college run by the Sacre Coeur Sisters. The pupils all filed past him as he was seated on a raised chair, to receive his blessing. He spoke very kindly and touchingly to one little girl who asked him to bring her mother back (she had gone to heaven!): 'Leave her with the Lord, she is well-off up there.'¹¹⁵

Despite the number of people pressing Don Bosco for a word and a blessing, the Rector was still able to question him about his 'secret for keeping such a huge number of boys in order and controlling them with so few staff.' For the moment, he had to content himself with Don Bosco's usual laconic response: 'We inspire the fear of God in them.' 'But fear,' Dupuy (who was a master of things spiritual) thought 'is but the beginning of wisdom.' He also wanted to know How Don Bosco 'helped souls climb to the heights of wisdom, which is the love of God.' He asked this by letter, and back in Turin Don Bosco had his generous host sent a copy of *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di S. Vincenzo de Paoli*.¹¹⁶ He and his confreres saw a notable difference in St Vincent de Paul's and St Francis de Sales' method of spiritual direction: the former 'led the soul, who is nothing before God's majesty, to trust in him and trust fully enough in Him to be able to spread God's love as widely as possible.' St Francis de Sales, instead, 'was content to propose that everyone seek God's will in everything in all simplicity.' He asked Don Bosco, who claimed that he 'had studied the two great saints in depth' if they had correctly understood St Francis de Sales, whose view they supposed he had adopted.¹¹⁷ Had it been a question about his

112 Letter to Fr Rocca, ASC F 3810320, handwritten original 3 pp.

113 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 52-58.

114 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 52-63.

115 MB XVIII 121-122 (eyewitness claim 1934).

116 This was the second edition, 1876, OE XXVIII 1-252.

117 Letter of Dupuy to Don Bosco, 2 July 1886, in MB XVIII 655-656.

educational approach Don Bosco would have had a ready reply: the preventive system. But the question was about spirituality understood as the way to Christian perfection and the heights of charity. Don Bosco had never tackled things speculatively nor had he ever made a historical study or a theological interpretation of the teachings of these two saints of the golden French era. The one who read the letter to him heard him say with a smile: ‘Well! “I don’t know either!’¹¹⁸ It is clear that Dupuy had put the two spiritualities into too neat an opposition. It is known that St Vincent was bound by ties of friendship with St Frances de Sales and had read the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God* and in some aspects owed his thinking to them. Nevertheless, he had emphasised the essential nature of charitable activity. He was also a precursor to Don Bosco in being allergic to purely doctrinal speculation about his own ‘Spirituality’, a term he did not like nor adopt, preferring the more concrete ‘spirit’ with clear reference to the ‘Spirit of God’ ‘Spirit of Jesus’, Spirit of the Gospel.’¹¹⁹ ‘St Vincent avoided attempts at simplification and classification,’ ‘he is not a speculative type of person.’ ‘his originality does not lie in “doctrine” but in life and experience.’¹²⁰

On the afternoon of 10 May, the travellers arrived in Valence where they were welcomed by the parish priest of the cathedral who put them up. The Bursar at Grande-Chartreuse was also there for supper and was very generous to Don Bosco. On 1 June, one of the monks brought 50,000 francs [180,800 euro] to Turin. The following day, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the Cathedral and spoke to the faithful mainly about the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, weighed down by debt. There were the usual generous donations that day and the following one, until their departure on 12 May for Grenoble. There he was welcomed by the clergy and the people at the Church of St Louis, and hosted with extraordinary cordiality at the Major Seminary.¹²¹ In the evening, utterly exhausted, he said just a few words at the function for the Marian month in St Andrew’s Church. On the 15th, after celebrating Mass, they left for Turin, arriving at the station at 6.30 p.m. By 7.00 they were at the Oratory.¹²²

Almost at the end of the Catalonian adventure, the chronicler noted on 16 May: ‘D. Bosco said Mass at St Peter’s altar in the Church. Today is the celebration for St Joseph and D. Bosco’s return to the Oratory. D. Bosco went down to the refectory, where they read out some magnificent compositions. This evening there was a beautiful academy put on by the trade students whose primary purpose was to celebrate St Joseph and then D. Bosco’s return. It was a beautiful evening. D. Bosco spoke of his travels, the good done and the decoration he carried around his neck: the decoration he received in Barcelona from the Catholic Societies.’¹²³

118 *Documenti* XXXII 472. Many years later, Lemoyne interpreted it and expanded on it: “They want me to talk about my method. Well!... Not even I know what it is. I have just gone ahead as the Lord has inspired me and circumstances demanded” (G. B. LEMOYNE, *Vita del Venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco...*, Vol. II. Turin, SEI 1914, p. 311).

119 Cf. A. DODIN, *François de Sales Vincent de Paul les deux amis*. Paris, O.E.I.L. 1984, pp. 43-96 (*Les emprunts faits par Monsieur Vincent de Paul au Traité de l’amour de Dieu*); ID., *Initiation à Saint Vincent de Paul*. Paris, Cerf 1993, pp. 47-81 e 167-181 (*Théologie de la charité selon Saint Vincent ed Esprit de Monsieur Vincent, esprit de la Mission*).

120 A. DODIN, *St. Vincent de Paul et la charité*. Paris, Seuil 1965, p. 64; L. MESSADRI, *Fra giansenisti e antigiansenisti. Vincent Depaul e la Congregazione della missione (1624-1737)*. Florence, La Nuova Italia 1977, pp. 20-37 (*La spiritualità di S. Vincent Depaul*).

121 Cf. *Séjour de Saint Jean Bosco au Grand Séminaire de Grenoble (Mai 1886)*, memoir of Carthusian Fr. Pierre Mouton, then a seminarian (MB XVIII 657-661).

122 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 64-69.

123 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 15 aprile 1886...*, pp. 63-71. “D. Bosco returned yesterday evening safe and sound – said Fr Cerruti to Fr Rocca that day -, and this morning celebrated Mass in Mary Help of Christians, *Deo gratias et Mariae*” (Letter of 16 May 1886, ASC F 3810322, handwritten original 4 pp.).

Some interesting information followed. In the second half of May, Don Bosco had 'the Salesian Cooperators certificate' sent to 'all the bishops and cardinals of Italy' and many replied over the days that followed, thanking him 'for the honour bestowed on them.'¹²⁴ The greatest number of letters came from Southern Italy.¹²⁵ On 23 June, the President of Peru arrived with his son. 'Enthusiasts' of Salesian work, 'they asked Don Bosco in a kindly way to establish a house in Peru and promised to return. In the late afternoon Mr Joaquin de Font y de Boter, Secretary of the Catholic Association, representing the Society and Salesian Cooperators in Spain' and 'the President of the Workers Societies in France, the Count of Villeneuve' arrived to take part in the festivities for Don Bosco's name day.¹²⁶

At the academy in the evening, Fr Lemoine offered a life of Mamma Margaret to Don Bosco, who was overcome with emotion.¹²⁷ On the following day, the 24th, a group of past pupils living in Turin came to pass on their greetings. Don Bosco spoke to them with particular tenderness, 'and as tired as he was in body and emotional in soul, his language was such that he made a great impact on the group and said that because he was now well-advanced in years he felt eternity coming on in leaps and bounds.'¹²⁸

The academy was 'made more splendid because of the large number of foreigners, the lighting, the beautiful items etc. They read out beautiful poems and prose compositions.'¹²⁹ Fr Cerruti noted, regarding Don Bosco's health: 'These days the poor man can hardly get by. He is not confined to bed but is very poorly, and is physically and morally exhausted.'¹³⁰ It is not so easy to interpret this comment.

On 7 July, 'to escape the very hot days in Turin' Don Bosco went to Valsalice.¹³¹ He returned to the Oratory only for the two meetings with past pupils on 11 July for the laymen and 15 July for the priests. He spoke to the first group of the uncertainty of their being with him 'for another year.' 'The inconveniences of old age' he said 'are a warning for me not to flatter myself.'¹³² The day before, he had written to 'Fr M. Rua, Vicar G. of the S. Cong. Dear Fr Rua,' telling him that 'My poor head is in a mess' and that he was no longer able to receive the monthly *rendiconto* of the Salesians at the Oratory and particularly of the members of the Superior Chapter. He asked him to do this for him or delegate another – he mentioned the names of Fr Bonetti and Fr Cerruti – to dedicate himself to this 'important but overlooked matter among us, especially by myself.'¹³³ At the past pupils meeting on the 15th the parish priest of the Great Mother of God parish, Fr G. B. Piano, and engineer Buffa, stated on behalf of their respective associations that no one could exceed the love of the past pupils and Cooperators, whom they represented, had for Don Bosco. Raising a hand, Don Bosco replied graciously: 'Which of these fingers do I love most? Which could I do without? None of them for sure, because all five are dear to me and equally necessary. Well then, I am telling you that I love you all, without distinction and beyond measure.'¹³⁴

124 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886 al 12 genn. 1887*, p. 5.

125 *Documenti* XXXII 382-402.

126 Don Bosco received a letter from De Font and the President of the Feliú Association on July 14 in which they thanked him for Don Bosco's special affection for them and the members of their respective associations.: MB XVIII 675.

127 G. B. LEMOINE, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto edificante ed ameno*. Turin, tip. e libr. salesiana 1886, 188 p.

128 BS 10 (1886) no. 8, August, p. 87.

129 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 15-18.

130 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 26 June 1886, ASC F 3810325, handwritten original 2 pp.

131 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, p. 22.

132 BS 10 (1886) no. 8, August, p. 87.

133 Letter of 10 July 1886, E IV 355-356.

134 BS 10 (1886) no. 8, August, p. 88.

On the evening of 15 July, he left for Pinerolo as guest once more at the Bishop's house where he remained until 13 August.¹³⁵ There, he recommenced some significant correspondence. On the 22nd he replied to the President of the Catholic Workers club in Bergamo, who had asked for a blessing on the tenth anniversary of its foundation. He would pray for him and his members but he also recommended his two hundred thousand or more 'young orphans' to their charity and prayers.¹³⁶

There was no lack of news on his health: 'My health is passable.'¹³⁷ 'My health has forced me to suspend any kind of work. Only now can I begin to do something and I find it is my duty to write the first words for you, my charitable young lady.'¹³⁸ The cholera had reappeared in the summer and while thanking someone for another donation he suggested the usual antidote in the usual practice in honour of Mary Help of Christians.¹³⁹

Back in Turin, 15 August saw a lengthy morning visit from Cardinal Alimonda, and in the afternoon the splendid feast of prize distribution and Don Bosco's birthday. Fr Berto presented a gift of 'the huge volume with a list of Privileges which had been so long awaited.' It was still in manuscript form. A printed edition would only be available in the second half of 1888.' The most moving scene, however, was Fr Lasagna's arrival while the academy was in full swing. He arrived unannounced and embraced the Father he had not seen for so long. What a feast, what a warm jubilation!!!¹⁴⁰

From 21 to 31 August, Don Bosco was present for two sets of retreats at S. Benigno Canavese, the first for aspirants and novices, the other for rectors. On the 31st 'with little strength and suffering from the excessive heat' he returned to Turin and the following day went to Valsalice for the opening of the Fourth General Chapter at 5.30 pm.¹⁴¹

7. An alert presence at the Fourth Salesian General Chapter (1886)

Don Bosco sent out a letter of convocation on 31 May 1886. He had appointed Fr Francis Cerruti as Moderator, a methodical man, capable organiser with a tendency to arrive at decisions. The first task was the election of members of the Superior Chapter except for the Rector Major (Don Bosco) and Vicar (Fr Rua).¹⁴² Attached to the letter were four pages with indication of matters to be dealt with.¹⁴³ Chapter: 1. *Regulations for parishes run by the Salesians*. 2. *Direction to be taken regarding the working section in Salesian houses and ways of developing vocations among the trade boys*. 3. *The way of carrying out the Regulari disciplinae decree of 1848 concerning admission of novices to profession of vows*. 4. *Systems to be followed in promoting men to Holy Orders*. 5. *Ways and means for establishing houses as studentates for clerics*. 6. *Ways to provide for exemption from military service*. 7. *Modification to be introduced into the Directory [List] of our Society*. [8] *Proposals from confreres*.

As happened at the previous Chapter, there was too much here as well to deal with in the time available, from the afternoon of 1 September to the morning of 7 September. To make up for it, the

135 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 22-27.

136 E IV 356-357.

137 To Count L. Colle, 25 July 1886, E IV 522.

138 To C. Louvet, 27 July 1886, E IV 472.

139 To Mrs F. Maggi, 27 July 1886, E IV 358.

140 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 29-30.

141 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 33-36.

142 Cf. *Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua ed altri loro scritti ai salesiani*. Turin, tip. salesiana 1896, pp. 33-35: letters of Don Bosco of 31 May and 24 July 1886.

143 *Capitolo generale IV*, ASC D 579, FdB 1864 E 1-4.

Moderator was very organised and was able to get the Assembly to arrive at final decisions on at least some of the matters that had been partly thought through at previous Chapters.

Among the proposals were some more drastic ones put forward by Bishop Cagliari, Fr Piccono, Fr Riccardi, calling for a stricter formation for trade boys and coadjutors, and better preparation of candidates for Holy Orders.¹⁴⁴ But these proposals were not known to Chapter members since they arrived in Turin two days after the Chapter closed.¹⁴⁵ The only representative of the Salesians in America at the Chapter was Fr Lasagna. The most concrete proposals came from Salesians in Italy who were closer to the 'worker side' of Salesian activity.

Fr Belmonte, the Rector of the hospice in Sampierdarena, and whom the Chapter elected as Prefect General of the Congregation, did not just stop at the moral aspect of formation of trade students. 'Seek the best possible development in their trade' he insisted 'so that when our boys leave our houses they are not forced to take up any job to earn a living, because even after spending a few years in our houses they have not learned the trade sufficiently to take it up elsewhere. Find the best trade masters even at the sacrifice of their spending a very busy day.'¹⁴⁶

With regards to preparing clerics for Holy Orders, he suggested a precise program: '1, Demand that they complete their theological courses over four years. Give the Tonsure at the end of the 2nd year, subdiaconate at the end of the 3rd year and diaconate midway through the 4th year, then priesthood. The candidate should precede each ordination with a study of the treatises indicated and achieve a score of no less than 7 in the exams.'¹⁴⁷

Fr Canepa, future novice master, stressed some of the more visible pedagogical aspects encouraging giving the trade students group a higher profile and dignity. As a principle he proposed there be no difference between the trade and academic students, and drew from this some of the consistent behaviours of the teachers: "1. Encourage emulation among them by distributing rewards to the boys most deserving of them on a number of occasions through the year. 2. Confreres should help the boys love the house and the Rector by practising the preventive system so much instilled by our Father. 3. The Rector of each house should speak with the boys and spend time with them often, especially the older ones.' 'Then instead of being divided they should all come together and form just one family. Indeed, I would dare say that their circumstances as abandoned boys demands more charity and careful supervision from the superiors than for the academic students.' And finally, 'For the good of the confreres and the Congregation it would be desirable that no one be ordained priest unless he has completed the regular course of theology.'¹⁴⁸ There was a well-articulated and constructive proposal for an anonymous confrere to be placed in the trade workshops.¹⁴⁹

Fr Giovanni Marengo, elected secretary of the Chapter, summed up the Assembly's work in a manuscript of 19 unnumbered pages: *Report on the 4th General Chapter of the Pious Salesian Society held at Valsalice college from 1 September to the seventh of the same month in 1886*.¹⁵⁰ The impression we gain from this is that the time available for an in-depth discussion of the problems was really insufficient. However, the presence of authors of the proposals at the Chapter, and the work begun during the 1883 General Chapter allowed them to draw up substantial documents, especially on the first two topics.¹⁵¹

144 Replies to the form from 28 July 1886, ASC D 579, FdB 1865 A 10-11, B 6-12.

145 Cf. Letter of Moderator, Fr F. Cerruti to Bishop G. Cagliari, 12 October 1886, MB XVIII 177 no. 4.

146 ASC D 579, FdB 1866 C 7-8.

147 ASC D 579, FdB 1866 E 7-8.

148 ASC D 579, FdB 1866 C 9, E 9.

149 ASC D 579, FdB 1866 C 11 – D 1 and E 8.

150 ASC D 579, FdB 1867 D 9 – 1868 A 3.

151 Cf. J. M. PRELLEZO, *La "parte operaia" nelle case salesiane...*, RSS 16 (1997) 353-391.

Don Bosco's interventions (a considerable number of them during the plenary sessions) are interesting for our biography. The first of them was in the morning session on 2 September, on the delicate questions of *ways and means to establish houses as studentates in the Provinces*. He was averse to demanding and utopian decisions and moderately in favour of the suggestion that some of the more outstanding students be sent to Rome to complete their studies at the 'higher Schools [ecclesiastical Universities] opened by the Holy Father.' 'I approve of this and see it might be a bit premature given the need for personnel for current works.' Further on, in relation to the various names that were given to Salesians in formation, the *Report* records that 'D. Bosco recommends keeping the terms in use such as *Ascritti* [enrolled members] or *trial year* instead of *Novices* or *novitiate*, because it is neither necessary nor useful.' Again, following the 'overall' approval of the document which was hastily done and unworkable, Don Bosco had it delayed 'for a further, and more practical examination on how to implement it.'¹⁵²

At the afternoon session on 3 September, Fr Lasagna read out the planned regulations for parishes 'formulated on the basis of studies done over the last three years and more complete current studies.' It was preceded by various observations encouraging the Congregation 'not to easily accept the care of parishes.' Don Bosco arrived to preside at the session when they were discussing a way of making the parish priest immovable and invited them to leave it to the Superior Chapter for the time being to study how to do this.¹⁵³

Over the days that followed, they discussed important topics such as the *Direction to take with the trade/workers section, and developing vocations among them*, and application of the 1848 *Regulari disciplinae* decree. Don Bosco did not intervene. Instead, half way through the morning session on the 6th he spoke up on his favourite topic of adult vocations. 'D. Bosco incidentally, recommended getting to know the Work of Mary Help of Christians, that is, encouraging vocations among adults.' 'D. Bosco gave as the reason: sometimes boys are shipwrecked during adolescence, then return to their senses at 16, 18 or even 20 years of age.'¹⁵⁴

Don Bosco presided on the afternoon of 6 September, dedicated to examining the various proposals. He intervened on the question of instructions from Leo XIII regarding Freemasons in *Humanum Genus*, 20 April 1884. He displayed his habitual opposition to his adversaries.' Many decades later, Fr Joseph Vespignani, who came from Romagna, recalled what Don Bosco had told him when, as a young priest, he had spoken to him about the opportunities for a Salesian foundation in Bologna where the Italian youth organisation had arisen. This group was made up of elements ready to defend Catholic institutions and priests: 'We do not have this particular fighting spirit of zeal. We do not get involved in politics. All we seek to do is to work among youth, and we pray that they leave us alone in this.'¹⁵⁵

He took a similar attitude at the Chapter to what Leo XIII said about those who joined secret societies like the Freemasons: 'It is enough to recommend older youth not to join any society without their parents' and the parish priest's consent, but not to talk about this or publish it. That would simply stir up the ire of our enemies without any benefit from it.'¹⁵⁶

He then went on to other topics. He noted how important it was for the rectors to meet frequently with the house chapter. The *Report* continues: 'He again reminded people how circular letters are very helpful for eliminating many faults and are a way of dealing in particular with religious duties, the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This is something the Spiritual

152 G. MARENCO, *Relazione del 4° Capitolo generale...*, p. 5.

153 G. MARENCO, *Relazione del 4° Capitolo generale...*, pp. 7-8.

154 G. MARENCO, *Relazione del 4° Capitolo generale...*, pp. 10-12.

155 G. VESPIGNANI, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato don Bosco (1876-1877)*. S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica don Bosco 1930, pp. 26-27.

156 G. MARENCO, *Relazione del 4° Capitolo generale...*, pp. 13-14.

Director will remind the Rector Major about.’ With regard to the Provincial Visitation and visits to houses from the Provincial and Superior Chapter members, the *Report* notes: ‘D. Bosco recommends they always go in the name of the Superior and see that the rules are obeyed not because *I want* it but because of the duty the rules impose. Saying “I” wrecks everything.’ When it was noted that the *Deliberations* lacked appropriate recommendations on the preventive system ‘D Bosco reminded people he had begun a small booklet on the topic [the 1877 pages?]. He hopes to complete it himself or through others.’¹⁵⁷

The *Deliberations* were published the following year, brought together with deliberations from the previous Chapter in a slender 28 page booklet.¹⁵⁸ At the Superior Chapter meeting on 24 October 1884, Don Bosco had expressed a desire for the Superior Chapter to coordinate the decisions of the 1883 General Chapter so they could be printed prior to the 1886 General Chapter.¹⁵⁹ But nothing was done. The cumulative *Deliberations* in 1886 contained completely new documents by comparison with the First and Second General Chapters and were the result of preparatory studies, the work of the Commissions, and discussions at plenary sessions of the Third and Fourth General Chapters. They were developed under six headings: I. *Regulations for parishes*. II. *Ordinations*. III. *Religious spirit and vocations among coadjutors and trade students*. IV. *Regulations for the festive oratories*. V. *Salesian Bulletin*. VI. *A way of providing for exemption from military service*.

The deliberations mirrored ideas which Don Bosco had often shared and formulated and all were formally approved and promulgated by him as we see from the letter of presentation¹⁶⁰ and the circular on 21 November 1886 which offered a brief report. In the circular he invited confreres to give their ‘full obedience to the new Chapter’ touching on the sensitive aspects of Salesian religious spirituality: obedience, charity and avoidance of grumbling, poverty. *Obedience* he wrote ‘should be prompt, humble, joyful,’ and looks on the ‘superiors’ as brothers, indeed loving fathers,’ seeing ‘the representatives of God himself in them.’ ‘The greater our obedience is, the more meritorious before God and the greater the sacrifice in carrying it out.’ With regard to charity, he encouraged them ‘not to fall into the major fault of grumbling, which is displeasing to God and harmful to the community.’ Don Bosco also used the opportunity to recommend, ‘persevering observance of the vow of poverty.’ Poverty was the source of spiritual good for the Salesian and of well-being for the Congregation, pleasing to Providence who had been so generous to us and to our benefactors. Then came the invitation to ‘reduce costs,’ ‘save in provisions, travel, building and in general in everything that is not necessary.’¹⁶¹

What stood out in the *Regulations for parishes* was the first article which in principle, though not in fact, remained in force in the Salesian Society until 1972: ‘Having considered the purpose to which the Salesian Congregation tends in its works according to our Constitutions, Chapter 1, it seems we should neither easily nor ordinarily take on parishes which the bishops offer us.’¹⁶² A strong reminder of the Salesian Spirit permeated rules of behaviour in parish priests’ relationships ‘with the people.’ ‘The spirit of our Saintly Protector was to be all things to all people, *Omnia omnibus factus*, and this same spirit, if it is to be the driving force for all Salesians, must be especially so for whoever is asked to run a parish.’ He must not overlook ‘recollection, reserve’ and also ‘the sick, poor, and children are to be the object of his special concern.’¹⁶³

157 G. MARENCO, *Relazione del 4° Capitolo generale...*, pp. 14-16.

158 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel Settembre 1883-86*. S. Benigno Canavese, tipografia salesiana 1887, 28 p., OE XXXVI 253-280.

159 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 43v, session on 24 October 1884.

160 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 3-4, OE XXXVI 255-256.

161 Cf. *Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua*, pp. 40-43.

162 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, p. 5, OE XXXVI 257.

163 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 10, 11, 13, OE XXXVI 262, 263, 265.

The prescriptions regarding *Ordinations* presumed that candidates for the priesthood were spread around the houses, that the Spiritual Director General or Catechist General had the duty of recording the studies they were undertaking on the basis of reports from the Provincial and the local rector who bore direct responsibility.¹⁶⁴

It is certainly worthy of comment that the Coadjutors had been the subject of reflection over a good two General Chapters. But the question had hardly begun to be explored when, as we have seen, a month after the Third General Chapter, Don Bosco felt he needed to speak about it to clarify his thinking. The Fourth General Chapter did not offer any further deeper understanding of their equal status as 'consecrated men' with the clerics in a Religious Society governed by clerics. Just the same, the coadjutor's field of activity was expanded: 'directing and administering the various businesses' of the Pious Society and 'becoming Master tradesmen in workshops, or catechists in the festive oratories, and especially in the foreign missions.' There was obviously encouragement for them to demonstrate that they were 'good religious' and practised 'religious virtues.'¹⁶⁵

Relatively more elaborate was the section on *Young trade students*. It was a significant step forward from an older craftsman type formation to a system which to some extent approached the kind of formation found in a good technical college with an eminently practical approach.¹⁶⁶ It was intended to be such that the apprentices, as it called them, 'having completed their training by the time they leave out houses, have learned a trade whereby they can earn an honest living,' are 'well-instructed in their religion' and possess 'knowledge appropriate to heir state.' As a consequence, the Chapter drew up a tripartite program: human, moral, religious formation (*the religious and moral aspect*), the general, specific and technological dimension (*the intellectual or professional aspect*): 'literary, artistic, scientific knowledge), and acquisition of a refined ability to exercise a skill or trade (*the job-related, professional aspect*).¹⁶⁷ This last and essentially practical but carefully planned aspect has been one of the characteristics of Salesian technical schools for more than a century. The teaching curriculum was adequately structured: 'The Professional Councillor and Master tradesman,' it explained 'should split or consider how to split the gradual series of activities which together make up the trade into courses or steps. The pupil should gradually achieve these stages such that after his training, he should know and be fully capable of exercising his trade.' (art. 3). 'It is not possible to specify the period of training since not all skills require equal amounts of time to achieve, but as a general rule we can establish a period of five years.' (art 4). 'The house for tradesmen novices should be well-equipped with what is needed to become proficient in the various trades and have the best Salesian Master tradesmen.' (art 5b).¹⁶⁸

The *Regulations for festive oratories* did not look at how they functioned, since the 1877 regulations and current practice did this, but looked at how such an oratory should be founded and run under the auspices of each Salesian House. The basis for this came from reference to art. 3 of the first chapter of the Constitutions which said: 'The first exercise of charity of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales is to gather poor and abandoned boys to instruct them in the Holy Catholic Religion, especially on Sundays and Feast days.' To carry this out, it established that 'it is very helpful in cities and towns where there is a Salesian house to also establish a recreational park or

164 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 13-16, OE XXXVI 265-268.

165 Cf. *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 16-17, OE XXXVI 268-269.

166 On the positive outcome and limitations of this evolution and the part played by Don Bosco and his collaborators, cf. J. M. PRELLEZO, *Don Bosco e le scuole professionali (1870-1887)*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 331-353 (in particular, pp. 348-352). Already interested in the problem is L. PAZZAGLIA, *Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco (1846-1886)*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*. Turin, SEI 1987, pp. 13-80.

167 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 18-22, OE XXXVI 270-274.

168 *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 21-22, OE XXXVI 273-274.

festive oratory for day boys in need of religious instruction, and who are exposed to the risk of perversion.’ The Third General Chapter had already decided in practice that each rector should establish ‘a festive oratory as part of his house or institute if there was not one already, or develop it if it already exists,’ mobilise benefactors and Salesians of the place, remembering that ‘the festive oratory was the cradle’ of the Salesian Society (art 1). All Salesians, clerical or lay, should lend a hand there and consider it to be ‘an apostolate of the greatest importance, because in present times the Festive Oratory is the only plank of salvation for many boys, especially in cities and towns.’ (art. 4). Then a major preventive factor was emphasised: ‘The smooth running of the festive oratory depends especially on a true spirit of sacrifice, great patience, charity and kindness towards everyone so the pupils have and continue to have a fond memory of it and keep coming even as adults.’ (art. 9).¹⁶⁹

With regard to the *Salesian Bulletin*, it specified that its purpose was to ‘keep alive the spirit of charity among Cooperators, give them an awareness of works founded or to be founded by our Pious Society, and encourage them to give appropriate aid. Therefore, it should be regarded as the chief official publication of the Society.’¹⁷⁰ A year earlier, at the Superior Chapter meeting on 17 September 1885, there had been a lively discussion of Cooperators and the *Salesian Bulletin* in particular. Fr Rua had read out a letter from well-known German priest Fr G. B. Mehler. He said he had already enrolled many Germans as Cooperators and sent a list of them. He suggested the certificate also be given the privilege of signing them. Don Bosco and the Chapter members did not believe this was appropriate but a letter sent could go out in German with the certificates which would be printed and signed in Turin. Mehler also invited them to produce a German edition of the *Bulletin* in preparation for the Salesians coming to Germany. There was no problem with the *Bulletin* being in many languages: besides the Italian edition there was already one in French, and another in Spanish for Latin America. The disagreement arose over content. Don Bosco firmly defended the principle of a *Bulletin* with only one lot of content. ‘The *Bulletin* should not be something special to each region like Spain, France, Italy etc., but should be general to all regions just as Salesians work in general, not particular. News can be collected in such a way that all the different regions are involved and all the language editions are identical. This is why they are printed in languages at the mother house so they all have the same approach. It is a very powerful tool that should not escape the Rector Major’s hands and which in other hands could take an approach which is not in keeping with his intentions.’ Since it is part of Salesian work as a whole, it should be ‘something general’ and not ‘something particular to each region.’

Fr Rua, instead, who had wanted to ‘establish relations with Germany’ for some time, found Mehler’s suggestion providential and maintained the identical content and centralisation of editorial work and printing in Turin would give rise to a number of problems. Certain reports, which might be good for Italy, could be inappropriate for France, Spain or America. And again, huge distances meant readers would end up with out-dated past information or advice. Finally, since the *Bulletin* was also aimed at arousing charity, it could not abstain from dealing with ‘local interests.’ Fr Durando suggested the *Bulletin* be reduced by some pages and a supplement on local needs be added, at least on some occasions. Fr Rua accepted and improved on this suggestion: the *Bulletin* should be in two parts, one of general interest, the other localised for different countries, just as newspapers ran a ‘various news items’ section. Don Bosco cut the discussion short, rejected the two suggestions and insisted on one set of content for the *Bulletin*. He feared that local diversity could see it ‘deviate from the purpose it was given.’ Cooperators liked ‘the history of the Oratory and letters from missionaries.’ The magazine was about these subjects. ‘For other news of conferences or celebrations in other countries and even in Italy,’ he continued ‘there can be a small newsletter: if there is something of an extraordinary nature it can be published [in the *Bulletin*],

¹⁶⁹ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 22-24, OE XXXVI 274-276.

¹⁷⁰ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo generale...*, pp. 24-25, OE XXXVI 276-277.

because it would be of interest to everyone; including foreigners. Then if some urgent information needs doing the Salesians can be in touch with Catholic journalists and they can publish invitations or urgent items in their pages. If that is not convenient for them we can use circular letters.¹⁷¹

171 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 77r-v, session, afternoon of 17 September; cf. Also pages added to *Verbali*, pp. 1-8.

Chapter 34

A TESTAMENT FOR THE MISSION AND SERENE ARRIVAL AT THE FINAL GOAL (1886–88)

- 1886 11–13 September: journey to Milan;
29 September – 3 October: 53 Salesians take vows; on grumbling;
14 October: clerical novices at new site in Foglizzo cancvese;
November 4: official opening of new site;
December 8: final edition of Ricordi confidenziali.
- 1887 5 January –12 February: Archbishop of Quito at the Oratory seeking foundations in Ecuador;
April 20 – May 20: to Rome via Genoa, La Spezia, Florence, Arezzo, Chiusi, Orte;
April 30 – May 18: in Rome; return to Turin via Pisa and Genoa;
July 4 – August 19: resting up at Lanzo Torinese;
13 September: college at Valsalice becomes a studentate for clerical post–novices;
20 October: clerical clothing of novices at Foglizzo;
14 November: three Salesians to Battersea, London;
24: clerical clothing of Prince A. Czartoryski and another three Salesians;
6 December: farewell for missionaries to Ecuador;
7: visit from Bishop Doutreloux: Bishop Cagliari arrives;
20: last time out in carriage for Don Bosco;
24: receives Viaticum and Sacrament of the Sick;
31: picks ups slightly; gradual improvement.
- 1888 8 January: Visit from Duke of Norfolk
20: illness takes a turn for the worse;
30: final agony;
31: Don Bosco dies at 4.45am.

The final stage of Don Bosco's earthly journey accentuated rather than softened his words and suffering life testimony regarding his faith in the two things that had been the constant poles of his existence: his unconditional dedication to his mission and firm perseverance in keeping mind, heart and hope fixed on the final goal, paradise. To be a Christian and Citizen who inhabits the earth but is also a candidate for heavenly citizenship is something he had proposed many times to young people and adults, benefactors, Salesian men and women, and now it became his most intense testimony of life, and as his spoken and written word grew weaker, this testimony became more eloquent.

1. Key to interpretation

We gain a better understanding of the events in this final stage of Don Bosco's life if they are read in the light of what he himself was writing in the final pages of the *Memorie dal 1841*, probably towards the end of spring and in the summer of 1886. He offered three enlightening perspectives: the fidelity of Salesian workers to their consecration, the anxious hope which accompanied him in the final stage of his earthly journey to heaven, the vision for himself and his followers regarding the future of the mission.

We have already mentioned what he had to say to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.¹ He dedicated two paragraphs to the Salesians: one on *In difficulties* and another on *Basic recommendation for all Salesians*. Finally, he indicated the solution for possible disagreements with civil and religious authorities in the most conciliatory attitude possible. Patient charity and a tangible desire for the good of souls had to also inspire the behaviour of the Rector towards confreres and Salesian educators towards the boys. The basic recommendation was twofold: the cult of poverty and careful practice of charity, loving 'everyone with fraternal love,' bearing in mind that it would 'always be a wonderful day' when we succeed in 'winning over an enemy by charity' or 'making him a friend.'²

Then followed a *Recommendation for myself*. His first thoughts were those of a father to his children. He reassured the boys that they had 'always been the delight' of his heart and recommended they practise 'frequent communion' not only in suffrage for his soul but also to be 'dear to God' and to be certain of 'the grace of receiving the holy sacraments at the end of life.' In an especially heartfelt way he encouraged his Salesian priests and clerics, family and friends of his soul to pray and receive communion so Jesus would shorten his time in purgatory. He then turned to himself to 'call down the Lord's mercy' on himself 'In the final hours' of his life. He was still writing his spiritual testament. This unfolded over three actions: profession of faith in all truths revealed and taught by the Church; a request for God's forgiveness for his sins, especially scandal and even, as he said 'too much focus on myself'; the request that other than grieving 'for the eternal repose of my soul' they pray, do works of charity, mortification, holy communion.' He begged them: 'Let your prayers be addressed to heaven especially so that I may find mercy and forgiveness as soon as I present myself before the tremendous majesty of my Creator.'³ Fear of God, never separate from love, remained an essential feature of his spirituality, one he lived and proclaimed.

Finally, he saw a glorious *future* for the Congregation and presented this to his Salesians. These lines prepared for or echoed the dream in Barcelona on 10 April 1886, and foreshadowed others.⁴ 'Our Congregation has a happy future before it, prepared by Divine Providence, and its glory will

1 Cf. Chap. 29, § 4.2.

2 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 123-125.

3 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 125-126.

4 Cf. § 6.

endure so long as our Rules are observed.' More precisely: 'In due course our missions will be brought to China and precisely to Peking [Beijing]. But do not forget that we go there for poor and abandoned boys. Marvellous things that we could not believe possible until now will be seen there among unknown peoples ignorant of the true God, things which the all-powerful God will clearly show the whole world.' These goals would be achieved at the price of an unconditional response to the austere demands of the mission: avoiding comforts, since 'our real comfort' was our concern 'for savages, the poorest children, those most at risk in society.' 'On the contrary,' he said, 'when ease and comforts begin among us, our pious Society will have run its course.' Instead – and this was the conclusion of the *Memorie* – 'when it happens that a Salesian succumbs and ceases to live while working for souls, then you will say that our Congregation has had a great triumph and many blessing from heaven will descend upon it.'⁵

2. In gradual decline from 1886 to 1887

Right to the end, then, Don Bosco leaned into the mission, for himself and his Salesians, He still summoned up courage to go out begging for funds in personal encounters and through correspondence and remained at the centre of government of the Congregation, continuing his direct activity as spiritual director of young people. It was an uneven rhythm of life which he took up again immediately after the demanding efforts at the General Chapter.

2.1 Quick trip to Milan

"After a thousand uncertainties,' Viglietti wrote on 11 September, Don Bosco made a quick trip to Milan, something he wanted to do and which was requested by benefactors and friends who had an extraordinary animator in Fr Pasquale Morganti (1853–1921), Spiritual Director at the Major Seminary and future Bishop of Bobbio, then Archbishop of Ravenna.

Don Bosco was accompanied to the train station by the administrator working for Marchioness Consuela Vidal y Moragas (1861–98), Leandro Súñer, whom he had met in Barcelona and who had visited him a day earlier at Valsalice on his return from Germany. Don Bosco arrived in Milan at 12.40 and was guest of his friend Archbishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana. Immediately that afternoon there were many visits from clergy and laity. At 11.00 a.m. the following day, there was a Salesian conference. After the solemn Mass celebrated by the parish priest (the *schola cantorum* from the Valdocco Oratory sang a dazzling Haydn Mass), Fr Lasagna gave a vibrant address while Don Bosco huddled in an armchair next to the bishop's chair. Then came a collection. After Benediction Don Bosco, tired and bent over, exited slowly from the church supported by the Archbishop who was seven years his senior, and Viglietti, between two rows of people who were deeply moved. On Monday he celebrated Mass in the Archbishop's chapel. At the end he spoke to the many who were there, receiving them one by one, giving each a medal and a brief word as a memento. He then left Milan exhausted, at 4.25 p.m. and was back at Valsalice by 8.30 p.m.⁶ A large part of the Milanese press was interested in the visit, though from different perspectives. The moderate liberal *Corriere della sera*, gave great prominence to it on the 13th and 14th. *La Perseveranza* wrote sympathetically, *Il Caffè*, *L'Italia* and *Il Pungolo* expressed admiration, the Catholic and conciliatory *Lega Lombarda* and other papers in Milan provided ample information, as did *Il Corriere di Torino* in Turin and *L'Eco d'Italia* in Genoa. Also interested were the anticlerical *Il Secolo*, *La Lombardia* and the extremist Crispin *La Riforma* in Rome, not without stressing that Don Bosco was 'one of the influential heads of the Italian clerical party.' The Catholic right wing

5 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 126-127.

6 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 37-45.

Osservatore Cattolico was full of information and praise in its 12 and 13 September issues.⁷ Naturally, no less so was *L'Unità Cattolica* where Fr Giacomo Margotti was all for Don Bosco.⁸ It was an anticipation of the celebrations, recognition, the broad range of evaluations of an ideological and political nature which took place after 31 January 1888.

2.2 Within the family at the Oratory and elsewhere

On 22 September, the secretary noted: 'All the newspapers are saying that Don Bosco is seriously ill. Don Bosco thanks God that his health has been better for some time. Fr Margotti came to visit this evening alarmed by the reports in the newspapers.' A telegram even arrived from *La Croix* in Paris, requesting the 'Superior of the Salesian Congregation' for news on Don Bosco. Don Bosco himself replied: 'I am well. I cannot explain your anxiety, but thank you for the attention.'⁹

He returned to the Oratory on 27 September, leaving again on the 29th for S. Benigno, where he attended the novices' retreat, and on 3 October received the vows of 53 of them. He spoke at length about charity, lambasting people who took the vow of obedience and then abandoned themselves to the sacrilege of criticism.¹⁰

He turned his gaze towards new missions in a circular to Cooperators on 15 October 1886, translated into several languages. Only the work of the Salesians and their Cooperators could come to the aid of such 'pitiful misery' and 'poor neophytes.' He overlaid existing realities with future plans: 'It is good for you to know that to ensure the total conversion of Patagonia we have already decided to open a way from the western side of Chile and already a group of Salesians has gone there to found a house over the Cordillera in the city of Concepción belonging to the Chilean Republic. It is from there that colonies of missionaries should leave to evangelise Araucania and western Patagonia spreading soon, little by little into the Chiloe and Magellan Archipelago in the so-called Tierra del Fuego, all populated by countless indigenous tribes without any idea or religion and civilisation.'¹¹ Sending out the circular required major mobilisation of clerics and boys to write out addresses for recipients of all kinds including the Emperor of China, the Shah of Persia and any number of newspapers. The result was flattering.¹²

'Right at the moment I must leave for Foglizzo to clothe a hundred future missionaries as clerics. Two days later, I will return here and write again,' Don Bosco told Mrs Teodolinda Pilati from Bologna on 4 November, who had sent him a considerable donation of 500 lire [1,808 euro].¹³ He went to Foglizzo for the official opening of the new novitiate for the clerics, St Michael the Archangel's. He was given a great welcome there by the people, youth and adults, led by the Mayor. There was a solemn banquet involving the municipal council and parish priests from nearby towns. The blessing of the new chapel took place at the St Michael's Novitiate at 5.30 p.m. and Don Bosco presided at the clerical clothing of 75 novices. The next day he left from Montanaro station and was back at the Oratory by 5.00 p.m.¹⁴ Faithful to his promise (and hopeful) he immediately wrote again to Mrs Pilati with his customary exaggerated quantities. Of course, there

7 *Una fedele cronaca su Don Bosco a Milano* traeva dal *Corriere di Torino* il BS 10 (1886) no. 10, October, pp. 122-123.

8 Cf. "*L'Unità Cattolica*", no. 215 and 216, Tuesday and Wednesday 14 and 15 September 1886, pp. 859 and 862-863.

9 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 46 and 48.

10 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, p. 49.

11 E IV 360-363; cf. *La missione de' Salesiani in Patagonia ed una lettera di D. Bosco a' suoi cooperatori*, "*L'Unità Cattolica*", no. 248, Friday 23 October 1886, p. 990.

12 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, p. 54.

13 E IV 364.

14 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 51-53.

were also clerical novices at the Oratory, D, Benigno and other houses. 'I am back home from the function at Foglizzo' he told her. 'I blessed the habits for a hundred and ten 'levites' now added to a band of about 500 others preparing to go and work among the savages. I recommend them all to your charity and your sister's charity, so they may grow in knowledge and holiness and thus gain many souls for heaven.'¹⁵

The chronicler opens a glimmer of light on Don Bosco's private life over these and the following weeks: 'For a month around here, every day (if it is fine) I have the carriage prepared and take D. Bosco for a ride. The driver takes us into the countryside. There we get down and D. Bosco walks, talks and recovers a bit.'¹⁶ This was the context in which he invited a parish priest to come and find him. The priest had been a companion of his at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) and was now a benefactor: 'If you are not worthy of being nuisance like D. Bosco is, you are worthy of being a donor. Why don't you come still and see this poor friend of yours?'¹⁷

On 30 November, he was at Valsalice for the pupil's prize-giving. Beforehand there was a family banquet with Cardinal Alimonda, Fr Margotti and other important people in attendance. The chronicler noted that the distribution of prizes 'was truly splendid. The Cardinal spoke at length.' At 6.00 p.m. he returned to the Oratory.¹⁸

2 December was an emotional day. In the morning Don Bosco received the vows of around twenty clerics, who came from S. Benigno, in his small chapel. In the late afternoon, seated in an armchair on the sanctuary in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, he attended the farewell ceremony for 26 Salesians and 6 Sisters leaving for Latin America.¹⁹ Present were Bishop Manacorda and Bishop Leto. Fr Lasagna spoke. Cardinal Alimonda concluded with Benediction and some enthusiastic words. Don Bosco was present but silent, accompanying the farewell greeting he gave each of the travellers with visible emotion and tears.²⁰

On Christmas day Viglietti, who was ordained priest on 18 December, celebrated his first solemn Mass. The new refectory for members of the Superior Chapter was opened. It was next to the library and very near Don Bosco's small chapel and room. This made it possible for him to join the common meat.²¹

There are two significant letters at the end of December. The first thanked generous Count Eugenio De Maistre, one of Count Rodolfo's sons, who had put him up in Rome in 1858. He promised special prayers for him and his family with the usual attractive intentions: 'I will ask heaven to make your crops abundant, the good health of your family and the great consolation of seeing them go from virtue to virtue until they all find themselves gathered around you in paradise.'²²

The other letter was addressed to Bishop Cagliari, the last to him; Fr Lasagna brought it to America when he departed with the missionaries. He told him that debts contracted in America with the General Administration were now paid off, 'paid by Don Bosco' he said magnanimously. 'Long

15 E IV 364.

16 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, p. 59; cf. also pp. 60 and 61.

17 To Canon B. Rumiano, 30 November 1886, E IV 365.

18 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 55-56.

19 "L'Unità Cattolica" had announced this earlier by publishing an invitation circular signed by Don Bosco, no. 280, Tuesday 30 November 1886, p. 1119, *La partenza da Torino di nuovi missionari per l'America*.

20 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 56-58; *Partenza dei missionari salesiani*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 284, Saturday 4 December 1886, p. 1134; *La missione salesiana per l'America*, BS 11 (1887) no. 1, January, pp. 7-9: a news item also appeared in the *Osservatore Cattolico di Milano* 2 December.

21 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 62-63.

22 E IV 365-366.

live abundance!' He then turned to some practical matters, in particular the request to send precise information on the development of the missions in Latin America to the Superior Chapter, Propaganda Fide and the Lyons mission centre. He alternated this request with cheerful nostalgic notes: 'Are you preparing a pagan choir to come and sing at My Golden Jubilee Mass? Pay attention, because this evening, *Deo dante*, I will give a short talk from the old 'little mount' to our Salesians ... Take great care of your health; work, temperance, and all will go well. *Amen*. May Mary guide us to heaven.'²³

But Don Bosco was no longer able to give the goodnight with the *strenna* for the new year from the usual pulpit. In the early years of the Oratory there was a heap of excavations (dug from foundations), the 'little mount' which the Oratory boys used like running up and down. 'For some days now, D. Bosco has been utterly exhausted' the chronicler noted. But he did lend a hand hearing confession of the two senior classes. Commenting on the doctor's advice that he give this up he told Fr Viglietti: if I cannot at least hear the boys' confessions what else can I do for them? I promised God that I would be there for my boys until my last breath.'²⁴

3. A new year and flashes of renewed vitality (1887)

1887 began with a message accredited to the Virgin Mother, the dream of *the Handmaid of the Lord*. Don Bosco had this dream over two nights, 4 and 5 January, and entrusted it in very clear fashion to two sheets of paper, the first part in Italian, the second in Latin. Fr Viglietti transcribed it faithfully into his chronicle. In their words and content, the texts confirmed the essence of Don Bosco's faith in the power of the *Handmaid of the Lord's* intercession as mediatrix of graces and solicitous motherly helper. She, '*cui fecit magna et potens est*, not only encouraged the recovery of young French lad Ludovico Olive whom the doctors had given up on, but was above all solicitous for the spiritual health of her children. She complained of bad talk and the ineffective confessions of the boys and warned the priests to be faithful administrators of the means of grace.'²⁵

On 5 January, Don Bosco allowed himself to be involved in a youth foundation requested by another Latin American nation. The secretary recorded: 'Today the Bishop of Quito (Republic of Ecuador) arrived, spent more than an hour with Don Bosco and said he was not leaving until D. Bosco had given him some missionaries. Don Bosco seemed well-disposed.'²⁶ Bishop Jose Ignacio Ordóñez left for Rome and returned to the Oratory on 12 February, when agreement was soon reached.²⁷ The agreement was drawn up and signed by Don Bosco (the last he would sign) on the 14th. It was the opening of a college of arts and trades.²⁸ and was ratified by the plenipotentiary minister resident in Paris, Antonio Flores, who would eventually become President of Ecuador from 1888–1892. Don Bosco communicated this to the current President José María Plácido Caamaño (1883–1888) on 7 March, as we know from his deferential reply.²⁹ *L'Unità Cattolica* announced the news warmly on 12 August.³⁰ The farewell to departing missionaries took place on 6 December 1887, just at the beginning of Don Bosco's final illness.

His health seemed to improve in early January, enough to offer hope for a new trip to southern France: 'D. Bosco is doing fairly well' Fr Cerruti told French Salesian Fr Charles Bellamy: 'I am

23 Letter of 31 December 1886, E IV 366-367.

24 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 63-64.

25 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 69-73. The two originals are published in critical edition by C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 98-99.

26 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 66-67.

27 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, p. 69.

28 The text is in MB XVIII 783-784.

29 Found in MB XVIII 784-785.

30 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 187, Friday 12 August 1887, pp. 746-747.

convinced that this year, too, the Lord will make it possible for him to go at least as far as Marseilles, but we don't yet know if this is certain, or when.'³¹ The chronicler noted on 23 January: 'Yesterday evening D. Bosco heard confessions from 5.30 until 8.00 p.m. It was wonderful to see all the boys in the 4th and 5th year go.'³² On the 25th Don Bosco reassured Mrs Olive from Marseilles of her son's health – 'Ludovico is better and better' – and suggested as a good work, helping the orphans at St–Cyr.³³ On 29 January he was at the solemn Feast of St Francis de Sales with a sung Mass and the presence of Cardinal Alimonda.³⁴ 'Health, holiness and perseverance on the way to Heaven' he wished his young friend from years ago. Ottavio Bosco di Ruffino, by now married and a father.³⁵

Fr Cerruti was not so optimistic about Don Bosco's health at the end of the month and hinted, as he had on several other occasions, of some kind of moral suffering. 'Also pray for D. Bosco' he wrote to Fr Rocca. 'He is physically very low due to some serious internal problem which is not over yet. Blessed obedience!'³⁶ Just the same, on 3 February, Don Bosco was at the church of St John the Evangelist for the Cooperators conference and listened to Fr John Marengo's talk (the Rector of the house) from the sanctuary.³⁷ Over these days, too, he agreed with Fr Dalmazzo, who had come from Rome, on matters concerning the upcoming consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart.³⁸

In March, the *Salesian Bulletin* launched a new appeal for charity, always Don Bosco's supreme concern, heightened by the recent earthquake that hit Liguria, causing considerable damage to some Salesian works. At the beginning of the booklet was written: 'D. Bosco in past years used to go to southern France at this time, visiting friends and benefactors in Mentone, Monaco, Nice, Cannes, Toulon, Marseilles. This year, however, he has been forced to renounce this trip which he would gladly undertake and which is really needed to seek alms for his dear orphans. Thank heaven he is not ill as such but his general weakness, upsets, and doctor's advice, force him to remain in Turin. Here, though, he can receive letters and will not fail to reply to them. He can also receive any charitable individuals who wish to visit him He has decided to go to Rome in the second half of April, where on the 7th [in fact it was the 14th] of May, unless there are further delays in work, he will attend the consecration of the beautiful new Sacred Heart Church, the object of his keenest interest.'³⁹

The earthquake along the western Ligurian Riviera, which struck on the morning of 23 February 1887, also felt in Piedmont and Tuscany, was a new opportunity to ask for charity. The house at Vallecrosia had the greatest need.⁴⁰ Don Bosco was personally involved, recommending to the Salesians above all to be austere and to save.⁴¹ Naturally, he also involved the Cooperators, as his secretary noted on 4 April: 'D. Bosco always thinks up new ways to get the Cooperators to help.' He wrote a beautiful and moving letter and had it inserted in the April *Bulletin*, appealing to public charity for the damage caused by the earthquake in his houses in Liguria.⁴² Above all, it was a new

31 Letter of 14 January 1887, ASC B 521, original 2 pp.

32 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 gennaio 1887 al 15 maggio 1887*, p. 3.

33 E IV 406.

34 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 gennaio 1887...*, pp. 3-5.

35 Letter of 30 January 1887, E IV 371.

36 Letter of 31 January 1887, ASC F 3810344, original. 2 pp.

37 *La festa di S. Francesco di Sales e la Conferenza dei Cooperatori Salesiani in Torino*, BS 11 (1887) no. 3, March, pp. 26-27.

38 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, p. 6; BS 11 (1887) no. 3, March, pp. 26-27.

39 BS 11 (1887) no. 3, March, p. 25.

40 Cf. Chap. 23, § 1.1.

41 Cf. circular to Salesians, 1 March 1887, *Lettere circolari di D. Bosco e di D. Rua...*, pp. 44-46.

42 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 28-29; cf. BS 11 (1887), no. 4, April, pp. 37-38.

occasion to create a more compact, active community of minds and hearts.⁴³ He wrote other passionate letters regarding current calamities and needs, always humbly asking, promising prayers, trustingly reassuring people of the reward. Some of these letters were undated; all were an expression of these agonising days. 'You should not wonder that this poor priest once again appeals to your charity which is so well known to me. I find I have great need of it.' This was how he began a letter to a Genoese Cooperator to ask her help for the damage caused by the earthquake. He asked: 'for the love of God' like a poor friar, 'who had no financial resources,' like a truly poor man, and apologised for his bad writing. He was 'elderly and half-blind.'⁴⁴ The same expressions appeared in another letter to Genoese Baron Rafaello Cataldi,⁴⁵ and also to Marchioness G. Tagliacarne from Turin, thanking her later for a donation of 100 lire.⁴⁶ He also praised a Venetian priest for his substantial donations: 'I bless you and your charity, but I also greatly praise your courage because you yourself are doing things without waiting for others who come after you to do them, as some people do, and for the most part they are fooled.'⁴⁷

The chronicler, meanwhile, did not miss out commenting on dreams, nightmares really, which Don Bosco sometimes refashioned. His health was very much up and down.⁴⁸ This was reflected by some news from Fr Cerruti over these days: 'Our beloved D. Bosco is sufficiently well but needs us to console him by fulfilling our duties exactly and by our holy perseverance. This will very much prolong his life which is so dear and precious to us.'⁴⁹ D. Bosco is well enough and gives us a constant and splendid example of self-denial, poverty and purity. Let us imitate and console him.'⁵⁰ D. Bosco is somewhat uncomfortable; yesterday he did not say Mass and had to retire to bed early. This morning he did not celebrate Mass but is very tired and a bit constipated. Let us pray.'⁵¹ 'D. Bosco is a bit better.'⁵²

He was up and down over the days that followed. On 5 and 6 April, the secretary noted some alarming events: 'This evening around 7.00 p.m, D. Bosco felt very bad. I was really frightened. He was unable to speak, struggled to breathe, could not move and needed me to undress him immediately and put him to bed. He almost did not know what I was doing.' 'This morning, D. Bosco could not celebrate Mass, got up late, took a little coffee but vomited it almost immediately. Then he picked up strength and is better now. Today he went to lunch with the others. He went to bed early this evening.'⁵³ The unstable nature of the situation was also stressed in a letter of Fr Cerruti's to Fr Rocca in mid-April, with comment on the trip to Rome: 'D. Bosco is improving, but is always less well, worse than last year. Yesterday he poured out some of his moral worries confidentially... Poor man! He is suffering a lot. Let us pray . And let's be good. He leaves for Rome in a few days, but in stages.'⁵⁴ 'D. Bosco leaves with Fr Rua on Wednesday [20 April].'⁵⁵ 'Our beloved D. Bosco is sufficiently well and leaves for Rome the day after tomorrow for the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.'⁵⁶

43 Cf. letter of March 1887 to E. Nerli, A. Parodi Cataldi, C. Louvet, G. Musso Bensa, E IV 371-373, 476; cf. Chap. 22, § 2.

44 Letter to O. Dufour, undated, IV 374.

45 E IV 374-375.

46 Letter of 30 March and 4 April 1887, E IV 376.

47 Letter to Fr Varettoni, undated E IV 375.

48 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 15-17.

49 Circular to Salesian Provincials, 28 March 1887, ASC 381, printed

50 Letter to Fr A. Riccardi, 31 March 1887, ASC B 5210557, original. 2 pp.

51 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 7 April 1887, ASC F 3810352, original 3 pp.

52 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 11 April 1887, ASC F 3810353, original 2 pp.

53 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 gennaio 1887...*, pp. 29-30.

54 Letter to Fr G. Barberis, 15 April 1887, ASC B 5210162, original 1 f

55 Letter to Fr G. Barberis, 15 April 1887, ASC B 5210162, original 1 f.

56 Circular to Salesian Provincials, 18 April 1887, ASC F 381, printed; cf. Also letter to Fr L. Rocca, 19 April, ASC F 3810355, original 2 pp.

4. Final journey to Rome

Don Bosco also gave some indication of his state of health in a letter to his great benefactor and friend Count Colle. He dwelt mostly on his immediate plans for himself and the Colles. 'I do not know if you have received news of us for some time,' he wrote. 'In fact, I am almost forced to abandon correspondence except for strictly confidential matters. At present the consecration of the Sacred Heart Church has been finally set for 13 May. I am forced to make the trip to Rome in short hops, but I hope to be there on that day and find both of you there in good health. We can speak calmly together then. From Rome we will return here to Turin for the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians on 24 May.'⁵⁷ But news came to him of a worsening of the Count's heart problem and on 12 April, Don Bosco wrote expressing his concern and promising prayers from himself, the Salesians, and the boys.⁵⁸ Days earlier he had a fever and slight bronchitis.

The *May Salesian Bulletin* gave readers more precise information on the Sacred Heart Church: 12 and 13 May, the organ tested. 14th, the consecration of the building, continuation of festivities until the 19th. It also announced that Don Bosco would be present, with the young *schola cantorum* from the Valdocco Oratory. The body of the article was dedicated to a rapid review of what Don Bosco had done to carry out 'the audacious, indeed reckless project' entrusted to him by the Head of the Church. 'Initially bewildered,' he had replied: 'This work is dedicated to the memory of the great protector of orphans, Pius IX. But the orphans are the delight of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so Mary will provide.' Now the Church 'towers over all of Rome.' But not everything was finished: the bell tower was unfinished and the facade lacked statues. Some altars inside had not been built and all the chapels, except for Mary Help of Christians were missing their altar pieces. The murals were not all complete and the main altar still needed steps and the altar table. The consecration could have been delayed but it was urgent to provide pastorally for a population of more than 15,000 souls.⁵⁹ In reality, above all they wanted Don Bosco to be there as he keenly wanted to be, before his precarious health meant he could no longer travel to Rome.

He left Turin on a first class ticket with Frs Rua and Viglietti on 20 April. He arrived in Rome on the 30th at 3.00 p.m. after stopping at Sampierdarena in Genoa from the 20th to the 23rd, La Spezia from the 23rd to the 25th, Florence from the 25th to the 28th, Arezzo from the 28th to the 30th. Audiences began at Sampierdarena in the afternoon and continued the following morning. There were people asking for blessings and graces from Mary Help of Christians. In the afternoon, in the Church of S. Siro, 'packed with people,' Bishop Francesco Omodei Zorini gave a conference.⁶⁰ Audiences continued during the mornings of the 22nd and 23rd. 'At 11.00 am' the secretary noted, on the final day, 23 April, 'we went to lunch. D. Bosco took no food, he was too tired, and we left at 11.45.'⁶¹ The stop at La Spezia was less tiring, made more relaxing by the festive welcome from the boys, the city and a large gathering of ecclesiastical, civil, and military authorities. Fr Rua gave the conference to Cooperators on the Monday morning, 25 April.⁶² At Florence, where he arrived on the evening of the 25th, Don Bosco was the guest of Countess Ugucioni, who was in a wheelchair. Meals and audiences, though were at the Salesian house. Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the Ugucioni's private chapel, or the chapel at the college.

57 Letter of 8 April 1887, E IV 526.

58 E IV 526-527.

59 *La consacrazione della chiesa del S. Cuor di Gesù al Macao*, BS 11 (1887) no. 5, May, pp. 49-51.

60 *Don Bosco a Genova*, BS 11 (1887) no. 6, June, pp. 66-67.

61 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 31-39.

62 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, p. 43.

Audiences were carefully controlled, limited to ladies and gentlemen of the aristocracy and better-known clergy, including Archbishop Ceconi and his Auxiliary, Donato Zati di San Clemente, who placed his carriage at Don Bosco's disposal including for a relaxing excursion.⁶³

In the late evening of the 28th the travellers were at Arezzo as guests of the Bishop, Giuseppe Giusti (1814–97). A day of complete rest followed, with a four-hour outing by carriage and on foot with the Bishop, Fr Rua and the secretary.⁶⁴ In the afternoon of 30 April, Don Bosco arrived at Termini Station at 3.00 p.m. and entered Sacred Heart from via Magenta behind the church apse where there was a simple room for him. He remained there until 18 May, almost as a recluse, celebrating Mass in a small room adjacent to his own and going out only for the papal audience on 13 May. However, there were many distinguished visitors: Cardinals Ricci, Bartolini, Laurenzi, Verga; his friend Mons. Kirby the Rector of the Irish Seminary, who encouraged a Salesian foundation in London along with Countess Stackpole; Prince Doria, Marquis and Marchioness Vitelleschi. He wrote to Count Colle again from Rome, and to Claire Louvet on 1 and 3 May respectively, inviting them to the Feast of Mary Help of Christians.⁶⁵

The solemn dinner on 8 May, feast of the Apparition of St Michael the Archangel, was special. It was not only an encounter between Don Bosco and some eminent clergy and lay people, including the Archbishop of Catania, Archbishop Dusmet, and Prince Czartoryski, but it also became a de facto opportunity to present his successor, Fr Michael Rua. The boys came and sang a hymn in honour of the Vicar, who said a few words, thanking them and giving them a sweet each. During the dinner, Don Bosco recalled with sincere emotion his and the Oratory's great friend Fr Giacomo Margotti, editor in charge of *L'Unità Cattolica*, who had died two days earlier at 62 years of age.⁶⁶

On 8 May 1887, the Cardinal Vicar sent out a notice about the solemn consecration. Don Bosco wrote again on the 12th to Count Colle who had given some not so reassuring news of his health, and listed some of the more important upcoming events: on the 13th he would ask for a special blessing for the Count at the papal audience; on the 14th the consecration of the Church and a solemn octave to follow.⁶⁷

Especially touching was the private audience with Leo XIII at 6.30 p.m. on 13 May: It lasted for an hour. The Pope treated him with great gentleness: 'I am old' Don Bosco said to a lively and energetic man five years his senior. 'I am 72 and this is my final journey and the conclusion of everything for me.' Then, 'D. Bosco told him about everything especially the Sacred Heart Church.' 'We left truly moved and confused by so much kindness.' Don Bosco presented Fr Rua to the Pope as his Vicar and successor, an ascetic figure who must have immediately made an impression on the Pope.⁶⁸

Beginning with the consecration on 14 May by the Cardinal Vicar, Lucido Maria Parocchi, the new Protector of the Salesian Society,⁶⁹ there were various Cardinals and bishops who took part in the different festivities. The *Schola cantorum* from Turin, masterfully conducted by Salesian coadjutor Giuseppe Dogliani, was very much involved and appreciated. Don Bosco, 'very tired and lacking in strength,' took no public part in any of the rites. But he attended the banquet of honour on the 14th: he offered a brief toast followed by some lofty words from Parocchi. Don Bosco went down to the church on Monday the 16th and celebrated Mass at the altar of Mary Help of

63 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 44-47.

64 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 47-49.

65 Cf. E IV 527, 476-477.

66 BS 11 (1887) no. 6, June, pp. 67-68.

67 E IV 528.

68 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 genn. 1887...*, pp. 62-76.

69 Cf. *Festa in Roma per la Consacrazione della chiesa del S. Cuore di Gesù*, BS 11 (1887) no. 6, June, pp. 61-66.

Christians, barely able to control his emotion and the flow of tears. The people thronged around him as far as the sacristy, asking for his blessing.⁷⁰

Not only was much of the hospice still to be built but the church, too, still needed lots of money to complete. Before leaving, Don Bosco took a pen and thanked the Holy Father 'for the charitable and truly paternal reception' and especially asked him to help: 'If your Holiness could either in part or fully come to our aid with the remaining L. 51,000 [184,841 euro] our finances would be under control. All 250,000 of orphans pray daily that your Holiness' health may be preserved. We are all working for this in a heartfelt way. Please forgive my terrible writing.'⁷¹ He would write once more in November.

On Wednesday the 18th at 9.20 am, Don Bosco left Rome for the twentieth and final time. He made a stop at Pisa as guest of Archbishop Capponi, who made it possible for him to have two nights and a day of utter rest.⁷² Don Bosco used the opportunity to write to the Colles with a P.S. he took up most of the letter. He told them he had spoken well of them and especially the Count's illness to the Pope, and Leo XIII had asked Don Bosco to give them a special blessing in his name, with a plenary indulgence.⁷³

Following his return from Rome,⁷⁴ on 23 May, Don Bosco received a visit from the Duke of Norfolk on his way to Rome. The same day there was a Cooperators conference held in the Church of Mary help of Christians by 'Fr Rua, Vicar of Don Bosco,' according to the *Salesian Bulletin*.⁷⁵ This was another public passing of the baton on the eve of the most solemn Salesian Celebration. The amazed chronicler wrote, about the extraordinary Feast of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco's last: 'Masses began at 2.30 am and continued until 2.00 p.m. with constant communions. Right from the morning we saw extraordinary graces, young people with crutches in hand, paralytics begin to move.'⁷⁶

There are two letters, on 27 May and 6 June respectively, to the Carmelite Sister Superior in Tunis. In 1884, Don Bosco had encouraged her to accept the invitation from Cardinal Lavigerie to found a monastery in his episcopal see in Tunis: 'Have faith: nothing is lacking to us if we have faith. The good God commands this foundation.'⁷⁷ The two letters he sent, (one a repetition) contained the special blessing obtained from Leo XIII for them and the Carmelite Sisters in Algiers and Carthage.⁷⁸

'D. Bosco is going well enough. *Deo Gratias*,' Fr Cerruti told Fr Rocca .⁷⁹ But in reality, worn out, bent over, Don Bosco was forced to walk and support himself with a stick beside him. The chronicler often referred to rubbing his legs with 'oil of henbane' to reduce swelling.⁸⁰ He himself wrote: 'The heat in Turin now is threatening to burn us up, so I have come to Valsalice, where I feel better thanks to the cooler climate.'⁸¹ The chronicler confirmed this on 10 June: 'He is very well and at least no longer needs to complain about it being too hot. He is very cheerful and in good humour. He loves recalling things from the old days of the Oratory.'⁸²

70 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887 al 23 dicembre 1887*, pp. 3-5.

71 E IV 377.

72 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 9-11.

73 Letter from Pisa, 18 May 1887, E IV 529.

74 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 9-10.

75 BS 11 (1887) no. 7, July, p. 74.

76 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 13-17.

77 Cf. letter to M. Marie des Anges, 17 July 1884, E IV 412-413.

78 E IV 413-414.

79 Letter of 4 June 1887, ASC F 3810363, original 2 pp.

80 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 17-18 (3 June), 20-21 (5 June).

81 A C. Louvet, from Turin-Valsalice, 12 June 1887, E IV 477.

82 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 23-24.

Struggling more and more to write, he wrote to two people in France he was still in close contact with. To Louvet, who had come to Turin for the Feast of Mary Help of Christians and left with tears in her eyes, he made his goodbye explicit: 'I have always assured you that our earthly relationships are not lasting ones, but that in eternal life we will spend our days in true joy without end and will never lack the thing we desire: *in perpetuas aeternitates*.' He told her not to fear imminent war: 'When I see the least danger,' he added 'I will tell you immediately, assuming I am still among the living.' He concluded by hoping the Blessed Virgin would keep her in good health 'but always and securely on the way to Paradise.'⁸³ The 'Way to Paradise' returned in his last four letters to her on 4 and 25 July, and 4 and 5 September. As a priest, he saw himself in the final phase of his earthly pilgrimage while she had to 'still wait some time.'⁸⁴

On 14 June, he wrote a letter to Count Colle, one of unusual length given his situation and more concerned about the recipient's health than his own. He assured them both that a room and table were ready for them at Valsalice for the feasts of St Aloysius and St John, and the climate was pleasant. He told them they could speak 'of our business in Rome, S. Benigno and of our 'missionaries' especially in need, with the added problem of Bishop Cagliari's serious fall from a horse on the Cordillera.'⁸⁵ He wrote again a few days later, assuring the Count of his many prayers, also including a brief prayer to St John and asking him, if he felt the need to reply, not to tire himself but to limit himself to two simple words or phrases, 'I am or I am not better.'⁸⁶

He returned to the Oratory on 23 June for the beginning of his name day celebrations. He had the usual meeting in the morning of the 24th with the past pupils who were paying their traditional respects. Fr G. B. Piano, parish priest of the Great Mother of God parish spoke on their behalf. He began: 'It is a good thirty years ago since I entered here and became part of D. Bosco's family.' Calling him by 'the sweet name of father' he saw certain features embodied in him: 'The family [familiarity] and love, both of these are part of you.' 'How often, when we see ourselves surrounded by a large crowd of children, we are reminded of your kind face, your penetrating gaze, your fatherly advice and we do what we can to copy that.' 'Love, this magical word, guided you throughout your life. You loved God and in God you loved your children.' 'You love us.' He ended with a heart-rending prayer: 'O God, hear our prayers, hear our requests. Send your blessing down on our beloved, white-haired Father. Preserve him for many years yet for the good of your Church, of society and our love.'⁸⁷ The secretary felt he needed to note in his diary: 'There was a splendid academy in the evening. The trouble was that towards the end, D. Bosco felt unwell and had to leave.' The following day he had recovered once more.⁸⁸

5. Interlude between recollection and governing

A new 'exile' began on 4 July, this year at the college in Lanzo, lasting until 19 August.⁸⁹ He moved around in that small world, usually in a wheelchair. This was not his only problem: 'D. Bosco is well

83 Letter from Valsalice, 12 June 1887, E IV 477-478.

84 E IV 478-479.

85 E IV 529-530.

86 To Count L. Colle, 18 June 1887, E IV 530-531: "O St. John" was the prayer in French, like the letters 'do not allow us to celebrate without obtaining from the good God either the perfect recovery or at least a felt improvement. Amen'.

87 *Nella fausta ricorrenza dell'onomastico dell'ottimo fra i padri Bosco D. Giovanni gli antichi suoi figli in attestato di riconoscenza, 24 June 1887*. Turin tip. salesiana 1887, pp. 3-4, 6, 8-9, 11, 14.

88 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 25-26.

89 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 27.

enough' the chronicler noted, 'except for the dreams disturbing him at night,' ignoring the fact that these, too, could have been simply the result of age and poor health.⁹⁰

Don Bosco had almost completely abandoned any direct government of his institutions. But just the same he was present implicitly or explicitly as an inspiration, as well as memory and prophecy. He was a living relic, source of trust, certainty for the future and his dreams, even the most ordinary of them, were religiously collected. They represented for him and those closest to him, the creativity that encouraged people to go forwards in vigilant continuity.

He spent days at the Oratory, Valsalice, Foglizzo, but there was no interruption at all in two kinds of presence: animation through word and example, and his contribution through correspondence, suggested by the yearning not to cut off the relationships most needed and helpful for supporting his works. We can be amazed at the insistent crusade of charity, his disturbing descriptions of urgent needs, his habitual exaggeration of figures. Not all the young people in his houses were 'orphans', maybe not even the majority, and they certainly did not reach the numbers he quoted. One example is a letter he wrote at Lanzo to a priest friend, parish priest at Boves (Cuneo): 'Your fraternal letter calls to mind things that were my delight, but no longer. Only your benevolence and charity remain unchanged. My family, which was only around fifteen thousand orphans when I used come to your place, now is around three hundred thousand, all healthy, strong and with indescribable appetites. They are my heirs and successors... Now, do me a special favour. Tell Marquiss Montezemolo from me and all the Salesian benefactors that we all offer him our thanks and pray our humble respects. They remember him, pray for him every day, and await him with great pleasure.⁹¹ The constant worry of expenses and debts justified this rhetoric of hyperbole. On the other hand, the wealthy, too, had to deserve Paradise and if it cost inevitable sacrifices for the poor, then even more so did he need to confront the wealthy who lived in economic and social security with the need for consistent donations.

From Lanzo, he wrote immediately to his more familiar recipients with their different problems. To Louvet, giving her courage, he also gave news about his health ... and the health of others: 'Fr Rua is better, Count Colle no.'⁹² He told the Count he was sending Fr Rua to him, who 'knew very well the intentions' of everyone involved, the Count, Countess and the writer. Clearly, this referred to use of financial resources.⁹³ Further on he praised the Cooperator from Bologna, Teodolinda Pilati, who had donated the considerable sum of 15,000 lire [54,365 euro]: 'May God be blessed for inspiring you to do good works in your lifetime ... ' The three hundred thousand 'orphans' would 'at least offer a holy communion.'⁹⁴

He gave news of his own health over a handful of days in letters he wrote: 'I am here at Lanzo half blind and half if not entirely lame, and almost unable to speak.' 'My Hand no longer works for writing' he told Baroness Azelia Fassati Rici on 24 July.⁹⁵ And he wrote to Louvet on the 25th: 'I am at Lanzo. Health is a bit better, and yours? ... Fr Rua's health is not as would be desired. At the moment he is in Toulon with Count Colle who is seriously ill.'⁹⁶ 'I find myself almost in the same situation. A little better but I cannot walk without two people supporting me' he shared with Count Colle on the 26th.⁹⁷ Then on the same day writing to Teodolinda Pilati: 'I struggle to write. My days

90 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 29-30.

91 To Fr G. Calandri, from Lanzo 22 July 1887, E IV 381.

92 Letter of 4 July 1887, E IV 478.

93 Letter of 7 July 1887, E IV 531.

94 Letter of 26 July 1887, E IV 382-383, followed by another on 15 August after another offering of 20.000 lire (E IV 383).

95 E IV 382.

96 E IV 478.

97 E IV 531.

are flying quickly to their end.⁹⁸ Fr Cerruti noted in one of his letters over those days: 'D. Bosco is well at Lanzo.'⁹⁹

He had letters read to him at Lanzo, amid tears, from missionaries, received visits from local authorities and others, and was present at the prize-giving for students.¹⁰⁰ By mid-August, news of his health was not good: 'D. Bosco has been suffering from upsets over these days, which leaves him exhausted. He is in pain, does not speak ... Struggles to breathe, cannot be at the past pupils' dinners because he cannot manage the travelling.'¹⁰¹ The *Salesian Bulletin* confirmed this and added to it. On the afternoon of 11 August, the priest past pupils came to Lanzo with a representative group. The parish priest of Cunico d'Asti, Fr Griva, who led them, said that 'Don Bosco was so moved by this that at first he couldn't speak.' 'They were still his eyes but as for his overall looks – Ah! How much he seemed to be suffering. He did not want to receive us in the hall, but, supported by our arms, went out into the fresh air in the field next to the college and he gave us an audience there, reminding us how he had first welcomed boys in the fields in Valdocco. He went down in a wheelchair.' 'We pushed the wheelchair as far as the pergola at the bottom of the field. He got us to sit there and told us a thousand things in a few minutes.' 'He spoke of his Golden Jubilee Mass in 1891.' He would have liked a choir made up of Patagonians, and wine from Cunico d'Asti to drink. To the question as to what they were to tell the Oratory he replied: 'Tell them *I am very well* and that all the worries they have for my health do not disturb my peace of heart.'¹⁰²

On 14 August, he wrote a letter full of hope to Countess Colle who had provided amazing news on her husband's health. It was a grace. 'May the Blessed Virgin be thanked forever and ever' she said.¹⁰³

He moved to Valsalice on 19 August, remaining there until 2 October, when he returned to the Oratory. In reference to the imminent feast of Our Lady's birthday he promised prayers for his privileged correspondents: 'Is your health good?' he asked Louvet and told her: 'Mine is a little better.'¹⁰⁴ 'P.S. My health is better' he told her again a day later.¹⁰⁵ He gave Count Colle family news and presumed he was in good health.¹⁰⁶

On 13 October, he met 900 French pilgrims on their way through Turin, at parco del Valentino. They had stayed there for supper at the Sogno restaurant. The *Salesian Bulletin* referred to it: 'Told that the room could not hold all those people, D. Bosco sat outside near the door. After a few moments of rest and when they were all around him he gave them a blessing from his heart, which he wanted them to pass on to their families, relatives and friends. It was to be extended to their works and dearest intentions. But since his state of health and the number of listeners did not allow him to continue in a loud voice he asked Fr Rua to say some words on his behalf.'¹⁰⁷

On 17 October, he thanked Count Colle who had sent 5,000 francs [18,122 euro] for expenses involved in clothing the clerical novices, which was to take place the 'following Thursday.'¹⁰⁸ It was his final letter to the Count, other than a note reserved for him 'to be sent after my death.' The note

98 E IV 382.

99 Letter of 26 July to Fr L. Rocca, ASC F 3810363, original 2 pp.

100 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 30-34.

101 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 34-35.

102 BS 11 (1887), no. 9, September, pp. 106-107.

103 Letter of 14 August 1887, E IV 532.

104 Letter of 4 September 1887, E IV 479.

105 Letter of 5 September 1887, E IV 479.

106 Letter of 6 September 1887, E IV 532-533.

107 BS 11 (1887) no. 11, November, p. 137.

108 E IV 533.

was contained in the *Memorie dal 1841*.¹⁰⁹ But we know that the Count died on 1 January 1888, a month before Don Bosco went to Foglizzo Canavese for the clerical clothing of 94 novices.¹¹⁰ He returned to Turin in the afternoon of the following day, 'dead tired and with no strength left.'¹¹¹ On 28 October, he wrote to his faithful benefactor from Nice, architect Vincenzo Levrot: he did not ask for alms but promised special prayers, his own and the Salesians' over the Feast of All Saints and All Souls.¹¹² On 1 November, the secretary noted: 'For the first time D. Bosco was forced this year not to go down with the boys in the church to say the rosary for the deceased.'¹¹³

Yet, he was not so completely out of energy that he could not keep asking for money. That was the last activity he would relinquish. Viglietti noted on 28 November: 'D. Bosco's activity has diminished. I have noted him writing, here and there, asking for aid, then there is always another to follow and now, in our current straitened circumstances with extraordinary needs and problems that seem insurmountable, D. Bosco is providing, with a new circular, for the missionaries in general but especially for Ecuador, asking for help.'¹¹⁴ He was referring to a long circular with other individuals, naturally, put together for him, on missions and missionaries with particular reference to the immediate expedition to Quito.¹¹⁵ A shorter one on the same topic followed on 20 November.¹¹⁶ He was no less tenacious with personal requests. The first recipient was the Pope himself. He did this on 6 November, with a letter sent through the Papal Chamberlain Bishop Francesco Salesio Della Volpe. It was a renewal of a petition sent directly to the Pope from Rome, to obtain a grant of 51,000 on behalf of the Sacred Heart Church. 'The Holy Father's charity gives me hope that he will pay it' he wrote to Della Volpe as an encouragement for the renewed appeal. 'I find myself in very straitened circumstances, so if the boundless charity of the Holy Father can come to my aid, the moment could not be more timely.'¹¹⁷ There were also urgent needs coming from the missions and missionaries about to depart. He wrote to a benefactor on 7 November: 'Help me to the extent that you can, and in time God will say to you: you saved a soul, be assured of your own salvation.' He concluded: 'I can no longer write; these are my final efforts from my poor hand.'¹¹⁸

On the afternoon of 24 November, he presided at the clerical clothing of Polish Prince Augusto Czartoryski (1858–93). His parents and entire family were there. 'This is certainly a memorable day for the Congregation,' the secretary commented. It was the last sacred ceremony Don Bosco performed.¹¹⁹ Accompanying the vocational journey of Polish Prince Augusto Czartoryski, heir to that very noble family and pretender to the Polish throne, and accepting him into the Congregation, had presented Don Bosco with some delicate issues over a three year period. He had come to know the entire family in Paris, visiting them at the invitation of Prince Ladislao on 18 May 1883. He had been very cautious in evaluating the young prince's inclination to the clerical state. His father placed great store on his accession to the throne. However, he had always encouraged him to walk the path of holiness.¹²⁰ Finally, on 14 June 1887, Don Bosco accepted him and, in autumn, admitted him to the novitiate at S. Benigno Canavese.¹²¹ The prince professed his vows at

109 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 112-113.

110 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 42.

111 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 42-43.

112 E IV 410.

113 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 44.

114 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 55-56.

115 Circ. 4 November 1887, MB XVIII 785-789.

116 Circ. 20 November 1887, MB XVIII 789.

117 In MB XVIII 351; cf. Chap. 30, § 2.

118 To Mrs T. Zavaglia-Manica di Argenta (Ferrara), 7 November 1887, E IV 384-385.

119 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 48-54.

120 Cf. Letter of 27 May, 3 July, 26 August, 15 December 1885, and again, 5 January 1887, E IV 432-435.

121 Cf. *Documenti* XXXVI 46-48.

Valsalice on 2 October 1888. Struck down by tuberculosis he was ordained a priest on 2 April 1892, despite serious opposition from his father.¹²² He died on 8 April 1893.

The missionaries 'willingly go to give their lives amid the savages in America' Don Bosco wrote gracefully to Mrs Broquier from Marseilles, who had sent him 500 francs [1,812 euro], 'but you provide the bursary. Both serve the Lord and work to earn souls for Heaven. Whoever works to save souls saves her own soul: And there is more: whoever gives alms to save souls will be rewarded with good health and a long life. Let us give much if we want to obtain much! He concluded, unaware that this would be his final letter to her: 'I can no longer walk or write, except badly.'¹²³ It was the Gospel of charity and use of wealth proclaimed to the rich, according to Don Bosco. A testament.

6. Future Projections

Though less physically present in the active field of work, Don Bosco was there via spoken or written messages and through the ideal image his sons bore in their thoughts, hearts, style of activity. But there was more. Instead of impeding matters, it seemed that his reduced activity and health issues had given wings to his daily planning and nightly dreaming, this latter reflecting or prolonging the former. It was a phenomenon, moreover, that seems to have developed just at the time of his physical decline. The dreams mostly concerned two fundamental aspects: celebration of the present and corn for the future – the spread of the Salesian work around the world and Salesian fidelity to the original inspiration. Other aspects flourished parallel with these, concerning the spiritual circumstances of young people in harmony or otherwise with God. He spoke gladly of these things to those close to him such as members of the Superior and General Chapters. Fr Lemoyne, then in the closing chapter of his life, to Fr Viglietti, who was charmed by it all and recorded it all including the nightmares and hallucinations.

We see a prehistory of this in the dream of the ten diamonds which took place over three occasions on 10, 11 September 1881 at S. Benigno Canavese. On the first occasion, a noble gentleman appeared to him and the rectors gathered around him. The man was wrapped in a cloak adorned with ten diamonds, symbols of the virtues Salesians were meant to cultivate (*Pia Salesianorum Societas qualis esse debet*): faith, hope, charity – work and temperance – obedience, poverty, expectations of the eternal reward, chastity – fasting. On the second occasion, a thick gloom covered everything which only allowed people to read a card on which was written: *Pia Salesianorum Societas qualis esse periclitatur anno salutis 1900* and where the individual who first appeared was now in a torn and moth-eaten cloak. The diamonds or virtues were now replaced by the opposite vices: sleep and sloth, laughter and coarseness, selfishness, gluttony, idleness, a tear or rent which is disobedience, concupiscence, luxury, attachment to earthly things, absence of hope. Finally, the darkness dissipated when a young man resplendent in white appeared and gave them a lengthy series of warnings, concluding with a hymn of hope and to the glory of God.¹²⁴

We have simply mentioned a dream he had in August 1883 and which he told members of the Third General Chapter that year on 4 September. It appears to be a dreamlike version of Don Bosco's unrealistic aspirations to be with his missionaries on the other side of the Atlantic.¹²⁵ After a breathless race he finds himself in a 'hall' where many people were talking, among other thing, of 'the multitude of savages still engulfed in the shadows of death, endless hordes in Australia, India,

122 Cf. Note by Fr G. B. Lemoyne in MB XVIII 802-803.

123 Letter of 27 November 1887, E IV 386.

124 *Documenti XXIII* 197-199; cf. C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 59-71.

125 Cf. Chap. 31, § 3.

China, Africa and more particularly in America. Europe, a commentator says, Christian Europe, the great teacher of civilisation, and Catholicism, seem to have become apathetic toward the foreign missions. There are few who are zealous enough to tackle the lengthy journeys or unknowns [peoples? places?] to save the souls of millions who have also been redeemed by the Son of God, by Christ Jesus. Another said that a huge number of idolaters are living in misery outside and far from knowledge of the Gospel in America alone.' He then condemned the ignorance of geographers concerning the enormous wealth in the regions around the Cordilleras. Don Bosco, who sought an explanation but no one listened to him, was then approached by 'a young man about sixteen years old.' It was the young Luigi Colle, who indicated a numbered rope which when uncoiled, let him see all of South America, where the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were working. At Don Bosco's requests about the future, the young man had him climb aboard a train which zig-zagged through America from north to south. This was a reality already being planned and the docile savages would come, in future, to receive instruction, religion, civilisation and trade with a new generation of Salesians unknown to Don Bosco. The concluding reflection was his own: 'The Salesians will draw the population of America to Jesus Christ through the gentleness of St Francis de Sales.' 'Civilisation will replace barbarism and many savages will come to be part of the flock of Jesus Christ.'¹²⁶

Another dream on the future of the Congregation but with special focus on fidelity to the Rule, was the one on 28 November 1884, where the devils met to decide the best way to destroy the Salesian Congregation. Various traps were considered: gluttony, love of riches, freedom or libertinism, acquiring learning for oneself and not on behalf of others. This final suggestion seemed to gain unanimous consent.¹²⁷

In the dream he had about the future of the Salesian Society on the night of 31 January 1885 and again on 1 February, creativity has the upper hand, day and night. It was a projection and planning in the present or for the future, for himself or for his successor. It came a few hours before the departure of the Salesians to America led by Bishop Cagliero. 'All throughout the day before' said Lemoyne, who had first heard the dreamer tell his dream '[Don Bosco] fell prey to much agitation and emotion, thinking about the departure of Bishop Cagliero and the missionaries. The following evening, ten of his sons had to begin their journey from Sampierdarena to Marseilles. His fatherly tenderness made him feel depressed and down.' The dream, similar to the one about the missions in 1883, had as its scenario this time a 'huge plain between Chile and Argentina' traversed by Salesian missionaries. Mysterious routes spread out from there with fantastic vehicles coming from existing houses in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, but then pressing on to the unknown countries beyond rivers, seas and lakes as far as 'Mesopotamia' real or ideal, and southern Africa. At a certain point, a huge table appeared with children flocking to it and singing and a great variety of men and women of various colours, kinds and attitudes. 'Each crowd that entered,' his 'interpreter friend' explained to Don Bosco, was from nations or parts of nations all to be converted by the missionaries.' Others of 'rough and strange' appearance, were 'Sons of Cain ... Belonging to Patagonia and southern Africa.' It was a vision of a potentially unlimited Salesian presence.¹²⁸

A very high mountain was the setting for one dream. Don Bosco told the Salesian Chapter on the evening of 2 July 1885, again concerning the spread of Salesian work around the world. From one high peak the 'Angel Arphaxad (China)' invited them to 'fight the Lord's battle and gather the peoples in his granaries.' At the foot of the mountain, people of many unknown languages gathered. The second scene was Africa, and the 'Angel of Cam' stood at the centre, proclaiming

126 C. ROMERO, *I sogni di don Bosco...*, pp. 83-93. The dream gave rise to many interpretations, adapted on the bases of the human and theological sciences, and also had political implications cf. *Don Bosco e Brasilia: profezia, realtà sociale e diritto*, ed. C. Semeraro. Padova, CEDAM 1990.

127 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 20 maggio 1884...*, pp. 28-31; cf. MB XVII 385-387.

128 *Documenti* XXIX 43-48; MB XVII 299-305.

salvation for the black continent. Finally, Don Bosco's imagination brought him to Australia and Oceania, 'various clusters of countless islands,' again with children calling out. It was an offer of various work spaces for a Congregation with a future full of promise. Don Bosco spelt out the conditions: 'That the Salesians do not allow themselves to be caught up in love of comfort.' 'If they do not give in to gluttony they will have long-lasting security.' They should also disseminate the *Bulletin* and expand the work for adult vocations.¹²⁹

On 17 July, Don Bosco was bothered in a dream by the invitation to open an improbable girls' oratory near the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, where he had arrived with Mamma Margaret and his brother Joseph.¹³⁰ In another, on 29 September, his ideal notion of the priest emerged strongly. He found himself walking towards Castelnuovo with an elderly priest. The conversation came around to priests in general and they agreed on a notion that Don Bosco never failed to propound in word and deed: 'Work, work, work! Here is the aim and the glory of priests, never to be tired of working. How many souls are thus saved! How many things there are to do for the glory of God! Oh, if the missionary were truly missionary, if the parish priest were truly parish priest, how many miracles of holiness would shine out everywhere? Was there a lack of priests? If every priest acted like a priest there would be enough.'¹³¹

We have mentioned the missionary dream he had at Sarriá on 9 April, devoutly and movingly recorded by his young secretary, Carlo Viglietti.¹³² As it was on the other occasion, the dream's observation point was near Castelnuovo and the onlookers were coadjutor Giuseppe Rossi and Fr Rua. A sea of children surrounded Don Bosco telling him: 'We have waited so long for you. Finally, you are among us and you will not run away from us.' Then, just as happened in the dream he had at ten years of age, a shepherdess invited him and the youngsters around him to look ahead and read. Valparaiso and Santiago passed before them. From that point, the number of future Salesians could be seen beyond mountains, hills and seas. The youngsters read: it was Peking [Beijing], and between Peking and Santiago Africa appeared, with dozens of Salesian houses, then Hong Kong, Calcutta, Madagascar. A condition for all this to happen needed to be fulfilled: that the Salesians 'constantly cultivate Mary's virtue' and also that they distinguish carefully between earthly and heavenly sciences.¹³³

On 3 July 1886, the secretary noted: Mary Help of Christians prepares the road the Salesians must take. From this month Don Bosco speaks only of China. He asked Festa to make a serious study of these places ... and today, unexpectedly, a letter arrived from China (Shanghai). He tells us that a large sanctuary has been built near Shanghai, dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, and the Chinese are going there on pilgrimage ... They make the Stations of the Cross and practices of piety and obtain extraordinary graces ... D. Bosco was moved to tears, and says that even if he can no longer go on, his sons will see what Mary has prepared for them in China.¹³⁴

On other occasions, real nightmares alternated with dreams: assaults of monsters, suddenly finding himself in the midst of a battle, seeing farmers disconsolate when faced with empty haylofts, seeing caskets full of riches whose contents flowed through the hands of the poor under their very eyes.¹³⁵ On 24 March 1887, Don Bosco commented: 'It is a dream' after telling of a

129 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Sogni*, ASC A 0170604, with a variety of explanations, a letter to Bishop Cagliari and repeated interpretations, then and decades later: MB XVII 643-647.

130 *Documenti* XXX 416-417.

131 MB XVII 383-384.

132 Cf. Chap. 33, § 5.

133 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di don Bosco. Dal 24 marzo 1885...*, pp. 84-87. E. Ceria mentions it in MB XVIII 72-75.

134 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 18 maggio 1886...*, pp. 20-21.

135 *Documenti* XXXII 427 and 483; MB XVIII 25, 149, 161, 169-170.

prediction of famine as punishment for the abuse of wine.¹³⁶ The secretary recalled one scary nightmare Don Bosco had on 1 April, a 'vision'. Terrifying things were related: a frightening rumbling noise, gradually increasing as if it was an earthquake, a fearful cry, inarticulate human voices coming from a large barrel with people ripped apart inside it, groans, cats meowing, dogs barking, words of warning, hell: '*Multi gloriabantur in terris et cremantur in igne.*' A voice then offered the preventive remedy: 'Hurry up and pay your debts with gold and silver,' that is 'with incessant prayer and frequent communion.' Don Bosco was out of breath, afraid and weeping, when he told me this dream' Viglietti informs us.¹³⁷

In a very short dream at the beginning of 1887, Our Lady reproached Don Bosco and priests in general for failing in their duty to warn the rich to make good use of their wealth and give their excess to the poor.¹³⁸ Some remnants of a familiar idea were provided by two other brief dreams, the first recounted on 24 October, the other toward the end of November 1887. In the first 'he sees Fr Cafasso, with whom he visited all the houses of the Congregation, including the ones in America; he sees everyone's situation and each individual's state.'¹³⁹ In the second, he recounted things that 'fearfully increased his responsibility before God.' 'I saw my way of advising young students and the trade boys, ways of preserving the virtue of chastity, the harm that befalls someone who violates this virtue – they seem to be alright then suddenly they die. Ah! To die because of that vice! It was a dream about just one thought, but what a splendid and great one! But I cannot go on at length, I do not have the strength to express this idea' he concluded.¹⁴⁰

We know that Don Bosco reminded Bishop Cagliero in a letter on 10 February 1885, of the fundamental realism and moral function of the dreams.¹⁴¹

7. Works begun, planned foreseen

Inactivity did not stop Don Bosco from playing a decisive role in beginning new works. In autumn 1887 he opened the way for Salesian entry into *Trent* in the Austro–Hungarian Empire, but in an area whose people, culture and language was Italian.¹⁴²

The first negotiations had begun in 1877 at the initiative of a certain Gambari, but they came to a standstill almost as soon as they began. The city saw a growing number of Salesian Cooperators and sympathisers, however. Negotiations resumed in 1885 at the initiative of a Cooperator, the Mayor, Paolo Oss Mazzurana. He went ahead in full agreement with Bishop Giovanni Della Bona and the Congregation of Charity. Management of an orphanage was on offer, situated in the Palazzo Crosina e Satori. It had 25 boys and 25 girls, some in internal workshops, others enrolled in schools around the city. At its session on 13 July 1885, at which Don Bosco presided, the Superior Chapter decided to request clarification of the proposal's concrete terms.¹⁴³ Naturally, the prior condition was for the girls to be relocated. After visiting the work, the Economist, Fr Sala, reported back to the Chapter at its meeting on 2 November 1885. The salient points for a likely agreement came out of this discussion. Don Bosco concluded: 'Let Fr Sala study the project. Frs

136 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 gennaio 1887...*, pp. 21-22.

137 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 gennaio 1887...*, pp. 22-28.

138 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 18-20; MB XVIII 361.

139 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 43-44; MB XVIII 463.

140 *Documenti* XXXVI 57; cf. MB XVIII 465.

141 E IV 314; cf. Chap. 30, § 4.1.

142 For the beginning of the Salesian expansion in the Austro-Hungarian empire with the first presence in Trent, see S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia AustroUngarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1868 ca.-1919)*. Rome, LAS 1997, pp. 94-107.

143 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 63v, session on 13 July 1885.

Sala, Durando and Lazzero will examine it and report back.¹⁴⁴ At its meeting on 1 December 1885, the text, in 16 points, was presented by Fr Durando, discussed and approved.¹⁴⁵ On 17 November 1885, Bishop Della Bona died and was succeeded by Bishop Eugenio Carlo Valussi on 7 June 1886. Once the proper contract was drawn up the Superior Chapter meeting on 15 September, at which Fr Rua presided, appointed Fr Pietro Furno (1858–1905) as Rector. He arrived in Trent on 15 October, along with the mature cleric Simone Visintainer (1852–1928). In 1893, the Salesians founded their very own work there, which became a rich source of vocations for the Lombard–Veneto Province, (1895, with Mose Veronesi as Provincial) and then the Veneto Province from 1925.

The beginning of Salesian activity in *London* came at the very end of Don Bosco's life. He was involved, just the same, to the extent his fading energy allowed. The work was to be established at Battersea, an area of London on the right bank of the Thames dependent at the time, on Southwark diocese. Bishop John Butt, who met Don Bosco at Sacred Heart in Rome 1887, advised him against going to such a poor area but he found Don Bosco adamant, so much so that the Bishop raised the question with Fr Rua, who spoke of it at the Chapter. Nevertheless, the Bishop warmly welcomed the Salesians on their arrival. Countess Stackpole supported the work from Rome, where she lived, along with the new eighty–five–year–old Archbishop Kirby, whom we have met in these pages. In 1874, the Countess had the parish of Battersea established at her own expense, with its church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But the priest assigned to it had left, and the Bishop had no more priests available to administer it. All he could do was to look on it as a simple chapel dependent on the nearest parish. The Countess appealed to Leo XIII, assuring him that Don Bosco would take care of the parish, and attached schools for boys and girls, so long as the land and building were completely handed over to him.¹⁴⁶ The Pope was in favour and Propaganda Fide passed on its *nulla osta* to the Bishop for handing over the former parish and responsibility for maintaining the school.¹⁴⁷

Don Bosco, who was ill, was not at the Superior Chapter meeting on 10 June 1887, which discussed accepting the work. However, replying to objections from the Economer, Fr Sala, Fr Rua defended the Superior's decision.¹⁴⁸ But before Salesians were sent there, Fr Dalmazzo was asked to make an exploratory visit. He arrived in London on 9 October, and wrote to Don Bosco in favour of the choice.¹⁴⁹ On 14 November, Irish Salesian Fr MacKiernan, Rector and parish priest, Englishman Fr Macey, assistant parish priest, and catechist, and coadjutor Rossaro in triennial vows, departed Turin for England. They were welcomed at the station on 16 November by a friendly young priest, the future Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne, and brought letters of presentation with them. Some of those remain: one to the Duke of Norfolk and one to the Italian Consul in London.

To the Duke, Don Bosco wrote: 'Certainly a work of this kind requires courage, especially in the great city of London. But God, who has helped us with other foundations, will also help us with this one and we hope for your Highness' support. The church has already been supplied with some furniture by some charitable citizens but there is still nothing for the priest teachers and their residence. It is for these early needs that I am asking your Highness to help and advise.'¹⁵⁰ For the Consul, he stressed the fact that the Salesians sent to the parish at Battersea would also be

144 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 86r-v, session on 2 November 1885.

145 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 88v-89v, session on 1 December 1885.

146 Text of the petition in MB XVIII 800-802.

147 Cf. W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics of growth...*, pp. 87-88.

148 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 99r, session on 10 June 1887; cf. W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics of growth...*, p. 91.

149 Cf. W. J. DICKSON, *The dynamics of growth...*, pp. 92-94.

150 Letter of 13 November 1887, E IV 385.

involved in 'seeing to the moral well-being of English and especially Italian youth living in the parish.'¹⁵¹

The Salesians were established at *Liège* in Belgium only when the large technical institute, the 'Orphelinat Saint-Jean-Berchman' was opened on 8 December 1891. However, this had its roots in an event four years earlier on 8 December 1887. The previous day, Don Bosco had received Bishop Victor-Joseph Doutreloux (1837-1901), Bishop of Liège in 1879. It was not the first time 'the bishop of the people and its children, the poor, workers and of fraternal encounter' had been in contact with Don Bosco. Like many other things in Belgium, he had been struck by reading d'Espinete's book. Since August 1883, he had been insisting, in person and through correspondence, on asking the Salesian Society to run the "Patronage des Apprentis" in Liège.¹⁵² On receiving a negative reply due to lack of personnel, the bishop followed up with another letter in which he announced he was coming to Rome in spring 1884 and would visit Don Bosco. This took place in May. Other letters followed, the last being on 17 May 1886, brought by lawyer Doreye. It was insistent and concrete and together with his final visit on 7 December 1887, was able to drag a 'Yes' from Don Bosco. On 8 December, Don Bosco dictated the following to Fr Viglietti: 'It pleases God and the Blessed Virgin Mary that the sons of St Francis de Sales will go to open a house in Liège in honour of the Blessed Sacrament.'¹⁵³ It was up to his successor, Fr Rua, and Fr Scaloni, the first Rector, to agree with the bishop, following Don Bosco's death, on the Salesian work in Belgium.

8. Final illness

In December, according to the secretary's note on the 2nd, Don Bosco's health began to give real cause for alarm: 'D. Bosco feels he will soon have to cease celebrating Mass. The poor man says so with great regret in a very soft voice. I have been helping him celebrate the Holy Sacrifice for three years every day and have noted how his strength has been constantly failing. Months ago he stopped turning around for the *Dominus vobiscum*. Now for a month at communion I have been distributing the Sacred Host for those hearing Mass. Nor does he have the strength to say the *Ave* and *Oremus* after Mass. I say them and he mentally accompanies me.'¹⁵⁴

The final illness unfolded in four stages: from 2-19 December, he got worse; from 20-29 December he was in danger of death; from 30 December 1887 to 19 January 1888, there were hopes of a recovery; from 21-31 January the inexorable final collapse. Because the *Salesian Bulletin* was a monthly magazine, it could not provide up-to-date and detailed news, however the January and February issues in 1888 gave essential and precise information on the second stage with the near certainty of the end in the final days in December and the renewed hopes over the first twenty days of January.¹⁵⁵ Secretary, Fr Viglietti, and lay Salesian Peter Enria, nurse, kept up detailed entries over the whole periods beginning with the early days of December until death. From these and information from the Superiors of the Congregation who were always around the dying man, a detailed *Diary of Don Bosco's illness* was put together for the April issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*.¹⁵⁶ It was a bare-bones narration, but filled with dramatic tension on how Don Bosco experienced his final illness and expectation of death with genuine humanity and deep faith.

151 Letter of 14 November 1887, MB XVIII 454-455.

152 For the first letter, 19 August 1883, and for others, cf. A. DRUART, *Les lettres de monseigneur Doutreloux à don Bosco*, RSS 2 (1983) 274-295.

153 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 65.

154 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 56-57.

155 Cf. BS 12 (1888) no. 1, January, pp. 6-7 and no. 2, February, pp. 14-15.

156 BS 12 (1888) no. 4, April, pp. 38-49.

It was something Don Bosco experienced, in the final seesawing of health, with an aura of mystical zeal and *'cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo,'* but with the same calm seriousness with which he had spoken to youngsters and adults about death and eternity. He experienced his illness and awaited death in prayer, offering up his suffering in the firm belief that it had to be accepted for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, his soul and the souls of others, and that eternal salvation is a serious matter. He believed this was the merciful gift of God and the result of human effort, and that along the journey to Calvary, the Mother of Jesus is present when called upon. He believed, too, that everyone's prayer, beginning with the people closest to him, was important. He spontaneously and gratefully accepted care, and medicines which would alleviate pain and bring about recovery if that were to be God's pleasure and if it could be of use to his neighbour. At any rate, suffering was accepted as a means of purification and salvation when therapeutic intervention did not succeed. The *Recommendation for myself* in the *Memorie dal 1841 al 1854-5-6* was an eloquent prelude to all his likely ultimate suffering in life.

From 1 December, Don Bosco was 'not at all well.'¹⁵⁷ From 6 December he ceased celebrating Mass, making an exception with great effort, on 11 December, Third Sunday in Advent. On 6 December, however, he succeeded in being present for the ceremony to farewell missionaries. 'He entered the sanctuary supported by Festa and myself while Fr Bonetti preached,' the secretary noted: at the end 'the missionaries filed past one by one to say goodbye and kiss D. Bosco's hand ... They were weeping, D. Bosco was weeping and the whole church was weeping.'¹⁵⁸

There were four priests and four coadjutors led by Fr Calcagno who were preparing to leave. They opened an oratory and trade workshops in the Ecuadorian capital. They took a letter with them for the Archbishop of Quito who, as we know, had been especially passionate in his request for them. 'I am handing over these beloved sons of mine in J. C. into your hands' Don Bosco wrote 'as if into the hands of a loving Father who wants to help them on every occasion with appropriate advice and spiritual and temporal aid. They are coming with all good will to correspond to Your Grace's expectations, by working with all their strength for the Christian education and instruction of poor and abandoned youth especially: and when their number is greater they will gladly devote themselves to the spiritual and moral good of tribes who perhaps need their work in order to know and follow the way to Heaven.'¹⁵⁹

Bishop Cagliero arrived from America on 7 December. Don Bosco embraced him and was deeply overcome with emotion, weeping copiously, 'weeping like a child.' In the evening there was an hour-long meeting with the Bishop of Liège, Bishop Doutreloux, who was present for the common meal the following day. As we have said, the 'no' on the evening of the 7th became a 'yes' the following day. Don Bosco was unable to celebrate Mass for the Immaculate Conception. 'He spent a sleepless night and was exhausted.'¹⁶⁰ On 15 December, the secretary summed this up: 'Since for about two weeks he has not felt strong enough to celebrate H. Mass, he has been at my Mass each day and received H. Communion.'¹⁶¹ 'D. Bosco has not been very well for some days. He finds it difficult to breathe and eats very little,' Fr Cerruti wrote.¹⁶²

157 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 58.

158 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 58-61; cf. *La partenza dei missionarii salesiani per l'Equatore e l'arrivo in Torino di Monsignor Cagliero*, BS 12 (1888) no. 1, January, pp. 7-9.

159 Letter of 6 December 1887, E IV 387. The Apostolic Vicariate of Mendez and Gualaquiza was created in 1893 and the first Vicar was Fr James Costamagna Costamagna, who was Provincial Argentina for 14 years.

160 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 62-69.

161 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 70.

162 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 15 December 1887, ASC F 3810410, original 2 pp.; "D. Bosco has been unwell for some days. Let us pray", he told Fr Cesare Cagliero the following day (ASC G 992, original 1 p.

An outing in the carriage with Fr Rua and the secretary on 16 December did not help. On 20 December, the secretary's entries indicate a noticeable worsening. Don Bosco 'can no longer walk,' 'he is taken around in a wheelchair and his breathing is laboured.' Nevertheless he asked to go out for his usual carriage ride. In the evening the doctor 'found him quite agitated.' Fr Ceruti was not optimistic in his correspondence the same day. 'This evening' he told Fr Rocca 'I will give our beloved D. Bosco your greetings and prayers, and those of your house. Unfortunately, he is getting worse. He is up for part of the day, or rather, sitting up, since he has to be moved in a wheelchair, but is disturbed by asthma attacks and lack of strength. Let us pray.' In the postscript he repeated: 'I recommend prayers and communions in the house of D. Bosco. Pray to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians. He is in bed and we are worried. I leave in sorrow seeing him in such a state. May God's will be done.'¹⁶³

On the evening of the 21st the doctor even predicted no more than four or five more days of life. But he ate 'jelly and sorbet' the secretary wrote, wanting the newspaper to be read to him and to see certified and insured letters,' meaning letters containing donations.¹⁶⁴ Dr Vignolo's calming words (he was Viglietti's uncle) that 'it is not a case to be too alarmed,' did not seem well-founded.¹⁶⁵ But this was belied on the difficult day that was Friday the 23rd, when it seemed he had begun his final agony. The chronicler had us live this hour by hour. Don Bosco was concerned about having someone other than his young secretary with him to assist him spiritually. 'I am off to eternity' he said and spoke openly and repeatedly of 'Holy oils' and 'Viaticum'. He insisted on asking that people pray for him, for a death 'in God's grace.' 'I want nothing else he said. Cardinal Alimonda came to see him: 'May I do God's holy will' Don Bosco told him. I have done all I could.' 'He wanted the Cardinal's blessing. They were both emotional and kissed and embraced one another.' At 5.00 p.m. Fr Giacomelli, his confessor, arrived. They were alone for three minutes. It was all done.¹⁶⁶

Christmas Eve was a day of heightened spirituality and pathos. At 7.30 a.m. he receive Viaticum from Bishop Cagliari: 'D. Bosco shone like an angel ... It was a solemn moment, only sobs could be heard.' At 10 p.m. he turned to Fr Viglietti, asking for another priest to be with him during the night as well: 'I fear I will not reach the morning' he told him. At 10.30 p.m. he entrusted his notebook with the final *Memorie* to his affectionate secretary, asking him to give it to Fr Bonetti. At 11.00 p.m. 'Bishop Cagliari came and administered the final anointing. He [Don Bosco] spoke only of eternity, gave advice, then slept.'¹⁶⁷ Fr Cerruti told Fr Rocca: 'This morning Bishop Cagliari solemnly administered Holy Viaticum to D. Bosco, who unfortunately is rapidly getting worse. However, this evening and this morning he could no longer be heard vomiting. If this returns it is only a matter of days. If it stops he could still last for part or all of 1888. This is what Fissore thinks who consulted with two other [doctors] and he will return before midday. However, Don Bosco does not put much store on his recovery. He asks insistently for the sacraments of the Church and wants all temporal matters to be settled. With this in mind we have had the notary here almost all day yesterday.' As a postscript he wrote: 'The consultation has just finished (11.00 am). We observe a notable improvement especially after vomiting stopped.'¹⁶⁸

For the first time, on Christmas Day *L'Unità Cattolica* gave *News on the serious illness of Fr John Bosco* and noted: 'Our eminent Cardinal Archbishop, who loves and reveres him as a saint,

163 Letter of 20 December 1887 with p.s. on 22 December, ASC F 3810411, original 2 pp.

164 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 71-75.

165 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, p. 75.

166 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 16 maggio 1887...*, pp. 75-78 e *Dal 23 dicembre 1887 al 31 gennaio 1888*, pp. 3-7.

167 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco, Dal 23 dicembre 1887...*, pp. 6-9.

168 Letter of 24 December 1887, ASC F 3810412, original 4 pp.

went to visit him and, moved to tears, blessed him.¹⁶⁹ On the same day they spoke of an avalanche of telegrams. One came from Rome with the Holy Father's blessing. Fr Cerruti said: 'D. Bosco's state continues to be worrying, though this morning Fissore found the beginning of an improvement. May God let it continue. He is peaceful and has kept his full awareness, but insists on soon having all the comforts of the Church. Yesterday, Bishop Cagliari administered the Holy oils and telegraphed the Pope – indeed Don Bosco himself wanted him to telegraph, asking the Pope for his apostolic blessing.'¹⁷⁰ On the 26th Cardinal Alimonda, who was leaving for Rome, came once more. Don Bosco assisted at Mass and received communion each day. Requests for information came from all sides, especially Rome, from the Cardinal and the Pope, while special prayers, public and private, were asked for his recovery.¹⁷¹

Beginning 26 December, Fr Rua gave the rectors information on the illness each day until 31 December, then on 2, 5, 18 January 1888.¹⁷² In the first such communique he confirmed what the newspapers said: Don Bosco was 'seriously ill' and told them of the course of the illness since 6 December, when Don Bosco had stopped celebrating Mass except for 11 December, the Third Sunday of Advent.¹⁷³ In the postscript to the next letter, he explained the illness in the categories of the day: 'As well as the cerebro–spinal decay' afflicting him 'for many years' there was another 'the doctors call cardio–pulmonary,'¹⁷⁴ then speaking of 'sensible improvement,'¹⁷⁵ or, more precisely, quoting *L'Unità Cattolica*, 'only relative' improvement, with 'the most recent information' being 'alarming once more.'¹⁷⁶

Some significant entries on the patient's essential lifestyle stand out over these days: 'D. Bosco often asks the doctors to tell him clearly about his state "*because I fear nothing; I am at peace and ready.*" 'On the 29th, fearing the final hour had come, he had Fr Rua and Bishop Cagliari called and gave them a fundamental command: 'Promise me you will love and support one another like brothers. Mary's help will not be lacking. Recommend frequent communion and devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Recommend my eternal salvation to everyone and pray.' Later he whispered: 'One needs to learn to live and to die, both.'¹⁷⁷

News on D. Bosco's illness given by the *Salesian Bulletin* provided information on the critical stage from 22 to 29 December, summing it up thus: 'No human hope of recovery and only divine kindness could reconstitute a physique destroyed by fifty years of tireless work, suffering and sacrifice for poor and dear young people. This is the cause of his illness. Citizens, the wealthy, the aristocracy, municipal; authorities in Turin, and other well– known individuals sought information on his condition. Various Piedmontese bishops visited him. Telegrams arrived from all over Italy and from abroad. Everywhere they were praying for his recovery and continue to hope.'¹⁷⁸

On the 29th, a journalist from *L'Unità Cattolica* recounted his visit to Don Bosco lying ill and was amazed at what he found. He had gone 'to the bedside where he lay seriously ill' but added: 'We say "serious" though it does not look so at first sight. His countenance has lost none of its habitual

169 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 299, domenica 25 December 1887, p. 1194.

170 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, 25 December 1887, ASC F 3810408, original 2 pp.

171 Cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dicembre 1887...*, pp. 9-15 and 19-20.

172 Cf. ASC A 4570310ss; see also FdR 3980 A10-B11; ASC A 0240602 ff.

173 Letter of 26 December 1887, ASC A 0240602.

174 Letter of 27 December 1887, ASC A 0240601.

175 Letter of 28 December 1887, ASC A 0240603.

176 Letter of 29 December 1887, ASC A 0240604.

177 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 16, 17, 19. It was the skill that Silvio Pellico said he had learned at the moment of a "truly exemplary and holy" death, before his mother and, a year later, his father: "They taught me first of all to live then to die" (Letter of 27 May 1838 to Countess Ottavia Masino di Mombello, *Epistolario di Silvio Pellico raccolto e pubblicato a cura di Guglielmo Stefani*. Florence, Successori Le Monnier 1990, p. 175).

178 *Notizie della malattia di D. Bosco*, BS 12 (1888) no. 1, January, pp. 6-7.

calm and serenity; his gaze, as usual, is kind, lively, filled with sweet expression; his colour id perfect as before. He is fully aware, perfect, we would say, sparkling. These are all in real contrast to he weakness which has left him exhausted and with a voice so weak it barely issues from his lips.¹⁷⁹

'The illness continues to be serious, slow and enduring' Fr Rua announced the following day,¹⁸⁰ news which contradicted on the last day of the year: 'Let us rejoice in the Lord' he began, informing readers he had been able to telegraph the Pope through Cardinal Alimonda in Rome: 'The doctors are now saying there is positive improvement., Then, he continued 'I can notify you that or beloved Father is somewhat better and the doctors are beginning to offer hopes of a recovery.' At 11.45 a.m., after consultation with doctors Fissore, Vignolo, Bestenti and Albertotti, the doctor looking after him, an optimistic bulletin was issued: 'The danger is over. Very noticeable improvement. The fever has ceased. No more vomitting. Liquid behind the right lung almost entirely disappeared. Hope for continued progress. Mind perfectly lucid.'¹⁸¹

The optimism was moderated two days later: 'Our beloved Father's serious illness is not getting worse but nevertheless improvement is very slow. Proximate danger of death averted.' Fr Rua let people know he would only write again when there was 'relevant new information to indicate.'¹⁸²

'Fortunately,' *L'Unità Cattolica* announced at the dawning of the new year 'the patient's condition has change much over the last two days. Yesterday the doctors again found a noticeable improvement and declared that there are no longer symptoms of the illness which justified fear of immediate danger of death, and indeed, this offers the well-founded hope he will get better.'¹⁸³ 'Since the 30th of last month [December]', repeating the *Salesian Bulletin's* news 'D. Bosco had begun to feel better.' 'In subsequent days the improvement has been more noticeable.' 'Currently D. Bosco is still in bed and it could also be that from now on he can spend time in his room.'¹⁸⁴

Count Colle died on 1 January. He added to the incalculable number of donations he had made over recent years with a large legacy of 400,000 francs [1,421,710 euro]. Fr Cerruti wrote to Fr Rocca: 'Above all I give you news of D. Bosco who continues to improve. Indeed, the doctors are saying the danger has passed. Please God it continues since we depend only on God and Mary Help of Christians.'¹⁸⁵

Hopes for recovery seemed revived over the first twenty days in January. On 5 January, Fr Rua gave some stunning information: 'Our beloved Father is getting better and better. He breathes more freely, more easily. Speech is clear and he can eat more comfortably. Doctors continue to give hope of convalescence soon and that he will soon be able to get out of bed. I will tell you in another letter of the day to be set aside for common thanksgiving, with a solemn ceremony and the singing of the *Te Deum*.'¹⁸⁶

On 7 January, the secretary noted: 'This evening, following the doctor's advice, we began giving D. Bosco and egg and coffee after some pieces of bread cut up. Before taking the food, he took off his biretta, made the sign of the cross and prayed, weeping. I was very much afraid the food might be bad for him, instead he kept everything down very well ... It was 6.00 p.m.. D. Bosco then said to me: Viglietti, ask Fr Lemoyne how to explain how someone who has been in bed for 21 days

179 *La nostra visita a D. Bosco*, "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 302, Thursday 29 December 1887, p. 1206.

180 Letter of 30 December 1887, ASC A 0240605.

181 Letter of 31 December 1887, ASC A 0240606.

182 Letter of 2 January 1888, ASC A 0240610.

183 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 1, Sunday 1 January 1888, p. 1.

184 *Notizie di D. Bosco*, BS 12 (1888) no. 2, February, pp. 14-15; cf. C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 20-29.

185 Letter of 2 January 1888, ASC F 3810414, original 3 pp.

186 Letter of 5 January 1888, ASC A 0240609.

almost without eating, out of his mind, etc., suddenly comes back to life, perceives everything, feels strong, healthy as if he had never been ill.¹⁸⁷

There is a record of a visit from the Duke of Norfolk on 8 January. The Duke spent about half an hour with Don Bosco. Almost by association of ideas the beggar in Don Bosco came to the fore once more. He told Fr Viglietti: 'Before his illness D. Bosco spent his last penny and was without any money during his illness, but noted that his orphans continued asking for bread before and after, therefore whoever wants to do some charity, let him do so because D. Bosco can neither come or go.'¹⁸⁸

Despite Dr Fissore's predictions, suggesting no more than two months of life left for Don Bosco, some reasonably good news was recorded for a number of days. 'D. Bosco continues to get better and we hope he can soon begin his convalescence' Fr Cerruti wrote on 10 January.¹⁸⁹ This morning he heard my Mass and received communion, the secretary noted on 11 and 15 January.¹⁹⁰ Given this context we can believe a letter in French to the Duke of Norfolk is genuine, either written or dictated by Don Bosco on 13 January, and which Fr Berto had a copy of. Don Bosco said his health was still precarious and he was still in bed, but he was concerned about liabilities of 250,000 francs [894,819 euro] which had accumulated over the years of work on the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome. He would feel very much relieved if the Duke could give him the aid that charity and availability allowed. In recompense, the donor could count on the prayers of his 250,000 orphans.¹⁹¹ Midway through the month *L'Unità Cattolica* offered the news that 'Bishop Cagliero, taking advantage of the noticeable improvement of the revered Don Bosco, went to Nice on the 4th of this month.'¹⁹² Some days the news continued to be good, in the *Salesian Bulletin* retrospectively and in real time from Fr Viglietti: 'Today D. Bosco received a visit from the Bishop of Malines in Belgium. (18 January)'. Fr Rua wrote: 'News of our beloved Father continues to be good. The doctors hope that if nothing happens to slow the progress he makes in convalescence, he could easily get up from bed next week.'¹⁹³

Fr Viglietti continued with his notes: 'Although slowly improving, D Bosco can now say that all he needs is some strength to get out of bed. He has no real pain. On the 15th he began to hear Mass each morning and receive communion from me. Today D. Bosco received a visit from the Bishop of Lari in India, Francesco Filippo (20 January).'¹⁹⁴ Fr Cerruti was no less optimistic on the 20th; 'D Bosco is getting better. On Monday he will start to get up.'¹⁹⁵

Instead, it was the beginning of the end. On 22 January, the chronicler wrote: 'D. Bosco had gone backwards a bit in the last two days' though still receiving visits from the Archbishops of Cologne, Treviri (22 January), and Paris (24).¹⁹⁶ Writing to Fr Barberis on the 24th, Fr Rua had to radically revise the expectations aroused by the circular he sent to rectors on 18 January, and invited him to recommend that rectors in his Province, which included the novitiate houses, 'have special prayers said, and exercised of piety' for Don Bosco. In fact, he wrote, 'Some new

187 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 23-24.

188 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 25-27.

189 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, ASC F 3810415, original 3 pp.

190 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 27-28.

191 E IV 407-408.

192 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 12, Sunday 15 January 1888, p. 46.

193 Letter of 18 January, ASC A 4570310.

194 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 27-29. "Francesco Filippo" was Bishop Jules François Philippe (1835-1904), titular bishop of Lares, coadjutor of the Vicar Apostolic of Visakhazigapatnam in India, of the Missionaries of St Francis de Sales of Annecy, founded in 1838 by Fr. Pierre Marie Mermier.

195 Letter to Fr L. Rocca, ASC F 3810416, original 2 pp.

196 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 29-32.

deterioration has been noted for some days.¹⁹⁷ The situation became irreversible over the days that followed: 'D. Bosco is very serious today.' 'He told Bishop Cagliero, who spoke to him about going to Rome, "Wait till after"' (25 January). 'He continues to be serious.' (26 January). He replied to the thought suggested to him by Fr Bonetti, that 'Jesus suffered on the cross without being able to move,' saying 'Yes, that is what I am always doing.'¹⁹⁸

The illness was in the final straight over the 27th and 28th. The chronicler wrote on the 28th: 'D. Bosco continues to grow worse. Yesterday, during the night and again this morning he was often quite delirious.' This morning he called out a good 20 times: *Mare! Mare!* [Piedmontese for Mother] and for some hours, his hands joined, he has been saying; "Oh Mary! Oh Mary!" He tells everyone we will see each other in Paradise. He told Fr Bonetti: "Tell the boys I will be waiting for them all in Paradise." This morning he received the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He has given everyone final reminders.' 'He often takes the crucifix and kisses it. He told Fr Bonetti: "When you speak or preach, insist on frequent communion and devotion to Our Blessed Lady." When given a picture of Our Lady Help of Christians he said "I have always placed all my trust in Mary help of Christians.'

The doctors had given up hope: 'They found him gravely ill and the only hope they leave is that the illness drags on, but there is no hope of saving him.'¹⁹⁹ On Sunday 29th *L'Unità Cattolica* combined *The Feast of St Francis de Sales and D. Bosco's health*: 'Venerable D. Bosco, in prey to the slow degeneration of the spinal cord, which can be seen from the alternating improvement and deterioration, had truly improved for some weeks. But over recent days things have worsened again and continue to do so, mainly respiratory symptoms and although this does not preclude hope for improvement, it does nevertheless give cause for concern, given its persistence.'²⁰⁰

The diagnosis was quickly confirmed by the facts. We see these in the chronicle: 'D. Bosco continues to be very ill,' 'he is always out of his senses.' (29 January). On the 30th it reported: 'Tonight he stopped talking, only groans.' 'Bishop Cagliero said the litany of the dying and gave him the blessing of Carmel at 10. He was completely out of it.'²⁰¹ Shortly before the final agony, however, he succeeded in articulating a prayer familiar to him and which he used to suggest to others: *Marie Mater gratiae/ dulcis parens clementiae /Tu nos ab hoste protege / et mortis hora suscipe*.²⁰² It was a prayer he had also written in the first circular on behalf of the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.²⁰³ 'At 1.45 the final agony began. Fr Rua and Bishop Cagliero said the prayer [of the dying]. The death rattle continued until 4.45 am. The Angelus bell in our Church rang. D. Bosco's breathing slowed. Half a minute later he was a corpse, he was in Paradise.'²⁰⁴ St Vincent de Paul had entered heaven at the same hour, 4.45, on 27 September 1660.

9. First celebration of the 'dies natalis' in freedom

197 Circ. on Don Bosco's last illness, FdR 3980 B12-C2.

198 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 29-33.

199 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 29-35.

200 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 24, Sunday 29 January 1888, p. 95.

201 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 35-40.

202 It would be sung on 22 June 1889 at the ceremony blessing Don Bosco's tomb. The musician, Gerolamo Maria Suttill, called it *D. Bosco's last prayer*. He knew him very well and was very much taken up by him: taken in at the Oratory in 1852 as a refugee from Venezia, then under the control of the Hapsburgs, he continued to be a guest there: Cf. BS 13 (1889) no. 8, August, pp. 99-100.

203 Cf. Chap. 14, § 5.4.

204 C. VIGLIETTI, *Cronaca di D. Bosco. Dal 23 dic. 1887...*, pp. 40-41.

The final goodbye was not traumatic, just the end of a long farewell begun years before with gradual detachments and absences, many stages of physical decline and worsening health. The final illness, too, with its deterioration of a body already weakened and failing, though lucid in spirit and keen in faith, and with its inextinguishable flame of charity, had prepared for the 'goodbye until we meet in Paradise' of Wednesday morning, 31 January. Don Bosco had always been near in strong and loving concern for his people. Everyone was sure he would be even closer and more caring from paradise where he had so often fixed a convincing appointment in the present and for the future. So, the sufferings of his long illness were to some extent forgotten in the transfiguration of someone so beloved, holy and protective, still very much present in the minds and imagination of Salesians, boys, Cooperators, friends, admirers. The report of events following his death, under the headlines *D. BOSCO !!!* in the *Salesian Bulletin*, interpreted their state of mind perfectly: 'We loved him as one loves the smile of childhood, the hopes of the young, the supports and good things of mature age. For us he was the greatest, noblest, affectionate, generous person you could possibly find on earth. There is no moment in our lives that does not bear some memory of his affection for us.'²⁰⁵

This was shown by the solid nature and quality of the people who crowded around the body laid out in the Church of St Francis de Sales and at the funeral rite in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. On the 31st, dressed in priestly vestments, the body was exposed in an armchair in the corridor behind his private chapel. The Salesians were able to visit him, followed by 'crowds of priests, large numbers of the upper class, devout matrons.' At 6.00 p.m. a large number of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were also admitted. The same day, Fr Rua announced the Father's death to Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators.²⁰⁶ The *Sorrowful announcement* was given to all the past pupils by the *Past Pupils of the Oratory Committee for demonstrations to Rev. D. Bosco*, signed by the President, Carlo Gastini and Secretary Matteo Alasia.²⁰⁷ Cardinal Alimonda sent a telegram and letter the same day from Genoa.

At 6.00 am on 1 February, the body was laid out in the Church of St Francis de Sales. A sorrowful and reverent, grateful and affectionate crowd of young people and adults, clergy and laity from every social class filed by throughout the whole day. 'It seemed as if the whole of Turin came to the Oratory.' "Let us go to D. Bosco!" they said to one another.' The Church of Mary Help of Christians was packed with people who had come to pray for the peace of his soul. At 9.00 p.m. all the boys from the Oratory said their night prayers before his body and the Rector, Fr Francesia, gave the traditional goodnight.

Lying in the bier left open so Salesians coming from a distance could see his face, the body was placed on the catafalque erected beneath the cupola in the Church of Mary Help of Christians on the morning of 2 February. The solemn funeral was celebrated at 9.30 a.m. by Bishop Cagliero. The funeral Mass he himself had composed in 1862 was sung. At 2.00 p.m. the coffin was closed and a glass ampule enclosed, with a scroll containing a brief biography of the deceased.²⁰⁸ The solemn funeral procession took place in the afternoon, attended by at least 100,000 people, very many parish priests, countless representatives of clergy and civil bodies in Italy and abroad, educational institutes and Catholic Associations, plus three bishops: Cagliero, Leto and Bertagna. The procession wound along the via Cottolengo, the Corsi Principe Oddone and Regina

205 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, p. 25: the entire news item, pp. 25-36; in folder. no. 4, April, pp.

38-51, *Diario della malattia di D. Bosco*, recalls Don Bosco's earthly days from 2 December to 31 January and *La tumulazione della salma a Valsalice*.

206 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, p. 28; *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*, pp. 1-3.

207 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, pp. 28-29.

208 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, pp. 32-33.

Margherita, via Ariosto. It was a triumphant cortege for 'a great man more alive than ever in the veneration of the multitude, the respect for his memory, the greatness of his institutions.'²⁰⁹ On return to the Church of Mary Help of Christians, Bishop Bertagna gave absolution to the body. Then the coffin was carried to the Church of St Francis de Sales to await burial.

' "What a beautiful celebration!" more than one person exclaimed' according to the chronicler 'and those who at first wondered at an exclamation of the kind also ended up saying "It was a beautiful celebration!" They repeated to one another the witty and loving words they had heard from D. Bosco's lips, told some of the dearest features of his life with a smile, a sense of contentment that is difficult to put into words. The time for sorrow was over. Everyone felt that D. Bosco was alive and not far away.'²¹⁰

Since 31 January, the Salesian Superiors had been trying to gain permission for Don Bosco's body to be buried in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. In fact, the fear was that bureaucratic difficulties would force him to be buried in the city cemetery. On the evening of the same day they met at 10.00 p.m. and with Bishop Cagliari present the Superior Chapter made a promise – as recorded in the minutes – 'that if Our lady gives us the grace to be able to bury D. Bosco beneath the Church of Mary Help of Christians or at least at our house at Valsalice, work would begin this year or as soon as possible to decorate his chapel.'²¹¹

Following requests, permission was given for Don Bosco to be buried beyond the city boundaries at the Salesian Study Centre at Valsalice. Work was quickly carried out to provide a grave site. On the afternoon of 4 February, at 5.30 p.m. the burial took place in extreme simplicity. The funeral carriage was followed by the carriage used to take Don Bosco for rides over his final months and was now occupied by Bishop Cagliari, Frs Bonetti and Sala. A crowd of more than a hundred clerics received them. At Valsalice, Bishop Cagliari repeated the funeral rites. Frs Cerruti and Lazzeri were with Fr Rua and the Superior General of the Daughters of Mary help of Christians, Mother Caterina Daghero. Bishop Cagliari and Fr Rua both spoke at the end.

It was the happy thought of the clerics at Valsalice with their Rector to send Fr Rua a message that same evening, professing their unconditional obedience to him as father and superior, indicated by Don Bosco himself as his successor.²¹²

By looking after Don Bosco's remains , Valsalice became even closer to Valdocco where the presence of the deceased was more real and tangible, alive through his original work: the Oratory, whose very stones spoke, along with the stones of the churches of Mary Help of Christians and St Francis de Sales, and through memories, spirit, grace, tied in with them and animating them ... but even more so through the people who represented him in real life, beginning with the serious yet simple, secure, modest, devout and trustworthy figure of his successor, his intimate 'vicar' always, and now Rector Major, Blessed Michael Rua.

209 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, p. 34.

210 BS 12 (1888) no. 3, March, p. 35.

211 *Capitolo Superiore*, session on 31 January 1888, fol. 109v.

212 BS 12 (1888) no. 4, April, pp. 50-51.

Chapter 35

SNAPSHOTS AND AN OVERVIEW

After a little less than a month's stay, Don Bosco left Paris on Saturday, 26 May 1883. There was a lengthy silence on the train that took him, with Fr Rua and Fr De Barruel to Dijon. Finally, the main speaker tells us, he broke the silence and said to Fr Rua: 'What an extraordinary thing! Do you remember the road that runs from Buttigliera to the Becchi? There on the right is a hill; on the hill is a small house; at the foot of the hill running down to the road is a field. This poor little house was where my mother and I lived. As a ten year old boy I took our two cows to pasture in that field. If all these gentlemen knew they were creating such a triumph around a poor little peasant boy from the Becchi, eh? Providence's joke.'¹

We have already looked at an overall view and evaluation of Don Bosco's personality in relation to both main periods of his life story, especially from the end of the 1840s and early years of the next decade, then from the 1870s and into the 1880s. But no less interesting were the many evaluative recollections beginning from 31 January 1888. Despite their immediacy, they often seem to be more objective than a number of the many reconstructions that followed, partly under the influence of a widespread hagiography which gave more value to interpretation – sometimes warped by particular unessential historical accounts – than the enormous amount of documentation available on an extraordinary daily existence full of facts and ideas; and also partly from times that were particularly favourable to 'celebratory' or rather, unfocused, contributions which had a tendency to see Don Bosco within the framework of the multiplicity of works that had eventuated – especially his two Religious Institutes of educators – in a century that was further away from his time in history and, in some respects, from his ideal influence.

Testimonies and counter-testimonies given during the processes of beatification and canonisation could also have significance, conditioned by the still modest and monotonous Salesian narrative tradition gradually being put together. There is no doubt that calmer reflections are possible today, encouraged by a more controlled detachment (which does not make it an outsider's view) from the distant present. Detached, but more faithful to it due to more information, better documentation, historiographical contributions and perspectives able to forewarn of or free people from futile and misleading mediations.

However, we should not distance ourselves from the origins which indelibly marked the life of Don Bosco and his work. They are the roots which, in various ways, determined the growth, expansion, results, the outlet for all the inner forces which helped Don Bosco navigate his way through life, often amid storms and reefs.

1. Substantial features immediately echoed in the press

Journalistic perceptions are necessarily bound by time and space but are often closer to reality than certain myths that build up outside time and history. In many instances, they are not simply locked into the fleeting moment. A number of newspapers, in fact, had been following events regarding Don Bosco for some years, either positively or negatively, even for decades, mixing

1 *Documenti XXV* 284.

familiar, daily news items with events that were more relevant such as his mission outreach, the battle over the secondary school at Valdocco, and some events with international repercussions such as his journeys to Paris, Frohsdorf and Sarriá (Barcelona).

Even the more celebratory emphases and the emotional impact they echoed derived from the feeling that here we are faced with a 'personality', a man, a priest, who was outwardly simple, modest, but of immense spiritual stature and notable individual characteristics. Testimony to these were concrete works already widespread in Italy and abroad: oratories and *patronages*, technical-vocational *schools* for apprentices, and initiatives on behalf of young workers, hospices, infant, elementary, lower and upper secondary classical and technical schools, print shops and publishers, migrant missions.

An historical sense is often missing from these recollections, weakened by the prevalence of dubious kinds of provincialism which ignore much of what was achieved or is being achieved elsewhere and in other historical contexts. This makes the dynamic and courageous operator less realistically the pioneer, precursor, the first or unique actor. It forgets what we have often reminded the reader of since the first chapters and which we have followed in this biographical reconstruction: in no area was Don Bosco the only and unique actor. There was no activity he put his hand to in which he did not involve others intensely – lay men and women, male and female religious – with major creativity and passion, extending himself into fields both within and beyond his attention as priest and educator: the abandoned, poor, blind, deaf mute, orphans, boys in correctional institutes etc.

L'Unità Cattolica in Turin stood out for its calm and balanced journalistic recall. It had always been a friend to Don Bosco and, more than all the other newspapers, provided information on developments of Salesian works and their founder and promoter. Its priest friend had died 'in the Lord's embrace, the Lord he had served faithfully over seventy-two years which were full, abounding in good works, one greater and holier than the other,' wrought 'with rare patience, invincible constancy.' 'In fact, his life is among the most providential and had many points of contact with outstanding lives, most of all the life of St Francis de Sales, the Saint he emulated with singular devotion in his meekness, kindness, unalterable calm and zeal against heresy.' He was 'the apostle for our times,' whose 'dominant thought' was 'the education of youth,' working 'tirelessly in every way, in spoken word, his writings, and with many and varied institutions.' 'It is said that Don Bosco had the gift of miracles and many tell of solid proof ... but it is certain that the greatest, most outstanding miracle is that he did so much with such apparently weak means.' It listed some of his most prodigious achievements: having moved 'public charity ... At a time of so much selfishness.' Amid so many wars against religious institutions, he had succeeded in 'founding a new Religious Order which had spread with incredible speed through Italy, France, Spain, the Americas, even as far as the savages of Patagonia.' He had enriched many dioceses with priests, had widely promoted good press, multiplied the number of churches, and in particular had built the Church of Mary Help of Christians, 'goal of numerous pilgrimages.' Poor as he was, he had left behind 'institutions costing tens of millions.' Nevertheless, the article emphasised, he 'lived in the world as someone foreign to the glory given him' and no calumny, jealousies, persecutions disturbed 'his peace of heart,' assisted by 'his continuous union with God and his deep humility.'²

L'Osservatore Cattolica from Milan, at the head of the intransigent group of Italian newspapers, was poor in information but made up for it with excessive rhetoric. It more or less openly intended to celebrate in Don Bosco the unbeaten champion of the 'Catholic ideal.' It began: 'Don Bosco. This simple name sums up an entire apostolate, perhaps the greatest and most wonderful of the

2 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 26, Wednesday 1 February 1888, p. 105. The newspaper dedicated the entire first two pages to Don Bosco the following day, full of information even in the weeks that followed, quoting, among other things, material from other newspapers.

19th century,' a 'giant of charity.' His death was 'a worldwide misfortune,' 'one of the most fateful events of 1888.' His was a name summed up 'a true Christian era.'³ The *Voce della Verità* in Rome, which had not been sympathetic to Don Bosco's mediation in the *exequatur* question under Mons. Francesco Nardi, now presented his life as a sequence of 'portents.'⁴

'A true Christian hero' *Il Diritto Cattolico* from Modena described him as, 'an athlete of the Faith, an outstanding Italian who spent his lengthy career in works of virtue and charity and performing prodigies, true miracles with God's help.' The *Berico* from Vincenza proclaimed him to be 'one of the splendid figures that the Catholic Religion made a giant of.' The *Pensiero Cattolico* from Genoa predicted: 'There will come a time ... when he is raised to the altars like so many other heroes of charity, especially St Vincent de Paul.' 'One does not weep; one prays and calls on the graves of saints,' *L'eco di Bergamo* pontificated.⁵

The other important Catholic daily in Turin, the *Corriere Nazionale*, highlighted Don Bosco's religious and pedagogical genius wholly aimed at the complete salvation of youth which both uplifted the people and brought social regeneration. 'A man endowed with keen faith and steady trust in Providence,' it said. 'This Italian priest is a modern example for all the clergy and Catholic laity of what to do and say on behalf of all of society through the education of youth.'⁶

The secular *Corriere della sera* spoke of 'a life wholly spent in works of religion and charity,' hoping that even 'in the liberal field, many men could be counted on who had Don Bosco's truly superior organisational mindset supported by the strength of will and perseverance that leads to accomplishing the most wonderful enterprises.'⁷ Moderate Catholic leaning papers in Barcelona, too, such as the *Correo Catalano*, the *Revista Popular*, the *Hormiga de Oro* and the *Diario de Barcelona*, who had been interested in Don Bosco for years before and after the unforgettable visit in 1886, painted a picture of a man with an extraordinary wealth of intuition and achievements and strongly marked characteristics: man of God, 'poor and obscure', 'virtuous' and revered, firm in faith, tenacious in confronting obstacles and persecutions while fulfilling his mission, 'a remarkable priest who was victorious in a hundred battles,' 'a new apostle of charity,' 'a new St Vincent de Paul,' 'father of the poor.' He was an apostle of the young, 'a son of the people and dedicated to the people,' entirely dedicated to 'the religious and social education of poor abandoned boys,' 'the poor children of the people, from off the streets and squares, abandoned and despised by everyone, even, very often, by their parents.' 'He built real palaces of charity for them in various parts of Europe, which brought together the most exquisite zeal for the religious education of their residents, perfecting them in a range of skills according to their vocation.'⁸ Among these, special care was taken of boys prepared for manual work in arts and trades workshops, members of the emerging 'working class'.⁹ 'Beloved, of God and men,' his grave was 'surrounded by glory,' 'a hope

3 "L'Osservatore Cattolico", 31 January-1 February 1888, no. 25, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 240-241.

4 "La Voce della Verità", 3 February 1888, no. 28, p. 2, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 241.

5 Citati da G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 241-242.

6 *Prodigi della carità*, "11 Corriere Nazionale", no. 31, 1 February 1888, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 239.

7 *Don Giovanni Bosco e le istituzioni salesiane*, "11 Corriere della sera", 1-2 February 1888, no. 32, quoted and commented on by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 235-236.

8 Cf. R. ALBERDI, *Resonancia de la muerte de don Bosco en Barcelona*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988) 211-214.

9 R. ALBERDI, *Resonancia de la muerte de don Bosco...*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988) 190.

for everyone.’ Don Bosco would certainly be regarded by posterity as one of the most distinguished figures of the century.’¹⁰

Don Bosco’s action on behalf of the working world was highlighted in Turin by the *Voce del operaio*, the Catholic Workers Association Weekly. ‘No man was more popular in Turin than Don Bosco,’ it said ‘and the worker cohort in particular had real veneration for this admirable priest. And rightly so, since Don Bosco dedicated his great soul, his tender heart as father and apostle, to the working class for more than fifty years.’¹¹ On 23 September 1888, the Workers Association group from the Great Mother of God parish met at Valsalice. The group’s parish priest and ecclesiastical assistant, Fr Giovanni Battista Piano (1842–1928) celebrated a Mass of suffrage. He had been a pupil at the Oratory from 1854–58 and, as we have indicated, spoke in the name of the Oratory past pupils who came along on the morning of 24 June 1887, to pay their traditional respects. In front of the tomb, with a past pupil’s devotion, he illustrated ‘in essential words how D. Bosco had been one of the few who really understood and knew how to resolve the difficult work issue, how he had always been the true friend, true benefactor of the worker.’ He also recommended remembering Don Bosco’s saying: ‘A sincere Catholic cannot be other than at least an honest worker, a loyal citizen, an unenviable father of a family.’¹²

2. Outlines of a profile taken from recollections at memorial services

Substantial elements for a profile also emerge from the many memorial services. Some in particular, came from personalities who had had more than a casual or superficial relationship with Don Bosco, people who knew his works and shared his thinking and who also had a personal view and evaluation of the secular world with which Don Bosco had interacted in a very timely way and with inexhaustible vitality, and in which they themselves continued to operate: Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda, Bishops Tommaso Reggio, Emiliano Manacorda and Donato Velluti Zati of the Dukes of San Clemente, notable personalities of the Catholic Movement, and Canon Giacinto Ballesio.

Genoan Cardinal *Gaetano Alimonda* (1818–91) was a leading journalist in his city already as a young priest: *L’Armonia* (1848) founded at the same time as the Turin *L’Armonia*, *Il Cattolica di Genova* (1849) then *Il Cattolica* (1851) the *Stendardo Cattolico* (1862). A collaborator of the *Annali Cattolici* between 1863 and 1866, in contrast to the Margotti approach, he encouraged Catholics to take part in political elections. A renowned preacher not only in Genoa, sometimes called the ‘Lacordaire of Italy’, the ‘new Bossuet’, he dealt with topics in a conservative way that was a constant comparison between the Catholic Faith and current ideologies and customs of the time.¹³

In the address he gave at the month’s mind, Alimonda went back to the four principal dimensions of his revered friend’s work.¹⁴ The *Salesian Bulletin*, maintained that ‘of all the funeral eulogies,’ Alimonda’s held ‘prime of place.’ ‘It was a masterpiece,’ since the speaker, ‘like an

10 Eulogy by the editor of the “Revista Popular” 34 (1888) 100, quoted by R. ALBERDI, *Resonancia de la muerte de don Bosco...*, “Salesianum” 50 (1988) 214.

11 *La morte di Don Bosco*, “La Voce dell’operaio”, no. 3, 5 February 1888, p. 2.

12 *Gli Operai Cattolici della Sezione Gran Madre di Dio in Torino e l’Unione del Coraggio Cattolico alla tomba di D. Bosco*, BS 12 (1888) no. 12, December, pp. 146-147: reproduced the article published by the *Voce dell’Operaio* in no. 19 1888.

13 Cf. G. ALIMONDA, *L’uomo sotto la legge del sovrannaturale*, 4 Vols. Genoa, tip. Della Gioventù 1866-1868; Expanded edition, 4 Vols., ibid. 1881; ID., *I problemi del secolo XIX*, 3 Vols. Genoa, tip. della Gioventù 1874-1876; the 1882-1883 edition, 4 Vols.: four series of conferences given in 1872, 1873, 1874, 1875 respectively, on *Problemi religiosi*, *Problemi paleontologici*, *Problemi filosofici*, *Problemi economici*: Cf. G. TUNINETTI, v. Alimonda, Gaetano, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia*, Vol. III, t. I. Casale Monferrato, Marietti. 984, pp. 12-13.

outstanding painter or sculptor, knew how to represent the holy man in all his beauty, a man who with his timely works stood like a giant astride the 19th century.¹⁵ This text was translated into other languages, with editions in Nice, Barcelona and Buenos Aires. According to the Cardinal's theses, Don Bosco, moved by charity, did an extraordinary work of evangelisation, indeed divinisation of his century. Four great passions marked his activity: education and pedagogy, 'nurturing the worker' and through this, creating a better social order with a solution to the 'worker question', promoting free and empathetic associations, extending civilisation to peoples still deprived of this in Africa, Asia, Oceania.

Don Bosco had accepted everything the new 'pedagogical discoveries' showed and had animated them with religious faith, offering youth very many and varied institutions and modes of growth and formation.¹⁶

In a century of progress in arts, trades, industries, he had taught people how to join work with prayer, using the most modern 'machines and equipment' in very many areas of work, since work was tied in with true freedom guaranteed by a religious meaning for life, honesty, happy use of leisure time, a harmony of 'all things beautiful, mystical, of science, poetry, musical instruments, singing.'¹⁷

Modern society believed it had found its security in forced organisations which culminated in the army and police force. This was based on a system of preventive repression. By contrast, Don Bosco had established large families of voluntary educators, male and female, flanked by the free association of Cooperators, all aimed at creating one great family around his youthful institutions, thanks to the 'preventive system' practised in them. 'So,' he commented, 'the movement created through the association proceeds in an orderly and tranquil fashion; it does not require violence or ruinous ways; literature, arts, industry at the heart of the Association all takes place and grows harmoniously.'¹⁸

Finally, Don Bosco had conceived of and achieved the leap of putting Salesians into Argentina, enabling itinerant peoples on the 'huge plains' of Patagonia to participate in the benefits of civilisation. Thus, by contrast with secular individuals who went among the indigenous peoples 'to sell goods or take away new materials,' Don Bosco had divinised 'the work of culture among hospitable races' to bring peace, salvation, freedom: he had not sent people 'to enslave [others] but to extend the kingdom of God, with fervent love for the Church and unshakeable fidelity to the Pope.'¹⁹

At the basis of it all shone 'the intimate and divine virtue which dominated the life of this Servant of God, his animating virtue, heavenly charity' that puts up with, believes, hopes, sustains everything.²⁰

A peer of Alimonda's, nobleman *Tomaso dei marchesi Reggio* (1818–1901), also active in journalistic initiatives in Genoa in the 1840s and 1850s and who then became Archbishop of Ventimiglia and Archbishop of Genoa, was beatified in 2000. He brought heightened activity with more visible social and political openness to youth and worker groups. With Fr Magnasco, future Archbishop of Genoa, Frs Frassinetti and Sturla, he had cooperated in founding the first Genoan

14 Cf. *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo. Ai funerali di trigesima nella chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino il 1° marzo 1888*. Discorso del cardinale arcivescovo Gaetano Alimonda. Torino, tip. salesiana 1888, 53 p.; *Funerali di trigesima nella Chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice*, BS 12 (1888) no. 5, May, pp. 56-58.

15 BS 12 (1888) no. 4, April, p. 52.

16 G. ALIMONDA, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo...*, pp. 9-20.

17 G. ALIMONDA, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo...*, pp. 21-29.

18 G. ALIMONDA, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo...*, pp. 29-43.

19 G. ALIMONDA, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo...*, pp. 43-50.

20 G. ALIMONDA, *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo...*, pp. 50-53.

Catholic Workers Society in 1854.²¹ As Bishop of Ventimiglia, a diocese which hosted the Salesian work at Vallecrosia in 1876, Bishop Reggio dared draw a comparison between Don Bosco's mission as priest of the young and workers, and Christ's redeeming work, as would also be done in 1933–34 in Pius XI's Jubilee Year of Redemption.²² 'Our Don Bosco', as he said in his funeral eulogy in his own cathedral 'was prefigured endless centuries ago in the image of Jesus the Redeemer, in his humility, meekness, his burning love for souls, in everything,' especially by imitating the Redeemer in saying: *sinite parvulus venire ad me*. 'These were Jesus' words and they describe everything about D. Bosco's character.'²³ It was the emerging feature the speaker underscored again when going back over the salient points in his life, beginning with his early apostolate in the prisons: 'This was D. Bosco, the friend of youth, saving society through youth, his mission.'²⁴ He then stressed the choice of prevention more than other speakers did. As he put it, the Piedmontese educator had not adhered to the dominant pedagogy. Based on the principle that 'what is bad must be repressed, not prevented' this left full freedom of expression to youthful instincts and inclinations, except for the censure that could then derive from the experience of evil,' 'Let the young person know evil early on and abhor it or correct himself through remorse' was the foundation of this principle. But with his strong and penetrating insight into the youthful mind, Don Bosco thought differently: 'Instead of allowing the youngster to know evil in all its ugliness, let his heart be uplifted in love for what is good. Let the youngster be guided by persuasion and the sweet attractiveness of loving-kindness, rather than by the steely violence of the law. Away with all mollycoddling. A strong body, vigorous mind are equally developed through honest recreation, music and gymnastics along with work either of mind or hands. Educate the heart more than anything else and wisely instil the sense of faith and holy fear of God.'²⁵

Emiliano Manacorda from Penango in the diocese of Casale Monferrato (1883–1909) became the Bishop of Fossano in 1871, and had a degree of influence on Don Bosco. He came to know him when still a young priest, and soon began work in the Roman Curia. He shared a passion with the founder of the Salesians – catechetics, and the belief that the social question and more specifically the worker question was essentially a moral issue which had to be resolved through charity. He did not hide the injustices resulting from progress, built on the 'inhumane, the cruel antisocial and anti-christian' exploitation of the worker, but he cringed at any suggestion of revolution, considering socialism to be the enemy of religion and society.²⁶ According to him, one could not contemplate 'D. Bosco's marvellous life' without twin reflections on the designs of Divine Providence who prepared his faithful servant for great works and 'the power and effectiveness of the charity that made D. Bosco an object of wonder and profound veneration for all classes and nations.' For this Bishop, Don Bosco was so contrary to 'revolution' that he was God's gift to humanity as a remedy for the intellectual aberrations' and 'the filth of the basest passions which the 19th century had become a receptacle of, a product of the 'rationalistic philosophy' of the preceding century. 'The modern world' he opined 'flees from looking to heaven, and hearts only know how to love what refers to the senses.'²⁷ In Manacorda's words, for Don Bosco the entire period of upbringing was 'a real workshop' in which all the faculties of mind and heart were

21 Cf. M. PANICO GIUFFRIDA, v. Reggio, Tomaso, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia*, Vol. III, t. 2. Casale Monferrato, Marietti 1984, pp. 705-706.

22 Cf. for example, the homily for the canonisation and address to the Salesian Family, on 1 and 3 April 1934 respectively, *Discorsi di Pio XI*, Italian edition edited by D. Bertetto, Vol. III. Turin, SEI 1961, pp. 84-87.

23 *Nelle solenni esequie di trigesima in suffragio del sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco, fondatore dei salesiani fatte per iniziativa del Rev.mo Capitolo della cattedrale di Ventimiglia il 1° marzo 1888. Orazione letta dal Vescovo Mons. Tommaso de' Marchesi Reggio*. S. Pierdarena, tip. e libr. salesiana 1888, p. 4.

24 T. REGGIO, *Nelle solenni esequie...*, pp. 7 and 22.

25 T. REGGIO, *Nelle solenni esequie...*, pp. 13-15.

26 Cf. G. GRISERI, v. *Manacorda, Emiliano*, in *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia*, Vol. III, t. 2..., pp. 497-498.

activated and harmoniously coordinated to the supreme end, 'the glory of God through the salvation of souls,' above all of the young.²⁸ His wide variety of initiatives stemmed from this. He did not get lost in all this but was in control of it all. 'D. Bosco was thought, and love' he said. So, no wonder that 'he had such an influence on the heart and spirit of whoever approached him, even the most reluctant and undisciplined.'²⁹ Bishop Manacorda recalled the major elements of his undertakings, his successes, the 'many imposing, costly works,' generated by charity 'amid countless obstacles.' Finally, he thanked God who had responded to 'apostasy and perversion of some of his people by giving humanity the gift of Fr John Bosco, the honour, apostle and athlete of the 19th century. He made use of all his strengths of nature and grace and took up the struggle against evil with zeal that is worthy of the greatest heroes: 'the marvel that was his whole life.'³⁰

More intimist in style was the eloquent biographical portrait drawn by Florentine Bishop Donato Velluti Zati dei Duchi di S. Clemente (1845–1927), Auxiliary bishop of Florence, at the month's mind celebrated in the Filippini church on 3 March 1888. The Pontifical Mass was celebrated by the Bishop of Arezzo, Giuseppe Giusti. Don Bosco was 'the outstanding apostle of the young and of childhood, emulating St Vincent de Paul and Giordano Emiliani, Joseph Calanz, de la Salle in our century, the holy priest formed according to God's heart, the founder of the institute placed under the patronage of St Francis de Sales.'³¹ The speaker felt 'lost' faced with the immense daily work of this man' and the 'barely credible works ... of a priest who was a great benefactor of humankind.'³² He then went on to list developments in his life, dwelling especially on the beginnings as an apostle in the prisons, and the early Oratory.³³ He concluded by attempting a spiritual profile in which he hinted at the 'many extraordinary deeds, marvels, which would need to be submitted to the Church's judgement. He preferred to identify the 'two miracles' of Don Bosco in what he had done and been. There were 'all the houses, all the oratories, all the thousands of children saved, the huge amounts of money collected for charity,' and finally, 'Don Bosco's entire life' with its qualities and solid virtues.³⁴ His judgement on Don Bosco the educator? 'He was incomparable in the art of educating, an enemy of too much and too little, like his heavenly Patron. He guided [youngsters] along the middle way which alone leads to virtue. He thought big, had a magnanimous heart and was an enemy of the pedantry of those who love things to be always regulated by the clock and compass.'³⁵

Very much within the Salesian ambit was the funeral eulogy preached by an Oratory past pupil, Canon *Giacinto Balesio* (1842–1917), Provost and Vicar Forane of Moncalieri; he spoke as part of the memorial service celebrated in the Church of Mary Help of Christians on 8 March 1888. With great emotion he described the image of Don Bosco as *paterfamilias* of the 'house attached' at Valdocco where the speaker, a peer of St Dominic Savio, spent the happy years of his adolescence as a student.³⁶ Don Bosco had been 'the man who thought, loved, feared and hoped, spoke and worked, made every effort and sacrifice on behalf of his boys, given him by heaven.'³⁷ 'What history cannot fully tell,' he explained 'what it will not succeed in understanding well, is the

27 *Elogio funebre nei solenni funerali di trigesima celebrati il 1 ° Marzo 1888 in suffragio del compianto sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco fondatore dei Salesiani letto nella parrocchia del SS. Cuore di Gesù di Roma da S. E. Rev.ma Mons. Emiliano Manacorda vescovo di Fossano.* Rome, Tip. A. Befani 1888, pp. 7-9.

28 E. MANACORDA, *Elogio funebre...*, pp. 10-14.

29 E. MANACORDA, *Elogio funebre...*, pp. 20-21.

30 E. MANACORDA, *Elogio funebre...*, p. 27.

31 D. VELLUTI SAN CLEMENTE, *D. Giovanni Bosco. Parole dette nella Chiesa dei Padri dell'Oratorio di Firenze.* Firenze, Libr. Salesiana 1888, p. 9.

32 D. VELLUTI SAN CLEMENTE, *D. Giovanni Bosco...*, pp. 11-12.

33 D. VELLUTI SAN CLEMENTE, *D. Giovanni Bosco...*, pp. 12-32.

34 D. VELLUTI SAN CLEMENTE, *D. Giovanni Bosco...*, pp. 38-42.

35 D. VELLUTI SAN CLEMENTE, *D. Giovanni Bosco...*, p. 40.

36 BS 12 (1888) no. 5, May, pp. 59-60.

intimate side of his life, his constant, calm, kind, invincible, heroic sacrifice; his study and great love for his boys, the trust, respect, reverence and affection he inspired in us; the great authority, opinion of holiness and learning we had of him, regarding an ideal type of moral perfection.³⁸ He continued: 'This is how D. Bosco governed his, indeed our, beloved Oratory, with the holy fear of God, with love, the edification of good example.'³⁹ He then added: 'Cheerfulness was woven in with religious piety, study and work ... D. Bosco was its soul. His uniform was *Servite Domino in laetitia*'⁴⁰ 'So who is Don Bosco? D. Bosco among us was the Man of God, the man of good for everyone but especially for the children of the people, and we could well say that *pauperes evangelizantur*.' 'For us he was a teacher and guide in loving young people and leading them to what is good. For us he was the example of truly Christian kindness. In his way of governing us he did away with artificial formality and rigour which puts a gap between the one who commands and the one who obeys.' 'Loving and expansive, he exercised authority by inspiring respect, confidence and love.'⁴¹

3. Official documentation during the stages leading up to the canonisation

The term 'saint' was being used from the day Don Bosco died. The *Corriere Nazionale* in Turin picked up on the words used by the people as they filed past his body, and drew the inference: 'All believers will come to his graveside because that grave will become an altar.'⁴² Even Bishop Tomaso Reggio was asking himself a month later: was he offering a 'gloomy word' in his cathedral or a 'panegyric on a saint'? 'D Bosco is in heaven' he replied. "He is experiencing eternal glory living for his children and is an imperishable example for us."⁴³ And when he sought to discover where his hero drew 'so much virtue and power' from to achieve his countless works for good, he found the roots in a deep interior life wrapped, though it was, in simplicity. He had intuited this when he first saw him and heard him speak. 'Small in stature, his appearance reminded you he was a son of the peasant class, of simple, open ways of working. His gaze was shrewd, his word calm and thoughtful but pleasant, always worth something. It revealed an upright man, a pious soul, the priest of J. Christ. As priest of Jesus Christ, he knew everything about him and loved him and he knew and loved creatures in him.' Then he added a special comment – similar to the one expressed by Bishop Velluti Zati regarding the miraculous deeds attributed to Don Bosco – and concluded with a prophetic canonisation: 'If I were to say nothing else about his life, the fact is that sometimes even extraordinary gifts of God do not necessarily make saints. Even if the small things may not always reveal something extraordinary, his priestly life was exemplary, active and passionate: seventy–three years, I would say, spent entirely in the love of God and of souls! There is no problem here: D. Bosco was a saint. And what can saints not do! All of us here admired the saint. Yes, that is what it looked like to us when he spoke words to us in this very place which memory will never forget. I still seem to hear that word of his now, so alive, so incisive and inspired!'⁴⁴ 'My Children, today we have honoured the memory of a great man and tomorrow we

37 G. BALLELIO, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco nel suo primo oratorio di Torino...* Torino, Tip. salesiana 1888, pp. 6-7.

38 G. BALLELIO, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco...*, p. 9.

39 G. BALLELIO, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco...*, p. 12.

40 G. BALLELIO, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco...*, p. 14.

41 G. BALLELIO, *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco...*, pp. 19, 21.

42 *Prodigi della carità*, "Il Corriere Nazionale", no. 31, 1 February 1888, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 239.

43 T. REGGIO, *Nelle solenni esequie...*, pp. 3-4.

44 T. REGGIO, *Nelle solenni esequie...*, pp. 23-24; cf. also E. MANACORDA, *Elogio funebre...*, pp. 3-4.

will erect a church to a great saint' were also the concluding words of the Bishop of Barcelona at the memorial service in the Church of Our Lady of Bethlehem on the afternoon of 5 March 1888.⁴⁵

If not sanctity, less prejudiced members of the secular world certainly recognised at least a special moral superiority of religious origins. While not sharing the 'ascetically based system' practised in his 'philanthropic school,' the Milan *L'Italia*, run by Republican-leaning Dario Papa, recognised that Don Bosco had been 'a superior man, iron-willed and of first rate energy, and a profound, broad mind.'⁴⁶ *La Nazione* in Florence made a similar judgement, and with similar reservations: 'We might disagree with him regarding his educational methods, but we cannot deny our admiration for him.' 'With his institutes, the boys he took in and his charity of all kinds, he demonstrated what the iron will of a Catholic priest joined with virtue and the true charity of the Gospel can do.'⁴⁷

It was taken for granted that in the Catholic and Salesian world close to Don Bosco there would be an immediate move to open the Diocesan Information Process (1890–97) as soon as possible. This precedes the cause for beatification and canonisation.⁴⁸

The introduction of the cause in Rome saw the beginning of a series of official documents throughout the basic stages, which described the Venerable Servant of God in summary form. These were the three stages of Servant of God (heroic virtue), Beatification, Canonisation.

It began with a decree signed by Pius X on 24 July 1907, establishing the commission to introduce the cause.⁴⁹ According to the practice at the time, this attributed the term 'Venerable' to the Servant of God.

Twenty years later, at the conclusion of a journey which had its tough moments, following on from the preparatory Commission on 20 June 1925 and two other preparatory events on 20 July and 14 December 1926, the Congregation of Rites, on 8 February 1927, and in the presence of Pius XI, expressed its unanimous opinion in favour of Don Bosco's heroic virtue, approved by the Pope on 20 February.⁵⁰ The public reading of the decree relating to this took place on 20 July.⁵¹

The decree approving the two miracles for beatification followed on 17 March 1929.⁵² After the Congregation of Cardinals, in the presence of Pius XI, had voted on 9 April in favour of proceeding securely with the solemn beatification, the Pontiff gave his solemn *ex cathedra* approval on Sunday 21 April, ordering that the decree be made public⁵³ and that the Apostolic Letter in the form of a Brief be sent out regarding the beatification being celebrated as soon as possible in the Vatican Basilica.⁵⁴ The rite took place on Sunday, 2 June.

In the final stages of the Apostolic Process, the decree of approval for the two miracles required for canonisation was issued on 19 November 1933.⁵⁵ Two weeks later, on 3 December, the *de toto* decree was issued declaring that the public proclamation could safely go ahead.⁵⁶ On 1 April 1934,

45 BS 12 (1888) no. 5, May, p. 64; R. ALBERDI, *Resonancia de la muerte de don Bosco...*, "Salesianum" 50 (1988) 208-210.

46 *Particolari sulla vita di don Bosco*, "L'Italia", no. 32, 1-2 February, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 235.

47 "La Nazione", 2 February 1888, quoted by "Unità Cattolica", no. 28, Friday 3 February 1888, p. 110.

48 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. III..., pp. 61-110.

49 AAS 41 (1908) 641-648.

50 P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. III..., pp. 188-205.

51 AAS 19 (1927) 150-153.

52 AAS 21 (1929) 165-167.

53 AAS 21 (1929) 195-197.

54 AAS 21 (1929) 313-318.

55 AAS 26 (1934) 31-34.

56 AAS 26 (1934) 68-71.

Easter Sunday, the Pope, speaking *ex cathedra* before Mass, declared Don Bosco a Saint, proposing him for the veneration of and imitation by the Church. In his homily during Mass he outlined for the faithful the principal virtues of his life.⁵⁷

The long and rigorous process – with moments of particular severity which are occasionally recognised in the official documents themselves – concluded with the ‘Litterae Decretales’ *Geminata Laetitia*, dated 1 April 1934. They reconstructed the entire journey that had led to adding St John Bosco to the host of Saints in the Catholic Church and authoritatively proclaiming him as such before the Universal Church.⁵⁸

The documents regarding the normal biographical elements are repetitive, but differed in their development and in what they emphasised.

Obviously, they are to be evaluated according to the values and limitations of the historiography of the day, which they reflect. Information and related interpretations and evaluations were taken for the most part from documentation assembled by Fr John Baptist Lemoyne, and which was partly reflected in the first nine volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs*⁵⁹ and summed up in the two volumes of the *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco* (Life of the Venerable Servant of God, John Bosco) compiled by the same author, appearing in 1911 and 1913.⁶⁰ Apart from the occasional emphatic tones – more so in the ‘Litterae Decretales’ which concluded the Process – the documents belonging to the Process are characterised by a notable moderation in choice of content, and great discretion in evaluation regarding the reference literature, certainly evident in the tendency to highlight Don Bosco’s outstanding role within the Church and society of the 19th century. At any rate, the discourse indulges much less in the extraordinary and laudatory than does certain lazy literature of Salesian origin of yesteryear, and even occasionally of today. Without a doubt, minus the obsessive and unilateral forms of certain productions and their comments, they are based on fragile historical foundations which came to light close to and during the first centenary of Don Bosco’s death.⁶¹

The best developed document, replete with information, is obviously the concluding one, the ‘Litterae Decretales’ on 1 April 1934. But the most significant one concluding the difficult Process appears to be the summary decree on Don Bosco’s heroic virtue, issued on 8 February 1927 and repeated in the address of Pius XI on 20 July, when it was read out publicly. In affirming the high standard of life of the candidate for canonisation, in fact, the Pope’s words were the result of the verification of outstanding Christian and human maturity which consisted of the constant practice of faith, hope and charity, guaranteed by solid values of temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence and other virtues associated with or stemming from them. His was a life willed by God in realising the gifts of nature and grace totally oriented to God’s greater glory and the good of his neighbour.

Clearly, the decree presumed that the many ‘imputations’ [objections] presented in Don Bosco’s regard during the Apostolic Process, were overcome. Sometimes with a resolve and tenacity that

57 *In sollemni canonizatione beati Ioannis Bosco*, AAS 26 (1934) 217-221.

58 AAS 27 (1935) 281-295.

59 G. B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie biografiche di don Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 1-5, 1898-1905... *del venerabile servo di Dio don Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. 6-9, 1907-1917. Between 1930 and the canonisation of Don Bosco, which took place on 1 April 1924, Volumes 11-14 were made public, still in extra-commercial editions; from 1834 to 1838 Volumes 15-19 followed and in 1939 the tenth Volume

60 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. III..., pp. 111-116.

61 Cf. For example G. CERONETTI, *Elementi per una Antiagiografia (don Bosco)*, in ID., *Albergo Italia*. Torino, G. Einaudi Editore 1985, pp. 122-133; S. QUINZIO, *Domande sulla santità. Don Bosco, Cafasso, Cottolengo*. Torino, Edizioni Gruppo Abele 1976; M. L. STRANIERO, *Don Bosco rivelato*. Milano, Camunia 1987; not to mention the myriad of celebrations, apotheoses with a poor critical sense which will be discussed later: cf. § 5 and 6. Nevertheless, as has been remarked on during this study and in the bibliography, it also gave impetus to a considerable amount of research and studies of notable value.

was not merely ritual. 'This man' he affirmed 'engaged in arduous undertakings subject to not a few difficulties. He worked among young people and adults of very different characters, never deviated from exercising Christian virtues, and indeed achieved the highest degree in them as was recognised and defined after severe canonical discussions.'⁶²Pius XI alluded to this not only when he accepted the unanimous recognition by the Congregation of Rites that Don Bosco had practised all Christian virtues to a high degree, but also when he discreetly referred to the not always peaceful serious examinations carried out in the preceding years by witnesses, consultors and commission members. He divided into two categories men who had appeared like meteors in history: those who 'flash past, causing more terror than benefit,' 'like a rod and whip to castigate peoples and sovereigns'; and to the contrary, others, 'greater because they are greater in good, great in love of humanity' who 'pass through and arouse true admiration, an admiration filled with sympathy, acknowledgement, blessing, just like there is for the Redeemer of mankind, the Man-God who passed through, blessing and being blessed.' 'The Venerable Don Bosco' (he continued, suggesting his own admiration linked to indelible personal memories) 'belongs to this category of men, chosen from out of all humankind, those colossi of great charity. His figure can be easily reconstructed if we replace the detailed and rigorous analysis of his virtues from the earlier lengthy and repeated discussions, with the summary which brings it all together and reconstitutes the beautiful and grand figure out of all the bare lines.'⁶³

It seems the right moment, therefore, to bring together the features emerging from this figure, built up over 25 years of 'detailed and rigorous' analysis and which became even more persuasive when seen through the controversies already known to whoever is familiar with his biography. These controversies concerned his exorbitant activism, the apparently limited nature of his prayer life, the preoccupation with finding money, the tight and astute administration of it to the seeming disadvantage of justice, his exploitation of extraordinary but at times ambiguous deeds, his troubled relationships with Archbishops Riccardi di Netro and Gastaldi, his stubborn nature, his carelessness in forming personnel who were often inadequate for the delicate mission of education because of their youthfulness

The documents assume all these different debates, and although they do not explicitly reflect them, they are certainly the result of them. In any case, they paint an exemplary figure for the Church and the world – as the Congregation of Rites ended up seeing him – which at the same time tends to achieve the greatest degree of fidelity possible to the historical reality. Certain features emerge relating to Don Bosco, the core of his work, (youth, the structures he put in place for them, his preventive style of activity) and finally the vision of life which was the horizon for all of this.

Highlighted above all were his humble origins, the persistent lack of means, the chief difficulties and contradictions which were a cross but also an opportunity to display his virtue through his tireless effort.⁶⁴ The Gospel image of the 'mustard seed' that becomes a tree (Mt 13: 31–32, Mk 4: 31–32) recurred often.⁶⁵ 'Over such a troubled period shaken by agitation from many individuals teeming with desire for novelty, and with many persecutions of the Church, Blessed John Bosco, among other men and women of holy life raised up by God, arose truly *ut gigas ad currendam viam*,' (Ps 18;6)⁶⁶ creating works of exceptional value for the earthly and human salvation of youth and their personal and social growth. He sought help from everywhere to guarantee the

62 AAS 21 (1929) 196; cf. A summary picture of these in AAS 21 (1929) 316.

63 *Discorsi di Pio XI* I 677.

64 AAS 41 (1908) 646; AAS 19 (1927) 150, 151; AAS 21 (1929) 166, 196; AAS 26 (1934) 32 and 68-69; AAS 27 (1935) 282 and 283.

65 AAS 19 (1927) 150; AAS 26 (1934) 31.

66 AAS 26 (1934) 32.

functionality and vitality of these works.⁶⁷ However, it was also made clear, perhaps with reference to certain criticism, that Don Bosco 'frankly revealed necessities and urgent needs to those with possessions to encourage their generosity, though without ever rendering their willingness less free through indiscreet requests.'⁶⁸

The documents noted the enormous breadth and greatness of his activity and works, beginning with the initial oratory up to the courageous adventure of the missions abroad:⁶⁹ 'an activity carried out with huge efforts, discomforts, journeys which are evidence of a busy, active and arduous life,'⁷⁰ 'a magnificent work of Christian education which spread throughout the world over a short period and continues to grow vigorously.'⁷¹

There were often remarks of equal measure concerning Don Bosco's special human qualities and the inner resources of grace from on high.⁷² From childhood he appeared to be extraordinarily gifted in human terms,⁷³ gifts cultivated above all by an exceptional mother.⁷⁴ His precocious and profound rootedness in God made of him a priest constantly inspired not by fame and gain but only by faith made active through charity, aimed at promoting 'the glory of God and the salvation of souls.'⁷⁵ The religious source was almost tangible to whoever had been able to admire his profound interiority up close.

'Don Bosco with God,' 'Don Bosco's union with God' were the most frequent kinds of statements used to describe this. He had been 'so outstanding in his spirit of prayer that his mind was constantly united with God, although he might have seemed distracted by a multiplicity of affairs.'⁷⁶ Already in the beginning at Valdocco, the documents stated, 'he was on fire with that divine flame of charity which, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, led him to translate into action the works prefigured in that incipient oratory.'⁷⁷ 'The spirit of the Lord was in him.'⁷⁸

It is remarkable that by contrast with the then current discussions and even some emphases given by Pius XI, only two of the official documents made any mention of the *gratiae gratis datae*: the extraordinary as expressed through predictions, reading consciences, healings, visions and miracles.⁷⁹ It is especially amazing that only one indication ('*ut fertur*') was made to the much publicised dream at nine/ten years of age.⁸⁰ Instead, the supernatural in its precise theological significance was placed within the context of the marvellous things he did and the undoubtedly heroic virtues he practised. Pius XI obviously took this perspective: 'In the life of the Servant of God,' he noted 'the supernatural had almost become the natural, the extraordinary had almost become the ordinary.' 'Every year, every moment of his life was a miracle, a series of miracles.' 'When one observes such an immense harvest of good, one asks oneself: how could all this have happened? And the answer can only be this: it is the grace of God, the hand of God Almighty that arranged all this.'⁸¹

67 AAS 21 (1929) 196.

68 AAS 19 (1927) 151.

69 AAS 41 (1908) 646; AAS 21 (1929) 166 and 316; AAS 26 (1934) 70.

70 AAS 19 (1927) 151.

71 AAS 26 (1934) 31.

72 AAS 21 (1929) 165-166.

73 AAS 19 (1927) 151; AAS 21 (1929) 313; 27 (1935) 282.

74 AAS 41 (1908) 642; AAS 21 (1929) 313, 315; AAS 26 (1934) 68; 27 (1935) 282, 283.

75 AAS 21 (1929) 195 and 316.

76 AAS 26 (1934) 70.

77 AAS 26 (1934) 32.

78 AAS 21 (1929) 314.

79 Cf. AAS 21 (1929) 166; AAS 27 (1935) 288.

80 AAS 27 (1935) 283.

81 *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 36-40.

Don Bosco's familiarity with religious reality, finally, found particular expression in three great devotions, sign of an open and frank Catholicity understood in the context of both Pius IX's and Pius XI's times: Christ the Saviour and Redeemer, the Eucharist: the Virgin Mother Help of Christians; the Church and the Pope.⁸²

At the centre of the documents' attention and in the footsteps of famous predecessors like Saints 'Joseph Calasanza, Vincent de Paul, John Baptist de la Salle and others similar'⁸³ was Don Bosco's firm will amid countless difficulties, to dedicate himself totally to the young above all, the poor who lacked anyone to guide them, and to whatever concerned them. This, of course, also came through in every moment and expression of our biography. Under the regime of God's love, Don Bosco gave his all in his radical and heroic dedication, including to the material and earthly good of the young.⁸⁴

For this reason, his work, considered with absolute priority in an intra-ecclesial perspective as an instrument producing 'eternal salvation', was considered remarkable also for its strong social value. 'In fact,' as the *de tuto* decree for canonisation noted emphatically 'this far-seeing man, inspired by God, had foreseen how decidedly important it was for the preservation of society from impending ruin to lead young people, especially abandoned ones, on the path to salvation. In realising this work which his generous soul carried out so energetically, there is no doubt he occupies prime of place among the educators of Christian youth in our time.'⁸⁵

The decree began from a completely negative view of the 19th century in which, as it states, 'the fruits of what had been sown widely in the preceding century came to maturity, to the harm of the Church in Italy in particular.' By the mercy of God, however, it had been opposed by men of outstanding holiness. 'Among them the Blessed John Bosco, who stood out for the nobility of his soul and the greatness of his enterprise. He pointed the way to salvation through tough past times and stood up like a milestone in the last century.'⁸⁶ Similar concepts, referring to the errors of heretics and innovations and the sophisms of men far from the Faith were expressed in the 'Litterae Decretales'.⁸⁷ They aimed at highlighting, in evident dependence on Pius XI's addresses, the modern nature of the saint's initiatives. 'A careful observer of the nature and mentality of his time and a prudent evaluator of new things, he did not hesitate to put new discoveries and progress of human and civil culture to use including for the growth of religion.' Besides, 'by joining his strenuous defence of faith and morals with charity and prudence, he constantly followed the rule of winning the benevolence of his adversaries. In this way, in those turbulent times, he robbed the enemies of the Christian Faith of any specious pretext for abuse of power, and avoided either himself or his institutions being mixed up in politics. By way of summary, 'Don Bosco was truly sent by God to promote the Christian restoration of human society which had become estranged from the truth, and he gained great merit before Christian and civil society, his name being known all over the world.'⁸⁸

Repeated references to the dynamic associations of men and women were also placed within this context. These were men and women organised in consecrated life or living in the lay state and committed to charitable work among the young: the society of the St Francis de Sales, the

82 AAS 21 (1929) 316; AAS 26 (1934) 70; cf. Chap. 2, § 2.

83 AAS 41 (1908) 642.

84 AAS 41 (1908) 644-645; AAS 19 (1927) 151; AAS 21 (1929) 165-166, 195-196, 314-315; 26 (1934) 31-32, 69, 219-218; 27 (1935) 282-283.

85 AAS 26 (1934) 69.

86 AAS 26 (1934) 68; AAS 27 (1935) 286-287.

87 AAS 27 (1935) 286-287.

88 *Litterae Decretales*, AAS 27 (1935) 287-288.

FMA Institute, the Salesian Cooperators Union, the Work of Mary Help of Christians for clerical vocations among young adults.⁸⁹

Great importance was given to the 'prevenient education' approach to which Don Bosco had given his own original form in the pedagogical arena. 'Bearing in mind the scriptural *Initium sapientiae timor Domini*, Don Bosco followed the approach of prevenient concern, assistance and charity.'⁹⁰ It could be described as both a new method and one derived from St Philip Neri.⁹¹ He had re-adapted it and brought it up to date, especially as a system of paternal and maternal love, and proposed it as such to male and female educators, consecrated men and women, and lay people.⁹²

He attracted adolescents whom he found abandoned and in difficulties through loving-kindness, and filled with the spirit of St Francis de Sales and St Philip Neri, he won their affection, amused them with games, so much so that they flocked to him from everywhere as they would to a most loving father. This divine charity shown them, however, was united to such supernatural prudence that it became a perfect educational method, outlining an excellent and sure way within pedagogical discipline.⁹³ As for moral formation, truly and properly speaking the Servant of God's educational method aimed at preventing evil by careful vigilance, kind words, meekness and charity: a method he called the preventive method. As we have said, it was a new method with which one changes 'the hearts of adolescence by preventing rather than by punishing.'⁹⁴

Again, all of Don Bosco's life was spent under the banner of novelty in a successful synthesis of the divine and the human which the *de tuto* decree for the canonisation saw adequately represented by the wisdom and prudence of 1 Kings 4:29. 'God gave him wisdom, since detached from all earthly goods he was uniquely positioned to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls. "Give me souls" he said "and take away all the rest."' 'God gave him prudence because he chose the most suitable means for such a great mission.'⁹⁵ The Pope echoed this in his homily on 1 April 1934: 'Entirely consecrated to procuring the glory of God and the salvation of souls, he granted no truce in bring about what he believed God wanted, with reckless zeal, never distracted by the suspicion of others, courageously pursuing ways and methods introduced by the new times.'⁹⁶ The language of the 'Litterae Decretales' matched this. Don Bosco was 'a very dear ornament of Italy and the whole Catholic orb,' 'a hero of holiness,' 'who will remain in memory and blessing over the centuries for so many great benefits that his countless spiritual progeny renders to civil and Christian society until today.'⁹⁷

Finally highlighted was Don Bosco's effort to affirm human and divine values in his charitable activity, and the way he developed these in a unified way. This likened him to the great modern saints, in line with the words of the First Letter to the Corinthians, who were entirely focused on God, and boundlessly dedicated to their neighbour in charity: St Francis de Sales, with his 'devout humanism', St Vincent de Paul whom he emulated, St Philip Neri, the living image of *Servite Domino in Laetitia*. It was taken for granted in the early biographies, while he was still alive, that

89 AAS 41 (1908) 645-646; AAS 21 (1929) 166 and 315-316; AAS 26 (1934) 70; AAS 27 (1935) 284-285.

90 AAS 41 (1908) 645.

91 AAS 21 (1929) 315.

92 AAS 19 (1927) 152.

93 AAS 26 (1934) 68.

94 *Litterae Decretales*, AAS 27 (1935) 284, 285-286. The central thesis of the Bull was "Don Bosco the Saint of Christian education" according to a lengthy essay by D. BERTETTO, *San Giovanni Bosco visto da Pio XI come "grande maestro ed eroe dell'educazione cristiana"*, in R. GIANNATELLI (Ed.), *Don Bosco. Attualità di un magistero pedagogico*. Rome, LAS 1987, pp. 23-113.

95 AAS 26 (1934) 70.

96 AAS 26 (1934) 219.

97 AAS 27 (1935) 281.

Don Bosco would often be referred to in the document as ‘the new Philip Neri,’ the ‘Italian Vincent de Paul,’ or the St Vincent de Paul of the 19th century.’⁹⁸ These were saints who, along with St Ignatius Loyola, were celebrated more than others as masters of practical charity for the thousands of men and women in the 19th century ‘dedicated to initiatives similar or identical to those of Don Bosco, in agreement with him in their spirituality and often in their methods.’⁹⁹

4. ‘An admirable model of holiness and work’

This is Pius XI’s definition. Our biographical reconstruction confirms it. Moreover, we have already noted the various *post mortem* commemorations along these lines and the documents from the Process we have just seen. Don Bosco appears as a priest of faith, open to the divine, the supernatural, and equally fully embodied in earthly realities through his intense activity. But this does not make him a solitary phenomenon, an exceptional event. We have emphasised that ‘the spirituality of Catholic action’ is precisely one of the characteristics of his century.¹⁰⁰ None of the journalists’ comments or the canonical processes or Pius XI’s addresses create any rifts in these two characteristics of his personality. He was able to be perceived as a diviniser of his 19th century because he had recognised one of its crucial problems, and had spent all his physical and mental energies on it: the world of the young in areas where poverty and abandonment reigned, filling it with religious and civic content. Even one of the ‘most liberal’ newspapers – as *L’Unità Cattolica* described it in an article – the *Gazzetta di Torino*, described him as uniting ‘religion and charity’ in his tireless work and did not hide its admiration for a man who was both ‘pious and charitable.’¹⁰¹

It was something so evident that Pius XI himself dared express the mixture of ‘holiness and work’ with the bold formula *Qui laborat orat*. When others had adopted it in other words and contexts a few decades earlier, they had been accused of ‘Americanism’. Obviously, what he meant by it was not to identify them but to suggest the vital shared presence of *orat* and *laborat*, the religious dimension and earthly commitment. Pius XI insisted on it, convinced that he had recognised it in Don Bosco’s practical behaviour thanks to his direct and deep appreciation gained over a few busy days spent with him in Turin.¹⁰² These were the credentials he offered a large Salesian community as soon as he was elected Pope. ‘We are pleased to be among the oldest personal friends of the Venerable Don Bosco. We saw this glorious Father and Benefactor of yours and saw him with our own eyes. We were with him, heart to heart. We had a lengthy, uplifting exchange of ideas, thoughts and considerations.’ He had admired the twofold dimension in him as ‘a great giant and supporter of Christian education.’¹⁰³ In his day-to-day efforts he had seen Don Bosco reveal the perfect marriage of the two fundamental ‘principles’ or maxims of his way of working: the *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* and *Qui laborat orat*. At the Oratory in Turin he had been able to see a man who was ‘present to everything, busy with a continuous range of affairs amid many requests and consultations’ and at the same time ‘his spirit always elsewhere, always above

98 The French press in particular insisted on this in February 1888: cf. *Courte notice sur Don Bosco et les Oeuvres Salésiennes*. Marseille, Typ. et Lit. Salésiennes 1896.

99 Cf. Especially Chap. 2, §§ 4-7.

100 Cf. Chap. 2, § 7.

101 Cf. “L’Unità Cattolica”, no. 27, Thursday 6 February 1888, p. 106.

102 He often liked to say: “the Holy Father was able to see the Blessed from close at hand” (17 June 1932, *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 722); “He had been able to see the work and had the chance to be close to it” (8 May 1934, *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 122); “He had the good fortune to see him close up”, “he had been able to get to know him with a certain familiarity, thus had the good fortune to get to know him, and judge him as a man of great standing from any point of view” (15 May 1934, *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 129). On Don Bosco’s image in Pius XI’s words, cf. L. CRIPPA, *Don Bosco nella stima di Pio XI*, “Salesianum” 37 (1975) 853-860; ID., *L’imitazione di don Bosco alla luce del magistero di Pio XI*, “Salesianum” 39 (1977) 483-496.

103 To educators and pupils at the S. Heart Institute in Rome, 25 June 1922, *Discorsi di Pio XI* I 33-35.

where his serenity was ever unperturbed, where calm always dominates, was always sovereign, such that the great principle of Christian life was fulfilled in him: *Qui laborat orat*.¹⁰⁴ 'Since his prayer was incessant,' he explained 'his constant conversation with God' and the quality of his work lay in 'his ongoing invocation: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*, souls, always seeking souls. The love of souls.'¹⁰⁵ In Turin he had been able to admire, 'a great, exceptional worker'¹⁰⁶ and a great friend of God and workers for the faith,¹⁰⁷ completely dedicated to promoting the *glory of God* through his apostolic efforts.¹⁰⁸

In our journey through Don Bosco's biography, we have seen that the glory of God and the salvation of souls was the constant summit of his experience and spiritual teaching. It was the concrete translation of the twofold yet single Gospel commandment of love of God and neighbour. It was not his invention. He had learned it as a clerical student at the pastoral seminary set up by Chiaverotti and enhanced as Guala's and Cafasso's Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), where it was infused with an Ignatian and Liguorian spirit and refined with new touches in the encounter with the ideals of Francis de Sales, the apostle of the Chablis. There are a good number of scholars who had seen Don Bosco as one of the most prominent representatives of this spirituality. One distinguished theologian has written that we find in him 'the perfection of charity necessary for every apostolate' such that it led him to 'even leave aside divine contemplation ... in order to serve God in the salvation of his neighbour.' Hence, a man of 'prodigious activity in every good work' and a man 'of the highest contemplation,' 'a man of God' in the full sense of the term.¹⁰⁹ It was not an isolated opinion. Someone, well informed in the history of spirituality, has said he is 'the emblem of the modern kind of Saint' whose 'type of holiness adheres to the most evident and irremissible needs of our life today.' Don Bosco's mission was completely social.' 'His temperament was all about concreteness, practicality, and in keeping with the needs of social life.' 'So, his was a spirituality made up of impulses ordered to action and direct incitement, to bringing about Christ's kingdom in real terms,' 'for the glory of God.' 'Don Bosco was an active contemplative.'¹¹⁰ 'Times have changed now,' Don Bosco himself states 'so as well as praying fervently we need to work and work tirelessly if we do not want to see the total ruin of the present generation.'¹¹¹ 'Believer or non-believer,' wrote an enthusiastic scholar of Don Bosco, a pupil and beneficiary of his spiritual guidance for many years, 'whoever encountered this powerful and extraordinary genius for good could not separate these two ideas embodied in him or hide either aspect: the man of Christianity, the Saint, and the man of powerful, broadly innovative activity in education and charity.'¹¹²

Another scholar of spirituality observed that 'his interior life was fully focused in his outward existence and, one could even say, was strengthened by it. It was the gestures of this life, simple and so varied but done with the perfection of charity, which were also gestures of adoration, and they made up the essence of what could be described as the liturgy of men of action.'¹¹³ The Spirit of God, says a theologian of our times 'can lift up to the highest contemplation those who, by dint of charity, are immersed in the service of their neighbour in the most extenuating circumstances of

104 After the reading of the Decree on Heroic Virtues, 20 February 1927, *Discorsi di Pio XI* I 677 e 679.

105 *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 1005-1009; cf. Again, *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 35 and 46.

106 To leaders of the "Magneti Marelli", 28 January 1933, *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 814.

107 To groups of faithful, including youngsters from the Pius XI Institute in Rome, 28 May 1938, *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 747.

108 Cf. *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 87-88.

109 C. PERA, *I doni dello Spirito Santo nell'anima del B. Giovanni Bosco*. Turin, SEI 1930, p. 57.

110 A. PORTALUPPI, *La Spiritualità del Beato D. Bosco*, "La Scuola Cattolica" 58 (1930), pp. 24-26.

111 Conf. ai Cooperatori a S. Benigno Canavese, 4 June 1880, BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, p. 12.

112 A. CAVIGLIA, "Don Bosco". *Profilo storico*. Turin, SEI 1934, p. 10

113 P. CRAS, *La spiritualité d'un homme d'action. Saint Jean Bosco*, "La Vie Spirituelle", 20 (1938), t. 44, pp. 287-288.

active life ... Who could doubt the high degree of contemplation arrived at by St Catherine of Siena, St Vincent de Paul, the Cure of Ars, St John Bosco, to quote just some?¹¹⁴

5. The 'legend of the saintly entrepreneur'¹¹⁵

If objective historical analysis of Don Bosco's everyday activity, most of it during his working hours (he left few hours for sleep) obliges us to deny any dualism in the two areas we have been talking about, then even less so does it allow us to carry them to the extreme. We have seen how Don Bosco continued to be a priest of charity and salvation in his feverish activity, completely the 'man of God.' We have also seen in tangible ways how his precocious and uninterrupted inclination to the 'mysterious' or the 'miraculous' was never unbalanced in the direction of the magical. He was no shaman. Rather was it always solidly based on assumptions that were theological and ecclesiastical to a degree. Thus, it does not seem historically justified to make a janus-like character out of him, a split personality or some kind of 'completely anomalous kind of saint.'¹¹⁶ The 'daily' and the 'nightly' side of him co-existed without any problem, also because, as we have seen, the other dimension is completely incomparable with the first, absolutely dominant over and the source of the second.

However, it would be to present an unbalanced view of him if he were to be identified as overly immersed in the 'too humanly human' of an exaggerated activism, more so if likened to the style of action and management of the industrial world. It seems historically unsustainable to lock him into categories quite alien to his slow, laborious, measured way of working – we have read one letter to Fr Cagliari where he calls him a *bogianen* [Piedmontese term for the stubborn, tenacious, resolute character of the Piedmontese peasant]¹¹⁷ – by calling him an 'entrepreneur' of either the sacred or the profane, a manager or founder, and leader who was in some ways similar to a head of industry, business leader or the like.

He was given this description in satirical fashion by the *Fischietto*, a newspaper which took mocking interest in the *Dominus Lignus* [or in Piedmontese, Bosch=wood]. It attributed him with the refined skill of 'making money at any cost,' making him 'a very lucky industrial Catholic.'¹¹⁸ It was an anomalous description, a negative imprint which anticipated others of the opposite kind, but in reality, just as misleading.

It would seem that the profile closest to the reality of the great worker that Don Bosco was as founder and governor was the one drawn by the title and content of an article *L'Unità Cattolica* dedicated to him the day after he died. The columnist – it could even have been a member of the Salesian Superior Chapter – wrote of *Don Bosco the wise organiser* in quite spare terms but ones that hit the mark: 'From documents Don Bosco reserved to himself we see the wisdom and especially the care and order with which he managed (right up until he fell ill) the huge amount of administration involved in houses spread throughout Europe and America. Everything was managed with regularity and simplicity at the same time ... D. Bosco knew every detail of each of the houses. Daily correspondence involving reports and instructions kept their progress constantly under his gaze ... distance, transport difficulties, the number of measures to be taken, none of these things affected their progress thanks to his wise organisation and especially his unity of

114 J.-H. NICOLAS, *Contemplazione e vita contemplativa nel Cristianesimo*. Città del Vaticano, Libr. Editrice Vaticana 1990, p. 279 (v. also pp. 38-39, 313-314); cf. M.-D. CHENU, *Si. Thomas d' Aquin et la théologie*. Paris, Aux Éditions du Seuil 1970, pp. 54-65.

115 Heading of an insert in the Daily "Il Sole 24 ore", 24 January 1988.

116 Cf. Contrary to these distortions, see the realistic picture drawn by V. ONGINI, *Un santo da battaglia*, "Riforma della Scuola" 34 (1988) no. 10, p. 74.

117 Letter of 27 April 1876, E III 52 ("Poco alla volta. *Bogianen*").

118 "Il Fischietto", quoted by P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. III..., p. 15.

direction.¹¹⁹ The earlier cited article in the *Nazione* (Florence) drew up a profile in a few quick lines which was not in disagreement with this: 'Over the fifty years of his priestly life, he showed he was always gifted with a spirit of enterprise, a good memory, could take things in at a glance, had a strong faith and a vigorous mind. He went through trying misfortunes without allowing himself to be discouraged.'¹²⁰

These are undoubtedly preferable forms of description to those of an entrepreneurial or managerial kind which tend to be rhetorical and redundant but which were used of him by many people following the canonisation (1934) and were then picked up again in many celebrations, in the written and spoken word on the occasion of the first centenary of his death (1988). It has even been written that Don Bosco created a multinational in creating the Salesian Society.

From the biographical reconstruction we have attempted, it should be the case that Don Bosco's 'dreaming' and acting was much more concrete, and belongs to a courageous apostle with initiatives that were measured and considered, both in the way he governed and developed things. He was ready to pay the price for them daily, including making unusual sacrifices. Despite this, his so-called 'multinational' had well-defined dimensions at the time of his death, even if they seemed extraordinary and surprising to him and to those who were well aware of the humble beginnings and slow, laborious progress and the chronic lack of personnel and means.

In reality, on 31 January 1888, there were about 100 houses spread thinly across Europe and Latin America. They were of unequal consistency, and equally split (in number, not in size) between the Salesian Society and the FMA Institute. At the founder's death, 774 professed Salesians, in either temporary or perpetual vows, were involved in them. Of these, 302 were priests, 285 were clerics, 187 were coadjutors or Salesian Brothers (lay men). On the female side there were 389 Sisters in either temporary or perpetual vows. The two Institutes placed their hopes for immediate growth in 276 male and 104 female novices. Nor should we overlook the slow rhythm which characterised the development of the works, sometimes occasional works which were followed by closure and withdrawal in some cases.

As for the assumed future 'multinational' style of an industrial giant, Don Bosco never gave thought to forming leaders in a managerial style as found in large enterprises, but rather men who had the single ambition of 'doing things like Don Bosco' and who generally knew how to handle themselves successfully in a variety of fields of endeavour: oratories, orphanages, colleges for academic students, workshops for trade students, churches and chapels, mission stations, migrant centres, popular and school-based publishing.

From our biographical pursuit, a further incontrovertible fact emerges regarding Don Bosco's rapport as founder and leader with his dependants. There was no doubting who was the protagonist in the foundation of and developments within the Salesian Congregation – and something similar could be said for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians – which he governed almost to the end with great energy and particular farsightedness, with a focused personal regime. But we have also seen how much foresight and affectionate care he showed in spiritually and culturally nurturing his early helpers, drawing them almost exclusively from the boys at the Oratory and preparing them with the greatest discretion to shift from the youthful desire to 'stay and work' with him, to the suggestion and then decision to join his Institute and be bound by religious vows. But once this first step was made, he also showed outstanding talent in making them excellent men of government.

Two stand out above all the others, even beyond the calibre of Francesia, Durando, Bonetti, Albera, Cerruti, Lazzero: Rua and Cagliero, and the former even stood out from the latter. Don

119 "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 27, Thursday 2 February 1888, p. 106.

120 Cf. "L'Unità Cattolica", no. 28, Friday 3 February 1888, p. 110.

Bosco would not have been able to do so much and with so much freedom of movement had he not been able to count on the vigilant and active presence of Fr Michael Rua in the mother house, a lieutenant with an extraordinary personality, almost by nature a man of government, a born administrator with an instinct for obedient, enterprising collaboration, superior spirituality. He was fully prepared as successor to pick up the founder's legacy, which was to some extent as yet incomplete, requiring vigorous continuity on many fronts and some urgent reorganisation – for example in the financial arena – and completion at organisational, legal, disciplinary and formative levels. We cannot omit a reminder of the effort and concern of Don Bosco from 1870 onwards for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. These efforts were proportionately similar to those for the Salesians, either made by himself or through excellent collaborators such as Frs Cagliero, Costamagna, Bonetti. The biography is full of positive indicators in this regard.

In his enterprising style of government, Don Bosco did not try to shape his co-workers in his own image but helped them to grow, respecting each one's temperament and encouraging them to expand their interests. He was happy to have them alongside and continue his work as versatile and creative individuals. For their part, his 'sons' had grown up under his tutorship in line with the spirit of initiative and energy he had passed on as their 'father' and they became his 'vision' in founding and running works that spread from Piedmont to Liguria, southern France and Spain and distant South America. They felt, thought and acted as they believed he would have felt, thought and acted, not in a slavish kind of way but in free and spontaneous imitation.

Finally, one need to bear in mind the absolutely fatherly and familiar nature of his governance and relationships with his co-workers, and the trusting approach he took to financial management of his youth works and religious communities which he constantly followed up. There is nothing there which would make us think of the approaches used by a modern equipped and managed 'industry'. The youth works and religious Institutes supporting them – the Society of St Francis de Sales, the FMA Institute, the Cooperators Union – had more of a simple handcraft workshops origin about them and remained as such in their organisation and functioning.

Similarly, the professional schools [technical-vocational] which were trade workshops for the most part, were not set up to emulate factories belonging to a large industry, but operated at a level more suited to giving a dignified formation to young people, since without it they would have remained without culture and a trade, ignored both by the ideologies behind the 'worker issue' and people in power and by the official school system. They have their own intrinsic historical value apart from their 'paleo-capitalistic' history,¹²¹ and the Saint of Charity' who promoted them is by right and *de facto* a 'Social Saint', without being directly involved in the phenomenon of industrialisation and capitalism. The technical-vocational initiatives he took, however, are neither extraneous to nor opposed to these phenomena. They aimed at creating precise skills and a technical mindset in youngsters who were primarily artisans but also ready for no less valid qualifications in the industrial world.¹²² In fact, more than a few past pupils were easily able to fit into that world and were certainly not unqualified.

6. Enigma, mystery or something else?

The diary kept by the wife of the biographer of the Count de Chambord offers us a simple physical description of Don Bosco ,whom she saw in July 1883 at Frohsdorf Castle. 'He is short and squat

121 Cf. S. QUINZIO, *Domande sulla santità...*, pp. 86-87.

122 Cf. *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale...*, pp. 20-21 (*Dei giovani artigiani, Indirizzo intellettuale e Indirizzo professionale*); J. M. PRELLEZO, *Dai laboratori di Valdocco alle scuole tecnico professionali salesiane. Un impegno educativo verso la gioventù povera*, in L. VAN LOOY - G. MALIZIA (Edd.), *Formazione professionale salesiana*. Rome, LAS 1997, pp. 19-51.

with an intelligent gaze but (she saw him at a time when he was exhausted) he looks like an old man who is worn out. He looks rather uneasy and a man of great simplicity.¹²³

Nevertheless, this man was always animated by a twin awareness of 'greatness'. At the level of reality and daily activity, he was moved by an irrepressible and by no means hidden tendency to see his own mission in grand terms, involving others in it, dramatising needs and problems, exaggerating dimensions, accentuating the difficulty of finding solutions, amplifying his ideas, the projects he had in mind and undertakings already underway, exaggerating results and successes.¹²⁴ He mixed another kind of awareness with this, one that came from persuasions we could broadly define as 'supernatural'. Don Bosco felt an urgency in his mission which was a mysterious investiture from on high, and which without doubt did not come mainly from his dream at nine or ten years of age, and which he made explicit, though not publicly, only in his 70s, but it coincided with his vocation as a priest consecrated to God for the salvation of his neighbour. By dint of this, he sometimes spoke as if he saw himself surrounded and sustained by graces, including extraordinary ones from God who enlightened him, allowed him to read hearts and consciences, sent him dreams to warn and guide him.

But it would be a distorted perspective not to take account of his way of understanding and living the 'extraordinary'. As an unshakeable believer, solidly anchored in the Catholic ecclesial community, and not in his own popular religious beliefs but in the Catholic 'Credo' and its liturgical worship. Don Bosco found the vital resources for his work especially, and above all, in such things as: faith in Divine Providence, the presence of Christ the Saviour in the mystery of ongoing redemption and the Eucharist, Grace, the Sacraments, the Word of God, prayer, the Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians, Mother of the Church, and of each individual member of the faithful. Within this religious framework he entrusted himself and others to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the Saints, suggested appropriate prayers to obtain graces, including special ones, imparted blessings, distributed blessed medals, suggested the exercise of charity by way of financial aid, favours, support.

With this image of the profoundly believing priest, it is no surprise that persuasions and sensitivities proper to popular religiosity would also find a place in his awareness. He never nurtured himself systematically with the works of the great masters of Christian spirituality. The religiosity he lived or proposed and passed on to his closest disciples and the boys, never went beyond the confines of the solid patrimony of essential truths channelled through the Catholic Catechism and manuals of current practices of piety used by his people. Therefore, it seemed normal to him that with the 'supernatural' that was of the Faith, he could also experience the extraordinary, the mysterious, including expressions bordering on the miraculous. Indeed, as we have often emphasised, he was at home in the Catholic Church, and so considered it was licit to make broad use of this pedagogically, while perhaps sometimes overdoing this. Hence, to varying degrees he could give credit to dreams of premonition, indulge in reading consciences, dare to make predictions about the future, assure people of the all-powerful nature of certain prayers and practices for preserving them from the scourge of widespread epidemics, encourage recovery through prayer and blessings. In essence, even here he did not go beyond the bounds of Christian sensitivities of long-standing pedigree.¹²⁵

123 Cit. in MB XVI 339.

124 It was also the inspirational idea for the panegyric and commemoration given by Cardinal Alimonda at the month's mind, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter. Elsewhere, the presence of similar sentiments was stressed also in the Salesian world, at various times inclined to highlight them and perpetuate them: cf. P. BRAIDO, *La missione salesiana oggi, in La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione nella Chiesa di oggi*. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1973, pp. 110-114, (*La "grandezza" di don Bosco*).

125 Cf. J. DELUMEAU, *Rassurer, protéger. Le sentiment de sécurité dans l'Occident*. Paris, Fayard 1989.

Just the same, Don Bosco never trusted dreams or the extraordinary as the way to achieve either the instruments or places of education, nor did he ever seem to be affected by unusual inner turmoil or panic attacks as one individual has written.¹²⁶ By contrast, according to one clear statement of his, whoever spoke of him as a miracle worker would be committing 'a dangerous error.'¹²⁷ What is evident, instead, is his conviction as a believer that so long as every good thing is a gift of grace it must be supported, or rather, not be hindered by their beneficiary.

The ministerial activity of the priest educator and social worker can also be located within this dynamic. The humanity and the mystery expressed through 'graces' which were not in his power to do, but God's alone through the intercession of the Help of Christians. This mediation was even more effective when it had the chrism, the anointing of presbyteral dignity behind it, and was carried out as part of preaching the Word of God, administering the Sacraments – especially Penance – celebrating Mass. At this level, it became a serious responsibility, according to the theological and pastoral principles he had learned during the austere period of his formation: 'the priest does not go alone to heaven, nor alone to hell. If he does good he will go to heaven with the souls he has saved through his good example. If he does wrong, gives scandal, he will go to perdition with the souls damned through his scandal.'

When replying on 24 June 1883 to the words of praise addressed to him during the meeting with the past pupils, which he felt were a 'forgivable licence' for children who were accustomed to expressing their feelings more from the heart than the head, he said: 'However, always remember that Don Bosco was never anything other than a poor instrument in the hands of a very skilled artist, indeed the most wise and omnipotent artist, God himself.'¹²⁸

But the 'poor instrument' was only relativised, not cancelled out. He seemed to be essential in eliminating obstacles to God's action and in making it available. This is why, other than invocation, prayer, he urged 'working hard.' Of interest in this regard is an observation by a well-known biographer of Don Bosco's: 'When we evaluate Don Bosco's thinking and acting within the narrow confines of a learned view of the relationship between human action and God's transcendental action, a stubborn temperament might perhaps accuse him of Pelagianism. But we can be certain that he never had the least temptation to quietism.'¹²⁹ It is therefore often the case that we can perceive exhaustion in him to the point of illness, but it never hinders and indeed makes more evident his reflective calm, serene prayer of entrustment, invocation to God and the Virgin Mary, his joy at working for the coming of the kingdom.

Inseparable from all this was the cross, not as some kind of superstructure but as a vital need in an extremely serious existence. The cross was not the object of a masochistic search, but the simple result of the indissoluble marriage of burning charity and uninterrupted work.¹³⁰ We have seen his serious warnings on the austerity of consecrated life in the circulars he wrote in the 1860s, and in the one which was pretty much a personal testament on 6 January 1884.¹³¹

Pius XI even identified reasons here for placing Don Bosco amongst *the martyrs*.¹³² 'Here was a life that was a true, proper and great martyrdom, a life of colossal work such that just seeing him, the Servant of God, was to gain the impression of oppression.'¹³³ 'Don Bosco', he insisted on 4

126 Cf. G. CERONETTI, *Elementi per una Antiagiografia...*, in G. CERONETTI, *Albergo Italia*, pp. 124-125.

127 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 103; cf. also Chap. 31, § 2 and Chap. 32, § 4.

128 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August 1883, p. 127.

129 F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*. Paris, Beauchesne 1967, pp. 265-266.

130 It does not seem justified to create an antithesis between things that historically can't be separated, such as are found in S. QUINZIO, *Domande sulla santità...*, pp. 85-87.

131 Cf. Chap. 15, § 11 and Chap. 32, § 4.1.

132 He spoke of it on 3 December 1933 when reading the Decree for Canonisation, mentioning, as well as Don Bosco, three Jesuit martyrs.

133 *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 1040.

April 1934 'was a true martyr of his charity, which is the charity of the Church; a man who was not spared difficulties and obstacles of every kind but who was always trusting and tranquil because he knew and always proclaimed he was working for God, and he knew that God was always with him.'¹³⁴ Among the crosses, certainly the heaviest ones were the intimate, profound and unexpressed ones less remembered by those who gave the panegyrics after his death: precious collaborations and friendships irremediably destroyed (Moreno, Gastaldi) with the intimate suffering of not having been able to or know how to re-establish these bonds or 'win over or win back hearts through his prime approach of preventive pedagogy: reason, religion, loving-kindness. Or the painful and inexplicable loss of men (Oreglia di Santo Stefano, Blessed Luigi Guanella); defections of promising vocations, setbacks in education; the failure to meet Pius IX at the end of the latter's life; the 'moral' suffering Fr Cerruti pointed to in his final years – the inactivity, loneliness, perhaps the feeling of complete uselessness.

This is Don Bosco, and core of his message which is in no way triumphalistic. We have mentioned the clarification he made when Fr Branda had informed the Superior Chapter that he had given biographies written by d'Espiney and Du Boÿs to politicians who were asking the Salesians to take on a large correctional institution. He said that in cases where they wanted to make known the educational system he had conceived and practised, Du Boÿs was the better choice. 'd'Espiney by contrast, he said 'is helpful for pious individuals and to open purses.'¹³⁵ This was probably because of the prevalence of the episodic, occasional approach and the miraculous, the miracle worker in it. Already in 1881, Fr Rua had advised the author to 'suppress certain things not appropriate for the times.'¹³⁶

After all that, what remains of the enigmatic or the mysterious which are not 'the mysteries of divine grace' and the unconditional availability of a lucid human will.'

7. A herald of the central importance of adolescence for civil and religious society

We have seen already during his earthly existence that Don Bosco was perceived as a priest perfectly in tune with the pastoral orientation of his own diocese, but whose intuitions and works went well beyond the average Church worker in the social and charitable field. After his death, this was spelt out in various ways, most of them legitimate: apostle of youth, innovator of the oratory and preventive system, dynamic organiser of youth works and religious institutes dedicated to them, daring catalyst of human and material resources for enabling and extending them, appreciated popular writer and publisher, promoter of agreements between the religious and civic world. Realistic dreamer.

Certain empathetic descriptions have been floated: 'diviniser of the 19th century', resolver of 'the social question', the greatest educator or pedagogue of his century.

We have seen that most of his charitable initiatives – especially those relating to welfare and the care of young people – were shared by many people, men and women, clergy and lay, and by many institutions which had sprung up in the 19th century more than in any other. Therefore, in speaking of him, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, no one should be excluded, and when we are stressing certain perspectives and giving him credit in certain areas, we must not undervalue credit belonging to others, some greater than him in certain areas and ways of acting.

134 To German Catholic youth, *Discorsi di Pio XI* III 93.

135 Cf. *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 80rv, session on 22 September 1885; Chap. 33, § 4.

136 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica* I..., p. 258 and III p. 21.

For his contemporaries, however, and for some others, he was the exceptional apostle of youth education. Pius XI spared no effort to proclaim him before a wide range of audiences, from youth belonging to Catholic Action through to Alpine guides: 'We saw this great giant and supporter of Christian education.'¹³⁷ 'A guide for spiritual mountains who led people to the great heights of Christian life for millions of young people.'¹³⁸ 'A great friend of childhood and youth,' 'that great teacher who can well be called the hero of Christian education which is alive, true, and exquisitely Christian.'¹³⁹ The Pope's boundless admiration explains certain rhetorical exuberances, but Don Bosco's considerable activism supported by notable communication skills – personal presence, works, support initiatives, a network of relationships at every level, the press, journeys – meant that he was seen as a master in managing public opinion not only in the country or a continent but in the world of the young through its requests, resources, problems, the weight it carried in determining the future for Church and society.

It is true that initially, Don Bosco's attention was given especially to the cohort of poor and abandoned boys, and that as years passed he continued to profess an unchanging fidelity to this original choice and propose it to his disciples. We know that in one of the 'Reminders' he gave Salesians leaving for America, he insisted: 'Take special care of the sick, children, the elderly and the poor, and you will gain God's blessing and the good will of people.'¹⁴⁰ Years later, in the *Memorie dal 1841*, the 'Reminder' became a final warning to all Salesians: 'The world will always be pleased to receive us so long as our concerns are directed to the savages, the poorest children, those most at risk in society. This is the true prosperity for us which no one will envy and no one will want to take from us.'¹⁴¹

However, at the same time he felt himself impelled, because of how things were, to fill the concept of poverty and abandonment with new meanings, opening himself in essence to all young people, including ones he could not reach through his own works, which were inevitably limited in number and quality. When all is said and done, for him all 'youth' as such could find itself deprived of love, adequate moral and religious instruction, wise guidance in life and hence at risk in society in many contexts – from family to school, groups, political and cultural structures – which were less attentive to the real problems of childhood and adolescence, or which were even negative or dangerous in their regard. So, it was not just a case of youngsters to protect from the risk of moral degradation and delinquency. Other more numerous and widespread emergencies were threatening: personal ones such as the necessities of life, culture, a guaranteed job, morality and religious faith to be preserved or fostered; social needs such as unemployment, lack of job qualification, use and abuse of free time. This plurality of situations was already part of the real and mental world in which Don Bosco operated. He could find himself faced with a boy who was a candidate for holiness and who asked him to be the tailor for the cloth he was entrusting him with, himself, to make the suit worthy of the Lord; but he could also be presented, as he said in his address at Nice in 1877, with a fifteen-year-old orphan living by his wits and playing the violin in pubs and cafes, followed the next day by another sixteen-year-old orphan, a foreigner, lacking everything, who could only offer the cloth of his own basic needs. As we have said, he also had work to do – and it was more than just a narrative strategy – with *Valentino*, who had Dominic Savio's potential, but was misled by a corrupt individual and became an accomplice to murder. This young man asked from prison for his former educator to guide him on the way to rehabilitation and a future of freedom. He had been thoughtless and inattentive. In the Oratory itself, the director was lucky to have boys whom he said were superior in holiness to Dominic Savio, but he also

137 To Salesians at S. Heart Institute, Rome, 25 June 1922, *Discorsi di Pio XI* I 33.

138 To Alpine guides, 16 November 1929, *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 201.

139 To Roman Catholic youth, 26 March 1930, *Discorsi di Pio XI* II 272-273.

140 J. BORREGO, *Recuerdos de San Juan Bosco a los primeros misioneros...*, p. 207.

141 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 127.

complained of having young perverts, thieves and rebels. And he also knew that while his Salesians were teaching young aristocrats and 'upper class' well-to-do boys at Valsalice, far away in Patagonia other Salesians were gathering and attempting to civilise young native boys in makeshift hospices, removing them from a nomadic existence with no future.

For everyone, without distinction, finally, there was potential to be freed up, resources to be engaged, love for truth, goodness, beauty to be awakened and educated. Youthful age, 'boys' – child, adolescent or young adult – was in fact a time and place for grand dreams to be nurtured, as he projected already very early on in his preface to the *Giovane Provveduto* (Companion of Youth), not a museum to be looked after or a patrimony to be squandered.

Seen this way, as something to be concerned about but also something full of hope, youth seemed to be too precious a reality for every adult not to share some responsibility for it: the Church's hierarchy at every level, and every believer aware of the needs and resources of faith, politicians and civil authorities, men of finance and businessmen, heads of families, teachers, work providers, journalists, lay men and women of whatever social status. Everywhere, including the privileged platforms in Paris and Barcelona, Don Bosco proclaimed that the future of society, both civil and religious, depended on its youth. Without making a formal theory of it, in an adult-oriented world he never ceased to claim, with all his strength, the right for misunderstood, undervalued and abandoned youth to grow into the fullness of their humanity and with constructive ideals for the future, despite their explosive and sometimes ambivalent possibilities, instead of feeling condemned to wasting their intellectual, cultural, professional, emotional and volitional ability.

The field to be tilled and cultivated had no limits, and the world populating it was varied and changeable. As the concept of poor and abandoned youth evolved, it needed to correspond to the extreme flexibility required to approach it, attract it, get to know its conscious and unconscious aspirations, and work constructively with it in formats adequate to the different circumstances: shelter, prevention, protection, promotion. This is what Don Bosco aimed at when practising and proposing his many versions of the so-called 'preventive system'.¹⁴²

8. The preventive system as a way of life, and interpersonal relationships

According to Don Bosco, the mission to youth not only imposed a new role on adults in society and in the formation processes for new generations, but also required a real change in relationships, with material enrichment for both young and old involved. This is the historical import of his other great legacy: the preventive system. It is well known that Don Bosco did not invent it in any of the forms and expressions well known in his day: pastoral, educational, correctional, social demographic, political. We know that he took it partly from a long-standing Christian tradition. However, it goes without saying that he refashioned it in innovative ways through his welfare-type activity among the young and ordinary people, enriching it and even relaunching it in literary form. This enrichment came about by above all being based on the vast array of ends to be achieved and content to be passed on, thanks to the many resources he had intuited within growing youngsters, and hence the variety of attitudes, means and ways of relating to them.

This also changed the way of being and acting of individuals and communities, and their way of coexisting with the young and in society. What was born was a *particular style of encounter with young people*, that at a certain point Don Bosco believed he could translate into formulas and conceptual structures which he called a 'system'. It was more practical than theoretical.¹⁴³ The

142 Cf. Chap. 17.

143 Before indicating a systematic body of ideas - for example a philosophical system - the term refers to a plurality of material elements coordinated among themselves, to a systematic complex of celestial bodies

objectives, processes, methods and means characterising this system – reason, religion and loving-kindness – which were familiar to a long-standing Catholic educational system, were exercised and passed on by him with particular attractive accents. The chief end was to form ‘upright citizens and good Christians’ but this was to be achieved with new and clever ways of acting and approaches, including the way they were applied to traditional religious and secular means.

By transforming relationships with the young, the ‘system’ also reshaped the relationships their educators had with benefactors, Cooperators, civil and religious authorities and, in general the whole network of interpersonal relationships within and beyond the fields of welfare and pedagogy. It also ended up describing a new style of social coexistence and interaction in all its forms. Naturally, the weak theoretical systematisation of this gave rise to a variety of translations and evaluations dependent on the different ages and categories of the young, the institutions, geographical areas and culture they were involved in.¹⁴⁴ This is why it has been and continues to be the subject of many practical and theoretical interpretations which draw on the manifold intuitions and implementations of the origins and which find it perfectly available for changing times and contexts.¹⁴⁵

What one authoritative individual has said and written about an unavoidable and hoped for processing of a ‘new preventive system’ in the Salesian Society is certainly well-founded, one that is in keeping, within a Christian understanding, with ‘new evangelisation’ and the consequent ‘new education.’¹⁴⁶ It is essential, however, that it be freed from the term ‘scholastic’, more verbal than attentive to the real, and that it be open, with a breadth of views, to the rich potential inherent in the preventive idea, the inspiration of Don Bosco’s original multifaceted ‘oratorian’ experience. The preventive and truly ‘open system.’¹⁴⁷

9. Maximum involvement of all available forces

Don Bosco’s dreams – as has been noted, more daydreams than night ones, which foretold or were a prelude to more than utopian projects – were never restricted to small elite groups but opened up to ever broader areas and horizons. Gradually, the early world of Valdocco came to see

(the solar system), etc., to a rule of conduct ("A system of life"), a way, a way of acting: for example "this is not my system".

144 Cf. P. STELLA, *Juan Bosco en la historia de la educación*. Madrid, Editorial CCS 1996; cf. Chap. 17, §§ 1-5.

145 Cf. G. MILANESI, *Prévention et marginalisation chez don Bosco et dans la pédagogie contemporaine*, in *Éducation et pédagogie chez don Bosco, Colloque interuniversitaire*, Lyon, 4-7 avril 1998. Paris, Editions Fleurus 1989, pp. 195-226; ID., *Sistema preventivo e prevenzione in don Bosco*, in *Ispirazioni, proposte, strategie educative*. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1989, pp. 33-62; P. BRAIDO, “Prevenire” ieri ed oggi con don Bosco. Il significato storico e le potenzialità permanenti del messaggio, in P. CAVIGLIÀ et al., *Donna e umanizzazione della cultura alle soglie de l terzo millennio...* Roma, LAS 1998, pp. 273-325; X. THÉVENOT, *Une pédagogie de la confiance et de l’alliance e Le système préventif face au pluralisme des croyances*, in *Eduquer a la suite de don Bosco... sous la direction de Xavier Thévenot*. Paris, Cerf / Desclée de Brouwer 1996, pp. 131-172.

146 Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *La “Nuova Evangelizzazione”*, AGC of the Salesian Society, no. 331, 70 (1989) 21-22; ID., *Nuova educazione*, AGC, no. 337, 72 (1991) 13-19; ID., *Chiamati alla libertà (Gal. 5, 13) riscopriamo il Sistema Preventivo educando i giovani ai valori*. Roma, Istituto FMA 1995, pp. 9-12; ID., *Un “nuovo” sistema preventivo*, BS 119 (1995) no. 4, April, p. 2.

147 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere...*, pp. 391-404 (“Restaurare”, reinventare, ricostruire); ID., *L’utopia della prevenzione primaria della famiglia e alla famiglia*, in L. PATI (ed.), *Ricerca pedagogica ed educazione familiare*. Milano, Vita e Pensiero 2003, pp. 425-446.

that it was the 'capital' of a huge kingdom which embraced the entire galaxy of young people, the 'multitude', the many.¹⁴⁸ So, it required the *general mobilisation* of all available forces.

Along with Don Bosco, though numerically limited, were co-workers encouraging this potential army of workers. They were his male and female Religious, consecrated to the mission by vocation, flanked by the 'third order of works' made up of 'men and women Cooperators, and supported, as we have seen first hand, by a huge number of benefactors.

In support of the animating core group, we have seen how much Don Bosco did to keep active, warm consensus alive and constant among all the potential forces in the Church, from the Pope to the least of the faithful. Nor did he fail to involve men and women of good will, including non-believers, anyone who gave thought to the present and future of the growing generation and society. His 'hard work' became the distinguishing badge of the founder's personal life, and something he was able to pass on with the same passion to his Religious Institutes, Cooperators and all the 'militants' under the banner of *vis unita fortior*. This is why he did not consider the uninterrupted begging for money to be humiliating, or the bombardment of publicity to be indiscreet. In February 1911, during the Apostolic Process, Fr Paul Albera invited them to interpret these things in the overall context of the search for all the good possible. 'Certainly,' he testified 'there was no lack of people who criticised what the Venerable did, and the publicity he gave his works, but I do not know of anyone who ever doubted the purity of his intentions or the holiness of his life.'¹⁴⁹ And, we could add, the vastness of needs and the pressure coming from the most urgent ones. Over the long and difficult *iter* of the canonical process for beatification and canonisation, there were many re-examinations of accusations, many of them made by the secular world during his lifetime. He had been a money-grabber, was scrupulous in the ways he got hold of it, litigious when it came to legacies and rights, strict in matters of contract and payment, insistent in asking for things.

We have seen this many times. In spite of criticisms and gratuitous suspicion, Don Bosco never ceased being the beggar, whether at home or on the move. It was a concern throughout his life to ask the 'have mores to share with the have nots, including for the spiritual benefit of the people, he put this to. In the immediate, what was impelling him was the *suprema lex* of growth and preservation of his works of charity, including the costly missions abroad. But there was also the conviction that he drew on reasons from on high. 'Perhaps you wonder,' he told listeners of a *sermon de charité* he gave at S. Remo on 10 April 1880 'at seeing a priest walking through the Church, purse in hand. But when I look at the crucifix and I think of what Jesus did for our salvation, I gladly take purse in hand and ask for alms out of love for him.'¹⁵⁰ As befuddled as I am,' he wrote to Fr Cagliariro 'I must still travel around for a month or so.'¹⁵¹

One can be certain that he did not lose much time over following the daily criticisms or satires – e.g. the ones in Turin's *Il Fischietto* – of his efforts to look for financial means to begin new works, maintain and develop existing ones, cover debts. He did not ignore them, but continued with calm determination in looking for bread for his 'children': the cartoonist had no competence at all when it came to the art and effort of begging.

When Don Bosco died, the secular *Gazzetta Piemontese* wrote about a 'real contrast of appreciation and contrary judgements': 'some saying he was an outstanding, brilliant benefactor

148 Cf. M. BARBERA, *San Giovanni Bosco educatore*. Torino, SEI 1942, pp. 9-44 (*L'Educatore delle moltitudini*); P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco educatore delle moltitudini*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 139 (1988) 230-244.

149 *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus Apostolica Auctoritate constructi in Curia Ecclesiastica Taurinensi super fama sanctitatis vitae, virtutum et miraculorum in genere Ven. Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco Sacerdotis Fundatoris Piae Societatis...* Volumen unicum, Anno 1913, fol. 270r.

150 Cit. in MB XV 143.

151 Letter of 16 April 1881, Em IV 41.

and others a shrewd and grasping priest' inspired by the Machiavellian principle of "the end justifies the means." It ended, however, with an unrequested and expiatory general absolution: 'Much will be forgiven him because he benefited so many,' 'a man who worked, fought for, benefited others throughout his entire life.'¹⁵²

In this and in other circumstances, he followed a simple, homely principle, '*Laetare et benefacere* and let the sparrows sing,' an effective antidote against sterile criticisms – easy for anyone outside the scrum – that he was carrying out excessive propaganda on behalf of his own works and obscuring the works of others, or pressing his benefactors too hard, or was over-confident in the range of strategies he used. 'His was a constant visual navigation among reefs to avoid shipwreck: bills due for payment, debts, loans, lack of aid. In his final *Memoirie*, he made this appeal: 'Regarding myself, I recommend that debts left by the deceased Rector are not made public. That would make people think there was bad administration by administrators and the Superior himself, and would cause some mistrust in public opinion.'¹⁵³

Under pressure from the start until the last day of his life from concerns about the financial stability of his works, he acted like a cautious householder concerned about upholding his own and his family's honour. He was no less concerned for the salvation of the rich: thus, his ongoing contact with the needs of the poor and the prosperity of the well-off could only lead him to an empathetic interpretation, one of solidarity over and above just one of charity, based on the Gospel's precept of almsgiving.

Some saw and highlighted strong virtues in this difficult hunt for resources, which was not without pain nor lacking in humiliation. Nice-based Canon Fabre chose as a question for his commemorative address on 14 January 1889 'How could he find the money to give his work such a solid base?' He did so, he explained, with the highest degree of humility based on the rock of his trust in God: humility joined with courage, steadfastness and tenacity. He summed it up saying: 'Here is Don Bosco's special character – indomitable courage united with the deepest humility.'¹⁵⁴

This capacity for involving so many people can also be considered as one of the characteristic features of his 'modernity' which we will shortly say more about. He possessed an active, practical vitality which was solidly anchored in the real, without ideological schemes and supports, and with strict adherence to spaces, times, expectations of the 'many'. It was such that it brought men of different and sometimes even opposed religious, moral and political beliefs to consensus about his works: the Pope, cardinals, bishops, politicians on the right or left and non-political people, clergy and anti-clerical types. Common folk, the rich and the not-so-rich. Deep down, though with varying motivations – apart from the kind of education he gave young people 'which some people felt was backward – they agreed on the goodness and timeliness of the objectives behind his commitment to the journey: setting moral standards for them through the reassuring means of an active and severe religiosity, giving them a cultural formation and a job-oriented one, so they could fit into and be qualified for the existing social order and therefore directly or indirectly help progress in every sector and defend the principles of co-existence in civil and ecclesiastical society. From one or other angle he was seen as the providential formator of excellent Christians or trustworthy citizens, 'upright citizens and good Christians.

152 *Don Bosco*, "Gazzetta Piemontese", no. 31, 31 January-1 February 1888, p. 1, quoted by G. TUNINETTI, *L'immagine di don Bosco nella stampa...*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 234-235; a similar judgement was also found in the Milan *La Perseveranza* on 2 February (Ibid., p. 236).

153 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 101.

154 "Bulletin Salésien" 11 (1889) no. 5, May, pp. 79-90.

10. 'According to the needs of the time'

The better informed, and in particular the documents as part of the Process, and Pius XI, generally recognised Don Bosco's strong desire to fit in with the times and act accordingly, and also recognised that he was neither a reactionary nor some nostalgic *laudator temporis atti*. But perhaps the reality was not so simple. We have often emphasised in this biography some of the traditional and conservative features of his mentality and culture, and how he fitted into society. It would seem we ought recognise some partial truth in the hostile critiques of certain orientations of his pedagogical hagiography and certain applications of the preventive approach coming from secular individuals or the Waldensians.¹⁵⁵ Don Bosco was certainly not the reactionary cleric they presented him as, nor, obviously, could his critics have been able to criticise him for being an ultra right-wing Catholic, even though there was some rigidity there, but no less than one could find among reformed Christians and secularists. An example might be found in his story of *Valentino*, when he contrasts the secular and Catholic college.¹⁵⁶ The attitude emerges, though in a controlled fashion, in a variety of settings. In France, we find Don Bosco's relations with people are clearly towards the anti-republican legitimists.¹⁵⁷ For this part of the world, Don Bosco 'symbolised in his person the effective action of regenerating conservation in society. Through self-denial he worked for the salvation of the people by educating the young to work for God and country. He rebuilt the world through their concrete initiation into life.'¹⁵⁸

But he cannot be reduced to this. We have often seen in these pages how many people saw something 'new' in his religious and youthful institutions, in his operating choices, his methods and style of action among the young. They were certainly not the same things as the ones that benefactors and others who sided with conservative resistance saw in him. Despite that, they were things they admired, respected, and sustained. He was no liberal or democrat or, in the Catholic scene, a declared conciliarist or compromiser. But nor could he be classified among openly intransigent types, averse as he was to being aligned with any party or organised movement, including on the Catholic side. Above all, he was more sensitive to the motives of *lex animarum* than to any rigid defence of 'principles'. If he was occasionally described as a 'liberal' or 'democrat', it was not because he had developed some considered political or social notion that guided his choices for one side or the other side. He would never have discharged himself or his Salesians from being free to act, and this freedom of action was clearly sanctioned in all the agreements drawn up when taking on the different colleges, and even the agreement to build the Sacred Heart Church.

As a man of action, he preferred the freedom of complete dedication to the solution to the problems of the moral and religious salvation of youth, and he never defined the extent to which

155 Cf. F. MOTTO, *La "Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico": un beffardo commento de "Il Cittadino" di Asti nel 1860*, RSS 15 (1996) 369-377; E. REGGIO *contadino*, *Le Boccie di don Bosco ossia il giovane provveduto di confusione*. Torre Pellice, Tipografia Alpina 1884; G. RICAGNI, *Don Bosco e l'istruzione ne' suoi collegi*. Alessandria, Tip. Jacquemod G. 1882, 20 p. There is a ridiculous example of an essay on 18 November 1883 by O. VERIDICUS, *Il clericalismo a Torino*. Torino, tip. G. Candeletti 1883, p. 15: "This prodigious man, worthy of inspiring one of the most splendid pages of Smiles, this man who from nothing knew how to fill Italy, Europe with his fame" but also "a living incarnation of the formidable power of clericalism" who "Forms his priests, bending them to blind, passive, stupid obedience, imbuing them with prejudice, stubbornness, intolerance."

156 Cf. G. BOSCO, *Valentino...*, pp. 8-13, 19-25, CE XVII 186-191, 197-203.

157 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1171-1175 (*Une sensibilité "contrerévolutionnaire"*): recalled are the Legitimists, backing the Count of Chambord (amongst whom A. Du Boÿs) or the Count of Paris (amongst whom Czartoryski), Léon Harmel, a fierce antirepublican involved in the Cercles Catholiques d'Albert de Mun, with similar political views. Those who visited Don Bosco in Paris were all of the same mind: de Cessac, Riant, de Mun, Montigny, Oyague, Princess Marguerite d'Orléans, etc.

158 F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1175-1176.

this was linked with economic, social and political freedom. If the notion of the 'good Christian' was a clear enough one, the 'upright citizen' notion was less so, something he considered to be defined rather by personal moral virtues and justice. This was the perennial source of his free and easy way of operating. He could be comfortable in any kind of regime or with systems that left him free to act at that level. Perhaps, this is why in a variety of circumstances – private, official, unofficial – he could gain audience from people who were quite ideologically different to himself. In any case, his position did not differ substantially from that of many educators, great and small who, according to the well known 'educationalists' theory, supported the intrinsic social and political importance of the moral and religious formation of the new generations. Those who held power in the economic, social and political arenas were the ones who needed to be involved in these aspects.

It was within this indeterminate horizon that the fixed points and openings of his fully Christian action in the welfare and education sectors were revealed: the clarity of religious aims, the inseparable presence of the practices of piety, the serious nature of his programs for human and professional formation, the stated openness to the new, and to progress. When Fr Achilles Ratti was Don Bosco's guest in 1883, he immediately understood this. When he became Pius XI, he often recalled it with wonder. When congratulating the Salesians 'for [their] schools and well-equipped workshops with all the most complete and modern discoveries in mechanics' he heard them say proudly: 'When it was a case of something that concerned the grand cause of doing good, Don Bosco always wanted to be in the vanguard of progress.'¹⁵⁹ It was certainly never a vain ambition to always follow fashion, or go after records, or seek vainglory. Rather was it an imperative posed by the nobility and greatness of the ends to be achieved and the old and the new difficulties that could hinder or restrain their accomplishment. He felt it was his duty to avoid the Gospel's reproach that 'the children of this world are more shrewd in handling their affairs than the children of the light.' (Lk 16:8). He wanted to reverse that, or at least balance it out. To achieve what was good, it became his duty to look at every possible industry and the most advanced tools. Be they old or new ones, the objectives had to be pursued with the most suitable means, the most functional and productive ones, just as he sought aid and support beyond old and pre-established boundaries, as well as relationships, whatever side they were on. 'In matters that will help young people at risk or will help win souls or God, I will run to the point of rashness' he wrote to Carlo Vespignani from Lugo in Romagna.¹⁶⁰ This is why, in Don Bosco's way of operating, 'ideological frameworks and spiritual models from ancient tradition are at the basis of initiatives and doctrinal core issues which flow into modernity.'¹⁶¹ Already in 1915, in a publication aimed at drawing up the profile of a Salesian, the intelligent and imaginative director of oratories, an anonymous author characterised Don Bosco in terms of modernity alongside other apostles of the young: St Philip Neri, St Jerome Emilian, St Joseph Calasanz, St John Baptist de la Salle. 'Don Bosco presented himself with true modern attitudes and methods' he wrote. 'His educational method was modern, based fully on charity. His technical-vocational schools for workers were modern; his idea of associating lay people as Cooperators with his works was modern. Modern too was the establishment of print shops for reorganising text books and pleasant literature. And finally, very

159 To those taking part in Don Bosco's Beatification, 3 June 1929, and to the Salesian Family in Rome, 11 May 1930 (*Discorsi di Pio XI* II 92 and 326); cf. Also American donors of the new Telephone centre in the Vatican, 19 November 1930; to leaders of the "Magneti Marelli", 28 January 1933 (*Discorsi di Pio XI* II 446 e 814); to the Italian Electronic Association, 15 May 1934; to Roman Catholic Action groups, 24 June 1933; to Salesians working at the Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana (Vatican Press), 31 July 1937 (*Discorsi di Pio XI* III 130, 169, 628).

160 E III 166.

161 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco...*, p. 76.

modern and entirely his, was the kind of festive oratory which began, matured and improved under the guidance of Providence who spoke to him in dreams.¹⁶²

It does not seem to be the case that we can attribute absolute originality to Don Bosco's methods and ways of working. It does not seem that we can find major turning points in his activity and ways of thinking by comparison with formation or education in the *ancien régime*, or earlier and contemporary experiences in the welfare and education fields. But what cannot be denied is his desire to innovate in order to bring initiatives and styles of activity to be fully up-to-date, and what is evident are the evolutions encouraged and determined by his willingness to respond as adequately as possible 'to the needs of the times' in the world of young people, hence not just to current youth but also in the future.¹⁶³

More generally, according to Don Bosco one could only but be anti-revolutionary, but at the same time it was right and proper to use the freedom propounded by [political] innovators to defend oneself from such freedoms and to safeguard and pass on eternal values. Precisely because of this he did not avoid new things that could be reconciled with the Faith, and indeed, he willingly accepted and developed such things. This is what he had said so vigorously in the afternoon session on 4 October 1877, at the First General Chapter. He intended to practise and have his Salesians practise the Gospel principle of 'giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' 'Caesar' was not just the political world but the human world in all its completeness, society, culture, science, technology, discoveries which made living and co-existence more civilised and smooth. This expanded interpretation meant combining quite varied things: divine and human, nature and grace, faith and reason, fidelity to the Church and Pope and obedience to civil authority, ancient and modern, tradition and innovation.¹⁶⁴ Don Bosco can be called a modern saint in this sense, even though he ignored or avoided rational modernity if it was a system or an ideology. Without having elaborated any explicit theory about it, Don Bosco dreamt of the greatest humanisation for everyone, beginning with the poor and abandoned, but not if it was separate from divinisation by grace. He accepted and proposed everything that was humanly valid, aiming at the future of young people in a society fascinated by the idea of progress more than the past or present of the educators. He looked to heaven, where God and eternal happiness exist, but at the same time he was firmly rooted in the earth which is God's creation, and in history which is the work of redeemed humankind, rich in a triple citizenship which is civil, ecclesiastical and heavenly, and as such he worked in freedom and the fullness of possibility.¹⁶⁵

We have seen that from the first text of the Constitutions he made an open choice of freedom for his Religious: the freedom of citizens who work by right in a free State in full possession of their civil rights. With this power, the relationship became 'contractual' in economic and institutional matters, as befits the free citizen, someone who manages his educational and welfare activities with a partner in the administrative and political sphere. The administrators and politicians were no longer holders of a 'superiority' at the top – as happened in the 1840s – but were invested with constitutional authority ruled by law. We saw this, for example, in the case of many boys entrusted to the Oratory by government ministers. He did not request nor accept civil or religious protection over his works or activity, including the construction of the Sacred Heart Church commissioned by the Holy See's Vicariate. He intended to manage finance, administration, education in a fully autonomous way. He guaranteed this through his demanding but fruitful search for private charity,

162 Cf. *Un apostolo degli oratori festivi. Il sac. Cav. Giuseppe Pavia*. Profilo. Torino, Scuola tip. salesiana 1919, p. 11.

163 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo*, in *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione nella Chiesa di oggi...* Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1973, pp. 145-170.

164 *Verbali* III 42-44.

165 Cf. P. STELLA, *Bilancio delle forme di conoscenza e degli studi su don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, pp. 34-36; P. SCOPPOLA, *Don Bosco e la modernità*, *ibid.*, pp. 536-540.

without excluding public charity, which he turned to not so much to receive gracious donations but rather to obtain a due contribution to the vitality of works freely dedicated to educational and welfare activity given as a subsidiary function within society and the State. He had good cards to play for this. He was sure that different though their motivations may be, Church and State were keenly interested in a work which addressed the preventive promotion or recovery of poor and abandoned youth representing a real or potential risk to the social order and morality, since they were at the heart of this.

Therefore, while never achieving a precise reflective perception of the coming of industrialisation and social problems created or made more acute because of it, in particular, the worker issue, he knew very well that he was experiencing and working in a social and economic system which was in ferment. It was all the more difficult but essential for young people to fit within this, especially those at risk, and he wished to promote this, precisely because they were much needier and by now very distant from his own childhood experience in a static, restorative setting and historical era. With this in mind, he sought and encouraged his print works at Valdocco to take part in the National Expo in Turin in 1884. He protested vigorously against the jury's vote that awarded only a silver medal, and said he would refuse to accept it unless the decision changed. He might have been physically fragile but his spirit was strong when he proudly declared: 'It is enough for me ... to have demonstrated factually that I have spent more than 40 years promoting the moral and material well-being of poor and abandoned youth as well as progress in science and the arts.'¹⁶⁶

The recommendations he gave to the Third General Chapter in 1883 'to get to know and adapt ourselves to our times'¹⁶⁷ was not just shrewdness or an invitation to prepare counter-measures against their negativity, but above all an availability to accept anything new that was not in clear contrast, in Italy or elsewhere, with morality and faith. This is why he accepted the political transformations that took place in 1848 through to 1876, and while remaining outside the debates and struggles in the political and social arenas, he shared all the benefits the new statutory order offered: freedom of initiative, absence of jurisdictional controls, faculties, even ones tied to certain conditions, for open schools, despite even the absolute conditions where technical instruction was concerned, the absence of obstacles to the public profession of religious faith, wider freedom for the press and propaganda in work and in writing, the freedom to establish associations of any kind, be they mutual aid, good press, or charitable and religious activities.

It is not possible to consider Don Bosco's almost universal acceptance without seeing him more or less consciously characterised by a heightened activism and productive pragmatism. In fact, the 1900s saw a gradual decline in the grand metaphysical systems and a retreat to cultural and thought patterns which encouraged doing over being, replacing the primacy of truth as an object of speculative research with effective social involvement aimed against new forms of slavery, and restoring man to his true and authentic humanity. The primacy went to action, possibly collective action, which is an impetus towards a better future, not without a utopian component, an uninterrupted impulse to progress and the search for the well-being of the individual and society. In a certain sense one could say that Don Bosco was unconsciously inclined – without knowing it or accepting its principles – to a philosophy of praxis, a theology of action, an activist pedagogy. He was inclined to a thinking not limited to contemplating and interpreting reality but aimed at transforming it. For Don Bosco, as we have said, in a certain sense '*operari sequitur esse*' replaces '*esse sequitur operari*'. The world is not saved by abstract ideas but by concrete concepts of science translated into techniques that improve life and coexistence at all levels. Thinking is the 'militia' of the man who does things, acts, is the protagonist. Don Bosco, as Filippo Burzio has

166 To the executive Committee (revision jury office), 25 October 1884, E IV 301; cf. Chap. 30, § 3.1.

167 Cf. Chap. 31, § 3.

written, is characterised along with Cottolengo, Cafasso, and others 'by strong social commitment, vigorous activism, realistic concreteness.'¹⁶⁸

11. Wanting the best but seeking whatever good was possible

Fascination with the 'avant garde' did not mean Don Bosco ignored the endless requests coming from the world of young people, which was in fact worldwide, or the lack of resources of personnel and funds. This did not clip his wings but rather led him to do the concrete good that was possible rather than projecting a problematic potential best suited to some indefinable future or one that had already seen its use—by date. He sought to form courageous, inventive and creative collaborators for an apostolate that went beyond national borders, people who at the same time had their feet firmly planted in reality. Four names have been mentioned for Latin America: John Cagliero, Francis Bodrato, Louis Lasagna and James Costamagna, who showed imagination and practicality in equal measure with explicit reference to the model, their distant father, who was as close to them as ever. For his part, he formed the hypothesis in the *Memorie dal 1841* that in some cases certain initiatives could find themselves hampered. This was no reason to abandon them. 'Once a mission abroad has begun,' he wrote 'continue it with energy and sacrifice.' 'When financial means are lacking for some religious undertakings, they can be suspended, but continue what has begun as soon as our finances and sacrifices allow.'¹⁶⁹

This directive, however, had created delicate problems and contradictions in the case of the spiritual construction of his Religious Institute. The disagreement, as we have seen, between Cafasso the perfectionist and Don Bosco who kept an open mind to possibilities while both being in agreement on working for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, was proposed at the level of ecclesiastical authority in Rome and Turin. The differences concerned more particularly the clerical formation of young men on the way to priesthood, but also extended to the manner of being and acting of the whole Salesian Society. Well known Canon Colomiatti summed it up with regard to Don Bosco at a particular moment in the canonisation process in 1915–16. He recalled what Fr Giuseppe Allamano had told him: 'He told us that he knew from D. Bosco himself that Fr Cafasso, the Rector of the Pastoral Institute, and a man of God, had expressed to him that he disapproved of his way of doing good, adding that good should be done well, while he, D. Bosco, wanted to do good but without so much perfection.' The direct version of Blessed Allamando's at an earlier stage of the process was more nuanced: 'He said that good must be done well, and I maintained that it was enough to do it simply amid so much misery.'¹⁷⁰ Bishop Cagliero explained: 'The best, the Venerable Don Bosco used always say, 'is the enemy of the good. If he had waited to begin his works until when he had everything ready and all the people he needed, he would never have begun.'¹⁷¹ He recalled that a similar criticism to Cafasso's was made by Abbot Gaetano Tortone regarding the ecclesiastical formation of clerics who were recreation leaders for the boys at the Valdocco Oratory: 'D. Bosco educated his young men haphazardly and some even said they were "D. Bosco's horses let loose" [*ii cavalass d' don Bosco!*].' On the other hand, Allamando himself could recognise that over the years he spent at the Oratory for his secondary schooling (1862–66), this is when his own priestly vocation had matured.¹⁷²

168 Cf. P. BAIKATI *Cultura salesiana e società industriale*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della letteratura popolare...*, pp. 351-352, 354.

169 *Memorie dal 1841*, RSS 4 (1985) 59.

170 *Positio super dubio An adducta contra Ven. Servum Dei obstent, quominus in Causa procedi possit ad ulteriora?* Romae, Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis 1921, p. 34 (cf. almost identical words on p. 45) and p. 115.

171 *Positio super dubio An adducta...*, pp. 82 and 84.

172 *Positio super dubio An adducta...*, pp. 82 and 84; cf. I. TUBALDO, *Giuseppe Allamano. Il suo tempo. La sua vita. La sua opera*, vol. I 1851-1891..., pp. 23-29. On Tortone's judgement, cf. Chap. 15, § 8.

It is true that at the factual level Don Bosco himself admitted that the hasty attainment of the possibility had sometimes not brought good results. At a meeting of the Superior Chapter on 5 November 1885 – recorded in the minutes – ‘he complains that many Salesians have none of the Salesian spirit. Every year there are defections after so many years educating them, and as soon as they become priests we need to make use of them and they have no time to be formed. Certain priests were ordained because necessity forced us to.’¹⁷³ We have noted the reservations of Archbishop Riccardi di Netro and Bishop Renaldi of Pinerolo.¹⁷⁴ But faced with the urgent and pressing needs, Don Bosco could not be satisfied with the elegant elaboration of fascinating plans for a distant future. He needed to take risks. The greatest difficulties came from Archbishop Gastaldi, from whom he expected understanding and protection, even friendship, more than from anyone else. In this case, he became disoriented, anguished. What supported him was the steady belief that the work he was responsible for, his Religious Congregation, was willed by God to carry out a mission of universal importance which was clearly providential and salvific. He survived the vicissitudes with evident good faith and a spirit of penitence, with steadfastness and fortitude equal to those who opposed him, though sometimes with the doubt that he had lacked some discretion.

We must not forget, though, that Fr Cafasso’s judgement referred to Don Bosco in the 1840s and 50s, the priest of the early days, alone, without regular co-workers and with as yet no well-defined plan. With growth in social and ecclesial responsibility, Don Bosco faced a twofold need even more strongly: do good – good that is possible, authentic, not just casual – in the broadest range of areas, and do it well, with dignity and sufficiency before God and man. Obviously, he did not exclude the better and the best when that was possible. But he did not write documents about all this. He spoke about it and taught it through deeds. We do find a trace, though, in two lines of a letter we have already cited in reply to one of his rectors, someone probably agonising over the ideal, almost perfect college, and the real one that could be achieved in fact. ‘I am fully in agreement with you’ he noted. ‘*Optime* is what we seek, but unfortunately, we must content ourselves with the mediocre amid so much evil.’¹⁷⁵ It was a ‘mediocre’ which, in the Italian lexicon of the 19th century, meant ‘average’ or ‘medium’, the midway point between the excellent and the strictly necessary.

Never for one moment did Don Bosco oppose the principle of ‘the good must be well done’ with the norm that the good must be done no matter what, perhaps even mixed in with a little evil: he never employed the rule of the lesser evil. What is certain – and maybe this was his most distinguishing characteristic – is that he was not attracted by the idea of doing nothing in expectation of some phantom opportunity for a completely utopian good. The different choices were not opposed to one another but needed to be integrated: do what is possible at all costs, and look for the better that might be achievable, never excluding in principle the ideal, the best and certainly not attempting whatever lay beyond the possibilities of personnel and institutions. Other people, including specialists were around to do these things, when it was a case of special youth situations: the emerging group of children and older youth caught up in industrial employment, the whole area of true and proper delinquency, the group closer to his interests of minors in correctional institutes, the huge numbers of poor youth in cities and countryside, the latter flowing into the former, the illiterate, the area of mental and physical handicap. Don Bosco never ventured into all of these. Dreamer he may have been, but he was wise and prudent, and never imagined any plan to involve himself or his men and women in fixing all the wounds or responding to all the needs, including those which others sometimes believed would be suited to him. The *bogianen*, a realist and concrete man, would have disavowed not a few panegyrics and certain representations which were largely just fantasy.

173 *Capitolo Superiore*, fol. 87R, session on 5 November 1885.

174 Cf. Chap. 15, § 7.

175 To Fr G. Bonetti, 6 June 1870, Em III 213; cf. Chap. 24, § 1.1.

Finally, the humble search for the possible was reflected in the simplicity and moderation of his language. While professing some skills in the rhetorical device of hyperbole, Don Bosco was far from that in his concrete activity and daily conversation. He was not a speculative type, someone who favoured ideas cut off from reality. He was a professional practical thinker of ideas that could be understood and communicated and which helped people be effective in what they did. His conversations and writings were not full of abstractions that went over peoples' heads and touched nobody. Perhaps Pius XI's praise in his homily at the canonisation was excessive when he said that it was 'with bold concepts and modern means that he set about carrying out those very new intentions ... which he knew were in keeping with God's will.'¹⁷⁶

In reality, Don Bosco recounted facts in writing or *viva voce*, pointed to living examples, presented visible and tangible situations, highlighted well-defined problems to be resolved. He required that conclusions be tackled and implemented with the means at hand, and their adoption was entrusted not so much to reflection as to the positive involvement of whoever heard or read what he had to say. This was another reason why he preferred meeting individuals face to face, personalising what he had to say in conversation, personal letters; with the boys, Salesians, benefactors, civil and religious authorities. In public, his language was also intrinsically individualised. It is true that sometimes the wood was hidden by the trees, and attention given to the part meant that we lost sight of the whole. The interest in details prevents us from seeing the ends and broader interests. This is the price we pay for his *Realpolitik*, but on the whole and despite its limitations it is this which is his winning card: in ministry, his charitable activity, his mission in all its expressions, his planning and implementation and government of the many support institutions. It is in this light that we need to reinterpret the norm of wisdom on which maximalists of the *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* challenge him, a principle transferred from the metaphysical arena or moral world to the level of practical, prudent action, the only level where life is really at stake, a continual deciding 'here' and 'now'.

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