

VOLUME XIII - 1877-1878

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



FATHER EUGENIO CERIA

FATHER EUGENIO CERIA (1870-1957) already enjoyed the reputation of a distinguished scholar, author, and editor when in 1929 Father Philip Rinaldi, Superior General, asked him to continue the publication of the **Biographical Memoirs**, the monumental work begun by Father John Baptist Lemoyne. Father Ceria's qualifications had been enhanced by his personal contact with Don Bosco during his formative years as a novice and a student of Philosophy at San Benigno Canavese and Valsalice. **Don Bosco con Dio**, published in 1930 and now considered his masterpiece, is a penetrating and inspiring study of his spiritual father.

By systematic and persevering effort Father Ceria brought the **Biographical Memoirs** to completion in 1939, his contribution being Volumes XI-XIX. Other works followed. While compiling the **Annali della Società Salesiana** in four large volumes (1941-51), he published biographies of St. Mary Mazzarello, the Venerable Father Michael Rua, the Servants of God Father Andrew Beltrami and Father Philip Rinaldi, and many other outstanding Salesians. Though advanced in age, he undertook the collection and editing of the **Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco**, in four volumes, two of which were published before his death, which occurred on January 21, 1957 at the age of 86.

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<i>Countries</i>	92
<i>Provinces</i>	77
<i>Houses</i>	1,572
<i>Bishops</i>	63
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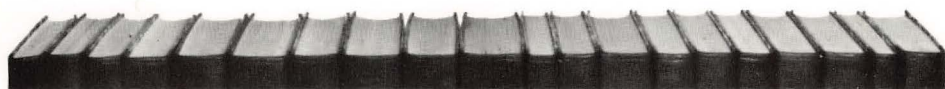
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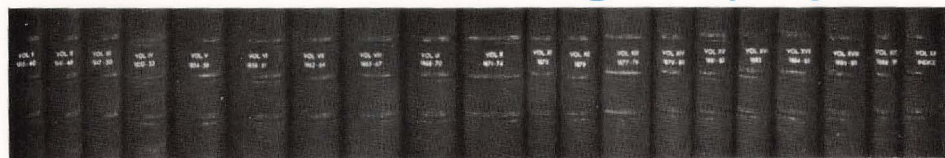
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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL
MEMOIRS
OF
ST. JOHN
BOSCO



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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The
Biographical Memoirs
of
Saint John Bosco

by
REV. EUGENIO CERIA, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

REV. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

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1877-78

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FIRST EDITION

Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE

TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

VERY REVEREND FELIX J. PENNA, S.D.B.

(1904-1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT

This Volume is Respectfully Dedicated
to
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL RAÚL SILVA HENRIQUEZ
Archbishop of Santiago, Chile,
In This His Forty-Fifth Year of Priesthood
A Loyal Son of Don Bosco
He Has Brought Honor to the Church
as
Educator, Builder of Peace
Defender of Human Rights
Proponent of Social Reform
and
Advocate of the Poor

Editor's Preface

SAINST JOHN BOSCO, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when other orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the *Risorgimento*; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of youth*.

He is known familiarly throughout the world simply as Don Bosco.¹ His now famous system of education, which he called the *Preventive System*, was based on reason, religion and kindness, and indicated by its descriptive name that, also in education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He always sought to place pupils in the moral impossibility of committing sin, the moral disorder from which all evils flow.

To ensure the continuation of his educational mission in behalf of youth he founded two worldwide religious congregations, the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) which today number more than 40,000 members conducting 2,800 educational institutions throughout the world.

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content himself with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*.

¹*Don* is an abbreviation of the Latin *dominus*, master. It is used in Italy as a title for priests; it stands for *Father*.

Fortunately, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available in this American edition not only to his spiritual children, devotees and admirers, but also to all who are interested in education.

In these volumes Don Bosco is shown in action: not *theorizing*, but *educating*. What he said and did in countless circumstances was faithfully recorded by several of his spiritual sons, chief among them Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. From the day he first met Don Bosco in 1864 to his own death in 1916, Father Lemoyne spent his life recording words and deeds of Don Bosco, gathering documents,² interviewing witnesses, and arranging raw material for the present nineteen volumes of the life of Don Bosco, eight of which he himself authored besides readying another volume for the press before his death.

In the compilation of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell'Oratorio dal 1835 al 1855* (Memoirs of the Oratory from 1835 to 1855) written by Don Bosco himself, the diaries and chronicles of various fellow Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio de S. Francesco di Sales* (The History of the First Twenty-five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales) written by Father John Bonetti, S.D.B., and personally checked by Don Bosco, the proceedings of the diocesan process of beatification and other unimpeachable contemporary documents and testimonies. Above all, Father Lemoyne, intelligent, conscientious and well-informed, not only used reliable sources, but was himself an eye witness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This enabled him to write a true history, even though not according to modern critical methods. He concerned himself principally with presenting chronologically his vast selected material and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth

²All the documents in the archives at the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy are now being microfilmed and stored in the Don Bosco College Library in Newton, New Jersey.

and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.³ When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, the *Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

In editing the translation of the *Biographical Memoirs* accuracy and readability were the goals we set. This was not easy and occasionally, as regards the latter, we may have fallen short of the mark. Nineteenth-century Italian does not readily lend itself to an agile version that strives to be an accurate translation and not a paraphrase.

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

FR. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-Chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.

June 5, 1965

124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

³Cf. Francis Desramaut S.D.B., *Les Mémoires I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, Lyon, 1962, pp. 411ff.

Author's Preface

While secretary of state, Cardinal Nina was one day asked by Leo XIII what he thought of Don Bosco. "Since Your Holiness asks me," he replied, "let me say that I consider him not just an ordinary man, but a giant whose arms have reached out to embrace the whole world."¹ Quite so, and well said! History will have no problem demonstrating that Don Bosco received from heaven an extraordinarily vast mission in favor of not one single nation but the entire world. Fresh proof came to light as national barriers seemed to tumble before him at his beatification, when all nations exalted him as they would a native glorious son.

Don Bosco did truly stand at the heart of Catholicism, its herald and standard-bearer sent to set afoot fresh activities and renew old ones for the expansion of God's kingdom and the conquest of souls. A few instances: two congregations endowed with extraordinary ability to adapt to all modern needs under any system of government and within all climes; several more congregations growing out of these; new public relations procedures viewed at first with diffidence but later universally adopted; updated structures for religious cooperation preserving the aims of the older third orders but harmonizing them with the times, forerunners of our present-day Catholic Action; the championing of a missionary consciousness wholeheartedly accepted by all levels of society; a uniquely personal trend in education which little by little superseded time-worn pedagogical systems of the past; printing schools for worldwide diffusion of good literature; diversified enterprises, freshly created or recent, to benefit young people and meet their contemporary needs; recruitment of late vocations to the priesthood; innovative liturgical ceremonies irresistibly attracting the faithful in droves; an unprecedented insistence on frequent use of the sacraments for all Catholics and on early First Communion—

¹*Positio super introductione causae. Summarium.* [Summary of the position paper on the introduction of the cause of beatification and canonization, No. 18, Paragraph 77, p. 851, Salesian Press, Rome, 1907.]

both of which innovations were solemnly sanctioned twenty years after his death by Pope Pius X, in words reminiscent of Don Bosco's familiar expressions; a priestly ministry independent of political ties; a spirit frankly adhering to orthodox principles yet applying them with kindly understanding. This cursory, overall view of initiatives emanating directly from Don Bosco or deriving from his promotion and encouragement has spread throughout the world with beneficial effects. Yet, but a century ago, his innovations were either ignored or lost in oblivion or judged impossible or applied under restrictive conditions. Nor did it take long for the world to notice what a sterling apostle was in the making, for just a hundred years ago today [1931], as a teenager, Don Bosco started among his peers a club [for wholesome entertainment] which he called the "Società dell' Allegrìa" [The Cheerful Company]. We cannot help but endlessly admire how far ahead of his time this lad of sixteen was as he drew up norms of conduct for his club and set it into action.²

This thirteenth volume of *The Biographical Memoirs* offers a notable contribution to the life story of our founder, covering two years of his life, 1877 and 1878. It is a rather bulky tome, but splitting it into two would only have proven clumsy, for the events of those two years are best fitted into a single frame, so that the reader may readily view in one block all the events in their mutual interaction.

Two events which touch both the Salesian Congregation and the Catholic Church stand at the heart of this volume: our Congregation's first general chapter and the transfer of Peter's keys from Pius IX to Leo XIII. The former event marked a singularly important step in the development of Don Bosco's Congregation, giving it a forceful thrust forward; in the second, Divine Providence willed Don Bosco to be neither a passive nor a useless spectator. These two most important events were preceded, attended and followed by endless work and severe trials which beset him without relief and filled every hour of his day. Don Bosco made three trips to Rome and three to France; he sent two large parties of Salesians and two of Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to South America, where he also founded new works. In Italy he opened houses at La Spezia, Lucca and Este, laid the foundations for a

²See Vol. I, pp. 194f, 203. [Editor]

boarding school at Magliano Sabino, and took over a paper mill at Mathi Torinese. In France he opened a festive oratory at Marseille and an agricultural school at La Navarre. He transferred the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato and provided convents for them elsewhere. He laid the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, organized the Salesian cooperators and launched the *Bolletino Salesiano* [*The Salesian Bulletin*].

And these are but the most outstanding of his achievements. Directly or indirectly, they created a world of concerns and ceaselessly absorbed all his energies, yet no one project ever so engrossed him as to prevent his attending to several others at the same time. The reader wishing to grasp the breadth of Don Bosco's ubiquity need only draw up a synchronized chronological table of the events related in these pages, listing under their respective dates all the concerns, dealings, ventures and undertakings to which he devoted himself. Then one can wonder how prodigiously a man could so multiply himself in so many many diverse ways, not only without lessening his intense attention to each task, but also without ever losing mastery over himself and over his unalterable serenity. The supernatural heroism of that serenity and of that self-assurance will stand out at those times when his soul, burdened by a score of problems, will perforce have to drink the chalice of bitterness. No one ever drew nigh to Don Bosco even in the midst of his most critical vicissitudes without perceiving the heavenly fragrance emanating from this total absorption in God. Nor could it have been otherwise. His untiring and multiform external activity was animated continually by that supernatural inner life which is the breath of the Divine Spirit.

As to the manner of continuing this work, there is little to say, after the publication of [our] two previous volumes. We have received many spontaneous encouraging testimonials from respected older confreres who were themselves witnesses of the events they read about, from novice masters who day after day keep referring to the memoirs of our holy founder, and from scholarly confreres who, in addition to their other talents, have particular competence in this work. These approvals are sufficient proof that the route we have chosen is the right one, with no reason to alter it. Our plan is as follows: within every chapter to direct toward one central topic all related concepts and events which occur within a given time span;

to look diligently after the historicity of each event, the proper sequence, and the clarity and dignity of the narration; to assemble and set into it, like so many precious gems, whatever our founder said or wrote that has been faithfully passed down to us. Don Bosco's spoken or written pronouncements bear the imprint of the idiom of the saints; they may not merit literary praise but they are always adorned by far more precious and rare values, especially the flawless reflection of their most noble souls and that spiritual sweetness which we call unction. Then, too, our Salesian readers will detect in them the beatings of a fatherly heart. To deprive them of those words would therefore be doubly blameable.

Doubtless, no skill will ever suffice to bring out the complete figure of Don Bosco. He has nothing to fear from history; indeed, the deeper our knowledge of his admirable life, the more easily we shall understand why our present Holy Father, Pius XI, repeatedly took pride before the whole Church for having enjoyed his intimacy for a few brief days during the early years of his priesthood. Now from his exalted position, the Pope surveys in its entirety the vast expanse of Don Bosco's mission as it unfurls throughout the world, and it is no mean boast that he long ago perceived, under a modest exterior and in a fleeting moment of encounter, the man chosen by Divine Providence for our age and time.

Turin, August 24, 1931

Father Eugenio Ceria

EDITOR'S NOTE

As with Volumes VI through X and Volume XII, we have omitted material from the original text that is of little interest to American readers and of no direct consequence to these biographical memoirs. Such omissions will always be pointed out in the footnotes.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
January 31, 1983
Feast of St. John Bosco

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For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Reverends August Bosio, S.D.B., John J. Malloy, S.D.B., and Salvatore Isgro, S.D.B., Provincials emeriti of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsors of this project, and to the Very Reverend Dominic DeBlase, S.D.B., their successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Provincial Councillor for the Salesian Family, for his very valuable editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

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SALESIAN GLOSSARY

(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASSISTANCE: Salesian method of supervision of boys and students, friendly and informal in manner, stressing the prevention of disorders rather than the punishment of offenders.

ASSISTANT: a Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

CLERIC: a member of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood.

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

COMPANION OF YOUTH, THE: a prayer book composed by St. John Bosco for the use of boys, originally entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto*.

COOPERATORS: Christians (laymen, lay religious or priests) who, even if they have no religious vows, follow a vocation to holiness by offering themselves to work for the young in the spirit of Don Bosco, in the service of the local church, and in communion with the Salesian Congregation.

EXERCISE FOR A HAPPY DEATH: a monthly practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion as if for the last time.

FESTIVE ORATORY: a Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities, mostly on Sundays and festive days.

The Festive Oratory was St. John Bosco's first work and, for a good many years, his only one. He called it "oratory," that is, a place of prayer, because its primary purpose was to teach boys to go to church and pray. "Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education, and, consequently, the salvation of their souls; recreation, entertainment, singing, and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means." (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. II, p. 71. See also Vol. III, pp. 67f)

GOOD NIGHT: a short talk immediately after night prayers, given by the Director or someone in his stead. It consists of advice, exhortations, or occasional remarks.

ORATORY: see Festive Oratory, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

ORATORY, THE: abbreviated form of "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" (*See below*)

ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE: the *first* festive oratory and the *first* boarding school for boys founded by St. John Bosco in a district of Turin known as Valdocco; the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

VALDOCCO: a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum*, the valley of the slain—i.e., some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)

THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

The First Month of 1877 in Rome

IN December 1876 Dominic Savio had told Don Bosco in a dream: “Oh, if you only knew how many tribulations still await you!”¹ The year 1877, whose unfolding we are about to narrate, was for Don Bosco one long sequence of adversities and sufferings which strewn his already arduous path with sharp thorns. We begin with the problem of the Conceptionists² which forced him to journey to Rome. At this point we shall limit ourselves to essentials, reserving full treatment to a later chapter.

Don Bosco left for Rome on New Year’s Eve, accompanied by his secretary, Father Joachim Berto, Father Joseph Scappini, the priest assigned to direct the Conceptionists, and Fiorenzo Bono of Biella, a [Salesian] lay postulant who had been assigned to our school in Albano.

Father Scappini was prefect at our school in Lanzo when Don Bosco wrote as follows to the director:

Turin, December 18, 1876

Dear Father Lemoyne:

The Holy Father had word written to me that I should return to Rome as soon as possible with at least one Salesian who is to remain there after my departure. After consultation and prayer as to whether I should take you or Father Scappini, I find that at the present time an indefinite absence on your part could unfavorably affect the school’s reputation; therefore it must be Father Scappini. Tell him and see that he is replaced

¹See Vol. XII, p. 439. [Editor]

²See the Index of Volume XII under “Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception.” [Editor]

by Father [Louis] Porta³ within two weeks. We shall leave for Rome by train on January 1 at the latest and will discuss the matter during the trip. Later, the Holy Father will tell us what to do and, with God's help, we shall do it. The matter still concerns the case of the Conceptionists. Father Scappini should be at the Oratory one day before our departure.

Give my warmest greetings to all our Salesians and boys. Tell them I love them dearly in the Lord and pray for them. I wish them pleasant holidays and a happy New Year. In Rome I shall ask a special blessing for them from the Holy Father. You can add that God is entrusting to us the salvation of many souls in Australia, India and China. They must therefore quickly grow physically, intellectually and spiritually. May they soon become intrepid missionaries to convert the entire world. God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Scappini's departure from Lanzo clearly showed the effects of the educational system taught and practiced by Don Bosco. The boys broke into tears, and touching scenes took place. Yet Father [Joseph] Scappini had been anything but an indulgent superior. Rather, by nature he was inclined to severity, and his duties included handling unpleasant situations. Nevertheless, this occasion revealed how much his pupils loved him. A superior who tempers the severity of discipline with charity and kindness of manner in the performance of duty always makes himself beloved by his boys.

After a very pleasant journey they arrived in Rome at about 1:30 the following afternoon. As usual, Mr. Alexander Sigismondi⁴ took them to his house. After dinner,⁵ Don Bosco went with him to the Caffarelli Building to see Monsignor [Louis] Fiorani, Commendatore of Santo Spirito,⁶ while Father Berto and Father Scappini took lodgings in an apartment near the hospital. Don Bosco was hosted by the Sigismondis. In his chronicle, newsy but very skimpy in details, Father Berto conveys at least the impression that Don Bosco made good use of his time during that month in Rome.

³See Vol. VII, p. 434. [Editor]

⁴A Vatican expediter who always hosted Don Bosco during his visits to Rome. [Editor]

⁵In several European countries the main meal was and still is around noon. [Editor]

⁶See Vol. XII, p. 360. [Editor]

Obviously we would like to know more of what he did and said during his many visits to prelates and friends and in his meetings with distinguished members of the clergy and laity, but with nothing better available, we will have to settle for crumbs.

After an initial courtesy visit, Don Bosco often conferred with Monsignor Fiorani, who was regularly accompanied by his secretary. Their talks dealt mainly on how to merge the Conceptionists with the Salesians or at least how to harmonize their respective constitutions. After drafting their conclusions as a basis for action, Monsignor Fiorani sent Don Bosco the document "for a calm appraisal" of whether or not it fully matched his ideas and, if necessary, for critical remarks. This shows that the agreement which had been reached the previous November no longer held. Don Bosco submitted his remarks on Sunday, January 7. Of the next meeting on January 13, his secretary wrote, "In the end, the Holy Father's views were given only lip service." Don Bosco therefore sent this letter to Fiorani:

January 15, 1877

Your Excellency:

Over the last few days I have carefully considered the present state of the Conceptionists, and I have become convinced that, despite my good will, I cannot reach the goal you were aiming at in accordance with the revered directives of the Holy Father.

Had we promptly carried out our original plan after I arrived at Rome, we probably would have found better cooperation [from the Conceptionists].

Now, faced with such varied opposing views, I have no choice but to offer to provide priests for religious services alone, if this is acceptable to the Holy Father. Father Scappini will personally inform you of all developments.

I must go to Albano and Ariccia for a couple of days and will be back next Thursday.

Most obligingly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Pius IX was kept abreast of the negotiations by Don Bosco, and at an audience with Monsignor Fiorani he asked to see that letter. After reading it through, he exclaimed, "Poor Don Bosco! How

generous of him to take on the spiritual direction of the Conceptionists. He does his utmost. Tell him that I would like to give him a handsome present." The Pope thus broadly hinted that Don Bosco was not anxious to assume responsibility for the Conceptionists and was accepting the burden solely out of duty.

After another interview, the Conceptionists were convoked in the presence of Monsignor Fiorani and the "house master" or "mayor," as they called him. Don Bosco acquainted them with the Holy Father's directives as he had received them from the monsignor: that Monsignor Fiorani would direct material interests and Don Bosco would handle the spiritual. It is strange that, on that very evening, the Pope sent for Monsignor Fiorani and handed him the gift he had promised Don Bosco—twenty thousand lire—urging him to make sure that in the direction of the Conceptionists Don Bosco would have authority over both material and spiritual matters. The monsignor replied, "We shall endeavor to proceed always with both parties' consent." The Pope then added, "Tell Don Bosco that this gift has nothing to do with the Conceptionists, and that I hope to do much more for his Congregation."

Free to use the generous sum as he saw best, Don Bosco sent this short note to Father Rua, undated and unsigned: "You will be receiving a money order for twenty thousand lire in the name of Joseph Rossi. Spend it quickly as best you can, but give most of it to Rossi himself, if he needs it. No need to record its source." Rossi did the buying for the Oratory. Instructions to spend the money quickly and the doubt of Rossi's need of money were pleasantries on the part of Don Bosco. He knew the many debts of the house only too well. Monsignor Fiorani had written to Don Bosco about the necessity of paying a visit to the lay director of the Santo Spirito Hospital, adding, "If possible, call on me first. I will offer a few suggestions."

Apparently Don Bosco went straight to the director and was courteously received. Twenty days later he once more called on the gentleman, who again was most gracious and offered to introduce him to Prince Paul Borghese, his successor as hospital director. As soon as he saw Don Bosco, the prince exclaimed, "Don Bosco has known me from boyhood. I even served his Mass." Before moving on to electing members of the Conceptionist council, Don Bosco again called on the prince with Father Scappini, but after a useless

wait from eleven o'clock until noon, he went to Monsignor Fiorani. There he was present at the election of the superior general, the financial administrator, the ward superintendent, and the novice master [of the Conceptionists].

We now turn to the papal audience. After wasting a whole week waiting to be summoned to the Vatican, Don Bosco went there on the morning of January 9. Spotting him in the Pope's antechamber, Monsignor Macchi, the chamberlain, told him that he had no appointment. "Yet I must speak with the Holy Father," Don Bosco insisted. "Other people are here for their personal interests, but I come for matters which interest the Holy Father." In fact, no sooner was he ushered in than the Pope asked, "Why did you wait so long to see me?"

"Because it is so difficult to get through to Your Holiness."

The Pope turned to Monsignor Macchi with a questioning look, but Don Bosco promptly went on, "Holy Father, every delay is fatal to our project."

"Wait," the Pope said. Dismissing the chamberlain, he then spoke with Don Bosco alone.

On January 11, Don Bosco had another private audience of about half an hour at 5:30 in the afternoon. Ten days later, about dusk, he had a third private audience under very unusual circumstances. He had been waiting some fifteen minutes when the Pope, dismissing the cardinals who were in conference with him, took to his bed because of a bad cold. Shortly afterward he secretly sent for Don Bosco. "You find me in bed quite early," he remarked as Don Bosco was ushered in. Then he immediately turned the talk to the Conceptionists. Among other things, Don Bosco informed the Pope that he was assuming only their spiritual direction.

"No, take on everything," the Holy Father replied.

"But that is not the agreement with Monsignor Fiorani."

"Monsignor is not the Pope," Pius IX retorted.

Departing, Don Bosco appeared bewildered—something unusual for him, regardless of situations. Engrossed in thought he silently and very slowly descended the stairs, while Father Berto, walking at his side, dared not utter a word. They sat together in the antechamber of [John] Cardinal Simeoni, the new secretary of state after Cardinal Antonelli's death. Then the good father fixed his gaze on his companion and with a voice trembling with emotion

said, "The Holy Father is in bed, a bed as low and poor as those of our boys. He has no rug on the floor on which to place his feet when taking off his shoes. The floor is of brick, so worn and uneven that one has to be very careful not to stumble. In fact, as I approached, the Holy Father, knowing that I am near-sighted, warned me, "Walk slowly and come around this way; otherwise you will trip."

Don Bosco mentioned this unusual audience to Father Rua in a letter dated January 22, remarking in uncharacteristic language, "Mind you, the Holy Father was ill in bed and canceled all audiences, but he still received the 'street-kids' leader' who kept him company for some three quarters of an hour."

During the first audience the Pope had made a humorous remark that gives us a chance to establish clearly Don Bosco's stand on a troublesome matter. Pius IX's keen mind often prompted him to make some witty remarks, pleasant in irony but rich in salutary admonition.

"Did you know that we have eleven commandments?" he remarked to Don Bosco. The latter expressed surprise, and the Pope went on, "It says: 'Anyone who says that Rosmini's⁷ works are forbidden commits a grave sin.' But this commandment was issued without my knowledge. What do you say?"

"I think it has no binding force until Your Holiness approves it," Don Bosco answered.

"Yet they proclaimed it throughout Turin without even consulting me."

The Pope was alluding to an admonition in the diocesan calendar of Turin. On June 20, 1876, the Congregation of the Index had sent a letter to the archbishop of Milan, where a controversy over Rosmini's teachings had flared up again. The letter restated the order "to observe the strictest silence regarding the controversial nature of Anthony Rosmini's works because it is unlawful to censure him or his works which deal with matters of faith and morals. It is, however, permissible in schools and in books, within stated limits, to discuss his philosophical views and explanations of certain theological truths."

⁷Anthony Rosmini (1797-1855) was a philosopher and the founder of the Institute of Charity. He also served as an advisor to Pius IX, but he gradually fell into the Pope's disfavor. Some of his works were condemned by the Congregation of the Index. His philosophical system is known as Rosminianism. [Editor]

On the basis of this ruling, the above-mentioned calendar went on: "Therefore those who declare as dangerous the works of Anthony Rosmini—to which the decree *Dimittantur*, issued by Pius IX on July 3, 1854, refers—gravely contravene the Holy See's directive promulgated by the Congregation of the Index." In support of this assertion the authority of Bishop [Peter] Ferrè of Casale was appealed to. In a letter to a superior dated April 26, 1876, the bishop had written: "For over twenty years I have authorized the teaching of Rosminian theories in my seminary and have noted most satisfactory results from both an intellectual and a spiritual perspective."

At this point some questions are in order. First, what did Don Bosco really think of Rosmini's theories? As one who let nothing that concerned the Church escape him, Don Bosco always viewed the question more from a practical than a speculative viewpoint. There is a whole string of anecdotes about him and the bishop of Casale that clearly reveal his personal opinion. The bishop, truly learned and pious, professed a certain veneration for Rosmini and his philosophy; let it not sound irreverent to say that he was infatuated by it. Don Bosco, who revered Rosmini as a saintly priest, did not in the least share this enthusiasm for his philosophical system. The bishop, Don Bosco's good friend, had a hard time trying to engage him in discussions in the hope of changing his mind or at least eliciting from him some statement favorable to his cherished views. To avoid contradicting him, Don Bosco always parried these attempts and deftly changed the subject. However, on one occasion, finding himself backed into a corner, Don Bosco fended off the attack by saying, "Your Excellency, I am not a philosopher and so cannot match you in such discussion. Yet, I do know for certain that it is impossible to prove the existence of God *a priori*, as the Rosminians claim to do. Therefore, the innate idea of being⁸ falls by itself."

Usually Don Bosco managed to slip away by making the best of circumstances. Once, as the bishop was showering him with philosophical arguments against those who denied that Rosmini was a follower of St. Thomas, Father Francesia came into the room. "You are just in time," Don Bosco told him. "Listen to what

⁸This theory was expounded by Rosmini in his *Nuovo Saggio sull'Origine delle Idee*. [Editor]

Bishop Ferrè is telling me. It's beyond me. These things put me to sleep. Perhaps you can understand something."

Another time the bishop invited him to dinner at his residence in Casale. Also present at table were all the canons, Father [John] Bonetti and Father [Joseph] Bertello. They were hardly seated when the bishop began extolling Rosmini's theories. Don Bosco kept his peace and the canons nodded approval. One of them tried to involve Father Bertello who prudently was keeping his thoughts to himself, though he loved and taught philosophy. When the bishop himself addressed him, Father Bertello—true to his character—frankly declared himself to be an anti-Rosminian. A lively debate followed. The good bishop was so taken up by the discussion that he stopped eating. To end the matter, Don Bosco was asked to state his opinion. "Yes, speak," the bishop personally insisted.

"Your Excellency," Don Bosco said, "I shall not discuss the pros and cons of this matter. Permit me to make one remark only. Would a bishop be pleased to know that his seminarians held opinions at variance with his? Now I regard the clergy all over the world as seminarians in relationship to the Pope. Would the Pope be pleased if his clergy, or a part of his clergy, held and championed principles unacceptable to him? Besides, I hold that we owe great deference to the Pope even as a private theologian and therefore should abide by his judgment. This is the way that good children conduct themselves toward their father."

Those present felt admiration, the bishop said no more, and the discussion ended. That evening the seminary rector congratulated Don Bosco on the response which he himself had so often intended to give the bishop but lacked the courage to do so. It is to the credit of Bishop Ferrè that these ideological differences never lessened his affection and esteem for Don Bosco or his desire and readiness to please him at all times.

If on rare occasions Don Bosco discussed Rosminian philosophy, he did so only because of the sad effects that this lasting and bitter controversy wrought among the clergy. However, for Rosmini himself he never had a disparaging word. While not favoring his philosophical system, which he admitted he was not competent to judge, he esteemed his saintliness as a man and priest. He showed his lofty opinion of this philosopher when he said, "Father Rosmini

proved himself to be a learned philosopher by the books he wrote, but he revealed himself to be a profoundly Catholic philosopher by his submission to the judgment of the Church. He showed his consistency by professing respect for the See of Peter in deeds as well as words.”⁹ “Rosmini’s profound knowledge was matched by the firmness and humility of a good Catholic.”¹⁰ I do not recall ever seeing a priest say Mass as reverently and devoutly as Rosmini. He was visibly a man of deep faith, which was the source of his love, kindness, modesty and dignified demeanor.”¹¹

We do not raise the second question but report it as put to Don Bosco himself in strict confidence by his secretary: “Why did you use your influence with Pius IX to have Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi appointed bishop of Saluzzo and then archbishop of Turin, knowing that he had been a member of Rosmini’s Institute of Charity and was still following his philosophy?” Don Bosco’s secretary recorded his reply as follows: “Look, on several occasions Canon Gastaldi assured me that he had left the Institute of Charity because some of its members were not sufficiently submissive and loyal to the Pope. He also assured me that he had abandoned some of the liberal views he had espoused and upheld before becoming a Rosminian. Besides, I had every reason to believe that he would always favor us. What else can I say? As soon as he became archbishop of Turin, he changed his tune. He championed the Rosminian philosophy, defending its advocates publicly and privately while opposing us because I would not go along with him. Averse to dissension, I endured everything and always kept silent rather than fall out with him.”

He was asked the same question repeatedly. In 1878, for instance, having been invited to dine with the Benedictines of St. Paul on the feast day of their patron saint, he listened silently to

⁹Letter from Don Bosco to Father Joseph Fradelizio, a Rosminian, December 5, 1849. He did not know Father Rosmini personally at that time. He wrote this four months after two well-known pamphlets by Rosmini had been put on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. [Author]

¹⁰*Storia d’Italia* [History of Italy] by John Bosco, Chapter 47. In his monograph *Il Rosmini e gli Uomini del Suo Tempo* [Rosmini and His Contemporaries], p. 257, No. 1, Father John Baptist Pagani wrote: “We know from a reliable source that two religious called on Don Bosco to persuade him to delete those words from his *History of Italy*. He replied that he could not do so because they were absolutely true. [Author]

¹¹From a letter of Bishop Tasso to Father Bernardino Balzari, Superior General of the Rosminians, February 2, 1909. These words were uttered by Don Bosco during the last years of his life to Vincentian Father Vincent Tasso, later bishop of Aosta. [Author]

what was being said about the archbishop of Turin while guests were sipping their after-dinner coffee. Abruptly, Cardinal Bartolini asked him point-blank whether or not he had recommended Gastaldi for that see. "Yes, Your Eminence," he replied. "Now, unfortunately, I am paying for it."

On one of his first days in Rome, Don Bosco called on the minister of education for an important reason. In previous years special examinations had been scheduled for persons who lacked a degree but wanted to be certified as secondary school teachers. This easement, which benefited Catholic schools mostly, was opposed by the anticlericals. Don Bosco had twice before had his teachers certified through this program and now he planned to do so again.¹²

Minister Coppino received him very courteously and listened as Don Bosco explained how the lack of financial means kept many brilliant young men from obtaining university degrees. He also pointed out that both private and public secondary schools employed uncertified teachers. Coppino commended Don Bosco's presentation of facts and asked him to put them in writing as a formal petition. Don Bosco immediately complied, dating his petition "Turin, January 6, 1877."¹³

The petition's favorable reception and the minister's several promises led Don Bosco to believe that he had achieved his goal. Imagine his disappointment when a decree was issued on May 10 imposing conditions that hardly any of his thirty young men could meet! All candidates had to be thirty years of age with at least six years of teaching experience, or twenty-five years of age and already certified to teach in elementary or technical schools. Finally, a directive from the department of education dated July 31 bound competent school authorities to strict enforcement of the regulations. Despite his outward appearance, Minister Coppino always opposed Don Bosco and the Oratory.

On the morning of January 16 Don Bosco went to Albano, where his sons welcomed him with open arms. He stayed at the Carmelite monastery where the Salesians resided, and they were soon joined by the confreres from neighboring Ariccia. As was his custom, the

¹²This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

¹³Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

next day he paid his personal respects to the local ecclesiastical and municipal authorities. He spent the evening with his sons, raising their spirits (as Father Francis Varvello, who was present, declared) with most amusing conversation, as though he had forgotten all of his worries. On the third day he joined the community in their Exercise for a Happy Death. Then, after paying his respects to Albano's mayor and looking over some premises which were being offered to him for a boarding school, he returned to Rome.

Here he resumed his visits to officials of the Holy See, submitting his first triennial report on the state of the Salesian Society to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, in keeping with the Apostolic Constitution *Romani Pontifices*. The report listed one hundred and sixty-three perpetually professed members, seventy-eight in temporary vows, one hundred and twenty novices, seventy-nine aspirants and eighty-nine priests. The Superior Chapter was made up of: Father John Bosco, *Rector*; Father Michael Rua, *Prefect*;¹⁴ Father John Cagliero, *Spiritual Director*;¹⁵ Father Charles Ghivarello, *Economer*;¹⁶ Father Celestine Durando,

¹⁴Michael Rua first met Don Bosco when the Oratory still had no permanent quarters. (See Vol. II, pp. 247ff) In 1847, won over by Don Bosco's kindness, Rua began attending the festive oratory regularly. After graduating with honors from the Christian Brothers School in Turin in 1850, he became first a day student at the Oratory and then a boarder on September 22, 1852. On October 3, he donned the clerical habit and became Don Bosco's most valued assistant. On December 18, 1859, he was elected spiritual director of the fledgling Salesian Congregation. In 1884, at Don Bosco's request, Pope Leo XIII named him to be Don Bosco's vicar with right of succession. He became rector major on December 31, 1888 and died in this post on April 6, 1910. The diocesan process of beatification was started in 1922. In 1936 the cause moved to Rome and in 1953 he was declared Venerable. See also the Index of preceding volumes. [Editor]

¹⁵John Cagliero entered the Oratory in 1851. (See Vol. IV, pp. 200ff) He was ordained a priest in 1862 and led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in 1875. (See Vol. XI, pp. 348f) He became the first Salesian bishop in 1884 and a cardinal in 1915. He died at Rome in 1926. In June 1964 his remains were brought back to Argentina and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma. For further details see the Indexes of Volumes, IV, V, VI and XI. See also Vol. IX, pp. 125, 128f. [Editor]

¹⁶Charles Ghivarello (1853-1913) entered the Oratory at the age of twenty and received the clerical habit from Don Bosco the following year. He made his first formal vows in 1862 and was ordained a priest in 1864. His building expertise greatly helped Don Bosco. He filled important positions until his death in 1913. [Editor]

Prefect of Studies;¹⁷ Father Anthony Sala, *Consultor*.¹⁸

Don Bosco had decided to appoint Father Bonetti¹⁹ as spiritual director or catechist general, in place of the absent Father Cagliero, but he was not yet able to withdraw him from the direction of the school at Borgo San Martino. Father Ghivarello, a former consultor, became economer, replacing Father Bodrato who had left for South America. Father Durando, currently a consultor, took over the general supervision of Salesian schools. Father Sala, the new member of the Superior Chapter, became consultor in place of Father Lazzero, who was appointed vice-director of the Oratory. Father Barberis, master of novices, figures only as a consultor of the Oratory house chapter. We shall speak of the houses later on.

From the Oratory Don Bosco received letters signed by the novices and artisans who expressed their fervent love for the Vicar of Jesus Christ. The Pope graciously listened as they were read to him. Don Bosco also received messages from pupils in all grades who had received excellent marks in conduct during the first term.

Toward the end of January, the archbishop of Turin arrived in Rome accompanied by the rector of the archdiocesan seminary; both took lodgings with the Rosminians. We mention their arrival because the press garbled fact with conjecture, involving also Don

¹⁷Celestine Durando entered the Oratory in 1856, and on his very first day he met Dominic Savio, with whom he later founded the Immaculate Conception Sodality. In 1859 with other young clerics, he joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Congregation. He was ordained a priest in 1864. The following year he became a member of the Superior Chapter and held that office for nearly forty years. He also authored an excellent Latin grammar and dictionary and other works. A zealous priest, he distinguished himself in the ministry of the confessional. He died at the Oratory on March 27, 1907. [Editor]

¹⁸Anthony Sala (1836-1895) entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family's silk mill. He took his vows as a Salesian on December 29, 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1869. In 1875 he was appointed councilor to the Superior Chapter, and in 1880 became economer general of the Salesian Society, a post to which he was re-elected in 1886 and 1892. He died in Turin on May 21, 1895. [Editor]

¹⁹John Bonetti entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. In 1859, along with other young men, he banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its Superior Chapter. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, apologetic and Salesian publications, chief among them *The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these *Biographical Memoirs*. In 1866 he was elected spiritual director of the whole Salesian Congregation. He died in that post at the age of fifty-three, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that Father Bonetti would be the first member of the Superior Chapter to follow him to the grave. [Editor]

Bosco in their rumors.²⁰ The papers all agreed on one point: Archbishop Gastaldi had gone to Rome to submit his resignation as archbishop of Turin to the Pope. They concurred too on the reasons for his action. They were, in substance, the archbishop's clash with the Vatican centered on his directives to his clergy not to censure the life and teachings of Father Rosmini, and his feud with Don Bosco, who snubbed the archdiocesan administration with impunity. As usual *Il Fischietto* carried a cartoon showing Don Bosco as an iron-fisted gladiator who had just floored the archbishop at his feet.

After Don Bosco's departure from Rome, Monsignor [Charles] Menghini, an attorney then defending Archbishop Gastaldi in a thorny canon law suit, thus evaluated these newspaper stories: "Press reports on Archbishop Gastaldi's resignation are groundless. I think that some reporter got his hands on a few pages of my defense of the archbishop and is out to make money. I refer to the words on page 37: *Therefore, twice already have I expressed to the Holy Father my earnest desire to withdraw from this office, where my hands are tied by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities.* However, I am convinced that the archbishop will never submit his resignation."²¹

In those days newspapers were not read at the Oratory except by a handful of superiors, and then only privately. Still, rumors of the uproar reached there, all the more so because, in defense of religion and in partisan retaliation, both Catholic and moderate newspapers sided with Don Bosco. Consequently, when he was one day asked to speak of this matter, he changed the subject.

Another time the question was put in a different way. Several priests and clerics around him began to talk about the worldwide fame he was being given by newspapers of every color and jokingly asked him whether this made him proud. "Proud?" Don Bosco replied. "I'm afraid that the Lord has other things to reprove me for, but not pride. I realize how little of my own is found in our undertakings. Were the Lord not to will it and provide the means, we would collapse immediately. My contribution, especially now,

²⁰See, for example, *La Gazzetta del Popolo* of Turin, January 31 and February 4; *La Libertà* of Rome, afternoon edition, January 30; and several others. [Author]

²¹Letter from Monsignor Menghini to Father [Joachim] Berto, February 4, 1877. [Author]

is so insignificant that I am totally amazed that the Congregation and all our enterprises manage to forge ahead.”

As we have done in the preceding volume, before accompanying Don Bosco on his return trip to Turin, we offer our readers a small batch of letters which he wrote from Rome, arranged chronologically and prefaced by brief explanations. Certainly he wrote many more letters but these are the only ones we could find.

1. To Father John Bonetti

Whenever Don Bosco left the Oratory for a considerable time, he always found ways to keep in touch with his boys and spur them on to self-betterment. That year, in telling them of the Pope’s blessing to the Oratory or to their own school, he remarked that the Holy Father was asking all the pupils to receive Holy Communion for his intentions. He invited them to do the same for himself so that he might achieve his goals in Rome. The vicariate apostolic of Malabar, mentioned in this letter, remained just a wishful objective of Alexander Cardinal Franchi. Pius IX’s death and subsequent changes led to its abandonment.

Rome, January 9, 1877

My dear Father Bonetti:

I enclose a brief note for the clerics Zemo and Laureri. I accept what they say and hopefully look forward to the fulfillment of their promises.

Tell Vincent²² to remember me to his mother, to whom the Holy Father sends his special blessing.

He sends another particular blessing to our dear boys, especially to the members of the Altar Boys’, St. Aloysius and Blessed Sacrament sodalities. To all he wishes health, holiness, wisdom and heroic determination to go to the East Indies, where we have accepted a vicariate apostolic with about three million souls.

I urge all the boys to receive Holy Communion for me, as I have many

²²Vincent Provera, brother of Father Francis and buyer at Borgo San Martino. The cleric Thomas Laureri became provincial of the Salesians in Liguria. For a time he also substituted for the procurator general in Rome. [Author]

thorny matters to handle. I shall say a special prayer for them at St. Peter's tomb.

May God bless us all. Amen. The Sigismondis wish to be remembered to all.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

2. To Mr. Andrew Boassi

This gentleman was allegedly a secret government agent and, possibly, a convert from Freemasonry. He often called on Don Bosco, whom he respected and trusted and who was always very kind to him, endeavoring, as usual, to induce him to give some consideration to his soul. The frequent reports of his missionaries on the religious situation in Rio de Janeiro spurred Don Bosco to do something for Brazil. Its ruler, Emperor Don Pedro II, was dethroned by the revolution of November 15, 1889, and died in exile in 1891.

Rome, January 10, 1877

Dear Mr. Boassi:

First, let me thank you for your kind remembrance of me and all our little world at Valdocco. We very often mention you and hope that you will visit us before long.

I am very glad that you enjoy friendly relations with Emperor Pedro of Brazil and his wife. When you get the chance, recommend to them one of our schools in that vast empire. I believe that many poor boys would grow up into good citizens instead of ending up in prison. I entrust this matter to your prudence.

The land that would suit Mr. Piano is no longer for sale. A church is to rise there and work has already started.

May God safeguard you and grant you a happy life.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

3. To Father Michael Rua

The Oratory's first play of the year was staged on the feast of the Epiphany, and after that performances were scheduled every Sunday. For some years Don Bosco had not been particularly

pleased with these performances because of the kind of plays and their presentation. Lavish productions, expensive wardrobes, lack of clear moral purpose, disruption of the timetable, a special supper for the actors after the entertainment, lack of a firm and alert stage manager—all these things had given rise to disorders. The year before, Don Bosco had already mentioned the problem to the coadjutor brothers [Joseph] Dogliani, the music master, and Peter Barale, the bookstore manager. They were both good and capable men, about twenty-eight years old. He asked them to join him on a stroll to town and expressed his thoughts substantially as follows: “Our stage plays are no longer what I want them to be. Therefore I have decided to put you in charge of dramatics. What I want is unpretentious, moral productions. Above all, I want to know in advance what will be presented.” The two coadjutor brothers did their best to comply, but they ran into difficulties in stemming the contrary tide. Don Bosco even vetoed a play entitled *The Poor People of Paris*, although the script had already been given to the actors. In the following letter he insists on returning to the former practice.

Rome, January 11, 1877

Dear Father Rua:

Give some consideration to our stage plays. Speak with Father Lazzero and take united action to ban scenes of tragedy, duels and sacred words. Perhaps Barale and Dogliani can help.

Forward my book of railway tickets to Sampierdarena. I will use it immediately for my return to Turin. If our sisters wish to see our stage plays, they may do so.

As regards Sozzi do as the Lord may inspire you. This evening I have another audience with the Holy Father.

Farewell and rejoice in the Lord.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

4. To Father Michael Rua

This undated letter was written after the first private audience with the Pope. . . .²³

²³We are omitting a brief history of the Chieri festive oratory which is mentioned in this letter. [Editor]

The special blessing for ailing Father Vespignani calls for some comment. He had entered the Oratory on November 6, 1876, as a newly ordained priest. The following Christmas Don Bosco admitted him to perpetual vows. While he was still with his family, he coughed up blood-stained spittle several times between August 10 and the end of the month. At the Oratory after the feast of the Epiphany in 1877, he again began to cough, lost strength and felt pains in his chest and shoulders. In the hope that a milder climate might speed his recovery, he was sent to our school in Alassio, but he grew worse and a recurrence of tuberculosis made him keep to his bed. Since his doctor considered sea air bad for him, he returned to Turin, but upon reaching Bra a violent lung hemorrhage wore him down. These attacks recurred several times, until Don Bosco, just back from Rome, paid him a visit after the feast of the Purification [February 2].

“How are you?” he asked. “Do you feel any better?”

“Ah!” he answered. “I asked to be sent to America, but as for going there or returning it’s all over. I am preparing for my trip to eternity.”

“No, no, you will go to America.”

With that, Don Bosco blessed him. From that day Father Vespignani began to improve until he recovered completely. That same year he left for South America and worked there untiringly until 1922. Currently [1932] he is Prefect General for Arts and Trades Schools.²⁴

[No date]

Dear Father Rua:

1. Kindly inform Mr. A. Crida that everything has been done. Ask him to pray, as I will too. Let’s keep hoping.
2. Go ahead with the entertainment on Shrove Tuesday, but let it be short and funny. It should be over by 5 P.M.
3. As regards Miss Pozzi, it is best to wait for the reading of her will. Should she leave us anything, offer Holy Mass for the repose of her soul.
4. Our archbishop wrote a long letter speaking of his health and expressing his satisfaction with the Chieri festive oratory, etc. . . .

²⁴He filled that office until his saintly death in Turin in 1932. In 1948 at the request of Salesians and alumni in Argentina, his remains were transferred to San Carlos Church in Buenos Aires. [Editor]

5. Minister Coppino has promised to ease many regulations at the forthcoming January certification examinations.

6. Tell Father Vespignani that I have requested a special blessing for him from the Holy Father and another for all the sick, particularly Father Guidazio and Toselli.

7. Inform Grandmother Theresa, Miss Cinzano, Mrs. Massarola, and Miss Mandillo of the same blessing.

[Undated and unsigned]

5. *To Father Michael Rua*

On Thursday, January 18, at the Oratory's Exercise for a Happy Death, general Communion was offered for Don Bosco's intentions. The same was done on Sunday for the Pope. "On both occasions," the chronicle records, the Communion was very many and very fervent.

[No date]

Dear Father Rua:

Distribute the enclosed letters. If possible, read them and deliver them in person, especially the one addressed to Mr. Faia.

The Holy Father received me graciously. He sends his blessing to all Salesians, novices, aspirants and students. As he is badly afflicted with a cough, he asks particularly for a Holy Communion from each and grants a plenary indulgence to all who receive.

I will give you details at another time. May God bless all of us.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

6. *To Father Michael Rua*

This letter too is undated. It was written during the week before Don Bosco's trip to Albano, and therefore before Sunday, January 16. It asked Father Rua to take care of several matters and errands.²⁵

²⁵Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

7. To Father John Cagliero

This letter encloses an undated note which restates things mentioned in the same letter. More important is the postscript: "I have just come from the Holy Father, who cordially sends his apostolic blessing to all Salesians in America and adds this exhortation, *Urge them in my name to observe your rules with vigilant care, especially in matters of moral conduct, which is in constant peril in that part of the world.*"

Rome, January 14, 1877

My dear Father Cagliero,

By this time you will have welcomed our dear confreres. Although no definite news has arrived, I trust that they had a pleasant voyage. I have put all this aside to write to you on some important matters.

Let us see what we can do about two requests I have received from the Holy Father: a vicariate apostolic in Patagonia and another in either Carmen de Patagónes or Santa Cruz or Punta Arenas, or, better still, a single vicariate containing all three locations. We could start with a school and junior seminary at Carmen, also known as Patagónes, and Concepción. Then, once this house is pretty well set, we can plan for the other two localities. What means do we have? Both the Sacred Congregation and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith will help. The Holy Father will help even more, and we in turn, after studying the situation, will do our share. How about personnel? Our Congregation must provide all of it. It has occurred to me that, among others, we could ask Monsignor Ceccarelli to head the enterprise. Speak to him about it. Undoubtedly he will become a bishop, but he could still be the official pastor of the parish at San Nicolás while one or more Salesians run it for him. How about Father Cagliero? We shall accept the vicariate apostolic of Mengador²⁶ in India, and Father Cagliero will be the vicar apostolic, Father Bologna the vicar general, and so on. According to Cardinal Franchi the vicariate numbers some three million souls.

Between those presently available and those in training we have enough personnel. We can easily train six Salesians for Patagonia, and ten priests and ten catechists for India. God will do the rest.

As you see, I have done the groundwork. Think it over, speak with Monsignor Ceccarelli and others, and then let me know if you feel up to the task of directing this undertaking.

The Holy Father sends his special blessing to all Salesians in America,

²⁶Read "Mangalore." [Author]

and to all present and future volunteers, especially to Mr. Benitez, for whom I beg of God added years of health and happiness.

I have not yet been able to settle on a price for the plot adjacent to the Church of Our Lady of Mercy.²⁷ Hopefully this can be done by the beginning of February, when I shall write to you again. The consul appears well disposed, but he is a Genoese and very cautious in doing business.

Tell all the Salesians that here in Europe the Congregation gains in reputation, with an increase in number, in requests for new foundations, and, I believe I can say, also in individual fervor. You will see it all in the directory being sent to you under separate cover. How are things in America?

For your information, I have always written to you on the 1st and 15th of every month, but it seems that many letters have been lost.

I am also writing to Archbishop Aneyros to tell him of the Holy Father's wish that an attempt be made in Patagonia and of the advisability that he write a letter to the president of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith at Lyons.

May the Lord bless us, keep us in His peace and lead us to eternal life.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. You will see Monsignor Roncetti soon, if you have not as yet. He is the Holy See's chargé d'affaires in Brazil. He will stop in Buenos Aires to look over our situation and will confer with Archbishop Aneyros about the possibility of penetrating into the Patagonian pampas. He thinks well of us; I have recommended his appointment to this mission. He does not know that when he returns he will be made a cardinal; you might mention this when you see him.²⁸ You will be wise to keep the archbishop informed of everything. I am still awaiting definite word from Montevideo so that I can let you know the full extent of the Holy Father's blessing.

8. *To Joseph Buzzetti*

We do not know why Don Bosco calls him "Romualdo." It is probably one of his usual pleasantries bearing on some remark in Buzzetti's letter to him or some personal incident. His loyalty to Don Bosco was extolled by Father Lemoyne in Volume V of these memoirs.

²⁷See Vol. XII, p. 190. [Editor]

²⁸Monsignor Caesar Roncetti left Brazil for reasons of health on July 1, 1878. He had won universal esteem and affection during his mission there. [Author]

Rome, January 20, 1877

My dear Romualdo:

Your letter was a delight. Since it contained nothing personal, I let several prelates read it and they loved it.

Carry on trustfully, for God is with you. Give my greetings to all your musicians and tell them that if they will play some good music for me when I return, I'll treat them all to a glass of choice wine.

God bless you, dear Buzzetti. I ask you and your pupils to receive Holy Communion for my intention. God willing, we shall see each other next week.

Yours always in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

9. To Archbishop Gastaldi

This is a reply to the archbishop's letter concerning the festive oratory at Chieri. On January 7 Attorney Menghini briefed his prelate-client on a defense memorandum of a suit which the archbishop had initiated with the Sacred Congregation of the Council and offered this suggestion: "At this time I believe it would be good policy to show some courtesy to Don Bosco, who is very powerful with Cardinal Berardi, one of the judges of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Would you then please do me the great favor of having *the enclosed note delivered* to Don Bosco?"²⁹ His letter to the archbishop is undated, but Cardinal [Louis Marchese of] Canossa asserted that the meeting referred to in the letter was held on January 14.

[No date]

Your Excellency:

I was greatly heartened to receive your esteemed letter. It was all the more welcome for its news of Your Excellency's health, for which I have hoped and prayed to God.

As soon as I receive an audience with Cardinal Berardi, I shall not fail to pay him your respects, which certainly will be welcome. However, he is

²⁹Menghini's original letter is in the possession of Father Franchetti of Turin. The italics in the line quoted are our own. The original letter from Don Bosco to Archbishop Gastaldi is in the possession of the heirs of Count Charles Cipolla, former professor of history at the Royal University of Turin. [Author]

not well. As for Chieri, I shall do all I can to set up a festive oratory for girls and another for boys. Your approval and support greatly encourage me.

As I was writing this, Bishop [Louis] Canossa of Verona came in and immediately inquired about Your Excellency's health. He was pleased with the good news I gave him and asked me to send you his greetings.

He is now in Rome. He would like to be excused from being appointed archbishop of Bologna, the see which the Pope assigned to him when making him cardinal. It is very unlikely that the Holy Father will change his mind.³⁰

I pray that God will keep you in good health. I am honored to profess myself

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

10. To Father Joseph Bologna

Nearly all the letters which Don Bosco sent to the Oratory were read aloud after night prayers. He usually sent greetings by name to both pupils and Salesians. Father Bologna, prefect of the day students, was disappointed because his name was never mentioned. When Don Bosco learned of this, he sent him an amusing little poem [dated January 22, 1877] in which he specifically mentioned the several languages this industrious Salesian was studying after volunteering to go to the missions. That is why Don Bosco referred to Father Bologna as vicar general in India³¹ in his letter to Father Cagliero.

11. Father Julius Barberis

After Father Chiala's death, the task of editing and publishing the letters from the Salesian missionaries in South America was entrusted to Father Barberis.

³⁰Pius IX made him a cardinal in 1877 but allowed him to remain in Verona where he died in 1900. [Author]

³¹We omit this poem because a translation would hardly do justice to its humor. [Editor]

Rome, January 23, 1877

Dear Father Barberis:

I enclose a letter from our missionaries. See if it is advisable to eliminate quotations and English or Irish names.

I shall write to the novices about their letter for the Pope. The Holy Father has been bedridden for the past two days but now feels better. He received me while confined to bed and held me for almost an hour to keep him company.

Tell the novices that I have set up some grand projects for them, which they can successfully carry out if they have good health, holiness and wisdom.

Give my regards to Peretto³² and tell him that I am taking his letter into consideration.

Send me as quickly as possible the decree on the Sons of Mary Program.

May God bless us. Ask all your novices to pray.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

12. To Father John Branda

Father Branda was the catechist of the artisans. On January 22, Don Bosco had written to Father Rua and among other things had told him: "Visit my dear artisans and tell them that I read to the Holy Father the letter which you wrote about them. The Pope was very pleased and kept saying, 'God bless those dear boys of mine. They give me much comfort. I shall pray for them that they will remain good. Ask them to pray for me because my end is near.' "

Rome, January 25, 1877

Dear Father Branda:

I was deeply consoled by the news you sent me. The Holy Father listened with delight as I read him your whole letter. He sends a special blessing to all the artisans. Tell Arietta that there is still time for him too. God's mercy is great, but he should not delay. I hope that he will give me joy by receiving the sacraments on the feast of St. Francis de Sales.

Meanwhile tell all that I always remember them at Holy Mass. I thank them for their prayers, which have already been partly answered. Tell

³²The cleric Charles Peretto was a member of the first group of Salesians sent to Brazil in 1883. He became provincial and died there at Ouro Preto in 1923. [Author]

them to keep on praying; they too will rejoice, and in a material sense also. Greet them all for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On January 29, after celebrating Mass in honor of St. Francis de Sales in the Sigismondis' private chapel, Don Bosco took leave of his generous hosts and set out for Magliano by train. The auxiliary bishop of Cardinal Bilio met him at the station at Borghetto. After a short walk he was welcomed by all the seminarians, the boarding students, the day pupils, and their teachers. Greeting them in a very fatherly way, he entered the bishop's coach and rode with him into town. Soon afterward, the mayor called at the bishop's residence with a welcoming committee.

The next morning Don Bosco returned the mayor's visit. He was named Orsoli, and was somewhat of a bear who did not usually take too kindly to priests, but, charmed by Don Bosco's words and manners, he even attended a little gathering prepared for Don Bosco by the seminarians in which they recited poetry for him. When asked to speak, Don Bosco drew upon the classical heritage of the region with a thought from the classics taken from Agesilaus upon his visiting a school: Never do anything you may be sorry for later, but always do what may prove helpful in days to come.

On the third day both seminarians and boys made the Exercise for a Happy Death. That evening, Second Lieutenant [Benvenuto] Graziano, whom we have already mentioned,³³ came from Viterbo, where he was stationed, and directed a short entertainment. It featured *L'Orfanello* [The Young Orphan] and *Lo Spazzacamino* [The Chimney Sweep] sung to guitar accompaniment. Finally, on February 1 Don Bosco bid farewell to his Salesians and friends and went on to Florence. There he remained until the evening of February 3 as a guest of pious and charitable Marchioness Uguccioni, who was still stunned by the recent death of her husband. The next morning he arrived in Turin and received, as customary, a most hearty "Welcome back" from the Oratory community.

³³See Vol. XI, pp. 102ff. [Editor]

Two days after his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco found himself back in Rome in a dream. It was a prophetic dream which he privately narrated to the directors gathered for their annual conference. We transcribe the narrative as it was immediately recorded by Father Barberis and Father Lemoine. It is necessary to know, first, that Raphael Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, the Holy Father's vicar after the death of [Constantine] Cardinal Patrizi, had asked Don Bosco to send Salesians to direct the Hospital of Our Lady of Consolation, just a stone's throw from the Roman Forum. Personnel was scarce, but since this was the first request of the new cardinal vicar to the Salesian Congregation, Don Bosco was very anxious to oblige. On the night of February 7, he went to bed preoccupied with this thought and dreamed that he was back in Rome.

I seemed to be in Rome again. I went at once to the Vatican, unconscious of the fact that it was the dinner hour and that I needed an appointment, or of anything else. I was in one of the halls when Pius IX walked in and informally sat down in an armchair of some sort near to me. Greatly astonished, I tried to rise and pay my respects, but he would not let me. Indeed he insisted solicitously that I sit by his side, and then he began a conversation which substantially ran as follows:
"It isn't long since we last met," he remarked.

"Yes, it was only a few days ago," I replied.

"From now on we must see each other more often because we have to discuss many things. Meanwhile, tell me what you have been doing since you left Rome."

"There wasn't time for much. I settled a few matters which awaited my return and then I set to thinking what could be done for the Conceptionists, when suddenly I received a request from the cardinal vicar that we assume the direction of the Hospital of Our Lady of Consolation. This is the cardinal's first request of us and we would like to oblige, but at this time we are handicapped by lack of personnel."

"How many priests have you already sent to the Conceptionists?" (Meanwhile he took my hand and, holding it, had me pace the hall with him.)

"We sent only one. We were seriously considering sending more, but we are in a bind because we have no one."

"Well, first provide for the Santo Spirito Hospital."

(Moments later, the Holy Father stood erect, his countenance raised and almost beaming with light, and he gazed upon me.)

“Oh, Holy Father, if our boys could only see your face now, I am sure that they would be beside themselves with joy. They love you so much.”

“It is not impossible. . . . Who knows but that they may see their wish fulfilled?”

Then, as if suffering from a sudden dizzy spell, leaning here and there, he tottered over to a sofa and, sitting down, he stretched out upon it full-length. Thinking that he was tired and was trying to get some rest, I attempted to slip a cushion under his head, but he refused. Stretching out his legs, he said, “I need a white sheet to cover me from head to toe.”

Frightened and dumbfounded I stared at him, not knowing what to say or do. I could make no sense of what was happening.

At that moment the Holy Father arose and said, “Let’s go.” We walked into a hall full of prelates and the Holy Father went straight toward a closed door. No one seemed to pay attention to him. I quickly opened the door for him as he got close to it so that he could go through. Seeing this, one of the prelates shook his head, murmuring, “That’s none of Don Bosco’s business. There are people who are charged with doing that.”

I apologized as best I could, remarking that I claimed no privilege but had opened the door only because no one else had moved to do so and because I feared that the Holy Father might be inconvenienced or might stumble. The Pope overheard this and, turning back, said smilingly, “Leave him alone. I am the one who wants him to do this.” He then went through the door and did not come back.

So there I stood all alone, no longer knowing where I was. As I turned here and there to orient myself, I saw Buzzetti. His presence made me feel much better. I was about to tell him something when he came over to me and said, “Look, your shoes are worn out and messy.”

“I know, but what can I do? These poor shoes have done a lot of walking. They are still the ones I was wearing when I went to Lanzo. They have twice traveled to Rome. They have already gone to France and now they are back here. Obviously they have to be worn out by now.”

“You can’t wear them any longer. Can’t you see that the soles are all gone and your feet are resting on the ground?”

“You are quite right, but now tell me: Do you know where we are, or what we are doing here? Do you know why I am here?”

“Sure I do.”

“Then tell me. Am I dreaming or is all this that I am seeing something real? Say something.”

“Be at ease. You are not dreaming. All you see is real. We are in Rome at the Vatican. The Pope is dead. And all of this is so real that, if you were to try to leave, you would have a hard time and would not even be able to find the staircase.”

I went to the doors and windows. Everywhere I saw buildings in ruins and rubble, and the staircases in shambles.

“Now I really know that I am dreaming,” I said. “Just a little while ago I was in the Vatican with the Pope, and there was nothing of this sort.”

“The ruins you now see are the effect of a sudden earthquake which will occur at the Pope’s death, since the whole Church will be fearfully shaken by his demise.”

I did not know what to do or say. At any cost I wanted to get away from where I was. I tried to go downstairs, but I was afraid of plunging into some deep pit.

Even so I did try, but many people were holding me back, some by my arms, some by my cassock. One even grabbed me by the hair and would not let go on any account. I began to scream, “You are hurting me!” So intense was the pain that I awoke and found myself in bed in my own room.

Although Don Bosco did not think he should keep this usual dream to himself, he still forbade the directors to mention it to anyone, saying that, for the time being at least, there was no need to make much of it. That this was no ordinary dream became evident exactly a year later when, in the early hours between February 6 and 7 [1878], the great Pontiff Pius IX surrendered his beautiful soul to God after a brief illness.

CHAPTER 2

The Conceptionists: Frustrated Efforts at Affiliation

AFTER an initial most promising phase,¹ the problem of affiliating the Conceptionists [to the Salesian Congregation] kept getting even more tangled up. Some people felt that it had been an affront to the Roman clergy to summon a priest from elsewhere to direct and reorganize an institute situated in Rome itself, as if the city had neither diocesan priests nor religious orders equal to the task. Complaints of this sort were brought to the Pope himself on several occasions even in semi-official ways. Then difficulties and resistance came from other quarters. The entire administration of the institute had become so unsatisfactory that civil authorities wanted to relieve the Conceptionists of the responsibility of the Santo Spirito Hospital. Prince Borghese himself, the lay superintendent, could not help remarking, "They tell me that Don Bosco works miracles. I do not believe it, but if he ever solves this problem, it will be the biggest miracle ever." Undeniably, chaos reigned. Some of the brothers had never even made their First Holy Communion and many others had not been to the sacraments for years. Gradually, despite their religious habit, they were losing even the semblance of religious life. Furthermore, so many nasty rumors had been spread about Don Bosco that nearly all of them greatly feared him.

Throughout the month of January he visited them several times, celebrated Mass for them, stayed for dinner, and thus saw things for himself, conversed with them, and, by God's grace, appeared to be making headway. Most of them immediately made their confession

¹See Vol. XII, pp. 359ff. [Editor]

to him and began to receive the sacraments. Much more had to be done, but slowly and cautiously. At all events, when the Holy Father heard of the initial results, he was so relieved and delighted that he was almost beside himself with joy.

However, the thought of having been slighted kept nagging certain people. A delegation, recommended by a prominent prelate, came before the Pope urging him to entrust the Conceptionists' direction to the Jesuits. Pius IX, although thoroughly annoyed, patiently showed them that, were he to send the Jesuits to Santo Spirito that morning, a mob would turn the hospital upside down before nightfall with clamorous demands that the Jesuits be driven out. He also added that, since the Salesians had already demonstrated their ability, he saw no need to call upon someone else. Later, he said to the prelate, "Call personally on Don Bosco and tell him that I am pleased with him. Tell him also to hold on to the direction of the Conceptionists and to have his sons come here soon. In fact I want the institute's administration to pay every Salesian his regular salary and to provide for his needs." On another occasion, the Holy Father had remarked to a confidant of his, "They are doing their best to put me in a bad light. Poor Don Bosco! He is so helpful. He does all he can."

Nor did the Pope stop there. To forestall wild talk, interference or trouble that might hinder Don Bosco's efforts, he made it known that the Salesian in charge of the Conceptionists would be responsible exclusively to the Pope, to whom he would report in a regular monthly audience. Don Bosco was delighted by the ruling, and also for the added advantage it offered the Salesian Congregation in the conduct of its own affairs.

Throughout these negotiations Monsignor Fiorani, the commendatore of Santo Spirito Hospital, played the role of *deus ex machina*. For some unknown reason he kept expressing more and more certain personal views of his which were hardly in accord with the Pope's clearly stated intentions. As he saw it, the crucial point was that there should be two directors, each with the title of apostolic visitor, namely, Don Bosco for spiritual affairs and Monsignor himself for temporal matters. But how was such a two-headed family to keep alive? Don Bosco was convinced that under such a system nothing could ever be done about reforming the institute. He was anxious to discuss this problem thoroughly with

the Pope, but he was no longer in a position to be granted a papal audience. Under the circumstances, he had to be content with finalizing negotiations through Monsignor Fiorani, who, in winding up the discussions, made it clear to him that it was the Pope's will that they consent to this division of power. Don Bosco yielded and agreed to the experiment.

We call it an experiment because he always regarded such a solution to be a stopgap measure, considering it at best ineffective to reach the Pope's goals as he understood them. He said as much to Father Barberis, who quoted him in his chronicle on May 1 as follows: "When I was first told about the Conceptionists in Rome, I immediately stated that if the intent was to succeed, the Conceptionists had to be affiliated to the Salesians while reserving hospital work for their exclusive goal. When the Pope approved my point of view, I drew up a plan which met his favor. As time went on, intrigue and confusion arose, and modifications had to be made, but only as temporary measures. My original plan, approved by the Pope, still stands."

The experiment meanwhile was formalized in a decree issued in the Holy Father's name by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on February 6, 1877. It contained seven articles:

1. Don Bosco was appointed for life as apostolic visitor in matters solely spiritual; however, his successors were not to hold office for life but only at the Holy See's pleasure.

2. Monsignor Fiorani was appointed apostolic visitor for temporal affairs, but not for life, and the same was true for his successors.

3. The jurisdiction of the Conceptionists' superior general was suspended.

4. Both apostolic visitors were authorized to delegate their powers respectively to a Salesian and to a religious or diocesan priest.

5. The visitor for spiritual affairs was to appoint a Salesian as spiritual director of the professed Conceptionists and another for the novices in compliance with the constitutions of the Conceptionists which were not to be altered.

6. The visitor for temporal matters was authorized, in consultation with the visitor for spiritual affairs, to admit postulants to the novitiate and novices to profession, as well as to dismiss novices

judged unsuited to the institute; he was also authorized, always in agreement with his colleague, to see to the assignment and reappointment of offices.

7. Both visitors were to present a triennial report to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

In the above cited conversation Don Bosco described the situation created by this decree as follows:

For the time being Don Bosco has charge over everything concerning the good of souls and the progress of the congregation while Monsignor Fiorani is to be its temporal head. There will also be a steward or administrator general who will fatten up at their expense, since he will handle all wholesale buying and sell at retail prices. In addition they are also authorized to elect a director general from our midst. With this plethora of superiors I believe that no one will know whom to obey, and with such a setup I cannot see how that congregation will ever thrive. At this point our concern is gradually to turn the Conceptionists into genuine Salesians by their observance of our rules; as to the manner of observing them, they can use their own as a practical handbook. However, egged on by a few Capuchins and stewards who live at their expense, and kept in a ferment by wild rumors, they would like to retain their autonomy. Monsignor Fiorani himself, who repeatedly stated in writing that everything could be settled with just a few words, once he saw my determination, kept stretching things out. We would have gotten nowhere, and who knows how long negotiations would have dragged on, had I not insisted that I had to leave Rome at all costs, and would indeed have left, whether or not we had come to any agreement. So far nothing new has turned up, but we must reach out toward our goal, urging general obedience to superiors without specifying anyone.

A sample of the prevailing mood of the Conceptionists surfaced at Turin in early summer. A certain Conceptionist, Brother Peter, was causing his community serious embarrassment by his outrageous conduct. Acting within his competence, Don Bosco summoned him to Turin in order to admonish him. Without a clear notion of why he had been sent for, he arrived and, learning the reason, instantly returned to Rome in a rage.

We must now backtrack a few months. In February a conflict had arisen concerning the Conceptionists' founder which fanned the flames of discord among the members as they sided for or against the new spiritual direction which had taken over from the

Capuchins. This led up to a series of letters from Rome to *Unità Cattolica*, whose January 28 issue carried this article entitled "Don Bosco and the Conceptionists."

For some weeks there has been much talk here of Don Bosco and of the Conceptionists, and I feel that this is the time to clarify the issues and to correct certain notions which threaten to be spread abroad in an erroneous if not harmful version. The Brothers Hospitallers of Mary Immaculate are [popularly] known as Conceptionists. Their mission is to tend the sick and perform the most menial services for them. Founded in 1854 by Cyprian Pezzini of Cremona in honor of the Immaculate Conception, they were from their very origins assisted, trained and consolidated by a Capuchin friar of Genoa, Father John Baptist Taggiasco. Their motherhouse has always been the Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome, and since there are no priests among them—in fact all classical and literary studies are excluded—their spiritual direction was entrusted by rule to the Capuchin Fathers. However, due to the times in which we live and the heavy demands being made on the Conceptionists by other hospitals, it became impossible to set up a regular novitiate, not to speak of a regular observance of their constitutions. At present, the [precarious] situation among religious orders no longer permits the Capuchins to give them the assistance they need, and the Conceptionists have been breaking up. The Holy Father, who has always had a special place in his heart for this institute because of the great good it can accomplish, especially for terminal patients, decided to take them under his own protection. In asking the help of Don Bosco, he explained his views on organizing these sons of Mary Immaculate, telling how he himself had seen to the construction of a house in Piazza Mastai specifically for their novitiate. Don Bosco graciously accepted the proposal of His Holiness and was named apostolic visitor for life with full powers. With the assistance of a few Salesian priests, he will concern himself with establishing the needed novitiate and enforcing community life, which will enable this new institute to achieve its most praiseworthy goal of giving spiritual and bodily relief to the sick, especially at the hour of death.

Another Capuchin, Father Valentino of San Remo, a former director of the Conceptionists, read this article and became highly indignant, branding it "utterly and entirely false, except for its statement of the Holy Father's concern and solicitude for the institute." From Anagni he immediately sent the editor of the Turin newspaper an irate letter of protest and enclosed an amended

version, written, he claimed, "by Father John Baptist Taggiasco," a fellow Capuchin living at the Sette Sale in Rome, whom he described as the "true, genuine founder of the Conceptionists." This was intended as a reply to that "packet of lies," seeking the "restoration of the honor of the Capuchin Order by fully clarifying a fact which was well known to all in Rome who had any dealings with the Santo Spirito Hospital."

Unità Cattolica refused to print Father Valentino's letter in deference to Don Bosco who had compiled the former article from data obtained from the older Conceptionists themselves.² Subsequently, the letter was printed in a Franciscan periodical.³ According to Father Valentino, the Conceptionists were founded in 1857 by Father Taggiasco with the assistance of some of his confreres in order to replace lay nurses with religious ones in the care of the sick. To prove his assertion he cited a similar statement of the Conceptionist Brother Crispino of Rome, whose testimony was declared very questionable by Don Bosco's secretary for reasons which hardly warrant explanation here.

Our archives still have another autographed statement of the first chronicler of the Conceptionists, who, on receiving the habit in 1858, began compiling the institute's annals in 1860. On November 23, 1876, he declared and asserted "as sheer truth, which he was ready to confirm by oath," that he had recounted the history of the institute's origins "under the inspiration and influence" of the Capuchin Fathers who were then spiritual directors of the Brothers Hospitallers, since he himself knew nothing of the earlier relationship between Father John Baptist [Taggiasco] and the young Cyprian Pezzini of Cremona, whom he now acknowledged as the first and only founder. He then continued: "Hence, while I reaffirm the truth of all that happened after my entrance into the institute, so I declare as unlikely, or at least doubtful, whatever took place before that." Don Bosco had therefore been well informed.

The controversy had no sequel, one reason being perhaps that

²This is stated by Father Berto in a handwritten note kept in our archives. He also wrote that he was present when the article was compiled. [Author]

³*Echo of St. Francis of Assisi*, February 28, 1877. [Author]

Don Bosco, abiding by his custom of letting people gossip, did not intervene directly or through others.

At the beginning of March, Monsignor Fiorani, availing himself of the faculty granted him by the February 6 decree to assign personnel, after having first conferred with Don Bosco, called upon Brother Louis Mary Monti of Milan to assume the office of superior of the institute. He was a Conceptionist of very fine spirit, an original member of that religious family. His first act was to pay his respects to Don Bosco, expressing his thanks "for all the good he had brought to the institute and therefore to the lowly Conceptionist Brothers." He then went on to bare his soul in sentiments of affection: "Words are certainly inadequate to thank you, Very Reverend Father, for all you are doing to improve our condition, nor have we any way to repay you. Yours will certainly be an eternal reward from God and Our Immaculate Mother. So far I have not had the blessing to meet you personally, but I recognize the father from the work of his son." By this he alluded to the director of the Conceptionists, Father [Joseph] Scappini.

The new superior's first two months in office were troublesome indeed. Misconduct and transgressions were now such that they could no longer possibly be kept from the public eye. The people were scandalized. Eight brothers and about twenty lay helpers had to be dismissed. Once the chief troublemakers were out of the way, it became possible to enjoy a bit of peace. It is to his credit that in all these matters he never took a step without first consulting the spiritual director, Father Scappini. But lamentable difficulties kept blocking the resurgence and new growth of the institute. Some members, banding with influential outsiders, kept up a barrage of embarrassments under the guise of zeal. Monsignor Fiorani let himself be made a fool of by a servant of his in whom he put too much trust and by others who, though well intentioned, lacked good judgment and turned molehills into mountains to the great sorrow of poor Father Scappini. He in turn, though sorely troubled by his own problems, had to sustain Brother Monti, who, no less upset, had no one else to rely upon. "I owe you a debt of gratitude, Father," he repeatedly told Don Bosco, "for the good you are doing to me and my confreres through Father Joseph, our good director, a genuine copy of his spiritual father."

Lest a remark of Don Bosco be lost in oblivion, we quote it here,

although it was uttered in different circumstances. He was speaking to the lay Salesian, Brother [Peter] Barale, whose faithful service our good father even then appreciated. One day he asked Don Bosco if, in the face of current difficulties and unknown future fears, he had ever considered dumping the paper mill he had purchased at Mathi, but Don Bosco hushed him by this resolute response: "Once Don Bosco puts his hand to a project, he is not one to stop halfway."

Is not the Conceptionist situation a proof of this? He had pledged himself, perhaps with misgivings, to this historic experiment which he knew had no chance of succeeding. But he had committed himself to it, and for this reason he conscientiously worked at it without retreating or slowing down because of difficulties arising from unwise planning. At the same time he never lost sight of the one solution which he judged best suited to reach the intended goal and most in keeping with the Pope's desires. So, for a third time in less than eight months, we again see him in Rome, wearing himself out, cudgeling his brains and, let us say it, distressing himself to achieve in a worthy manner the good sought by Pius IX. In this situation too he acted with consummate prudence.

Grand preparations were then in progress in Rome to honor Pius IX, who was celebrating the jubilee of his episcopal consecration during the first days of June. Don Bosco wanted his Congregation to be represented, and so he decided to send Father [Joseph] Lazzero and Father [Julius] Barberis to the Eternal City for this purpose. However, without letting on that they were preparing the way for him, he planned their trip so as to make it serve a double purpose. He first appealed to Monsignor Fiorani, in the interest of economy, to lodge his two Salesians with the Conceptionists, seeking not so much to keep down expenses as to give them a chance to talk freely with Father Scappini and learn first-hand what the true situation was. More important, he told the monsignor that his two delegates were respectively director of the motherhouse and director of the Salesian novitiate, and he suggested that he put them in touch with the brothers and freely draw upon their services if he thought he could use them in any way. Indeed, if the Conceptionists had not as yet made their spiritual retreat, why could not his two priests preach it? The monsignor, after checking with Father Scappini, thought that the latter suggestion was excellent. Father

Scappini wrote to Don Bosco and assured him that, as far as he was concerned, it was a superb choice and the two priests were anxiously awaited. They left Turin on May 28, and after the jubilee celebrations were over, they preached the retreat. “The spiritual exercises went far better than either we or they had expected,” Father Lazzero wrote.⁴ “Today, the closing day, we all dined together at the Santo Spirito Hospital—a real family celebration. The Conceptionists are truly quite fond of us. They would shirk no hardship for our sake, but heaven help anyone who would touch their independence! Hence, the *status quo* will still regulate our relations in the foreseeable future.”

Don Bosco had already been nine days in Rome when this letter was mailed from there. He had escorted the archbishop of Buenos Aires, who was heading an Argentinian pilgrimage, but it seemed quite clear that he was there solely to benefit the Conceptionists. Among other things he drew up a lengthy memorandum for the Holy Father to acquaint him with the drawbacks caused by the setup that had been chosen and to insist on the need to revert to the original plan. He had Father Scappini and the other two priests read the memorandum, discussing it with them in detail, and editing and revising the wording until he thought it satisfactory. In the meantime the Pope was taken up with the jubilee celebrations and many bishops were awaiting an audience with him. Still word got to Don Bosco that Pius IX was lamenting the fact that he wasn't receiving a report from him about the Conceptionists. *But how can I get to him?* Don Bosco asked himself, writing to Father Rua.⁵ On June 10, he attended a public audience, and when the Pope, in filing through the crowd, came up to him, Don Bosco asked if he might have a few moments of private conversation with him. “Only too gladly,” Pius IX answered, “but, please, kindly wait until this surge of pilgrims is over and I can find a free moment.”

Don Bosco requested a private audience also in writing but waited in vain for a reply. Seeing that he could not stretch his stay in Rome any longer and since he had no way of personally submitting his report to the Pope, he entrusted it to the cardinal vicar and asked that it be delivered to Pius IX at the most

⁴Letter to Father Rua, June 13, 1877. [Author]

⁵Letter from Rome, June 8, 1877. [Author]

convenient time and manner. Then, breaking off his stay, he returned to Turin.

The report contained two chief sections: one listed the evils existing in the Conceptionist Institute, the other offered recommendations for rooting them out. Don Bosco specifically deplored five evils:

1. The lack of a regular novitiate.
2. The Conceptionists' firm belief that they knew how to govern themselves, although they had neither training nor experience in the actual governance of a religious society.
3. The excessive number of superiors who, in governing independently of each other, kept getting in each other's way.
4. The lack of vows and of any suitable preparation for taking them: a situation leading to brawls, reciprocal threats, insubordination and desertions.
5. In view of a future religious profession, an uncertainty about which superior was to receive the profession and about the rules to be professed.

He also suggested that five main remedies were to be urgently applied if the institute was to endure:

1. Establishment of a novitiate far away from the Santo Spirito Hospital.
2. Religious profession based on the Salesian Constitutions.
3. Prohibition against accepting any hospitals in which the Conceptionists would be working with persons of the opposite sex, unless their living quarters were completely and rigorously segregated.
4. Elimination of any need to employ lay male nurses.
5. Unquestioned unity of government.

Don Bosco concluded his report by offering the Holy Father the most lowly and willing services of the Salesians in all matters as it might please His Holiness then or later to assign to them.

The Holy Father weighed the gravity and significance of the report. However, eager that the Conceptionists should attain the aims of their institute and yet unable to probe the matter personally, he appointed Cardinal Randi to do so and informed Don Bosco of this on June 20 through Cardinal Simeoni, the secretary of state. Cardinal Randi, on studying Don Bosco's memorandum, concentrated on those points which showed that Don Bosco, unable to act

freely, felt at a loss to carry out the mandate he had received. Upon reading the decree of February 6, he had to admit that it certainly was far from clear in delineating the powers of the apostolic spiritual director and in practice led to unforeseen complications. He therefore decided that more explicit directives were needed to remove all doubts and close the door to eventual conflicts. He also conferred with the apostolic administrative director and was given clarifications of policy, as well as the assurance that the latter had personally never raised any obstacle, nor did he intend to do so in future, in the way of the spiritual director's exercise of duty. After that, the cardinal invited Don Bosco to express "his valuable feelings" on this matter and to make any further observations which he considered necessary. The entire letter could hardly have been couched in more complimentary terms for Don Bosco, but he was unable to reply as promptly as he would have liked because he was escorting the archbishop of Buenos Aires through Liguria and France. Knowing how anxious the Holy Father was to see the matter quickly settled, the cardinal wrote a second letter urging Don Bosco to send in his final observations without delay. Furthermore, since Father Scappini had succumbed to seasonal fevers—a not uncommon occurrence for visitors who arrived in Rome before the waters of the Tiber had been dammed up—and had returned to his native Piedmont a few weeks before, the cardinal asked Don Bosco to send someone soon to take his place. As quickly as he could, Don Bosco hastened to reply, reiterating the viewpoint which was basic to the experiment from the first moment of the negotiations, a viewpoint he saw no reason to relinquish.

Turin, August 7, 1877

Your Eminence:

Trusting that you will kindly overlook my delay in writing, I now make it my duty to reply to your honored letters which concern the Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception, commonly called "Conceptionists." The better to clarify my views on this matter, I think it best to start at the beginning of this affair.

In November of last year, the Holy Father graciously had Cardinal Bilio summon me to Rome. On my arrival, His Holiness spoke of his desire to regularize the Conceptionists. I willingly acceded to his proposal, and, in order that his will might be faithfully carried out, I asked that he put

it in writing for me. He did so in a rescript of November 15 of that year. I set myself to study the situation and, in accordance with the rescript, after a month and a half I was ready to submit to His Holiness some basic terms on which I felt the regularization could rest. His Holiness was pleased with everything, and Monsignor Fiorani informed me that all was proceeding well, with only a brief conference needed before I could definitely get to work. He just asked that, in coming to Rome, I take along another priest who would immediately assume direction of the Conceptionists. But then he began to tell me of amendments and that I should leave matters just about the same as I first found them. In view of this, I insisted on talking to the Holy Father, who verbally confirmed all that was contained in the aforesaid rescript. After that I could no longer have the honor of paying my respects to His Holiness and always had to go through Monsignor Fiorani, who stuck to his plan that it would be wiser for me to be apostolic visitor for spiritual matters. I found it difficult to see how two heads in one and the same family could possibly effect a unified rule agreeable to everybody. However, since he told me that this was the Holy Father's wish, I said nothing and agreed to go along with it, although I foresaw difficulties from the very beginning, as I had the honor of commenting in a memorandum submitted to His Holiness. I suppose it has come into the hands of Your Eminence. Please note that I did not draw up that memorandum as a subterfuge, but only because I could not speak to the Holy Father himself. Now, considering the present setup of the Conceptionists as their apostolic visitor, I have no other suggestion beyond what I have proposed in the memorandum. However, if a foolproof, firm and definitive plan is wanted, I would say that we already have it in the one originally drawn up by the Holy Father's enlightened wisdom. If, on the other hand, it seems desirable to try another plan, my suggestion is to entrust the direction of the Conceptionists to the Commendatore of Santo Spirito, while the Salesians, as chaplains, would only concern themselves with the spiritual tasks of catechizing, preaching, hearing confessions and celebrating Holy Mass. However, in this case, the Salesians would have no further responsibility, material or spiritual. They would live apart from the Conceptionists and go to them solely for those things that concern their spiritual duties. This last plan could be adopted without difficulty, since the Salesians have to open a small house for confreres who pass through Rome on business or reside there, and the priests assigned to the Conceptionists could make that their residence.

Having most sincerely expressed my viewpoint, I now await the favor of your comments. However, should the Holy Father desire any other arrangement, I shall not raise the slightest objection, and all the Salesians will, with one soul, abide by the revered wishes of our benefactor, Pius IX.

I had the opportunity to speak with Father Scappini, who has been ill with fever for some days. He now seems a little better. If I see in the next few days that he cannot return to his post, I shall send at least one other priest to provide for the Conceptionists' religious services.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

It is doubtful that the Holy Father would have objected to Don Bosco's proposed revision of the decree of February 6 since it would really have facilitated the implementation of his intentions. Hence Cardinal Randi asked Don Bosco to return to Rome or to give the Salesian who was to take over the direction of the Conceptionists the necessary powers and instructions. It was becoming most urgent that this Salesian be present in Rome also because, without him, the Conceptionists' practices of piety were being neglected, and the postulants, who had been judged worthy to take their first religious vows on the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, had to be properly instructed. Don Bosco's prompt, clear reply expressed his thoughts unmistakably and definitively.

Turin, August 18, 1877

Your Eminence:

As you kindly wrote, certain matters are best dealt with face to face. Indeed, I did not express myself sufficiently well in my letter. I simply wanted to say that to provide a stable future for the Conceptionists, they should be affiliated with an institute acknowledged and approved by the Holy See. Their habit, name, objective and all the rules needed to sustain that objective should be kept. This is the way I have always seen fit to set up on a firm basis a secure existence that will not deviate from the observance of their own constitutions. This, too, I believe, is the aim of the rescript of November 17, 1876.

If, however, as Your Eminence points out, the identity of the institute and the continuance of its services in its present locations are to be preserved, I believe that the first requirement is to entrust both the spiritual and temporal administration of the institute to a person who has the full confidence of the Holy Father. Such a person is to have complete responsibility. The Salesians, on their part, would be chaplains who would go to the Conceptionists solely to carry out their priestly ministry, with no interference in internal affairs. In this case, the Salesians could be guided and, when necessary, admonished by their own superior, who would freely

exercise his authority and make sure that they are carrying out their duties.

I am happy to tell you that Father Scappini is doing better and has already returned to Turin. He feels that he can go back to Rome and be close to Your Eminence before the end of this month, or, at the latest, by the beginning of September. I shall give him all powers especially in regard to Your Eminence, whom we hold in unbounded love and trust. I believe that you both can personally smooth away any difficulties that may arise with this project. I shall be coming to Rome myself soon, but my health is presently somewhat shaky, allowing me to work a while at my desk, but not to leave my room, let alone take trips.

May Your Eminence give me the favor of your holy blessing. Pray for me and for the Salesian Congregation, that amid the host of possibilities offered to us by Divine Providence we may choose and work at those tasks which redound to God's greater glory. We, in our lowliness, shall not cease to offer special prayers for the precious health of Your Eminence, of whom I am honored to profess myself in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

However, neither Monsignor Fiorani nor Cardinal Randi, averse to having the Salesians involved in the direction of the Conceptionists, was of that opinion. Father Scappini, somewhat stronger, was all set to leave for Rome and had already notified Brother Monti of his coming, when the latter, in the name of Monsignor Fiorani, wrote back to say that he was not to come because his return might well serve no purpose. At this news Don Bosco was dumbfounded and immediately begged the cardinal for an explanation.⁶ He came to learn that the reform of the Conceptionists was to be temporarily entrusted to Roman ecclesiastics under the supervision of the cardinal vicar. Cardinal Randi deplored the hasty communication of this news in so unseemly a manner, even before matters had been firmly finalized, but there was no turning back. Don Bosco, for all the efforts he had put into the Conceptionist project, was thus rewarded with such an unenviable disservice. The underlying causes will be better understood once the intrigues of his adversaries will be thoroughly known. For the time being, Don Bosco's letter to Louis Cardinal Bilio may well be the best epilogue. The cardinal had spoken the

⁶Don Bosco's letter was written on September 19, but we have no copy of it. [Author]

first word on the matter to Don Bosco; to him Don Bosco addressed the final word.

Turin, November 20, 1877

Your Eminence:

From the very beginning it was Your Eminence who had much to do with my involvement in the direction of the Brothers Hospitallers popularly known as the Conceptionists, and so you are certainly in a position to know and appreciate the state of things which I shall briefly run through.

Through Your Eminence, the Holy Father, in his goodness, was so kind as to summon me in most affectionate terms. "I desire," he told me, "that you assume the care of the Conceptionists, who have a lofty mission and can greatly help the sick prepare for a good death. However, you are neither to reform nor to correct, but rather to create or, better still, to blend their constitutions with those of the Salesians."

Although I realized the weight and delicacy of this assignment, I felt that I was being greatly honored to be given the opportunity to work under the revered direction of the Holy Father, and all I asked of His Holiness was that he kindly express his thoughts to me in writing, so that I might better ponder and carry them out. Please refer to the rescript of November 17, 1876, under number one.

Basing myself on this rescript, I set to work and in a month or so sent in an overall plan which provided for retaining the name, habit and purpose of the Conceptionists with all of those rules which were not in conflict with those of the Salesians. The Holy Father was pleased with everything, and Monsignor Fiorani wrote to me that all was proceeding well, that nothing more than a very short conference was needed, and that I was to bring a priest with me. But no sooner did I get to Rome than difficulties arose. I thought that the Holy Father's intent had not changed, but Monsignor Fiorani kept saying that radical changes were not advisable and the only possibility was a moral reform, most especially since His Holiness had given the Conceptionists a large grant of 200,000 lire. Don Bosco therefore was to be named apostolic visitor and be represented by Father Scappini. I could not see the reason for this. I spoke to the Holy Father, and he just repeated what he had previously said and written. Monsignor, however, kept saying that the rescript had to be modified. I yielded to this change because I was assured that it was the Holy Father's wish. Thus, Father Scappini became the spiritual director, while all administration of material goods and personnel was reserved to Monsignor Fiorani.

A further study of the Conceptionist rules as applied to real life convinced me that this state of affairs could not go on, and when I came to

Rome for the Holy Father's jubilee, I did my utmost to obtain but a moment's audience with His Holiness. I first asked in writing; then the Holy Father, in a general audience, made it clear that he wished to hear what I had to say, but it was not possible because of the rush of pilgrims who wanted to catch at least a glimpse of the Pope. Under the pressure of time and business, since the cardinal vicar had asked me for detailed information about the Conceptionists, I thought that I would give him my memorandum, which I enclose, so that he might pass it on to the Holy Father, as I believe he did.

Second, urgent business recalled me to Turin. A month later Father Scappini became so ill and weak that he had to return home and go to bed, but he first provided a priest to replace him for the spiritual care of the Conceptionists during his absence. In the meantime Cardinal Randi's first letter reached me, asking for clarifications and comments.

Third, should you have time, you might here see His Eminence's letter and my reply. My conclusion was that we would simply offer our services as chaplains unless the Holy Father willed otherwise. In that case we would follow his desires. Meanwhile Father Scappini recovered from his relentless fever and was all set to return to Rome. He had already notified the superior of the Conceptionists, when he received a letter from Brother Louis [Monti] who, writing for Monsignor Fiorani, told him to suspend his return to Rome since he might have to go back again. He gave no explanation whatever. Cardinal Randi now has the letter. Dumbfounded, I begged His Eminence for some explanation, and a few days later he replied with a letter dated October 1, 1877, informing me of the Pope's decision and deploring the manner in which Father Scappini had been dismissed. Under the circumstances I had no other choice than to cease taking any interest in the Conceptionists. I now await instructions and have meanwhile assigned the personnel to other duties. However, in every letter I have always insisted that the Holy Father be told that the Salesians regard his every wish and desire as an order that we will always gladly and promptly carry out.

I have written on certain confidential matters to His Eminence Cardinal Randi. I hope soon to make a visit to Rome and speak to Your Eminence of things it is best not to entrust to paper. I am most grateful for your kindness toward us and humbly invoke your holy blessing.

Your humble and grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

For a better overall understanding of this affair, we would also have to know the details which caution would not let Don Bosco "entrust to paper." Nevertheless, any alert reader will have

realized by now that there had to be some shady behind-the-scene dealings which Don Bosco had gotten wind of. Yet he persevered to the end with maximum uprightness, love and unselfishness.

After Pius IX's death, the Holy See did not leave the Conceptionist Institute to fend for itself but, by allowing a certain number to become priests and so provide spiritual direction for the brothers and by other saving reforms, it brought about the Institute's renewal. Today [1932] it is an honor to the Church and is gaining recognition for its outstanding contribution to the welfare of civil society.

CHAPTER 3

The Annual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales

THE Oratory's celebration of the feast of St. Francis de Sales was postponed to Sunday, February 4, so that Don Bosco might attend. He arrived at 8:30 that very morning, greeted by the band, with thunderous applause, hurrahs, and a show of overwhelming joy. The directors of several houses, present at the Oratory for the meetings held regularly around the feast of St. Francis de Sales, had a hard time elbowing their way through the happy throng of youngsters to reach his side. The good father was never so thrilled as when he saw himself thus mobbed by that motley crowd of his Oratory sons, all vying with each other to show their love and gratitude. That evening in the little theatre a very heart-warming assembly was held in his honor. Each department of the Oratory was represented by speeches which in one form or another expressed the delight of all at having their beloved father back with them. The dramatic club presented a play, *The Vocation of St. Aloysius*, and its excellent performance delighted everyone.

The meetings began on the evening of February 5, with the opening session chaired by Father Rua. The first matter of business concerned personnel, financial administration, and new houses—on none of which is it necessary for us to dwell. We will rather concentrate on three topics which have a general or historic bearing on the Congregation.

The expansion of the Salesian Congregation, with its widening range of concerns, made it ever more difficult for Don Bosco to continue that individual attention which he so effectively gave the confreres, so much so that it was feared that the spirit of piety would be hurt, especially among the new clerics. It is an undeniable

fact that Don Bosco's influence produced year after year a certain type of cleric which it would be most desirable to perpetuate generation after generation: thoughtful, studious, fervent in prayer, well rounded, ready to do whatever they knew to be their superiors' wish. Theirs was a life blending prayerful concentration with action, a life we may today call a reflection of Don Bosco's own spirituality. These models, rising from the ranks of their companions, were looked up to with respect, deference, and admiration by those who never rose above the mediocre yet were still incited to greater good by their example. The soul of this formation, this life, was what we call the spirit of piety, shown by the frequent reception of the sacraments, love for prayer, zeal for divine worship, a taste for God's word, and wholesome reading. The members of the Superior Chapter and the directors devoted their time to foster this spirit in their several communities, especially among the young confreres, while being alert to detect and promptly eliminate those things which might diminish it.

A second topic was that of the Sons of Mary. We made no further mention of this apostolate in the twelfth volume of this series because in the eleventh we had already gone beyond the year 1875 and encroached upon that volume. As we have already narrated,¹ this providential project, which had been based at Sampierdarena, was nearing full maturity. As word got about, inquiries poured in from everywhere, even after the school year was well on its way. To avoid disrupting classes, Father Albera, the director, would have preferred to postpone all applications that came in after the first few weeks until the end of the school year, but, knowing the priority which Don Bosco gave to this endeavor, he did not wish to contravene his desires. Don Bosco's views on this matter did in fact differ widely from his. It was Don Bosco's intention that all those who applied and met the necessary requirements were to be accepted regardless of the time of year. So great, he maintained, were his expectations of the project's results that they were not to be jeopardized by perilous delays. Once the assembly was informed of this, it agreed to add an article to the regulations for the Sons of Mary: that latecomers be willing to do some manual tasks until, after some preliminary studies, they were

¹See Vol. XI, pp. 20-59. [Editor]

numerous enough to make up a new class and have a regular teacher assigned to them.

Finally Father Rua passed on to the assembly a wish of Don Bosco's that they were to consider an order. He desired that each school hold a triduum of talks at the beginning of the school year so as to give the students a right start. This would afford them an opportunity to straighten out their minds after the distractions of vacation and to attend to their spiritual needs with calm. The proposal was adopted and has unbrokenly been in practice since 1877, to the inestimable advantage of discipline, moral behavior and study.

Don Bosco attended the next morning's meeting. After the previous evening's deliberations were approved, he brought the members up to date on the Congregation's most recent developments and examined a series of proposals and plans, explaining the criteria which should become their norm in making decisions according to his spirit. In the intimacy of this family gathering, he was also able to speak freely about the Conceptionists and acquaint them with the actual condition of that institute and the state of negotiations up to his departure from Rome.

Don Bosco had always been unwilling to take over monasteries and turn them into boarding schools because he disliked giving people a chance to say that religious were driving out other religious. If, on a rare occasion, it was a question of redeeming a monastery from the hands of lay owners, he always demanded that the owners themselves clear the matter with the Holy See and obtain its permission. On this occasion, instead, these were his actual words: "Now the Pope not only gave me permission, but urged me to buy buildings once belonging to religious and turn them into Salesian houses. The purpose of this is to give back to the Church what was stolen from it and to preserve the original purpose of these houses consecrated to God's glory, lest they be used for profane purposes. From here on, if our finances make it feasible, we know that we shall run into no problems with Rome."

Insistent requests had come in from Albano and Magliano for a Salesian boarding school in each town. Cardinal Berardi, for the third time, offered him the boarding school at Ceccano which the Scolopian Fathers wanted to close down since enrollment had dwindled to no more than ten students. Don Bosco had also been

asked to take over the boarding school at Ascona. After giving this news, he added, "It's incredible! We move on to situations heaped high with obstacles, and yet so far we have never had to pull back. We always go forward. Every enterprise we put our hand to succeeds beyond all expectations, even though we constantly see others forced to retreat time after time from positions they long held. It is truly the Lord who makes us forge ahead under full sail. We would deserve to become blind if we failed to see God's hand everywhere in all we do."

A thorny problem then came to the floor. The five-year lease of the Valsalice college² was about to expire. During those five years it had been constantly hoped that the number of boarders would grow, but somehow it never met those expectations. Was the college therefore to be kept open or should the whole facility be returned to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, from whom it was rented? "What are we to do?" Don Bosco asked his co-workers. Then he went on to say, "I have always wished that this college should stay open and prosper so that we might foster vocations to the priesthood and see whether we could draw also from that social level laborers for the Lord's vineyard. We reaped some good fruits, but we cannot say that the Lord has blessed our work in this house as He has done in the others. When the direction of this school was offered to us, we all opposed the idea. The only reason we accepted it was to obey the archbishop. As far as our own Congregation is concerned, it looks as though St. Francis of Assisi has lent us a helping hand thus far. You know the story they tell about him, how the devils, raising all kinds of hell against his new institute, met to hatch a plot. Several schemes were brought up to wipe out those mendicant friars, until finally one little devil, more cunning than his fellows, jumped up and declared that the surest way to undermine the fervor of any religious order was to infiltrate its ranks with nobility and with the wealthy. To offer these individuals the thoughtful attention due their position, special concessions would have to be made, privileges granted, and exceptions posited to the rules, exceptions which would then have to be extended to all, with the result that the whole order would become lax. The assembly of devils cheered and unanimously voted in favor of the plan. And so I

²See Indexes of Volumes X and XI under "Valsalice." [Editor]

believe that St. Francis has so far safeguarded us. There have been some members of the nobility who have either tried our life or asked to try it, but to date no one has decided to stay on with us. For all these things let us always give thanks to the Lord.”

As for a decision on the Valsalice college, Don Bosco did not feel that it was time to say the final word. He urged all to think and pray. This was not just an excuse to evade a decision. In fact, ten days later he wanted the Superior Chapter to re-examine the future of the college with Father Dalmazzo, its director. The lease was to expire in September. Opinions on the advantages of keeping the school open were divided. Those who thought it should continue had three sound arguments on their side: the school had been accepted in obedience to the archbishop and this was still a valid reason, fostering vocations from the nobility was quite an achievement, and pulling out would be a setback for the Salesians. Those who favored leaving the school argued that the school's very nature was hardly in keeping with the Congregation's objectives, that its enrollment was dropping, that hardly any success had been achieved in getting vocations, and that every year the Oratory had to make up a deficit of six thousand lire. Were the poor then to subsidize the wealthy? After a careful weighing of all pros and cons, the decision to keep Valsalice open prevailed, but some financial measures were taken to keep the administration solvent. The plan of mixing day students and boarders, as was done by other schools whereby a vehicle picked up pupils and brought them home, was unacceptable because of the fear of potential problems.

Let us return to the morning session of February 6. Before closing it, Don Bosco expressed repeatedly and very warmly a desire of his which he had already brought up in past years: namely, that each director should write up a history of his school and devote the greatest care to the task. He closed the session with the following words: “The Holy Father has told me that if we want our schools always to flourish, we must strive to foster among ourselves and among our boys piety, morality and thrift. Let each of you give serious thought to fostering these three elements among both Salesians and pupils. Speak of them in your sermons and conferences and in private talks. I would like one of the meetings during these days to be devoted to searching for practical ways of following the Pope's advice.”

In the afternoon, all the Oratory confreres, novices and aspirants—two hundred and eleven in all—gathered in the Church of St. Francis de Sales for a general assembly. The detailed account of each house, which formerly used to be given by each director, was this time given in part by Father Rua as he got it from the different directors and in part by Don Bosco. The latter opened the meeting by stating, “Today’s assembly is a little different from the gatherings we hold during the year. It is still the conference of St. Francis de Sales which has been held in the past years, only somewhat modified to make room for the many topics we have to discuss. To bring up everything in detail would take too much time. Let Father Rua give us a comprehensive picture of our schools in Piedmont, Liguria and France, and I’ll say something about America, as well as our houses in Lanzo, which I have just visited. To meet your desires and to safeguard the spirit which is to prevail in all our houses, I will show you how the Lord helps and shields us. He will certainly preside over this assembly for the Congregation’s good, for our overall encouragement and for the welfare of souls.”

Although in the course of our narrative we have usually recorded only Don Bosco’s talks word for word, it seems useful at this time to make space, by exception, for Father Rua’s report, which luckily has come down to us in a transcript made by one of his listeners. It was given with all the thoroughness which Don Bosco’s first successor put into everything he did and must have been put together under his direct guidance. Father Rua’s talk follows:

My report shall proceed in order of time, starting with the houses which were established first. I will tell you what I picked up from the individual directors as well as whatever else I already knew.

Starting with our first school—Borgo San Martino—I can say that on the whole all is proceeding very well for both pupils and Salesians. At first we feared a drop in enrollment because of the rice fields which are quite close to the school, but the opposite was true. The enrollment went up, so that now it numbers two hundred pupils besides faculty. True, precautions must be taken to ward off the threat of malaria, but, thank God, no one has as yet come down with it. Indeed, I’m glad to say that on my visit I found the infirmary empty, and Father Director assured me that not a single boy had fallen ill during the entire month. The financial situation is healthy too. They are not rich, but they are getting along thriftily, thanks also to

the nuns who went there this year to run the linen room and the kitchen. Certainly they do not stint on necessities and have all they need for food and clothing. As to their moral conduct, we need not quote Isaiah: "You have multiplied the nation and have not increased the joy" [9:3], because with the growth of the student body, the spirit of piety has also grown. The sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament, the Immaculate Conception, the Altar Boys and St. Aloysius are doing very well. Excellent work has been done by both priests and clerics. This year, after final examinations, a good number of students donned the clerical garb, some entering the seminary, the greater part of them remaining with us and coming to the Oratory. This year our confreres there reopened the festive oratory to provide better care for their day students. Some of them attend Mass in the school chapel; others go to the parish church for prayers, Mass, catechism, sermons, benediction, religious instruction and wholesome recreation. What our clerics are doing for the boys, the sisters are now doing for the girls.

From Borgo San Martino we go on to our school at Lanzo, where enrollment has also gone up considerably, so that, in spite of the large size of the building, there is little free space. How wonderful is Divine Providence in allowing this school to experience a marvelous growth and thus to promote the students' moral development. Lanzo had the most room for students. Last August the railway was completed, and ministers, members of parliament and senators attended the inaugural services.³ Since the township of Lanzo lacked suitable premises, the municipal authorities asked the director of our school, which serves the town, if he would graciously allow them the use of our grounds for the reception of the king's representatives. The ministers came to our school, were given a joyful welcome, toured the premises, and stayed an hour and a half. The event was widely publicized, and we feared harmful repercussions from distorted reports.⁴ However, it all turned out very much to our advantage. As host to the realm's highest authorities, the school became famous and highly rated, with a consequent rise in enrollment. I say nothing of the pupils' health because Lanzo is a health spot *par excellence*, and the boys' only problem is to satisfy their appetite, even though they are well fed. Their piety, conduct, and diligence are up to standard. On the other hand, there is a shortage of personnel because some priests have been transferred to other schools—Father [Joseph] Scappini, for instance, who was assigned to Rome. A void has been left which must be filled either by others or by increasing the work load of those who remain. We hope that,

³See Vol. XII, pp. 300-309. [Editor]

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 399-403. [Editor]

with the aid of newly professed young clerics, the needs of the school will be adequately taken care of. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are already lending a hand by caring for the linen room.

Coming to our school in Varazze, the director reports that the boys' conduct and diligence are excellent and heartening. Enrollment has reached its peak, but we cannot build an extension since the school is owned by the town and no land is available. In fact, our clerics teach day students in town because rising enrollment forced the authorities to rent new facilities. The pupil's good behavior is due to our confreres' hard work.

Now let me tell you about Alassio. The new building, begun three years ago, was completed last year. It is the town's pride and joy. People who ride the train admire the imposing, graceful new wing, while townsfolk boast of having one of Don Bosco's schools. The building, empty last year, is now filled with two hundred students, despite severe screening of all applicants. This makes us rejoice because it has helped to improve the boys' conduct. Not that this all important element of school life was lacking before, but things have improved and the reason may well be that there is now more room for all. We were able to apportion space as required, especially separating the lyceum from the lower grades. Religious practices were the first to benefit. The lyceum students, formerly a cause for worry in this matter, now offer an example to all the rest. Throughout the neighborhood the Salesians enjoy an enviable reputation; numerous requests have poured in from different towns of Liguria for Salesian schools. These are not requests from private individuals or from isolated groups, but rather formal requests from municipal authorities and citizens of great influence. We have received petitions signed by all the aldermen of Novi Ligure, Montaldo Ligure, Nice, and so forth, which reveal a deep desire both to support our undertakings and to benefit by our help. They love us, and rightly so, because our priests willingly offer their services for Mass, sermons and confessions in the neighboring villages, and we hardly need say that the parish priests are very thankful. Several times, when visiting Alassio, I asked for a confrere, only to be told, "He is conducting a mission in that town." Upon inquiring about another, I was told, "He is out hearing confessions." At times, as many as four or five are out on priestly work. This is very good as long as it does not disrupt school routine. At Alassio the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians take care of the kitchen and the laundry besides teaching catechism to the girls. Remarkably, all complaints about food have disappeared—a big achievement in itself, for almost every school has such grievances, and complaints are heard even at the king's table.

Not far from Alassio is our school at Sampierdarena. I feel a tinge of

envy when I speak of this house, because it threatens to outdo the Oratory. Five years ago it was just a little bit of a house at Marassi, where a few rooms had to do for classes, dormitory, kitchen, and study hall. There was no room there for expansion, so plans were afoot to move to Sampierdarena, notorious for its irreligion and Freemasonry. It was a calculated risk. However, Divine Providence wanted us there and our superior paid no heed to the difficulties. A house was bought and personnel were moved from Marassi, where facilities were only rented. Still, the cramped quarters were no better, applications kept pouring in, and the enrollment of day pupils kept rising. We needed a building suited to our needs. Don Bosco paid the place a visit, and lo, as if by magic, within two years up rose a huge, beautiful building to house both resident and day pupils. Enrollment rose speedily and now boys and young men number close to three hundred, not too far behind the Oratory. The growth is also due to the Sons of Mary Program. There are eighty young men—some of whom are a bit older—taking Latin courses, and they will supply the Church and our Congregation with good priests. We have received many applications for the novitiate and aspirantate. This year we reaped some priestly vocations for both the diocese and our Congregation from among the resident students. We also opened a festive oratory for the day boys. The playground is fairly large, a corridor was turned into a chapel for religious instruction, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is given in the public church. The boys are also offered the opportunity to receive the sacraments. We must note too that a printshop—the second in our Congregation—was opened and has already turned out several good books. We trust that it will be a great aid in spreading good literature throughout the area to the people's betterment.

A word or two about Valsalice. Its enrollment has gone up slightly during this school year, 1876-77, but growth is slow, as we might expect from this particular type of student. Nevertheless, we have reason to be pleased with the school's progress in study and wholesome behavior. A few students donned the clerical habit and entered the diocesan seminary. As for studies, the end-of-year final exams for the state diploma were most satisfactory. Here in Turin the exams are very tough, and the three Valsalice students who took them not only got passing grades but all three won the highest honors, in spite of the fact that it is rare that students are not required to repeat the examination.

From Italy we pass over to France, where we have a school at Nice. As you know, Don Bosco went there shortly after our first missionary departure service [in 1875]. For years there had been talk of a boarding school. After a small house was rented, a priest was sent as director, a young cleric as teacher, and a lay Salesian as cook. First came a festive

oratory, then a hostel for poor lads, and when the number grew to fourteen, no more could be accepted since facilities were too strained. These conditions held until August or September of 1875 when, thanks to the united effort of many benefactors, a house could be purchased near the Place d'Armes, with many large rooms, two flower gardens, and several playfields. The only problem was the price tag—one hundred thousand lire. How could we buy it, strapped as we always are for finances while daily puffing ahead like an old steam engine notwithstanding our debts? Undismayed, Don Bosco faced this seemingly insurmountable problem by trusting in Divine Providence, which came to his aid. The house was purchased and is now doing well with an enrollment of fifty boys, forty of whom are learning a trade, while the other ten are taking academic courses. That house too has given recruits to our Congregation, two students having applied for admission as aspirants, our first French contingent. Hopefully the Lord will bless our efforts and we will be able to do a great deal of good. The house is called St. Pierre's Hospice. I could tell you a few stories about it, but time is short. There we conduct day and evening classes for day students and operate two festive oratories. It is a boon for this city, to which destitute, jobless people flock in search of work and livelihood, people who pay little heed to their own spiritual well-being or that of their children. They neither attend church themselves nor bother to send their children to school or to catechetical instruction. Hence, many become bad. It is really to their advantage—and to the city's as well—to ensure that these youngsters, who might receive no schooling at all or, at best, a poor one, be given a Christian education and led to the sacraments. The French press has praised our school, publicized our good work in Nice, and suggested that every French city get itself a Salesian house. Last week two newspapers extolled the Salesians to the skies and caused such a surge of enthusiasm that Marseille, Lyons, Bordeaux and other cities are now considering setting up a Salesian school. A few days ago, a kindly soul wrote a letter to the director [at Nice] offering us at no cost at all an entire house with large halls, rooms, playground and flower garden, the only condition being that we open a school there.

Last year Don Bosco, returning from France, went through Bordighera and Vallecrosia, where the Protestants have gained a foothold and do great harm to souls with a network of churches and schools. Grieving and worrying, the bishop of Ventimiglia saw no way of stemming the impious tide. Catholic schools had closed down and no one attended the parish church any longer. He begged Don Bosco to find some way to remedy the situation. Don Bosco obliged and agreed to open a Salesian house there. We rented a few small rooms, plain and bare, to house the Salesians and serve as a school for boys and girls, and we rigged up a chapel of sorts by cleaning up two sheds so low-ceilinged that, were the bishop, who is of

average height, ever to officiate there, he would have to take off his mitre. To wear it, he'd have to be no taller than some people here. (*There was a general, audible murmur of "Father Paglia, Father Paglia!"*) It reminded me of the old chapel⁵ we used to have on the site of our present dining room. For lack of classroom space, we have to use the sacristy and the chapel. The sanctuary is curtained off during the day and evening sessions. The boys are receptive when invited to receive the sacraments, and we make it easy for them to go to confession. This year we admitted forty to First Holy Communion. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are also getting good results with the girls.

How do they manage to make ends meet? Well, they have often lacked wine or meat and have had to be content with soup, at times not very well seasoned, but they had nothing else. Occasionally some kind person comes knocking at their door bringing a little casket of wine as a good-will offering, followed shortly afterward by someone else bringing some fruit. Thus Divine Providence keeps them going, and we must be thankful to the Lord. The townspeople are very grateful and fond of the Salesians and gladly send their sons to our school. When their pastor died, they all hastened to attend the only Mass offered in our humble little church, huddled together even outside the doors. I said "the only Mass," but there were times when there were two Masses, one being said by a priest sent from Alassio because of the town's urgent need. Seemingly things are looking up now. Both boys and girls no longer go to the Protestant schools nor will they have anything to do with them, the only exceptions being the few resident pupils from out of town. We are very happy at our success and so is the bishop. He is very glad to have us. Enrollment at the Protestant schools is dropping, even though they supply students with everything they need.

At Trinità [near Mondovì]⁶ where last year, 1876, we sent a priest, two clerics and a coadjutor, we have a festive oratory for boys and also hold day and evening classes. Many public school pupils transferred to our school and consequently we had to add the higher elementary grades. Children attend classes during the day, and older lads and adults come in the evening. They have responded favorably to our invitation to frequent the sacraments and are a good example to the entire town. All of our pupils are day students, the festive oratory is flourishing, and our school is doing well. I should say something about our schools in central Italy, but Don Bosco will tell us about them.

I'll go on now to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Mornese who are experiencing a wondrous growth. Two or three years ago there

⁵See the Indexes of Volumes II and III under "Pinardi Shed." [Editor]

⁶See Vol. XII, pp. 357f. [Editor]

were only thirty sisters, novices, and aspirants in one house; now they number about a hundred and seventy, spread out over eight towns: Turin, Lu, Biella, Lanzo, Borgo San Martino, Sestri Levante, Alassio and Bordighera. The sisters have managed to solve the many problems which plagued the linen rooms and kitchens of our schools, while doing other wonderful work for girls wherever they are. In Mornese, for example, they take care of the girls' religious instruction. Their boarding school is flourishing despite the long rough road to the railway station. The Salesians also run the town schools. This past year we had some trouble in Mornese. Our Salesian teacher was being harassed, but all the people rose up in our defense, so that the pastor was forced to take action and silence the troublemaker. He then sent Don Bosco a formal note requesting that he keep both that Salesian and the sisters at the town schools. Don Bosco went along with the proposal. I could say a lot more about the virtuous, hard life of the sisters, but it is not necessary. They remind us of the ancient monks of Thebaid and other deserts.

Now let's talk about our motherhouse. The Oratory keeps getting better and better, but I am not saying this in self-praise. Let fitting thanks be rendered to God. This year we lavished great care on the students' sodalities of St. Aloysius, the Blessed Sacrament, and the Immaculate Conception. I also would like to mention the way that the church services have been carried out. The altar boys have been turning out in great numbers and have reverently carried out the sacred ceremonies. It has been a blessing. Many people purposely come to our church to see the altar boys in action and to be edified by their behavior. In turn, this has also proved to be a strong incentive for priestly vocations.

This year a large number of boys asked to don the clerical habit. In spite of the small number of upperclassmen, many applied for admission to our Congregation. Then, so many were the requests from other grades, especially among the Sons of Mary, that eighty applicants were accepted.

The artisans were hurt by two serious losses this year: the death of their director, Father Chiala, and of their head assistant, the cleric Piacentino. They died, but their work continues to bear fruit. The artisans keep holding on to the fervor which these superiors kindled in them, and it is our fond wish that their new superiors will guide them on to even loftier achievements. The Immaculate Conception and the St. Joseph's sodalities, as well as the other groups proper to aspirants, are prospering.

There has been an increase in the number of novices, and this year they are moving along with greater regularity. Besides having their own dormitory, study hall and playground, they now also have a dining room just for themselves. They number a hundred and forty, not counting the two at Nice and a few who went to South America. Father Barberis, their novice master, tells me that they frequent the sacraments and that he is

quite pleased with them, although there is room for improvement.

The festive oratory is well attended and well run. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have also opened an oratory for girls; they are so numerous that there is no room for them all in the chapel. It will have to be extended. Before the sisters got here, flocks of girls could be seen everywhere in the neighboring meadows. Now there are none. The boys go to one oratory, the girls to the other.

In conclusion, day by day our Congregation keeps advancing so wondrously that we can't help seeing that God is with us. Harassment and afflictions always make it stronger. The confreres have increased and even more so the novices. There is greater regularity in both material and spiritual matters. The number of young men leaving the Congregation is much lower than in past years. I am referring only to the novices and temporarily professed, because no one with perpetual vows has ever as yet left the Congregation, and we hope that no one ever will.

In conclusion I say: Thanks be to God! By our fervor and conduct and by the exact observance of our rules, let us respond to the protection over us of Mary, Help of Christians. We could say that the Lord carries our Congregation in His arms, giving it all the help it needs to prosper.

As Father Rua finished his report, Don Bosco arose and went on as follows:

I will be a bit briefer so as not to prolong this meeting unduly. Although something should be said of the St. Aloysius' and St. Joseph's festive oratories and our work at the Rifugio⁷ and at St. Peter's, let us fly straight out to America. We have already spoken of these overseas houses and have published the missionaries' letters; hence it would be pointless to discuss them now. However, just to bring you up to date I'll say that a boarding school has been opened at Montevideo, where there are neither seminaries nor clerical vocations nor Catholic schools. Both the capital and the entire country are in disarray. Parents who want a Christian education for their sons would have to send them to Valsalice or some other European school. Father Lasagna directs this school, named "Colegio Pio," the first school in America to be dedicated to Pius IX's honor. We are also conducting religious services in a church adjoining the school for both our pupils and the neighborhood because the school is located outside the city limits. Especially on Sundays the church is jammed. We have high hopes for it. Classes have been started for the boarders and also for poor boys as day pupils. We had ten Salesians there,

⁷An institution for wayward girls. See the Index of Volume II under "Rifugio." [Editor]

but they were not enough and we had to send additional help from San Nicolás and Buenos Aires. As more news comes in, you will be kept informed.

From Montevideo, a fifteen-hour steamboat trip down the wide Plata River takes us to Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. There we began by taking over the parish Church of Our Lady of Mercy. It is a real mission. We celebrate Mass, teach catechism, preach, and conduct religious services for both children and adults. Necessity has forced us to open a home for poor boys and two festive oratories.

The new school at San Nicolás expanded rapidly, and in only seven or eight months it had an enrollment of a hundred and forty. We also service a public church where people can attend sacred functions and receive the sacraments. Our priests, while attending to their own church and school, also minister within the parish and elsewhere with preaching, hearing confessions and celebrating Holy Mass.

In Buenos Aires we shall have to take over a parish in a section nicknamed “La Boca,” the Devil’s Jaws,⁸ because of its bad reputation and the fact that it is the headquarters of Freemasonry. It will be tough going for those who will work there.

Just now we are considering founding a mission in Patagonia—the home, as you know, of uncivilized Indians. We have already welcomed some of them into our school, and when Father Cagliero comes back, he will bring a few Patagonians with him so that you can see for yourselves what their features, color, and traits are like. We will also have to take over an apostolic vicariate. The Patagonians live rather close to Concepción. They have a reputation of being very ferocious man-eaters. Who are the brave ones willing to face such perils, to serve as food for those savages? Well, we shall see. Just now, many ask to be the first to venture into those lands and bring our holy faith to those natives. I have high praise for their courage, but it is my desire—indeed my duty—to proceed cautiously so as not to sacrifice anyone’s life. I am almost positive that not one of our men will perish, but should anyone, despite our patience and prudence, be martyred, we must accept God’s will and thank Him. Would any one of us shirk the privilege of martyrdom? Nevertheless I hope that God will protect us and that we shall be able to do some good even out there in Patagonia, without having to be killed and eaten.

I must also tell you that requests from all over the New World are pouring in upon us to open more houses. At Santiago, Chile’s capital, we are being asked to conduct a hostel. At Concepción, on the border of Patagonia, a plea has come that we staff a seminary, and the city backs the

⁸See Vol. XII, pp. 190ff. [Editor]

request with the promise of help. They are waiting for us in Paraguay, Brazil and elsewhere to set up schools, seminaries and hospices. Ideal situations have reached their peak in America, but we must wait to build up our resources and strength. Father Ceccarelli wrote to us, saying: "The Salesian Congregation is truly blessed by God, because in only four months it has achieved in America what other congregations have taken four centuries to do. I did not mean to tell you this, but I say it because it may spur you to carry forward with greater courage what we have undertaken to do. Let us take heart. God blesses our efforts, but, as St. Paul says, He wants us to do our share.

Let us now come back to Italy. I have just returned from Rome, where, I had been told, young people are different from ours and cannot be reached. I was also told that we wouldn't be able to open festive oratories—at least not like those we have in Turin. Call it a miracle, but in Ariccia⁹ we have taken over an elementary school which was formerly in the hands of Protestants, at the wish and insistence of both local authorities and the Holy Father. Our day classes are packed, and the Protestants have desperately begun private courses and are supplying pupils with free school materials in an effort to hold them. Still their enrollments have dropped to almost zero. At my arrival I was very happy to find that the few remaining pupils left their teachers of error and forsook them for good. If this keeps up, the Protestants will soon be bankrupt. It is not just our day classes which are packed, but our evening adult classes as well. In due time we shall also open up a festive oratory and then let the Protestants do what they please.

At Albano¹⁰ we run the municipal secondary school which also serves as the junior seminary, and everyone is really thrilled with the Salesians and happy with their work. We could not ask for more. As soon as I arrived, the seminarians asked me in a body to hear their confessions, and, on reaching the house, I found a delegation of day students requesting that they too be allowed to come for confession. I heard them from early morning until noon and was very pleased with the way they went about it, just as occurs here; there was no need for me to prompt them in anything. Some came as early as six in the morning and waited for their turn until noon with most admirable patience. Things couldn't have turned out better. Here, too, besides the town's secondary school, the municipality pleads that we open a school for both day and resident students. We have already looked at a site for this purpose. Cardinal Di Pietro, the bishop of

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 353, 356. [Editor]

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 354f, 356. [Editor]

Albano, has offered us his seminary, indicating that an abundant harvest awaits us. He knows that we are not looking for money but just for hard work.

A two-hour train ride from Rome to Tuscany across from Albano and Ariccia brings us to the town of Magliano,¹¹ notorious beyond description for its lack of morals. But there too I found obedient, respectful youngsters [in our school which is also a diocesan junior seminary]. They pleaded with the director not to let me go until I heard their confessions. Then, just as I was about to leave, the bishop lent his support by personally asking me to hear the confessions of both day and resident pupils. Therefore I had to satisfy them all, and that's why I was several days late in returning. All the seminarians want to become Salesians. The seminary rector, acting as spokesman for himself, the spiritual director and the financial administrator, asked me to accept them as postulants, and I consented.¹² However, we prefer to move along slowly with caution and foresight, lest we hurt the diocese and attract too much attention. Once we are surer about vocations from the diocesan seminary we shall think about admitting them. There is great enthusiasm for us and for our school in the towns around Rome. If we had personnel and accepted all the offers we get, I could open more than twenty new schools before All Saints' Day.

One thing we did was to agree to take care of the Conceptionists, an order founded by Pius IX twenty years ago, but now unable to last much longer without outside help. It was the Holy Father's will and we made the sacrifice. The matter is pretty well settled now, everything is in order, the director has assumed his office, and the Pope has personally donated twenty thousand lire.

Last year, you will recall, I stated that the end of the year would witness an extraordinary event and that the first seeds would be sown of a new enterprise destined to produce much good. I made that statement at the general assembly. Someone wished to hear more about it and so I will oblige. Really, there are two undertakings rather than one. The first is the establishment of some Salesian houses in Rome. From the very beginning, obstacles arose, but the Lord has so exceptionally disposed all things that, once the obstacles are removed, we shall achieve great good. Pius IX wanted us to take over the schools at Ariccia, Albano and Magliano. At what cost to us? None. Everything was provided along with food and lodging. All we had to bring with us were our personal belongings. We went there penniless, and all expenses were paid by the Holy Father and

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 355ff. [Editor]

¹²The seminary rector was Canon Francis Rebaudi; the spiritual director was Canon Anthony Pagani. Deeply impressed by the priestliness of Father [Joseph] Daghero and the cleric [Blaise] Giacomuzzi, they applied for the novitiate. [Author].

the town. Father Scappini has already gone to assume direction of the Conceptionists, and other confreres will be sent to help him. Just today we received a request for one more house in Rome. We may say that now our Congregation is assuredly established there.

The Holy Father has consented to give a monthly personal audience to one of our priests stationed in Rome—a concession made to no one else before.

We have also started negotiations for houses in India and Australia, and I must start preparing personnel, but there is no rush for that.

The second undertaking we wanted to start was the Association of Salesian Cooperators.¹³ It has hardly come into existence and it already numbers many members. Its aim is mutual assistance: spiritual, moral and also financial. We shall see its vast growth. Soon enough masses of people and entire cities will be united by the Lord into a spiritual bond with the Salesian Congregation. Financially, the association is to be totally autonomous, except in matters subject to the Holy Father's spiritual authority. Of course, we shall carefully avoid any clash with episcopal or civil authorities. Even the mayor of Magliano, the wealthiest man in town and an avowed liberal, has asked to become a Salesian cooperator, calling it a God-inspired association. Many others have followed his example, but we must proceed cautiously in accepting applicants.

Hand in hand with this project, we have decided to publish a bulletin which will pretty much become the Congregation's official publication and include many things we'll need to make known to our cooperators. It will come out regularly and will link Salesians and cooperators. I do hope that by responding to God's will, we shall live to see the day when entire cities and nations will differ from us Salesians only in the fact that their people will live in their own homes. If the cooperators now number one hundred, they will soon be thousands and thousands, and if they number one thousand, they shall become millions. However, we must admit only those who qualify. I hope this is what God wants of us.

Let us find ways of making this association known. God wills it. The Sons of Mary Program has already been mentioned. I wish that all our confreres and boys could be here to listen to all we have said, but since they are not present, I earnestly recommend that the directors pass this material on to them in a conference or in some other way, briefly or at length. They should all know what I said about our Congregation and whatever concerns it, our foreign missions and the Salesian cooperators. Let people say that we Salesians are only lowly men, but that we are instruments in God's hands and that the Lord looks favorably upon our

¹³See XI, pp. 60-77; Vol. XII, pp. 65f, 180f, 195, 439, 442. [Editor]

undertakings. If we did not see such things with our own eyes, we would say that they are fairy tales, but they are facts. Mere men cannot accomplish so much; it is God who has wrought these things. He uses us to carry out His holy will and fulfill His plans. And He will bless us.

What then are we to do? One thing only. When the Holy Father, bedridden, gave me an audience in his room, he told me what he thought about several matters. "Write to your sons," he said. "Start telling them and keep repeating it always: there is no doubt that it is God's hand which is guiding your Congregation. But a weighty responsibility rests on you, and you must prove yourselves worthy of such favor. I tell you in God's name that if you measure up to His divine aid by your good example, if you foster genuine piety and unblemished morals—particularly spotless chastity—and if this spirit lives on among you, you will have co-workers, cooperators and zealous priests. Vocations for yourselves, for other religious orders and for the dioceses will multiply a hundredfold. Good priests, who will accomplish much good, will never be wanting. I believe that it is a secret I am disclosing to you. I am convinced that God has raised your Congregation in these times to reveal His power. I am certain that God has deliberately kept this important secret hidden until the present, a secret unknown to ages past and to many a bygone congregation. Your Congregation is the first of a new kind of religious order, born in this age, whose style makes it possible for it to be both religious and secular. It has the vow of poverty and keeps personal ownership at one and the same time; it shares both world and monastery, and its members are both religious and lay, cloistered yet free citizens. The Lord has revealed this in our day, and I disclose it to you now. Your Congregation has been raised up in the midst of the world which, as the Gospel says, is seated in wickedness in order that the world may give glory to God. It has been raised up so that all may see that there is a way of giving to God that which is God's and to Caesar that which is Caesar's. Thus did Jesus Christ address His own day: 'Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's.' I predict—and you can tell your sons—that your Congregation will flourish, will spread miraculously, will last through the ages, and will always find co-workers and cooperators, as long as it shall strive to promote genuine filial piety and especially unblemished chastity. I could tell you more, but I am tired. Tell me something yourself."

We went on to other things. Now, will someone, gifted with a good memory, jot down what I just said? Afterward I'll gladly go over it and make slight additions in order that this transcript may be preserved as a cherished heritage of our Congregation.

But let us never forget to safeguard our morals jealously. The glory of our Congregation rests upon it. It would be a disaster, a stain on our

honor, should the Salesians ever degenerate. The Lord would disperse us if we failed in the virtue of chastity. It is a balm to be brought to all peoples, to be fostered in every individual. It is the very heart of every virtue.

Let me conclude by rejoicing in the fact that, thanks to God, we are almost free of debt despite all our expenses. At this time we have no financial worries, and so let us feel very grateful and confident. I must also express my pleasure to you for the work you have done and are doing. I hope that you will remain firm in your resolve. I must thank the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, who has always been our help. As superior of the Congregation, I am grateful to the directors for their collaboration and moral support. To them I say, "Take home with you my expressions of gratitude and thanks. Tell all concerned that I am pleased with them and that their father is not mindless of all they have done and endured. Tell them also that he urges them to sacrifice themselves and to join their forces for the welfare of souls—our own and others—for our growth in piety and virtue, and for an increase in the number of Salesians and of all those we shall one day meet again in heaven."

This general assembly did not, as in former years, end the annual conference; four more sessions were held.

Father Rua chaired the meeting of February 7. Its main objective was to finalize dates and preachers for the boys' spiritual retreats—steps which were considered vital for the smooth running of the school year. Father Rua also reviewed some wise precautionary measures to ensure the effectiveness of the spiritual retreats. Don Bosco presided at the day's second session. He discussed a proposal that the spiritual director of the Hospital of Our Lady of Consolation be entrusted to the Salesians. Then he narrated his dream of Pius IX's death, which we reported in the first chapter of this volume.

On February 8 Don Bosco made only one appearance at the end of the evening session. Most of the morning and evening sessions were devoted to studying and reviewing school regulations which were being readied for the press. Several amendments and additions were made to the text which had been approved at the conference of 1876 and reworked thereafter.¹⁴ It was felt that special care had to be taken in wording the regulations so as not to

¹⁴See Vol. XII, pp. 42ff. [Editor]

give the impression that the director's freedom and authority were being curtailed. There was no intention to give limitless authority to a director, but since the regulations would be read by the pupils, the younger Salesians and lesser superiors, his prestige had to be safeguarded. The assembly felt that the directors would know the limits of their authority well enough from the rules of the Congregation and the explanatory notes which had privately been passed on to them. One of their limits was stated by the Superior Chapter: they were to respect the Chapter's personnel appointments, which could be changed only in cases of absolute necessity; in such cases the prefect of studies was to be immediately notified.

The final item of the last session was in keeping with the wish expressed by Don Bosco on the morning of February 6: to find ways and means of maintaining high standards of morality in Salesian houses among both pupils and Salesians. There was general and firm agreement on the following eight points:

1. Pupils were to be treated with goodness to win their confidence.
2. Sacrifices were to be made when necessary in order to be with the boys and watch over them.
3. A chart was to be kept of each boy's place in the dormitory, classroom, dining room, and study hall.
4. Dormitories were to be checked out in nightly inspections.
5. Boys were to go by threes on their weekly walk, no stops were to be made, and no one was to be allowed to break ranks.
6. Pupils were to be told it was a mark of good manners to keep their hands on top of their desks in the classrooms and study hall.
7. Recreations were to be enlivened with games appealing to the boys.
8. Study time was not to be stretched out for younger pupils or for those who had not enough work to do.

The meeting was just about to close when Don Bosco came in and, being told of the discussion, said he would like to comment on the question of good morals. As usual, his words were very practical. To their eight points he added a ninth: great temperance in the use of meat and wine to whose excessive use he attributed the low morals of certain countries, adding that people who were sparing in the use of meat and avoided spicy or hard-to-digest foods were much less susceptible to the promptings of concupiscence. He also pointed out that the Church, in recommending penance, focused first on meat. "Bear in mind," he told them, "that up to

now the enviable reputation of our schools is due to the unchallenged, widespread conviction that our moral behavior is above all reproach. But will this be always true? Is our reputation well-founded? Be on guard! So far God has been our defense. Some dangers arise from within, others from outside. Frequent confession and Communion and constant vigilance are powerful preventive means. Mishaps may occur, but they can always be remedied. Supervision must be a concerted effort. No one is to consider himself excused when it comes to fending off any offense to God. Other preventive means are: keeping always busy and avoiding particular friendships, regardless of authority or age, for neither age nor tried and true holiness of life is adequate to repel the attacks of this enemy. Rather, the more advanced the age, the more subtle the lure. Even being physically close to some particular individual may have its dangers. One begins with little gifts of religious articles, then good advice, and then—well, it goes on from there. Never allow boys into your bedroom. Boys are very curious; some have already been corrupted by immoral publications, and nothing of their superiors' behavior escapes their attention. Heaven help one who compromises himself. In a word, love none or all equally! Work, too, is a powerful safeguard. Somebody once told me, 'Don't make your priests work so hard! Well, a priest will die either of overwork or of bad living.'

He closed with a theme dear to him: to be deeply concerned with vocations. He offered three suggestions: speak often of vocation, talk at length about the foreign missions, and publicize our missionaries' letters.

This should close our chapter, but we have a few things to add. After being away from the Oratory for over a month, Don Bosco felt that he had to address a few words to both boys and novices. Taken up by the conference meetings and private talks with the directors, and absorbed in settling urgent business and clearing up accumulated correspondence, he had found no time to speak to either group. We feel that our inclusion of both talks, given separately to students and novices, will complete a cycle of discourses on the Congregation and the motherhouse. Don Bosco gave them at that point within the school year which he had chosen as the most suitable time for imparting to each of the houses a

steady, constant rhythm to be followed until the end of the school year.

On February 11 he went to address both students and artisans assembled for night prayers. We must note that on the previous day the Lord had taken to Himself the first of the “six and then two” Oratory pupils and clerics [whose death had been] predicted by Dominic Savio.¹⁵ The boy’s name was Stephen Mazzoglio, a fourth year Latin student, a native of Lu, described as prayerful, studious and exemplary from his first day at the Oratory to his death. Don Bosco spoke as follows:

We have finally managed to get together. I was as anxious to see you and talk to you as you were to speak to me. Now I have come for a brief talk mainly to get a look at you and you at me even though the lighting is not too bright. It has been quite some time since we’ve talked together and lots of things have happened in the meantime. Some of you do not even know me. Some new boys have been saying, “We haven’t even seen Don Bosco yet.” Well, now that you have seen me, are you happy?

I have been to Rome, and while there I have been pretty busy with matters beneficial to the Oratory. I realize that you are very good and have prayed a good deal for me. Just between us, I want to tell you that everything I have put my hand to has been successful. From Rome I went to Ariccia, where we have a school, and there everything went well. From Ariccia I went on to Albano, where we have another school, and there too everything was settled nicely. Then I went to Magliano, where we have a third school, and there we drew up plans for a promising future. Then I returned to Rome, where we accepted and opened a fourth house. Furthermore we came to a final agreement about the Conceptionists.

The Holy Father is all for us. He gave us special blessings and made us a handsome present, not counting all the other favors he has in mind for us.

Going on to other matters, I must tell you that we lost a brother of ours, Mazzoglio, who breathed his last yesterday morning at four and was buried this morning. He was a good lad and was prepared to die. His companions say that he received Holy Communion last Sunday. On Monday evening he took to his bed, from which he was not to rise again. Since his condition became very rapidly critical, Father Cappelletti, who was urgently summoned, rushed to his bedside, but Mazzoglio was already unconscious and died a little later.

Now think: if Mazzoglio had delayed his general confession until, let’s

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 439, 441. [Editor]

say, Easter, what would have been his fate? Certainly we would have serious misgivings. Fortunately, as we hope, he was ready. This tragedy should be a lesson to us because when we least expect it, death may overtake us. Were the same thing to happen to us, would we be ready? Some of you are now whispering, "It may well happen that another one of us will soon die. After all, it's almost taken for granted here that we boys die in pairs, and that if one of us dies during Lent, another will not be around at Easter." Well, be that as it may, an empty saying or whatever, let us all keep well prepared. Let's not wait to make a general confession and set our lives straight until we are on the threshold of death, for we will then be caught unprepared and it will go badly with us. Let us make our confession in good time. Then let death come to me or to you, for we shall be ready for it. To one whose conscience is at peace death is a comfort, a joy, a passage to perfect happiness. But for one who is in sin, it is the most frightening thing, a source of torment and despair.

Of all the people who have ever lived on the face of this earth not one has yet escaped death. Although it is most certain to come, the hour, place and manner are most uncertain. Some die in childhood, others as adults, still others in old age. Who knows when or where we shall die? Will it be at the Oratory, on an outing, in bed after an illness, or suddenly of a stroke? No one knows. In the face of such certainty and such uncertainties, we had best be ready. I'll set the example, and you should do likewise. "Make hay while the sun shines," says the proverb. The Lord reminds us that death comes like a thief, when we least expect it. Pray to the Lord that I may always be ready, lest death may take me unawares, and I shall pray for you at Mass and ask that none of you will die unprepared. As in past years, we shall hold our Exercise for a Happy Death the day after tomorrow, and then, through the courtesy of the prior¹⁶ of the St. Aloysius Sodality, you will be treated to something to boost your strength. Start preparing for this spiritual exercise tomorrow evening. If anyone needs to go to confession, let him do so tomorrow morning. This shall be our real carnival celebration: a clear conscience and inner peace so that, should the Lord come to take us to Himself, He may find us ready.

Don Bosco addressed the novices on Sunday, February 18, in a surprise first visit to their dining room which had been inaugurated two months before. He dined with them. They greeted him with a few complimentary poems and crowned the dinner with a band

¹⁶Originally the "prior" was a duly elected sodality officer (*see* Vol. III, p. 459). Later, the "prior" was usually a prominent benefactor invited to be honorary chairman of a particular festivity. He generally responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

concert in the portico. “Our dear Don Bosco was radiant with joy,” wrote Father Barberis in his chronicle. The sight of such a fine group of clerical novices—sixty-five in all—and the lofty hopes they augured prompted Don Bosco to exclaim repeatedly, “I am glad. I am really glad. I must come again. I will ask visiting priests to dine here with you from time to time.” After dinner, he addressed them as follows:

You have greeted me with speeches and poetry. Now let me talk to you in prose, so that also the non-poets among you can fully enjoy this day. My only purpose in coming was to see your new dining room and enjoy watching you do justice to this place.

I must offer my congratulations to all of you for doing your duty in this dining room. I’m not implying that you don’t do it elsewhere. I am totally pleased with you in everything and everywhere—even though a few don’t get 100% in conduct! Well, 90% is a good enough mark.

First of all, I want to urge all of you to take good care of your health. I have heard that many would like to fast especially in these days of Lent, and that some want to shorten their recreation in order to study for the upcoming examinations¹⁷ or to do some penance or for other reasons. Hence, before you come to me for permissions which I very rarely grant, let me tell you that, as much as possible, your penance should consist in keeping the daily schedule. This is what I want to impress upon you: keep your timetable, especially during this Lenten season. Substitute acts of penance with acts of obedience. Rise promptly in the morning, retire when you should at night, be punctual in class and chapel and in doing each appointed task. Make your tongue observe Lent by not allowing it inopportune talk of any kind. Those few of you who have enjoyed a protracted carnival and have earned less than 100% in conduct are now to observe Lent by their excellent behavior.

By doing otherwise you would be out of step with the rest. What I see as necessary is that you grow and become strong young men by keeping healthy and that you later be able to do a lot of work. Hence I was glad to see your expertise in bolting down your dinner without being squeamish. I’ll be back to dine with you again because you treated me well. I too like to do justice to my dinner.

The Jesuits, I am told, before admitting a candidate, put him to his first test by inviting him to their community dinner. If he eats everything

¹⁷He alluded to the term examinations, usually held during the last two weeks in Lent. [Author]

without being fussy, clearing his plate with a zesty appetite, he has a pretty good chance of getting in because those watching him will think that he is healthy and strong and will be able to work. Contrariwise, the candidate who pushes his plate aside or eats only half of it or is fussy about his food or gripes about it has hardly a ghost of a chance of getting in. The Jesuits want only people who can be a help, not a burden to their community. Had a novice master of theirs seen you this morning, I'm sure that he would have given you top grades. It's a sign that you are healthy.

I must have you grow healthy and strong so that you can replace the men we send to the houses and help me in the work that keeps forever growing. I am glad to see that you are so many because we are being called from everywhere and the harvest keeps getting bigger all around us. Just these last few days I have received very important proposals to open new houses in France, England and Austria. They will have to wait, but you have to grow quickly.

Everywhere people think highly of us, as if we were saints and could work miracles. Well, I believe that you are all good fellows and can work wonders with a dinner, but as to anything else—no offense meant to anyone—I don't think that you have yet gotten to that point. Still, we must try to help each other and live up to that reputation.

There is buoyant enthusiasm for Salesians everywhere. Wherever a Salesian goes, the eyes of all are on him to see the "model" sent by Don Bosco. Everywhere I've gone—Albano, Magliano, and elsewhere—I found everyone tingling with curiosity to see a Salesian, and no sooner did one come to them than they immediately exclaimed, "He is a saint." Even those who were dismissed from the Oratory for serious breaches of conduct found employment in no time. As soon as they arrived in some village or town and the people found out where they came from, they were immediately hired as monitors or teachers, even if they were of mediocre intelligence. All they had to say was, "I come from the Oratory," and nobody would even ask them for a letter of recommendation. Well, let them achieve all kinds of success and do better than ever before. I have only told you this to show you the lofty esteem in which we are held. But tell me now: What would happen if we were to fail to live up to this lofty reputation with which people regard us? Let us not let them down. Let us carry out our duties, whatever they be: scholastic, religious or moral. The Lord will take care of everything else.

Father Cagliero writes to us from America that the members of our last missionary expedition have arrived safe and sound and are hard at work. He begs that those who are preparing to join them will honor the name "Salesian." In America things will proceed smoothly and of their own power as long as the reputation set by the first arrivals is not tarnished.

Therefore, let us try to live up to their image of us even though we may not all be saints.

Your exams will show us if you have been studying. However, not everyone who has studied diligently will necessarily get the highest marks because he may not be very gifted or may have a poor background. Anyway, when one has deserved 100% in conduct, he will also manage to get passing grades with God's help and his own efforts. All in all, I hope that your exams will be successful.

One more point. I ask you to make efforts to shun and forestall grumbling. In a word, show that you are content with things as they are. You will be a lot happier, because if you have legitimate complaints, but do not spread them around, you will enjoy inner peace and the discontent will gradually and harmlessly fade away. On the other hand, if you voice ill feeling, others will chime in, and even things which they never noticed before will become annoying. I don't mean foul talk, things about which St. Paul says: "Let them not even be mentioned among you." [Eph. 5:3] I'm not even remotely hinting at that. It's entirely out. I am talking about criticizing a superior's arrangements and orders or the routine running of the house. Just yesterday a confrere wrote to me, "When something has been decided by my superiors, I immediately like it. I need no other reasons." I would like all of you to say the same.

Grumbling generates worries about human respect and fear of what others may think or say. Often many of you would do great things, but the thought that others may criticize or misinterpret them is enough to make them give up their plans and so the good is never done. This is a most grievous evil which stems from grumbling.

It is only too true that such grumbling does take place. It is a fault which has wrought serious harm within religious congregations. Just recently I got a letter about the same thing. Why is there so much arguing when it's a matter of obeying? Has the superior given an order? Then let it be followed. But why did he give it? Why? Why must one find a reason? Let each of us do his own duty, and the superior will do his. When one begins to criticize a superior, condemning what he has done or the way he did it, soon enough others will chime in like a chorus and come forth with the most ridiculous statements, especially if one of them is a smooth talker. Discontent then spreads to others, and the whole community begins to suffer. Strive then to do your best to prevent criticism of superiors and abstain from it yourselves because it does grave harm. Should this grumbling entail something offensive to God, then raise your voice against the enemy of souls and cry wolf. All means must be used to silence the offender. Only this kind of criticism is good. Whenever you can impede an

offense against God by speaking out, do so, please do so, and God will reward you.

I have nothing else to say but to urge you to take heart and fulfill your duties with a manly spirit. God will bless your every effort. Undauntedly take care of your health, keep up your studies, and prevent criticism of superiors. Then we shall want for nothing, and we shall be in a position to defy all demons and their followers. We shall fear them no longer, and with surety we shall benefit ourselves and others.

When we stop to think that besides all these novices there were also at the Oratory many professed clerics, we are not surprised to learn that some people might feel a certain apprehension at the sight of so many blackrobes in one single place. Would not visitors pick up an unfavorable impression? Would not the evil-minded have a pretext to spread venomous lies? Precisely not to attract too much notice, applicants donned the clerical habit a few at a time without fanfare. But year by year the need for a separate novitiate made itself felt more intensely. "I should always be in the very midst of the novices," Don Bosco stated in this regard, "in order to form their spirit and confer time and again with their novice master, but here at the Oratory there are really too many people." In the face of necessity, Don Bosco was not one to point it out and then just talk about it. His mind immediately raced ahead to find means to meet the need. And so, in the school year 1879-1880, a spacious and pleasant novitiate was established in the neighboring town of San Benigno Canavese.

From previous talks of his and other sources we know that Don Bosco, both publicly and privately, in groups and with individuals, would gladly talk about the progress being made by his Congregation and the destiny which awaited it. His aim in doing so was to fire the souls of his sons to grand endeavors, instilling in them the inner conviction that the Salesians were being called to great things and that each and every one of them had to ready himself to do his share generously.

CHAPTER 4

Journey to France

DON Bosco's good friend, Father John Giacomelli, remarking how the Salesian Congregation kept growing, once asked him whether it would also expand to France. "The French can take care of themselves," Don Bosco answered evasively. On several other occasions he repeated a comment to the same Father Giacomelli which seems to clarify what he meant: "Events shape men; men do not shape events." For this reason Don Bosco went whatever way the finger of God pointed, wherever His hand led him. God-planned events and inner enlightenment showed him the way, and divine assistance helped him to follow it. So it was with the foreign missions, with the Sons of Mary Program, with the Association of Salesian Cooperators, and now with [the Salesian work in] France. The little we have already seen of the boys' home in Nice¹ will stand out more distinctly as these Memoirs move on to other Salesian foundations in France.

The dedication of the new quarters of St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice and the need to discuss opening a Salesian house in Marseille on location were the main reasons that occasioned Don Bosco's trip to France toward the end of February 1877. There were secondary reasons, too, like the stopovers he intended to make at Toulouse, Bordeaux and other towns, and it is likewise a fact that on February 19 he mentioned having received twenty-four requests from various parts of France. However, the only documentation we have concerns a quick trip to Cannes.

This journey to France prevented his being at the Oratory for an important and somewhat critical situation. In those very days both

¹See Vol. XII, pp. 49f, 89f, 93f. [Editor]

the prefect and the school supervisor of the province of Turin were jointly paying official visits to all the city's schools including the Oratory. Since no one could better deal with such a contingency than Don Bosco himself, he gave detailed instructions to those in charge before leaving. The chronicle² records them:

I have already invited them to come to the Oratory. They replied that they would first inspect the public schools and that perhaps the Oratory would be the first private school to be visited. Welcome them most cordially. Have the brass band meet them at the entrance, and escort them to a suitable area for a reception of songs, speeches and poetry recitation. Stress the fact that we have more trade students than academic students. Give them a tour of the bakery, dining rooms, workshops and the better dormitories. See that all presses are running when they visit the printshop. The study hall does not make a very good impression when empty, although it may seem too crowded when the boys are there. Whoever escorts them should point out that in this charitable institution many things are needed which we cannot provide because of lack of funds. Finally, give them a good send-off with the band and present them with a copy of my *History of Italy* as a sample of our printing and book-binding and as a token of our esteem.

Don Bosco could set his mind at ease that his instructions would be followed because he knew that, thanks to Father Rua, they would be carried out to the letter.

He left on February 21. The first stage of his itinerary called for brief stopovers at Sampierdarena, Varazze, Vallecrosia and Ventimiglia. He was probably at Vallecrosia on February 22,³ but we then lose track of him until February 28, when he set out from Nice for Marseille⁴ with Father Ronchail. Our narrative has been pieced together from documents in our archives and in the files of St. Joseph's parish in Marseille, all of them sparing in their account of the initial negotiations to establish a Salesian foundation in the capital of Provence.⁵

²Chronicle of Father Barberis, February 19, 1877. [Author]

³We gather this bit of information from a short note of Don Bosco to the director, Father [Nicholas] Cibrario. [Author]

⁴A short note to Father Barberis on February 28 says: "I am now leaving for Marseille and will write to Father Rua from there." [Author]

⁵We are grateful to our confrere, Father Frederick Rivière, who supplied us with photocopies of documents recently found by chance at Marseille. [Author]

Attorney Ernest Michel⁶ was the first to make Don Bosco known in Marseille. In 1876 he conducted a conference on Don Bosco's work⁷ for poor, homeless youth. One of his most attentive listeners, Father Clement Guiol, the pastor of St. Joseph's Church, felt that he had to contact Don Bosco and enlist his aid on behalf of the swarms of Italian boys in the streets of Marseille, totally deprived of anything like a Christian education. Not being a personal acquaintance of the attorney, he turned to a go-between—Canon Timon-David, founder and superior of a youth work known as *Oeuvre de la Jeunesse Ouvrière du Sacré Coeur* [Sacred Heart Center for Working Youth]. The canon was a close friend of the kindly and charitable attorney. The two priests were in immediate accord. At the request of Father Guiol, the canon wrote to the attorney on May 21, asking him to commend the youth of Marseille to Don Bosco's care. Believing that Don Bosco would soon be coming to Nice, the attorney thought it best to wait and discuss the matter with him personally. As a matter of fact, Don Bosco was visiting the Salesian houses in Liguria in June and everything seemed to indicate that he would cross into France, but this became impossible. When informed of it, Father Ronchail hastened to deliver the canon's letter personally to Don Bosco in Liguria and returned to Attorney Michel with Don Bosco's answer to the canon's letter.

The gist of it was that he was favorable to the idea, with three conditions: 1. that the bishop's approval be first obtained; 2. that the canon himself be in favor of it and offer moral support; 3. that a site and building be provided to gather boys on Sundays and to shelter the homeless. Don Bosco also informed the canon that in the fall he would find it easier to visit Marseille and discuss the matter with him.⁸

Attorney Michel quickly forwarded the letter to Canon Timon-David, enclosing his own French translation, and the canon in turn informed Father Guiol in these edifying words: "I most ardently hope that negotiations with Don Bosco will prove successful, even if we should lose by it. All that matters is that . . . Christ is being

⁶See Vol. XI, p. 395. [Editor]

⁷*Bulletin Salésien*, 1896, p. 6. [Author]

⁸This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

proclaimed. That is what brings me joy.” [Phil. 1:18] This “we” is in reference to himself and his own religious. There was in Marseille the Institute of Divine Providence or Institute for Homeless Children, staffed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At the time there was talk of replacing them with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Puy, founded by Canon Timon-David. The canon was willing to step aside and yield his place to the Salesians should Don Bosco accept the proposal.

Somehow Don Bosco was unable to get to France in the fall of 1876 [as he had hoped], but he managed to do so in February 1877, traveling as far as Marseille. Since he needed a temporary residence in Marseille for his missionaries awaiting their ships, he was quite willing to accept a home for destitute boys. However, Bishop Place was not inclined to admit a new congregation into Marseille, where so many religious orders were already looking after the spiritual and material needs of the people. Fortunately, once Don Bosco was able to talk with him, he easily gained the good prelate’s benevolent support. In fact, when he presented his modest request, the bishop replied that a mere foothold was much too little, for Marseille needed something like Don Bosco’s Oratory in Turin. Furthermore, he recommended Father Guiol as the best qualified diocesan priest to help him in such a venture, not only because of his virtue and powerful influence among people, but also because he was pastor of Marseille’s wealthiest parish. He concluded by giving Don Bosco a letter of introduction to Father Guiol. This intervention of Divine Providence was all the more remarkable since relations between the bishop and the pastor were widely known to be rather strained because they disagreed on certain administrative policies. This must also be taken into consideration in understanding a certain remark made by Don Bosco one day when some people were reportedly discussing in his presence the first miracle he had worked in Marseille sometime in January 1870. Giving due credit to the pastor of St. Joseph’s Church, he corrected them, saying, “Not at all! Don Bosco’s first miracle in Marseille was that Bishop Place chose Father Guiol to help him in his venture.”

Since Don Bosco’s knowledge of French was inadequate for the matter at hand and Father Guiol did not understand a single word

of Italian, an interpreter had to be called in, but this did not prevent both hearts from being in perfect accord with each other. We do not know the exact terms of their agreement, but we can be quite sure that Don Bosco's preliminary talks with Father Guiol and his first contacts in Marseille gave rise to the Salesian foundation which became a reality the following year.

After Don Bosco left Marseille, Father Guiol and Canon Timon-David had an exchange of views which led to a formal proposal to entrust the Institute for Homeless Children to the Salesians. Official notification of the proposal reached Don Bosco in the first half of May. He had visited the above-mentioned institute and had noticed that it did not measure up to his requirements. It accepted seven-year-olds, keeping them to the age of fourteen, whereas his schools of arts and trades took them in when they were about twelve and did not relinquish their care until they completed their professional courses. Furthermore, he had also realized that he would not have a free hand because the institution was subject to a board of trustees. In reporting to the Superior Chapter on May 11, he expressed himself as follows:

While in Marseille, I inspected an orphanage. The building is magnificent and the funds are abundant, but the boys are inadequately assisted. Furthermore, since there are no workshops on the premises, the youngsters go to the city to work. Any good boy entering the orphanage is soon spoiled. Its director, whom I thought was well-intentioned, asked my advice, and I told him that at the outset it would be absolutely necessary to set up workshops on the premises, the way we have here at the Oratory. Yesterday I received a letter from him stating that he is willing and eager to hand over to us the management of this orphanage, an institution of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart.

The offer was not accepted because of lack of personnel.

In Marseille Don Bosco was a guest of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Could he possibly live in the midst of so many boys and not be concerned for their good? One day, while crossing the playground, he met a youngster whom he beckoned to draw nearer. As he always did with boys, he said a few words to him. Just what he said we do not know, but it made such an impression on the lad that, on rejoining his companions, he exclaimed, "I've just seen a saint." It acted like an electric spark, and in no time all

the pupils wanted to see him. Although his French was more ingenious than correct, he nevertheless gradually won their hearts, arousing a keen desire in them to make their confession to him. One group was allowed to do so. After the first few confessions, word got around that he revealed also sins one might prefer to conceal. The news created a furor throughout the entire boarding school; all the pupils pleaded to be allowed to make a general confession to him. Deeply worried, the superiors thought it best to deny the request. To avoid any unpleasantness, Don Bosco very regretfully let them have their way.

But could Don Bosco refrain from speaking of vocations in a Catholic school, assured though he was by the superiors that finding priestly vocations among their pupils was impossible? "None of them would want to be priests," they kept telling him in all honesty. However, Don Bosco's kindness and saintliness so touched the boys that many felt a desire to become priests—Salesian priests—and wanted to go with him to Turin. In fact, on returning to Turin, he found a batch of letters from them restating their eagerness to go to Turin and become Salesians, declaring themselves ready for any sacrifice so long as he would accept them. A few, sons of wealthy families, further stated their willingness to pay any sum. Ingenuously, one even promised to give all that he owned as soon as he would be of age to dispose of it, and one even managed to run away from the school and, on arriving at the Oratory, firmly refused to go back home.

Don Bosco also attentively took stock of the educational system used there. The staff kept asking him how he could so quickly gain the good will and love of youngsters wherever he went, so that at a single glance they were won over and spellbound as if by a mysterious force. In reply, he would explain the preventive system and the loving kindness with which boys in Salesian schools were guided and admonished. He would also point out the results that derived from the opposite system, according to which superiors always kept aloof from their pupils, habitually displaying a grave, even stern countenance in order to bolster their authority.⁹ Don Bosco had not as yet written his golden treatise on the preventive system, but he was probably already mulling over its content or had

⁹Chronicle of Father Barberis, April 6, 1877. [Author]

formed the idea of writing it from the comments he heard, as we shall soon see.

News of his stay in Marseille spread beyond the city, thanks also, if not mainly, to the pupils' talkativeness with their parents. Thus it happened that a local shipbuilder, wealthy and religious-minded, hastened to call on Monsignor Payan, pastor of the pro-cathedral. "We have a saint here in Marseille," he exclaimed, "and we haven't even met him." Together they paid Don Bosco a visit and were so charmed that both became his friends and benefactors. Mr. Bergasse, the shipbuilder, is still gratefully remembered by the Salesians of St. Leo's festive oratory. The press also gave Don Bosco good coverage and thereby caused an onrush of visitors who begged to meet him.

However, he did not receive all callers because an oral hemorrhage forced him to prolong his hours of nightly rest. This may perhaps have also made him change his plans to visit other towns. Of the many requests for Salesian foundations, nine came from Marseille itself. Unable to deal with the matter directly because of his weakened health, he asked the bishop to look into the matter and offer advice. The prelate gladly consented, promising to smooth out any possible difficulties. Being very eager to see the Oratory, he promised to come to Turin to report his findings in person. The Riviera's winds and its sudden changes in temperature always affected Don Bosco's health.

He remained in Marseille about a week. We infer as much from an undated letter to Father Rua which gives no indication of his whereabouts, though, judging from its contents, it must certainly have been written from Marseille.¹⁰ As was his habit, in this letter to Father Rua he enumerates a dozen instructions, permissions and requests on a wide range of matters, three concerning his stay in Marseille. One item is particularly striking for its comment on the

¹⁰In describing his return itinerary, he wrote: "Next Monday I shall leave for Ventimiglia, Alassio, Noli, Varazze, Sampierdarena, Turin, etc. After tomorrow forward all mail to Alassio until further notice." From Nice he certainly went to Ventimiglia, but to which "next Monday" was he referring? Since he had arrived at Marseille on Wednesday, February 28, he must have written this letter sometime between Monday, March 5 and March 12, the date of the dedication of St. Pierre's Hospice. Although he expected to leave Nice on the evening of the same day, he most likely left on March 13, as we surmise from another letter to Father Rua from Nice, dated March 8, 1877. [Author]

bishop: "He returned yesterday to Marseille and today I will dine with him at his residence with Father Ronchail. He seems quite favorable to us. I am checking out the ground and will drive my spade into the most suitable spot." The second item concerns the school where he was staying: "Yesterday a student assembly was held to award honor certificates to the best of the six hundred pupils. I think we could do likewise. There were selections in prose and poetry, with vocal and instrumental music which delighted the jam-packed audience in the church basement auditorium." A third item refers to a visit to a tuberculosis sanatorium: "Tomorrow morning we go to Cannes, where I shall stay some six hours visiting some patients and discussing with a friend of McMahon's a memorandum to be submitted to the government." Marshal Maurice McMahon was president of the French Republic from 1873 to 1879. The memorandum was most likely aimed at obtaining government authorization to open an academic secondary school alongside the trade school. He then continues: "God willing, I shall be in Nice toward evening."

Although he was so busy, he did not forget his distant sons, especially those who were sick. "Boost the morale of Father Vespignani, Father Tonelli and Giovanetti," he wrote, "and remember me to them. Assure them that I pray for them by name at Mass, and ask them to pray for me." The young cleric Giovanetti died on March 6 [1877]. He was the first of the two deaths predicted by Dominic Savio.¹¹ Nor did Don Bosco forget the Oratory students. "Tell our boys that it feels like fifty years since I last saw them. How I long to see them again and tell them loads of things. I also ask that they pray for a companion who does not intend to enjoy his Easter in their company." This lad was John Briatore, a first year Latin student from Deversi di Garesio near Mondovì, who died on March 28. He was the second of the six mentioned [by Dominic Savio] in Don Bosco's dream.¹² Easter in 1877 fell on April 1.

Don Bosco had a message for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. "When sisters are to be sent to a new house," he wrote, "they should not all be taken from the motherhouse. As we do with

¹¹See Vol. XII, p. 439. [Editor]

¹²*Ibid.* [Editor]

the Salesians in Turin, a capable sister should be chosen from one of the houses to be superioress of the new foundation and she should be replaced by a new sister. We shall talk about this on my return.” He even remembered that at Albano a young cleric needed a piano: “I have written to Prince Chigi about a piano for Trione, and I hope that he gets his wish.”

In the second phase of negotiations for a Salesian school at Marseille we shall see that Father Guiol did not remain idle. An indication of his serious eagerness is the fact that he was most anxious to see Don Bosco’s works on the spot and in action. On May 1 he wrote to Don Bosco that he could not fight a desire to come to Turin and spend a few days at the Oratory. Father Rua replied on Don Bosco’s behalf [on May 5, 1877] telling him to come as soon as possible and offering him hospitality at St. Pierre’s Hospice in Nice and at Sampierdarena while traveling to Turin.¹³

His visit was a short one because, with the approach of Pentecost, his pastoral duties did not permit him to stay until the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. On returning to his parish, he wrote to Don Bosco to thank him for his warm hospitality. The latter was unable to reply immediately because of pressing work and because, among other duties, he had to escort the archbishop of Buenos Aires to Rome. From there he replied to Father Guiol:

Rome, June 13, 1877

Dear friend in Jesus Christ:

Having been in Rome for a few days I now reply to the gracious letter you sent to me at the end of May.

Instead of your thanking me, I should ask your pardon if we failed in the attention you deserved during your very brief stay with us. We felt honored by your presence.

You barely caught a glimpse of the preparations [for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians] and did not see the feast itself. How happy I would have been to have you with us that day.

I have written to the Italian consul, Commendatore Strambio,¹⁴ hoping for his support of our plans that are so entirely humanitarian and religious.

The Holy Father spoke favorably of our project and blessed all who

¹³This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

¹⁴Commendatore Hannibal Strambio was the Italian consul at Marseille and a schoolmate of Don Bosco’s. See Vol. I, pp. 262, 265f, 337. [Editor]

support it. He asked about the bishop of Marseille whom he greatly respects. He remarked that Marseille is a wide-open field of missionary work among immigrant workers and their families. We must labor strenuously and patiently, for God's assistance will not fail us in this undertaking.

The archbishop of Buenos Aires and his pilgrim party were rather late in reaching Genoa. We hosted them in our house at Sampierdarena, from where I escorted them to Rome. On their return trip they will pass through Turin.

Rome is packed with pilgrims. The Holy Father is in excellent health. This manifestation of love is quite unparalleled.

At your first opportunity, please give Bishop Place my humble regards and tell him that the Holy Father sends him a special blessing.

Dear Father, may God bless you. Pray for me and for our undertakings.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

This letter shows that, notwithstanding everything he had to do, opening a Salesian house in Marseille was uppermost in his mind. It would seem that every undertaking of his enjoyed top priority.

Back in Nice, meanwhile, a committee of prominent citizens was making adequate preparations for the inauguration [of St. Pierre's Hospice]. They were Count De Béthune, Count Michaud de Beauretour, Count De la Ferté-Meun, Attorney Ernest Michel, Baron Héraud, Charles Gignaux and August Faraut, who had already done so much to promote this charitable institution. The former Villa Gautier,¹⁵ which had been purchased and remodeled with charitable donations, could now comfortably accommodate many more youngsters who needed food, technical training and a Christian education. In a circular the committee invited the most influential citizens to the inaugural ceremony of March 12. Their firm commitment had to be publicized if fond hopes were to become an accomplished fact. That very morning something occurred which we may well take as a sign. A boy turned up at St. Pierre's Hospice, begging for help and shelter.

"Who are you?" he was asked.

"I'm an orphan."

"Is your father living?"

¹⁵See Vol. XII, pp. 89f, 93. [Editor]

“No, he died before I was old enough to know him.”

“And your mother?”

“She is very poor. She has no food. That’s why she sent me out to shift for myself.”

“What do you do?”

“I play the violin in taverns and cafes. If I could learn music properly, maybe I could someday play in theatres and earn more money.”

“How old are you?”

“Just past fifteen.”

“Can you read and write?”

“Very little.”

“Have you already made your First Holy Communion?”

“No.”

A few more questions about religious instruction revealed that he did not know even the basics and that the danger of his coming to a sorry end was very real. He was accepted without further ado.

That afternoon both the school chapel and the adjoining rooms were crowded with people, while outdoors multi-colored flags and pennants waved along the tree-lined sidewalks flanking the playground. City authorities had also been invited and they voiced their delight and hearty approval [of this Salesian undertaking]. Chevalier Toselli, an alderman, represented the city mayor who had been unexpectedly called away. Bishop Peter Sola and his assistants began the religious ceremony at 2:30. The school choir performed masterfully.

After a vespers service, Don Bosco addressed the congregation. He opened by describing the hospice’s beginnings, in great part already known to us. He remarked that half the money to buy the land and building had been donated by the Holy Father and other charitable persons, and he expressed the firm hope that the remaining fifty thousand francs would be gradually paid off. After describing the hospice’s purpose and what it was doing for youths, he vividly spoke of the wretched state of countless destitute boys who needed shelter, instruction in the Catholic faith, and training in various trades either in town or at the hospice, so that they might be able in due time to earn an honest living. He continued as follows:

You will ask: Are there many such boys? Presently the boarders number

just sixty-five, but we have a very substantial number of day pupils. Moreover there is a waiting list of over two hundred who urgently need shelter. We shall accept them as soon as room becomes available and a program is set up for them. Divine Providence will send us what we need.

At this point you may rightly remark that the small premises, the flood of applications, and the need for repairs and expansion call for a larger building. This very chapel is inadequate. We need a larger church for the celebration of Mass, for hearing confessions, for catechizing younger children, and for regular church services for our boys and the neighborhood people. This is a crying need if this hospice is to achieve its goals: the well-being of the people and the salvation of souls. Now how can all these needs be met? How can we raise the money to feed and clothe the boarders and to provide teachers, assistants and craftsmasters? How can we continue the work in progress and still plan for expansion?

True, in order to keep things going we have had to contract several debts, and the balance due on this hospice still runs more than fifty thousand francs. Yet, despite all this, we must not be dismayed. Divine Providence, who watches over everything like a compassionate mother, providing for birds, fishes, animals and lilies, will also provide for us who, in the eyes of Our Maker, are far more precious than all of those. Moreover, God, who inspired you so far to generously encourage, establish and support this hospice, will continue to assist you with His grace and send the necessary means. God who willed that hospices be built in order to shelter over fourteen thousand boys, when not a single cent was in the offing, will not let us down. All these undertakings aim at alleviating the sufferings of the most destitute members of society and at rescuing souls presently in the gravest danger, souls for whom heaven and earth were created and for whom our adorable Savior gave His last drop of blood.

No, we need neither doubt nor fear. Let us not question God's goodness, your faith, and your warm, well-known generosity. I feel sure that the love of neighbor which prompted you to make so many sacrifices in the past will never allow an undertaking so auspiciously begun to remain unfinished.

This hope, based on the kindness of your hearts, has also another sound foundation—the great reward you all await, which God promises to those who do works of mercy. God is infinitely rich, generous beyond all limits. In His richness He can reward us abundantly for everything we do in His name. As an infinitely generous Father, He compensates most handsomely even the littlest thing we do for love of Him. The Gospel tells us that even a glass of cold water given to the least of His brothers for His sake will have its reward.

In the Book of Tobit, God tells us that almsgiving rescues us from death, wipes out our sins, wins us mercy and leads us to life eternal. Highlighting other generous rewards is the fact that Our Lord regards as done to Himself every good deed done for the needy. Were we to see Our Savior walking our streets, begging, and knocking at our doors, would we not gladly give Him our very last coin? Well, Our Lord is present in the lowliest and most destitute beggar. Whatever we do for the needy, He tells us, we do for Him. And so it is not just poor children who are begging for our help, but Jesus Himself.

And what of the extraordinary reward which God holds in reserve for the most critical and trying moment which will decide our eternal fate? Gentlemen, when we shall face the Supreme Judge to account for our lives, He will not be concerned about our mansions, savings, glory or wealth. He will not even mention them. Lovingly, He will merely say, "Come, blessed of My Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for, under the guise of a pauper, I was hungry and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; naked and you clothed Me; a stranger and you took Me in." [Mt. 25:34-36]

These and other words will the Divine Judge say, as we read in the Gospel. Then He will give us His blessing and lead us into His kingdom. Furthermore, like a good Father, God knows that the spirit is willing but the flesh is very weak, and He seeks to reward us a hundredfold even in this life by giving us special help to lead a good life and die a happy death, a plentiful harvest, family peace and harmony, success in business endeavors, good health to parents and friends, and the protection and proper upbringing of our children. Christian charity is rewarded too by the inner joy that one experiences after a good deed. Is it not deeply comforting to know that, with a little almsgiving, one contributes to rescuing [potentially] harmful citizens and turning them into upright members of society and the Church?

Besides these earthly and heavenly rewards, a further recompense comes to us from those whom we have helped. Yes, gentlemen, we would not deprive you of the reward which we can certainly give you: morning and evening, all our Salesian priests, seminarians and students, especially those at St. Pierre's, will offer special prayers for their benefactors to obtain divine blessings upon you, your families, relatives and friends. They will pray God to grant your families peace and harmony, continued good health, happiness, protection from spiritual and temporal harm, perseverance in virtue, a long life and a holy death.

In conclusion, should we have the good fortune of meeting again in this mortal life, we shall joyously recall your generosity and doff our hats

respectfully as a token of our undying gratitude. On His part, our merciful God will hold a heavenly reward in trust for you.

As Don Bosco finished speaking, some members of the audience rose to take up a collection, although none had been planned since the church's limited space was practically filled by his habitual benefactors. The result—fifteen hundred francs—was a surprise. Afterward, the bishop solemnly imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Outdoors on the playground an assembly was later held to honor Bishop Sola with speeches, poetry and musical selections. Finally the guests were conducted on a tour of the halls, classrooms and workshops. In one room, prizes for a small lottery to benefit the pupils caught the visitors' eyes, and the tickets were all scooped up in no time.

Don Bosco's mention of the young violinist who had been admitted that very morning aroused the guests' desire to see him. While they were gathered in the garden, the boy was introduced to them and he gave them a sample of his ability. One guest was so impressed by the ease of his performance and so moved by the shabbiness of his clothing that he took it upon himself to contact the Ladies' Committee which regularly met at Our Lady of Nice Church and had them provide him with decent clothes. The next day the youngster went to them and entertained the delighted charitable women with his violin. He remained at St. Pierre's for over a year, applying himself diligently to his studies and religious practices.

The following day another boy of sixteen called on Don Bosco, an out-of-town orphan who had not as yet made his first confession and Communion. Unfortunately, too, he had strayed from the path of virtue. Don Bosco immediately accepted him.

Another striking event happened on February 14. A boy's parents had been driven by poverty to place him against his will in a Protestant hospice. Horrified by the lies he was told about Catholics, he ran away, only to be caught and forcibly brought back. He managed to run away a second time and luckily met the director of St. Pierre's Hospice, who, on learning his sad story, promptly accepted him.

Don Bosco's speech was so impressive that it was thought best to publish it and spread the name of St. Pierre's throughout France.

Don Bosco agreed. In fact, after rethinking the matter, as is often the case, he decided to broaden its scope. During his return trip to Turin, he compiled a fine little booklet, and it was printed at the Oratory under the title: *Inauguration of St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice*. A brief description of the event was followed by an edited version of Don Bosco's address and a series of articles dealing with the preventive system. The latter, with slight variations, later appeared in print as a preface to the *Regulations for Salesian Houses*. Speaking of this entire booklet sometime later, Don Bosco disclosed that it had cost him days of work and that he had gone through three drafts. "I kept feeling that my writings were really not to my taste," he stated. "Years ago I used to jot down pages and pages without ever having to edit them. Now, instead, I write, correct, rewrite, and revise four or five times and still I am not satisfied." However, he did feel that this little booklet could do a lot of good in France.¹⁶

Indeed, it was destined to do a great deal of good there and everywhere else, both then and now, thanks to that preface which seemed to be a mere filler, as though the author himself had no adequate measure of its potential. Contemporary pedagogy was long on theory and very short on practice; its meager fruitfulness was due to the fact that it based its principles exclusively on natural philosophy. Such rationalistic principles and positivistic spirit both informed and weakened its thrust. Don Bosco, on the contrary, unassumingly, and without pretending to have discovered the secret of pedagogy, drew his inspiration from the Gospel and the Church's teachings, blending harmoniously the supernatural means of divine grace with the norms of natural philosophy. He thus brought forth a system that has yielded and continues to yield most abundant fruit in the field of education. He managed to pack in a few pages all that he had practiced for many years. We need focus on just one item: the relationship of authority to rewards and punishments. The famous Raphael Lambruschini, standard-bearer of the day's naturalistic school, devoted at least two-thirds of his book *Dell'Educazione* to that topic, saying many fine things, but his assertions were sadly so entangled with theoretical errors that his effectiveness was minimal when compared with Don Bosco's

¹⁶Chronicle of Father Barberis, April 22, 1877. [Author]

achievements. Don Bosco, traveling the route of reason and religion, in a few masterly strokes solved the stubborn problem once and for all.

The Italian Ministry for Public Education gave fitting and well-deserved recognition to the pedagogical value of Don Bosco's *Preventive System in the Education of Youth*¹⁷ when it adopted it as a textbook in teachers' colleges. On this score Senator [Peter] Fedele, former cabinet minister and professor of history at Rome University, made the following statement on a memorable occasion: "Don Bosco's achievements cannot be explained if we exclude the supernatural. They are the visible flowering of his inner virtues. He opposed the materialism that was corrupting our youth, and he halted the nation in time as it was starting on a downward plunge to destruction. Certain idealistic philosophers smiled when I proposed a study of Don Bosco's pedagogical system. Today, time has proven me right."¹⁸

It is quite appropriate here to mention an even older tribute to Don Bosco's educational system, which became public knowledge in 1878 when Count Charles Conestabile della Staffa of Perugia published a booklet¹⁹ in which he narrated how he saw Don Bosco apply his pedagogical system long before he ever thought of putting it into writing. One day the count called on Don Bosco and found him at his desk, scanning a list of names. "These are a few of my rascals whose conduct leaves much to be desired," he said. Offhand the count asked what punishment he had in mind for them. "No punishment," Don Bosco answered, "but here is what I'll do. This youngster, for example (and he pointed to a name), is very mischievous, in spite of being also good-hearted. I'll approach him at playtime and I'll ask him how he is feeling. He will promptly reply that he feels fine. 'But are you really pleased with yourself?' I shall insist. First, he will show surprise; then he will lower his eyes and blush. Gently I shall urge, 'Something is bothering you. If your body is well, maybe it's your soul that ails you. Has it been long since you went to confession?' Within minutes this boy will go to

¹⁷See Vol. IV, pp. 380-385. [Editor]

¹⁸*Bollettino Salesiano*, July 1931, p. 203. [Author]

¹⁹*Opere Religiose e Sociali in Italia [Religious and Social Undertakings in Italy]* by Count Charles Conestabile, Padova Press, 1878, pp. 27-29. [Author]

confession, and I am pretty certain that I shall hear no more complaints about him.”

The count listened in silence, enchanted by the warmth of Don Bosco’s speech, and he later commented in his booklet, “It was then that I discovered the secret of the success of this humble priest’s undertakings. On many occasions since then, when deep sadness has flooded my heart at the sight of the evils plaguing our day and age, I have recalled that priestly voice and my confidence has been restored in a society to whom God sends such reformers.”

From the chronicle of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, we gather that on his way back from France Don Bosco stopped at Vallecrosia for a thorough visitation of the sisters’ community. He praised their thrift and spirit of poverty, but he insisted that they take care of themselves and not abuse their health. Very often the neighbors would offer the sisters gifts in kind, and someone had just then given them a huge snow-white cabbage. It looked like a gorgeous oversized flower. They showed it to Don Bosco who, after looking at it thoughtfully a moment, turned to the mother superior and smilingly asked, “Would you do me a favor?”

“Of course.”

“Here is my calling card. Send it with this magnificent cabbage to Countess Corsi in Turin. She will know that Don Bosco has not forgotten her.”

The mother superior obliged. At that time Don Bosco was negotiating for the purchase of a house at Nizza Monferrato to transfer the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians from Mornese, and the countess had shown her interest and was helping.

We will end our account of Don Bosco’s return to Turin by giving details of a few letters which he wrote on the way or immediately after his arrival at the Oratory. On March 17 he was at Alassio. This we know from a letter he sent to Father Dominic Ossella of Casale, to whom we are mainly indebted for building a girls’ school in that town and entrusting it to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Alassio, March 17, 1877

Dear Father Ossella:

I have read your letter with care. Your wish to look after the dying is an excellent idea, but the means you plan to use are extremely difficult and

thorny for you or for any other priest. I will explain this when, God willing, I come to Borgo San Martino after Easter.

I would rather suggest that you dedicate yourself to another undertaking, easier and certain to succeed: promoting priestly vocations. "How am I to do that?" you may ask. Make efforts to send good boys to places where they can grow in knowledge and piety and develop a vocation for the priesthood. Encourage good young adults whom you meet to continue their studies. If necessary, teach them yourself or direct them to places where they can be trained for this.

Other matters I shall discuss in person. Meanwhile pray for me. God bless you.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

From Alassio he was escorted to Noli to see a fine building which the townsfolk wanted to turn into a resident and day school. The building belonged to the father of the late Salesian cleric Anthony Vallega.²⁰ Don Bosco accepted the offer on three conditions: 1. that the municipal school be entrusted to the Salesians; 2. that the teachers' salaries should total thirty-five hundred lire; 3. that the Salesians should not have to put out any money.

During the first half of April, however, Mr. Vallega called on Don Bosco with some new, onerous proposals that bogged down all negotiations.

Father Barberis' chronicle also records a visit of Don Bosco to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Alassio. Upon inquiring if they had a lot of work to do and learning that indeed they did, he remarked, "When I visit your convents and am told that there are piles of work, I feel at ease. Where there is work, there is no devil." He also visited three nuns who were ill. Then, turning to the rest of the community which had accompanied him, he asked: "Which virtue do you want me to speak of?" The sisters, always laden with so much work that they didn't quite understand how they could practice the rule which told them "to live always in the presence of God," replied in one voice, "Teach us how to live always in God's presence!"

²⁰See Vol. XII, p. 311. [Editor]

“It would indeed be wonderful to have the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians always living in God’s presence,” he rejoined. “It can be done in this way: renew your intention of doing everything for God’s greater glory every time you go from one task to another.” After elaborating somewhat on this topic, he concluded: “So you see, it is not so hard to form the habit of keeping united with God.”

On March 23 he was at Sampierdarena. Some time before leaving Alassio, it would appear that he wrote to Father Ronchail, entrusting some errands to him and offering advice and suggestions. Of prime importance is the following recommendation: “From all the above, you will realize that *to be a director means essentially to portion out what needs be done and then see to it that it is done.*”²¹

There is also a letter from Sampierdarena, dated March 24 and addressed to Father Rua, but it will suffice to report only a few of its twelve numbered items. The first concerned the health of the bishop of Alba: “Very sad news about Bishop Galletti; have special prayers said. I shall write from here again; let us pray and hope in God’s goodness.” The third item referred to the Church of St. Secundus, but we shall talk of this at length in due course. The seventh voiced his chagrin about the masonry work being done at the Oratory—a closed balcony or terrace, such as we see there today [1932] outside his room.²² The work had been begun very quietly during one of his absences so as to afford him less uncomfortable quarters. He wrote, “Tell Father Ghivarello that all I want is the completion of the masonry work. I don’t want to hear any more masonry racket after my return. How ill-advised was the whole thing! I was told that everything would be inexpensively done in a few days, and instead. . . .” Nor did he omit a word for the sick: “Remember me to our dear Father Vespignani and Father Tonelli. Tell them that I am very glad to hear they are improving; I pray that God will grant them Samson’s strength because there is plenty of work to be done. The fifth item too was quite important: “I had better write to the archbishop from here.”

As a silent protest against the insolence of the press, the

²¹This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting a brief history about the canonical erection of an abbey in the principality of Monaco. [Editor]

²²See Vol. XII, p. 269. [Editor]

cathedral canons and the entire clergy of Turin had staged public demonstrations honoring Archbishop Gastaldi upon his return from Rome. Informed of this by Father Rua, Don Bosco sought to give a token of his solidarity with the diocesan clergy by an expression of his personal esteem for his archbishop. This prompted his writing not from Sampierdarena, as planned, but from Turin. His letter reads:

Turin, March 28, 1877

Your Excellency:

I have just returned from a visit to our houses in Liguria and am delighted to hear that Turin's clergy publicly manifested its esteem for you on the occasion of your auspicious return from Rome. Gladly, on behalf of myself and all the members of the Salesian Congregation, I join in these sentiments of respect and veneration. When Your Excellency fell sick some months ago, we prayed for you, and now we shall double our humble prayers that God in His goodness may grant you unfailing good health, so that you may continue to labor for the welfare of the Church and of our Congregation which I respectfully commend to you.

Please accept these heartfelt good wishes, both in disproof of unfounded newspaper gossip and as an assurance that the Salesians will always be at your service in whatever way they may be of assistance. In the name of all, I am highly honored to remain

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

A note from Archbishop Gastaldi "cordially thanked the Rev. Don Bosco for his letter of March 28." Soon afterward Don Bosco once more merited the archbishop's commendation for something far more meaningful than a simple gesture of courtesy. Bertulla, a hamlet suburb of Turin, rose up against the pastor of the abbey church—the mother church—because he claimed parochial jurisdiction, such as Sunday Mass attendance, baptisms and weddings, while the other parish was vacant. Its parishioners rebelled. Archbishop Gastaldi upheld the pastor of the abbey church, but the indignant congregation threatened to call in a Waldensian minister and turn Protestant. When Don Bosco learned of this, he inquired into the matter. More concerned about the salvation of souls than any conflict with his archbishop, he called on him and showed him that by virtue of ancient rights the people of Bertulla were correct in

opposing the demands of the abbey pastor. Persuaded by Don Bosco's arguments, the archbishop set things right. Totally satisfied, the villagers relinquished the idea of forsaking the Catholic Church and heartily welcomed their newly appointed pastor. As late as 1902, when the pastor of Bertulla narrated this incident to Father John Baptist Francesia, the villagers were heard to say, "If we are still Catholics, we owe it to Don Bosco."

On March 28, Don Bosco promptly replied to a request as follows:

Turin, March 28, 1877

Beloved in the Lord:

I have just returned from a long tour of visitation of our houses in Liguria, and I hasten to reply to your kind letter. I could not ask for a more precious gift than having someone come to reinforce the Salesian ranks, for whom the harvest is now more abundant than ever before. By all means, come together with your friend, the priest. We shall have a father-son talk and I think we'll agree on everything. I'll be here the whole week. I am looking forward to your visit. May God bless us all. Pray for me.

Cordially yours in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

From Turin Don Bosco wrote again to Father Ronchail. The letter reminds us of the people of Nice and their needs, bringing to light the aura of active charity which Don Bosco brought to all dealings with his family and outside people.

[No date]

Dear Father Ronchail:

1. I enclose my account of the inauguration of St. Pierre's Hospice. Because of pressing business, I delayed my return to Turin. Besides, I have not been too well; that is why I am lagging behind in my work. Now try to contact or, better, ask Attorney Michel and Baron Héraud to translate the article and annotate it. Let me know if we should print it here or in Nice. You need not return the manuscript, as we have a copy here.

2. I am deeply grieved by the sudden death of our well-deserving friend, Attorney Ferrant. Add to my report whatever you think necessary in this

regard,²³ and let us pray that God will send us others like him.

3. When you have a chance, pay my respects to Countess Celebrini and Miss Dolores, assuring them that at the start of Mary's month on April 23,²⁴ we shall offer special prayers for them morning and evening.

4. You will be receiving the letter for Countess Michel. Give her my regards.

5. Father Isnard should contact Father Lanza to obtain a statement of good standing. I will write to the bishop.

6. As for the worker' club and its promoters, you can always say that we steer clear of all political affiliation, strictly abiding by Our Lord's words, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God." No one has anything to fear from us in word or deed.²⁵

7. This is the third time I tried to get you a priest, but, one after the other, all three fell ill. Nevertheless, I'll get you one somehow and soon.

8. Send me news of the lottery. If you still have many tickets, send me some; if I cannot turn them into gold coins, I will at least get paper money for them.

9. I am waiting for a nice long letter from Mr. Audoli. Please tell him to be cheerful and patient, and urge him to come for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

10. If you have any news of Father Giovan and the director of the Christian Brothers, let me know.

11. Were you able to talk to Father Tiban about the land for the church?

12. Within a week I believe that you'll have a master bookbinder to get things started.

My warmest regards in the Lord to all the priests, clerics and our boys. May God bless them all. Pray for me.

Your affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On his return to the Oratory [on March 28, according to Father Barberis' chronicle], Don Bosco's voice was rather weak and he had to make an effort to talk because of his bronchial condition, so

²³An outline of the deceased benefactor and a letter from Father Ronchail to Don Bosco describing his end was added as a footnote. [Author]

²⁴Since at the Oratory the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, was observed on May 24, Mary's month started on April 23. [Editor]

²⁵We are omitting a description of this club and its gratitude for the free use of Salesian premises. [Editor]

that he was not able to address the Oratory community at night prayers until April 10.

It has been so long since we last saw each other, but as the saying goes, "The heart is where its treasure lies." While I was in Nice and Marseille, I kept thinking of my beloved sons here at the Oratory. True, there are many boys there too, but I found my mind playing tricks on me when I spent time with them. I seemed to be with you, but when I talked to them, they all answered in French, and that convinced me that I was not at the Oratory.

You won't believe how highly the people of Nice think of you. If one of our artisans—even a beginner—were to go there, he would be getting top wages. They think so highly of you that one of them asked me to send a few of you there and volunteered to pay your fare and education just so that you might edify the townspeople and give an example of holiness to our boys at the hospice in Nice and in other towns. They think that each of you is another St. Aloysius, but I fear that, were they to come here, your reputation for holiness might go up in smoke. They asked me: "Are they all like St. Aloysius?" "Well," I replied, "some are and some are not." However, being afraid that you might let me down, I tried to save face by telling them that I really wanted to keep all of you here to be an example to one another. I also said that you and I cared so much for each other that we could not bear to be separated, except when it was absolutely necessary or you had to return home after your graduation. And even then, I told them, we would be heartbroken. And so I managed to let them keep their high opinion of you and their admiration for our mutual love.

Now, joking aside, let me tell you something more important. Nice is bubbling with enthusiasm for our Congregation, and Marseille has offered us nine houses. In France alone we have a total of thirty requests, and there are many other offers in other parts of the world. Everywhere the demand rises for a house like the Oratory. People think that all a boy has to do is come to one of our houses and he immediately becomes another St. Aloysius. For the time being we cannot grant their requests, but with God's help we'll manage to do something.

To meet these pressing requests I would have to have all of you here become Salesian priests so as to be able to send you to open houses. But we cannot do this all at once. Hopefully, with God's help, we shall do it in the future. On your part, prepare yourselves to become good priests who can be sent wherever they are needed to care for the souls whom Divine Providence will entrust to us. And if you do not become Salesian priests, may you become saintly diocesan priests. You will then be able to choose and train good boys to send to our schools. Under your guidance, they, in turn, will work for the salvation of souls.

On this score, I want to tell you that we shall start our spiritual retreat this Sunday evening. Prepare for it in the next few days by thinking on what you plan to do for your spiritual and eternal well-being. You will have time to give serious thought to your vocation. There may also be some among you who have let the feasts of All Saints, the Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Lent and Easter go by without reconciling their conscience. They now have another chance to settle their affairs. Let each of you seriously examine his conscience and ask himself, "Am I really at peace?" If he can say that if he were to die then and there he would feel at ease, let him continue that way, but if, upon reflection, he realizes that something is bothering him, then it is better for him to straighten things out now, so as to enjoy peace of mind later on.

On my part, I wish to speak privately with each of you either during this retreat or before or after. I'll do all I can to help you.

I enjoy talking with you, and you seem to feel the same way, especially when your spiritual well-being is at stake. Let us all endeavor to stand united in the Lord. He will help us and if we do our share, we shall obtain what we desire.

I hope that we shall all make a good spiritual retreat, deserve abundant blessings from God and make progress on our way to holiness. Good night.

Three days after this address, Don Bosco again wrote to Father Ronchail, telling him in this short letter about six youngsters of Damascus who had been recommended to Attorney Michel and were to be admitted to St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice. Their names were Kabil, Nais, Lofti, Homsî, Naggiar and Klat. They were all accepted.

[Turin] April 13, 1877

Dear Father Ronchail:

I believe that the boys recommended to Attorney Michel should be accepted into our hospice. Make sure that you get some publicity for this in due time and that the attorney sends a good article to *Unità Cattolica*. I think it will be to our advantage.

Both the priest and young cleric whom you need will soon arrive. Bring this holy card to Marchionese Celebrini and tell her that I expect to be in Turin during May and June. God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On several occasions some people criticized Don Bosco for seeking publicity in newspapers and other publications. We hold, instead, that his virtues shone in this matter too.

He was well aware of what people thought and said, and he realized that he might be discredited in the eyes of certain influential people. At times, indeed, disapproval was expressed to his very face. But he justified his course of action by saying, "Our times call for action. The world has become materialistic, and so we have to go out of our way to make known the good that we are doing. Even if we were to work miracles by praying day and night in solitude, the world would neither notice it nor believe it. The world has to see for itself." In speaking of the advisability of getting the greatest possible exposure for good undertakings, he used to say, "This is the only way to make them known and enlist support for them. Today the world wants to see things being done; it wants to see priests working, teaching and helping poor, destitute youths in hospices, schools, workshops and so on. The only way to save underprivileged youngsters is to instruct them in the faith; it is also the only way to Christianize society."²⁶

An extraordinary incident of mind-reading occurred at the time of this journey of his in France. It became public in Nice in 1908, on the occasion of the celebration of the decree conferring the title of "Venerable" on Don Bosco.²⁷ Father Paul Albera heard it in the presence of many people from the lady herself to whom it happened. A Mrs. Beaulieu, who had known the saintly Curé of Ars, believed that in virtue of this she was qualified to identify any other saint when she saw one. At Don Bosco's arrival in Nice, the lady, upon hearing that a saint whom she had heard about had come to the city, wished to meet him personally. A friend of hers, knowing this, took her to the home of friends at dinner time. Don Bosco was seated at the head of the table, and the lady and her friend took their places at the opposite end. With his usual serenity, Don Bosco was just raising his glass for a toast to his host. Mrs. Beaulieu was shocked. "Is this a saint?" she wondered, feeling all

²⁶*Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1895. [Author]

²⁷At that time the title of "Venerable" was given to a servant of God when the cause for beatification had already been introduced officially in Rome. Now [1932] it is conferred after the decree on the heroicity of his virtues. [Author]

her hopes drain away. When the dinner was over, she introduced herself to Don Bosco, lavishing compliments upon him. Don Bosco smiled and said to her, “Whether you eat or drink, do everything in the name of God.” The good lady understood and needed no further evidence to change her mind. She soon became a Salesian cooperator and had been one for three years when she told this incident to Father Albera, after having repeatedly told it to others.

CHAPTER 5

Episcopal Jubilee of Pius IX and Visit of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires to Don Bosco

THE closer Pius IX came to the end of his life, the greater grew the love of the faithful for his august person. They gave solemn witness to this on the occasion of his episcopal jubilee in 1877, when it might be said that the whole Catholic world made a pilgrimage to the Vatican in the person of its representatives who defied the scorn of worldwide political anticlericals. In June particularly, thousands came to pay homage to the venerable Pontiff. Gifts sent to him from everywhere in the world formed an impressive display valued at ten million lire, while a special Peter's Pence collection netted a further sixteen and a half million lire. No other Pope had ever received so many testimonials of affection.

This worldwide tribute of devotion toward Jesus Christ's Vicar thrilled Don Bosco's heart, full as it was with reverence for the Supreme Pontiff's office and with deep gratitude for Pius IX's person. He decided to send the Oratory's director and the novice master to Rome to represent the Salesian Congregation officially and to offer the Pope an album. "What would you say," he smilingly asked Father Rua one day in the company of several other priests, "if I were to send these two shorties (pointing to Father Lazzero and Father Barberis) to Rome?"¹ Father Rua nodded and the others applauded.

Work on the volume was immediately started, and the product

¹Chronicle of Father Barberis, April 4, 1877. Occasionally Don Bosco would joke with his Salesians as he had done when they were boys. [Author]

was a handsome one. Elegantly bound, its cover bore the following gold engraving:

TRIBUTE
OF FILIAL HOMAGE
FROM THE SALESIANS AND THEIR PUPILS
TO THEIR EMINENT BENEFACTOR
AND GLORIOUS PONTIFF
PIUS IX
IN THE THIRTY-SECOND YEAR OF HIS PONTIFICATE
AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-SIX
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS EPISCOPAL JUBILEE
JUNE 3, 1877

Inside, on sheets of parchment, came first a statistical summary of the Salesian Congregation and then a list of the Salesian houses, headed by the motherhouse with the title: "The motherhouse in Turin is known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." Then followed the roster of members of the Superior Chapter and of the Salesians residing at the Oratory. All graphic work had been expertly done. The contents were unique in that under each house were listed all its various sections or departments along with the names of the Salesians assigned to each department and the number of boys or persons in their charge. "I learned to do this at the Vatican," Don Bosco explained. "When speaking of Turin I used to lump together novices, artisans, students and day boys as if they were all in the same premises until I was told that they should have been presented in itemized, distinct form." The Oratory was consequently described as follows:

1. Student Section: Chapter members and number of pupils.
2. Arts and Trades Section: As above.
3. Novitiate: Personnel and number of novices.
4. Adult Students' Section, etc.
5. Church of Mary, Help of Christians.
6. Festive Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and adjoining school.
7. Festive Oratory of St. Aloysius and adjoining school.
8. Festive Oratory of St. Joseph.
9. St. Joseph's Institute where about a hundred girls are taught skills by the Sisters of St. Joseph. *Chaplain:* Father Anthony Sala.
10. St. Peter's Institute, a home for about one hundred young women recently released from prison. *Chaplain:* Father Joseph Bertello.

11. Institute of the Good Shepherd, a residence for about five hundred girls of varying backgrounds. *Chaplain*: Father Joseph Bologna.
12. Institute of St. Charles and adjoining school for girls. *Spiritual Director*: Father Francis Paglia; *Chaplain*: Father Charles Cipriano.
13. Festive Oratory for girls in Chieri, who are supervised by several ladies of the Association of Salesian Cooperators. *Director*: Father Michael Rua.

After listing the Valsalice college and the Lanzo school, the same method was used in enumerating the houses by diocese and those in South America. Lastly, there came "The Institute of Mary, Help of Christians" described as follows: "The Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians is an adjunct to the Salesian Congregation, from which it depends. Its purpose is to work for poor girls as the Salesians work for boys. Its motherhouse is at Mornese, diocese of Acqui. The Superior Chapter is composed as follows. . . ." After Mornese came the catalogue of the other convents: Borgo San Martino, Lu, Alassio, Turin, Bordighera, Biella, and Lanzo in chronological order of foundation, each house listing the superior's name, number of sisters, activities, social condition, and number of girls. Thus, for example, St. Angela Merici Convent in Turin had these details: "*Superior*, Sister Elisa Roncallo; twenty sisters, some teaching poor girls, some caring for the Oratory boys' linen, others studying for teacher certification. They run a festive oratory for a large number of girls." The house at Bordighera had a significant entry: "*Superior*, Sister Rosalie Pestarino, three sisters who teach catechism to girls on Sundays and conduct classes three times a day during the week for girls who need stronger moral support since they live in a Protestant neighborhood. Beside running regular classes, the sisters tutor a number of young ladies to keep them from the influence of Protestant teachers."

The state of the Salesian Congregation in South America was recorded by Father Cagliero, who had been asked to do so by Don Bosco in a letter of March 31, 1877: "If you will send me a report on the state of our Congregation in South America, I will get it to the Holy Father for his episcopal jubilee, which has set all of Europe and America astir." Father Cagliero sent it with the draft copy of a special letter to the Pope from the Salesians in America.

Don Bosco felt that this kind of an album could be neither

mis-laid nor shelved, but kept on hand for ready reference by persons wishing to know the state of the Congregation in 1877. Father Barberis and Father Lazzero, who were to take it to Rome, left Turin on May 28.

Pilgrimage arrivals at the Vatican had begun on April 30 in time for two religious celebrations, Roman and universal in character. One was scheduled in St. Peter's on May 21 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the appointment of the Pope, then Monsignor John Mastai, as archbishop of Spoleto; a second celebration was held on June 3 in the Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli [St. Peter-in-Chains] where he had been consecrated bishop fifty years before. On both occasions the Oratory boys received Holy Communion together and attended solemn services. On May 2, the festive oratory boys collected seventy lire and thirty-five *centesimi* for the Peter's Pence collection.² [In Turin] the following notice was posted inviting the faithful to special services held on May 25 in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians: "Let us pray for our Holy Father Pius IX. On May 25, Holy Mass, prayers and Communion will be offered at 7 A.M. in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. You are invited to attend with other devout faithful and join us in prayer to obtain God's blessing of continued good health for our Holy Father." Both the invitation and the purpose of the celebration had been couched in cautious language because Turin too had its anticlericals who unfortunately kept disrupting public manifestations held to honor Pius IX.

Large numbers of French pilgrims attended the Roman festivities of May 21, and three hundred of them stopped at the Oratory on their way home. It was the eve of the solemn feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Arriving at eight-thirty in the evening, they were welcomed by the band and the hymn *To Rome, Ye Faithful*, which had been written to honor the Vatican Council and set to music by Father Cagliero. It was sung in a thundering chorus to the strains of the band by all the pupils. Don Bosco briefly greeted the pilgrims in French, and a handsomely printed copy of his greeting was given to all as a souvenir of their visit. There were some brief responses, the most eloquent of all being that of Father Piccard, the pilgrimage director. Refreshments were then served on the Oratory premises

²*Unità Cattolica*, May 13, 1877. [Author]

by the Catholic Youth Association before the visitors made their way to the railway station to board their train. The boys had been taught to say *Vive les pèlerins français* [Hurrah for the French pilgrims], and they kept cheering, to the pilgrims' delight.

On May 31, Don Bosco received a telegram from Gibraltar informing him that the archbishop of Buenos Aires would be landing in Genoa on June 1.³ Archbishop Frederick Aneyros was leading an Argentine delegation to Rome to offer the Holy Father the tribute of that prosperous republic's Catholic population. Don Bosco, who had known of the prelate's coming, had already taken care to reserve worthy accommodations for him in Rome. Now the news of his imminent arrival brought him so much delight that he kept talking about it to everyone with the keenest pleasure. He left for Sampierdarena on June 1.

We do not have any details of the prelate's landing, but we know that he was hosted by Archbishop Salvator Magnesco of Genoa and saw Don Bosco on the morning of June 3.⁴ They met in St. Cajetan's Church. Archbishop Aneyros arrived just after Don Bosco returned to the sacristy after saying Mass. The director, Father Albera, quickly started toward the sacristy, but the prelate stopped him, saying: "Do not disturb a saint when he is communing with God after Holy Mass." He waited in the church. A moving scene then took place. The esteem of the distinguished prelate for Don Bosco and Don Bosco's gratitude toward him were expressed in a most affectionate embrace. After a brief and silent tearful exchange of glances, they again clung to each other. Those who saw them later repeated that they had never seen Don Bosco so effusive, accustomed as he always was to controlling his feelings.

Just before leaving for Rome, Don Bosco remembered Count [Charles] Cays⁵ who had entered the Oratory only a few days

³Letter from Don Bosco to Archbishop Gastaldi, Turin, May 31, 1877. [Author]

⁴Letter from Father Joseph Rossi to Father Rua, Sampierdarena, June 3, 1877. [Author]

⁵Count Charles Cays (1813-1882), a staunch Catholic, was a deputy in the Piedmontese parliament from 1857 to 1860. After retiring from politics, he busied himself in works of charity. He became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained a priest the following year. After serving as director in one of the French Salesian schools, he was recalled to the Oratory to manage *Letture Cattolice*. He was of invaluable assistance to Don Bosco for many years and died on October 4, 1882, as he himself had predicted. [Editor]

before to begin his novitiate, and he wrote him a brief note:

Sampierdarena, June 3, 1877

Dear Count:

I must leave for Rome this afternoon at 12:30. Rossi will give you news of the Argentine pilgrims: a wonderful sight! Please speak to Barale about what has to be done for *Letture Cattoliche*. I think it advisable that you be measured for your cassock, so that on my return we can proceed with the ceremony which will entrust you entirely to the Lord.

Tell our dear Attorney Fortis⁶ to be *fortis in bello* [strong in battle] and that great sacrifices will reap a great reward.

May God bless all of us. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco left for Rome shortly after midday. Apparently Archbishop Aneyros did not travel with him but left later with Archbishop Magnasco of Genoa, whereas Monsignor [Peter] Ceccarelli⁷ and the Argentinians who had lodged at our house in Sampierdarena seem to have⁸ traveled with Don Bosco.

There were many things that Don Bosco had to attend to in Rome, the most important being the matter of the Conceptionists. He lodged as usual in the home of Mr. Sigismondi. The weather was stifling, and his little room tucked beneath the roof was like an oven, forcing him to keep both door and window open. The draft, which could have proved fatal to him, since he was perspiring (for he was wearing a heavy winter cassock), fortunately only brought on a fever with a miliary skin eruption. "Such thing never upset Don Bosco," wrote Father Barberis who was there.⁹ In fact, he went right on with his work, as¹⁰ though nothing were wrong.¹⁰

⁶The gentleman had come to the Oratory with the intention of becoming a Salesian, but some time later he joined the Jesuits. [Author]

⁷For information about Monsignor Ceccarelli see the Indexes of Volumes X, XI and XII under "Ceccarelli." [Editor]

⁸We gather this from the above-mentioned letter of Rossi. [Author]

⁹Chronicle of Father Barberis, June 28, 1877. [Author]

¹⁰We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to Father Rua, dated June 8, 1877, with a great deal of condensed news of a personal and general character. See *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. III, Letter 1,600. [Editor]

On previous trips to Rome Don Bosco had always had free access to the Pope, but now, in view of his age and ailments, Pius IX was granting no private audiences even to the host of bishops who had swarmed to Rome for his jubilee, simply receiving them in national groups. Don Bosco encountered also other obstacles, as we said in our account of the Conceptionists. Father Barberis' chronicle records without any vestige of doubt that Don Bosco was received in private audience "about two days before leaving Rome," whereas Don Bosco, writing to Cardinal Bilio at a later date, November 29, briefly tells the whole history of the Conceptionists' planned affiliation and states: "When I came to Rome for the Holy Father's jubilee, I did my best to obtain only a moment's audience with His Holiness. I first applied in writing. Then, in a general audience, the Holy Father made it clear that he wanted to see me, but it was not possible. . . ." ¹¹ In a letter of June 13 to Father [Clement] Guiol, Don Bosco did say, however, that the Holy Father had spoken of the prospects in Marseille and had praised the local bishop—all of which might lead us to assume that there had been a private audience, but this conversation could also have taken place at the general audience. Don Bosco may have asked, for instance, for a special blessing on that new undertaking, or the Holy Father may have said those words during the private audience he had granted to the archbishop of Buenos Aires, whom Don Bosco had asked to request the blessing on his behalf. What we know with certitude is that in the rather lengthy passage of his letter which recounted the Pope's wishes, Don Bosco did not say a single word which could even suggest that Pius IX had spoken personally with him. On the basis of this, we must infer that the last time Don Bosco saw Pius IX alive was in that general audience, which had been granted to the Catholic press representatives on June 10. Don Bosco attended as editor of *Letture Cattoliche*. Pius IX could not have been more gracious to him. He stopped in front of him, listened to what he had to say, and graciously mentioned a

¹¹See p. 43. [Editor]

petition Don Bosco had submitted through Cardinal Oreglia.¹²

“You need sacred vestments for your churches and missions, don’t you?” he continued.

“Yes, I do, Your Holiness,” Don Bosco answered. “Many of our churches have nothing.”

“Very well. Talk it over with Cardinal Oreglia here. I charge him to see that you are given all you need from the gifts in the exhibition.”

Don Bosco followed through with the cardinal, giving him a list of everything which each of his churches, chapels, and oratories needed. It took him some time to compile the lengthy list.

Don Bosco attended to two other matters in Rome: finding separate locations for a Salesian residence and for a boys’ home. He always felt somewhat ill at ease at the home of the Sigismondis who had only one spare bedroom. He traveled with a secretary and with a supply of writing materials. The matter turned out fortunately. The Noble Oblates at Tor de’ Specchi, who had a long-standing debt of sorts with the Oratory, were anxious to clear it by furnishing five rooms in a house which they owned just across the street for the convenience of Salesian travelers in Rome. After seeing the premises, Don Bosco was very glad to accept their offer, the more so since he wanted to silence the rumor that the Salesians intended to stay with the Conceptionists whenever they passed through Rome.

Hunting for a place for a boys’ home was more trying. After checking several premises, Don Bosco entered negotiations for the purchase of one in a newly developed section of Rome. On mentioning it to the cardinal secretary of state, he received not only encouragement but an almost formal promise that the Holy Father would generously assist him financially. Shortly afterward, the cardinal vicar told him that the new housing development, teeming with people, was in great need of a church, for they lacked even a

¹²On May 10, Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia had written to Don Bosco: “Your other petition has been generally granted, but it will not be taken into consideration until the [jubilee] exhibition closes, and this has not as yet even opened. For speedier results, I suggest that you write me a letter which I can show to others and in which, while thanking me for this information or, rather, while expressing your thanks to the Holy Father for his favorableness, you would mention your needs and your utter trust in the generosity of His Holiness.”
[Author]

temporary chapel, whereas the Protestants already had a church in a choice location. He begged Don Bosco to build a church as well. Three years before, the cardinal's predecessor had already instructed his aides to look for a place, but they had not found a site, much less the means. Unhesitatingly Don Bosco accepted the challenge. He called immediately on Count [Philip] Berardi to ask if he still intended to sell a piece of property which they had spoken of on a previous occasion. The count replied affirmatively and added that a third party, a partner, was involved. At once Don Bosco went to him and persuaded him to set a price. Both owners agreed on a price tag of two hundred thousand lire. Thus negotiations were started and satisfactorily concluded in a single day, except for the time-consuming legal formalities. Don Bosco, however, had to return to Turin. Delays set in, complications arose, and, in the end, nothing came of the project.

In the midst of all this bustle, Don Bosco still found time to write to Father Rua on June 12, 1877 about various matters of business. He also gave him some news: Bishop [Peter] Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro, then in Rome, intended to stop at the Oratory in Turin and take back with him at least five Salesians; Father Cagliero was going to delay his return to Turin in order to explore the farthest limits of Patagonia; the cardinal archbishop of Malines had sent in a request for a Salesian house in his archdiocese, as had also Cardinal [John] Simeoni for a house in Canada; Don Bosco had as yet not had a private audience with the Pope.¹³

Another letter from Rome, dated June 20, 1877, mainly reminded Father Rua of the forthcoming visit to the Oratory of the archbishops of Buenos Aires and of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁴

In the meantime, elaborate preparations were afoot at the Oratory for the arrival of the archbishop of Buenos Aires. Following instructions which Don Bosco had mailed to him on June 20, Father Rua asked Archbishop Gastaldi to allow this prelate and his priests to say Mass in the archdiocese and to permit the archbishop to pontificate on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. Archbishop Gastaldi promptly obliged. However, when everything was ready and notices had already appeared in the newspapers, the

¹³This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting a letter of Don Bosco to Father Francesia and another to Father Rua. [Editor]

¹⁴This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

chancery on June 24 informed Father Rua that since Archbishop Gastaldi would himself celebrate a pontifical Mass and deliver a homily in his cathedral on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, it was hardly proper for another prelate to pontificate also and preach in another church. The previous permission, granted through an oversight, was being revoked, but, as a concession, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was permitted on that feast after 6:00 P.M. and a pontifical Mass could be celebrated in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on the first Sunday in July, provided that, as ritually prescribed, the visiting archbishop be assisted by only one deacon and subdeacon rather than two—a privilege exclusively reserved to ordinaries.

On his name day,¹⁵ June 24, Don Bosco was still traveling with Archbishop Aneyros, Monsignor Ceccarelli and five priests from Argentina. They had left Rome on June 22 for Ancona, where they were splendidly hosted by Cardinal [Anthony] Antonucci. On June 23 they made a pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine in Loreto and returned the same day. Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua from Ancona:

June 24, 1877

Dear Father Rua:

I am here in Ancona with Cardinal Antonucci, and we are celebrating St. John's feast on the shores of the Adriatic, facing Vis Island [Yugoslavia].

God willing, we shall set out for Milan tomorrow and stay there until Wednesday afternoon at four when we shall leave for Turin, arriving around eight. For your information, Argentinians love meat and are accustomed to a fancy kitchen, although very graciously they never show dissatisfaction. Assign them the best rooms we have.

Tell our dear boys that I am now going to say Holy Mass and pray for them at length. [Notwithstanding my absence] they will not lose anything, spiritually or materially. They will have a special treat at table when I return. Archbishop Aneyros would like to take back with him half a host of

¹⁵At his baptism Don Bosco had been named after the apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist—a very popular saint in Turin—began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. [Editor]

missionaries to make a full-scale mission assault on the Patagonian Indians. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On Sunday, June 24, Don Bosco said Mass at ten in the Church of the Gesù, which was in the care of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. The young lad who served his Mass never forgot his encounter with Don Bosco as long as he lived. He saw a short, unassuming priest unknown to him enter the sacristy. But in that "swarthy countenance" he detected a certain appeal of loving kindness which immediately aroused him to curiosity and reverence. He also observed that there was something special about the priest's way of celebrating Mass, something which inspired one to mental prayer. After Mass and a few minutes of private prayer, the priest put his hand on the boy's head and gave him a little tip. He gently asked his name and what he did. Forty-eight years later, this boy, Eugene Marconi, pupil of the Good Shepherd Institute, wrote, "How gracious and loving that gentle voice! I was both surprised and moved."

When he returned to the institute, he noticed an unusual bustle among superiors and pupils. He was told that Don Bosco was in town and, since he would be visiting their school that afternoon, preparations were afoot to give him a fitting welcome. Toward three o'clock, while all stood lining the main hall, the very same "short priest" of the morning walked in, escorted by Monsignor Birarelli, the school director, and then the boy suddenly realized that he had served Don Bosco's Mass. As Don Bosco walked past the pupils, he stopped here and there to ask questions or say a few words, while giving to each a copy of [St. Alphonsus'] booklet *Massime Eterne*. When he got to Marconi, he stepped back a moment and, gazing into his eyes as though better to identify him, exclaimed, "We've already met! Good!" Then he addressed the director, "Monsignor, I commend this boy to you. In due time, he may be of help to you." On learning that the lad was the director's nephew, he added: "All the better! Your institute is now entering upon a stormy and perilous sea, and young pilots may be more helpful than older ones, provided they are willing and skillful." The boy grew up, became a priest and, as Don Bosco had predicted,

truly became the reliable pilot of that institute. Always at the side of its various directors, he dauntlessly steered his way through tossing seas, bringing his ship safely to port.¹⁶

After a stopover at Milan, where Don Bosco's dear friend, Attorney [Charles] Comaschi, hosted them, our illustrious travelers arrived at the Oratory on the evening of June 26. It was a triumphal entry. Two lines of boys extended from the main entrance to the porticoes, and Argentinian, papal and Italian flags, waving from the balconies, decorated the walkway. Posters and banners covered the walls of the main building, while a graceful triumphal arch, festooned with colorful lanterns, divided the students' and artisans' playgrounds. The school band stood at attention before the main gate. A resounding trumpet blast hushed the crowd, as Archbishop Aneyros stepped into the Oratory, flanked by Don Bosco at his right and the prelate's vicar general at his left, while a retinue of priests followed. The band immediately struck up the Argentinian anthem and a thousand hurrahs filled the air with joy. As the group inched its way along, the boys knelt to receive the archbishop's blessing and signed themselves. After gazing upon that jubilant multitude of youngsters, the guests strode up to the second-floor balcony to be greeted by enthusiastic shrieks and applause. With a sign Don Bosco hushed the crowd. "This is the archbishop of Buenos Aires!" he exclaimed, uttering the words in such a deeply moving tone and gesturing so expressively that the entire attentive multitude understood him to mean, "Here is our father, our benefactor, our friend, whom we have longed so very much to see!" So touched was the prelate by this introduction that he embraced Don Bosco, and, resting his hands now on his shoulders, now on his head, he said a few words which were drowned in a new wave of cheers. The evening ended with stirring vocal and instrumental music within a fantastic pageantry of colorful Venetian lanterns.

The next day one memorable incident at dinner proved highly pleasing and edifying to the guests. As a toast was being offered to

¹⁶*L'Ordine* of Ancona, February 12, 1925. [Author]

the archbishop and his retinue, a former pupil, Charles Gastini,¹⁷ noted for his inventiveness, stalked into the dining room in a minstrel costume. He greeted the guests and then declaimed in song a poem of his own composition in honor of Archbishop Aneyros and Don Bosco with such grace and charm that one of the Argentine priests, Canon Garcia Zúñiga, playfully called the young man to his side and offered him a peso. Gastini thanked him and then, hurrying to Don Bosco, with almost knightly grace handed him the peso, as though it had been intended for him. At this chivalrous, honest gesture, the canon called the minstrel back. "Had I intended to give Don Bosco a present," he said, "I would have done so myself. That peso was for you. Now take this one and keep it." With one leap Gastini was back before Don Bosco and gave him that peso too. Amid general laughter, however, he heard the canon's voice, "It was for you!" Changing tone, Gastini replied, "We all belong to Don Bosco. Here nothing is ours. Everything is his!" The audience cheered. Realizing that Gastini would accept nothing for himself, the canon made no other attempt, but jokingly remarked, "You won't get another one."¹⁸

The most solemn festivity was that which we might call "The Three Name Days." The celebration of Don Bosco's name day [June 24] had been postponed to June 29, and, as usual on this occasion, the observance began the evening before with speeches and musical selections. June 28, feast of St. Leo, happened to be the name day and birthday of Archbishop Aneyros, as well as being the vigil of St. Peter's feast and the name day of Monsignor Peter Ceccarelli. It was a happy combination.

The playground was transformed beyond recognition by imaginative Salesians and helpful upperclassmen into a vast outdoor theater, with a lofty canopy overhanging three gilt armchairs for the archbishop, Monsignor Ceccarelli and Don Bosco on a carpeted platform. A beautiful array of miniature flags, trimmings, flowers and colorful lanterns lent an air of magic. Around the playground, like a halo about the platform, a string of gas jets encased in varicolored glasses shed a soft light upon the

¹⁷Charles Gastini was one of the Oratory pioneers, having entered in 1848 at the age of eleven at Don Bosco's invitation. (*See* Vol. III, pp. 243ff) He became deeply attached to him, and with his comical talents he delighted the Oratory boys for many years. [Editor]

¹⁸Rev. G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 90. [Author]

gathering dusk. Transparent two-tone placards, backlighted by vigil lights bearing emblems and inscriptions in honor of Don Bosco and guests, framed the open windows. The eye-catching item was a huge sparkling star hung above the canopy. Six feet across, it sported twenty rays, each inscribed with the name of a Salesian house and the date of its foundation. The center of the star bore Don Bosco's name encircled by a wide banner reading "O.S.F.S."—Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. The star's backlighting produced a mystifying effect. A large crowd of Salesian cooperators and friends joined about a thousand resident and day boys in the playground. A stand in each corner was occupied by the brass band and the choir.

At about nine in the evening the honored guests strode up to the platform, and when Don Bosco motioned Archbishop Aneyros to take the center seat, slightly raised above the others, a courteous bout ensued, each trying to relinquish the honor to the other. The audience at first watched in silence, but soon the friendly exchange elicited thunderous applause. Humility had the upper hand, and the center chair was left unoccupied for Pius IX, in a symbolic gesture of devotion to the Holy Father on the very day when the Church honored the memory of the Prince of the Apostles.

Two anthems written by Father John Baptist Lemoyne were sung with a due intermission—one by the artisans, to the music of the imaginative Maestro De Vecchi, the other by the students, to the music of Brother Dogliani. Several compositions in prose and poetry were read in Italian, French, Spanish, English, Polish, Latin, Greek and Piedmontese. The ever present Gastini, the Oratory's brilliant entertainer, went through some fanciful skits which prompted loads of laughter. Naturally, much was said about foreign missions, especially Patagonia. The praises of Don Bosco, of Archbishop Aneyros and of Monsignor Ceccarelli ran the full gamut of language and sentiment. When the recitations and songs tapered off, Don Bosco, with the archbishop's leave, brought the entertainment to a close with the following address:

It is getting late, and we must adjourn till tomorrow evening, when His Excellency, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, and our kindly guests, whom I most heartily thank for the honor they have accorded us, will graciously attend another assembly in their honor. I also say my deep thanks to all who in music, poetry and prose have expressed or will express their

gratitude and love. I thought I could get away with my name day celebration. You know the saying, "Once on shore, we pray no more." Well, the feast of St. John the Baptist came and went, but you did not give up. You set about keeping it with even greater zest, as you did today.

Truthfully, I am delighted. I am grateful also to those who so graciously spent this happy evening with us, as well as all those who sent gifts or greetings.

I know, too, that you prayed for me while I was away, and not in vain, either. I still didn't know how much your prayers helped because the matter I asked you to pray for has not yet been settled, but I thank you with all my heart and urge you to continue praying.

Archbishop Aneyros also has a favor to ask of you: that those who receive Communion tomorrow will do so for his intentions. It will be a great day, beginning with High Mass at ten and ending with solemn Vespers. Monsignor Ceccarelli will give you a fine homily. I can promise you that you will be very happy with your dinner, and let me add that we probably have the best chef in town and that the fine bottles coming from our wine cellar will sharpen your appetite. Come evening, the musicians will be playing and singing with more pep than ever.

Archbishop Aneyros celebrated the community Mass on June 29 and distributed Communion, but he was only halfway through when he felt faint and had to be replaced by one of the priests. At ten, Monsignor Ceccarelli celebrated solemn High Mass, and that evening, after Vespers, he gave a sermon which displayed his remarkable oratorical talent. The archbishop of Buenos Aires could not impart Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament since it was not yet six o'clock.¹⁹ Toward six-thirty, the previous evening's performance in Don Bosco's honor was resumed, attended by a swelling crowd of outsiders. Directors and staff members represented all the Salesian schools. After the speeches, poems and musical selections, Don Bosco stood up, greeted by thunderous applause, and amid the most religious silence addressed the vast audience:

Today has been one of the loveliest of my life, one which will be remembered in the Oratory annals. My heart has been truly touched to see so many boys around me, so joyously expressing love and gratitude. How

¹⁹The chancery office had specifically forbidden it because at that hour services were still being held at the cathedral. [Editor]

wonderful love is when it is genuine! It is love which prompts people to contribute funds to gather and rear so many youngsters for heaven. They are generous souls who sacrifice a portion of their livelihood and invest it in this holy undertaking. And there are others who abandon the world to bind themselves to God in virtue and brotherly love so as to spend their whole life in caring for heaven's tender young plants. Yes, genuine Christian love links us so closely to Our Lord and prompts us to help each other lovingly. Charity draws many eminent persons from foreign lands to the Oratory and helps them adapt to its poverty, as they zealously respond to the call to carry the light of the Gospel to undeveloped countries and thus raise new sons to Our Heavenly Father's family. It is charity which has induced so many brave soldiers of Christ to leave fatherland, parents, relatives and all things to head for far-off nations, enduring privations and sacrifices in order to bring the good news to their distant brothers.

It is charity which has brought us here together tonight. My words come straight from my heart. I wish I could have fittingly welcomed Archbishop Aneyros, Monsignor Ceccarelli and the fathers in a diamond-studded mansion, floors strewn with roses and lilies, but, as poor religious utterly dependent on the help of pious persons, we cannot. In their goodness our worthy guests put up with discomforts so as to provide means to undertake other charitable activities. Let us thank them for the privations they endure in accepting our poor hospitality and for the great honor and pleasure they have bestowed upon us. We shall recall them with lasting memory.

When you return home to your country, to your own field of apostolate, tell your brother priests and Señor Benitez of our undying gratitude for the benefits you and they have given us. Be assured that, though there be a vast ocean between us, you will never leave our minds, hearts and prayers. Be convinced that you will always find faithful helpers and brothers in the Salesians. We love you with all our hearts and are eager to collaborate with you.

It is recorded—and we have heard it from witnesses—that Don Bosco's voice took on a unique tone toward the end of his speech.

The archbishop responded. His dignified manner and heartfelt warmth charmed the audience, even though he spoke in Spanish. (As a deputy in the Argentinian parliament he had gained a reputation as an extemporaneous speaker.) When he had finished, Don Bosco kissed his ring, and the prelate reciprocated by kissing Don Bosco's hand. They embraced affectionately amid thunderous applause. Don Bosco concluded by asking Monsignor Ceccarelli to

sum up the archbishop's speech in Italian, which he masterfully did.

God, in His Providence, crowned the day with a marvelous surprise. Josephine Longhi, a child who had been both paralyzed and mute and had wondrously recovered from both handicaps a month before by saying a Hail Mary with Don Bosco, had come with her parents to sign a written testimony of the miraculous cure. Father Rua asked them to go up to the platform and offer their respects to the archbishop and Don Bosco. Through his interpreter, Monsignor Ceccarelli, the archbishop asked the girl to tell him what had happened, and she willingly did so with ready fluency and liveliness. The prelate blessed her and gave her a medal. Moments later, as father and mother were signing the account drawn up by Count Cays, Don Bosco told the child to add her signature. Her father spoke up for her, saying that she could not write. "What?" questioned Don Bosco. "Hasn't this child gone to school and learned to write her own name?" The truth is that before her paralysis Josephine did know how to write but had been unable to do so since. On learning this, Don Bosco continued, "Well, if she knew how to write before, she still can now. Our Lady does not do things by halves." With these words he put the pen into her hand, and she immediately signed her name.

The boys' enthusiasm throughout those days defies description. They were charmed by the lovable, dignified manner of the American archbishop. Every time he crossed the playground or appeared at a window, he was greeted with loud applause. However, one unpleasantness forced him to shorten his stay at the Oratory. On June 27, he formally called upon Archbishop Gastaldi, only to find that the latter was out. The following morning he tried again and was told that the archbishop was at his summer villa in Pianezza. From there Gastaldi sent word that Archbishop Aneyros should not trouble himself further, since Gastaldi would be returning to Turin on June 29, but only to offer a pontifical Mass, and immediately after that he would return to Pianezza. Soon afterward he sent a secretary to invite Archbishop Aneyros—and him alone—to dinner, on some day or other. On arriving at the Oratory, the secretary went to the nearest boy, told him to give Don Bosco the message, and immediately left. Dumbfounded, the youngster went up to Don Bosco's room, but as he was about to

enter the antechamber, he noticed a number of gentlemen there, so he stopped at the threshold. Noting his embarrassment, Baron Bianco di Barbania questioned him and, hearing the singular message, offered to deliver it himself. Archbishop Aneyros felt so hurt that not only did he decline the invitation, but he decided to leave Turin as soon as he could. Under the pretext of his imminent departure, he courteously excused himself, actually leaving for Sampierdarena with his party early on the morning of June 30. He was most joyously received by Salesians and boys there. He then went on to Varazze and Savona, where he called on the bishop; afterward, he waited for Don Bosco's arrival at our school in Alassio.

While he still had a chance of dissuading the archbishop from rushing his departure, Don Bosco wrote at length to Father Cagliari. We include the letter here as about the most suitable place for it.

Turin, June 30, 1877

My dear Father Cagliari:

I would have to write a book really to give you all the news, but let me at least mention some items. I met Archbishop Aneyros and the Argentine pilgrims at Sampierdarena and escorted them to Rome. As usual, I stayed with the Sigismondis, after leaving the archbishop at the Latin American seminary at San'Andrea al Quirinale. He was able to see the Holy Father with his pilgrim band and also had a private audience, being very thrilled. Monsignor Ceccarelli, wearing the robes of private chamberlain, cut a splendid figure both in the company of his archbishop and alone.

The unbearable heat forced us to leave for Ancona on June 22, where we were lavishly hosted by Cardinal Antonucci. On June 23 we visited the shrine of Loreto, spending a wonderful day there. On June 24 [the feast of St. John the Baptist] the cardinal celebrated my name day with a banquet attended by all the pilgrims and many other people. There were toasts, tokens of affection and choice wines in abundance.

On June 25 we left for Milan, where we stayed with Chevalier Comaschi, and the next day we arrived in Turin.

The Oratory was bursting with enthusiasm and joy. Archbishop Aneyros was highly delighted, but there are no roses without thorns. At our request, Archbishop Gastaldi had given our guest permission to preach and offer a pontifical Mass on Friday [the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul], but then he revoked it. Again, when Archbishop Aneyros tried to pay him a courtesy call, Gastaldi was already at his villa at Pianezza, from

where he sent word not to bother with a visit since he would be coming to Turin on June 29 for a pontifical Mass and would immediately have to return to Pianezza. He had second thoughts, however, and, realizing that he had been rude, he sent the archbishop a dinner invitation strictly for him. The archbishop declined it on the pretext that he was all set to leave. Now, Monsignor Ceccarelli and I are pressing our illustrious guest and his company to visit our schools at Lanzo and Borgo San Martino and then spend some time at the Riviera where the archbishop's vicar general [Monsignor Brid] can take the saline baths he needs.

A thousand amusing incidents have occurred; I hope to tell you about them some other time. Archbishop Aneyros is very pleased with us and our work and speaks most enthusiastically about our Salesians in Argentina. He is set to depart on July 14.

Now to business. I wrote that you were to go to Santa Cruz. It is just an idea of mine, but if after some thought you judge it best to postpone this trip, be free to act accordingly.

We have the needed personnel. Since the school year is almost over, we shall postpone the missionaries' departure²⁰ to November 14, if nothing gets in the way. If necessary, we can move it and find some way to book passage.

Read my letter to Marquis Spinola;²¹ then put it in an envelope and deliver it to him.

This fall we shall be shouldering the burden of a resident school in Sicily, and another in one of the Swiss cantons, an orphanage at Trent and the seminary at Magliano Sabino where we shall have full control from elementary to theology classes. We shall also open a house in Marseille. Where is the personnel? We shall prepare it.

What I write to you is also for Father Bodrato²² and the others. We shall entrust letters and some errands to Archbishop Aneyros. Next week Archbishop Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro is due to arrive and refuses to leave unless he can take at least five Salesians back with him.

May God bless us all. Give everyone my best wishes and regards, pray for me, and believe me to be always in the Lord,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

²⁰The first expedition had left the Oratory on November 11, 1875 (see Vol. XI, pp. 356ff); the second had left on November 7, 1876 (see Vol. XII, pp. 368ff). [Editor]

²¹Italian chargé d'affaires in Argentina. [Editor]

²²Francis Bodrato (1823-1880) came to Don Bosco as a widower in 1864 and made his first vows as a Salesian in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alasio, Borgo San Martino, and the Oratory. In 1876 he led the second group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina, and two years later Don Bosco appointed him provincial. He died at Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880. [Editor]

Don Bosco would have liked Archbishop Aneyros to stay at the Oratory for at least another day or two to solemnize the feast of St. Aloysius which had been postponed to July 1. Printed invitations clearly stated that the archbishop of Buenos Aires would offer a pontifical Mass in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Fortunately, Bishop [Andrew] Formica of Cuneo happened to be at the Oratory and gladly consented to sing both Mass and Vespers, head the procession and then give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The festivities were to close on July 3 with a drama performance entitled *Patagonia—Its Past and Future* by Father Lemoyne. Don Bosco had not only suggested the plot but had also contributed to the script, taking it along with him on his trip to France, and being moved to tears while reading it. From Nice he wrote to Father Lemoyne on February 28, telling him that he considered the drama the latter's masterpiece but urging further improvements by: (1) simplifying the plot and the sets for easier staging; (2) smoothly linking the various parts of the plot and putting more life into the third and fourth parts; (3) merging parts four and five for a strong finale.

He promised to go over the revision and concluded, "It is something quite novel and it will be a hit." Indeed it was. A very spacious, canopied stage was set up in the artisans' playground. Attendance was well over fifteen hundred. The most esteemed but absent spectator—Archbishop Aneyros—was represented by Monsignor Ceccarelli, who was staying in Italy until the third missionary expedition, then being prepared, would depart. The plot's novelty and imaginative development, while drawing enthusiastic applause, also produced wholesome spiritual effects by stirring up interest and good will in the foreign missions and kindling or strengthening missionary vocations among boys and clerics. The play was the main topic of conversation at the Oratory and elsewhere.

On July 4, Don Bosco went with Monsignor Ceccarelli to our junior seminary at Borgo San Martino and then joined Archbishop Aneyros and his company at Alassio. Before leaving for Alassio on June 6, he wrote to Father Rua: "It looks as though this year will yield a good crop of Salesian candidates to be screened at the spiritual retreats at Lanzo." That same day, on arriving at

Sampierdarena, he sent Father Berto, his secretary, a list of chores to be done.²³

He reached Alassio at about eight in the evening, met at the station by Archbishop Aneyros who openly embraced him and walked with him arm in arm to the Salesian school. That evening a literary, musical entertainment was held in honor of the archbishop and the Argentinian priests. At its close the distinguished prelate delivered a brief, fervent speech which Monsignor Ceccarelli again translated into Italian. Don Bosco, totally exhausted, had withdrawn to his room for some rest.

He seemed still undecided about accompanying the archbishop to Nice and Marseille, the port of embarkation, but he regretted in his heart of hearts having to part with him and not seeing him off.²⁴ Consequently, he did not budge from his side until the prelate and his priests had embarked on the *Poitou* on July 17, saying his last goodbyes on deck. The Argentinians were very thrilled. The thought of going home elated them and made them count the days before their arrival there. Don Bosco listened in silence, and then smilingly told them that their calculations were wrong. With his usual calm he exhorted them not to be so anxious, but to dispose themselves to patience, since only on such and such a day would they safely reach Buenos Aires. He gave them the exact date, which added twelve days to the time normally required for the crossing between Marseille and Buenos Aires. "Incredible! Our crossing cannot take that long," they protested in unison with a feeling of distress. But Don Bosco was right. The ship headed into a storm as far as Cape Vert, suffering severe damage and being forced to dock at St. Vincent's Island until another ship could take its passengers aboard and continue to their destination.²⁵ They arrived at Buenos Aires on Friday, August 24, octave of the feast of the Assumption, the exact date predicted by Don Bosco. On September 4, Archbishop Aneyros wrote to him: "I have not had a

²³We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

²⁴In a short note to Father Rua from Alassio on July 7 Don Bosco wrote: "I shall probably go on to Nice and perhaps even to Marseille. It's a little toilsome, but I do not want to leave the archbishop until sailing time." [Editor]

²⁵The August 7 issue of *Unità Cattolica*, under the heading *Night Cables*, carried this message: "St. Vincent, August 3. The *Poitou*, owned by a French line, arrived yesterday with a damaged propeller. The passengers will continue their voyage aboard the English ship *Mondego*. All are well." [Author]

free moment and I wish I could write to you at length. . . . The time I spent with you is unforgettable. I have told everyone about it,²⁶ and I am extremely grateful to you and to your dear Salesians and beloved pupils.” Monsignor Espinosa, the future archbishop, likewise expressed his warm affection to Don Bosco.

During his stay in Marseille Don Bosco became very sick. Father Guiol nursed him most solicitously, but Don Bosco was very anxious to return to Turin. He wrote to Father Rua: “I am thoroughly exhausted. Our guests are going to Lourdes, but I am staying here. I shall see them off on Sunday when they board ship; then I will return to Turin, where I hope the mosquitoes will leave me alone.” But foreseeing that his creditors would not be so gracious to him, he went on to say, “We really must work hard to come up with some money. I am being pressured on all sides, but I can’t find any benefactor.” Six other items in his letter referred to fund-raising plans; one item suggested ways and means to pacify a creditor.

On his trip to Turin severe dysentery attacks forced him to make eighteen stops. He arrived at Sampierdarena on July 22. By far too weak to write and unwilling to delay his grateful thanks to Father Guiol for his solicitous care, he dictated a letter for him to Father Albera. “I reached Sampierdarena feeling a little better,” he reported. “Once again my most heartfelt thanks for your generous care. I ask that you pay my respects to the bishop at your convenience. Remember me also in your prayers.” But before reaching Sampierdarena, he stopped at Alassio and Varazze, as we gather from a note²⁷ to Father Rua.

At Alassio Don Bosco had an encounter which splendidly shows his prudence. At the Genoa lyceum, Father Sciorati and some of his colleagues had a very poor opinion of our lyceum in Alassio, and consequently our students were treated with severity and near hostility whenever they came up for state examinations. Their director, Father Cerruti, went to Genoa in an effort to dispel these prejudices. Before taking leave of Father Sciorati, he invited him to Alassio to examine our students. The latter—a liberal priest whose conduct was hardly edifying—obliged. Arriving at our school in

²⁶The prelate also recounted his stay with Don Bosco in a pastoral letter. [Author]

²⁷Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

civilian garb and hearing that Don Bosco was also there, he felt rather ill at ease and thought that he should offer Father Cerruti some explanation. "I hope you realize that I came in civilian dress for greater comfort and to forestall possible insults. . . ." While he was speaking, they came across Don Bosco who had many a time called other priests to task for not wearing the cassock but now said nothing at all. He was most gracious and treated Father Sciorati with the utmost respect. The priest, quite impressed and delighted, never forgot that first encounter, returning in other years always as a friend and always wearing his cassock. On every occasion Father Cerruti noticed a change for the better in him, observing also that he now celebrated Holy Mass regularly and devoutly. He ended his days in a truly priestly fashion. While a rebuke would only have angered or embarrassed him Don Bosco's prudent silence brought about a most favorable change in him.

Meanwhile at the Oratory Don Bosco now could hardly continue to hear the boys' confessions because he found it hard even to lift his hand to impart absolution. However, his physical exhaustion did not keep him from spending a good part of the morning in receiving callers, and from spending long hours at his desk in the afternoons, still less from keeping his mind occupied. At this time he was exploring the feasibility of starting a publication which had long been in his mind, the *Salesian Bulletin*.

CHAPTER 6

The Three Salesian South American Communities

THE three Salesian communities canonically established in Argentina and Uruguay made up the [South] American province. It was headed by Father John Cagliero,¹ Don Bosco's worthy representative in that distant region of the world, with headquarters in Buenos Aires. Don Bosco wrote to him very frequently, so that the mail boat rarely set sail on the 1st and 14th of each month without Don Bosco's letters. He kept Father Cagliero informed of Salesian activities, sent instructions, and sought news and suggestions. In a word, Father Cagliero enjoyed Don Bosco's fullest trust. On February 13, on returning from Rome, Don Bosco hastened to inform him of Pius IX's feelings and plans for Salesian affairs.

Turin February 13, 1877

Dear Father Cagliero:

I have just received the promissory note [of nine thousand lire] sent by Father Fagnano² last December 13. Two months in transit is really too

¹John Cagliero (1838-1926) entered the Oratory in 1851. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 200ff) He was ordained a priest in 1862 and led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in 1875. (*See* Vol. XI, pp. 348f) He became the first Salesian bishop in 1884 and a cardinal in 1915. He died at Rome in 1926. In June 1964 his remains were brought back to Argentina and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma. For further details see the Indexes of Volumes IV, V, VI, VII, IX, X, XI and XII. [Editor]

²Joseph Fagnano came to the Oratory at the age of fifteen as a seminarian for the Asti diocese. (*See* Vol. VI, p. 434) Shortly afterward he returned home, joined the army, and served as an orderly in the Asti military hospital. After his discharge, he returned to the Oratory, took his first vows in 1864, and was ordained in 1868. In 1875 he took part in the first missionary expedition to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. (*See* Vol. XI, p. 349) Years later the Holy See appointed him prefect apostolic of that area. He died in Santiago, Chile on September 18, 1916. [Editor]

long a time; we might have to push the bankers to speed things up. However, we won't refuse the note, nor would we even if it were double that sum. In this regard, I got a letter from Father Lasagna³ saying that all their church needs have been met by wealthy parishioners. Therefore make sure that what was brought there for that purpose is not wasted. You know what to do: have a coadjutor brother or a trusted person sell it without involving us in the transaction.

The Holy Father is thrilled over our Congregation. In addition to the Conceptionists' house in Rome, he wants us to take over the Hospital of Our Lady of Consolation, for which he encouraged me with a donation of twenty thousand francs. We have many proposals from other places. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have opened a girls' festive oratory in Chieri.

After a week of figuring and haggling, Commendatore Gazzolo has finally lowered his price to sixty thousand lire for the seven hundred square meters of land he owns adjacent to Our Lady of Mercy Church.⁴ He made it sound as if he were settling for this price as a favor to us, and as a bonus he would throw in another parcel of land in San Nicolás worth three thousand lire. When I mentioned your offer of eighteen thousand lire, he was dumbfounded, saying, "That is barely what I paid for it!" As you see, he may have paid nineteen thousand and is letting us have it for sixty thousand as a special favor. Some favor! Speak with Dr. [Edward] Carranza and see what can be done.

In your next letter let me know if we should soon equip another missionary expedition or, unless it becomes urgent, to wait a while, in which case we could more easily establish ourselves in Rome.

Try to put all your affairs in order, and when you feel that things can run smoothly by themselves, set a date for your return, not later than next August, and let me know.

It would help to tell Archbishop Aneyros that the Holy Father is anxious to do something for Patagonia and that the cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith will write to him—possibly by this very mail packet—about the advisability of setting up an apostolic

³Louis Lasagna (1850-1895), at this time director of the Salesian house in Montevideo (Uruguay), first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's outings with the Oratory boys. In October Louis entered the Oratory. (See Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f) He received the clerical habit in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial, he achieved marked success in the fields of education, social action, agriculture, priestly vocations, and church construction or renovation. In 1893 he was consecrated bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Indians of Mato Grosso (Brazil). He died in a train collision at Juiz de Fora (Brazil) on November 6, 1895. [Editor]

⁴See Vol. XII, p. 190. [Editor]

prefecture at Carmen de Patagónes. The Holy Father believes that once a house has been opened, it will be much easier to fan out far and wide. The Holy Father is particularly moved to such action by the tragic news he keeps getting from the nations bordering on Indian territory—Argentina, Chile and others—whose inhabitants are bent on fighting and wiping out the natives rather than converting them. If formal requests for missionaries reach you from Brazil or Paraguay, you may accept on two conditions: (1) that they share the heavy expenses we have already incurred and are still incurring; (2) that they wait until 1878.

The Holy Father has offered us an apostolic vicariate in India and another in Australia. For the moment I have agreed to send some missionaries to Ceylon in 1878. Just now I have been interrupted and cannot finish this letter or write to Father Fagnano, Father Lasagna and Father Bodrato. I will do so some other time. Please make up for it yourself by sharing this news with them. May God bless us! Regards to the archbishop and to our other friends and benefactors. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. You had better send me the names of the Salesian cooperators.

Don Bosco's next letter dates from mid-May. The thought had never left him that he had to reach the Patagonian Indians, and the time then seemed ripe. While pushing its frontiers to the Cordillera de los Andes, the Argentine government had erected a line of small forts garrisoned by five thousand men along the Patagonian border to keep the Indians at bay. With the passing of time, these military outposts, some ten miles apart, had attracted settlers and their families and had become wilderness villages and towns. The government itself had originally begun to build a small town in the area known as Carhué, and had named it Alsina after the minister of war who had conceived the idea of this advanced frontier. Now the authorities were seeking a parish priest, a teacher and two laymen who could teach some needed trades. This seemed a most suitable place for the Salesians to establish relations with the Indians and do some good for them.⁵ Don Bosco alludes to this plan in the first part of his letter.

⁵Letter from Father Fagnano to Don Bosco, San Nicolás, March 2, 1877. [Author]

Turin, May 12, 1877

My dear Father Cagliero:

I perfectly agree with what you wrote about Patagonia—gradually reaching the Indians by establishing Salesian houses in towns and villages which are adjacent to them. The Lord will see to the rest.

Rabagliati will receive a dispensation from canonical age, but he will not be able to profit by it until June 1. So let him receive the other orders and prepare himself for priestly ordination on the first Sunday of July.

I know that there has been too much publicity about us, but what can we do? I have always suppressed whatever seemed to be to our credit and amended whatever concerned others. However, if you can mail me a report from our South American missionaries I shall put everything right.

Attorney Ferrero stayed one day with us and brought us many letters, much too late.

You will be receiving the dimissorial letters; you or Father Bodrato can issue them, as needed.

I have already made reservations with the French line. Mr. Henry Bergasse of Marseille, its president, has promised us a substantial discount; the French government may also grant us a few free berths. I shall let you know when booking has been finished.

Since the number of houses is on the rise with a corresponding decrease in personnel, I shall shelve plans for Ceylon, Mangalore, Australia, etc., until your return. But I have an eye on some ten likely confreres to be sent to Dolores, if you tell me they are needed.

My love to all in Our Lord Jesus Christ. In another letter I shall list several things you will have to see to when you get back. May God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The most recent of the three communities, a boarding school named after Pius IX at Villa Colón in Montevideo, was staffed by three priests, two clerics and four coadjutor brothers. The director, Father [Louis] Lasagna, wisely kept in close contact with his counterpart at San Nicolás; both schools had a homogeneous student body, sons of well-to-do ranchers, who planned to follow liberal professions and careers. The two directors helped each other through frequent consultation and agreement in the selection of textbooks and the use of Salesian methods. The director of Pius IX School, however, faced a unique problem. Since the school at San Nicolás was in the country, the boarders rarely got visitors, and so

it was rather easy to keep them at the school during the year. Villa Colón, instead, was only a short distance from the capital, and consequently the pupils received frequent visits from their parents, who kept wishing to have their sons go home several times a month, even every Sunday. It was a serious inconvenience, but Father Lasagna solved it by a very simple expedient.

Among the sodalities Don Bosco had established to promote spiritual self-betterment, foremost was that of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Lasagna cleverly organized it among the upperclassmen—usually the school pacesetters—and encouraged its members to receive the sacraments often. Then, by imbuing them with love for their school, he won their support in dissuading parents from their ill-advised demands and thus achieved even more than he had planned. When parents saw their sons gladly forego visits home, they became enthused over the school and heartily praised it to the skies.

Nor did the good director rest on his laurels. He began to urge sodality members to get involved in spiritual works of mercy, such as teaching catechism to neighborhood boys. They responded marvelously. In fact, during the summer vacation and after their graduation, these young catechists set up genuine festive oratories in their own homes, zealously giving catechetical instruction every Sunday. Such high-minded initiative on their part won them the good will of many rich, noble families, who offered to donate presents and prizes for the young catechists' pupils. Moved by their brothers' example, the sisters began to do the same for the girls. These home-based festive oratories eventually became regular festive oratories attached to the local parishes, and these former Salesian pupils continued to exercise their zeal under the guidance and inspiration of Father Lasagna. Thanks to them, he was later able to organize an association of festive oratories under the chairmanship of a former pupil Dr. Languas. He gave them a common set of rules under the title of *Oratorios festivos de Montevideo regentados por Exalumnos del Colegio Pio* [Festive Oratories of Montevideo Directed by Former Pupils of Pius School].

Our archives contain a letter to Don Bosco from Mario Migone, a secondary school student and member of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality, testifying to the spiritual climate that reigned in the school

from its very beginning. Though accustomed to a very comfortable life because his parents were very wealthy, the boy adjusted admirably to the simple conveniences of boarding school life, as if it were his ordinary lifestyle, and he thanked God for having led him there. Moreover, upon graduation, he did not leave his teachers, but entered the recently opened Salesian novitiate to become a true son of Don Bosco, a priest always warmly attached to the Salesian Congregation and full of zeal for the welfare of souls.⁶

Notwithstanding its size, Pius IX School was still too small for all who applied that first year, and so Father Lasagna immediately had to break ground. From the very start of the school year (in March) it was obvious that the staff was inadequate to the need. Friends of the school seemed even more concerned than the Salesians. Not knowing as yet their hard-working style, they could not believe that a few Salesians could do justice to such a work load, and they feared for their health and the schools' excellent reputation. They begged Father Cagliero for reinforcements, which were indeed sent, but not until the following year. Meanwhile the school's apprehensive friends were able to see for themselves what tireless zest for work Don Bosco had instilled into his sons.

The Salesian staff at San Nicolás—four priests, three clerics and six coadjutor brothers—ran its own school as well as the local public school, besides conducting a festive oratory and providing a chaplain for the town's hospital. When completed, the new school

⁶Mario Migone (1863-1937) was the first South American boy to seek admission to the Salesian Congregation and the first to be ordained a priest. He enrolled at the Salesian school in Villa Colón in 1877, two years after the arrival of the first Salesian missionaries. His mentors were great Salesians: Father Louis Lasagna, Father James Costamagna, Father John Cagliero, and Father Joseph Fagnano. As co-founder of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality he sent the above-mentioned letter to Don Bosco in the name of his fellow students. Then, during a European trip with his parents, he visited Turin and the Oratory and was Don Bosco's dinner guest. Upon his return home, he entered the Salesian novitiate. He was ordained a priest in 1887 by then Bishop Cagliero, who chose him as his secretary. In 1891 he was assigned to the Falkland Islands, a British Crown colony, three hundred miles east of the Strait of Magellan, but, unable to stand the very rigid climate, he was recalled and named director of our school at Viedma and at the same time pro-vicar of Bishop Cagliero. Subsequently, he returned as director to the Falkland Islands and, after a few years, was transferred in the same capacity to the recently opened Salesian school in Santiago, Chile. At the expiration of his six-year term of office, he was assigned to Rawson, Chubut, where he founded a regional hospital. In 1905 he was again assigned to the Falkland Islands where he stayed until his death at Port Stanley on November 1, 1937. His many talents, innate goodness and fervent zeal won him the love of Catholics and Protestants, civil authorities, workmen and sailors. A city street was named after him. [Editor]

building towered over the [2,040-mile-long] Paraná River, porticoes and spacious playgrounds framed by rows of slender pines, and a neatly tended orchard filling in the rest of the land. Ships heading upstream on the Paraná could sight its white silhouette against the black foliage from afar, the passengers impressed by its aura of serenity and peace.

The new construction, however, left a trail of debts. "Things are going fairly well," wrote Father Joseph Fagnano, its director, "save for the fact that I am drowning in debts and hardly know which way to turn. Mr. Benitez⁷ does what he can and he will help us pay them. The Lord has given him good health."⁸

Mr. Francis Benitez, a lifelong friend of the Salesians, was always overflowing with loving veneration for Don Bosco and rejoiced in his happy achievements as if they were his own. When he heard that the Salesians were about to open a school at Villa Colón, venerable octogenarian that he was, he wrote Don Bosco a congratulatory letter in Latin [on January 17, 1877] to express his joy at the progress which he could see with his own eyes. He wrote to him again in Spanish, straight from the heart [on May 1], and sent it through Monsignor Ceccarelli. In this second letter we wonder what to admire more: the filial love for Don Bosco and brotherly affection for the Salesians or the genuine, touching humility of this Salesian cooperator. "Despite all knightly decorations and the Pope's benevolence,⁹ I am of little use," he wrote. He then said that he hoped for opportunities to be of greater help than in the past. Don Bosco could not answer the first letter until May 14, when he too wrote in Latin. After gratefully enumerating all that Mr. Benitez had done for the Salesians, he entrusted to him Father Bodrato's financial straits in Buenos Aires, recommending the latter to his generosity. Then, to cheer Father Bodrato and keep him posted, Don Bosco sent him this letter:

⁷The first great benefactor of the Salesians in South America. See the Indexes of Volumes X, XI and XII under "Benitez." [Editor]

⁸Letter from Father Fagnano to Don Bosco, March 2, 1877. [Author]

⁹The title of "Commendatore" obtained at Don Bosco's request. See Vol. XII, p. 130. [Editor]

[No date]

My dear Father Bodrato:

I give you advance notice that I wrote to Mr. Benitez to recommend your financial predicament to him. I thanked him for all he has done and is still doing for us, but I also asked that he direct his charitable attention to Our Lady of Mercy Church and its priests, whose livelihood depends exclusively on parishioners' offerings. This is for your information alone, should you be questioned on this matter.

You tell me that you have so much to do. I am aware of it and would like to send you help. It might make you feel better if you knew that here too we are so swamped with work that we do not know which job to tackle first. For some months now I have been working at my desk from 2 to 8:30 P.M. Still, do remember that your health is indispensable, and so do not overexert yourselves. Help will come from this side and from yours.

Tell all our dear confreres, Daniele, Rabagliati and the others, especially my dear Father Baccino, that I daily pray for all of you at Holy Mass.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. We bought a house at Nizza Monferrato where we hope to relocate our sisters' community at Mornese.

It is heartwarming to see how the true and tried Mr. Benitez kept a close eye on our undertakings. With huge delight he reported on a forthcoming visit by Father Cagliero to the Italian colony at Entre-Ríos. The visit had already been made, but Mr. Benitez had not yet known of it. Father Cagliero and the cleric Rabagliati¹⁰ had visited

¹⁰Evasius Rabagliati (1855-1920) became a Salesian in 1875. The following year he joined the second missionary expedition to Argentina and began his apostolate among the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. Ordained in 1877, he first accompanied Bishop James Costamagna to Patagonia, and then from 1880 to 1886 he directed the Salesian school of San Nicolás de los Arroyos. In 1886 he crossed the Andes to his new assignment at Concepción, Chile, where he remained until 1890, when Father Rua sent him to Bogotá, Colombia to open a trade school. After completing this assignment, he interested himself in the local leper colonies and greatly improved their services. In 1896 he became provincial of the newly established Colombian province and governed it until 1910 when, for reasons of health, he had to retire. Sent back to Chile for a well-deserved rest, he continued to work indefatigably in the priestly ministry and in seeking funds for the Colombian lepers. He died in Santiago, Chile, on May 2 1920. His death was singularly recognized by the Colombian government which declared a day of national mourning in his honor. [Editor]

that large Italian colony of Villa Libertad, some three hundred miles from Buenos Aires, between April 12 and April 26, 1877—an extremely fatiguing two-week trip, made all the more difficult by ten days of rain.¹¹ Remarkably, one of the Indian chieftains, honored by the government with the title of colonel, called and asked him to baptize four members of his tribe. Father Cagliero returned the visit, riding a half day on horseback, willingly enduring the hardship for the sake of strengthening his bonds with the Indians. The harvest which he reaped, far inferior to the need, made him cry out, “We need missionaries, missionaries, missionaries! Without them, souls are lost like abandoned cattle.”

The Salesians in Buenos Aires were working as hard as their other confreres’ communities. The arts and trades school, opened in April [1876] as we have already mentioned,¹² was officially dedicated at the end of September [1877]. Located about two kilometers from Our Lady of Mercy Church, it was still a temporary setup and as yet had no formal name; it was popularly known as St. Vincent de Paul Hospice in acknowledgment of the help given by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In order to build a permanent home on a site where the Salesians could all live together in a religious community, every effort was being made to purchase land adjacent to the church from Consul Gazzolo, as we have already said elsewhere.¹³ Don Bosco insisted without letup on this in his letters to Father Cagliero. At the beginning of September, Archbishop Aneyros had canonically established the parish of La Boca del Riachuelo [officially named after St. John the Evangelist]¹⁴ and had entrusted it to the Salesian Congregation in the person of Father Bodrato.¹⁵ It was a new area of activity which called for additional stalwart evangelical laborers. However, the

¹¹A description can be read in the first issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, August 1877, which published two letters from Father Cagliero. [August]

¹²See Vol. XII, p. 190. [Editor]

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 86, 190. [Editor]

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 192. [Editor]

¹⁵Francis Bodrato (1823-1880) came to Don Bosco as a widower in 1865 and made his first vows as a Salesian in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alassio, Borgo San Martino, and the Oratory. In 1876 he led the second group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina, and two years later Don Bosco appointed him provincial. He died at Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880. [Editor]

already overworked small band was further reduced on June 13 by the sudden death of one of its most active members, Father John Baptist Baccino,¹⁶ who had come to Argentina with the first missionary expedition. Under a humble exterior he concealed the warm heart of an apostle. He conducted day and evening catechism classes for boys, heard confessions for several hours daily, preached in both Italian and Spanish, and visited the sick. His daily work load would have exhausted many a man, yet he never slowed down and was sorry only that he could not accomplish all that had to be done. He pleaded with Turin for reinforcements. They arrived with the second missionary expedition, but he got no help; instead, the expanding Salesian work in Buenos Aires loaded more burdens upon him. Shortly after the missionaries' arrival, he wrote to Turin: "The Lord is clearly blessing our labors. Up to now I've had a lot of work, but now I have loads more. Formerly, the three of us had enough to do for six; now we are four and there is enough work for ten."

The zeal which drove him in the exercise of his priestly ministry was an overflow of his heart, especially whenever he wrote to Don Bosco. In a letter of March 19, 1876 he told him: "I have numberless crowds of young men, twenty and older, who have to be prepared for their First Holy Communion and confirmation. Most of them are Italian. Their parents come to the city from farms twenty-five miles away to receive the sacraments, attend Mass and hear the word of God. Then they leave their sons here for catechetical instruction. See, then, dear Father, I must prepare them for confession, Holy Communion and all else in hardly more than a week. Can I dare to give myself rest? With proper care we could also have priestly vocations; in fact, several young men have already applied for the Salesian brotherhood." Then on April 3 he wrote: "How delightful was the note which you so graciously sent me! You tell me to take good care of my health. Since I got here, I have been in top condition, thank God, but unless you send us help soon, we shall most assuredly break down. . . . Please send us also

¹⁶John Baptist Baccino (1843-1877) was accepted by Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1867 at the age of twenty-four. He donned the clerical habit in 1869, was ordained in 1874, and took part in the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina. He zealously exercised his priestly ministry among the parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy and died prematurely at the age of thirty-four. He was regarded by all as "the father of the immigrants." [Editor]

books. If you only saw how much good *The Companion of Youth*¹⁷ and the *Life of Dominic Savio* are doing. . . . Do not ask me about Buenos Aires because I do not know what it looks like. I have become a total hermit, going out very hurriedly only on sick calls.” On May 18 he wrote to Father Barberis: “I find it pretty hard to make time to eat. I do not know where my time flies. All I know is that I get up early and go to bed very late. Some days I do not even have the time to stop to see if it is morning, afternoon or evening. Still, I feel that I am made of steel.”

We shall close with a few lines from his last letter to Don Bosco, dated April 20, 1877: “We could say that all the Italians—even those living on the farms one or two hundred miles from here—come streaming to us like rivers into the sea. God gives us many reasons to rejoice. When we arrived, we told the people that we had come to work on their behalf and to do them good. They took it literally and keep us busy. Thank God for this. I am very glad I came here. I am at peace, doing all I can, though I am not up to the need. We must have more experienced men here than I. My only wish before leaving this earth is to see my beloved father Don Bosco once again. Dare I hope as much? Pray that I may at least be with you for all eternity, when we shall be reunited after death.”

The testimony of others fully corroborates what he confided in filial trust to his spiritual father. One such testimonial came from Consul Gazzolo, an eyewitness who later told the superiors in Turin how the zealous priest had spent the second Sunday of February 1877, the hottest month and the longest day of the year down there. An hour before sunrise, Father Baccino was already in the confessional, ministering to a host of Italians and Argentinians. He left the confessional to say Mass, after which he returned and stayed on till noon, after the last person left. In those days the Salesians had no kitchen in the house, and their meals were brought in from a nearby inn. Father Baccino had barely started to eat when he was told that a family had just arrived from a distance for confession and Communion. No sooner did he hear that they had been traveling six hours on horseback and four more by train, and that they were in a hurry to catch a return train, than

¹⁷A boys' prayerbook compiled by Don Bosco and first published in 1847 under the title of *Il Giovane Provveduto*. See Vol. III, pp. 6-18. [Editor]

he immediately got up from his meal to care for them. When he finally was free to finish his cold meal, it was time for vespers, followed by an hour-long sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament to a very large congregation. After that, an endless line of people waited to speak to him, seek his blessing and his priestly ministry, or ask for advice. Being then informed that he was needed by two persons who were seriously ill, he rushed to them. It was finally ten that night when he was able to eat some supper and go to bed. However, that evening's sermon had borne fruit: at four the next morning, a throng of parishioners was already lined up outside his confessional. According to Consul Gazzolo, that was more or less Father Baccino's usual Sunday schedule. Nor was his weekday schedule any lighter. He was the priest whom the sick mostly called for. When walking along, swarms of children would crowd about him in the playground and streets. He would stop to talk to them, catechize them, bless them, and invite them to the festive oratory. "How good are these priests!" people exclaimed. "God keep them with us!" Father Joseph Vespignani,¹⁸ who followed him just months after his death, was deeply moved by the love the children still bore for Father Baccino.

In their letters to Don Bosco church authorities extolled his zeal, but the best assessment of his work came from his superior, Father Cagliero. Following are excerpts from his letters to Don Bosco: "Father Baccino is doing magnificently well. . . . He takes excellent care of the parish. . . . For the Italians in Buenos Aires he is in every respect a 'good shepherd.' . . . People are very pleased with Father Baccino's sermons because of their simplicity, even though he may sometimes thunder at them. . . . Father Baccino never says, 'Enough!' . . . On August 19, 1876, I found him feeling well, but exhausted. . . . It's hard to see how he can do so much. . . . It would take four men to do all he does, and everything he puts his hand to turns out well."

Where did Don Bosco find such a good and faithful servant of the

¹⁸Father Joseph Vespignani (1854-1932) came to the Oratory in 1876, three months after his priestly ordination, in order to make Don Bosco's acquaintance. He remained there a year, became a Salesian, and in 1877 was sent by Don Bosco to Argentina as a novice master. In 1894 he was appointed director and later provincial. Elected to the Superior Chapter (now named Superior Council) in 1922, he remained in office until his saintly death on January 15, 1932. In 1948 his remains were brought to Buenos Aires and entombed in San Carlos Church. As novice master, confessor, writer and founder of nineteen Salesian houses, he earned the admiration of all. [Editor]

Divine Master? At twenty-three Baccino had felt a vague drawing toward a holier life. Then one day he heard that Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin took in young men who wanted to study for the priesthood. An inner voice told him that this was the place for him, but he feared that having no money might keep him out. It was not so. He left his farm in his native village of Giusvalla and entered the Oratory. The problems he faced on resuming his studies after a long interruption brought him some anxiety, but in that environment in which Don Bosco molded men to self-betterment, his determination so strengthened him that within two years he was able to begin his philosophy courses. Later, during his first three years of theology, he taught upper elementary classes at Lanzo, distinguishing himself for clearness of thought and a knack of transmitting knowledge effectively. At his death, many young Salesians blessed him for having set them on their way to the priesthood. When about ready for holy orders, he was transferred to Varazze, where the bishop was more kindly disposed toward the Salesians. The first talk he heard about South America kindled his enthusiasm, and he very excitedly volunteered for the missions. Don Bosco, who knew his mettle, satisfied this desire of his as soon as he was ordained a priest. Father Baccino was one of the ten missionaries in the first expedition. In a group photo he stands between Don Bosco and the Italian consul Gazzolo. His face bears a forceful yet kind expression, characteristic of this humble farmhand who became a most worthy minister of the Gospel.

Regretfully, his ministry was short, but the memory and example of his priestly virtues will never die. On Sunday, June 10, 1877, he directed an impressive Corpus Christi procession which extremely fatigued him. The following Wednesday, June 13, he came home around noon from a sick call and felt that he just had to lie down for a rest. His bedroom was a simple cubicle beneath the church belfry with little air and light. There he was seized by an attack of colic so violent that medical assistance could barely soothe his pain and enable him to receive the Last Sacraments. He expired almost immediately afterward. Informing Don Bosco of this sorrowful news, Father Cagliero wrote the best possible epitaph for the deceased: "He was good-hearted and humble, two traits which endeared him to all."

Soon after Father Baccino's death, Father Cagliero, the soul of

the mission, was scheduled to leave for Turin. On March 31 Don Bosco had written to him: "Can you possibly take part in the general chapter scheduled for the beginning of September? We have very important matters to discuss and decide upon. Let me know if you can possibly make it." The boundless trust and good will which Father Cagliero had been able to kindle in less than two years within his brother Salesians and among people of every condition was incredible. When Don Bosco had just hinted in a letter that he might recall Father Cagliero, good Father Baccino had replied, "You call us sons and still treat us so unsparingly? If we were mature missionaries I would have no complaint, but we are mere children. The Lord sends trials to grownups so that they can acquire merits, but He feeds His children on milk and candy. Don't you know that we are still children and that I am the youngest? If you take away our leader, what shall we do? 'Yet, not my will, but yours be done.'"

Many letters in our archives tell of the general grief felt by his friends and acquaintances when the moment of separation came. The overall sentiment is best expressed by these ringing words of Bishop Hyacinth Vera [vicar apostolic in Montevideo]: "Father Cagliero has been able to win the hearts of the Americans." In their letters to Don Bosco everyone prayed heartily for his safe and speedy return.¹⁹

Father Cagliero's return to the Oratory was preceded by the visit of the very zealous Archbishop Peter Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro, whom we have already twice mentioned in the previous volume.²⁰ "It is hard to think of any other prelate who understood Don Bosco so intimately or who had higher esteem or fonder affection for him," wrote Father Albera.²¹ Father Barberis went to the station to meet and welcome the archbishop in Don Bosco's name. At the Oratory's main entrance where Don Bosco awaited him, he was greeted by the brass band. Three wonderful memories remained after his departure. The first was his seeking advice of several boys, as described in the preceding volume.²² The second was a poem

¹⁹Letter to Don Bosco, Montevideo, August 5, 1877. [Author]

²⁰See Vol. XII, pp. 243, 392f. [Editor]

²¹Rev. P. Albera, *Monsignor Luigi Lasagna*, p. 162, San Benigno Canavese, 1900. [Author]

²²*Ibid.*, p. 243. [Editor]

written by Father Lemoyne in his honor. The archbishop wanted Salesians in his diocese at all costs. Using the prelate's and Don Bosco's first name, Father Lemoyne wove a theme about the Gospel narration of the miraculous catch of fish, describing how Peter, unable to haul the net in, signaled to John and his mates in the other boat to help lest the fish be lost; so was Archbishop Peter Lacerda seeking help from Father John Bosco's sons, lest he lose the overflowing harvest of his apostolic labors. Everything concurred to keep his hopes up that he would soon have a Salesian school for poor boys in the Brazilian capital or its environs, a hope eventually fulfilled in 1882 through Father Lasagna.

The third event was of quite a different nature: a reprimand given to Father Rua by the Turin chancery immediately after the archbishop's departure. It was the firm belief at the Oratory that, after receiving an oral request, Archbishop Gastaldi had given Archbishop Lacerda full permission to celebrate pontifically in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, all the more so since he had graciously invited the archbishop to the seminary summer villa, called the "Eremo" or Hermitage,²³ where the seminarians had held an assembly in his honor. No sooner had the guest departed than Archbishop Gastaldi had a letter sent to Father Rua voicing "serious complaints about the fact that Archbishop Lacerda had been induced to pontificate in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians by the assurance that permission had been granted." It was true "that Archbishop Gastaldi had allowed both that prelate and the archbishop of Buenos Aires to pontificate on the feast day of St. Aloysius during their short visits to Turin in late June or early July, but he had not given any permission for other occasions." Archbishop Gastaldi therefore recommended that the "greatest exactness and adherence to regulations be given in such grave and delicate matters."

Archbishop Lacerda treasured in his heart a prediction given to him by Don Bosco. He had already sustained countless trials and tribulations in the exercise of his episcopal ministry, and, knowing

²³This was the ancient Camaldolite hermitage in the Turin hills. The ancient monastery had been to a large extent built by its founder, the venerable Father Alexander Ceva. When religious orders were suppressed in Piedmont, the monastery was confiscated. Eventually Archbishop Gastaldi bought it back to provide restful surroundings for the seminarians during their summer vacation. The summer home was inaugurated in 1877. [Author]

that further crosses lay ahead, had confided all his anxieties to Don Bosco, who had assured him that glory would not be his during his lifetime in this world but only after his death. And so it was. All the state authorities, including the republic's president who sent a personal representative, attended his most imposing funeral, while countless thousands of his pictures were distributed and newspapers of every political hue sang his praises. Bishop Silva of Goas, who visited the Oratory in March 1891, gave witness to Don Bosco's prediction, which the deceased prelate had confided to him, and to the posthumous triumph which he himself had seen but a few months before.

At the beginning of September, Father Cagliero was again reunited with Don Bosco. Enthusiastically welcomed at his arrival at the Oratory and everywhere, he gave his good father joy by his report of the great things his sons were accomplishing in South America, as well as of the still greater things that their friends there expected of them. Thrilled by such news, Don Bosco wrote several letters which shed abundant light on his tireless apostolic activity. The first six letters, sent to South America in September and October, were addressed to benefactors and to the vicar apostolic in Montevideo.²⁴ In another letter, dated September 30, 1877, Don Bosco sent a second appeal to the president of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith for a subsidy to be given to his missions in South America.²⁵ With this letter, Don Bosco enclosed a detailed report for the society's council. The reply was prompt and most courteous, but negative, the common excuse being that the Salesian missions of South America had not been canonically established by the Holy See.

²⁴This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

²⁵We are omitting this letter which repeats what has already been said in previous pages about the success and growth of the Salesian work. [Editor]

CHAPTER 7

The New Motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians

WHEN Don Bosco first turned his attention to the site where he would later relocate the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, it was not to house the sisters there. However let us look at some background history first.

Not far from the residential area of Nizza Monferrato, at the very edge of its farmlands, stood a church and a monastery dating back several centuries. Through the years, the church, older than the monastery and dedicated to Our Lady of Grace, became a highly revered shrine. As for the monastery, we only know that it first belonged to the Friars Minor of the Regular Observance, then to the Reformed Friars Minor and finally in 1817 to the Capuchins. When religious orders were suppressed in Piedmont in 1855, the government evicted the friars and confiscated both church and monastery, selling them to the municipality of Nizza Monferrato for 24,000 lire—a mere pittance which turned out to be a total loss because the hoped-for advantages did not materialize. In 1869 the municipality decided to get rid of them and offered them for sale to a teachers' association if it would agree to turn them into a private secondary school for resident and day students. Negotiations were concluded favorably but fell through because of bureaucratic delays.

On March 3, 1870, Mayor Philip Fabiani, meeting with Don Bosco by chance on a train, suggested that he purchase the monastery and church for use as a Salesian school. Don Bosco may have given him some hope, because on April 29 the mayor wrote to remind him of their conversation, informing him too that, since the municipality could not finance alterations, the premises would be

sold at a reduced price. He only had to agree that he would open a secondary resident and day school. We do not know Don Bosco's answer, but we are sure that at the time he could not have taken on this obligation on such short notice. In 1870 he had only twenty-seven perpetually professed Salesians, counting priests, clerics and coadjutor brothers, and thirty-three with temporary vows. All were needed to staff the Oratory and the other two schools at Mirabello and Cherasco. In October of that same year, besides, he had to supply personnel for Alassio's large boarding school.

Anyway, we reasonably feel that it was providential that his attention was called to the profane use to which both the shrine and the monastery had been subjected. Worse was yet to come. A wine concern bought them and converted the shrine to a rambling wine cellar, replacing the side altars with barrels labeled with monastic titles. The profanation did not pay off, the company going bankrupt and putting all its assets on the auction block, including its vineyards, by the end of 1876.¹

Most of the townspeople, devout pilgrims like their ancestors to Our Lady's shrine, were concerned about what would happen next. No buyers showed up. The anticlericalism of the day made it folly even to hope that those ancient buildings would ever be restored to their original purpose. However, the general hope was that they might at least be turned into beneficial use for the people of the town or into a charitable institution. Then came that fine spring day of 1877 when Don Bosco unexpectedly arrived from Turin to inspect those venerable walls. The Count Balbo family, who owned fields and a summer home in the area, along with other prominent families, had prevailed upon him to visit the place and see what could be done to end this gross profanation. For quite some time Don Bosco, in turn, had been searching for a new home for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and had also considered the historic, abandoned Capuchin monastery. He found a sturdily constructed building—the only good thing about it. Work and money, he felt, could fashion it into a school. Its scenic location, wholesome climate, and easy access to other towns fully met the needs of a large and varied religious community. But when he stood at the church's entrance, he recoiled in disgust, exclaiming,

¹This paragraph and the preceding one are condensations. [Editor]

“Merciful God!” The church had become a squalid den, with broken-down altars, ripped up floors, grimy walls and musty ceilings—testimony of the abomination of desolation that had defiled that sacred edifice. One thing alone of the once hallowed place had withstood the ravage—the massive walls. Yes, this house of God and monastery had to be restored immediately. For Don Bosco decision meant action, and from then on he made it his chief concern to hasten the completion of his undertaking.

Two most important things had to be done first: making a contract with the wine concern, and obtaining Rome’s authorization. The first was urgent, the second was a formality. The agreement of intent of sale and purchase was signed April 30 [1877] for the sum of thirty thousand lire; other details were completed within the next few days.²

How decisively Don Bosco moved in business transactions of this kind is shown in three letters he wrote to Canon Edward Martini of Alassio. This priest had gone to South America shortly after ordination and had been pastor at Azul, near Buenos Aires, for fifteen years. He returned to Italy with a fair fortune and was able to provide himself with such comforts as are usually sought by those serenely approaching old age. At his first meeting, Don Bosco asked him how he kept himself busy. “I am resting,” he replied. “Resting?” Don Bosco echoed. “Priests rest in heaven.” Such plain words went straight to his heart, so that his love for Don Bosco grew more and more, while Don Bosco in turn solicitously prepared him for a saintly end of his life.

The freedom with which Don Bosco sought his help to buy the ancient church and monastery shows that Father Martini did not delay to the last hour doing meritorious deeds for heaven. In early May Don Bosco wrote to him, “We have purchased a building for our sisters in the lovely town of Nizza for thirty thousand lire. We have three months to sign the contract. Now it is your turn to rise to the occasion. . . .”³

[Shortly afterward] Father Martini handed over to Father

²We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to a Salesian cooperator, Mrs. Frances Pastore, telling her about this transaction. [Editor]

³This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Cerruti⁴ twenty-five thousand lire in bonds, which the latter hastened to deliver to Don Bosco. The canon's generosity was also prompted by his learning that the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were active in the South American missions. Wishing that a religious congregation with missionaries in the land where he had honestly made a solid fortune would benefit by his wealth, he appointed Don Bosco as his sole heir at his death in 1884.

Meanwhile, the usual steps were being taken to obtain needed permissions from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. On September 14, 1877, after a favorable report from the bishop of Acqui, with the consent of the Capuchin superiors, the Congregation issued a rescript instructing the bishop to give Don Bosco the required permission, provided that he would offer a written assurance that both monastery and church would be returned to the Capuchins should their legal rights ever be restored. In that case Don Bosco was to be indemnified for incurred expenses. This document was to be kept in the chancery archives at Acqui. Don Bosco of course had no objections.

In this, too, he gave proof of delicate sensibility. Although he had firm reason to believe that the Holy See would not hesitate to give him the required permission, he resisted pressure from interested parties and firmly stated that he would sign no contract until he had received the Holy See's permission.⁵ He made this very clear in a letter dated August 25, 1877⁶ to the agent of the wine company.

The contract was signed on October 12, 1877 at Savigliano in the office of notary Saverio Negro. Don Bosco was legally represented by Father Rua, who made a down payment of fifteen thousand lire, the balance to be paid during April 1879 at an annual interest of six percent.

⁴Francis Cerruti (1844-1917) entered the Oratory in November 1856. After completing the five-year secondary school course in only three years, he was chosen by Don Bosco for teacher certification studies. He was also among the first seventeen young men who joined Don Bosco and his fledgling Salesian Congregation in 1859. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1866 he was ordained a priest and received his Ph.D. in literature. At Don Bosco's request, he compiled an Italian dictionary and deepened his knowledge of education. He filled administrative posts as director, provincial and, finally, prefect general of studies. Through his efforts several Salesian schools received accreditation. He died at the Oratory at the age of 73. [Editor]

⁵This sentence is a condensation. We are also omitting a letter of Don Bosco to Countess Corsi informing her of the course of the negotiations and recommending to her care a Salesian priest in need of some rest. [Editor]

⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Don Bosco's disbursement made him the owner of little more than the bare walls of an ancient church and monastery; vast outlays had still to be spent to restore the church into a worthy house of God and to turn the monastery into a school building for girls and a sisters' novitiate. Therefore, in March 1878, once the weather allowed full resumption of work, Don Bosco sent out a circular far and wide begging for money, construction material and equipment. Work progressed quickly and steadily, but time was needed to make necessary alterations, so that by the end of August much remained to be done in spite of Don Bosco's efforts to expedite matters.⁷

If Don Bosco was so anxious to hasten and prepare and outfit a new motherhouse for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, it must have been because there was an urgent need to move them out from Mornese. Indeed, that was the case. At one of the annual conferences of St. Francis de Sales, the location of Mornese had been discussed as being too far from the train station and having no coach service. Furthermore, the winter roads were impassable and travelers were exposed to serious privations and hardships. Rosignano's parish priest had invited Don Bosco to settle the nuns there, but that village too was off the beaten path, and the site which was offered required excessive outlays. The problem was still under discussion in the conference when Don Bosco announced that Countess Corsi was engaged in buying a house at Nizza Monferrato for this purpose. He worded his statement thus because he felt that it was not the time to disclose that he was negotiating with the wine company through the countess. He quietly continued to work toward that goal.

Two additional reasons favored relocating the sisters. Their health was suffering perhaps because the air of Mornese was too thin for the sisters who worked so hard without sufficient nourishment. Secondly, the expansion of the boarding school with an increase of postulants made for tight and uncomfortable quarters. That the townsfolk would be very sorry to see the sisters leave was not likely, since the old harsh feelings against Don Bosco for having opened a school for girls rather than for boys⁸ was just

⁷This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco trying to assuage the holy impatience of Countess Corsi. [Editor]

⁸See Vol. X, pp. 260, 264f. [Editor]

dormant, not really extinct, suddenly flaring up now and then, as during the carnival of 1877, for instance, when the poor sisters were tormented the whole night long by coarse remarks being yelled at them under their windows.

Not an inkling of Don Bosco's plans got out to anyone in Mornese for a full year. Only at the beginning of February 1878 did Don Bosco invite Mother Mazzarello and another sister to check out their new headquarters at Nizza Monferrato and make suggestions to Father Sala⁹ and Father Bonetti¹⁰ who were to meet them there. To accompany her, Mother Mazzarello chose Sister Henrietta Sorbone, who was in charge of the students. It seemed that she could already foresee the eminent role in the new motherhouse which Divine Providence was reserving for this young Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians. Indeed, [in 1881] Don Bosco assigned her to be Mother Mazzarello's vicar. She held that post for more than fifty years until, a living witness to the Congregation's traditions, she transferred with the Superior Chapter from Nizza to Turin.

The account of Mother Henrietta's vocation is not a negligible episode in Don Bosco's biography. Having lost her mother when quite young, she became a mother to her brothers and sisters, all younger than herself. Then, one day in May 1873, her fellow villager Marcellus Rossi,¹¹ the revered Salesian doorkeeper, chanced to come to the village and told her wonders about Don Bosco and his saintliness. The devout spinster listened with

⁹Anthony Sala (1836-1895) entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family silk mill. He took his vows as a Salesian on December 29, 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1869. In 1875 he was appointed councilor to the Superior Chapter, and in 1880 he became economer general of the Salesian Society, a post to which he was re-elected in 1886 and 1892. He died in Turin on May 21, 1895. [Editor]

¹⁰John Bonetti (1838-1891) entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. In 1859, along with other young men, he banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its Superior Chapter. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, apologetic and Salesian publications, chief among them *The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these *Biographical Memoirs*. In 1866 he was elected spiritual director of the whole Salesian Congregation. He died in that post at the age of fifty-three, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that Father Bonetti would be the first member of the Superior Chapter to follow him to eternity. [Editor]

¹¹Marcellus Rossi (1847-1923) entered the Oratory in 1869 at the age of twenty-two. He was first assigned to the bookstore and, after one year's probation, was admitted to triennial vows in January 1871. At the beginning of 1873 he fell critically ill and obtained permission to make his perpetual profession. To the amazement of all—including his doctor—he felt

growing admiration and with envy of his good luck, as she said to herself: *How wonderful it must be to meet a saint!* Rossi ended by telling her, "Don Bosco will soon be going to Borgo San Martino. Come along, and I'll point him out to you." The invitation sharpened her desire to see for herself what a saint looked like.

Wresting permission from her father and joining two of Rossi's sisters, she set out, fully convinced that she would soon see a saint. The three girls briskly walked four miles to Borgo San Martino, reaching the town at about seven in the morning and finding their way to the parish church where they received Holy Communion. They then set out for the girls' school, meeting Rossi, who took them there. Ushered into the linen room, they waited some time with a few women who were mending clothes, until band music and the villagers' cheers announced Don Bosco's arrival. The three girls were taken to a corridor through which Don Bosco had to pass. From there they could see a nearly delirious crowd swarm into the courtyard. At long last they saw him enter the building and slowly make his way toward them, trailed by a throng of friends and boys. Henrietta kept staring at him from head to toe. Whatever it was she had imagined in her dreams, here was a priest no different from any other. As the bystanders greeted him by kissing his right hand, her feeling of enchantment kept ebbing fast. Then Don Bosco abruptly stopped in front of her and, pointing a finger, said: "Go to Mornese."

"Mornese? What's Mornese?"

"It's a pretty village. You will see. . . . Now it's time for lunch. We shall talk about it later."

Henrietta stood there, puzzled. After lunch, Don Bosco sent for her. "Good girl!" he exclaimed as soon as she entered the room.

"What's your name?"

"Henrietta Sorbone. I come from Rosignano Monferrato."

"How is your health?"

"Good."

"How old are you?"

perfectly well the following morning. In urgent need of a conscientious doorkeeper, Don Bosco entrusted him with that office on a temporary basis since he was uncertain whether Rossi's health would hold. As things turned out, Rossi remained on the job forty-eight years admired and respected by all for his courtesy, amiability and edifying demeanor. He died at the Oratory on March 27, 1923. [Editor]

“Eighteen.”

“Do you like to study?”

“Very much so. My mother wanted me to become a teacher, but she is dead now and I have to look after my little sisters.”

“How many are there?”

“Four, and I also have two brothers.”

“Have you ever thought of becoming a nun?”

“I couldn’t really say, but I believe that my mother would have been happy to have all her daughters consecrated to God.”

“Good, good! We shall see.”

“My parish priest told me that if I am good and look after my little sisters properly, he will provide for me, so I would not like to make other commitments now.”

“Don’t worry. I will talk to your parish priest.”

“What about my sisters and my father?”

“Divine Providence will provide for them too. At Mornese we have the convent of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. You could study there.”

“Who are the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians? Are they nuns?”

“Yes, they are nuns.”

“But I like the kind of nuns who dress like those we see in holy pictures.” She said this because she thought that the women she had seen in the linen room were nuns.

“Don’t worry,” Don Bosco assured her. “The sisters at Mornese are dressed as you said. You can study there, become a sister and do a lot of good.” He told her other things too which she could not then grasp but which came true later. Then, taking a blue slip of paper from his pocket, he jotted something on it and handed it to her with the words, “Here! For the time being, go back to Rosignano and give this to your parish priest. But go to Mornese soon, and as you are about to set foot into that holy house, leave your own will outside the door.” Tucking the note away, Henrietta slowly and thoughtfully walked to the door and, on reaching it, turned around to bid Don Bosco goodbye. He looked at her in a fatherly way and said with feeling, “Let us leave this treacherous world!” Uttered in such a vibrant tone, these parting words deeply impressed her. It seemed that Don Bosco had almost seen a wild

beast about to tear her asunder. *The world must be a despicable place*, the girl kept thinking as she returned home.

It was no easy task to convince both her parish priest and her father, but their opposition soon yielded. On June 6, 1873, the first Friday of the month, Henrietta Sorbone entered the convent at Mornese. She studied, became a sister, just as Don Bosco had told her, obtained teaching credentials and became the Mother General's vicar. She had just celebrated her fiftieth year in that office when she gave us this account, adding many other details, one of which we will not omit. Her father's unbelievable sacrifice and Christian spirit in favoring her vocation were most generously rewarded by God. Both he and his children were provided for beyond all expectations. We can see how God inspired Don Bosco and blessed those who cooperated with him in accomplishing His holy designs.

The Mother General had to visit not only the house which was about to be opened, but all the houses of the Congregation, even though she really felt that this was unnecessary, particularly if those houses had a Salesian director. However, Don Bosco thought otherwise, and he gave her to understand that it would be much better if she visited and stayed a few days in the latter houses as well. She would gradually realize, he added, that religious communities run well when they are often visited by their superior. As such, it was only fitting that she see for herself the needs, satisfaction, zeal in work, fidelity to practices of piety and timetable, matters of health of the community, and so on. She could also help directors work out their problems, offer them advice and express her wishes. Mutual understanding is always a great help, both physical and spiritual. Hence, the good superior was to make her tour of visits and extend to all Don Bosco's heartfelt greetings and blessings. Mother Mazzarello faithfully followed his instructions. Then, at the second retreat in Turin, in the summer, she spoke with him about the more salient observations she had made at her visits.

Her unwavering docility and deep veneration for Don Bosco were shown on countless important occasions. For instance, when even level-headed people remarked that the sisters' black habit gave them the look of perpetual mourning and that a little white could correct that image, the sisters discussed the matter and

designed a new habit. Mother Mazzarello, however, wanted Don Bosco's opinion and, at her instructions, Sister Catherine Daghero¹² volunteered to act as model and presented herself to Don Bosco in her new habit. "It's pretty nice," Don Bosco remarked with a smile. "Give it a try. After all, you sisters have to wear it."

It was a memorable day at Mornese when word began to spread of sending the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to France and to South America. Prudence, however, counseled a period of waiting, since the good sisters lacked knowledge and experience, but Mother Mazzarello exclaimed, "If Don Bosco speaks this way, it is Our Lady who has told him, and She knows what Daughters to choose for Her Son's work." On another occasion, some sisters who had taken their teacher certification tests at Cuneo, on their return to Turin, had high praise for the Dominican nuns who had shared their warm hospitality with them. "We must learn to do likewise," Mother Mazzarello remarked, "but we are not to forget that they treated us so kindly because we are Don Bosco's sisters."

Once, in a report to Don Bosco concerning the house in Biella, she voiced doubts about its future because the sisters who lived there were not very happy. "No one stays in Don Bosco's house by force," replied Don Bosco. "If the sisters do not like it there, they may be sent elsewhere, but we shall not close that house." Mother Mazzarello ventured no further comment.

In 1878, on her visit to the house at Alassio, she found the sisters' schedule much too burdensome, obliging them to rise very early and retire very late. Humbly and respectfully she asked the director, "Does Don Bosco know about this schedule? If he does, very well. If not, please see that it is modified."

Such profound reverence for Don Bosco naturally overflowed on to his sons. When she saw that the recently born *Salesian Bulletin* [September 1878] carried the prospectus of the two girls' schools which the sisters were opening at Nizza and Chieri, she exclaimed: "Don Bosco and the Salesians really consider us part of their family. None of our works would last and succeed, were it not for Don Bosco and his sons. Heaven help us if we should be blinded by pride and think we can do without them! We

¹²She was Mother General from 1881 to 1924. [Editor]

would become a shoot cut off from the vine, nothing more!" She voiced the same feeling to Sister Elisa Roncallo, who, in a burst of joy, was telling her of her festive oratory in Valdocco. "Yes, yes," Mother Mazzarello remarked, "this is most wonderful, but let us bear in mind that, after God, we owe all to Don Bosco and his wonderful saintly sons whom he has given to us as guides and guardians. Let us never stop thanking Our Lady for calling us to become Her daughters and entrusting us to a saint—Don Bosco!"

One day, the sister superior in Turin told her of a conversation she had had with Father Rua, her community's director.

"May we continue to eat fruit for breakfast, Father?" she had asked. "People give us plenty."

"What does the rule say?" he replied.

"That we may have coffee and milk or fruit."

"It says 'or,' not 'and.' Right?"

"If we don't eat the fruit, it goes to waste."

"Better that than breaking the rules! However, why don't you give that surplus to the needy or to the girls as an enticement to be good?"

On hearing this, Mother Mazzarello concluded, "Do you see what saints are like? Heaven help you in Turin if you do not take advantage of living with saints for our sakes, too, because we are not blessed to live at Valdocco."

Mother Mazzarello's repeated show of such sentiments likewise animated her daughters, to whose loving devotion for Don Bosco we owe their anxiety to record all he said on his rare, brief visits to them. One such visit he paid to the sisters at Valdocco in 1878 on his return from Rome and France. Since he had never been away so long and they hoped to see him soon, they tried to show their happiness as best they could by decorating their little reception room. Hearing of this, Don Bosco sent them word, "I won't go to a home decked out with curtains, drapes and sofas!" The sisters quickly put things back as before. When Don Bosco did call on them, he made no reference to this, but immediately inquired about the number of pupils. Being told they were a goodly number, he remarked, "Wonderful! This is truly our great mission. But remember that to do good to these girls, you must always be cheerful; you must love and respect them all, even those who may not deserve it. And do they keep coming regularly every day after

lunch and every evening after getting out of work?" Receiving an affirmative answer, he told them that this lessened the possibility of sin and safeguarded the girls from any evil they might learn in the streets. Furthermore, their minds were filled with wholesome thoughts for the night and the following day, benefiting not only them but their own families as well, since young people like to tell of the day's happenings at school. On being asked for suggestions on how to spread knowledge and love of Mary, Help of Christians, he replied, "Speak about Her at the right time to pupils and outsiders whom you meet. Mention Her when you write to parents, relatives and acquaintances. Tell persons who need special graces about favors obtained through Her intercession and give them medals and holy pictures. Seek Her help often through the invocation 'Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us,' and invite others to do likewise; sing hymns in Her honor in the playground and in church, especially during Mary's month. Suggest that baby girls be named after Her in baptism. Likewise, strive to keep Her feasts in the best way possible, not only in church services but also with group gatherings and processions. Finally donate pictures of Mary, Help of Christians to families and parishes and dedicate new convents to Her under that title."

Through Don Bosco's prayers the Valdocco sisters had received a signal favor from Mary, Help of Christians during the Immaculate Conception novena, and this had both intensified their love for their heavenly Mother and increased their veneration for their spiritual father. A novice—Josephine Quarello—was not residing at Mornese but staying in Valdocco to help Sister Catherine Daghero with her teaching duties. On returning to Mornese for a few days' rest she fell critically ill, so much so that Dr. Albertotti declared her beyond all help. The good novice resigned herself to God's will but asked to be taken to Don Bosco for his blessing in preparation for a holy death. Regardless of obstacles, she had her wish. On painfully reaching Don Bosco's antechamber, she had no time to voice her wish, but Don Bosco told her, "So you want to go to heaven! So do I, through God's mercy. However, you still have lots of work to do." As he slowly stressed these final words, he raised his hand over her in blessing. *This time he is mistaken*, the girl said to herself, believing that he had not been fully informed of her critical condition. However, *she*

was mistaken, for immediately she began to feel better. Within those very nine days she quietly returned to her school work as if nothing had happened.

We are reminded also of another visit made by Don Bosco that same year (1878) to the sisters at Lanzo. He went through the entire house, having a gracious word for everyone he met. He commended the sister in charge of the dining room. "Good!" he said. "Strive to give good example to all the sisters about you." To the cooks he said: "Martha and Mary! You are like so many Marys. Do you know how to change earthly dishes into heavenly ones? It's quite easy! Just offer your work to God by keeping united with Him and with the Blessed Virgin, and by striving to do your very best." To the superior who felt ill at ease when dealing with lay people who periodically, especially on feast days, would visit the kitchen, workroom or the students' linen room, he made her understand that she had nothing to worry about and that the occasion gave her a chance to do them some spiritual good, at least through her edifying demeanor.

In a previous chapter we referred to two other visits of Don Bosco to the sisters. When, after similar incidents, Mother Mazzarello heard her Daughters speak of them, she would very fittingly conclude, "Our good father always does good no matter where he goes."

If the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians took so much to heart Don Bosco's casual remarks, we can easily imagine how much they treasured the little talks which he gave them at different moments of their spiritual retreats. Two occasions came in 1878—the first at Mornese in August. Perhaps the general excitement of moving soon to Nizza prompted him to go, and he notified Father Lemoyne,¹³ their director, who had succeeded Father Costa-

¹³Father John Baptist Lemoyne (1839-1916) was renowned as the first chronicler of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

From their first providential meeting in 1864, Father Lemoyne esteemed Don Bosco as a man of outstanding character and holiness. He not only strove to understand and acquire his spirit, but also took upon himself the task of committing to writing anything of significance that Don Bosco did or said. Information concerning earlier events he painstakingly gathered from eyewitnesses and other sources.

In 1883 he came to the Oratory as editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* and secretary of the Superior Chapter. The five ensuing years he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and

magna¹⁴ when the latter left for South America.

Turin, August 6, 1878

Ever dear Father Lemoyne:

I really do want to come to see you. God willing, I shall be at Mornese on August 16 and remain a week. We shall have time to talk to our heart's content and count all the money which you, the sisters and anyone else can put together.

Cordial regards to Campi, Musso and all our spiritual relatives. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

At the close of the spiritual retreat, he received the vows of several sisters and in the usual "souvenirs homily" extolled the virtue of obedience. A simile he used is memorable. "When you rip the seams of a sack," he told them, "its contents will spill out. The same happens to a religious who lacks obedience; all her virtues will be lost and she will cease to be a religious." Afterward, when Mother Mazzarello approached him, he told her, "I would like to see two posters in this portico—the first one reading: 'Mortification Is the ABC of Perfection,' and the second: 'Every Moment Is a Treasure.'" Before he left Mornese the two posters were up.

He also gave retreat souvenirs to the sisters attending the second spiritual retreat in Turin. Once more he stressed religious obedience, using a handkerchief as an illustration. "Obedience," he said, "should make us willing to be treated like a handkerchief, which can be washed, wrung and pressed, without offering

heard from Don Bosco himself the story of the arduous road he had had to climb in his youth to get to the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Divine Providence guided the Salesian work.

After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was formally charged with compiling available materials for his biography. Forty-five large volumes of galley proofs bear witness to his dedicated research and provide the material for the nineteen volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are the *Life of Don Bosco* in two volumes and the *Life of Mamma Margaret*, Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin on September 14, 1916 at the age of 77. [Editor]

¹⁴James Costamagna entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twelve. He became a Salesian in 1867 and was ordained in 1868. He led the third expedition of Salesian missionaries to Argentina in 1877, opened the first Salesian house in Talca, Chile, in 1887, and was consecrated bishop and appointed first vicar apostolic of Mendez and Gualaguiza, Ecuador, in 1895. He died at Bernal (Argentina) on September 9, 1921. [Editor]

objections. Do we want to be a cheerful person? Let us be obedient. Do we want to assure our perseverance in our vocation? Let us always be obedient. Do we want to make great strides toward holiness and eternal happiness? Let us readily obey even in little things.”

That same year, 1878, Don Bosco gave the sisters a handsome present on the feast of the Immaculate Conception—a printed copy of their rule which had been approved by the bishop of Acqui two years before. A poster with Father Costamagna’s words, “Every Sister Should Be a Living Copy of the Holy Rule,” was already hanging in the porticoes when the other two, just mentioned, were put up. Now, the printed copy of the rule was to help them achieve that goal. Don Bosco wrote a Foreword containing some fatherly admonitions as follows:

Turin, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1878

To the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians

Thanks to Our Heavenly Father’s goodness, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, to which you have the good fortune to belong, has of late experienced substantial growth. In the space of a few years we have been able to found a considerable number of houses not only in Piedmont and Liguria, but also in France and even in the most remote regions of South America.

When the whole Congregation could fit in the motherhouse at Mornese, a few handwritten copies of the rule were enough for all. But now that is not so, for, thanks to Divine Providence, houses and sisters have multiplied.

Hence I felt that it would redound to God’s greater glory and to your spiritual well-being to have them printed. I give them to you with the formal approval of several bishops who have found them most suited to help you grow in God’s grace and belong totally to Jesus as you dedicate your whole life to the Christian education of poor girls. The institute you belong to has also received the praise and approval of the bishop of Acqui in whose diocese it was born in 1872, and where it still thrives.

Hold dear these rules. Read them, meditate on them and, most of all, practice them. Simply memorizing them would be utterly useless. Each of you is to do her very utmost to keep them most diligently. This must be the goal of your superior’s vigilant zeal and the steadfast concern of all of you. It is thus that you will enjoy peace of mind, stay on the path leading to heaven, and become saints.

I gladly take this timely occasion to urge you always to pray for the soul of Father Dominic Pestarino. He was your first director and God's instrument in laying your institute's foundation. His zeal and charity certainly deserve our gratitude.

Pray too for one another that the Lord may help you persevere in your vocation and make you worthy of great deeds for His greater glory. Pray especially for your sisters who have already gone to distant lands of the world and for those who are about to go, so that they may make Our Lord known and loved. Pray, above all, for the Catholic Church, for the Pope, bishops and priests. Pray for the Salesian Society, to which you are affiliated. And do not forget me as I wish you every blessing.

May the Blessed Virgin protect and defend us in life and death, and may Her powerful intercession obtain for us from Her Divine Son the inestimable grace of being united again one day beneath Her mantle in Heaven.

Fr. John Bosco

Divided into sixteen chapters, these rules basically matched the rules of the Salesian Society whose Rector Major had jurisdiction over the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. To grasp the spirit of the rule we present the salient features which are not contained in the Salesian constitutions.

Several important virtues are proposed in Chapter 9 for the novices to study and the sisters to practice.

1. Patient and zealous charity not only toward little children, but also with young women.
2. Simplicity and modesty, interior and exterior spirit of mortification, strict observance of poverty.
3. Subjection of mind and will; a willing, unquestioning acceptance of advice, corrections, and duties.
4. Spirit of prayer in the prompt carrying out of practices of piety and in keeping united with God, with complete trust in His providence.

Noteworthy is the second rule of Chapter 11 concerning the sacraments:

[The sisters] shall go to confession every week. In telling their failings, they should try to omit needless details and briefly, with candor and humility, state their faults as though they were admitting them to Jesus Christ. They should have that deep respect and trust for their confessor

which befits one appointed by God to be their father, master and spiritual guide. They are not to discuss matters proper to confession, still less their confessor.

The Foreword to Chapter 11 on the vow of chastity has these beautiful words:

The virtue of chastity must be most outstanding among the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. First, their mission to instruct and guide souls on the road to salvation is similar to that of the guardian angel and so calls for a pure, angelic life. For this reason, virgins are called angels on earth. Second, total loyalty to one's vocation demands complete internal and external detachment from anything which does not lead to God.

The last chapter contains thirty general rules. Some are clearly distinctive of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

9. Each sister should regard herself as the least of all, trying never to avoid or decline to do the lowliest house chores which the superior may assign to her in keeping with her physical strength and as she shall prudently judge wise in the Lord.

10. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians shall always maintain a cheerful attitude toward their sisters, laughing and joking, but always as angels would do. In the presence of men, they shall always observe a serious and dignified manner. When in town, they shall walk with edifying composure and modesty, refraining from staring, acknowledging greetings with a nod, and bowing to priests and religious.

11. Both in and out the community they will try to speak humbly, without being opinionated, especially avoiding harsh, cutting, judgmental or conceited speech concerning themselves or the good which God has achieved through them, doing their individual and community tasks solely for God's love. They shall not speak of their birth, age or wealth, should they have been fortunate in that way before joining our Congregation. They shall not raise their voice in conversation even during recreation periods. When in the presence of men, they will be serious and grave in speech. If the person's social standing should be above their own—such as clergymen, for example—respect for their position demands such seriousness and gravity; if they are ordinary layfolk, seemly conduct and good example require it.

12. Their entire dedication should shine through their way of dealing with people by control of their eyes and of their whole person, as befits those who are imitators of Christ crucified and servants of the poor. In

church they shall show the greatest composure, kneeling upright and genuflecting fully when passing before the Blessed Sacrament.

21. Every sister must be careful of her own health. When one does not feel well, she shall herself inform her superior, without concealing or exaggerating her ailment, so that she may receive the help she needs. In time of illness she is to be docile to the infirmarian and the doctor so that they may care for her as they believe best in the Lord. She shall endeavor to be patient, resigned to God's will, enduring privations inseparable from poverty, and always maintaining an unshaken spirit in the hands of that God who is a loving Father both when He guards our health and when He afflicts us with illness and pain. To strengthen them spiritually, Holy Communion will be given to the sisters who are bedridden at least once a week, according to the circumstances of their illness.

22. The sisters shall always endeavor to keep closely united in the pleasant bond of charity. It would be a shame if women who choose to imitate Jesus Christ were to neglect that commandment which He so insisted upon, even calling it *His* own precept. Over and above the practice of mutual forbearance and impartial love, it is a rule that, should a sister fail in charity to any sister, she shall apologize as soon as she has regained her calm and realized her fault, certainly before retiring for the night.

23. For a higher perfection of charity, every sister shall willingly consider her sisters' well-being before her own; all shall at all times help and support each other by showing their love and holy friendship. They shall never give way to any feelings of jealousy of one another.

24. Let the sisters desire and effectively strive to do all the good they can to others, seeking to help and serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of His poor, especially by assisting, serving and comforting their sisters who are ailing or are sorely tired, and by promoting the spiritual good of the girls where they live.

27. Let them be most fervent in their practices of piety, which will help them acquire that order of spirit which gently leads us to the full imitation of Jesus Christ, our divine example, the Bridegroom of the faithful soul.

Mornese will forever shine in the annals of the Congregation because the first Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians who crossed into France, and those who voyaged to South America blazing the path for their sisters to follow, all started there. In September 1877 they went to Nice, and in October 1878 to Saint-Cyr. As for South America, Don Bosco wrote to inform the Mother General that any sister desiring to give herself to the foreign missions to work with the Salesians and in their spirit for the

salvation of souls, especially those of girls, should ask in writing and he would review their applications and make a selection. Many applied. Six were chosen¹⁵ and went to Rome with the third Salesian missionary expedition [1877] to receive the Pope's blessing. They then took the same ship with them and sailed to Villa Colón to open a house there. A second group of ten sisters, led by Sister Magdalene Martini, the first sister to be called "Mother Provincial," sailed from Genoa on December 30, 1878. Two of this second group stopped at Villa Colón, while the others went on to Buenos Aires and opened a house at Almagro.

In September 1878, before the motherhouse was relocated to Nizza Monferrato, other sisters left Mornese, assigned to the new house at Chieri. The large building they were going to use had belonged to the Bertinetti family, who had willed it to Don Bosco. As a boy he had often gone there and had also taken his examination there for permission to don the clerical habit. In that city the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians opened a girls' festive oratory, and this fulfilled a prediction of St. Joseph Cottolengo, namely, that one day that house would be turned into a convent.¹⁶

When the time came to leave Mornese, there was no general exodus. The first group of five arrived at Nizza on September 16, 1878, and were joyously welcomed by the local clergy and by Don Bosco's benefactors. While setting up the residence for their sisters, the Daughters also got busy attracting girls to catechism classes and games.

After a thorough cleanup, the church was blessed on October 27 [1878]. The ceremony took place without any pomp, for reasons which Don Bosco gave in a letter to Countess Mary Balbo, daughter of Countess Corsi, on October 22: "This Sunday," he wrote, "either personally or through Father Cagliero, Father Lazzero and others, I'll explain why we do not dare make a fuss about the celebration. Chiefly, the reason is that we have no suitable place to receive distinguished guests or ecclesiastics. Then, too, our funds are low and we cannot afford further expenses. I

¹⁵As a tribute to them, we list the names of these pioneer sisters: Sister Angela Vallese of Lu, *Superior*; Sister Joan Borgna of Buenos Aires, Sister Angela Cassulo of Castelletto d'Orba, Sister Angela De Negri of Mornese, Sister Theresa Gedda of Pecco (Turin), and Sister Tessie Mazzarello Baroni of Mornese. [Author]

¹⁶This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

know that our good Mamma has helped us and will continue to do so, but her loving sons must not abuse her goodness.”¹⁷

Four days after the church’s blessing, a group of girls arrived from Mornese; some were paying resident students at the sisters’ school, others were pupils who needed to attend school on a regular basis. The rest of the girls remained at Mornese where they were called “The Little Daughters.” Later, both Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and postulants moved to Nizza in small groups. When only a few were finally left at Mornese, Don Bosco asked Mother General to leave also and formally establish the motherhouse at Nizza. “By relocating their motherhouse in Nizza,” Father Cerruti stated in a speech, “the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians grafted fresh branches onto a glorious ancient institution and restored, on a broader scale and in more timely form, the traditions of a splendid past which has been temporarily suspended.”¹⁸

¹⁷This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

¹⁸*Ricordo delle feste giubilari*, Nizza Monferrato, Tipografia Croce, 1904, p. 14. [Author]

CHAPTER 8

Count Charles Cays

WE shall continue to call the subject of this chapter Count Cays, for so was he always known to Don Bosco and his contemporaries, as well as to the older Salesians. Adjusting perfectly to the utterly youthful family environment of the Oratory, this elderly nobleman became the walking praise of Don Bosco and of his works.

Charles Cays, count of Giletta and Caselette, was born [in Turin on November 24, 1813] of a very ancient noble family of Nice. A graduate of the prestigious Jesuit Carmine Lyceum, he obtained his law degree at the University of Turin. He married in 1837 and had a son, but his wife passed away in 1845; from then on he made himself a father to the poor, taking special delight in teaching catechism to homeless youngsters at the festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and the Guardian Angel. He was one of several city noblemen who were won over to Don Bosco's cause and worked under his direction in the physical and spiritual care of the children of the working class. Like his parents and grandparents, he enjoyed the favor of the royal family who spent three months during the cholera epidemic of 1854 in his castle at Caselette, a noted health spot at the foot of the Alps. From 1857 to 1860 he also served in the sixth legislative session of the sub-Alpine parliament and there eloquently championed sound principles and Church rights. As politics became increasingly anti-Catholic, he retired to private life and devoted his time solely to charitable and religious works. He visited the sick at home and in hospitals, assisted derelicts, taught youngsters catechism, established and directed chapters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Turin and its suburbs, promoted good publications and was

always foremost when good could be done or evil prevented. All this he did as a widower within his own family. Not that it spared him police harassment, for in 1862, like Don Bosco¹ and other prominent citizens, he was subjected to an embarrassing house search which only proved how dedicated this saintly man was to works of charity. Still, he felt it his duty to defend family honor by writing and publishing an account of this indignity. It is a document that brings to light his noble, sterling character.²

About 1877, a deep-seated desire for religious life asserted itself anew. We believe that Don Bosco was referring to Count Cays when he wrote in a memo of April 4, 1877: "I have prayed much for the gentleman of our acquaintance, and the thought which persists in my mind is that he would do a lot of good as a priest. You know him better than I. What do you think?" The count's vague aspirations finally focused on the Salesian Congregation, and so the following month he opened his heart to Don Bosco, in whom he had always placed unlimited trust. Their conversation was published in Count Cays' obituary³ and must be held as substantially authentic, for there is no doubt that it was known and edited by Don Bosco, who never sent his Salesians annual biographical material on their deceased confreres without first reading and when necessary correcting it. [Substantially, the conversation went along these lines:]

"This is all very well, Count, but are you aware of what it means to become a religious? One has to give up wealth, titles, conveniences and all worldly matters."

"I have thought about it and its demands for a long time," the count answered. "Besides, I have experienced that riches, honors and worldly delights cannot satisfy my heart's yearnings nor will they at the hour of death."

"But you are accustomed to many comforts at home, and you won't have them in a religious house. You will not want for essential things, but I must tell you very frankly that you will miss very many things which you now enjoy in the way of food, clothing, rest, and so on."

¹See Vol. VI, pp. 316-329, 331f. [Editor]

²*Una perquisizione, ossia le Franchigie costituzionali sotto il Ministero Ricasoli* [A House Search, or Constitutional Rights under the Ricasoli Ministry of the Interior] by Count Charles Cays of Giletta and Caselette. Torino, Speirani, 1862. [Author]

³*Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882* [Biographies of Deceased Salesians in 1882], pp. 11-12, Tipografia Salesiana, Sempierdarena. [Author]

“True, but I also know that a lot of people have done without so many creature comforts and pleasures, and still do. With God’s help, I hope to do the same.”

“But you are master of your own home, while in a religious community you will have to obey like a simple servant. Have you thought of that?”

“Yes, and I am convinced that when my life’s course is over I shall find more comfort in having obeyed than in having given orders.”

“Excuse me if I raise another objection, Count. You are no longer a young man, and I wonder if you could physically hold up under our rules.”

“True,” the count replied with some emotion after a moment’s reflection. “I am not young. I am deeply grieved to offer God only the leftovers of my life. Still I am cheered by the realization that I am not yet decrepit or senile. I am sixty-four but am in excellent health, and so I can reasonably believe that I shall be able to adapt to community life. At least I don’t think it unwise to make a try.”

Seeing the count’s firm determination and knowing his virtue, Don Bosco might have summarily seconded his holy intentions and promised to accept him as a Salesian, but he did not want to give even the semblance of rushing matters. Therefore, as the novena to Mary, Help of Christians was about to start, he suggested that Count Cays make the novena and spend a few days in reflection and prayer for God’s enlightenment.

Don Bosco was not in principle opposed to admitting adults or noblemen into the Congregation, but in those early years he was very much concerned that its membership be homogeneous, and the thought that eventually they might be admitted made him rather uneasy. Apropos of this, Father Barberis’ chronicle, under the dateline of May 17, 1876, has recorded a very important conversation he had with Don Bosco.

All other congregations—Don Bosco remarked—were bolstered at their start by highly educated and talented individuals who joined and assisted their founder, thus becoming co-founders. Not so with us. Our first Salesians were all pupils of mine. This has put a weighty, relentless burden on me for some thirty years, but it is a blessing because, all being formed by me, they were imbued with my principles and methods. In other congregations, the founder’s assistants eventually and unavoidably brought in some differences which ultimately proved fatal to their congregation. Being adults and set in their ways, they could not normally be expected to shed the old Adam completely. Thus far no aristocrats or

men of vast wealth or scholars have entered our Congregation, so that everything we have learned and accomplished has been of our own doing. One who has not given serious thought to the nature of a congregation or religious order cannot appreciate the importance of this viewpoint, but let one investigate the causes of the growth and decline of religious orders or the source of the splits which plagued so many of them, and he will find that it happened because there was no homogeneity from the very start.

It would seem that Divine Providence had prepared an extraordinary happening as a revelation of God's will for the very moment Count Cays was to make a decision. His spiritual retreat was over, and the novena to honor Mary, Help of Christians was nearing its end. As agreed, he was to open his heart to Don Bosco on the eve of the feast. Some doubts still lingered in his mind. That morning Don Bosco's waiting room was crowded. Count Cays sat, waiting his turn, when a woman who lived in the city walked in, half dragging and half carrying her eleven-year-old daughter, Josephine Longhi. The child had been terribly frightened by threats made to her, and she had gone into convulsions, losing her speech and the use of her right hand which had become paralyzed. Neither treatment nor prayer had brought about any improvement. The girl had not uttered a single word for a whole month and was now beginning to show signs of mental derangement. Hearing of the wonders wrought by Mary, Help of Christians through Don Bosco, Josephine's mother brought her to receive his blessing. After waiting for nearly an hour, the poor woman wiped the perspiration from her daughter's face and, taking her arm, made ready to leave. Father Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, asked her what was wrong. She answered that it was getting late, and considering the line of people ahead of her, it was too hard for her daughter to wait much longer. Some people stood up to see the girl and, realizing her pitiful condition, unanimously agreed to let her go in ahead of them. The one most anxious to obtain this agreement was Count Cays, who followed her with his eyes as she entered Don Bosco's room, saying to himself, *If that girl comes out cured, it will be a proof that Our Lady wants me to become a Salesian, and I shall put aside all doubts and fears.*

While he was mulling over this decision, the girl's mother sat her child down on a sofa in Don Bosco's office and explained her pitiful case, concluding that her only hope now rested on God's mercy and

the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Would Don Bosco give the girl his blessing? He urged the woman to put her trust in the Madonna. Bidding the young invalid to kneel, he blessed her and told her to make the Sign of the Cross. She started to do so with her left hand, but he stopped her.

“Use your right hand!” he said.

“She cannot,” her mother objected.

“Let her try. Come now, use your right hand!” The girl quickly obeyed.

“Good,” Don Bosco said. “You did that well, but you did not say the words. Do it over and repeat with me: ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’”

Her tongue was loosened. She who had been speechless for a month could now talk. Ecstatic with joy, she exclaimed, “Oh, Mamma, the Madonna has cured me.” With a shriek the mother burst into tears.

But would the girl now be able to stand and walk too? Pacing up and down the room with confidence, she dispelled all doubts and, unable to contain her joy, opened the door. With eloquence beyond her years, she told the bystanders all that had happened. All were deeply moved. Mother and daughter then went to the church to thank Mary, Help of Christians.

Count Cays had no further doubts about his vocation. When his turn came to see Don Bosco, he told him of the proof he had asked of God and its fulfillment. “If you will take me, I want to be a Salesian.”

“You are welcome,” Don Bosco replied.

“When can I come?”

“Whenever you wish.”

“I’d like to come tomorrow, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians and my fortieth wedding anniversary, but since I must still conclude some business, I will come on the 26th, if it’s all right with you.”

“I have no objection. The 26th is the feast of St. Philip Neri. I hope that he who was so devoted to the Madonna will obtain for you the grace of perseverance.”

Count Cays kept his word. In the interests of truth, we must admit that he fought a formidable battle during the first twenty-four hours, particularly through the night. The change in lifestyle seemed so impossible that he feared he could not long endure it.

Would he not be wise to pull back with dignity then and there, rather than be forced to leave later on to the shock of many who knew him and to the hurt of the Salesian Congregation? Fortunately he kept no secrets from Don Bosco and the next day opened his heart to him. Aware of the count's bitter trial, Don Bosco, who had previously restrained him, now urged him to stand firm in his decision. Buoyed up by Don Bosco's words about initial difficulties and the valid signs of his vocation, the count replied, "You are right. I did not see it that way. I let myself be upset without reason."

"Let us do this," Don Bosco advised. "Be more concerned about God's unfailing help than your difficulties. Try our life for a couple of weeks. In the meantime, we will pray. If the Lord does not wish you to continue in this life, I hope that He will let you know in one way or another."

His misgivings allayed, the count was assailed by a doubt: Was the girl's cure permanent or momentary? One morning, while passing through the sacristy into the Church, he saw her. She had come with her parents to make an offering. She was walking with full confidence, her cheeks aglow. She was in perfect health. Such an encounter was surely the deed of Providence.

From then on Count Cay's determination was never again to be shaken. His innate dignity, his integrated, strong and well-tested character, and his enlightened faith, practiced for so many years in such manly fashion, made him a Salesian of unbreakable mettle. Without ado he quickly gave up his custom of sleeping late and followed the community timetable. His bedroom was a plain, homey attic apartment, with a dormer providing the sunlight and ventilation, the kind of room which Turin called the shelter of the poor. Today [1932] these attic rooms are occupied by the Oratory domestics. Since it had no heating in winter, Count Cays would wrap himself in a green woolen army blanket taken from his bed to keep warm through the day. He ate the food served to the community, forgetting his former home comforts, and was satisfied with the humble fare so simply prepared. At times his efforts to swallow the meal being served were noticed by his superiors, and they sought to have something better prepared for him, but he rejected all special treatment. In addition, since the novices had a separate dining room, he left Don Bosco's company, dear as it was

to him, after a day or so to join his fellow novices. Friends who knew of his poor health could not understand his endurance. Baron Charles Bianco of Barbania used to say that he thought it a miracle. "His whole life," Father Vespignani wrote,⁴ "was spent in study, prayer, and friendly talk with his confreres, with no mention ever of his noble lineage or worldly wealth."

He was vested with the clerical garb by Don Bosco at Lanzo on September 18, 1877, but he had already begun his theology studies three months before⁵ under Father Vespignani, who, in spite of his having but recently become a Salesian, was assigned that task by Father Rua in appreciation of his well-rounded knowledge of theology. Count Cays himself, of course, was already well read in religious topics, since he had strongly concentrated on apologetics so as to discharge with honor his duties as a Catholic representative in the anticlerical sub-Alpine parliament. He wrote fluent Latin prose. That same year, in fact, on Don Bosco's name day he had presented him with a precious crucifix, an heirloom of Blessed Cafasso,⁶ and had accompanied the gift with an original epigram in Latin couplets. So earnestly did he apply himself to the study of theology that without any hesitation he would recite his lessons in Latin. His preciseness for explanations kept his teacher constantly alert and convinced him of his pupil's vast reading in Holy Scripture. It was no surprise that Father Rua, after careful scrutiny, presented him to Don Bosco for holy orders soon after his perpetual profession and even before the end of 1877.

Don Bosco had decided to let him take his vows on the feast of the Immaculate Conception by shortening his novitiate to the bare minimum; this would enable him to receive tonsure and minor orders by Christmas. Pius IX, aware of Don Bosco's great prudence, had generously given him free rein in the interior governance of the Congregation—a permission which he quietly availed himself of but never appealed to in self-defense when controversies occasionally arose. His council members, of course,

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 87. [Author]

⁵On September 9 [1877] Don Bosco wrote to Father Margotti [editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*]: "Yesterday Count Cays donned the clerical habit here in Lanzo. I hope to make a model Salesian of him. Every week he studies a new theological treatise in its entirety." [Author]

⁶Now St. Joseph Cafasso. He was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1947. For further information see the Indexes of preceding volumes. [Editor]

knew of it, and naturally such authorization would end with Pius IX's death.

On November 14, forty days in advance, as Archbishop Gastaldi had ruled, Father Rua wrote to the archbishop and requested that he graciously ordain Count Cays and two other candidates on Ember Saturday, December 22, adding the information that the count would pronounce his vows on December 8. Ignoring Father Rua, the archbishop replied⁷ directly to the count as follows:

I shall admit you to tonsure and minor orders on the given date, provided that you deposit the required ecclesiastical patrimony with this chancery. I cannot consider your vows valid if made before the period prescribed by the Salesian constitutions expires, unless you have been granted permission by a papal rescript or at least a letter from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. This letter must be submitted for my inspection. Having known you and your qualifications since 1829, I am not requesting the testimonial letters prescribed by the papal decree of January 25, 1848. I consider this requirement fulfilled. In all conscience, however, I cannot act otherwise in respect to holy orders than in the way stated above.

Once this obstacle had been removed as requested, the archbishop informed Count Cays on November 23 that he would ordain him and the other two Salesians. Then, in an abrupt about-face, he wrote again on the following day to state that he would not ordain the two clerics. Regardless, both clerics reported at the chancery on December 6 to inquire if they would be allowed to take the required examination. The archbishop, who then was convinced that Don Bosco was behind a certain anonymous letter which we shall mention later, gave them a negative reply through a chancery official. When Count Cays reported to the chancery that same day, he was told that he would be admitted alone. In chagrin and surprise the count repeatedly declared that he was a Salesian like the other two and intended to remain so to his death. Feeling that this was not enough, he took the matter up with Don Bosco and then wrote the following letter:

⁷Letter of November 14, 1877. [Author]

December 7, 1877

Your Excellency:

Three Salesians petitioned Your Excellency for admission to orders: two for the sub-diaconate, and I for minor orders. However, only I received a favorable reply. I am most grateful to Your Excellency, but I also feel that I must fulfill another duty, painful as it is. Certainly it is not my concern to inquire into your reasons for such contrasting treatment, but I cannot help thinking of the very striking difference that exists between me and the other two ordinands. The latter are perpetually professed members of the Salesian Congregation whereas I am not. If this was the determining factor in your decision, I feel that I must conscientiously inform Your Excellency that tomorrow, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, I too shall be privileged to take my vows as a Salesian. Consequently, on the day of my ordination [December 22] I shall not only be a Salesian in heart and soul, but also in fact. Since this puts me on the same level as the other two ordinands, how can I alone present myself for ordination if you have cause not to ordain the other two Salesians at this time?

Although it is my most earnest desire not to delay achieving one of my most cherished yearnings, I cannot overlook the fact that this yearning was never distinct from my desire to become a member of the Salesian Congregation, to which I have consecrated myself.

If even a shadow of doubt exists that this desire of mine will always be my deepest aspiration in the time to come, I must, despite myself, forego the honor of presenting myself for the forthcoming ordinations and leave the fulfillment of this desire of mine in the hands of Our Lord and the Most Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians.

As a member of this religious Congregation, I can do no less than share my confreres' lot, and though this step pains me greatly, I still prefer it to one which might make me seem ungrateful toward this loving Mother and disdainful of my confreres.

I trust that Your Excellency will not fault this letter, for it is dictated by my desire to open my heart completely to you as my ecclesiastical superior, for whom I have always had and always shall have sincerest, loving respect and deepest veneration.

Reverently kissing your ring, I am honored to remain,

Yours devotedly,
Charles Cays

Since this incident had aroused much talk in Turin, and since the count's carefully-worded letter and high position merited con-

sideration, Archbishop Gastaldi, lest his decision stir up accusations of favoritism, immediately sent word that all three candidates would be admitted to examinations. They did very well, and all three were ordained by the archbishop.

At six in the evening of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Salesians, novices, students and artisans who wished to join the Salesian Congregation gathered in the Church of St. Francis de Sales for the triennial profession of three young clerics—Galavotti, Bielli and Caligaris—and of the coadjutor brother Lisa; especially they came for the perpetual profession of Count Cays, who had financially helped Don Bosco to build that church in 1852 and had been “prior”⁸ of the feast of St. Aloysius. This occasion offered Don Bosco the opportunity of speaking on the wondrous ways of Divine Providence.

I am delighted to be with you and to have the chance of speaking to you on this feast of Mary Immaculate. We have just witnessed, among other things done in Her honor, several religious professions, the most pleasing gifts one can offer to God and His Most Holy Mother. This too fills me with joy. The renunciation of your wills and your comforts, which a few of you have made for love of Mary and Her Divine Son, has greatly enriched this festal celebration. On my own part, even humanly speaking, I can do no less than congratulate those who have just taken their vows.

One among them, by whom I have been especially moved, is Count Cays. While this church was being built, he had already become a brother to us, taking an interest in our work, helping us in our time of need, and accepting the chairmanships of our festivities. Who would then have thought that someday Count Cays would take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in this very church, forsaking wealth and all worldly comforts in order to embrace an austere life of self-denial and to become a Salesian? Had anyone suggested this, he would have been thought to be out of his mind. Neither he nor I could have then dreamed such a thing, and yet what no one would have imagined did come to pass, thanks to Divine Providence. In this very church, which he helped build and in which he had consecrated himself to Our Lord by vow, renouncing all worldly ambition and comfort, he will lead many youngsters to heaven. Divine Providence wondrously brought this about, and I was glad to cooperate.

⁸Originally the “prior” was an officer of the St. Aloysius Sodality. (*See* Vol. III, p. 459) Later on, this title was bestowed on any benefactor who agreed to be honorary chariman of a certain celebration. He usually responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

We must truly admit that the Lord's ways are unfathomable until He chooses to show His will. Fortunate indeed are all—young or old, rich or poor—who are chosen by God to fulfill His adorable will for His greater glory and their own spiritual growth. Fortunate are those who, as soon as they see His will, immediately embrace it and strive to follow it. Their eternal salvation is assured.

Let me now address myself to all of you, my dear sons. It is the first time, and it may be the last, during this school year for me to have the chance to talk to you all together. During the profession service, a thought came to me. The catechism tells us that God created us to know Him, to love Him and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him forever in heaven. How many lofty thoughts there are in these few words! How much food for meditation for both learned and ignorant, rich and poor, fortunate and unfortunate, indeed for everyone! We are all called upon to know, love and serve God, but many things keep us from loving and serving Him as we should: riches, passions, the devil. Really, very few in the world lead a truly Christian and holy life. Yet, God makes it very clear that He wants all of us to become saints. "It is God's will that you grow in holiness," writes St. Paul [1 Thess. 4, 3]. God gives us all we need to reach this goal. It is up to us to cooperate.

Is there one powerful, effective means to eliminate obstacles? Instead of facing a hundred, can we cut them down to ninety, sixty or even ten? Yes, if we do what Our Lord suggests: "Go, sell your possessions . . . and follow Me" [Mt. 19, 21]. Become a religious! With a single blow, through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, we can strike down our three enemies.

How sharp is the contrast between the peace of mind enjoyed by those who consecrate themselves to God and the inner turmoil tormenting those who live in the world. The latter experience two thoughts struggling for prominence in their minds, two loves striving to take over their hearts. They think that they can be saved while enjoying the puny pleasures of this world, and yet it is obvious that one can neither serve nor follow two masters. Loving one inescapably means hating the other; serving one means rejecting the other. The devil seeks to draw us with every possible enticement. "Let us enjoy things that are real. . . let us crown ourselves with roses before they wither," he tells them [Wis. 2, 6, 8]. Our Lord, instead says: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" [Dt. 6, 5]. He seeks us totally for Himself. But no one can serve God and at the same time give himself to this world's delights, that is, serve the devil. How attached men are to their wealth! Yet it is written: "You cannot serve God and mammon" [Mt. 6, 24]. Those who live in the world are caught between

these two powers. We must serve God, but our corrupt nature inclines us toward vanity and concupiscence, and these we must utterly reject to avoid eternal damnation. If we yield to the world and to the devil, our conscience will torment us and rob us of our peace. We have no alternative but to fight back undauntedly. This is the war which we must wage in our lifetime on several fronts, beset as we are on all sides by burning passion, vanity, pride, jealousy, greed and lure of wealth. These are the thorns of which Our Divine Master spoke [cf. Mt. 13, 22]. To earn them and hold on to them one must go through turmoil and anxiety.

Other difficulties are caused by being overly attached to parents, relatives and friends, to our spiritual detriment because we forget God and do not give Him first place in our lives. These interior conflicts never cease, day or night. To help us in these continual bitter struggles and to guard us from the devil's tricks and vexations, the Lord offers us a weapon which will strengthen us and weaken our enemy. If you want to ward off strife, He tells us, give up worldly comforts, sell what you have, follow Me, and you will be rewarded a hundredfold in this life and enjoy everlasting happiness in the next. This is what He told a Jewish young man who asked Him how he could reach perfection. "If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor. You will then have a treasure in heaven. Afterward come back and follow Me" [Mt. 19, 20-21]. In short, one has to give up whatever leads to conflict, break off all relations with the enemies of his soul, and side with Our Divine Savior by becoming a religious—the way of life that will assure us of peace and security. Jesus Christ also told His apostles that if they wished to abandon their trade and become fishers of men, they should give up their possessions and follow Him. They had but little, yet Jesus wanted them to abandon even that little. Anyone who honestly wants to belong to the Lord must reject earthly things. That is the golden rule given us by Our Divine Savior to enable us to attain our salvation.

But cannot one be saved while living in the world? Yes, but I must point out that he will have to overcome many difficulties which would not exist were he to leave the world and consecrate himself fully to God.

Some may object that even the world has its saints, genuine Christians who observe God's laws as excellently as religious. True, but they still have to face perils and difficulties in order to do a little good. For instance, most of them find it quite hard to have time for prayer, whereas in a religious congregation it is very easy to nourish one's soul spiritually because such practices are mandatory and time is set aside for their observance. How many Christians in the world have time for meditation? Very few. And who can meditate with greater ease than a religious? In our Congregation fortunately, we have time for daily mental prayer. If we

want to meditate in a group, we rise at five in the morning and go to church. That is all! It is hardly possible in the world. And as for private meditation, one in the world cannot set a definite time because of visits and dinner invitations which must be repaid in kind, other social and financial obligations, household cares, chores and so on. As for early rising, we know that people of the world get up at seven, eight, or even ten. Not so long ago I called on a fine gentleman shortly after ten and was told that he was still in bed. "What?" I exclaimed. "He isn't up yet? He must have gone to bed very late."

"Yes, indeed. He usually dines at four, relaxes for a while and then goes to the theatre or, occasionally, to a dance, and does not return till midnight."

I thought to myself: *If we led such a life, when would we have time for meditation? We would have to do without it.* If we take a close look at how worldly people spend their day, we will see that daily they face greater difficulties in doing good. Sometimes they really do mean to go to Mass or visit the Blessed Sacrament, but they lack either time or opportunity. So too with other devotional practices. In short, the world is not the best place to grow in piety. Rather, it makes for extreme difficulty in keeping God's commandments and it is a virtual impossibility to practice the evangelical counsels. It is already a great achievement if one can keep oneself in God's grace and not slip into the snares set by the devil and the flesh.

Hence, a good Christian who really wants to play it safe has only one course open to him: to flee these perils and join a religious congregation. There he will live as in a fortress, fully protected from his enemies. But God does not grant the singular gift of a religious vocation to everyone. Fortunate are the chosen ones, as we are! That God has gathered us all here is a clear sign that He wants us to serve Him. I assure you that you will disarm your spiritual enemy by persevering in your vocation and observing the rules. Furthermore, you will surely and safely pursue the road to heaven, and, after being rewarded a hundredfold in this world, as Our Savior promised, you will gain life eternal.

If people living in the world knew the peace and joy one enjoys in religious life, they would all give up their pastimes, pleasures and riches and scale the walls of religious orders so as to find the happiness sought in vain elsewhere. We who experience this should make the best of our good fortune. This is the great gift which God gives us when He calls us to religious life. A treasure is ours for the taking. I say this to assure you of your call from God. Rise to the occasion by meeting His expectations and you will unfailingly experience the bliss of religious life.

You might wonder: *Can Don Bosco really assure us that we have been called to this life?* I do not want to dwell in detail on the signs of a divine

call. But I believe that I can answer affirmatively. The very fact that we are all together here is a sign of God's will. I repeat: observe the rules and banish doubt.

But do not fool yourselves into thinking that just because you belong to a religious congregation you can take your ease and be certain of your salvation notwithstanding your attachment to earthly things, in your heart at least. If any of you should seek to serve two masters he had better leave the Congregation, for he will find no peace here. Whoever would take religious vows and expect nothing but enjoyment would be a fool. Equally foolish would be the religious to whom St. Bernard's words could be applied: "They are content to be poor provided they want for nothing." If such a one is among us, let him discard such a notion because it is an awful blunder. The religious life is not a bed of roses! Just the opposite—it is thorns! But who among us would want a crown of roses while Jesus is crowned with thorns? Occasionally, humility, obedience, mortification and work have their thorns, but who does not know that the road to heaven is narrow and thorny? However, I must add that one is not to think that religious life is all thorns. At first it's thorns, but, later, it's roses. True, it demands constant work, self-sacrifice and self-denial, but these hardships bring greater blessings and supreme contentment as we realize that we are serving so generous and so good a master. True, our reward is in heaven, as St. Paul says, but even here on earth a sacrifice for God is repaid a hundredfold. We must offer Him everything we do, even the reward of our labors. Let it all be for His glory! When we are weary, the Lord will comfort us in rest, and our confreres will hearten us. When the devil tempts us, we shall not be carried away by his blandishments, but shall defend ourselves with powerful weapons which the Lord Himself will provide to us.

As for the hundredfold reward promised by Our Lord to religious in this life, we shall find it mostly in the peace, trust and solace in our last moments. God keeps His word; His promise of eternal life surpasses everything.

All of us, my Salesians, will reach it if we treasure the gift of our vocation, observe our rules and always keep ourselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is so willing to help us.

The religious profession of Count Cays before the completion of his novitiate period broke out into a sad squabble the following year. We will touch only on the highlights. Archbishop Gastaldi reported to the Holy See that Count Cays had been admitted to perpetual vows before completing his novitiate. Naturally, the new prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,

Cardinal Ferrieri, sought an explanation from Don Bosco. He replied [on June 18, 1878], citing the canonical reasons which he thought fully justified his action, sustaining them by the authority of a noted and eminently respected canonist [Marie-Dominique Bouix].⁹ Don Bosco closed his letter as follows:

Turin, June 18, 1878

Your Eminence:

. . . This case is exceptional because it concerns a man highly renowned for piety, talent and knowledge. His life has been long and active in God's service. He holds degrees in both civil and canon law and is well read in dogmatic and moral theology. As a member of the Sardinian Parliament, he gave eloquent proof of being a scholar and a courageous Christian with his friend, Count Solaro della Margherita. He was also president of the Turin chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Though noble by birth and wealthy, at the mature age of sixty-five he renounced life's comforts and experienced religious life for several months before starting his novitiate in preparation for his formal admission in the Salesian motherhouse.

All these credentials preclude any doubt of his excellent qualifications, his mature judgment, his firm resolve, and the good he is capable of doing for our Congregation and for the Church. In fact, the reason for the aforesaid dispensation was not only to reward a man for such a singular example of virtue and holy resolve, but also to enable him to meet as soon as possible the many needs which Divine Providence has called upon our young Congregation to satisfy. As proof of all this, I cite the authority of Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin who, in a letter addressed to the novice, saw fit to give him a sign of his esteem by personally dispensing him from submitting requisite testimonial letters for licit admission to tonsure and minor orders.

I fully trust that I have justified my course of action. However, I dutifully declare that I am always ready to observe any law or prescriptions which the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars may enjoin for my guidance and the proper government of the Salesian Congregation.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

⁹Marie-Dominique Bouix (1808-1870), author of many books on canon law, joined the Society of Jesus in 1825, but for health reasons had to leave it in 1842 and was incardinated in the archdiocese of Paris. In 1870 the bishop of Montaubon asked him to serve as his theologian at the Vatican Ecumenical Council. [Editor]

These explanations were not received favorably. The cardinal replied on June 25, 1878, stating that in matters of vows the Salesian Constitutions had to be observed. His letter was forwarded officially to Don Bosco on July 7 by Father Constantine Leonori, who had now been for some time Don Bosco's advocate with the Sacred Roman Congregations.¹⁰

However, Don Bosco's letter of June 18 had not said everything. When objections to the validity of the imminent religious profession of Count Cays were first raised in Turin in November 1877, Don Bosco had consulted one of the curia cardinals—most probably Cardinal Berardi, Don Bosco's confidential counselor in the most important matters—and asked him to mention this question to the Holy Father. The Pope had no objection to what Don Bosco had seen fit to do, but could do nothing more. On several occasions we have reminded the reader that Pius IX, greatly trusting Don Bosco's prudence, had orally granted to him very ample faculties for the internal running of the Salesian Congregation. Prudently indeed did Don Bosco avail himself of this sovereign generosity, and even more prudently did he speak of it. After very humbly clarifying his reasons for his action, he requested a validation.

July 17, 1878

Your Eminence:

On the 8th of this month, I received your esteemed letter inviting me to request the validation of Count Cays' religious profession which he made before the end of his novitiate year or, as our constitutions put it, before his second trial period expired.

Not as a rebuttal, but only as a favor, in homage to the Holy See and for the good name of the Salesian Congregation of which I am the superior, I simply ask to be allowed to restate the reasons which prompted me to allow this exemption, as I explained at greater length in my previous letter.

1. Esteemed canonists, such as Bouix and Ferraris, state that the Tridentine decree concerning a full year of novitiate applies only to religious orders which have solemn vows, but not to religious

¹⁰We do not know exactly the date and the reasons which prompted Don Bosco to relinquish the services of Attorney Menghini and turn to Attorney Leonori. Doubtless, some very delicate motives must have induced him to do so. As we have already seen, Menghini handled also the legal matters of Archbishop Gastaldi; unavoidably, this could have caused a conflict of interest to both the lawyer and his two clients. There is no further mention of him in Don Bosco's correspondence. [Author]

congregations with simple vows, whose superiors may therefore for grave reasons dispense novices from part of that trial period.

2. Despite this, anxious to be sure of my course of action, I asked an eminent cardinal to mention this matter to the Holy Father. The cardinal's reply was that I could quite tranquilly grant the exemption, basing myself on the competence of those authors and the authoritative word of His Holiness.

Since this was an isolated case restricted to domestic matters of the Salesian Congregation, I did not apply for a rescript.

Having explained my reasons for my action, I now humbly beg pardon for my involuntary error and request the necessary validation.

Let me point out that, Count Cays' prescribed period of novitiate having expired some months ago, I will have him repeat the formula of religious profession and observe any additional formality prescribed by Your Eminence.

I am deeply honored to remain,

Very humbly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

It would certainly have been wise for Don Bosco to protect himself with a papal rescript to produce when needed, but he had not considered it necessary, both because Count Cays had deposited with the Turin chancery the patrimony needed for holy orders and was actually receiving them as planned, and also because he hardly thought that the case would wind up in a tribunal of the Holy See. Hence Pius IX's death deprived him of a most valid defense.

On July 29 [1878], Cardinal Ferrieri replied that he need only ask that Count Cays' novitiate and profession be validated and that the letter send a written statement to declare that he too was petitioning for it.

To tell Count Cays then and there of this legal hassle would only have upset him and made him think that his superiors had misconstrued Church law. This would have wrecked the peace of mind he needed to prepare for his forthcoming priestly ordination. We would add that one reason for advancing his religious profession had been the need to free him from the pain of an inner turmoil, and this in fact had ceased. Weighing these circumstances, Don Bosco thought it best to let the matter ride and await a propitious moment, all the more so because Cardinal Ferrieri had

set no date for carrying out his instructions. Then came summer and with it a slowdown in the activities of the Holy See's congregations. Count Cays was thus able to say his first Mass peacefully and even accompany Father Rua to Paris to handle some important business for the Salesian Congregation, to be described later. On his return he was in a proper frame of mind to receive the unexpected news with calm. When told what he was to do, fully grasping the nature and meaning of the situation, he petitioned Pope Leo XIII as follows:

Father Charles Cays, a Salesian in Turin, respectfully informs Your Holiness that he has been notified of the irregularity of his religious profession because of non-conformity to the prescriptions of the aforesaid Salesian Congregation's constitutions. He therefore humbly implores your kind validation, declaring his steadfast intention to remain in the Salesian Congregation and his readiness to renew his perpetual religious profession.

On December 12, Attorney Leonori sent a rescript¹¹ enjoining Count Cays to spend a full month in the novitiate in the care of the novice master, and then to renew his perpetual vows in keeping with the constitutions. With wondrous simplicity the good religious once more ate his meals with the novices, sharing their life, and then privately renewed his perpetual profession to Don Bosco. And thus the misunderstanding came to an end.

As we said before, none of this kept Count Cays from receiving the sub-diaconate from Bishop Salvai of Alessandria on April 15, 1878, and the diaconate from Archbishop Gastaldi on June 15. Finally, on September 20, the archbishop ordained him a priest in the cathedral, in the presence of the nobility, his relatives, friends and acquaintances and a huge throng. The newly ordained priest could have solemnly celebrated his first Mass in Turin, but this would only have unduly interfered with his piety. Hence, without fanfare of any kind, he went with his son to Sampierdarena and there celebrated High Mass in the church of St. Vincent's Hospice. Aglow with fervor, he made an unforgettable slip. Instead of

¹¹In the letter accompanying the rescript, Attorney Leonori wrote: "I shall call on Cardinal Oreglia tomorrow and shall tell him everything." This makes us reasonably assume that Cardinal Oreglia was of the same opinion as Don Bosco. [Author]

imparting the final blessing in the usual way, he intoned it in a loud clear voice as a bishop does.

Don Bosco, who was at Sampierdarena to preside at the annual spiritual retreat, assisted the new priest at the altar. Afterward, while the latter was saying his thanksgiving prayers, he wrote to Attorney [Alphonsus] Fortis in Turin, who was then anxious to follow Count Cays' example and become a Salesian. Don Bosco had known him as a youngster, having been a dear friend of his father. In his letter he addressed him as professor because he had asked him to teach philosophy to the Oratory clerics.

Sampierdarena, September 22, 1878

My dear Professor Alphonsus,

Count Cays has just celebrated his first Mass, and I write you a few lines while he is making his thanksgiving.

The spiritual retreat at Lanzo starts on Wednesday. I shall be waiting for you, even if I have to come and fetch you myself.

I shall kill two birds with one stone if our dear Richard,¹² who not only wants to become good but also hopes to perform miracles—that's my wish too—will come with you.

I hope that Papa is in good health. I hesitate to invite him, but should he come along to Lanzo, we shall all celebrate and he will be in good hands. I pray daily that God will grant him a long, happy life.

May God bless us all. Give my regards to Mamma and to Richard and please pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I shall be back in Turin tomorrow.

Having become a priest, Father Cays for the rest of his life daily prayed for three favors of the Blessed Virgin: that he die with Don Bosco at his side, that he be able to bless the members of his own family so that they might persevere in the faith of their fathers, and that he not have to suffer much in his last hours, for he claimed to have little patience.

Prayerful, humble, obedient, mortified and most charitable, he edified his brother Salesians for only five more years. On October 4,

¹²The younger brother of Alphonsus. [Author]

1882 the Lord summoned him to Himself. He died at the Oratory, assisted by Father Rua, to whom Don Bosco entrusted him during the last two days of his life since he himself was expected to be at San Benigno to close the spiritual retreat. Father Cays generously offered this sacrifice to God. Father Rua, beloved by Don Bosco, worthily represented his spiritual father also in assisting the dying. In fact, the common belief at the Oratory was that Father Rua had a special charism for this gentle ministry.

To the very end, Father Cays' actions and words were a sublime manifestation of faith, hope and charity and a steadfast demonstration of his sincere love of religious life. In his many talks with Father Rua, he often grieved that in his last few months he was unable to observe all the rules, such as rising on time in the morning. He thanked God for having mercifully spared him grave physical pain. The last evening of his life he wholeheartedly blessed his son and daughter-in-law. He died in the early hours of the day marking the centenary of St. Francis of Assisi, as he himself had predicted. Witnessing the peaceful death of Father Cays, Father Rua commented publicly that the joy one experiences in dying without fear more than makes up for the sacrifice of living without worldly pleasures.

CHAPTER 9

The First General Chapter

THE first general chapter of the Salesian Congregation as prescribed by the Holy See was to be held three years after the definitive approval of the constitutions, and thence subsequent chapters were to be convoked every third year. This ruling remained in effect till 1904.

Don Bosco had given a great deal of thought to this first general chapter, but spoke of it only on April 21, 1877. "Since this is our first general chapter," he said to some superiors, "and we must send its proceedings to Rome, I want it to be as solemn as possible. It will give our Congregation a new look. . . . It will be a giant step! How good it makes us feel to see that we are forging ahead year after year."

He was then drawing up a thorough array of topics which he felt had to be studied and voted upon by the assembly. "I want this chapter to make history in our Congregation," he stated, "so that by my death all our affairs will have been settled and organized." Here the chronicler remarks: "It is amazing how Don Bosco, while seemingly overlooking a lot of details and talking sparingly, actually keeps an eye on everything, thinks, and, when the decisive moment comes, has everything ready."

His main concern at that time was to pull his Congregation firmly together and leave no major problems to his successor. Looking upon this general chapter as his last major undertaking, he somewhat laid aside all unrelated matters to dedicate himself wholly to it. "Our main pursuit now," he declared, "must be to live thoroughly by the rule. Up to now we have been content with having things run smoothly, but we are still quite far from living truly by the rule. It is easy to say that we live community life, but

we have a long way to go to achieve it. Our rules are concise and it would often take a lengthy commentary to show how even one word is to be translated into action. Had I had the experience I now possess when I first drafted those rules, I would have made them even more compact, reducing them to as much as one-fifth of their present length, because Rome endlessly scrutinizes every written word before giving an approval; little attention is paid to the rest. The Holy See is interested in the structure of our Congregation; living our life is our responsibility. This is what our general chapter has to concentrate on. Presently, many regulations have still been unobserved and are even unknown. The chapter will have to explain them in detail and prescribe how they are to be practiced.”

Upon completing his outline, Don Bosco had a sufficient number of copies printed, and in July he mailed them to each director to give every confrere a copy. All were asked to study the various topics and send in their comments which would then be collected, classified, and presented to the pertinent committees to be set up by the general chapter. Don Bosco introduced the topics as follows:

Our constitutions, Chapter 6, Article 3, call for a general chapter to be held every three years. It has authority to discuss and propose whatever may benefit the individual confrere and the whole Congregation. Three years ago our Congregation was definitively approved, and so our first general chapter is ready to be called. Directors and prefects of all our houses shall participate unless prevented by distance or some other good reason. Since this is our first general chapter, all confreres must do their very utmost to draw the maximum possible good from it for our community. The chapter will be held at Lanzo before or after the spiritual retreats. It will bring our constitutions down to actual practice. Therefore, all directors and prefects, acting with their respective house chapters, must acquaint themselves with the topics to be discussed in order to contribute additional proposals and comments. Each director shall make the agenda known to the members of this house chapter, give them the opportunity to study it, and urge them to do so.

The prefects were invited as consultors to the chapter so as to make the assembly as solemn as possible. However, since the prefects would have to substitute for the directors, who would be absent from their houses, Don Bosco decided to seek their advice in matters within their competence when they came together for their

spiritual retreat. Later in our narration, we shall list the members of the general chapter.

The chapter's agenda was accompanied by a set of ground rules which, approved and slightly amended, later served as a norm for subsequent general chapters. The outline is very important to us because it was drawn up by Don Bosco himself after several days' serious study. Hence it is worthwhile to glean those items which can help us understand our founder's views on vital problems of religious life, all the more so because today copies of that outline are hard to find. We will give headings and more meaningful passages of all twenty-one paragraphs of this outline.

1. *Community Life*. Several questions arise from this basic principle: "Community life is the bond which strengthens religious institutes, preserving their fervor and fidelity to the rules. Without community life things go awry."

2. *Health and Health Care*. Here again the source of what is said is found in general norms and principles, now our sole concern. "We must carefully guard our health and that of our confreres as a priceless gift of God enabling us to accomplish much good for ourselves and others. When candidates are accepted into the Congregation, care must be taken that they are in good health. References must be well based, and those who vote on the candidate must be well informed. As a general rule they should not vote to admit a candidate who cannot conform to community life and carry out the work proper to our Society. After one's definitive admission, all necessary health care should be given him, such as sufficient sleep, moderate work and regular meals. No work should be done after supper, but everyone should retire right after night prayers.¹ Diligence in one's duties and fair distribution of work according to one's strength, competence, inclinations and talents are important aids to good health."

3. *Studies*. This topic centered on academic and theological studies of the clerical students and their preparation in homiletics, with nothing noteworthy to report.

4. *Students' Curriculum*. Some preliminary recommendations: "Great concern that pupils be never idle, but also never overloaded

¹Supper was usually at 8 in the evening and, after a short recess, all gathered for night prayers at 9:00. [Editor]

with school work. Teachers should reasonably push mediocre pupils, who shall be given extra help in their respective classes." Four additional suggestions "to be borne in mind" for scholastic success are: "exact observance of the schedule; good discipline; reasonably long weekly walks, uninterrupted by stops; few holidays, seasoned with less strenuous studies."

5. *Textbooks.* As a general rule "our textbooks are to be written or edited by our own confreres or by people known for upright life and sound doctrine." He was also concerned that books meant for prizes be carefully selected. "It is preferable," he wrote, "to award good books which may be less liked by the receiver, than those in popular demand which contain harmful principles or teachings."

6. *Salesians' Moral Living.* The basic principle is: "Morality is the foundation and safeguard of religious institutes. That one's moral life be evident here and now is not enough, for it must have been there before one enters our Congregation." Here, then, are Don Bosco's criteria for admitting aspirants and novices. "Before accepting an aspirant, information about his previous moral conduct must be obtained from reliable sources. We may be lenient in regard to intellectual attainments and fees, but relentless in the applicant's moral qualities. Never, but never, is one to be accepted if expelled on moral grounds from a boarding school, seminary or other educational institution. Novices whose moral standing has been questionable during their year of trial must not be admitted to religious profession. Preferably, let a novice be dismissed at the first sign that his morals are not up to standard, as is the custom of other religious congregations." As for professed confreres, Don Bosco again stresses observance of the rules, obedience, practices of piety and not going out without need.

7. *Pupils' Moral Conduct.* Of paramount importance is the example given by the Salesians: "Pupils' morality will improve in proportion to its brilliance in the Salesians. Boys take what they are given and Salesians can never give to others what they do not themselves possess. All should ponder these words well, and directors should center their conferences upon them." Then "observance of the timetable and punctuality in one's duty" will be like "seeds of good morals" among our pupils. Additional sources of spiritual graces and blessings are the Altar Boys' Society,

sodalities, confession and Communion, triduums, novenas, spiritual retreats and church services. Lastly “games,” preferably those calling for “physical skill,” are also effective means; on the contrary, games requiring “physical contact, fondling and kissing” should be banned.

8. *Clothing*. No special rules, but Don Bosco’s spirit is clearly stated thus: “Loving thoughtfulness is needed in carrying out these directives. Superiors should make sure that all are provided with suitable clothing and with whatever is needed to keep out the cold and otherwise mitigate its rigor.”

9. *Thrift in Supplies*. This is prefaced by two opportune remarks. “In our livelihood we depend on Divine Providence which has never yet failed us, and, trustfully, never shall. But we must do our utmost to economize on all unnecessary expenses and use good judgment in buying and selling.”

10. *Thrift in Lighting*. Usual recommendations and remarks.

11. *Thrift in the Kitchen and in the Use of Wood*. One recommendation stands out: “The prefect should daily check out the kitchen to provide what is needed and to keep out unauthorized persons.”

12. *Thrift in Traveling*. Usual observations [on the topic] and additional ones concerning the mail.

13. *Thrift in Maintenance and Building*. Don Bosco remarks: “Elegance and affectation in buildings, furnishings and provisions leave a bad impression on those to whom we usually appeal for charitable donations.”

14. *Respect for Superiors*. Predominant is this admonition: “All in authority must set an example of obedience and respect for their own superiors if they expect to be treated likewise.” Amid routine recommendations there is the repeated exhortation that every Salesian write twice a year to the rector major “touching on health, difficulties doing one’s work and anything else concerning one’s physical and moral well-being.” Such letters and replies “may be read only by the writer [or addressee] or by those whom they allow.”

15. *Provinces*. The general chapter is given three guidelines for compiling a set of rules for provincials: the directors’ monthly written report; withdrawal of money from the houses and budgeting; routine and official provincial visitations. Two concerns

are identified by Don Bosco as specifically pertaining to the "authority" of provincials: "promoting the observance of our rules" and "forestalling possible abuses."

16. *Hospitality, Dinner Invitations.* "Good manners and courtesy to all." Dinner invitations "especially on days of abstinence" may be offered "respectfully," but only "to persons of simple tastes." Other recommendations are usual.

17. *Traditional Devotions.* This concerns "practices of piety not prescribed by our rules." A practical norm is offered: "Every director should keep alive the customs of the motherhouse, bearing them in mind and carrying them out in his own house."

18. *Personal Habits.* Particular existing regulations are pointed out.

19. *Almsgiving.* Main point: "Our constitutions do not allow anyone to retain any amount of money without his superior's permission. Hence, since our daily living is dependent upon Divine Providence, we are in no position to give alms." The practical norm is: "Nevertheless, in view of our social standing at the present day, the director may allow priests to keep some change for alms in cases of need, to avoid having a bad name and to forestall malicious gossip." One final caution follows: "Alms are not to be given in connection with confession, not even in the sacristy, since misinterpretation could lead to problems which every religious must painstakingly avoid."

20. *Novices.* The single main directive is that novices who have not been admitted to religious profession, for serious reasons, at the end of their probationary year are to be dismissed. Don Bosco cites two reasons for such severity: "What a novice has not achieved during his training period, he is not likely to achieve later on, and, even if he did, his would be a momentary, unreliable effort. . . . Remaining in the Congregation would most likely cause ill-feelings and discontent."

21. *Vacations.* In every case Don Bosco shows himself totally averse to vacations at home and with relatives, friends, or pupils. He reiterates his well-known caution: "Experience has taught us that such trips have always proved harmful. Occasionally one may think he has benefited materially, but we have no shred of proof that even one person ever derived spiritual benefit."

Shortly after sending out the outline, notice was given that the

general chapter would convene at Lanzo on the afternoon of September 5. The directors therefore met in Turin on that day and set out together for Lanzo, where they gathered in the school chapel at sunset and Don Bosco intoned the *Veni, Creator*. After the hymn and the reading of Articles 3, 4, and 5 of Chapter 6 of the rules, Don Bosco gave them the following brief address:

We now begin our first general chapter, which I declare officially convened and opened. It is of extreme importance for our Congregation. In a very particular way we are to examine our rules to see what we can do to bring about uniform observance in all our existing houses and in those which Divine Providence will enable us to open in the future. You all have the printed copy of the outline which contains your own comments and the suggestions which individual confreres sent in or will send in to be brought to the chapter's attention. All that remains is that we convene in God's name to deal with such matters as shall be put before us.

Our Divine Savior tells us in the Gospel that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be there among them. Our sessions have no other purpose than God's greater glory and the salvation of souls, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And so we may trust that the Lord will be in our midst and will personally lead our discussions to His greater glory.

At this time we purpose to place this chapter under the special protection of Mary Most Holy, who, as the help of Christians, cherishes nothing more than to aid those who endeavor to love and serve Her Divine Son and who come together for the specific purpose of drawing up practical ways of directing as many persons as possible to strive for the same end. Mary illumines the blind; let us plead that She will graciously enlighten our untutored minds throughout the time of this chapter. St. Francis de Sales, our patron, will also preside over our meetings and will hopefully obtain the help we need from God to make our deliberations in keeping with his spirit.

The one thing we must stress and keep without any reservations is the strictest secrecy concerning all discussions held at these meetings until we reach decisions and at the proper time make them known. These decisions will be printed and sent for approval to the Holy See—our infallible guide in these matters—after which they will be made public.

I earnestly wish that everything be done unhurriedly and conscientiously. We are here for this purpose, so let us put aside all alien thoughts and concentrate seriously on the agenda. If a few days are not enough, we shall stay on as long as we have to. Our goal is to do a thorough job.

Now let us call upon Mary Most Holy's protection by singing the *Ave*

maris stella, which will be followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Then we shall move to the chapter hall and start our sessions.

Immediately after Benediction, they all gathered in the director's office, which served as the chapter hall. We list here the names of the chapter members and their consultants, with qualifications as recorded in the minutes. Certain people in Turin at this time unfortunately kept alive the distasteful notion that the Salesians were just a crew of ignoramuses, good only at making noise. Don Bosco therefore took great pains to list the academic degrees of the chapter members and consultants, among whom were also non-Salesians. The official directory follows:

1. Rev. John Bosco, founder and rector major of the Salesian Congregation; author of many books, especially youth-oriented.
2. Rev. Michael Rua, prefect general, professor of rhetoric.
3. Rev. John Cagliero, catechist general, doctor of theology, renowned conductor and composer, provincial of the Salesian houses of South America.
4. Rev. Charles Ghivarello, financial administrator of the Congregation, instructor and inventor of equipment for the teaching of physics and mechanics.
5. Rev. Celestine Durando, prefect general of studies, professor, author of several literary works.
6. Rev. Joseph Lazzero, councilor of the superior chapter, director of the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.
7. Rev. Anthony Sala, councilor of the superior chapter and administrator of the motherhouse.
8. Rev. John Bonetti, director of the Salesian school at Borgo San Martino, secondary school teacher, author of several literary works.
9. Rev. John Francesia, director of the Salesian school at Varazze, doctor of literature, commentator of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
10. Rev. Francis Cerruti, director of the Salesian school at Alassio, doctor of literature, author of several secondary school textbooks.
11. Rev. John Lemoyne, director of the Salesian school at Lanzo, theology licentiate, author of several books for youth and for adults.
12. Rev. Paul Albera, director of the St. Vincent's Hospice at Sampierdarena, secondary school teacher.
13. Rev. Francis Dalmazzo, director of the Valsalice College, doctor of literature.
14. Rev. Joseph Ronchail, director of St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice, secondary school teacher, French language instructor.

15. Rev. James Costamagna, director of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Mornese, conductor and composer.

16. Rev. Nicholas Cibrario, director of the schools of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Torrione Vallecrosia (Ventimiglia).

17. Rev. Louis Guanella, director of the Salesian school and festive oratory at Trinità near Mondovì.

18. Rev. Joseph Scappini, spiritual director of the Conceptionists in Rome.

19. Rev. Joseph Monateri, director and teacher of the Salesian school at Albano Laziale.

20. Rev. Joseph Daghero, doctor of literature and professor at the seminary of Magliano Sabino.

21. Rev. Dominic Belmonte, professor of physics and natural history in the Salesian lyceum at Alassio.

22. Rev. Julius Barberis, director of the novitiate, doctor of theology, author of several literary works.

23. Rev. Joachim Berto, secretary to Don Bosco and archivist of the Salesian Congregation.

The following consultants attended several sessions, particularly those on finances: Rev. Joseph Leveratto, prefect of the school at Borgo San Martino; Rev. Anthony Pagani, spiritual director of the seminary at Magliano Sabino; Brother Joseph Rossi, general buyer of our houses; and Count Charles Cays of Giletta and Caselette, now a priest, doctor of both civil and canon law, former president of the Turin superior council of the St. Vincent de Paul's Society, former member of the Sub-Alpine Parliament. Other consultants were also present at different sessions.

Some directors had brought a confrere with them as a personal consultor. At the session on finances, Brother Joseph Rossi, buyer for the Oratory, came in from Turin.

There were two kinds of sessions: particular individual committee meetings and general assemblies for all chapter members. Don Bosco had managed to get two illustrious Jesuits for a few general sessions: Father Secondo Franco, an authority in ascetics, and Father John Baptist Rostagno, former professor of canon law at the University of Louvain, both of whom always held him in the highest esteem and veneration. He had conferred several times with them before the chapter opened so as to plan things in conformity with Church law and the customs of religious congregations.

Twenty-six general sessions were held, all chaired by Don

Bosco. The chapter members formed a semicircle around his table with no particular seating order. Each meeting opened and closed with customary ritual prayers.

At the first session, after the rules of a general chapter were read, the members proceeded to elect Father Rua as a moderator, and Father Barberis and Father Berto as secretaries. The moderator was to enforce the chapter's rules, let individual committees know in time when they were to present their reports, provide whatever was needed and, all in all, be the one to turn to in any necessity. One secretary was to record the minutes of each session, and the other was to write up the deliberations reached by consensus.

After elections, committees were formed for an in-depth study of each topic to be brought to the floor at the general sessions and, whenever possible, to draft the final resolutions. Each committee was assigned a chairman and chose one member to be its spokesman and to present committee resolutions to the general assembly.

Committee reports were to be presented in writing for greater accuracy, time-saving and easier recording by the secretaries. Five committees were formed at the first session, with three others added later to study several matters which had not originally been considered. Committee members and respective assignments were as follows:

FIRST COMMITTEE. *Admissions and Novitiate; Sacred Studies and Preaching.* Father Francesia, Father Lazzero, Father Costamagna and Father Barberis. *Chairman:* Father Francesia.

SECOND COMMITTEE. *School Curriculum, Publications and Related Matters.* Father Durando, Father Cerruti, Father Monateri and Father Daghero. *Chairman:* Father Durando.

THIRD COMMITTEE. *Community Life.* Father Rua, Father Ghivarello, Father Albera and Father Cibrario. *Chairman:* Father Rua.

FOURTH COMMITTEE. *Morality and Related Topics.* Father Cagliero, Father Lemoyne, Father Ronchail and Father Dalmazzo. *Chairman:* Father Cagliero.

FIFTH COMMITTEE. *Finances.* Father Bonetti, Father Belmonte, Father Sala, Count Cays and, later, Father Leveratto. *Chairman:* Father Bonetti.

SIXTH COMMITTEE. *Provinces and Duties of Provincials.* Father Cagliero, Father Rua and Father Albera.

SEVENTH COMMITTEE. *The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.* Father Costamagna, Father Bonetti, Father Cerruti and Father Albera.

EIGHTH COMMITTEE. *Selecting Resolutions of Former Years, Presenting Them to the General Chapter for Approval, Integrating Them into Proper Topics.*

These preparatory steps took up the time allotted for the first general session. When the day's agenda had been concluded, Don Bosco asked Father Franco to address the assembly. He obliged and dwelt on the topic of forming a Salesian consciousness.² Don Bosco then closed the session with this brief address:

This is our Congregation's first general chapter. Apart from the regulations we have just read, we do not yet have particular norms and customs to guide us. We shall proceed as best we can as to details, but slowly and calmly, so that this chapter may become the prototype of future ones.

True, we have very little time for this chapter, but many items on the agenda have already stood the test of many years, and, besides, we do not want to proceed scientifically by pre-determined rules. Rather, we intend to keep attuned to earthly realities which touch us directly. If we happen to overlook some matters, let's not worry, for we will have time enough to return to them on some other occasion. Let us concern ourselves exclusively with practical matters, without referring to other books in our work; let us concentrate on our outline, cutting out some articles, rephrasing or adding others whenever advisable. Let us study our rules, our school regulations, the circulars sent to our houses in former years, and the deliberations taken at the general conferences of directors at Lanzo and in Turin.

The value of this chapter lies in turning the theory of our rules into practice. Therefore we are to make every effort to reach our goal of having the rules uniformly practiced in each of our houses.

I remind you again that the most critical feature of our sessions—I might say the most necessary—is unconditional secrecy with outsiders and even with our confreres who are not chapter members, until deliberations have been sent to Rome for approval. Be cautious too when speaking together within earshot of others. Nearly every Congregation mandates this secrecy and sanctions it by oath so that violators incur guilt.

²This detail is not recorded in the minutes, but we learned of it from Father [Joseph] Vespignani, who, in turn, heard it from Father [Paul] Albera. [Author]

We have no such rule, but the fact that nearly all congregations have it should impress us with the vital importance of secrecy.

During these days let us all exercise patience as we study our various topics, even though things may not always run smoothly. After all, this is our first general chapter and we have no time-tested norms to go by. Let us hope that, since we have placed it under the special protection of Mary, Help of Christians, it may, God willing, prove very beneficial to our Congregation.

In the general sessions the committee reports presented by each spokesman were the first items to be discussed. Once resolutions were agreed upon by vote, they were drafted into articles which, properly assembled, would later be sent to Rome as the chapter's authentic acts. Resolutions were of two kinds: the first, purely disciplinary, were intended to form the substance of a manual for the Congregation's use; the second consisted of directives which were to be added to the existing, approved rules. The first set needed only the Holy See's routine authorization, whereas the second required formal approval if it was to have binding force. Most of the articles in the first set were published in 1878, and since they can easily be found, we think it best not to encumber this volume by incorporating them. Neither are the attendant discussions, recorded in the minutes, important enough for us to give them much space. Rather, we feel it more useful and pleasant to glean Don Bosco's vibrant words from these old records which fortunately are often verbatim transcripts. Passages of special note will be pointed out.

2nd Session. COADJUTORS AND ARTISANS APPLYING FOR THE PRIESTHOOD. PREACHING.

Ordinarily, anyone entering the [Salesian] Congregation as a coadjutor was not to be admitted to the priesthood—a ruling which other religious congregations followed inflexibly. But [it was agreed at this session that] the decision to make an exception was reserved exclusively to the rector major. As for trade school pupils wanting to switch to academic courses so as to apply to the Salesian Congregation as clerical students, the decision was left to the school's director. "After all," Don Bosco commented, "if a boy is morally and intellectually qualified, I think we should make it easy for him to become a priest, especially since there is a scarcity

nowadays.” He himself had in fact reaped excellent results in such instances; witness the case of our saintly Father Lago, a former coadjutor. Trade school pupils switching to academic courses were becoming more common every year. Mention was made of Fathers Tamietti, Pavia, Rinaldi, Cassinis, Beauvoir and Davico.

Don Bosco’s comments on preaching: “When possible, sermons should be written; they are more effective that way for both the congregation and the preacher, since the task of writing broadens his knowledge. When a priest is rushed for a sermon, he can draw from approved authors.”

3rd Session. ORDER AND DISCIPLINE. MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

We mention an incidental question which arose in this session about the history of the rules, and precisely on who were the rightful members of a general chapter. The rules of convoking a general chapter to elect the rector major specified the director and one perpetually professed member of each house, the latter to be elected by the other professed members of that house. But no mention was made about the composition of the chapters held every third year. To fill this void, when Don Bosco had the rules printed in Italian, he added a postil to Article 3, Chapter 6, reading: “The general chapter comprises the members of the superior chapter and the directors of our houses.” This summary statement did not invalidate the regulations for the election of the rector major. The first general chapter approved the postil and broadened it to include provincials.

Since this third session dealt with school matters, discipline was also touched upon. Don Bosco’s comments on this topic are very important:

Two particular situations have hampered the smooth running of our houses in the past:

1. Due to lack of personnel, the director was so badly overloaded with work that he could not possibly run the house smoothly. This situation has been gradually improving, though the operation is still not as smooth as it should be. Our basic principle must be: let the director be a director, that is, direct others in the course of their work. He should supervise and plan without putting his own hand to the work. If he cannot find fully qualified people for a certain task, let him be satisfied with the less qualified, but he should not yield to the desire to do things himself in order to see them done

better. He must see to it that everyone carries out his duties, but must involve himself in none of them, so as to give himself time to do what I fear I have never adequately stressed. As far as possible, the director should go through the whole house every day to see for himself whatever is going on. He may just walk through some areas, saying nothing, but he should drop in everywhere: kitchen, dining room, the wine cellar, dormitories and so on. If he does this, abuses can never take root in the house, and many vexing problems will be avoided.

2. [Years ago] we did not have hard and fast regulations. First we drew up a set of regulations for apprentices who went to work in the city. Gradually, as these regulations were effectively observed, we saw the grave need to set up our own workshops and so we had to adapt the regulations to this new situation. No sooner was this done than we felt it necessary to house students as well; hence, there was a new revision. Then we had to open separate secondary schools. Soon after, seminaries were put in our care, and now we are being asked to establish agricultural schools. These circumstances made it impossible for us to have a set of detailed, permanent regulations, with the result that several matters, even important ones, were overlooked. Now that things have settled well, let everyone strive to do his work and to see to it that others do their share. Then everything will run smoothly.

Many persons—very prominent people—have long been telling me that I would achieve far more by not reaching out so much and consolidating what we already have. I have been more aware than anyone else of the problems and failings which stem from our grave scarcity of personnel, caused by our spreading out into so many different fields. On the other hand, so many souls were on the road to damnation, and no one appeared to care! Then, also, I foresaw the disorders which would arise among us if we were not constantly engaged in very absorbing work. So I felt that it was better for us to continue as we had begun. It was also my intention to please the Holy Father, with whom I had discussed this problem and who encouraged me to go ahead, saying these precise words: “When you have a good priest or cleric, thoroughly dependable and trustworthy, go ahead and open a new house.” When I pointed out that these circumstances weakened discipline among the boys and they might become a bit unruly, he replied, “You may not make novices out of them, but don’t worry; you will turn out good, God-fearing Christians!”

4th Session. SALESIAN COOPERATORS AND THE
“SALESIAN BULLETIN.”

Much of this meeting dealt with the Association of Salesian Cooperators (of which we have already spoken at length in Chapter

IV of Volume XI) and with the *Salesian Bulletin*, which was to become their official publication. We shall briefly summarize the development of this periodical, soon to reach heights of popularity.

For some two years the Oratory Press first issued almost monthly a newsletter entitled *Bibliofilo Cattolico* [The Catholic Booklover] listing Salesian and non-Salesian publications of particular interest to young people and to the clergy. So far [1932] we have been unable to find a single copy, but it would seem not to have been exclusively confined to book lists. In fact, the second issue, dated August 1875, published the regulations for late vocations which Don Bosco had just then compiled.³ This modest newsletter lasted till August 1877, when it underwent a radical transformation. With the double title *Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano Mensuale* [The Catholic Booklover or Monthly Salesian Bulletin] its eight two-column pages dealt mainly with Salesian news and communications, while books were listed in an appendix. The series numbering not having been changed, the first issue appeared as Volume 3, No. 5. Also, it was no longer printed in Turin, but in Sampierdarena. This was an expedient Don Bosco resorted to because the diocesan chancery of Genoa did not raise difficulties for the *imprimatur* which the Turin chancery did. The double title remained through December, and the January 1878 issue was headed *Bollettino Salesiano* [Salesian Bulletin]. The subscription price of three lire was voluntary. At first Don Bosco acted personally as the editor because he wanted it to have the orientation he intended; another reason was that then and there he had no one else to do it for him. However he planned to recall to the Oratory for this purpose Father John Bonetti, director of the Borgo San Martino school.

It is a pleasure to hear our founder's words on this new venture. On August 10, 1877, just after the first issue appeared, he told Father [Julius] Barberis: "The *Salesian Bulletin's* aim is as much as possible to publicize our activities and show them as they really are. By winning popular good will for our works we shall obtain people's help. In skillfully presenting our needs we can also suggest varied ways of supporting our undertakings. This magazine will be the mainstay of all our enterprises; if it fails, they fail with it. We

³See Vol. XI, p. 24. [Editor]

have to work to get as many readers as possible by spreading it far and wide and free of charge, convinced that our main benefit does not lie in the three lire subscription. So, let's not insist on the price. One benefactor's alms will often make up for everyone else."

The *Salesian Bulletin* was presented to the cooperators in a two-page Foreword written by Don Bosco. We offer a summary: "The cooperators' regulations call for a monthly publication to keep them informed of projects achieved or in progress and so orient them to their goals. That promise is now being kept. Therefore, it is now possible for all to work with one mind and aim all efforts toward a single goal—God's glory and the welfare of society. The *Bulletin's* contents will be threefold: 1. Proposals of cooperators or their directors for the members' general and particular welfare, with practical norms for all. 2. Accounts of happenings which have helped the members and may serve as models; these may include edifying episodes, letters and news from missionaries, especially Salesians. 3. Communiqués, announcements, books, and maxims which should be publicized."

Don Bosco then went on to describe the Salesian cooperator. "The Salesian cooperators—he wrote—are people who wish to devote themselves to works of mercy in a specific rather than general way, in harmony with and in the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales." This means taking in destitute boys exposed to immorality, catechizing them, keeping them happily busy on Sundays and holy days, finding them jobs with honest employers, guiding, advising and helping them to live as good Christians and honest citizens. The *Bulletin* will offer opportune norms.

Don Bosco stressed the association's practical structure. "We are not establishing a confraternity, a religious, literary or scientific association, or even a newspaper," he repeatedly stated, "but a simple association of benefactors of humanity, who are willing to aid their neighbor not with promises but with action and personal sacrifice." He ended his presentation with these categorical statements: "We are totally detached from politics and will steadfastly avoid mixing in matters involving civil or Church authorities. Our unalterable policy is and shall be: 'Give us the care of poor destitute youngsters, and we shall do our utmost to provide for them, because we believe that this is the way of bettering our society.'"

Some people lightly dismissed the *Salesian Bulletin* as a fund-raising gimmick and, as usual, Don Bosco let them carp, while he kept on working, remarking only that in time even his critics would be copying him in great numbers and putting out their own bulletins. He was a true prophet. At all events, of Don Bosco's publications, the *Salesian Bulletin* is perhaps the one which has proven most fruitful both in generating aid for foreign missions and religious causes and in sparking enthusiastic priestly and missionary vocations. In this, too, Don Bosco was ahead of his times. With the rise of new trends the need was being felt to publicize what once was kept secret, both good and bad. He realized that he could best exploit this craze for publicity for a good cause. This was a trend, he sensed, which would turn into a veritable mania, a vehicle for spreading evil.

The general chapter voted down a proposal to start monthly meetings for cooperators, even though the regulations hinted at it. A cogent reason, reflecting Don Bosco's feelings, was that such a practice might create a bond somewhat embarrassing. Many people were eager to become cooperators and do good to others, but were reluctant to appear in public or found it difficult to attend meetings. Those, also, who might want to quit would soon make their leaving obvious by their absence, and, when justifying themselves later, they would blame it on some action of the Salesians. Since the *Bulletin* was now their unifying link the problem could be avoided. Should someone be considered no longer worthy of belonging to the association, his or her name could be removed from the mailing list and the matter ended.

The objection was then raised that a free publication was a costly burden. The reply was that up to then expenses had been more than amply covered. Many subscribers made generous donations; others gave nothing immediately but sent offerings on various occasions and helped the Oratory in other ways. As for the work, it was true that the Oratory was the only center for an already sizable number of associates, and certainly much more work remained to be done, but, once procedures were laid down, things would ease off and a capable full-time manager could handle the whole operation. These rejoinders came from Don Bosco, who then went on:

I could have readily found a way not requiring so much work, but, then,

this association would not have measured up to its purpose. That easy way was to decentralize and have many autonomous centers empowered to accept or reject members. That is how the Franciscan tertiaries are structured. Every Franciscan house can admit tertiaries. Consequently, their membership is always high. However, this does not allow for a central focus and for unified action. My strongest effort on behalf of our cooperators throughout many years—an effort which I think was successful—was to find a way in which they could all be united to their leader so that he could be enabled to keep in close touch with all of them. Presently, not even we can visualize how vastly this association will spread and how powerful a moral influence it will exert. When we shall have thousands of members—and I am convinced that we shall have at least five thousand in a very short time—we will see spectacular results. The Holy Father himself, on realizing that all the members would be linked to their head and he to them, cried in astonishment, “This is genuine Catholic freemasonry!”

Among other things, we also purpose to spread good teaching and to succeed. Let's suppose that various issues of the *Bulletin* invite all associates to engage in certain selected projects, such as teaching catechism to youngsters (after we have shown them its usefulness and how to do it), or campaigning for our schools, or maybe suggesting the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, stressing its advantage and explaining how it can be done, or urging people to make a yearly spiritual retreat, or explaining the advantages of spreading Catholic literature, and so on. Such friendly exhortations will produce wonderful results. I am convinced that much good will always be done because our proposals will be gladly accepted. Furthermore, should our Congregation be hard pressed for finances some day, I believe that an appeal in the *Bulletin* would bring returns exceeding our needs, because there will be many families ready to make sacrifices for our cause.

It is essential, then, that every director thoroughly grasp the nature of the Salesian cooperator so that he may present it in its true light. If you are asked about their scope, answer that they endeavor, through us, to help young people spiritually and materially, especially the poorest and most destitute, as much as they can. Tell them that the Holy Father personally asked to be considered as the first cooperator. Thus, without our having to exaggerate, many will be impressed and voluntarily will ask to join the cooperators.

Don Bosco then called on the assembly to search for a practical way to increase the number of cooperators. Favorable reception was given to the proposal to single out from the list of subscribers to

Letture Cattoliche people who were known to be fine Christians and send them a cooperator's certificate. When Don Bosco was asked whether individual religious or educational institutions could also be enrolled as cooperators, he answered:

Yes, both can. An institution should be enrolled in its own name and the diploma sent to the superior or superiors, so that the institution may be affiliated as one body. Inform the superior that each member, as part of that body, should perform some material or moral work on behalf of our Congregation.

Because our association has no binding rules, religious orders can belong to it, and all the more so Franciscan and Dominican tertiaries, since the means of attaining our goal—God's greater glory and the salvation of souls—differ substantially from theirs. Their life-style is fully ascetic with emphasis on prayer and the divine office, whereas we are people of action, movement, and charitable activities in aid of our neighbor. They being fully immersed in prayer and we in works of mercy, our two organizations blend very well and complete each other. A person may belong to both associations and still not be overburdened with either prayer or good works.

Generally speaking, the Association of Salesian Cooperators easily wins friends because it steers clear of politics. Because we are apolitical, I think we are free to work as we will. It was my intention to specify by an article of our constitutions that all members are forbidden to get involved in politics. The article was in the manuscript copy, but when our rules were submitted to the Holy See for the approval of the Salesian Congregation it was struck out by the examining committee. Again, in 1870, when the rules had to be re-examined before the definitive approval of our Congregation, I again inserted an article forbidding all members of our Society from entering politics, as though I were unaware that it had already been cancelled, and again they struck it out. Convinced of its importance, I once more inserted it in 1874, when the constitutions had to be approved article by article by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. They struck it out a third time with a written explanation: "This is the third time this article has been struck out. In general the article seems acceptable, but nowadays circumstances may well force one in conscience to intervene in politics, since politics are often inseparable from religion, and hence good Catholics cannot be forbidden." Thus, the matter was finally concluded, and we may now get into politics when it is necessary and genuinely advisable. Apart from that, however, let us abide by our overall rule of not engaging in any political activity, and it will be all the better for us.

The following day was the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Some of the chapter members would have liked to return to Turin for confessions and other priestly duties, but Don Bosco remarked that nothing was more important then and there than the business of the chapter and that it should be given top priority unless an emergency arose. "I want the chapter to proceed steadily but unhurriedly," he said. "Let us not rush anything, for these are history-making meetings for our Congregation, and much of our future progress hinges upon them. I do not say that they will either make or break our Congregation, but they will certainly provide a very sound foundation for its growth. I believe that the salvation of very many souls depends on the rules we shall adopt within the next few days." It was agreed that Father Celestine Durando alone would return to Turin on a very urgent errand.

5th Session. **ASPIRANTS. VERY YOUNG COADJUTORS.**

This session was held on the evening of Our Lady's Nativity after religious services. Its topic was aspirants, novices and triennially professed members. Don Bosco's remarks on the aspirants follow:

First let us understand what "aspirant" means in our Congregation. An aspirant is one who wants to withdraw from the world and comes to share our life first-hand to learn whether it suits him; he seeks to know whether he likes our Congregation. Outsiders can never really visualize our life; each one has his personal view. By staying a few weeks or months at the Oratory or at any of our houses, they will find out if our Congregation is really what they are seeking. At the same time, the superiors can get to know something about them. The aspirants can pay for their room and board in money or services. If an aspirant takes a good look at our life-style and decides to leave, he is free to do so. If he chooses to stay on, he can make a formal application for the novitiate. This is my idea of an "aspirant."

He need not be acquainted with all of our rules. It is enough to have a general idea of our spirit. If an aspirant is an acquaintance of ours and knows something about our Congregation, he has already done his aspirantship and may immediately be accepted into the novitiate.

The same holds for our students; they know our life and we know them. Nothing else is needed. On the other hand, an aspirantship is indispensable for an adult applicant. This is our advantage over other congregations and religious orders, who have no way of knowing their candidates beforehand and must accept them directly into the community.

When an adult applicant comes to us as an aspirant, it is advisable that he be given work to do at the beginning so that he may more easily acquire the spirit of our Congregation. If he does not go on, he will at least have earned his keep.

Concerning the age of a coadjutor for his religious profession, Don Bosco was strongly averse to banding young men with older men, asserting that such mixing of ages harbored grave dangers. He thought that the mind of the Church had always been to keep younger people separated from adults. He also always judged it a grave peril to assign certain house chores, such as kitchen or dining room duties, to very young coadjutors. "Sooner than assign an immature young man to set up and clean the dining room," he stated, "I prefer to do the work myself."

6th Session. COMMUNITY LIFE: GIFTS AND BOOKS.

The discussion on community life centered on the rule requiring confreres to hand over gifts to their superior. After pointing out the rule's fairness as the common practice in all religious congregations, Don Bosco cited two inspiring examples.

On one occasion, he said, he happened to see someone donate a watch to a nun. She accepted it, exclaiming, "How pretty! How lovely! Thank you. Thank you very much!" Then she turned to her mother superior and immediately handed it to her. Taken somewhat aback, the donor remarked, "I gave that watch to you!" "It's all right," she replied. "Reverend Mother knows what to do with it. If I need it, she will give it to me. Just now I can do without it."

On another occasion, a trustworthy elderly Dominican was given a considerable sum of money to be given away in charity. "Thank you," he replied. "I shall speak to Father Prior about it, and you can be sure that it will be very wisely spent." As the prior came by just then, the Dominican immediately handed the money over to him, explaining that the gentleman's intention was that it be given as alms. "But I brought it to you," the man remarked. "True," the monk replied, "but don't you know that a father owns what his sons possess?"

When the discussion later turned to personal and community books and taking them along when a confrere is transferred to another house, Don Bosco expressed his mind: "I believe that our Congregation will greatly mature if a confrere being transferred to

another house will not need a trunk but can immediately go with a compact bundle under his arm.”

8th Session. NOVICES: MORALS, SCRUPLES, MEDITATION.

The Salesian Congregation, it was restated, does not aim at reforming men of worldly fashions and, through prayer, meditation and penance, lead them back to the observance of God’s laws and the practice of the Christian life. It rather looks for mature, upright persons who want to dedicate talents and energies to works of mercy on behalf of their fellowmen. Father Cagliero, the committee’s spokesman, declared: “Our novitiate is not geared to reforming evil habits; its structure enables each novice to become acquainted with the life he intends for himself and with what will be expected of him for the rest of his days. We must keep this aim of our novitiate and our Congregation in clear view, lest we have to deplore the consequences.”

To achieve unified action in counseling applicants for our Congregation, Don Bosco suggested a possible case. A young man asks for admission and describes his moral condition as follows: “This year I fell into immoral acts on two or three different occasions,” or, “I fell once and for a long time after resisted temptation. Later, I yielded three or four times successively. Now I have not fallen again.” How are we to advise this young man? Should we encourage him toward our Congregation? “It’s essential to know,” Don Bosco stated, “whether he yielded to each occasion of sin which presented itself. If so, we should ascertain if his determination in his vocation is steadfast, unswerving and firm. If it is, we can advise him to follow it, because we would otherwise have to worry that seminaries and religious orders would soon be empty because practically no one could qualify. On the other hand, if the young man takes his vocation lightly, our answer should be in the negative.” A marginal note beside the next to the last sentence in the minutes states: “We are dealing here with moral lapses by oneself. Heaven help us if it were otherwise!” We are quite sure that this note is in Father Cagliero’s handwriting.

The discussion then turned to scrupulosity in applicants who are a nuisance in religious congregations. Attention was called to the fact that scrupulosity varies in people. Very few candidates give themselves to God without first feeling some qualms of conscience.

God permits this as a further purification of their souls. These individuals are to be encouraged, aided and advised with kindness because they will very soon turn out to be an honor to the Congregation. Other scrupulous persons, however, are truly unbalanced and their state of mind can only be regarded as a sort of incipient insanity. We must distinguish between both kinds of scrupulosity. The latter persons are to be rejected without question, because sooner or later they will cause serious problems.

At this point someone asked if anyone knew of a meditation book particularly suited for beginners. The rest of the community used a book by [Aloysius] Da Ponte,⁴ and it was agreed to continue using it because its abundant material made for profitable rereading again and again. Beginners, the general chapter decided, had best use St. Alphonsus Liguori's *Apparecchio alla Morte* [Preparation for Death] and *La Scuola di Gesù Appassionato* [Teachings from the Passion of Jesus] written by a Passionist priest. The minutes continue: "Da Ponte's book was very highly praised. The introduction is strongly recommended to be read over and over again and memorized because it is worth its weight in gold. Closely following its suggestions will make meditation so much easier."

10th Session. **BAD CONFESSIONS. SEMI-CLOISTER. FEAST DAY CROWDS. DORMITORY SUPERVISION.**

The chapter again considered the moral behavior of pupils. Once the discussion got under way, Don Bosco addressed the assembly:

We have said many things about our pupils' moral conduct and how we can best foster it, but as yet mention has not been made of the chief means. I mean frequent confession and Communion made truly well. In a previous session we agreed that boys should be given every opportunity of going to confession to priests they don't know, preferably Salesian priests. Doubtless we have achieved some success, but it is equally clear that an achievement of one hundred percent is impossible. Perhaps some nine out of ten youngsters are in a sad state of conscience, and easy access to confession does not solve the problem. We have to face the fact that a boy who has unfortunately harbored sin in his soul will generally stay that way for years, uninfluenced by solemn religious events, spiritual retreats or death. We have to realize that putting one's conscience in order is a

⁴A Spanish Jesuit (1554-1624), professor of philosophy and theology, novice master and author of several ascetic works. [Editor]

genuine grace of God, who at different moments, independently of extraordinary events, inspires a youngster to mend his ways.

Thanks to God's grace many an entangled conscience has been unraveled in our houses. We may say that no solemn feast or Exercise for a Happy Death is without its manifestation of God's mercy for some of our pupils. This happens frequently during spiritual retreats, although, sadly, it does not touch everyone. Years may pass and we may ask one such lad, "But didn't you make the spiritual retreat?" "Yes," he will reply. "Why then did you not confess this sin?" "I just didn't." And that's it. Still, I believe that we have to seek every possible way to make it ever easier for them to go to confession, because in the group there will always be one who, seizing the opportunity, will respond to God's mercy. Just the probability of such an achievement is worth our supreme effort in this matter. We must give it top priority.

When the discussion again turned to [safeguarding] the Salesians' morals, Don Bosco voiced his convictions as follows:

I have given this much thought and have as yet formed only a mental outline. It is a matter we must study together. There is the question of assigning, as far as possible, sleeping quarters for the Salesians in a section of the house which is off limits to visitors, domestics and pupils—a sort of cloistered area, so to speak, where trespassing is not tolerated. For instance, only Salesians are to have sleeping quarters along the stairway which leads to the bedrooms of priests, teachers and superiors in general. Also, that same stairway should not connect to the boys' dormitories. Above all, without any exception no women—not even the director's mother or the good women who come to our schools to mend the pupils' clothes and do similar chores—are to sleep in that part of the house. The reason is obvious: we often take into our houses people totally unknown to us, honest, perhaps, but as yet not well known. Besides, we know that the world is seated in malice and that all of us are sons of Adam. Many a year may hopefully go by with nothing happening, but the possibility is always there. Here and now there may be no danger, but we must be cautious. Even if these safeguards were unneeded and seemingly exaggerated in our regard, we must still realize that they are very wise in relation to outsiders; we must ensure that even the evil-minded cannot find a pretext to suspect or malign us. I feel like suggesting that we put up a gate barring entrance to that area and mark it with a "Private" or "No Admission" sign.

The Oratory regularly used to hold fairs on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, as did our other schools on their titular feast.

Many outsiders patronized the fairs, and this could pose problems. Considering this possibility, Don Bosco clarified the matter as follows:

In the beginning these things are necessary in our houses. At first they are harmless because they are a novelty, but the big mistake is to let them continue on a regular basis because irregularities may creep in every year and stay on for good on a far larger scale. It is frightening to see how these situations grow with time. Hardly ever did a disorder occur which was not repeated the following year on a similar occasion.

These fairs are great in the beginning because they publicize the school, make the pupils happy and win popular good will, but later on they should be curtailed and then done away with altogether.

At the start of the Oratory we did not have a doorkeeper and our boys used to go to town to work. The novelty and the fervent spirit of those days would let nothing improper happen. But as time went by, we had to wall in the playground and have a doorkeeper at the gate. Even so, anybody was allowed to come in; in time this too had to be restricted. The same applies to the fair on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. The first few years it was a noisy affair, but the novelty of it kept disorders at a minimum. Later on, we controlled admittance, and now we might say that this celebration is quite orderly.

It is worth recalling what was said about dormitory supervision. At one time, the assistant had a curtained cubicle in a corner of the dormitory with, at most, a small desk and a few books. Later Don Bosco insisted on doing away with the cubicle and desk, and the assistant had but a curtained bed, no longer in a corner, but in the midst of the dormitory.

Now [at this session] Don Bosco insisted again on this point, which he had very much at heart—away with desks. We are all the more struck by this insistence when we see how he countered objections raised by several directors.

“But we have teachers who have to supervise the dormitories,” one director said, “and they need a small desk for their books and papers, and a curtained cubicle where they can study.”

“No, not even then,” Don Bosco replied.

“What are the teachers to do?”

“Give them a place elsewhere, a desk with lock and key, for instance, in the study hall or in a classroom but not in the dormitory.”

“There is no space. With so many boys clamoring to enter our schools we are just too crowded.”

“Then lower your enrollment. There must be no desks or cubicles in the dormitories. A curtained bed is enough for retiring and for rising. All the rest of the time the curtains should be opened.”

The matter settled, Don Bosco expanded his comments to include means of nurturing good morals in the boarding schools’ situation.

The safeguards I just mentioned are very effective, but let’s be realistic. There is no way you can guarantee flawless morals in any person. We are all Adam’s children. We all have to strive and strain and then more. After that, we must pray a great deal too, for prayer will succeed where our best efforts fail. Bear in mind too that there are two very effective means of uprooting immorality and fostering purity to an eminent degree among our pupils, and they are: 1. Receiving the sacraments frequently. The heart of the matter is this: say what you will, no immoral habit can take root if the sacraments are received often and properly. 2. Promptly dismissing any boy guilty of moral scandal. There is no alternative to this. Deep-seated immoral habits can be changed only by a miracle. Such a youngster may go to confession and be truly sorry, he may ask pardon privately and publicly, but he will soon fall back into the same problem. With such boys one has to be unbending. Their repentance will be enough for sacramental absolution, yes, but not enough that we can trust them in the future.

11th Session. PARENTS IN FINANCIAL ARREARS.

The finance committee’s agenda ran through four meetings. At the first, the proposal was made that someone be appointed to collect school fees, because, it would seem, too many families failed to meet their payments once the children were in school. Pressing for payment legally would only mean a loss of time and bring on excessive problems. Don Bosco ended the drawn-out debate by stating, “We must use a kind of holy toughness with parents who are behind in payments. The only solution I can see is to send the boys home. This will prod parents or relatives into paying their debts promptly. If they cannot pay, they can keep the boys home, the only exception being a lad who shows well-founded hope of a priestly or religious vocation. In this case we can be more lenient and, if parents can’t pay, we may send the boy here or to

Sampierdarena or to any charitable house of ours, where Divine Providence will care for him as for others. However, as far as possible, our boarding schools must have fixed fees and cannot yield on this point.”

13th Session. ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR.

Should bread and soup be doled to the poor at the door of our schools? Public handouts, no; private assistance to families referred by the parish priest, yes. After this decision Don Bosco made some wise comments on giving alms, a sign of his generous, enlightened charity.

I very earnestly recommend that you help needy strangers most generously because, as a rule, they have no friends; even if they do, they are not given local assistance. When you meet truly destitute people, give them all the aid you can, for they are always worse off than needy neighbors.

Give special consideration to youngsters and to strong husky men whom we sometimes see begging for alms. If they are fit and healthy, theirs must be a genuine need which drives them to beg, and they must be good Christians; otherwise they would steal, and they would not stop at that. Boys have even a greater claim on our charity because they are our mission and because, being too young to be firmly rooted in sound moral principles, they can easily be misled by almost anything into evil ways they will follow all their lives.

If young women come to us for help, we should give it immediately, most kindly, most generously. No one else in the whole world is probably in such moral straits as impoverished, unsheltered young women. I would gladly give up my own dinner to help keep them off the streets. And we are not to make excuses and say that maybe they're really not in need or that maybe they are already beyond redemption. They would not ask for help usually unless they really needed it. Even if they should be morally corrupt, we will at least be keeping them from one more harm, and that is something good.

Let's not usually question a beggar's need but rather realize that poverty today is far more common than we may think. Even families that seem to be doing well may truly be in sad necessity. I have often been asked for food by government workers, and some of them were nicely dressed, and on getting even a little aid they wept with gratitude!

14th Session. MASONRY WORK. SCHOOL CHRONICLES.

Don Bosco always rebuked anyone who took it upon himself to

build or make substantial changes without first asking and obtaining his superior's permission. "This is a critical matter," he stated, "because expenses run excessively high both in new construction and in remodeling, especially if masons have to be called in. It is upsetting to see that while we strain to pinch pennies in other matters and do without necessities, hundreds of lire are thoughtlessly wasted on work not really needed. Let it be understood that before anyone incurs such expenses, he must have permission from his superior—presently from the rector major, later at least from his provincial." Some chapter members thought that Don Bosco was too rigid in his restrictions, but he went on to say:

I am far from too rigid. We have to be very strict because this is a matter which has to be kept under tight controls before it almost automatically grows to huge proportions. It's natural to want to change something we don't like—to put up a wall here and there, knock down another, to put in a new door and block up another. Then, the prefect or director changes and a successor feels he has to destroy what was built and rebuild what was destroyed. Expenses keep mounting sky-high and nobody profits.

Secondly, we must be very strict in this matter to forestall problems for the director. There will always be prefects, assistants and teachers who feel they cannot do without certain things and will clamor for changes. They go to the director, and, seeing some advantage in what they propose, he finds it hard to object, lest bad feelings arise. On the other hand, when the confreres know that such things are beyond the director's authority, they take it in stride and stop insisting. Besides, in this as in all situations, it is only natural for someone to ask for more than he needs to make sure he gets what he wants.

Some religious orders require that at the end of the year or at the superior's visitation, a budget of needed repairs must be drawn up, even of minor changes, for the superior's permission. The superior may raise no objections, but he is always free to say no. The mere thought that expenses of this kind have to be authorized makes people stop and think about the real necessity.

Shortly afterward the subject of school chronicles, which the directors had already considered in their annual conference, was again brought up on the floor. It was a casual introduction but occupied most of the session. Don Bosco addressed the topic and again showed how much importance he attached to the subject.

We are constantly working and do a lot of things, but we keep no record. To date, the pressure of our wide range of activities, which absorbed us, made it impossible to keep a written account of our work. We are still very busy, but things have eased up a bit, with many duties once shouldered by one man being delegated to others. Again, we were once not so aware of the need to record our activities, with the result that confusion often arose where there would be none had records been kept. Likewise, we now realize that since our Congregation has been definitively approved we have to set norms for our successors. By knowing that we did things in a certain way and were successful in our intent, they will know what to do in similar circumstances. At this point I consider this a matter of priority, and so I believe that every director must willingly put his mind to this task and study how and when he can draw up what we can call the history or chronicle of his school, something his successors will have to continue.

This chronicle should start with discussions held at the motherhouse when opening the school was still being discussed. It should report appropriate negotiations with pros and cons, favorable and unfavorable points, date of opening, and names of the current Pope, king and diocesan bishop. It should also record specific achievements year by year in chronological order and a brief biographical statement on people to be mentioned; most important, it should refer to original documents and their location. Two copies should be made of each chronicle—one for the school's keeping and one for our central archives. Our task will then be to extract matters of greater importance from the house chronicles to draw up a brief history of our Congregation.

In future years we will be surprised to see how much we did in so short a time and with such meager means, and we can learn from each other how to succeed in our undertakings. I say too that each of us can learn from his own experience. Incredibly, as time goes by, we forget many useful things we used to do which, simple as they were, had great value. By reading them, we learn again. Then, since these chronicles are for our own private use, they will be more helpful if we record also our mistakes—if we say, for example, that under certain circumstances certain things were done and proved mistaken. This will render our history a more truthful and more reliable guide.

All religious orders have these detailed records and keep them up to date even should the order be on the decline. Records are kept even of houses which were confiscated half a century ago, so that they have a history of all they went through: the date of their expulsion, their dispossessors, the various uses the houses were put to before being returned to the order, and the names of buyers and sellers.

The Jesuits appoint one member of each house to write the chronicle of

that house; their directory lists him as “house historian.” He or someone in his name compiles biographical data of each confrere of that house when he dies, and all these records are kept in the archives. Every third year each house sends a copy of its chronicle to the general archives to serve in compiling the entire order’s history, which is written not each year but only after some period of time or when they have a good historian. It is written in Latin which is stylistically correct for purity of expression and interest of narration. It is a true and authentic history.

Lest it prove too lengthy and tedious, highlights are selected from individual house chronicles and kept free of trivia. The annals are to be well written and edited, with authors using sound judgment and avoiding repetitions and trifles. Minor items and edifying incidents are recorded in the Jesuits’ annual letters which minutely transcribe sermons delivered in their churches, practices of piety, spiritual retreats, confessions, Communions and, especially, edifying incidents. These letters are sent throughout the order to be read aloud during meals. Each house has one member who writes them, listed in the directory as “Writer of the Annual Letters.” Certainly the chronicles I am speaking of entail much work, since we are starting fresh and have to record events of years past. The beginning will be hard, but once we have caught up to the present and need to record only one year’s main events, which we can keep recording as they happen, it will be a much simpler and easier task for each director.

Give special attention to collecting biographical data on confreres who have already passed into eternity: for some a few recollections, for others more detailed memoirs. The date carried in the appendix of our annual directory will do for recently deceased confreres, but we must hunt for information and keep documentation on those who died quite some years ago. These priests, clerics and coadjutors, I believe, are to be so many jewels which we highlight as blazing gems throughout our Congregation’s history. How much we could say of Father Alasonatti!⁵ And Father Ruffino⁶—how much we cherish his memory, a true model of Christian life. Though I hesitate to compare him with St. Aloysius, he was certainly

⁵Father Victor Alasonatti, born in Avigliana (Turin) in 1812, was ordained for the diocese in 1835. After teaching in his native town, he came to the Oratory on August 14, 1854 to help Don Bosco and stayed with him till his own death at Lanzo on October 7, 1865. He was the first prefect general of the Salesian Society. For other biographical details see Vol. V, pp. 45-49. [Editor]

⁶Father Dominic Ruffino (1840-1865) had started corresponding with Don Bosco in 1856 while a diocesan seminarian at Giaveno. In 1857, at Don Bosco’s invitation, he spent part of the summer at the Oratory. (See Vol. V, pp. 470f) In 1859, he had the foresight to start, on his own, a diligent chronicle of all that Don Bosco said and did. (See Vol. VI, pp. 282f) In 1860, he applied for membership in the Salesian Congregation. Ordained a priest in 1863, he continued his chronicle until October 1864 when Don Bosco sent him to Lanzo, near Turin, to open and direct this new Salesian school. He died prematurely the following year, a victim of priestly zeal. [Editor]

an example of what we expect in a good young man, a good cleric, a good priest. Such was his fervor of life that his piety matches the very best brilliance of Christian and religious life. An outstanding contribution of such biographies is that years from now we shall realize how much hard work we did in the past. Problems always arise with time, but the past will teach us how to steer clear of them. Just now, for example, I am faced with problems which beset me years ago. Others might feel hopelessly confused, but I am not worried because all I need is to check back and see if what I did was successful.

16th Session. AFTERNOON NAPS. PROVINCES AND PROVINCIALS.

Two successive sessions were devoted to the topic of good and bad habits. Of habits considered indifferent, but in practice always bad and baneful, Don Bosco singled out that of taking a bed-nap after the noon meal, a custom sanctioned by some congregations and good Christian educators for both members and pupils in tropical countries.

As for me—Don Bosco said—I consider it a serious danger for good morals. I think it is extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to keep this habit and still protect one's morals. Were directors of educational institutions to know how disastrous this habit can be, they would sooner close their schools than introduce the custom.

Are we then to forbid our pupils and confreres from taking a brief rest in the early afternoon, especially in summer, when one feels quite sleepy? Are we to fight this tendency? No. If we become sleepy while working or studying, let us yield to this need and slumber a while, relaxing on a chair or resting one's head on the desk, but let no one go to bed and invite sleep. I think this is what they call the "noon demon," against which we are warned as extremely dangerous for our souls.

As regards our pupils, let us keep to our customs: in very warm climates gather the boys into a study hall or classroom after a short recreation, and there one may study or snooze as he prefers, as long as supervision and silence are observed so as not to disturb those who wish to rest. Thus, those who need rest can have it, while the others can keep busy, and no one runs into moral danger. Briefly, what I disapprove of is the custom of going to bed after the noon meal.

Still, it was pointed out that, with very few exceptions, this was a

general practice in tropical climates. "Well, then, let's try to be among those very few who don't follow it," Don Bosco retorted. "I doubt that we shall have to regret our decision. We'll have more time for work, we shall build a good reputation, and perhaps others will follow our example."

The rest of the session was spent on a new matter, partitioning the Congregation into provinces. The result was a set of regulations for provincials to be read privately. We mention two items only which are not contained there but have historical worth.

In the title the chapter members discarded the word "province" and particularly the title "provincial" as outdated and as labeling the Congregation as monastic, arousing dislike, as a consequence of the long-standing aversion that anticlericals had engendered even in upright people against ancient, venerable religious institutions. The new terminology did not mean giving up a good tradition. Had not St. Ignatius too discarded some traditional monastic nomenclature? Had he not replaced the title "Father Guardian" with "Father Rector"? We too, it seemed advisable, should eliminate empty titles which might jar our contemporaries' sensitivities and make us disliked by those whom we only wish to serve. Therefore the term "Inspector" was to be used of the superior entrusted with the care of a group of houses which was known as an "Inspectorate." These two words were quite appropriate and acceptable to all [in Italy] since they were also used in civil and scholastic administration.⁷

Another topic was the age of a provincial. Should there be a minimum age? In writing the rules, Don Bosco had thought it best not to specify age limits for any office. In fact, the early drafts as well as the final text sent to Rome for approval say nothing of age. The Holy See, however, wanted thirty-five as the minimum age for the higher offices. Since the Congregation was then in its infancy, so to speak, and hardly any of its members were on in years, it was immediately necessary to seek temporary dispensation from this rule. The constitutions set no minimum age for provincials because there were as yet no provincials, with the result that the general chapter left this matter open, to see what the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would do when presented with the deliberations of general chapters concerning provinces.

⁷Such terms are still in use in Italy and other countries. [Editor]

As Don Bosco expressed his mind at the seventeenth session, the Salesian provincial is "a father whose task it is to help his sons manage their offices well, advising, helping and teaching them how to get out of difficulties in critical situations."

The discussion on provinces led to the question of which powers were to be recognized as vested in the rector major. On that score Don Bosco was clearly inclined to broaden them, endeavoring to make the entire government of the Society dependent on the rector major. At this point it was remarked that as long as Don Bosco held that office everyone wanted him to exercise unlimited authority; this was not so, however, for his successors. "That is just why I am so wary and vigilant lest anything hinder the rector major's authority," Don Bosco interrupted. "If this concerned me alone, I would not need to do this because you already let me do as I think best, be the matter important or not. Besides, since everything is in my hands, it would almost be impossible to do otherwise. But I must think of my successors."

20th Session. **THOSE WHO LEAVE.**

This session was more like an ordinary business meeting of the superior chapter. Soon the discussion turned to those who, heedless of their vocation, had left the Congregation. Don Bosco urged courtesy and kindness at all times. "It is not easy," he marked, "because often, if not always, they are pretty much at fault. Still, it is better to pretend not to notice their shortcomings and to treat them most kindly. They in turn will retain their love and respect for the Congregation, and we may be sure that after some time that former confrere of ours will be our friend and will at least help us by speaking well of us. And, believe me, we need this. Any ill talk, unjust and false as it may be, can always be very damaging to us. I'd rather see us go overboard with kindness than even slightly embitter them with justified reprimands and an unkind dismissal."

22nd Session. **INOCCIDENTAL DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES.**

At the opening of this session it was decided that, effective immediately, the reading of the minutes should take place at the closing of each session. This occasioned a digression on which we should dwell a little. It was asked whether it would not be good to have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every evening in all our schools. Having been a long-standing practice at the Oratory and at

Lanzo, should it not be introduced everywhere to advantage since it required only very little time? As excellent as it certainly was, it was turned down, except for novenas and the month of May, as had been customary at Valdocco before the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was built. Two reasons were given. First, boys should not be burdened with church services. Many youngsters belonged to lukewarm Catholic families where religion was unimportant and where daily prayer was not a practice. Our schools had daily morning and evening prayers, rosary, Mass and other devotions throughout the day—enough for everyone’s spiritual needs. Those who wanted more could be urged to do so spontaneously, particularly with daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin; nothing else, however, was to be added to community practices. Secondly, too much attention was not to be drawn from irreligious people—individuals and the general public—who kept an eye on the Salesians. In those days the anticlericals were seeking ways and means to destroy all traces of religion, using any pretext to destroy sacred institutions. School curricula kept changing regularly in the hope that religious teaching orders, attached to their own methods, might fail to meet the demands of modern education. Should the Church’s enemies learn of so many practices of piety in Salesian schools, they would immediately harass them. “We must realize,” Don Bosco said, “that we are at odds with a wicked, powerful and very malicious world. We must absolutely avoid attracting undue attention. If we ever chose to fight the enemy openly, we would run into immediate resistance and be unable to do anything. Let us always be law-abiding, striving to meet their wishes as best we can, adjusting to modern requirements, local customs and traditions as far as our conscience allows us. Sooner than clash with authorities, let us absorb the blame even when we are in the right, accepting all their regulations, decrees and programs. Thus we shall gain their good will, and they, in turn, will let us do our work (and that is the most important thing). At the same time, we will not have to do violence to our conscience.”

Twice before, the general chapter had considered the advisability of not arousing hostile criticism by unnecessary displays of piety. At the eighth session a proposal had been made to keep a small vigil light burning beneath the little statue of Our Lady in every

dormitory. Everyone welcomed the lovely thought that anyone who happened to awaken during the night would instantly look toward the Virgin Mary, but Don Bosco objected and made a remark which, the minutes tell us, "he had constantly in mind": "What would some ill-minded person say if he visited any of our schools and he found a little altar in every dormitory? We would be accused of superstition. The irreligious environment of our times demands caution in these things. Yes, let's try to instill our faith into the hearts of all as deeply as we can, but with as little exterior show as possible. What is right has to be done unhesitatingly, but if that is not the case, we will do better to avoid anything that will draw too much attention to us."

In the fifteenth session, when the discussion turned to fostering and spreading good habits, it was once more suggested that no practice be introduced which malignant critics might see as superstitious. Caution was urged in regard to local customs. For instance, was the custom to be kept in the playground of making the Sign of the Cross before beginning to chew on one's breakfast roll? "Certainly, this is an excellent habit," Don Bosco commented, "but wouldn't malicious tongues wag if they saw us doing that here or in their homes? They wouldn't mind our saying grace at table, since they know it is prescribed by the catechism; all good Christians do it, and they are not surprised. Here at the Oratory we can continue to follow our customs, but there is no need to introduce elsewhere the habit of making the Sign of the Cross before breakfast. We must never insist on it with our pupils because unfortunately quite a few have irreligious parents, who might not object to see their sons say grace before and after dinner, but who might be annoyed to see them doing so at breakfast. They might well take their sons out of our schools with the excuse that we are turning them into fanatics."

23rd Session. RECTOR MAJOR AND SUPERIOR CHAPTER. CRITICISM. LETTURE CATTOLICHE AND SALESIAN BULLETIN.

The minutes recorded several norms following the resumés of various debates; among them was one stating that certain matters should be referred to the "superior chapter." When this was read, Don Bosco amended it to "rector major," with the following explanation. "The phrase 'superior chapter' is redundant because

the rules already state that the rector major is to meet with the superior chapter whenever anything important has to be decided upon. The wording could also be interpreted to mean that the superior chapter is to decide matters independently of the rector major, whereas it is his responsibility to direct all things which pertain to the Congregation. Any important matter must always be referred to the rector major, who will in turn entrust it to its head if he sees that it concerns a particular office. But in matters of grave import, he will call a chapter meeting.”

The same minutes made mention of the need to spread wholesome books. At this point Don Bosco offered this advice.

Never criticize or downgrade books authored by others, as this would only make us hated. We shall adopt whatever textbooks we prefer; if friends should ask our opinion, let us answer as we think best, but not by being negative.

We should follow this policy even more as regards local confraternities of small towns or villages where things are done amateurishly. We are never to speak disparagingly of them, nor ridicule them, if they are run ineptly or awkwardly; on the contrary, we should instruct, advise and assist them in every possible way. This will draw on us the blessings of God and men.

Let us also react gently to those who criticize us, taking as our motto this precious maxim: “Do good and never mind gossip.” If we pick a quarrel with somebody, we are the losers, even if we win an argument. Occasionally some people are only too eager to start a quarrel so as to have an excuse or pretext to hurt us in other ways.

If we are so averse to criticizing other people’s work, we have greater reason to blame those of us who criticize our own work just because something does not appeal to them. It is my fervent desire that every director instill this principle into all confreres, recommending and insisting that the tendency to carp and quibble be banished from our midst.

Furthermore, let all directors zealously promote *Letture Cattoliche*⁸ and *Italian Classics for the Young*⁹ in our schools. Once, practically every pupil was a subscriber, but now their number has dwindled considerably! Take every opportunity during the year to speak favorably of them, make them known, and enlist new subscribers. Thus we will be circulating good books throughout our schools to our pupils’ great benefit.

⁸A monthly publication started by Don Bosco in 1853. See Index of Volume IV and subsequent volumes under *Letture Cattoliche*. [Editor]

⁹See Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195ff. [Editor]

They in turn will send them home, and many others will read them and, being friends and acquaintances, they will subscribe to them. It all helps to do good to more people. Believe me, this is far greater than it may appear at first glance. We work hard to get more subscribers, but if we neglect this most effective means, we will only be cheating ourselves.

Another extraordinary benefit of spreading and reading our publications, especially the *Salesian Bulletin*, is the unity of purpose which they instill into the readers and the intimacy they create among our confreres. We are still a fledgling Congregation, as yet relatively few in number. To date the Oratory has been the one and the only center for all of us. We all know each other, and all superiors in our houses, having seen how we do things here, try to keep up our customs and spirit, but with time, if we do not heartily exert ourselves to strengthen these ties, a diverse spirit will seep in so that there will no longer be absolute unity among us. We must do our utmost to become one in spirit, and one especially effective means is that, as far as possible, we read the same books, study the same treatises, and appreciate the same authors in all our houses, especially our own writers and publications. There is no greater help in this regard than the *Salesian Bulletin* and *Letture Cattoliche*, which should therefore be widely circulated and read by as many of us as possible.

24th Session. THE NAME "SALESIAN." GIVE UNTO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S!

The term "Salesian" kept recurring throughout the minutes to denote our Congregation's members and activities.¹⁰ This led Don Bosco to touch on a delicate topic which was particularly so at that time.

Let's use this word very sparingly. Not long ago it was unheard of and its meaning was hardly known. It came into use two years ago at our first missionary expedition and it caught on. Newspapers and books in Europe and South America were popularizing it by their frequent accounts of Salesian missionaries, and so the name took root. Besides, it was necessary for the Congregation to have a fixed name. St. Francis de Sales is a name dear to the Church and to civil society. It is the name of a saint outstanding for his meekness, a virtue much appreciated even by evil men; moreover, he is our chosen patron saint. The word "Salesian" has a good ring about it too, and so we felt it was wise to adopt it.

Now we are not to overdo it. First, in publishing books authored by our members, let us not add "Salesian Father" or "Member of the Salesian

¹⁰See Vol. XI, pp. 408f. [Editor]

Congregation” after the author’s name. We have been doing this, and there is nothing wrong with it. We can continue to do so under special circumstances, but not as a general rule. If the book’s author is one of our schools’ directors, we could quite properly add “Director of the Salesian School,” since this is his personal title and it helps to enhance the school’s reputation. To go further than that would only generate envy, ill will and even public and private harassment.

Still, we have now taken a very bold step in this regard by adding “Salesian” to the bulletin which we send to our cooperators. It has been a daring step, admittedly, but a calculated one. We had to make our true identity known. Until now, thank God, whatever was published about us was truthful, except for a few false accusations by some people hostile to us, but these allegations did not in the least affect the overall welfare of our Congregation. It is extremely important that we not be misjudged. Hopefully, the [Salesian] *Bulletin*, which is published specifically to make our objectives known, will greatly help in this respect by presenting in their true light our Congregation’s main achievements.

Our objective is to let it be known that one may with a clear conscience give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, without in the least derogating from giving to God what belongs to God. We are told that this is a problem in our day and age. I agree, but I would add that Our Lord Himself has already solved the problem. True, in practice we run into serious difficulties. Well, then, let us overcome them not only by leaving the principle intact, but also by clarifying it with correlated reasons and proofs. I am greatly interested in finding a practical way by which we can give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.

“But the government backs up the biggest scoundrels,” some people object, “and at times false doctrines and principles are upheld.” Well, then, we shall reply that the Lord orders us to obey and respect our superiors, “even bad ones,” as long as they do not order us to do anything clearly evil. Even when they might order us to do what is wrong, we should still respect them. We shall not do what is wrong, but we shall continue to respect Caesar’s authority because it bears the sword.

We can all see the serious difficulties besetting the Church today. I think that things have never been so bad since St. Peter’s time. Cunning is artful and can dispose of unlimited means. Not even the persecutions of Julian the Apostate were as hypocritical and harmful. Yet, what of it? Despite everything, we shall endeavor to act within the law. If fines are imposed on us, we shall pay them; if community ownership is outlawed, we shall retain property individually; if examinations are mandatory, we shall take them; if certificates or diplomas are needed, we shall do our utmost to obtain them. We shall keep going forward.

“But this is burdensome, expensive and a bother,” you might object. No

one knows that better than I. In fact, I do not mention most of the troubles to you lest you be frightened.

I struggle through the day to find ways of smoothing matters or remedying the situation. We have to be patient and forbearing. Rather than fill the air with lamentations, let us work with all our might to keep things going well.

Through the *Salesian Bulletin*, I hope to make this known little by little in a practical way. With God's help and indirectly, we shall make this principle prevail; through it an immense amount of good will accrue to both civil society and the Church.

As regards doing good and ignoring gossip, Don Bosco knew quite well that every rule has its exceptions. So, although he was very loath to use the press in self-defense, he felt that in certain instances it was his duty to wield this weapon. The ill-famed *Gazzetta del Popolo* had published a venomous letter from Giaveno for unmentionable misdemeanors in supervising boys in a local boarding school. The letter falsely stated that the seminarian was a "former pupil of Don Bosco's Oratory." As soon as Don Bosco gathered the necessary information, he wrote a letter to the newspaper's editor which is a fine example of moderation:

Turin, August 13, 1877

Dear Sir:

In your issue of August 7 you published a letter from Giaveno alleging certain misdemeanors, with which Susa's judicial department is now dealing, by a former pupil of mine.

I ask you to retract and state that the person on whom these misdemeanors are blamed was never a pupil in any of my schools, neither as a student nor as an artisan.

I hope you will have the courtesy to publish this correction in the interest of truth, lest I be forced to take legal action.

Very truly yours,
Fr. John Bosco, *Superior*

In the issue of August 19 *Gazzetta del Popolo* did publish Don Bosco's letter without comments in the daily column known as the "Cesspool" where the Giaveno correspondence had appeared.

25th Session. FINAL DECREE. CONFRERES' SPIRITUAL RETREATS.

In the sixteenth session Don Bosco had moved that before the

chapter's close, it should pass a decree authorizing the rector major to draw up the final draft of the proceedings and deliberations to be sent to Rome, allowing him to edit it as he saw fit. It was, after all, only natural that the complex deliberations would require revisions whose need was not apparent at the time they were taken; furthermore, discretion dictated that certain matters properly brought up during the meetings had best be kept out of the final draft. Since all this work of revision could not be done there collectively, it was necessary to empower the superior to revise them at his ease later on. How justified this precaution was on the part of Don Bosco soon became obvious to all.

The twenty-fifth session was held on the morning of October 5, the day set for the general chapter's end. After exactly a full month of work, all realized how much still had to be done, and yet it was urgent that the directors return to their schools for the proximate opening of the new school year. Don Bosco too had a long-standing commitment for Sunday, October 7, feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. He therefore thus addressed the assembly:

What we have accomplished so far is more a preliminary than a definitive draft. Hours of study and work are still needed to refine and codify articles and clear out repetitions and possible contradictions. Furthermore, we must separate what is structural and therefore to be submitted for approval as pertinent to the constitutions from what is merely disciplinary and from matters which we should know but which should not be made public in any way. Today, then, we should work out this decree as the final act of this chapter, and this evening at our last meeting we can read and sign it.

Unanimously the assembly cancelled the reading of the minutes. Don Bosco personally sketched the basic outlines of the decree, and Father Durando and Father Francesia were given the task to draft it.

The remainder of the session was devoted to the topic of the confreres' spiritual retreats in future years. At all times our founder gave extreme importance to the annual retreats. Until 1877 our school at Lanzo, in the sub-Alpine hill lands, had offered delightful hospitality to retreatants during the summer months, but the growth of the Congregation now made it necessary to find more such healthful retreat centers. It was decided that the Salesian houses of

South America, central Italy and Liguria should hold their retreats each in its own area, and two would continue to be held in Piedmont. The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were also to hold two retreats—but where and when?

Father Cagliero, the first called upon for his opinion, hedged a bit on the ground that suitable premises were unavailable. “Divine Providence will take care of that,” Don Bosco replied. “At any rate, ask the archbishop of Buenos Aires to let you hold the retreat in the seminary while it is vacant during the summer vacation. Buenos Aires is the only central location. It will certainly be costly to get there from Montevideo and San Nicolás, but it can’t be helped. We have seen our Congregation show marked growth ever since we began to hold spiritual retreats exclusively for our confreres.”

The Magliano seminary was chosen as the retreat house for central Italy, and Father Rua was appointed to go there to represent Don Bosco. As for Liguria, the choice was between Sampierdarena, Alassio and a house soon to be opened at La Spezia. Within the next two years, also, arrangements were to be made for spiritual retreats in France, but in the meantime the Salesians in France would go to Liguria. The two retreats at Lanzo were to be attended not only by the confreres of Piedmont, but also by all Salesian directors and those who could not go elsewhere.

It was the assembly’s unanimous decision that the retreats be always preached by Salesians. Experience had taught that non-Salesian priests, regardless of learning and holiness, did not produce as much spiritual fruit as our own. This prompted Don Bosco to exhort his listeners to train themselves in preaching. “Furthermore,” he said, “if you come upon a confrere with special talent in this field—or in any other field—do your best to nurture that talent. Thus you will get good results without too much toil.”

26th Session. CLOSING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

The general chapter, which had opened on the evening of September 5 with the singing of the *Veni, Creator*, held its final session that same hour on the evening of October 5 with the singing of the *Te Deum*.

The first item on the agenda was the draft of the decree. We need make but one observation here. The two authors had stated that the superior chapter was given full power to codify, amend and so on.

Don Bosco had the words “superior chapter” replaced by “rector major,” offering three reasons for the amendment: 1. According to Roman praxis, all official communications to the Congregation were always addressed to the rector major. 2. The word “rector major” was understood to mean also the superior chapter. 3. This was a general norm, as it had already been previously stated.

Some time was then spent again on the topic of preaching. At the second session it had been decided that a confrere should write a brief treatise on sacred eloquence to be used as a textbook in the theology course, and Father Bonetti had been asked to do it. Don Bosco commented as follows:

This little treatise should not be limited to preaching. It should also encompass our boys’ character formation. It should embody our preventive system of education. Youngsters should be drawn by love to do what is right through constant supervision and guidance, not by systematic punishment for transgressions. Experience proves that this latter method of education more often than not arouses lifelong hatred in young people toward their educators.

Let preaching be down to earth. Define the topic; then go on to its various aspects and explain them. Do not cite many quotations or merely tell a lot of stories to convince your listeners. Rather, carefully explain the quotation you choose. Likewise, rather than bring in many incidents, choose one most suitable and concentrate on it, highlighting its most applicable details. A child’s immature mind cannot grasp and appreciate a number of facts, but he can retain one fact which was firmly impressed on his mind. If the impression was very strong, his tender memory will retain it for years to come.

Meanwhile, the decree had been clearly rewritten and was returned to the assembly where it was read aloud. Then it was approved and signed by all.

This procedure closed the first general chapter, whose work had proceeded with exemplary alacrity. In congratulating the chapter members, Father [Secondo] Franco, S.J. stated that in one month they had accomplished what elsewhere would have taken several months. However, the task of publication was not so speedy, requiring far more time than had first been thought necessary. A year later the task was not yet completed. Under the circumstances, Don Bosco, who was desirous to satisfy the general legitimate

expectation, ordered the publication and distribution of the sections dealing with “Community Life,” “Morality,” “Thrift” and “Provinces,” deferring the rest to later. This publication was a handsome little book of some one hundred pages, with an affectionate letter from Don Bosco to “his most beloved sons in Jesus Christ” as a Foreword.

When this publication appeared, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had not yet acted upon Don Bosco’s petition to postpone the convocation of the general chapter. The three years required after the approval of the rules had begun April 4, 1874; consequently, the convocation of the general chapter had been delayed five months. Don Bosco was notified of the rescript’s issuing by Father Constantine Leonori [a Vatican attorney] in a letter dated November 24, 1878, which also told him of another rescript concerning Count Cays. The validation of the postponement of the first general chapter made it possible to convoke future general chapters during the summer vacation.

Don Bosco had repeatedly stated that the chapter deliberations would be sent to Rome, but after a year or more of alterations, he decided not to send anything to Rome. As was his habit, he thought it wise to try out the deliberations and see whether what sounded good on paper could stand up satisfactorily to practice. And so, in due time, the second general chapter was held, at which new deliberations were added to evaluate deliberations of the first. Then both, well codified, were published in 1882.

During preparations for the first general chapter, Father Secondo Franco, S.J. had said that its main objective was to form the religious consciousness of their confreres. What we have narrated in this chapter abundantly shows what great strides they made in that direction.

CHAPTER 10

Third Expedition to South America

THE third missionary expedition was first announced in the September 13 issue of *Unità Cattolica*. An article entitled “New Salesian Expedition to America,” after praising God for past achievements, described the vast field of activity which lay open to Don Bosco’s sons and stressed the need for evangelical workers in those distant lands. Don Bosco, it stated, was preparing a third expedition of some forty people to be made up of Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Some were to leave the coming November, the rest some time later. The article appealed to the good-heartedness of its readers, asking them to be generous with their contributions to Don Bosco to help him meet the inevitable expenses entailed. “We are not unaware,” the article continued, “that some people look with jaundiced eye on such expeditions, protesting that we need priests here.” After several similar remarks, it concluded: “A learned observer of modern history has told us that for every missionary going abroad, at least ten priestly vocations arise to fill the ranks which the missionary so heroically left to evangelize pagan lands.”¹

¹The article was written by Professor Vincent Lanfranchi of Turin, apropos of which we add a statement of Bishop Besson of Nîmes, who, in an open letter addressed to Father Bougaud, Vicar General of Orléans on August 28, 1878, wrote: “In his first year as bishop of Besançon, (Cardinal Mathieu) was very reluctant to let any of his priests become religious or go to the foreign missions. He saw it as an ill-considered drain on the diocesan clergy, which he felt it was his primary duty to strengthen. But a few years later he changed his mind, and his diocese was all the better for it. The more readily he allowed his priests to go to the missions, the more priests God sent him for his diocese. For every missionary who was allowed to leave, two or three seminarians would come from that missionary’s home town. The diocese of Besançon experienced its greatest growth from the day its sons began heading to foreign lands to convert nations still enshrouded in the darkness of death. The diocese of Besançon is so rich in vocations that it staffs other dioceses in France with excellent priests. How true it is that the more one gives to God, the more God delights in repaying.” [Author]

The article was cautiously hinting at the impression left on the archdiocesan clergy by a lengthy circular letter addressed to diocesan priests by Archbishop Gastaldi on August 4. His Excellency wrote of the alarming decline in the number of priests and urged that his pastors foster the piety of young men who showed an inclination for priestly life and send them to the seminary either at Bra or at Giaveno. But between the lines, in spite of sentiments so ably expressed, it was not too hard to perceive a bias against the training of young men for the foreign missions, as well as an insinuation that religious life was not any more perfect than the secular. An important document reveals that any reader who knew anything about the Salesian Congregation would immediately say that the circular was directed against it.² The passage which alluded most openly to Don Bosco was the assertion that “all priests without distinction are called by Jesus Christ to strive toward perfection.” It continued: “As everyone can see, Our Divine Savior has manifestly entrusted the countless multitudes of His faithful to the care of priests who form the so-called secular clergy. It would be ridiculous to suppose that He intended to leave the overwhelming number of souls redeemed by His Divine Blood to the care and guidance of that part of the clergy which in someone’s opinion is less perfect, less endowed, less blessed with holiness.” Even Canon Zappata, vicar general, in giving his “view of Archbishop Gastaldi’s circular,”³ was so sure that this “someone” was Don Bosco, that he commented: “I very much wish that the allusion to Don Bosco be struck out, or at least toned down, because I deeply fear that it may bring Your Excellency many unpleasant moments. You know better than I the many champions and patrons Don Bosco has in Rome and how they say he is particularly dear to the Pope. . . . Might it not happen that because of some misunderstanding or misinterpretation, Rome might issue unpleasant, damaging statements in your regard?”

In the light of the above, it is obvious that *Unità Cattolica*’s news article was not to pass without some comment. No sooner did the archbishop see it than he sent a copy of his own circular to the paper’s editor, Father Margotti, with a marginal notation: “I

²To the Most Eminent Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council. Statement by the Rev. John Bosco, Sampierdarena, St. Vincent de Paul Press, 1881. [Author]

³The original letter is in the possession of Father Franchetti of Turin. [Author]

warmly request dear Father Margotti to abstain from even indirectly contributing to *the constantly growing decline of priestly vocations in Piedmont*, especially here in Turin, as he may well have done in *Unità Cattolica*, Number 213, 1877. I ask him not to oppose the statements of his archbishop, whose authority cannot be slighted in any way without damaging the authority of the Holy See as well. Let all those called by God go to the missions, but such a vocation should not be foisted on those who neither have nor show it. A missionary vocation is very special.” *Unità Cattolica*’s editor, a close friend of Don Bosco, sent him the annotated circular and a covering letter. “My dearly revered Don Bosco,” he wrote, “please read the enclosed. For the sake of peace, please don’t send me news releases without the archbishop’s approval, so as not to embarrass either him or the Pope. Affectionately yours, Father Margotti.” Don Bosco, who was then presiding at the general chapter in Lanzo, answered laconically on September 19: “We shall have to go to heaven together, my dear Father, for where one of us is, there too is the other.”⁴

Missionary fervor was kept high, especially among the younger Salesians, by letters arriving from America in the first months of the year, vividly telling of the sacrifices the limited personnel had to make in their work. The letters, read aloud at mealtime, inspired many to ask if they could rush to their assistance. In fact, in April, many wanted to start studying Spanish, especially since Don Bosco seemed inclined to send reinforcements immediately after the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. However, he instructed Father Barberis to tell all applicants to concentrate on living Mary’s month devoutly and on preparing diligently for their examinations. He also made it known that this missionary band was expected to gain a better mastery of Spanish; indeed, he was hoping that Father Cagliero might give it a crash course for at least one month so that on reaching their mission the members might be ready to work.

⁴The letter then goes on calmly to tell of Count Cays’ donning of the clerical habit. In a postscript he added with equal calm: “Archbishop Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro asked me to send you his regards with the request that you allot space to the enclosed news release which shows that the [Portuguese] Empire has not yet lost all faith. Father Francesia translated and edited it into Italian. See what you can do with it.” The article did not appear in print. The remark “We shall have to go to heaven together” was interpreted by some as a prediction of their deaths, which occurred but a few months apart, Father Margotti dying on May 6, 1887, at 63, while in excellent health. [Author]

Eventually, the expedition was postponed to November. Don Bosco chose those who were to go just two months before the opening of the general chapter: four priests, eight clerics, six coadjutors. Everyone was bursting with eagerness to know who the lucky ones were. They listened attentively to every word he said, hoping to discover the secret, but the news came out very simply. One day Father Rua asked Father Vespignani to join Don Bosco for a cup of coffee. Not waiting for a second invitation, the latter dashed to the dining room, kissed Don Bosco's hand and sat beside him. As the fragrant brew was being poured, Don Bosco made small talk with him and the others who were there. Once everyone had been served and all were sipping their coffee, Father Rua pulled out of his pocket a tiny strip of paper, which he always kept rolled between his fingers during the after-lunch recreation as a memo for giving advice, instructions and the like, and, looking at Don Bosco with a rather mysterious grin, asked, "Do you want me to read the names of those taking part in the new missionary expedition?" With Don Bosco's consent, he read out very slowly: "Father Costamagna, Father Vespignani. . ." and so on. In a flash, the names were bandied about from mouth to mouth throughout the Oratory.

Reactions varied. Father Vespignani, having no expectations, was astonished. Having entered the Congregation soon after ordination on the very eve of the second expedition's departure, he had at once volunteered for the foreign missions, but, despite Don Bosco's reassuring words,⁵ he had always feared that his health could not endure the trip. Father Rua, noting his surprise, gently asked if he had any objection. No, he said, he had not. Don Bosco intervened, "You will go only after a doctor has given you a thorough checkup and has declared that the trip will not hurt your health." The doctor's opinion in fact was very favorable.

To outsiders all the priests and clerics seemed far too young. Such fears had been voiced before in whispers, but now quite openly. Yet Father James Costamagna, who headed the party, became a bishop; Father [Joseph] Vespignani was appointed provincial in the Argentine Republic and later elected prefect general of technical schools in the Superior Chapter, while Father

⁵See p. 17. [Editor]

[Dominic] Milaneseo became a heroic missionary in Patagonia. And these were the youngest of the priests. Of the clerics, two became very capable provincials: Father [Joseph] Gamba in Uruguay and Paraguay, and Father [Peter] Rota in Brazil; a third, Father [John] Paseri, distinguished himself as a zealous preacher and confessor. The fourth, Father [Bartholomew] Panaro, became as famous as Father Milaneseo at Chos Malal and Neuquén [in the Andes]. Lastly, Father [Louis] Galbusera, the efficient director of our huge boarding school at San Nicolás, became a widely acknowledged educator and, through the school, obtained wonderful results among the detainees of the city jail.

No one seemed to object to the choice of coadjutors. They just seemed to be good men. The names of two, [Bernard] Musso⁶ and [Benvenuto] Graziano,⁷ are known to our readers and they deserve further treatment. For some fifty years Musso taught shoemaking and trained a considerable number of young artisans with great charity and patience. His was the joy of teaching a trade to the first Indian to be taken in from the tribes of the Central Pampas, a chieftain's son brought to Pius IX School by Archbishop Aneyros. This lad, a full-blooded Patagonian, learned his trade so well that in turn he became a master craftsman at the trade school of Viedma in Patagonia.

Graziano we first met in Rome, in 1875, as a distinguished army officer. He put aside his epaulets and made his profession to Don Bosco. He was a most competent business manager in his many enterprises in South America, rendering priceless service in equipping and organizing the first Salesian trade schools.

We can now better appreciate a comment which Father Vespignani made fifty years later as he looked back over those days: "The third missionary expedition from the Oratory was to blaze a wide-reaching Salesian trail through South America. From Argentina they ventured into Chile and Bolivia, and from Uruguay into Paraguay and Brazil, which then became the hub of mission activity in Mato Grosso, the Amazon and the Rio Negro areas. The first two houses of the Plata territory became models of later

⁶See Vol. XI, p. 265. [Editor]

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 103. [Editor]

foundations in Ecuador, Colombia and the surrounding republics.”⁸ In a word, it was the parable of the mustard seed all over again, constantly renewed within the heart of the Church.

Under Father Cagliero’s able direction and Father Barberis’ direct guidance, the newly chosen missionaries studied Spanish and prepared themselves spiritually. Toward the middle of August they joined their confreres at Lanzo for their spiritual retreat. Father Vespignani’s comments on that retreat deserve a place in Don Bosco’s biography: “Don Bosco presided at our spiritual retreat and nearly always joined us at recreation. We would surround him with tender affection, hanging on his words, listening to his counsels and suggestions, asking a flood of questions, seeking his advice on all possible eventualities, eager to impress his moral image on our souls and to drink at the very source of his spirit. We never thought for a moment that we might never see or hear him again because we felt that Don Bosco could never die. Our only concern before being separated from him was to store up as many of his counsels and memories as we could.”⁹

In a homily giving the retreat souvenirs Don Bosco recounted a dream of his.

I’m taking the regular preacher’s place because I have a few things to tell you. To start off, a little while ago we received good news from America, which will be read to you later on, perhaps during mealtime. Now, rather than give you a sermon, I will tell you a story. Call it what you will—fable, dream, tale—and give it any importance you wish. If you like it, fine. In any case, we can always learn something.

Somehow I seemed to be strolling the avenues around Porta Susa.¹⁰ Outside the military barracks I spotted a woman who seemed to be a street vendor of roasted chestnuts, because she kept turning a cylinder which I thought held chestnuts for roasting. I was wondering at her novel way of roasting chestnuts, and, drawing nearer to watch, I asked what she was cooking in that strange-looking pot. “Candy for the Salesians,” she answered.

“What!” I echoed. “Candy for the Salesians?”

“Yes,” she replied and opened the cylinder to show me. I saw candies of different colors, divided into compartments of cloth. Some candies were

⁸Rev. G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 104. [Author]

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 112. [Author]

¹⁰One of three railroad stations in Turin, not far from the Oratory. [Editor]

white, some red, some black. They were all covered with some kind of sticky sugar icing which looked like freshly fallen drops of rain or dew, here and there stained red.

“Are these candies for eating?” I asked the woman.

“Of course,” she said and offered them to me.

“Why are some red, others black, and some white?” I asked.

“The white ones,” she answered, “require little work, but they stain easily. The red cost blood, and the black cost one’s life. Whoever eats them will know neither toil nor death.”

“What does that sticky icing mean?”

“It signifies the sweetness of the saint whom you have taken as your model. The resemblance to dew means that much effort and sacrifice are needed to maintain such gentleness and that sometimes it can be preserved only by the shedding of one’s blood.”

Astonished, I tried to ask more questions, but she refused to answer. In fact she stopped talking, and so I resumed my walk, pondering what I had heard. I had gone but a few steps when I met Father Picco with some of our priests, all distraught, abashed, the hair of their heads standing on end.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“If only you knew!” Father Picco said. “If only you knew!” I insisted that I had to know, but he kept repeating, “If only you knew! Did you see that woman making candy?”

“Yes. What of it?”

“Well,” he continued fearfully, “she told me to urge you to make your sons work hard. She said. ‘They will encounter many thorns but many roses as well. Tell them that life is short and the harvest great. I mean that our lifespan is short compared to eternity; in God’s sight it is but a fleeting moment, a mere nothing.’”

“Are we not working?” I asked.

“Yes, we are, but we must work harder!” he said. Then he and the others vanished from my sight. More puzzled than ever, I continued walking toward the Oratory and awoke as I got there.

This is the little tale I wanted to tell you. Call it a fable, a parable, a fantasy, whatever you wish. But I want you to bear well in mind what that woman said to Father Picco and the other priests: that is, that we must practice the gentleness of our own St. Francis de Sales and that we must unceasingly work hard.”¹¹

¹¹He later recounted this dream during the general chapter on the evening of September 28, while speaking to several superiors in the dining room after supper. Among them were Father Lemoyne and Father Barberis, who immediately afterward wrote down the account as they heard it. We will give Father Lemoyne’s account. In Father Barberis’ retelling, we are told that Don Bosco asked the woman who she was “because of her elegant appearance, so spotless and proper,” and that she answered, “You have no need to know who I am. Just

Here Don Bosco expanded on the woman's words, encouraging his listeners to practice what she had recommended. He also dwelt at length on the vast amount of work that had to be done and on the need of work, concluding: "Let's then be careful to be kind to everyone. Let's pray for each other that there be no falling away in morals, and let's resolve to help each other always. Let the honor of one be the honor of all, the defense of one, the defense of all. Let all be concerned for the honor and defense of the Congregation in each of us, because the honor or disgrace of one confrere falls upon the entire Congregation. Let us endeavor with all our might that this good mother of ours suffer neither harm nor shame. Let's strive to defend and uphold her honor." He kept up this strain and closed with the exhortation, "Let us take heart, my sons! Many thorns we shall run into, but remember that there are many roses as well. Let us not lose heart in dangers and difficulties. Let us pray trustingly, and God will grant the help He has promised to those who labor in His cause. Let us stand together and live as Scripture says of the early Christians: let us be one heart and one soul!"

More than the others, obviously the missionaries had greater need to form one single heart and soul. This was Don Bosco's concern. October 7 was the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Since the general chapter was over, Don Bosco was reluctant to break his custom of celebrating this feast at Becchi. He had already sent Father Milanesio with a group of aspirants to preach the novena there. On the vigil they were joined by the other missionaries who went as far as Chieri by train. After visiting the seminary where Don Bosco had studied for the priesthood, they continued their journey on foot, with frequent rest stops, enlivened by impromptu serenades on brass and string instruments which some had brought along. Don Bosco joined them toward evening. The feast was very devout and joyful. They returned to Turin by way of Mondonio,

remember all that you have heard, and be not concerned about who told you." It is natural that we should also record the account given by Father Vespignani (*Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, pp. 115-117), but he wrote his version much later. Still there is one detail we feel we should relate. According to him, Father Picco cried out, "Defections in the Oratory! Persecutions against the Oratory!" He then comments, "We heard the dream and witnessed the defections and persecutions which took place at the Oratory in those days, and we noted that the first one to taste the Madonna's candy had been our father, Don Bosco." In Father Vespignani's account, Father Lemoyne's and Father Barberis' "woman" is called "a lady," and later Father Lemoyne is convinced she is Our Lady. What he says about persecutions is absolutely true, as the next chapter shall show. [Author]

stopping to visit the grave and home of Dominic Savio. That community excursion was one of Don Bosco's ways of binding together the hearts of individuals who barely knew each other and yet were soon to share their labors so far from their common father.

As on other occasions, Father Costamagna, the group's leader, was not with them, for he was at Mornese, busily preparing the six Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians who had been chosen to be the first in a long series of sisters to travel to both North and South America. He taught them Spanish, having himself already acquired a fair knowledge of the language. He sustained them in overcoming the inevitable obstacles raised by their families and helped them prepare their wardrobe for the journey. Most of all, he strengthened their resolve with spiritual advice. He left Mornese only after the arrival of their new director, Father Lemoyne. On October 28 he addressed the entire community for the last time on this theme: "The world beneath our feet; Jesus always in our hearts; Eternity on our minds." The leave-taking showed the great esteem in which both pupils and nuns held him.

Among the pupils were two of Father Vespignani's sisters. The unexpected visit of their father helped him solve a problem. He had not written his family a word about his going to South America. His father found it out from the director at Mornese, and naturally he rushed to Turin sooner than he had planned. There he found Don Bosco, whom he had already met—as we have said—at the beginning of February, when his son had been sick and Don Bosco had just returned from Rome. At that time, though shocked to find his son so weakened by illness, he could not help but be fascinated by Don Bosco's kindness to all who came to him. On this second surprise visit it was much easier to reassure and calm the man. Don Bosco's loving manners so soothed him that, on leaving, Mr. Vespignani gave him a heavy gold chain, saying, "Please accept this little gift for Mary, Help of Christians." More than that, he made an even greater sacrifice: he did not ask to have his son go home before his departure but took it on himself to soothe his wife's motherly heart.

We must also say something about Don Bosco's weighty burden of financing the missionary expedition. He seems not to have sent out a circular appealing for help as on previous occasions. The *Salesian Bulletin*, with its wide circulation, served the purpose,

even though not all recipients paid for their subscription. The October issue reprinted in its entirety the article which had appeared in *Unità Cattolica*, and the November issue carried a special urgent appeal to the Salesian cooperators to come to his assistance. Then, Don Bosco personally called on his benefactors to receive their charitable donations. "I am making my rounds begging for funds to support our missionaries," he wrote to a director.¹² "Pray that they be generous." With humble insistence he also began a writing campaign. Even if he got no financial aid, he felt it was not a wasted effort, for at least he was drawing the attention of people and institutions to his Congregation.

He had hoped for the usual donation of at least a thousand lire from Foreign Secretary Melegari, to whom he wrote through the kindly offices of his benefactor, Commendatore Malvano,¹³ but he did not get it because the Turco-Russian war, then in progress, was creating extraordinary demands on the foreign ministry budget. However, he did receive very courteous responses from both the minister and his chief deputy. Such commendations from the highest officials of the land he always treasured as unsolicited letters of approval.

From the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to whom he also wrote, he received the same negative response.¹⁴

A month before, as on a previous occasion, he had in vain appealed to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith [in Lyons] for a subsidy. Neither did he forget Cardinal Randi, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, to whom he wrote:

Turin, October 1877

Your Eminence:

The Salesian mission of South America, which opened two years ago with Your Eminence's favor, has been blessed by God and now cares for five churches as well as a junior seminary at Villa Colón in Uruguay, a boarding school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, and a home for abandoned boys in Buenos Aires. These homes shelter several hundred pupils, of whom some have given signs of a priestly vocation and have volunteered

¹²Letter to Father Ronchail, Costigliole di Saluzzo, October 26, 1877. [Author]

¹³We are omitting Don Bosco's short note of October 24, 1877 to this benefactor. [Editor]

¹⁴Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

their services as missionaries to the Indians. Several missions have already been preached in areas bordering on Indian territories, and we are now in the process of opening three more mission stations: one on the Colorado River near the Pampas, a second at Carmen on the Rio Negro, between the Pampas and Patagonia, and the third at Santa Cruz, Patagonia's frontier on the Magellan Strait. To support these undertakings, to replace those Salesians summoned by the Lord into eternity and to staff the above three new houses, I find I must send another band of no less than forty missionaries. They are about to leave.

However, having hardly recovered from previous expenses, I must now appeal to you for help in order to outfit this band of missionaries, provide them with Spanish books, finance their journey, and so on. The expedition is very large but most needed. I am confident that we will very soon see Indians being converted by Indians.

I know there are obstacles in the way of such a subsidy, but I also know that a word from Your Eminence will smooth the way.

I assure Your Eminence that our Congregation is always at your service, and that we shall strive with all our might for God's increased glory and the growth of the Catholic missions, but I absolutely need your charitable moral and financial aid.

Trusting in your goodness, I deem it an honor to sign myself,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He wrote at greater length to Cardinal Randi a second time to try to get the indispensable papal approval needed to have Patagonia listed with the missions which the Society for the Propagation of the Faith regularly subsidized.

[Turin, October 1877]

Your Eminence:

Two years ago the first Salesian missionary expedition set out for Uruguay and Argentina under your auspices and with the Holy Father's blessing. Last year a larger band was sent. Our plan was to set up boarding schools or junior seminaries in areas bordering Indian territory and through the children to reach out to the tribes of the Pampas and Patagonia. God blessed our humble efforts with five parishes which have already been started to worship the Lord and to benefit the people. We have opened a junior seminary at Villa Colón near Montevideo, Uruguay's capital, and the Holy Father has told us how pleased he was to have this seminary named after him. A boarding school was opened at San

Nicolás de los Arroyos, bordering on Indian lands. Our third endeavor was a home for poor boys, particularly Indians, at Buenos Aires. All three places are filled with youngsters whose discipline and moral behavior are very commendable. Some have even shown signs of a priestly vocation. Also in Buenos Aires, with your authorization and the bishop's approval, we have opened a house of studies, or novitiate, to train young men for the the missions.

Within these past two years, the Salesians have conducted excellent parish missions in territories bordering on Indian lands, both in areas which had not seen a Catholic priest for years and in Indian settlements where the natives willingly flocked to hear the Gospel. Since this first endeavor proved successful, we have gone on to the next step of finding a way to break into the Indian territories. After conferring several times with Bishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires, we agreed that we would first have to set up mission stations in various spots as close as possible to Indian settlements. We have a choice of sites, since the caciques, or chieftains, seem well-disposed to us and are asking for missionaries. The most likely and least perilous choices are in the Santa Cruz and Carhué areas. The latter, growing in population, has an army post, built in 1875, on the frontier recently established by the Republic of Buenos Aires as a buffer against the Pampas tribes who keep up their massacring raids under the pretext of trade. This is the last outpost in western Indian territory, 37° 20' south and 5° west of the Buenos Aires meridian. Santa Cruz is a small settlement at the furthestmost tip of Patagonia in the Strait of Magellan, at 50° south. It is a trading post where Patagonian Indians can barter goods for much desired foods and beverages. A hostel and mission station in each of these two localities would be an excellent idea, I think, both to safeguard the faith of believers and to set up contacts with the natives, so that we can educate their children and reach deeper into their territory.

True, the expenses we have incurred are heavy. So too are those we now face as we send forty additional missionaries to join their confreres in working the harvest which daily grows in promise in this vast evangelical field. Still, we trust that the piety of the faithful will not fail us.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith is ready to help us financially, but very correctly wants us to have these missions formally approved by the Holy See, as the president of the central office in Lyons has notified me in the enclosed letter.

For the sole purpose of promoting God's greater glory and consolidating this Congregation's humble efforts in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ, I respectfully request that Your Eminence graciously approve these two missions and entrust them to the Salesians in the name of the superior, Father John Cagliero, founder of our American houses.

who has begun five parishes in that territory after personal visits and serious study. Your approval will establish two missions which, with God's blessing and the overall care of the Holy See, will brighten the future for the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia. I entrust all to Your Eminence's learned prudence and foresight and most earnestly seek your aid and counsel so that the difficulties which we will encounter in this matter may be smoothed over.

Gratefully and respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

On receiving these letters, Cardinal Randi passed on the first to the secretariat for extraordinary Church affairs, under which South America came, expecting it to issue an answer and therefore not responding himself. The second letter he also referred to that same department [on December 5, 1877] and advised Don Bosco to apply to it "for all decisions to be made in this matter." By the time the belated response reached Don Bosco, the missionaries were just about to set foot on American soil. In spite of opposition from many quarters of Turin which he constantly had to ward off, Don Bosco began drawing up an extensive plan for an apostolic prefecture and vicariate in Patagonia, sending it to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. We shall resume discussion of this matter later.

On top of all these disappointments, the bitterest yet was to come from the Pope, to whom he had asked Cardinal Bilio to appeal for a subsidy to his latest missionary expedition. We can understand his feelings on receiving the following answer.

Rome, November 4, 1877

My dear Don Bosco:

I found your letter of October 27 awaiting my return from a pastoral visit to my diocese. In my first audience with the Holy Father two days ago, I told him of the latest missionary expedition of forty Salesians to [South] America and of your urgent need for some kind of grant, particularly to offset the traveling expenses. It grieves me to say that the Holy Father did not seem as well disposed as last year. Unless I am mistaken, I see two main reasons for this: first, the matter of the Conceptionists and, second, your taking on too many things at one time.

I did my best to dissuade the Pope from any opinion less than favorable toward you. I do not know if I succeeded, but I believe that a visit from you

to Rome would be very wise, if not absolutely necessary at this time.

On my part, be assured that, given any occasion, I shall help as much as I can, not only because of my esteem and love for you, but also in thanks for the good work of your wonderful Salesians at Magliano, which I made it a point to bring to His Holiness' attention.

Hoping to speak at greater length with you personally, I commend myself to your saintly prayers.

Most cordially yours,
✠ Louis Cardinal Bilio

As we have seen, the Conceptionist affair,¹⁵ after causing Don Bosco so many troubles, had ended in failure, certainly through no fault of his, as our readers can have easily perceived. However, the Pope had no idea of the intrigues going on behind the scenes. As for Don Bosco's taking on too many tasks at one time, it is true that, viewed from afar, his enterprising spirit might well have frightened some people, but it is equally true that he never put his hand to anything without prudent and wise counsel. Furthermore, save for the Conceptionist affair, whose failure cannot be imputed to him, everything he had attempted during that period proved successful. Unfortunately, it was true that at this time the Pope's opinion of him was "less than favorable," but as our narrative continues it will shed more light on the forces then working against him. We cite only one instance now. In the second half of 1877, Pius IX had written Don Bosco three letters, which were promptly answered, but those answers never reached the Pope, because they had been intercepted by members of the Vatican household. At first, the Pope was astonished by what he thought was Don Bosco's silence; later he assumed that the latter's excessive undertakings had caused him to neglect other serious obligations; finally he voiced his complaint, asking: "What did I do to Don Bosco that he does not even bother to answer me? Have I not done all I could for him?" He even gave vent to his displeasure with Cardinal Bilio, exclaiming: "What harm have I done to Don Bosco that he does not answer my letters?" The cardinal could find no way to exonerate Don Bosco, as his affection prompted, but when Father Cagliero came to Rome with the missionaries, Cardinal Bilio told

¹⁵See Chapter 2. [Editor]

him very plainly everything he had merely hinted at in his letter to Don Bosco. Father Cagliero, who knew that Don Bosco had answered all three letters most readily and had been very surprised at not receiving any acknowledgment, fully assured the cardinal that Don Bosco was not to be blamed. The prelate was thrilled by this news, for now he had evidence to dispel the Pope's doubts. Upon hearing of this, Pius IX raised his eyes to heaven, exclaiming, "Patience!" However, Cardinal Bilio got the impression that the Pope was not fully convinced yet. As Pius IX approached the end of his life, the Lord allowed the angelic Pontiff to be distressed by afflictions which usually grieve the hearts of saints to purify and detach them ever more from this earth.¹⁶

Fortunately, the mail did not always bring bad news. Toward the end of October Don Bosco was informed that the agent of the French shipping line at Genoa had received instructions from Buenos Aires to assign ten second-class berths to Don Bosco.¹⁷

Since a small group of his missionaries was to embark at Lisbon, Don Bosco twice wrote to a priest of that city, receiving no reply. He followed up with a letter in Latin to the patriarch, entreating him earnestly to grant hospitality to the missionaries either at the seminary or elsewhere, and offering to pay for it, but, seemingly, he got nowhere, for he said nothing about it at the time of the missionaries' departure and they themselves never even thought of paying a courtesy visit to the prelate.

The solemn ceremony of departure was set for November 7. That day Don Bosco kept his sons very close to him, so as to give all an opportunity to talk with him at length both privately and collectively. They were of course no longer heading for unknown shores, for Father Cagliero had made arrangements for them before leaving for Italy and had done his best to orient them. Monsignor Ceccarelli, too, had been asked by Don Bosco to remain in Turin to teach them Spanish and then escort one part of the band. Still, being separated from Don Bosco by such a huge distance could not help but deeply move those men who had lived so close to him and

¹⁶To make matters clearer, we add that Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda of Fossano called one evening on the Pope between ten and eleven o'clock to give him a report in great secrecy. As he was talking to the Pope, Pius IX whispered to him: "Speak softly. Here even the walls have ears!" Bishop Fossano mentioned this incident several times to Salesians who were very close to him. [Author]

¹⁷Letter from Consul Gazzolo to Don Bosco, Savona, October 21, 1877. [Author]

who, with rare exceptions, were accustomed only to the quiet ways of their native, ancient Piedmont.

The gentle Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were even more apprehensive, but felt buoyed up by the thought that Father Costamagna would be their escorting angel. Father Lemoyne had arranged for a departure ceremony similar to the one in Turin to be held in their little chapel at Mornese on the evening of November 6. Relatives and friends of the departing sisters attended. After the singing of Vespers, he addressed them with a few words of encouragement and farewell. Then he imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and recited the prayers for travelers. Amid general emotion, Mother Mazzarello stood up and led the six departing sisters to the door, while those present said their farewells more in their hearts than with their lips. The two sisters who were going to Rome with Mother Mazzarello immediately set out for Sampierdarena, where they would meet the Salesians, while the other four joined them there on November 13 when their companions returned.

At the departure ceremony in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians at Turin on the evening of November 7, Don Bosco addressed the faithful as follows:

At the very outset, I must give thanks to God and to Mary for the choice blessings they have showered upon us.

Most of you remember how two years ago other courageous Salesians took leave of their families in this very church and set out for the unknown shores, without funds and without knowing what awaited them. They had good reason to be deeply worried, but, on reaching Buenos Aires and San Nicolás, they found help and support. They did so well that soon a second expedition had to be readied. Relying not on our own halting efforts but on the aid of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, we sent a second group to America's distant shores to their confreres' aid. Now a third and larger expedition is about to leave its native shores and families and carry the light of the Gospel to these far-off lands. They go not for self-satisfaction but because they are absolutely needed to share the burdens of those who preceded them and now do not suffice for the work, such is the vastness of the field awaiting them. We cannot let them be crushed by the burden. Other missionaries must go to their aid, nor will this third expedition be the last.

First let me state that, apart from the work entailed, this is not of our doing. All the glory is truly due to God, who has blessed our good

intentions and plans. Those who are about to leave, as well as those who must stay, are no longer fearful, for the danger is less and the distance shorter and no longer worrisome. Not that the distances have physically shrunk, but the crossings have already been made by others and transportation has so improved that our missionaries may well feel they are going on a pleasure trip—all the more so since a confrere of the first contingent has smoothed the way and has provided for the well-being of those who will follow. Furthermore, they will be accompanied by one of our confreres who came from there, spent some time with us, and now returns to his mission field.

Today a new band of Salesians leaves for the missions. Do you know what mission and missionary mean? Missionary means “being sent”—sent as the apostles were by Jesus Christ. “Go forth to bring God’s word to all nations,” Our Lord said, before leaving this world to ascend into heaven. Inspired by His word, the disciples made their message heard in all parts of the world. By the same command, the visible head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, sends forth priests to all parts of this earth to spread the light of the Gospel. When our missionaries get to Rome, they will call on the Holy Father not just to see him, pay their respects and be given a formal blessing, but to receive the mandate which Jesus gave His apostles: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation” [Mk. 16, 15]. Go, and do good. Go where you are sent. Armed with this blessing, they will go to savage tribes and change them into meek flocks to be led into Christ’s fold. “Their voice has sounded over the whole earth, and their words to the limits of the world” [Rom. 10, 18].

As missionaries, these men must be ready for the unexpected, even for the sacrifice of their lives as heralds of God’s Gospel. Thus far we Salesians have not been called upon to make truly grave sacrifices or to suffer persecution—unless we speak by exception of Father Baccino, who died in the mission field. Those who knew him say he died a victim of apostolic work or, as we might put it, as a martyr to love and self-sacrifice for the welfare of others. Yet that enterprising missionary’s death has not been our loss, but rather our gain, for he is now our patron in heaven.

God has blessed the fatigue of these brothers of ours. In several areas of South America we have opened houses, hostels, festive oratories and parishes. In Buenos Aires, for example, we have opened a large hostel to shelter poor and abandoned boys. But there are girls there who are even more destitute, poverty-stricken, homeless, who hardly know who they are and have no one to teach and care for them. They, too, must be looked after, and so, for the first time, six Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are leaving their country and families to hasten to where they are badly

needed. They will open schools and evangelize and, in a word, do all they can to help these poor homeless girls. This is another achievement.

Let me stress one point. Protestants also are opening missions there, but what a difference there is between their missions and ours, their missionaries and our missionaries! I have no time to go into detail but I will point out one thing. True, Protestants do go to the missions, but who sends them? The queen of England, emperors, kings, princes. On the contrary, who gives Catholic missionaries their mandate? Jesus Christ, represented by His Vicar, the Supreme Pontiff. Does the English queen or the Russian czar or the Prussian emperor send them in the name of Jesus Christ? No, for they are neither priests nor the direct successors of the apostles of Jesus Christ. These missionaries are sent by men, and theirs is a human mission, usually with objectives that are political and directed against the true Church. Jesus Christ does not send them. Before a Protestant missionary sets forth, he considers the size of his salary. "What are they paying me? Enough to meet my demands? Then I'll go. And how about lodging, food and clothing?" Finally, Protestant missionaries want to know if they will receive a subsidy for their children and wives. On leaving home, they take a load of things along because they want their homey comforts. Can the same be said of the Catholic missionary? Not at all! After bidding farewell to family and confreres, he sets out with God as his sole wealth and support, going where obedience sends him, where his help is most needed. He has no concern about where, how or when he will find the funds to live on.

Protestants go only where all life's comforts are available. If they are unavailable, they will strive to get them. They see their missionary activity in the light of material advantage, refusing posts of peril. Should they have to accept such positions or be shamed into them, they go well armed. Our Catholic missionaries, instead, shirk neither discomfort nor sacrifice, going where they are sent in the face of privation and peril. Hunger and thirst they endure with admirable patience. "God has sent me here to preach the Gospel," they say "and preach it I will, at the risk of my own life, with no care or worry for aught else." They set out to win souls for Jesus Christ while others go for economic gain for themselves and their families, to win honorable positions in the eyes of the world. Protestant missionary work may pay well, but the Catholic mission is a noble task for the good of humanity, necessary for eternal life, a commission which is both heavenly and divine.

Which of the two missionaries, Protestant or Catholic, emulates the life of the Divine Master, His love for souls, His efforts to save them?

Now a word or two to my sons who are leaving me. What can I say to them as they set out courageously into the Lord's vineyard? Let me offer

you the same advice and counsel which I gave to the first mission band. They have been published and you can read and ponder them at will. Another thing I heartily recommend is the observance of our Congregation's rule. Take it with you, read it, commit it to memory, keep it at hand as your constant working guide.

You will now go to Rome. Report to the Holy Father as to Jesus Christ Himself. Then on to America! On your arrival, thank all those who have been good to us. Tell them we remember them here in this church. Ask them to continue their kindness toward us, and assure them that all the good you do will redound also to their merit.

Remember that fervent Christians await you there, eager to welcome you, that your confreres are now preparing a home for you, that young people are anxious to listen to you, impatient to see and embrace you. Let these thoughts warm your hearts. A letter I received today informs me that religious vocations are developing there in abundance and that many young men have applied to join us. The harvest awaiting you is abundant, and you shall have many joys to recompense your efforts.

Go forth bravely. Possibly you will return some day to revisit this house, your hometown, your families and friends, but this should not be the thought with which you leave. Seek naught but to win souls for God. Be comforted by the encouraging words: "Save a soul and you have predestined your own." I beg you, pray for us here, and we shall pray for you that God may bless your work.

By God's grace, do your best, while we, by prayer and the aid of Mary, Help of Christians, shall join forces with you, one in heart and soul on earth, so as to win souls for heaven, to bring them into eternal glory. Shall we meet again on earth? Shall any one of you never again see this church? Perhaps, but your real return will come about in heaven, where we shall finally rest after our labors and enjoy full happiness. There we shall see each other in endless joy, in the company of our confreres and the many souls you will have saved. There we shall all be eternally happy, praising and blessing God.

Led by Father Cagliero, the missionaries set out for Rome. Shortly after midday on November 9, they and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were thrilled with joy at seeing and hearing the great Pope Pius IX. They stood lined up along Raphael's galleries as the Holy Father came to them, escorted by Cardinals Bilio, Pacca and Ledokowsky. Father Cagliero, invited to introduce them, said, "Holy Father, here is the third band of Salesian missionaries about to join their companions on our South American missions. These are the Daughters of Mary, Help of

Christians who are heading for Uruguay to found their first home for poor, abandoned girls. We have come to ask for your apostolic blessing, which we found comforting and wondrously effective during our two years' work in Uruguay and in Argentina." "Yes, I bless you with all my heart, my dear children," the Holy Father answered. Then, looking down the line, he asked, "Where does Don Bosco get all these people?"

"Divine Providence sends them, Your Holiness."

"Ah yes, Providence! You are right. Divine Providence can do all things. Let us put our trust in God always."

Father Cagliero then gave the Pope a handwritten report on the current situation of the Salesian missions in South America, a copy of a pamphlet that had been printed for the inauguration of St. Pierre's Hospice at Nice, and a brochure on the Sons of Mary program for belated vocations to the priesthood. The Pope was particularly impressed by the last. "Priestly vocations!" he exclaimed. "Excellent! Excellent!" They all kissed his hand, and then he addressed them in a loud, firm voice belying his eight-five years.

My dear children, let me now tell you something which may comfort you in days to come. It occurred to me this morning as I offered Holy Mass. At the Introit of today's liturgy commemorating the dedication of the basilica of St. John Lateran, our cathedral, I read a few words which first surprised me: *Terribilis est locus iste*. How awesome is this place! What can this mean, I wondered, and how can the Church be an awesome, fearsome place, when we come here to leave our grief, to lift our hearts and minds to God, to seek His help in need and affliction? The answer came to me. Yes, I realized, the Church is fearsome, even terrifying, but only for some people. You know, my dear children, that there are people who belong to the Church and yet are very, very evil. All they do is afflict and grieve her, and if they enter such a sacred place it is only to bring desolation with them and add to the sorrows of this poor mother of theirs. For such as these, the Church is indeed terrifying, for in holy wrath she visits terrible punishment and retribution upon them. We see this every day. For the rest, for those who love her, keep her holy laws and live devout lives, the Church is not frightening at all, but benign and tender. It is in your power, my dear children, to end this terrifying aspect of the Church. Armed with holy zeal, strive to bring an end to sin and iniquity on the face of the earth. Aim at being holy in your Congregation, and you will lead to holiness the inhabitants of those distant lands. Then you will see

the Church restored to joy as a kindly, compassionate mother, bringing happiness and blessings to all.

Then summing up his theme—here given sketchily as reported in the November 16 issue of *Unità Cattolica*—he concluded: “Love the Church, my dear children, defend her honor, make others love her. This is the thought that the Vicar of Jesus Christ gives you at this solemn moment. Remember it.”

Then he cordially gave them his blessing and allowed them to approach him and kiss his sacred ring again. As Father Vespignani came up, Father Cagliero remarked, “This young priest does not yet have faculties for confessions. I ask Your Holiness to allow him to exercise this ministry until he reaches Buenos Aires.” “Yes,” the Pope answered, “hear confessions. I grant you every faculty, but when you get to Buenos Aires, ask the archbishop for permanent canonical permission.”

Father Vespignani wrote: “We left that audience, our hearts bursting with indescribable feelings, and we blessed God. We felt as though we were descending Mount Tabor after seeing the Lord and speaking as intimately with Him as did Moses and Elias.”¹⁸

Some days later, one of their number, the cleric Charles Pane, suddenly came down with a fever while touring the catacombs of St. Callixtus. Mother Mazzarello, the first to notice his shaking, took off her own shawl and asked him with reverent firmness to put it about his shoulders. His whimpering protest broke down before her insistence and the chill that shook his body. The Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God took care of him until he was strong enough to travel to Sampierdarena, only to find there that his companions had already left [for South America]. He had to wait patiently to join a later expedition.

Don Bosco was waiting for them at Genoa on November 13. Doleful at the cleric’s illness, he told them, “Be careful now, and don’t start losing anyone else on the way.” They all crowded about him affectionately, bubbling with enthusiasm over their audience with the Pope, repeating in one voice all he had told them, endlessly speaking of the impression Rome had made upon them. The good father listened kindly, commenting fruitfully on their words and sharing their joy.

¹⁸Rev. G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 133. [Author]

At Sampierdarena Father Vespignani could hardly wait to talk with Don Bosco alone. The sudden, unexpected permission to hear confessions caused him concern. Not that he was unprepared, for he had attended regular moral theology courses in the seminary and had taken part in the Oratory's fortnightly lectures of Father Ascanio Savio. But now that he was about to begin exercising this sacred ministry, he hesitated. Incidentally, resort to this bold measure had been necessary because any attempt to obtain faculties in the usual manner in Turin would have been useless. Only when confessing to Don Bosco was he able to express the three areas he feared: spiritual guidance, counseling boys to overcome bad habits, and adult problems concerning the sixth commandment. Don Bosco listened very calmly and most attentively and then dispelled his fears. As regards spiritual guidance he recalled the text: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides" [Mt. 6, 33]. "Try to instill the kingdom of God's justice deeply into people's hearts," he said. "Guide them along the path of grace through the practice of all Christian virtues, and through prayer, for these are basic. As for the rest, like resolving particular cases and counseling for individual needs, that will come too in its time."

As regards young people's confessions he suggested insistence on frequent reception of the sacraments as an aid to purity, and on a constant reminder of eternal truths, never tiring of saying, "Watch and pray," and encouraging devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Help of Christians. Concerning matters of married life, he simply reminded him of the three articles in the Roman Catechism, *bonum fidei, bonum prolis, bonum sacramenti*¹⁹ and the exhortation to live a Christian life.

Don Bosco's concern was also for the sisters, who found it so hard to say goodbye to their mother general. On the evening of November 13, Father Cagliero arrived with a beautiful cloth painting of Mary, Help of Christians: "I stole it from the sacristy at Valdocco," he said facetiously, "and just for you." That painting, incidentally, has quite a story. The artist had been in danger of losing his sight and had come to Don Bosco, who blessed him. He

¹⁹The good of offspring, i.e., the faculty to procreate and educate the children; the good of faith, i.e., mutual fidelity; the good of the sacrament, i.e., the indissolubility of the contract. [Editor]

recovered completely, painted the picture and gave it to our father. “This painting is a reminder of that miracle,” Father Cagliero commented. “Don Bosco blessed it and asks that you take it with you.”

The group was to leave from three different ports at three separate times: the largest band was to sail from Genoa on November 14, a smaller group from Lisbon on November 29, and the smallest—just two Salesians—from Le Havre, sometime between those two dates. The first group, headed by Father Costamagna, included the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Accompanied by Don Bosco, they boarded the *Savoie*. The departure scene with farewells and a goodbye blessing which had taken place twice before was again repeated:²⁰ Salesians and sisters in tears, kneeling on the deck of the ship, and Don Bosco standing and giving them his blessing. Father Albera wrote:²¹ “On several occasions I boarded ship with him when he took leave of his missionaries. In those precious moments he evinced the strongest proof of his ardent faith and burning zeal. To one missionary he said, ‘I hope you will save many souls.’ To another he whispered, ‘You will have much to suffer, but remember that your reward is in heaven.’ To the one who was to exercise the parish ministry he suggested special attention to children, the poor and the sick.”

Don Bosco’s fatherly heart was so deeply wrung with emotion that Father Cagliero and Father Albera tried to divert his attention by pointing to the harbor launch waiting below. He boarded it, and was followed by Mother Mazzarello and another nun who sat together by themselves. Father Vespignani was a member of the second group, but Don Bosco had asked him to accompany him to the ship. A truly providential accident tempered Don Bosco’s deep emotion at parting with his sons, who were then leaning over the deck railing and trying to shout their last goodbyes. A sudden gust of wind swept off his skull cap. The sister, who was watching our good father’s every move, quickly reached out and fished it out of the sea, soaking wet. A thoughtful Salesian cooperato quickly put his own top hat on Don Bosco’s head. Don Bosco did not object. With a smile he thanked them and wore the top hat with a certain

²⁰See Vol. XI, pp. 366f; Vol. XII, pp. 382f. [Editor]

²¹Rev. Paolo Albera, *Lettere circolari ai Salesiani*, Società Editrice Internazionale, p. 78. [Author]

comical gravity in keeping with the moment's droll situation. Unexpectedly, with ineffable calm and gentleness, Don Bosco glanced at Father Vespignani from under the brim and said, "You are thinking about your mother. . . . Well, from now on let me worry about her."

"No, Don Bosco," Father Vespignani replied, touched by his thoughtfulness, "I am really not overly concerned for her. She easily resigns herself to God's will."

Don Bosco was never one to make a promise and forget it. Twenty-two years later, when her son returned from South America, Mrs. Vespignani showed him a letter which read: "My dear Mrs. Vespignani, your son, Father Joseph, leaves you, but Don Bosco will take his place for you. Are you pleased? Father Joseph goes to America to save souls and to assure his own salvation and that of all his dear ones. He is now in Lisbon, the sea is calm and Mary, Help of Christians has cast Her mantle over him. So, rejoice in the Lord! Your friend in Jesus Christ, Father John Bosco."²²

The *Savoie* put in at Marseille, where the missionaries disembarked and went to pay their respects to Father [Clement] Guiol [pastor of St. Joseph's Church] who welcomed them with open arms and marveled at the size of the group. "When will such a large group of Salesians come to share our life?" he exclaimed. "Marseille is nearer than America. I want you here this very year." Touched by his friendliness, the missionaries wrote about him to Don Bosco in most grateful terms.²³ Don Bosco was not to forget this wonderful priest's graciousness.

The smaller missionary group left Sampierdarena on November 16, led by Monsignor Ceccarelli, who had delayed his return to Argentina with his ordinary's permission. Backtracking a bit, let us explain how Monsignor Ceccarelli got to live in America. He was born in Mantua and studied in Rome. He had just earned his degree in theology and canon law when Archbishop Escalada, the predecessor of Archbishop Aneyros, died while attending the

²²Father Vespignani in his book *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 199, recorded this letter from a copy he had made at that time, but had not dated. The date given in his book is certainly in error, at least as far as the place of writing is concerned. [Author]

²³*Salesian Bulletin*, January 1878. [Author]

Vatican Council. The young priest offered to accompany the body to Buenos Aires—a gracious gesture which the Buenos Aires chancery repaid by offering him the parish at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, one of the archdiocese’s best. The rest is known.²⁴

When Monsignor Ceccarelli arrived at Sampierdarena from his visit at home, Don Bosco was already in Turin, but he found a letter from Don Bosco probably written in Latin. Don Bosco occasionally did that as a gracious gesture of trust, especially if he gave some advice. This may be the reason why the monsignor answered in Latin.²⁵ His letter is proof of the loving respect which Don Bosco was able to arouse in all who spent some time in familiar intimacy with him. The closer people got to Don Bosco the more they loved and respected him.

With the freedom of the saints, Don Bosco apparently did not hesitate to give this worthy Salesian cooperator of his some fatherly advice for his spiritual good. We can read as much between the lines of Monsignor Ceccarelli’s answer. Such was the spiritual charity with which Don Bosco used to repay his benefactors.

Since Monsignor Ceccarelli’s small group was to sail on the *Miño* of the Royal British Mail which called at Lisbon, they thought it best to go overland to Marseille and there continue by ship for Lisbon. Time, however, was pressing, and so, fearing they might miss their connection, they went directly by rail to Lisbon, after a brief stop in Marseille. They ran into problems, but after a full week of travel they got to Lisbon.

For those readers who want to know everything connected with our founder, we interrupt our narrative here to record five letters he wrote from Sampierdarena at this time. The first three were hand-delivered by his missionaries.

1. To Father Joseph Fagnano

Father Fagnano directed the boarding school and adjacent work at San Nicolás de los Arroyos. This note was in response particularly to a letter he had sent to Don Bosco on March 2 regarding plans for a first attempt into Patagonian territory. The same letter mentioned financial assistance: “This term I cannot

²⁴See the Indexes of Volumes X, XI and XII under “Ceccarelli.” [Editor]

²⁵We are omitting the monsignor’s letter. [Editor]

send funds to the Oratory,” it read, “but I hope I can send a contribution for the education of your many orphans during the second term.”

Sampierdarena, November 14, 1877

My dear Father Fagnano:

I received your letters. Why did you not come to Lanzo for your spiritual retreat? Were you afraid we'd have no room for you? I hope you will make a longer retreat next year. I have given thought to your various communications. The nuns will leave as soon as the house is ready for them.

This latest expedition has exhausted both my strength and my purse. I hope you are all set with personnel, but if you still need help, let us know and we shall try to send you somebody. The new contingent will bring you all the things you asked for. Send me whatever money you can. Bear in mind that the Holy Father is very much interested about Patagonia, and should Father Cagliari delay his return to America, you will probably be chosen to carry out the experiment. I shall endeavor to write a few lines for each confrere in accord with your notations on them. Always remind all our Salesians of the motto we have adopted: “Work and Temperance.” These are the two weapons with which we can overcome everyone and everything.

The confreres who are on their way will fill you in on other news.

I will only tell you that when you next come to Europe, you will find Salesian houses at Marseille, Toulon, Navarre, Cannes, Nice, Ventimiglia, La Spezia, Lucca, Magliano Sabino, Albano, Ariccia, etc.

My fond regards to all. I remember all of you in my daily Mass. Let all please pray for me.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you and with our dear boys. May He keep all of us steadfast on our path to heaven. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

2. To Father Dominic Tomatis

In those trying beginnings, Father Tomatis was inclined to discouragement, and our saintly father here writes him words of encouragement and self-confidence. His sons' trust in him was a powerful lever in Don Bosco's hand, and he used it to inspire them with zeal in their ministry.

Sampierdarena, November 14, 1877

Dearest Father Tomatis:

You will welcome a few lines also, written as they are by a sincere friend of your soul. The confreres arriving soon will have plenty of news for you, as will Monsignor Ceccarelli, who has seen everything and shared fully in our activities. Be of stout heart and good cheer. You must be—and this is my request—a model of work, self-sacrifice, humility and obedience for the newcomers. You will, won't you? But I would really like you to write me a long letter, a full account as it were of your spiritual retreat, telling me everything about your life, your virtues, and your present, past and future miracles.

Dear Father Tomatis, love Don Bosco as he deeply loves you.

I commend you with all my heart to the Lord at my Holy Mass. Please pray for me.

Yours ever in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

3. To Father Thaddeus Remotti

A zealous Salesian, Father Remotti exercised his priestly ministry over a period of many years at St. John the Evangelist Church in La Boca [Buenos Aires], assisted by some diocesan priests.

Sampierdarena, November 11, 1877

My dear Father Remotti:

I have told Father Bodrato to pinch you for me, and I hope he does so. Why? Well, whenever the devil tries to disrupt your work, return his pestering by an act of mortification, a fervent short prayer, an added fatigue for love of God. I am sending you two companions and I hope you will be happy with them. Be very thoughtful and patient with them. I am pleased with you. Keep up your good work. Be obedient yourself, and promote obedience in others; this is the secret of our Congregation's happiness.

God bless you! Trust that I am always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Sincerest regards to the assistant priests working with you at La Boca for the welfare of souls.

4. To Father Peter Vallauri

Don Bosco always felt perfectly at home with Father Vallauri, a devout, generous priest of Turin. Now and then he would call on him in the afternoon to get away from visitors or other interruptions in order to concentrate on his correspondence or other urgent work. Not infrequently, on returning home from a journey, he would invite himself to lunch with the good priest, so as not to arrive at the Oratory at an inopportune hour or in order to handle urgent business in town or do some desk work.

Sampierdarena, November 14, 1877

My dear Father Peter,

One gladly returns where he knows he is welcome. Friday at midday or so I shall drop in on you and ask for a bowl of soup for the love of God. I also hope I can see your sister Theresa. Remember me to her. Our missionaries and sisters left for South America today.

There were nineteen. Two other groups will leave early next week: one from Le Havre, and the other from Lisbon.

God bless us all. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

5. To Father Joachim Berto

Cardinal Bilio's message that the Pope was unhappy about the Conceptionist affair, coupled with the information that Father Cagliari had brought from Rome, made Don Bosco feel the necessity of drawing up a documentary report on the entire issue. If the papal brief he mentions in this letter refers to the Conceptionists—as the context seems to indicate—then the brief's date is February 6, 1877.

Sampierdarena, November 15, 1877

My dear Father Berto,

I found the brief among my papers and had a copy made. Now you must:

1. Make a copy of the Pope's rescript which commissioned Don Bosco to modify the rules of the Conceptionists so as to agree with those of the Salesians.

2. Find Cardinal Randi's letter to Don Bosco and my reply. Note that I have one of the cardinal's letters with me.

3. Get the letter sent by Brother Louis in which he informs Father Scappini to postpone his return to Rome.

4. Get the memo given to the cardinal vicar for delivery to the Holy Father. I believe it is in Father Scappini's handwriting.

Love me in Our Lord Jesus Christ. Believe me always,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. The first group of missionaries has already left. Tomorrow, God willing, I shall be back in Turin.

Monsignor Ceccarelli personally knew Archbishop Sanguigni, apostolic nuncio to Lisbon, and so when the missionaries called on him, he welcomed them warmly and spent much time with their leader. However, they did not know that a staunch friend of Don Bosco and of the Salesians was then in the same city, Bishop Peter Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro, who had been the Oratory's guest just two months before. He had arrived in Lisbon two weeks earlier and was to embark on November 24. If they had known, they might have had a chance to see him. The encounter would have helped them in their wait because the zealous bishop had talked a great deal about Don Bosco and the Salesians to prominent people in the city. But the missionaries, not knowing the language and not having letters of introduction to any persons of influence, passed through the Portuguese capital completely unnoticed. With their departure, all the missionaries were now en route to the land of their apostolate.

CHAPTER 11

“Affliction Makes for Endurance” (Rom. 5, 30)

ARCHBISHOP Gastaldi returned from Rome in February 1877, fairly well convinced that he would be wise to dispel any suspicion that he was opposing Don Bosco and the Salesians. As soon as he was back in Turin, therefore, he mailed to all the cardinals and to many other prelates a monograph entitled: *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales*. Its Foreword stated:

For some time now, the enemy of souls, ever alert to promote evil and to destroy good either by preventing it, if possible, or at least by partially wrecking and corrupting it, has busily labored to insinuate and spread abroad the belief that the archbishop of Turin looks unkindly upon the new Congregation of St. Francis de Sales (known as the Salesian Congregation), founded by the Very Reverend Father John Bosco. This rumor is undoubtedly the work of the father of lies, as anyone blessed with Christian prudence may easily see, but it has woefully given rise to uncertainty and doubt in the minds of many who are somewhat less endowed, and so it is desirable to dispel all such uncertainty and doubt.

It then cited ten incidents taking place between 1848 and 1876 to show how obvious it was that the archbishop of Turin had always given and was continuing to give the Salesian Congregation and its founder “such proofs of benevolence as to dispel all doubt and suspicion to the contrary.” We possess a copy of a handwritten notation of the archbishop which reads: “It is therefore manifest that the archbishop of Turin acts with no bad will when he is forced into serious and weighty conclusions about Don Bosco and his

Congregation, for he continues to feel an unwavering kindly interest toward both the founder and his Congregation, and he acts with the sole motivation of duty." Each cardinal of the Sacred Congregation of the Council received two copies, one bearing the signature of "Canon Chiuso, *secretary to the archbishop of Turin*, February 28, 1877." Although the statement was not exact in all it said, Don Bosco offered no response, since it contained nothing derogatory to his Congregation. No consequences seem to have followed.

But the next August, a controversy flared up which provoked a veritable flood of writing. A mere trifle in the beginning, it took on a weighty tone because of the importance the archbishop gave to the principles he cited to support it and the publicity it received. We will relate the whole story impartially by stages, letting documents speak for themselves and limiting ourselves only to collating them in an orderly manner.

A certain Father [John] Perenchio, of the diocese of Ivrea, called at the Oratory on August 17 [1877] and expressed a desire to become a Salesian. After gathering summary information, the superior admitted him to the first probationary period. Pleased with the response, the priest asked and received permission for a short leave; he came back two days later to begin his religious life as a postulant. Since he was known to be living a good life, he was allowed without further ado to celebrate Mass. On August 22, Father Joseph Lazzero, vice-director of the Oratory, was ordered by Canon Chiaverotti to inform the chancery office whether Father Perenchio was residing at the Oratory, whether he celebrated Mass, and how long had he been living with the Salesian Congregation. Father Lazzero replied: "Yes, Father Perenchio has been with us for several days. He has asked to be admitted to the Salesian Congregation, but has not as yet been accepted."

Meanwhile Don Bosco had already initiated the usual steps with Father Perenchio's bishop. The following day, Canon Chiaverotti, again acting under orders from the archbishop, asked Father Lazzero to answer the other questions put to him. Father Lazzero obeyed promptly on August 24: "Father Perenchio has been in this house twelve days. Up to now he has said Mass on the basis of a good reference from his pastor. Father Perenchio arrived with the curate, who testified orally that there was nothing on record against

him. We are giving him hospitality while the formalities with his bishop are being completed."

A brief parenthetical remark is pertinent. In regard to these formalities, Archbishop Gastaldi was later to write to Cardinal Ferrieri:¹ "What formalities Don Bosco could initiate with the present bishop of Ivrea I do not know, since it is widely known that Bishop Moreno has openly declared his disapproval of Don Bosco, and so it would be quite unlikely that he would give his consent to any priest of his who asked to join the Salesian Congregation."

The formalities were the usual ones required for obtaining testimonial letters. They were first requested in writing, and then, since no answer was received, someone was delegated to ask for them in person. To appreciate Father Perenchio's position properly, we must remember: 1. that he was obviously free of any ecclesiastical censure; 2. that he did not need his bishop's consent to leave the diocese, since he left in order to enter a religious congregation; 3. that on being admitted to the first period of probation, that is, to the first phase of religious life, he was to be considered a member of the Salesian Congregation as regards rights and privileges; 4. that no bishop could refuse testimonials to his diocesan priests who requested to become religious and that, on denial, recourse could be made to the Holy See.

We now resume our main story line. On that same day, August 24, "Father Rua or whoever represented him" received a third injunction: Father Perenchio was to be stopped from saying Mass since he did not possess the required papers; admission as a novice into the Salesian Congregation gave him no right to celebrate if he entered irregularly, that is, without his bishop's testimonial letters. The injunction further stated: "Neither he nor any professed member may celebrate Mass in churches which do not strictly belong to the religious order without the ordinary's permission."

How did the Turin chancery know that a priest of another diocese was at the Oratory? From statements made at the time, no sooner did Father Perenchio leave his diocese than the Ivrea chancery sent a decree of suspension *a divinis* against him to the Turin chancery, with the explanation that "he was guilty of misdeeds." The decree was accompanied by a covering letter,

¹Letter to Cardinal Ferrieri, Turin, September 19, 1877. [Author]

requesting that this be communicated to Father Perenchio by a messenger from the Turin chancery. The bishop of Ivrea was notified that the decree would be served not through the chancery office but through a messenger of a civil tribunal.

Where and when was this notice to be served and by whom? The Salesians never found out. On questioning, Father Perenchio stated he had not received the decree. Yet, despite that, Father Lazzero, in agreement with Father Rua, asked Father Perenchio to refrain from celebrating Mass, and, to avoid embarrassment, sent him to [our house in] Sampierdarena.

The superiors were undoubtedly struck by the letter's final forceful threat concerning the long-standing question of testimonials. The statement read: "The archbishop has instructed me to add that this is an extremely touchy and grave matter, and that, if the Salesian Congregation does not obey relevant Church laws, His Excellency will be obliged to invoke his authority and seek redress from the Holy See." But the superiors' concern was more for the closing words of the previous sentence: "Neither he nor any professed member may celebrate Mass in churches which do not strictly belong to the religious order without the ordinary's permission." *But we help out in the parishes and say Mass there without having ever asked for this permission*, was the natural reaction. *True, the diocesan calendar certainly states as much, but we have always taken that to be a general assertion of the ordinary's rights. Now this changes the aspect of things. It has put the professed Salesians on the same footing as a postulant who comes from outside the diocese. Just as the archbishop very clearly states in this instance that his personal permission is required, so it would seem he demands it of all of us, and this imposes a new obligation explicitly on us Salesians. We shall have to conform.* The outcome of this interpretation was a reply of Father Lazzero to Canon Chiaverotti in Don Bosco's name:

Turin, August 25, 1877

Very Reverend Canon:

Your letter addressed to me in the name of our most reverend and revered archbishop mandates that no priest of the Salesian Congregation may offer Mass in churches which *do not strictly belong to our Congregation*. We are grieved by such a severe measure, but we shall

conform to it, and so I am now hastening to inform several pastors to make other arrangements for those Masses which, at their request, several of our priests used to celebrate for the worship of the faithful. As regards Father Perenchio, of another diocese, who as a *novice* has no right to offer Mass since he has no testimonial letters from his bishop, I respectfully request you to inform me if any sacred canon or Church law: 1. requires that an ecclesiastical congregation, definitively approved by the Church, must account to the diocesan ordinary for its internal administration and submit for his approval those documents which it may or may not have received for the admission of postulants, especially since many religious orders have been dispensed from testimonials; 2. states that a priest who has been admitted as a *novice* may not say Mass in those churches which are exclusively the property of the congregation, particularly when he has presented the required certificate of his pastor, and he is accompanied and recommended by the pastor's own curate.

While respectfully awaiting your answer to these inquiries, I beg you to inform His Excellency that, bowing to his authority, Father Perenchio has stopped celebrating Mass as of this morning and will personally advance reasons which he feels should have been considered before such measures were taken. He assures me that his bishop was informed of everything by a person whom he had charged with this task and in writing as well, but that so far he has received no reply.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. Joseph Lazzero

It was also thought best not to send any priest of the Oratory to celebrate Mass in city churches or institutions until the latter obtained the requisite permission. Identical instructions were sent to our Salesians at Valsalice and Lanzo, which were also in the Turin archdiocese. Time was of the essence, since the injunction arrived on a Saturday and the priests needed the archbishop's permission for the following day. Father Lazzero's letter was delivered to the chancery at three that afternoon as the office was about to close, but the archbishop was away. True, the vicar general could have given permission, but he chose not to get involved in the matter.² Father Lazzero waited until Sunday morning in the hope he might get some kind of an answer, but, on receiving none, he sent this note to the pastors of the various

²See also letter from the superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to the director at Valsalice, September 2, 1877. [Author]

churches [where Salesian priests usually helped out]: “Strict orders of His Excellency the archbishop forbid us to celebrate Mass in churches other than those belonging to our Congregation. Should you wish the services of any of our priests, we shall gladly supply him, if you obtain written permission from the ecclesiastical authorities.” Hence, several churches had no Mass. Some did because the pastors, upon receiving this notice, got permission in time. The resulting confusion is easy to surmise, as is the gossip that buzzed in various sacristies.

The Salesians from the Oratory, Valsalice and Lanzo who requested authorization were told by the archbishop that he had never forbidden any Salesian priest to celebrate Mass in public or private churches of the archdiocese, and that the directives ascribed to him were purely fictitious. At the same time, however, with no previous canonical warning, and with no cited reason, on August 26 he suspended Father Lazzero from hearing confessions anywhere in the archdiocese for a period of eighteen days.

That same day he also wrote to Cardinal Ferrieri faulting Don Bosco on three counts: that he never asked either his own archbishop or the bishop of Ivrea or any other bishop for testimonials concerning their subjects before admitting them to the Salesian Congregation; that he played on the fantasies of the young and bewitched them into his institute; and third, the case of Father Perenchio. He concluded:

If matters are allowed to continue thus, Don Bosco’s houses will become hideouts for priests who have been censured by their bishops. I have a diocese within a diocese here. Don Bosco builds with one hand, but destroys with the other; he does great good, but paves the way to great evils; he undermines the authority of his own archbishop and sows discord among the clergy. I have done for Don Bosco what no one else, save the Holy Father, has ever done, but I am forced to appeal to the protection of the Holy See against the machinations of this priest who is animated by the spirit of *autonomy* and independence and instills it into his subjects.

On August 31, he wrote again to Cardinal Ferrieri on this question of the [cancellation of] Masses in diocesan parishes, claiming that by so doing the Salesians had intended “to cast their bishop in a bad light with the faithful of his diocese, upsetting and displeasing him.” Cardinal Oreglia informed Don Bosco about this

second letter on September 6, writing, "I forewarn you that Archbishop Gastaldi has written a scorching letter against you, holding you responsible for the cancellation of Masses in several churches and institutions of Turin last Sunday. Hurry and send me a written defense and all pertinent documents."³

On September 14, Don Bosco sent the following memorandum and all pertinent documents to Cardinal Oreglia and asked him graciously to deliver all such papers to Cardinal Ferrieri.

Turin, September 14, 1877

Your Eminence:

Through this humble petitioner, its Rector Major, the Pious Society or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales appeals to Your Eminence for enlightenment and guidance in the matters which are respectfully and briefly stated below:

1. Every time that a Salesian asks Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin for admission to holy orders or for the qualifying examination for confessions, he demands that we submit the testimonial letters which justified his admission to the novitiate.

2. Just recently, through his secretary, Canon Chiaverotti, having learned that Father John Perenchio of Ivrea had been received into the Salesian Congregation, the archbishop ordered the director of our motherhouse, or anyone in his place, to forbid Father Perenchio to say Mass in any church; then he extended this prohibition to all Salesians, or, at least, to all the priests of the motherhouse, enjoining them from celebrating Mass in any churches which do not belong strictly to the Salesian Congregation.

3. In total submission to the archbishop's orders, Father Lazzero respectfully asked whether there is any Church ruling which demands that an exempt congregation has to consult the ordinary as to admitting new members, especially if they come from another diocese, and whether a novice may be enjoined from saying Mass only because he does not have testimonial letters from his bishop.

The sole response to this inquiry was a severe censure inflicted on Father Lazzero, whose faculties for confession were withdrawn for twenty days.

³We have in our archives the original correspondence here quoted and which is still to be quoted later on, including the letters from the archbishop to Cardinal Ferrieri. We do not know how they came into our possession. [Author]

CONSEQUENCES

To forestall trouble, Father Perenchio no longer said Mass and neither did the Salesians anywhere other than in their own churches.

The pastors or rectors of some churches where the Salesians regularly offer Mass called at the chancery and sought the required permission. The archbishop was away and the vicar general replied that he could not interfere in the matter. At the same time, several churches and religious institutions which could not obtain permission had no time to replace them, with the result that many people had to miss Holy Mass on that Sunday. Father Lazzero, zealous in the ministry of reconciliation and preaching, had to watch penitents through his confessional, unable to render them even the smallest service for their soul's comfort.

By setting forth these facts as above, I cast no blame on anyone. I only implore Your Eminence graciously to help avoid a repetition of such sad, regrettable situations. On a separate sheet I have added a few remarks on this matter and I limit myself here to these few questions:

1. Could Archbishop Gastaldi lawfully pass judgment on the validity of Father Perenchio's admission to the novitiate, and, if he could, should he not first have asked the superior for his reasons?

2. Did he lawfully inflict a canonical penalty on the director, Father Lazzero, for having expressed his views on that judgment?

3. Could he forbid the Salesians from celebrating Mass in churches that do not belong strictly to our Congregation without his permission?

4. In this case, is it not enough to present testimonials signed by a superior who is recognized by the chancery?

5. When a Salesian reports for examination for the sacrament of penance or for holy orders, may the archbishop demand not only a letter of his superior but also the testimonials which superiors of congregations regularly request from the diocesan bishops before admitting a candidate to the novitiate?

Any suggestions or ruling Your Eminence may graciously propose will be accepted most respectfully by the Salesians, who will always feel honored to carry out your instructions promptly and faithfully.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The separate page contained a few juridical reflections drawn by the eminent Jesuit canonist, Father [John Baptist] Rostagno, on the injunction issued to the superior of the Oratory not to allow a priest-candidate of the Congregation to offer Mass in the Society's churches and on the directive to the superior or his delegate that

without the ordinary's permission no Salesian priest was to say Mass except in churches belonging exclusively to the Salesian Congregation. Don Bosco added a declaration on the matter of testimonials:

In an audience with His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, on May 3, 1876, the Supreme Pontiff granted me *vivae vocis oraculo* exemption from the testimonial letters prescribed by the decree of [the Sacred Congregation of] Bishops and Regulars of February 25, 1848, for all young men who had studied or lived for any reason in any Salesian house or boarding school should they in time ask to join our Congregation. Then, again, in an audience on November 10, 1876, he extended, also *vivae vocis oraculo*, this dispensation, with no exception, to anyone wishing to enter the Salesian Congregation. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was informed of this benevolent concession of the Holy Father—better still, this singular token of his clemency—in a letter addressed to the Cardinal Prefect of the same Congregation dated December 16, 1876, and again in a letter of January 1877, hand-delivered to the Congregation's secretary, who put it into the file of the Salesian Society. Father John Bosco.

On September 19, 1877, Archbishop Gastaldi for the third time addressed his grievances against Don Bosco in connection with the happenings of last August 26 to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, claiming he could now "present the matter in its proper light." Twelve pages of legal stationery, tightly spaced and written in small, clear penmanship, explained what the chancery's secretary meant when he wrote the directive that religious had to have the ordinary's permission to celebrate in churches not belonging to their congregation.

It was evident—he asserted—that the words "neither he nor any professed member, etc." were added only to state that, even had Father Perenchio been a *novice* in good standing or a professed member of the Salesian Congregation, the archbishop could still forbid him to celebrate Mass in churches of the diocese, just as he could forbid any religious. The statement was not to be taken to bar all of Don Bosco's priests from celebrating Mass in diocesan churches without a *new permission*,⁴ nor

⁴"New" in relation to the tacit permission by which they were already celebrating in diocesan churches although that year's liturgical calendar stated: "We caution all religious that they may not celebrate even a single Mass in any diocesan church or private chapel without our permission, the only exception being their own churches or chapels." [Author]

was any reference made to written permission. The decree did not cancel any formerly issued, explicit authorization which had been used for a number of years by a considerable number of Salesian priests . . . *sciente et non contradicente archiepiscopo* [with the archbishop's knowledge and approval].

In an annotation to a document which we shall soon quote, an important person remarked that, factually, though the archbishop's letter might be "clear" to some, it was "doubtful" and even "obscure" to others. The Salesians did not claim that the archbishop had forbidden them to celebrate Mass outside their own houses without his written authority. As a wise and easily understood precaution, they sought written permission from the rectors of churches and communities in which they usually celebrated. Then Archbishop Gastaldi went on to describe the scandal which the Salesians had caused by the abrupt stop of Masses and the need of reparation.

Just what kind of reparation he meant he had already indicated. Upset by the archbishop's remonstrations, Father Chiaverotti called at the Oratory on September 5 to ask for his letter which had created such a stir, maintaining he had written it at His Excellency's dictation. That same day, at the archbishop's wish, Father Lazzero returned the original to the chancery. However, shortly before, Canon [Joseph] Zappata, vicar general, had written to him:

Turin, September 5, 1877

Reverend Father:

I must carry out the archbishop's instructions to me to send for you and request the letter which was brought to his attention and with which he is acquainted. To make an appointment easier for you, I sent word by the two clerics who called at the chancery that I would meet you in the sacristy of Holy Rosary Church, where indeed I did wait for you until seven o'clock.

You probably were unable to come. However, since I cannot wait much longer to give His Excellency an answer, please come at once to the chancery upon receipt of this note. . . . Please bring the original letter with you, so that I may be sure to have it.

Yours sincerely
Fr. Joseph Zappata, *Vicar General*

That very evening the first general chapter of the Salesian Congregation was opening in Lanzo. Two days later Father Rua sent the archbishop the following statement from Don Bosco:

September 7, 1877. Father John Bosco, Rector Major of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, duly informs Your Excellency that Father John Perenchio, of the diocese of Ivrea, has been admitted as an aspirant to this Congregation. In conformity with the prescriptions of the Holy See, it was thought advisable to request a testimonial letter from his bishop, who did not see fit to issue one. In accord with the decree *Regulari Disciplinae*, of January 25, 1848, I duly inform Your Excellency of this. I am deeply honored to remain, etc.

Thus Don Bosco complied with the archbishop's admonition that Church laws concerning "that most delicate and important matter" of testimonials be observed, which he had issued with two pertinent threats.

In turn, Archbishop Gastaldi instructed Father Francis Maffei, pro-secretary, to acknowledge receipt of Father Rua's letter and to inform him that, before replying, the archbishop wanted to know whether Father Lazzero and the other superiors were sorry and were ready to apologize for the "most serious trouble" they had caused on August 26 by the "most enormous blunder" they had committed. They were to inform him of this in a letter to be signed by Father Lazzero or Father Rua or Don Bosco. Otherwise, he would take appropriate action to safeguard the respect and honor due his authority.

Convinced that they had obeyed an order from their archbishop, the Salesians did not feel that they had been guilty of anything demanding a written apology. So, rather than send any more troublesome papers, once they learned of the steps which the archbishop had taken with the Holy See, they felt that they ought to retain documents which were rightfully theirs and seek to repossess Father Chiaverotti's original letter. Father Lazzero, therefore, requested the vicar general to return it, but Monsignor Zappata answered that, since the letter was already in the hands of the archbishop, the request had to be made directly to him. The Oratory vice-director then hastened to write again on September 17, explaining that the Holy See wanted that letter.⁵

⁵This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

On September 19, Canon Zappata wrote to him, among other things:

Yesterday after 3 P.M., I received your note of the 17th in which you again request me to return the letter known to both of us. Before leaving my office, I went to the archbishop to request it, and he replied that he would send it the next day to the chancery. I have just received it—it's after 3 P.M.—and hasten to send it to you.

But the letter was accompanied by a decree of the archbishop suspending Father Lazzero from hearing confessions for an indefinite length of time.

That very same day the "serious complaint" about Bishop Lacerda's pontifical Mass⁶ was lodged. Three days before, one Father Caesar Cappelletti of Bologna had been suspended, the reason stated in a long letter addressed by Archbishop Gastaldi to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on September 19. It read:

In a city such as Turin, where presently priests keep moving in from other dioceses, and in a house such as Don Bosco's, where out-of-town priests have easy access, it is necessary for the ordinary to be ever on the alert, especially since Don Bosco is often away from Turin and not all his associates are very watchful. Some months ago, a priest of Bologna was given hospitality there. At the request of Don Bosco's priests, I gave him faculties for confessions, and he used them in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, which belongs to Don Bosco. Just a few days ago, a formal charge of solicitation was brought against this priest which I duly passed on to the Holy Office.

As soon as the priest was suspended, Don Bosco wrote to Bologna for more information on him without mentioning the reason for his request, and on September 19 the archdiocesan chancellor, Achilles Manara, later cardinal, replied, repeating what he had told him initially: that Father Cappelletti needed guidance and firmness since he was flighty, mediocre and apt to go for the limelight. Under guidance, he said, he could do good, being zealous and active; as for moral behavior, nothing could be said or proven

⁶See p. 135. [Editor]

against him. He therefore again recommended him warmly to Don Bosco's charity. It is Father Lemoyne's opinion that the accusation was doubtful. Be that as it may, the usual thing to do was to inform the superior of the measures to be taken before bringing charges against the Salesian Congregation to the Holy See. The priest returned to his own diocese.

Here, in keeping with our chronology, we shall insert a letter from Father Robert Murialdo,⁷ Servant of God, to Archbishop Gastaldi, who had been a fellow student of his.

Turin, September 18, 1877

Most Reverend Archbishop:

As I forward to you the letter you request, written by Father Lazzero to the Reverend Mother at St. Peter's Institute,⁸ I cannot help but renew my offer to act as your mediator with Don Bosco and his associates, with whom I am on excellent terms, in an attempt to end this present painful state of affairs.

I am sure that all these priests would love to return to the good relationship they used to enjoy with their ecclesiastical superior and to see him at the Oratory now and then, like the good father and friend they once knew him to be. One day, while in town, I met good Father Rua whom I have known from his boyhood. Because of my deep concern for the conditions existing between him and his confreres with Your Excellency, I brought up the topic. He expressed such grief over the present dissension that he was practically crying in the street, moving me to such pity that I could not press the subject.

At this time, Don Bosco and his Salesians are on retreat at Lanzo, and I feel this would be the most opportune moment to reach an understanding over past differences.

If you feel I ought to take some action, please let me know which steps, which approach and which words to use. It will truly be a wonderful chance for me to do my very utmost to bring about good future relations between Your Excellency and Don Bosco and his Congregation, burying the past in oblivion and crediting everyone's good intentions. Should my efforts succeed, I am sure that all decent people will be delighted and that the Supreme Pontiff himself will be overjoyed to know that the misunderstandings between Turin's archbishop and Don Bosco and his

⁷Cousin of Father Leonard Murialdo who was proclaimed a saint by Pope Paul VI on May 3, 1970. [Editor]

⁸Father Lazzero had asked the Mother Superior to apply to the chancery for authorization for a Salesian to continue celebrating Mass in the chapel of her convent. [Author]

Congregation have, thank God, been entirely cleared. And would this not remove a long, painful thorn from Your Excellency's heart? Perhaps a meeting of both of you, mediated by some important churchman, in which you could both express your views on the various matters which led up to the present regrettable situation, might greatly help dispel certain doubts and fears, as well as justify and clarify your lines of action. I am convinced that after such a mutual exchange, with each of you defending the rights you believe to be yours and offering each other satisfaction, you will find it easy to come to an agreement and renew your friendship.

So be it—soon, indeed, right now!

I say no more. I only ask pardon if, in writing, I momentarily forgot your lofty position and my lowly one. If you feel I can be of any help, tell me, for I am at your disposal. Otherwise, at least take into consideration my good intentions.

I kiss your sacred ring and beg your holy blessing upon myself and the humble Institute of St. Peter.⁹

Your faithful friend,
Fr. Robert Murialdo

It was at this time that these events prompted a second effort at mediation at the suggestion of the Jesuits at Chieri. It was no more than a pious suggestion, but it did give rise to an exchange of ideas with an eminent Oratorian¹⁰ and we feel that it helps clarify the truth, besides making for interesting reading. Toward the end of September, Father Louis Testa, S.J. wrote to Don Bosco as follows:

Chieri, Feast of St. Michael the Archangel, 1877

Reverend and dear Father:

I am a sincere, earnest friend of your Congregation, though I have not personally met you, its founder. I am a priest of the Society of Jesus, for some years professor at the seminary of Susa.

Being a long-time friend of the archbishop of Turin and acquainted with his confidant, Father Carpignano, I called on the latter, after intensive prayer to God, and sought an interview with him to discuss some very grave matters. The interview was granted, and so we together discussed the case of the pastor of Holy Martyrs' Church and of the Society of Our

⁹An institution for wayward girls founded by Father Peter Merla who greatly helped Don Bosco in the early years of the Oratory. [Editor]

¹⁰A priest of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. [Editor]

Lady of Consolation, founded with the Holy See’s consent by the Society of Jesus. We sought to end these complex matters of ours, and he gave me ample promises. Since they do not concern you personally, I will not go into further details. Other persons of influence and ability will see that matter concluded to meet the Pope’s wishes.

I then went on to say that it was high time to settle once and for all the multi-faceted controversy entangling the Reverend Don Bosco and his Congregation, approved by the Holy See. I remarked that it was a much discussed topic throughout Italy, particularly in the Vatican and even in France. Father Carpignano then told me of a meeting which had taken place between the archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Fissore [of Vercelli] and the Reverend Don Bosco, and which was of no avail because Don Bosco refused to sign a certain paper. Not being acquainted with the contents of that paper (which I now know in its entirety), I commented that the whole matter had been handled much too formally and that such serious disagreements were not to be reconciled easily and satisfactorily in this way. I suggested that Archbishop Gastaldi summon Don Bosco in the same gentle spirit with which (at my advice) he had summoned the opposition leader in the grave controversy that had flared in Chieri and charitably discuss those things which now divide them. To reach a settlement, I suggested both sides yield a little, as saints do, when questions of their rights are involved, rights *not purely personal*.

Father Carpignano (an excellent diplomat) then kindly asked if I were acting in any official or semi-official capacity in this touchy matter.

I replied, “From men, no, but from the God of peace, for the glory of the Church, yes. I call upon the witness of your founder for what I am going to say (and I turned toward the portrait). For over a year, whenever I pray, I keep hearing a voice within me saying: *Even as a lad you were the archbishop’s friend and fellow seminarian. Thanks to you, several disputes were settled between him and some highly placed people; just recently you prevented an impending grave clash on the occasion of the Chieri festivities to everyone’s satisfaction. From you he accepts certain truths and remarks which he would not tolerate even from another archbishop, so much so that you were able to say to his face without causing him offense that you spoke to him that way because no one dared breathe in his presence and that you had nothing to hope for from him and nothing to fear. You even threatened to make a novena against him, and not only was he not offended, but he even begged you affectionately to make a novena on his behalf. Why then don’t you avail yourself of this fortunate situation to do a little good to My servants?*

“However, aware of enormous entanglements and knowing my superiors’ will that none of us become involved with Archbishop Gastaldi,

I limited myself to praying and having others pray and to writing to a few influential persons in the Roman Curia to ask them to put a stop to what I feel is a scandal. But it happened on a particular morning (it was about the end of August) that as I passed in front of St. Philip's [Church], I felt strongly impelled to talk to you. I had once before helped you in the matter of your election, which some government official had opposed. Three times I tried to continue on my way, and three times I had to turn back, and so I feel I come to you only because God wills it. Promise me that you will give serious attention to this matter, which now stinks (excuse the word, it slipped out), and is causing consternation and maybe scandal among good people. You can do it if you are willing. I believe that the moral teachings of [St. Alphonsus] Liguori (sole author approved *specifically* by the Holy See) oblige both you and the archbishop *sub gravi* to do all you can to put this matter to rest *iuxta mentem Sanctae Sedis* [according to the wishes of the Holy See] as you did in the other two situations."

At my determined tone, Father Carpignano blanched somewhat, and his features took on a look of grief and embarrassment. In a low voice he said, "Father, I see that we both share the same ideas in this matter. The real problem is to find a practical way to bring it to a happy conclusion. You realize that we are dealing with *two saints*, adamant in their stands." (Here I interrupted him, "You mean stubborn, like all Piedmontese.")

He smiled and continued, "Let's try this. Let's pray to the Lord that He kindly intervene. It's amazing, but both men believe they are acting in accord with God's will and desires, and it may be that both are somewhat right and somewhat wrong. What are we to do in that case?"

I closed our talk by saying gravely and weightily, "*For the moment*, do not mention my name to the archbishop. Later, if you wish, you may. But let me tell you that from what I hear from Rome, the authorities there are sick and tired of all this mess in the archdiocese, and I am *very much afraid* that Pius IX will treat the archbishop as he already treated others and is now treating the bishop of Nice, in spite of the latter's very powerful support, capabilities, and astuteness. (Since he did not know the facts, I told him of them.) So these questions had best be settled now, *properly*, as the Pope wishes; otherwise next year someone will see to it."

Father Carpignano stammered something, and we parted gravely, thus ending our interview.

Since then, the archbishop has answered none of my letters, and his friends (whom I met) have treated me almost with fear. But I do know that he has changed some of his decisions and is somewhat afraid that you or I, my dear Don Bosco, may write to Rome. What I said about Father Carpignano is sufficient for now.

Let me just say that, were I in your place, I would never have agreed to waive the Salesian Congregation's privileges during the archbishop's lifetime. In fact, as *superior* I would uphold them in Rome with all my might. This is what we [Jesuits] have done from the days of St. Ignatius to the latest incident with Archbishop Darbois in Paris, who was forced to back down. For the same reason, I would not tolerate the bishop of Ivrea refusing your priests permission to celebrate Mass in his diocese. Furthermore, I would initiate canonical proceedings (Father Rostagno, S.J. is your man for that) on behalf of that young priest novice of yours who was suspended after his departure from Ivrea in a diocese *that was not his own*. If he was wrong, let the matter stand, but if he was right I would stick up for him *in the first instance* before the Turin chancery which issued the suspension, and then before the Roman Curia. Thus did the saintly founders act. A well-aimed blow forestalls further attacks. . . .

Allow me to kiss your hand humbly.

Your dear friend in Christ,
Fr. Louis Testa, S.J.

During the general chapter at Lanzo no one knew that Father Lazzero had been suspended from hearing confessions, but when it came time for him to return to the Oratory, he felt that his situation would become embarrassing. He wrote the vicar general to implore the archbishop to revoke the suspension or at least give him a reason for such severity, but Monsignor Zappata felt he could not oblige. "One seeking his superior's pardon," he wrote on October 4, "should earnestly express his wish and respectfully submit his petition." As for the reason for the censure, he added, "All I know is it had something to do with a letter signed by Canon Chiaverotti and addressed to either Father Rua, Don Bosco or someone else, but I know nothing about the reason for your suspension. . . . You can find out. . . . In accord with the merit and responsibility of your office, write directly to the archbishop and ask for the favor you wish, even at the price of humbly begging forgiveness, unless you feel that in good conscience you are not bound to do so." For the time being, neither Father Lazzero nor anyone else did anything to give the impression that they had been at fault.

The three letters of Archbishop Gastaldi to Cardinal Ferrieri had meanwhile prompted this official notice to Don Bosco:

Rome, October 10, 1877

Very Reverend Father:

In view of the complaints filed by the archbishop of Turin, this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars deems it opportune to turn to you in order to end the bewilderment of this city's faithful in finding themselves deprived of Mass on Sundays and holy days in many churches, institutions and religious houses where Salesian priests regularly offer Mass. Acknowledging the fact that the archbishop acted within his rights and that therefore he did not slight the Salesian Congregation in any way, you will please comply with the ordinary's ruling and make arrangements for the faithful to stop being deprived of the opportunity of attending the Holy Sacrifice on the days prescribed by the Church in the above-mentioned places. Furthermore, this Sacred Congregation can only exact your strict observance of papal decrees concerning the admission of candidates to the Salesian Society. You realize how important it is for your institute that applicants present testimonial letters from their respective ordinaries, since they inform you of both good and bad points of said applicants. While your scrupulous adherence to papal decrees on this matter is urged, it is understood that you are not barred from presenting the relevant documents on which you seem to base your conviction that you are dispensed from such observance.

Informing you of the above, I wish you all prosperity in the Lord.

✠ Cardinal Ferrieri, *Prefect*

Without the least delay, Don Bosco again summarized the history of recent events in his reply to the cardinal.

Turin, October 12, 1877

Your Eminence:

I was utterly surprised to receive Your Eminence's letter which seems to place the blame for the omission of divine services in several of the city's religious houses and diocesan churches on the Salesian Congregation. Since a remonstrance from our archbishop was already becoming known, at the beginning of September I sent a memo to Cardinal Oreglia and asked that he graciously deliver the same to Your Eminence. Perhaps he has been absent from Rome or is sick.

At any rate, I respectfully wish to meet Your Eminence's desires, and I humbly beg you to tell me of the charges brought by our archbishop so that

I may furnish you with proper clarifications. Till then, in response to your kind letter, I venture now to present a summary view of what happened, later sending you pertinent documents as soon as I can.

At the start of the year 1877 the archbishop of Turin decreed in the diocesan calendar: "We caution all religious that they may not celebrate even a single Mass in any diocesan church or private chapel without our permission, the only exception being their own churches or chapels."

We promptly obeyed such a grave order and applied to the archdiocesan chancery for the necessary permission, which was promptly given, and we continued to offer Mass as usual in those churches where we generally serve both on Sundays and weekdays. However, after mid-August the prohibition was expressly restated for the Salesians in a letter to this effect. When we asked for a clarification we received as sole reply and reason the suspension of Father Lazzero, director of this house, who had written a letter in which he respectfully asked for the cause of such a prohibition. We had, therefore, to inform the religious houses and churches which we serve to obtain requisite permissions. A few did obtain them in good time, and we continued to celebrate Mass for them as usual. Others were not so prompt and, since the archbishop was on vacation, the vicar general's reply to the requests was that he did not wish to get involved in the matter. This explains why some churches had no Mass. Although the archbishop maintains that this prohibition is "fanciful," it nevertheless still holds; in fact, several of our priests who went to offer Mass in several parishes were denied permission. Just last Sunday (feast of the Holy Rosary) Father John Cinzano, summoned home on family business, could not satisfy the fervent wishes of his parents and relatives and had to return to Turin in order to celebrate Mass in a church belonging to our Congregation. The pastor's only reason was that the prohibition was the express order of the archbishop. What was I to do?

A second matter is that of a testimonial letter of a novice. I know for sure that the testimonial is to be requested of the ordinary of the novice's own diocese, not of the ordinary of the diocese which the novice enters to reside. It would seem to me that an ordinary cannot interfere in a congregation's internal administration without slighting the Holy See, which approved its internal self-government. The priest in question came from the diocese of Ivrea. His ordinary was asked for a testimonial letter, but he saw fit not to grant it or even to send a reply. I then followed the ruling of this Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars], informing it of the situation in detail, in compliance with the papal decree of January 25, 1848.

Your Eminence, I am presently at the head of a newly founded Congregation which, though harassed by grave difficulties, is experiencing

considerable growth. To date, I have never taken a single step without the full consent of the Holy Father and of the Holy See, and it is my intent to continue doing so unflinchingly in the future. In your charity, give me your aid, continue your protection, counsel me, and I assure you that the Salesians and I will always promptly obey you. But I need guidance to face the vexations which endlessly plague us. Father Lazzero, a devout, zealous priest, to his great embarrassment, has to see his confessional thronged every day by the faithful, and he is still suspended from hearing confessions, without even knowing why.

Please forgive the freedom and trustfulness with which I write, and accept my deepest thanks and veneration.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

During these days a new attempt was made to relieve the tension. Father [Anthony] Tresso, pastor at Lanzo, learned of the suspension of Masses from the Salesian school's director, who was personally involved, and he obtained more details on the entire issue from the superiors during their general chapter at Lanzo. A loyal Salesian alumnus, he was asked by Don Bosco before leaving to find some way of bringing about a settlement and of assuring Archbishop Gastaldi that the Salesians' only concern was the welfare of the diocese and to obey and work without causing displeasure. Father Tresso willingly took on the task. He managed to get an appointment on October 11. The interview of ninety minutes was more a one-sided speech than a conversation, a tirade of resentment from the archbishop so vehement as to silence Father Tresso before he could even speak and to kill any desire to go to Turin and report to Don Bosco on his mission.¹¹

¹¹Father Tresso immediately spoke of the tirade to Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, who was waiting outside and who immediately put it into writing and sent it to Don Bosco (Letter of October 12, 1877). Ignoring the rest, we must, not without pain, in the interest of our narrative, highlight one point. Archbishop Gastaldi stated, "He [Don Bosco] boasts that he had me nominated bishop. In fact, he even wrote me a letter, flinging it into my face. But I sent the letter to Rome, so that they might see this fine saint in whom they put so much trust." We published this letter in Vol. XI, p. 355. In it Don Bosco recalled his "good offices and efforts" to "overcome the great obstacles that stood in the way of" his appointment both in Saluzzo and in Turin, but he did so solely to show his true feelings for the archbishop and the incongruity of turning against him after having done so much in his favor. So much for the boasting. As for the fact itself, reliable documents make it clear enough that Don Bosco did exert effective influence with the government in the problems of the *exequatur* and temporal rights. As for Gastaldi's nomination to the see of Turin, it has been maintained on the

On October 15 a new and notable issue arose. Archbishop Gastaldi issued a pamphlet, printed anonymously by the Marietti Press, which was nothing else than a rehashing of the lengthy September 19 letter. The first page was captioned: "Privately Printed for the Most Eminent Cardinals and Several Archbishops and Bishops." The pamphlet was entitled: *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales (herein known as "Salesian")*, which was thus described:

Founded in Turin by the Very Reverend Father John Bosco, priest of the archdiocese of Turin, in the institute known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, Via Cottolengo 32; it owns and services the adjacent Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

The text began:

In August 1877, this institute caused vexatious problems for the archbishop of Turin, who feels it proper to bring them to the attention of the most eminent cardinals and to a few archbishops and bishops.

Next came the account of Father Perenchio and the suspension of Masses. Then two explanatory statements closed with the observation that the archbishop's complaint against the Salesians essentially stemmed from their disregard of Church laws. The pamphlet concluded by stating:

On September 9, 1877, the archbishop of Turin in a letter to Father Rua, superior of the local community of the Turin Oratory, declared that when the Salesians *would apologize for their most serious blunder of August 26, and seek pardon through a letter*, signed by Don Bosco or Father Rua or Father Lazzero, the archbishop would consider the

authority of Canon Virginius Marchese, pastor of Cardè, diocese of Saluzzo, a secretary of the Vatican Council, that this was entirely due to Pius IX. *La Civiltà Cattolica* (1915, Vol. IV, p. 627) is also cited as proof. In saying good-bye to Monsignor Marchese in a special audience, Pius—having heard that he was returning to the diocese of Archbishop Gastaldi—charged him to tell the archbishop that he would never forget the services he had rendered during the Vatican Council. But this does not wipe out the fact that: 1. "great obstacles" would rise later; 2. these would be "overcome" thanks to the "good offices and efforts" of Don Bosco. Besides, Monsignor Marchese does not here raise any doubts about the matter, nor would Don Bosco have reminded Archbishop Gastaldi of it in his letter of 1875 were it not an undeniable truth. The matter was not a secret known only to the archbishop and Don Bosco, for it was common knowledge in Rome and elsewhere. (See p. 101 of Vol. XI and p. 9 of this volume.) [Author]

distasteful matter satisfactorily ended; otherwise he would be forced to resort to all necessary means to safeguard his position and authority. No such letter has as yet been received. Hence, this exposé. In all truth, Christian humility alone—the essence of the religious spirit shaping the life of any religious congregation and of each of its members—should be enough to prove that flagrant blunders—unintentional, yet the result of misjudgment and starchy thinking—were committed and compromised the divine authority of the bishop and of the ecclesiastical see. Therefore there is a strict obligation to make up for the offense at least by acknowledging the errors and asking pardon.

Now both parties could look only to Rome for a settlement, as Cardinal Oreglia's letter of October 15 to Don Bosco clearly stated:

I cannot understand the letter by Cardinal Ferrieri sent to you, especially since the chancery offices are now closed. Yet this in no way bars you from appealing to the Holy Father, as I suggested in my telegram yesterday. I think your appeal should demand that the dispute be discussed in its entirety by the full Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars]. I see no other way you can free yourself of this predicament.

Consequently, taking Cardinal Oreglia's counsel, Don Bosco took the memorandum he had sent on September 14 to Cardinal Ferrieri.¹² He merely changed the salutation and closing, inserted some changes and amendments, and then submitted it to the Holy Father.

Don Bosco's addition under "Consequences," following the second paragraph, is worth comment:

When the archbishop was made aware of several objections, he stated in word and writing that his letter had been misread. Yet, no one who reads it, I think, can take it to be anything but a genuine prohibition. In fact when Commendatore Occelletti¹³ called upon the ordinary for the required permission, he received it, but only for one person, and then with strict

¹²See pp. 255f. [Author]

¹³A great benefactor of Don Bosco, he established on his own premises a festive oratory for boys and helped Don Bosco's Oratory at Valdocco. For other details see Vol. X, p. 519. [Editor]

formalities.¹⁴ Why grant permission, unless there had been a prohibition? Another instance: When the curate of Sts. Peter and Paul Church asked that one of our priests be allowed to continue celebrating Mass in his church, the vicar general replied that if this priest was a Salesian, *he washed his hands of the affair*, but if he were not, he could offer Mass. Furthermore, several of our priests visiting their families asked to say Mass for their relatives, only to be refused permission by pastors, who claimed that such were higher orders they had received. On the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, a Sunday, newly ordained Salesian Father John Cinzano, visiting his family in Pecetto Torinese for the day, went to his parish church to offer Mass and was immediately forbidden to do so by the pastor because of the archbishop's order received personally two weeks before.¹⁵

Returning to the anonymous pamphlet, we must add that we have a copy, with marginal notes here and there by some official of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.¹⁶ At the top of the first page a pencil jotting reads: "It would have been better to settle this matter *inter te et ipsum solum ac postea dic Ecclesiae* [between you and him alone and then appeal to the Church—cf. Matt. 18, 15]. Such publicity can do no good." Then, in purple ink, "Childish nonsense smacking of gossip and word trickery."

The reason for the "long silence" [about an apology] deplored by

¹⁴The following note was issued for Chevalier Ocelletti: "Turin, August 25, 1877. Reverend Father Berto has our permission to celebrate Mass, preach and hear confessions in the chapel of Commendatore Ocelletti, and celebrate Mass in any public or private church or chapel of this archdiocese. ✠ Lawrence, *Archbishop*."

¹⁵Other minor alterations are these: At the end of the last paragraph before the heading "Consequences," instead of "for twenty days," Don Bosco wrote: "for a period of eighteen days, and then indefinitely." Under "Consequences" he modified the first paragraph: "To avoid publicity and scandal a letter was promptly sent to every church where we serve requesting that permission be obtained, and Father Perenchio no longer said Mass in the church of our Congregation; so, too, Salesians ceased celebrating in churches not their own." The word "could" in the second sentence of the second paragraph was altered to "would." The third sentence in the original draft, following the addition quoted above, was modified to read: "After setting forth these facts, the petitioner, blaming no one, humbly asks only that you graciously advise him what course he is to take so as not to run afoul of any regulation set by the Holy See in its approval of religious congregations, and thus to avoid repeating such sad and harmful dissensions." [Author]

¹⁶The notes are in the same hand as in a lengthy report on privileges, dated March 12, 1878, of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, signed by Cardinal Ferrieri. The language is stiffly curial. Furthermore, our printed copy has thirty-two additional hand-written observations matching those which Don Bosco had submitted to the Congregation with this premise: "We are faced here with facts which are blamed upon a poor, newly founded Congregation. Were they true, the Congregation would be unworthy of survival. The superior's duty to both his subjects and the Holy See therefore is to rectify matters and explain those facts to the supreme authority." [Author]

the pamphlet needs to be explained. After the exchange of letters between Father Lazzero and Canon Zappata, the Salesian superiors' first contact with the chancery on this matter came in a letter of Father Rua dated November 4. Three reasons had induced him to write. On November 2, pro-secretary Father [Francis] Maffei was instructed by Archbishop Gastaldi to ask if Monsignor [Peter] Ceccarelli¹⁷ had requisite credentials to exercise his priestly ministry in the archdiocese and to demand that they be presented to the chancery. "His Excellency would feel pained," the letter stated, "if this priest, on returning to America, were to say that Church laws are not observed in the Turin archdiocese." Another instance: Father Joseph Pavia, director of a festive oratory, was authorized to hear confessions in the suburban diocese of Albano Laziale, but shortly before the feast of All Saints was unable to report for the required examination before being allowed to hear confessions in the Turin archdiocese. He asked for permission for his festive oratory boys for just those few days, but the archbishop's reply was that he had no intention to grant him faculties until his Salesian superiors sought his pardon. Lastly, Father [Alexander] Porani, a Salesian already authorized to hear confessions, was forced to undergo another examination. He willingly obliged and obtained a *cum laude*, but when he asked for his certificate he got an identical refusal.

Then it was that Father Rua, as prefect general of the Salesian Congregation, wrote to Father Maffei.

Turin, November 4, 1877

Dear Father Maffei:

I am pleased to reply to your recent kind letters. First and foremost, please inform His Excellency, the Most Reverend Archbishop, that we have been very deeply grieved to learn of His Excellency's vexation caused by last August's unpleasant incident of the Masses.

Inform him also that our grief was further increased by a reprimand from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in connection with this incident.

I would have written earlier to His Excellency about this, but since I

¹⁷Pastor of San Nicolás de los Arroyos in Argentina, he had accompanied Archbishop Frederick Aneyros of Buenos Aires to the Oratory in Turin. For other details see the Indexes of Vols. X, XI and XII. [Editor]

knew the matter had been referred to that Congregation, I felt it improper to make comments which might prejudice either or both parties. However, I have been informed that His Excellency in his enlightened judgment desires me to write to him on this subject. Indeed, he has made it an indispensable condition for granting temporary faculties for confessions to our priest, Father Joseph Pavia, and permanent faculties to another Salesian priest, Father Alexander Porani. Incidentally, the latter got an excellent rating in the examination for this certification last August in this archdiocese. I, therefore, gladly satisfy His Excellency's desires.

In response to your most recent letter concerning Monsignor Ceccarelli, please assure His Excellency that he did have requisite faculties to exercise his priestly ministry in this archdiocese, and I believe he did present credentials to the chancery, although I cannot absolutely confirm this, since he has been away these past few weeks visiting relatives.

Requesting you to pay our respects to His Excellency, I thank you in advance and express my heartfelt regards.

Yours affectionately in Jesus and Mary,
Fr. Michael Rua

Why the delay in acceding to the archbishop's request and why dismiss the matter so summarily? The questioning reader will find the answer in the following excerpt from a letter from Father Rua to Don Bosco, who was then in Rome.¹⁸

Changing the subject—he wrote—I must remind you of something you may have forgotten. A recent pamphlet of the archbishop has upbraided us for not replying to him in spite of his hint to me that I should apologize and beg his pardon in writing for the matter of the Masses. As you know, this suggestion of the archbishop reached me at Lanzo where we both were so busy that we had no time to compose a letter demanding such careful thought. Besides, having seen the effect of Father Lazzero's letter, I much preferred to see the archbishop personally. As soon as I returned from Lanzo, I did go to the archbishop's residence. Since I could not speak with His Excellency, I saw his secretary, Father Chiuso, and expressed my regret for our mutual displeasure with the incident, pointing out that we had acted as prudence and charity seemed to prompt us. Some time later, the secretary gave me to understand that His Excellency still expected a letter. Thereupon I wrote it in the very same vein I had used when talking to his secretary.

¹⁸Turin, January 6, 1878. [Author]

Although Father Rua's letter of November 4 reiterated what he had personally told [Father Maffei], the archbishop expressed his dissatisfaction because it came far too late and it did not meet with his demands. Father Rua's response had been delayed because the apology demanded by the archbishop could not be made, as it would have been an admission of guilt when no wrong had been done.

Now, a new development arose. Father Angelo Rocca, of Rivara Torinese, had been invited by his pastor at home to officiate and preach on the feast of St. John the Baptist. Authorization was requested, and the archbishop's secretary replied that His Excellency first wanted the following information: 1. Where did the priest study theology? 2. Whose permission did he have to enter the Salesian Congregation? 3. When did he take his vows? 4. Why did he not apply to the archbishop for holy orders? The pastor answered these demands, against Father Rocca's judgment. Canon Chiuso replied that, regardless, the archbishop would not allow Father Rocca to say Mass at Rivara, adding that he felt His Excellency was punishing him for leaving the seminary against his will. It was a sorry situation. Father Rocca put in only a hasty appearance at the festivities, of which his father was chairman. However, when he had to return to Rivara in September for important family reasons, unwilling to forego the privilege of saying Mass,¹⁹ he resorted to an expedient. Since the private chapel in his father's home had been transferred to the ownership of the Salesian Congregation along with his share of the family residence, he considered the chapel as part of a home belonging to the Congregation and so beyond the archbishop's jurisdiction. He celebrated Mass there all week except on Sunday. Hearing of this, the archbishop had Father Maffei write to Father Rua as follows:

Turin, November 9, 1877

Reverend and dear Father:

His Excellency the archbishop has instructed me to notify you that Father Rocca, of Rivara, after leaving the seminary of Turin with no one's knowledge, entered the Salesian Congregation without the archbishop's recommendation. Furthermore, he has recently returned to his home

¹⁹Letter from Father Rocca to Father Berto, La Spezia, December 29, 1877. [Author]

parish and has celebrated Holy Mass at home, informing the parish administrator that he was availing himself of the privilege of a private chapel which has been granted to the Salesians.

Constrained by the obligation of his office to exercise vigilant care over the Most Holy Eucharist, His Excellency has asked me to inquire from you about the papal rescript which grants the privilege of a private chapel to the Salesian Congregation.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. Francis Maffei, *Archebiscopal Pro-Secretary*

Father Rua replied that Father Rocca had left the seminary with his superiors' consent for reasons of health and later entered the Salesian Congregation after the young cleric and he himself had requested the ordinary's testimonials. When these were denied, recourse was had to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, in accordance with the decree of January 25, 1848. The archbishop had the following reply sent:

Turin, November 13, 1877

Reverend and dear Father:

His Excellency has received your letter of November 12. He instructs me to inform you that neither you nor Father Rocca could possibly have requested the testimonials prescribed by the decree of January 25, 1848 because: 1. He has no recollection of such a request. 2. Contrariwise, he recalls very clearly that no testimonials have ever as yet been requested by the Salesian Congregation for any member of his diocese. 3. He recalls having been asked for his consent on only one or two occasions, but never for testimonial letters. 4. Should Father Rocca have sought testimonials and they had been denied so that recourse to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had to be made, that Congregation, *as regular practice*, would not have failed to inform the archbishop of that recourse and would have inquired about the refusal. This was not done in the case of Father Rocca.

The archbishop, therefore, concludes that it cannot be true that he was asked to issue testimonials for Father Rocca. He is extremely pained by all this since the Salesians keep finding ways to cause him endless distress and to force him to complain.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. Francis Maffei, *Archebiscopal Pro-Secretary*

Don Bosco was now feeling the pressure from all sides. On November 14 Cardinal Ferrieri wrote and required him to produce the faculties and privileges granted him by the Pope.

Rome, November 14, 1877

Very Reverend and dear Father:

In view of several complaints sent by His Excellency the Archbishop of Turin to His Holiness concerning you and your Congregation—which complaints His Holiness has asked this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to look into—it is necessary that you state specifically and in detail the faculties and privileges which you have been granted and enjoy by the benevolence of the Holy See, so as to aid the eminent cardinals in their review of this grievance. It is my duty to require this. Asking God's care over you, I remain,

✠ Cardinal Ferrieri, *Prefect*

On November 15, the archbishop warned Don Bosco that he had done “wrong” in publicizing throughout the archdiocese the indulgences granted to the Salesian cooperators and that he therefore had to inform the clergy of this. He had already sent his objections [he said] to Cardinal Asquini, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Briefs, but after a long delay all he received was a reply requesting further information, which he supplied, and he had as yet received no answer at all. Tired of waiting, he informed Don Bosco that it was his firm wish that publication of these indulgences be suspended in the archdiocese until the whole matter could be unraveled. “This,” a secretary wrote, “is not because His Excellency is averse to see the holy endeavors of the Salesian Congregation aided by divine favors, but solely because it is his strict duty to be on guard, and because the momentary and the permanent interests of the Salesian Congregation require that canonical procedure be followed in all things.” As for his intention of informing pastors of the invalidity of the indulgences, he followed the advice of prudent counsel and desisted, but this did not keep him from trying to get the brief annulled, until he was finally told that the Association of Salesian Cooperators had been canonically established by the archbishop of Genoa in his archdiocese and that he had named the hospice of St. Vincent de

Paul at Sampierdarena as the association's headquarters. However, the printing of the brief was never allowed in the diocese of Turin. This matter is treated in Chapter 4 of Volume XI.

At this very same time those who opposed the Salesian direction of the Conceptionists renewed their campaign in Rome, and in those days, too, obstacles were raised to Count Cays' ordination in Turin. Nor are we to forget that November 14 was the missionaries' date of departure, ungraced this time by the archbishop's blessing as all other departures had been. No sooner did Don Bosco return from seeing his missionaries off at Sampierdarena than he had to face the utterly unexpected demands of Cardinal Ferrieri whose delayed letter he received only after his return. From Borgo San Martino, where he was visiting the Salesian school, he wrote to his secretary, Fr. Berto:

Borgo San Martino, November 21, 1877

My dearest Father Berto,

Good morning! As soon as I got here I was handed a letter from Cardinal Ferrieri who, because of Archbishop Gastaldi's renewed complaints to the Holy Father, is requesting a copy of all privileges granted to our Congregation. Please find yourself a secretary who has neat handwriting and have him copy out all the decrees in chronological order, beginning from 1864 to the present, including rescripts and briefs.

No need for anything fancy; a new copybook will do. As for anything else, I shall see you on Friday. Mention this to Father Rostagno.

God bless us all.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

As though this were not cause enough for considerable worry, Don Bosco also had to prepare a defense before the Roman Congregations. He therefore had Father Berto collect documentation on the main issue of controversy, as we shall see in our chronological presentation of the facts. The first document was a statement of Father Perenchio, the first source of complaint.

Castigliole di Saluzzo, November 22, 1877

I, the undersigned, declare that during my short stay at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, I had no knowledge of any statement or decree of suspension issued against me by the bishop of Ivrea or by the

archbishop of Turin. Only on August 24 did Father Michael Rua inform me that His Excellency, Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi, had instructed him to forbid me from celebrating Mass in his diocese any longer, and so he suggested that I leave.

Although the church belonged to the Salesian Congregation and although the injunction was not issued by my own ordinary, I immediately refrained from saying Mass and left the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and the diocese of Turin.

Fr. John Perenchio,
Teacher in the city schools

That same day the pastor of Pecetto sent Don Bosco a written explanation for denying to Father Cinzano permission to offer Mass in his church. Gossips had quickly seized on this incident to line up this pastor with forces opposing Don Bosco.

Pecetto Torinese, November 22, 1877

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

I not only do not oppose you in any way, but I admire and revere you. I do not fight your Congregation but rather see it as a providentially special work particularly suited to our times. Such sentiments I do not just harbor in my heart but express them with my lips, as all who know me can witness. Although unfortunately I cannot claim your personal concern as an alumnus of your schools, you know how I expressed the wish to become one of your “sons” and asked you to consider me as one even though I did not merit it. Hence, the suspicion you expressed in your letter yesterday, which some people are rumoring of me, is false. Those who know me consider it rash, evil-minded perhaps, and I beg that you give it no heed.

The question is asked why I did not allow my own parishioner, Father Cinzano, to celebrate Mass on the feast of the Rosary. An honest heart and open mind will not find it hard to understand, and you will certainly not blame me once you know all the facts. I did not see the archbishop’s twelfth article in this year’s liturgical calendar to be so grievous that I could not stretch it to favor a parishioner of mine and allow him to celebrate Mass at least once. I personally would have allowed him even if I had to draw His Excellency’s ire upon me and drop lower still in his estimation—and let me say, by the way, that several ill-minded persons who have done me that service are now trying to do the same for me in your regard. But I was faced with a particular prohibition, as you will see. During the last autumn vacation, I was at the [seminary] hermitage

hearing confessions. One day, His Excellency, who knew Cinzano, questioned me about him and I replied that, although I was not sure, I believed from common talk in the village that he would be ordained within a year. To this His Excellency asked, "Will he be coming to say Mass at Pecetto?" "Not that I know of," I answered, "but I expect that sooner or later he may."

"In that case," the archbishop said, "*remember the admonition in the calendar, abide by it, and make sure that all do.*"

So, after that, how could I allow Father Cinzano to officiate? Am I to blame that I did not? I doubt it, and I venture to hope you will sympathize with me and graciously silence the spiteful tongues trying to discredit me in your eyes. Trusting that you will prudently accept my plea and not be upset with me, I ask that you restore me to your good graces. Remember me in your prayers.

Yours devotedly,

Fr. Perlo, *Pastor at Pecetto Torinese*

That same day Don Bosco sent the archbishop a reply on both the indulgence question and the matter of Father Rocca in a letter sketched out for him by Father Rostagno.

Turin, November 12, 1877

Most Reverend Excellency:

In reply to your honored letter of November 9, let me assure you that I have no wish to claim any privilege in regard to a Salesian priest celebrating Mass in a private chapel at Rivara last September 16. This priest, denied permission to say Mass by his pastor, honestly believed and felt he had a valid reason to offer Mass in a chapel which had become the property of the Salesian Congregation. Had he had time to consult me about it, I would never have given him permission, nor will I give such permission to anyone, things being as they are. Since no offense has been committed against God, I hope my frank explanation will find a kindly welcome in Your Excellency, for which I reverently pray.

As to the matter of indulgences granted to the Salesian cooperators, it would deeply grieve me to see Your Excellency's decision brought to the attention of the public, even if only to the pastors, until this matter has been thrashed out by the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences.

I am convinced that such a statement would become a cause of scandal, a stumbling block to both faithful and unbelievers who would certainly not fail to get wind of it. Most assuredly it would hurt the [Salesian] Congregation, for such a serious charge cannot fail to wrong us. However,

the worst damage may very well not be done either to the Congregation or to me. Just knowing about this rift of ours, *the fact that it is brought out into the open* would itself occasion much comment and conflicting opinions, not all of them unfavorable to me. Then I would in duty have to appeal to the Roman Congregations, and if, as I believe, their verdict were to be in my favor, how unbecoming it would be to have that decision made public! I have no intention to stop Your Excellency from doing whatever your zeal for religion prompts you to do, but please permit an unworthy servant of yours to plead that you seek wise and prudent counsel before taking such a step, if only to guard yourself against the carping ill-will of your enemies, as Your Excellency has already done with your letter published in the [diocesan] calendar.²⁰ Then, too, why not abide by the mature, authoritative decisions of the Roman Congregations? They will not fail to treat the matter thoroughly and render a just judgment. To open my mind fully to you, I am ever so sorry that the issue of prohibiting Masses was not handled in this way, but that a pamphlet, labeled “restricted,” should have intervened to prejudice any decision. Once Your Excellency had referred the issue to Rome, would it not have been more advisable to have it settled there? The Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars] will see for itself whether the publication was really “restricted.” Now, despite myself, I am being forced to reply. Doubtless, any defense of mine against such gravely serious charges—in matters where I am convinced I am right—cannot help but bring you censure proportionate to Your Excellency’s charges and reprimands against my course of action. Beforehand, therefore, I beg your forgiveness, and should it seem to you that I overly push some point, please attribute this to my need for self-defense and to the overwhelming unpleasantness I have experienced. Why cannot such problems be handled with fatherly concern and with the leniency due to a newly founded Congregation which sincerely seeks to do what is right, and which may err through ignorance but certainly not through malice? God will judge both Your Excellency and your poor servant concerning the honesty of our intentions, the Christian charity and humility with which we have acted, and the

²⁰This “as Your Excellency has already done” must be related to “before taking such a step.” etc. The way Don Bosco expressed himself is rather puzzling; had he spoken plainly, he would have had to write, “as Your Excellency failed to do.” In short, the archbishop had failed to seek “wise and prudent counsel” and had consequently been criticized by his enemies. Here Don Bosco incorrectly calls a “letter” what was really a note on Antonio Rosmini which appeared in the 1877 *Calendarium liturgicum*, pages xvi-xvii. We cited this note in the first chapter of this volume. The archbishop’s reply to Don Bosco about this matter on November 23 was: “Your alluding to my calendar shows that you have a mistaken notion which you should have dropped long ago. I do not fear *criticism*, but only *error*, and, thank God, I have shown those who needed to know this that what I wrote and published in the calendar is true, and that it was my right and duty to speak out.” [Author]

carefulness with which we have sought proper means of defending and fostering the interests of our holy faith. In Him I put my trust.

I cannot let go unchallenged the charge brought against me that I admitted into our Congregation without your testimonials a cleric (now Father Rocca) who had been dismissed from the respected seminary of Turin. Permit me, Your Excellency, to remind you that five distinct requests for testimonials were made by the cleric Rocca himself; once more they were requested by Father Rua, and once also by me, and we were never able to obtain them. As a result, following the instructions of the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars] of January 25, 1848 (*Collectanea*, p. 891) we had recourse to a higher authority.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop replied on November 23:

The best thing you can do is to come before your archbishop moved only by humility and charity. Then it might be possible to do away with the obstacles which block peace, and this for your own good, the good of your Congregation and the good of the archdiocese of Turin. As your present archbishop, I have most willingly helped build up the Salesian Congregation; likewise, I am now anxious to do my share to preserve and expand it, provided that the archepiscopal rights which I swore to maintain are safeguarded, and that the archdiocese of Turin will receive advantage, rather than harm.

He then skimmed over two other unresolved matters—the ordination of the two clerical fellow students of Count Cays and the erection of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. This latter controversy we shall treat in time.

Don Bosco also received a letter dated the same day from the pastor of Favria, giving his point of view on an incident very similar to that involving the pastor of Pecetto.

Favria, November 23, 1877

Reverend and dear Father:

I reply to your kind letter of the 21st which I received this morning. Most often complaints about priests stem from ignorance of either what actually happened or the circumstances. Regretfully Father Paglia too was not sure of the second section of article 12 in the *Decreta et Monita* listed in this year’s diocesan calendar.

No sooner did he read the prohibition than he took it as applying also to himself. *I have no such permission*—he thought—and so *I may not offer Mass*. Nor did he, to my regret. But then came another Salesian, Father Vota, to Favria, and, having the requisite permission, offered Mass several times. The above makes it clear that I issued no prohibition. Father Paglia did not offer Mass, obeying the decree cited, and tongues wagged in ignorance. If my request is of any use, please do something to forestall a recurrence of such incidents here and elsewhere.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. Michael Bonino, *Vicar Forane*

We add here a relevant letter of Father [Maurice] Arpino, pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul [in Turin], even though it is dated later.

Turin, December 12, 1877

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

Last August 25, Saturday, Father Lazzero informed me by mail that the following [day] Sunday, August 26, the Salesian who usually offered Mass for the parish children at St. Joseph's Oratory could no longer do so because of strict orders from His Excellency the archbishop. Since I could not get a replacement, I appealed to the vicar general and asked that an exception be made because I did not know about that rule. He replied that *he did not care to get involved*. His Excellency, then absent from Turin, luckily returned that evening, and I managed to obtain the required permission, so that the Oratory children were able to have Mass as usual. I am ever grateful for the spiritual assistance the Salesians give our children on Sunday, thanks to Your Reverence.

Gratefully and respectfully yours,
Fr. Maurice Arpino,
Pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles

More fuel was added to the fire when Don Bosco reprinted his pamphlet, entitled, *Mary, Help of Christians*. We discussed this matter earlier,²¹ and so here will only fill in some omissions. The problem flared up again two years later in May 1877, when one issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, compiled by Father Lemoyne, was published at Sampierdarena. On May 18, His Excellency had *Emporio Popolare*²² carry a brief item under the letterhead of the

²¹See Vol. XI, pp. 420-425. [Editor]

²²A newspaper edited by the Jesuit Father Vasco. [Author]

archdiocesan chancery: “*Letture Cattolice*, Issue No. 5, released this May with the title *La Nuvoletta del Carmelo* [The Little Cloud of Carmel], was not published in Turin, as has been regularly done over the past twenty-five years, but at a press in Sampierdarena. On the verso of page 133 we read, *With Permission of the Ecclesiastical Authority*. Our readers are hereby informed that the ecclesiastical authority referred to is not the archdiocesan chancery of Turin.”

The reason for singling out this issue is found in a piece of an article suppressed at the request of some kindly-minded person. It reads:

This issue was not submitted to the Turin chancery, which now decrees that henceforth permission for publications must bear the signature of His Excellency the archbishop or of his vicar or pro-vicar general or of some other authorized priest. We must cite the Council of Trent, Session 25, and its decree on the veneration of saints: *new miracles may not be so styled until authenticated and approved by the bishop*. From this very wise ruling of the Council it follows that any account of external supernatural events neither authenticated nor approved by the bishop has no credibility.

This deleted section was later included in the diocesan calendar of 1878 under No. 18 of the *Monita et Decreta* with an added *pro forma* warning that sacred images would be draped and churches closed where claims were made for miracles which had not been authenticated by the bishop. Then, on May 19, the archbishop wrote to Don Bosco in these assertive terms: “I consider it my bounden duty to investigate any account of supernatural events said to have occurred in my diocese through the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, honored under the title of Help of Christians in your church in Turin.” Don Bosco replied:

Turin, May 31, 1877

Most Reverend Excellency:

A cable from Gibraltar has just now notified me that the archbishop of Buenos Aires and fifteen Argentinians are arriving at Genoa tomorrow evening and will stay at our house in Sampierdarena. On my return [from there] I shall reply to your request and point out some happenings which I think should be thoroughly examined. Better still, I will identify the people

involved, for they are in a better position to give you the information you need.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

This investigation never took place, because the dispute kept growing until the matter was referred to Rome, as we have already noted.²³

In passing, we recall what we said elsewhere: the Tridentine Council's prohibition strictly concerns miracles attributed to the non-beatified or non-canonized who have died in the aura of sanctity. Hence, it sufficed to label the narrative non-authentic without having to challenge the truth of the events which had been published under the *Nihil Obstat* of the Genoa chancery.²⁴

When the new edition of the publication appeared on November 24, Archbishop Gastaldi, replying to a letter of Father Rua on the matter, again asserted that the Salesian Press "was guilty of seriously slighting the archdiocesan chancery of Turin and Church laws by reprinting the pamphlet *Mary, Help of Christians* . . . which had not the chancery's approval but merely that of Father Saraceno, ecclesiastical revisor and . . . which had been published against the archbishop's wishes." The 1877 edition, he continued, "manifestly" contained additions, and, even had it been true that *not one comma had been altered*, it should still have not been reprinted without being resubmitted for his approval. We have compared both editions and find them identical in every detail.

On November 25 two letters arrived at the Oratory from the archbishop's office. One was addressed to Father Rua and concerned the letter of apology.

Turin, November 23, 1877

Very Reverend and dear Father:

His Excellency has asked me to remind you that, in my letter of September 9, he demanded a written apology signed by either Don Bosco, Father Rua, or at least Father Lazzero, stating that the Salesians *were deeply sorry for the grave trouble they caused last August 26 and sought his pardon*. In no way is your letter of November 4—fifty-six days later—

²³See Vol. XI, p. 423. [Editor]

²⁴This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

seen as a response to that request! It merely states that you were *deeply grieved by the distress caused to His Excellency*, and nothing more. Any person of feeling is deeply grieved by any distress, however deserved, when he is rightly punished for a wrongdoing. It is obvious therefore that your statement says nothing at all.

With great esteem, I am,

Your devoted servant,
Fr. Francis Maffei,
Archdiocesan Pro-Secretary

The second letter, personally written by the archbishop to Don Bosco, was exceptionally severe, not only because it cast an ugly shadow upon his moral image, but also because, in all reality, it sealed his lips and bound his hands in such a way that he could no longer even defend himself.

Turin, November 25, 1877

Very Reverend Father:

I repeat what I wrote to you on November 23: the best thing you can do is to come before your archbishop humbly and well-disposed, so that we may remove the obstacles which block a peaceful understanding. The present archbishop of Turin, as he gladly helped establish the Salesian Congregation, is now willing to continue sustaining and developing it. He asks for nothing more than the safeguarding of his authority as archbishop and the well-being of his diocese. I therefore trust that you will follow my counsel.

In the event that you should print in any way or handwrite personally or pass on through others any writing unfavorable to the present archbishop of Turin to anyone besides the Supreme Pontiff and the eminent cardinals of the Sacred Roman Congregations, I here and now declare that at that very moment I revoke your faculties for sacramental confession and absolution, *ipso facto, in my diocese*. For then I would clearly know that I shall have lost all confidence in you and cannot entrust you with the conscience of my people and of those who are under my jurisdiction in this matter. In conclusion, should that ever happen, consider your faculties instantaneously revoked.

Should you yield to my counsels, the eminent cardinals and bishops, who already know of our problems, would immediately be informed.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
✠ Lawrence, *Archbishop*

After this threat, there were no other communications until the morning of December 1, when Don Bosco was sent an addition to the above.

Turin, December 1, 1877

Reverend and dear Father:

This is an addition and amendment to my letter of November 25. I inform you that should you personally or through others communicate any written statement *disparaging to the present archbishop of Turin*—be this handwritten by you or anyone else or be it printed by any means and in any fashion—to anyone other than the Supreme Pontiff, the cardinal secretary of state, or the cardinal prefects of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and of the Congregation of the Council, I state, as of now, that *at that instant* your faculties to grant sacramental absolution and hear confessions in this archdiocese will be revoked. Furthermore they will cease *ipso facto* with no need of further statement. In fact I declare these faculties revoked as of now, should you have already done any of the above.

Yours affectionately,
✠ Lawrence, *Archbishop*

Thus a sword of Damocles was suspended over Don Bosco's head for some time to come. He expressed his anguish over this to Cardinal Oreglia on March 25, 1878: "This cruel directive continues to hold, although he himself has published and continues to publish pamphlets and pastoral letters against us, and we do not respond both because it is our policy and because Your Eminence has advised it."

These woes, however, did not stop Don Bosco from gathering documents to bolster his defense, for he was determined to face the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars] to uphold the good name of his Salesians. We add three more documents about Father [Angelo] Rocca's prohibition to celebrate Mass in his home village. The first is hearsay. The second, a letter to Father Berto from the rector of the Royal Basilica and Arch-Confraternity of Sts. Maurice and Lazarus in Turin, confirms and complements the first. The third comes from the Turin chancery and it rehashes the question of testimonials. Together, they shed more light for our understanding of this episode.

Buttigliera d'Asti, December 1, 1877

Dearest Father Berto:

Here is my prompt reply. Father Tarizzo, parish administrator at Rivara, requested the archbishop to allow Salesian Father Rocca to preach and offer Mass in his native town, explaining that Father Rocca's parents were anxious to have all their relatives attend the solemn celebration. On learning that Father Rocca was a Salesian, the archbishop relentlessly refused to grant permission. Father Tarizzo delayed relaying this refusal to Father Rocca, who arrived at Rivara just days before the celebration. Fearing a scandal if he made the archbishop's prohibition public, Father Tarizzo turned to Father Zucchi, rector of the Royal Basilica, and asked that he go to the archbishop and tell him of the rampant gossip that would arise if he had to forbid Father Rocca to say Mass, especially since his family was highly esteemed in the town and he was known to be an excellent priest. Father Zucchi graciously went to Canon Chiuso, the archbishop's secretary, and begged him to consider the hue and cry which would arise from Rivara and the shock and anguish it would bring the parish administrator. Briefly, he made it clear that Rivara would never understand the reason for this prohibition after the archbishop had been approached in ample time on Father Rocca's behalf. Canon Chiuso, apparently recognizing the need of granting the requested permission, went to the archbishop's study and returned twenty minutes later with the answer that Father Rocca was not to officiate at any function in Rivara. Canon Chiuso added that the archbishop was adamant in matters concerning Don Bosco's priests.

All this I know from Father Zucchi himself, rector of the Royal Basilica. You may pass this on to Don Bosco and tell him he may use this information as he sees fit. I can always confirm it.

Recommend me to our dear Don Bosco's fervent prayers. Give him my fondest regards and tell him I hope to see him soon. Meanwhile, ask him to remember what I told Father Rua about the secret circular and the pastor of Revigliasco who read it.

Accept my sincerest and most cordial regards and pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. Felix Melica

Turin, December 4, 1877

Reverend and dear Father [Berto],

I have just received your letter of yesterday and hasten to answer. Last June, Father Tarizzo, parish administrator of Rivara, wrote to tell me that Mr. Rocca, father of the Salesian priest Angelo Rocca, was appointed

chairman of the patronal feast of St. John [the Baptist] and that he fondly wished to have his son sing the Mass and deliver the eulogy. His request was certainly in order. He added that, since Father Rocca was a religious, he needed the archbishop's authorization and was asking me to obtain it. Foreseeing how hard it would be to get the permission, I replied by mail to Father Tarizzo, saying that I was sorry to disappoint him, but if the matter was difficult for him, it was far more so for me, and that he should therefore directly contact the archbishop.

On the eve of the feast, I received another letter from Father Tarizzo enclosing a letter addressed to Canon Chiuso, which he asked me to deliver personally with a plea for the favor. I immediately took the letter to Canon Chiuso and earnestly begged that he intercede with His Excellency so that the serenity of a lovely family gathering might not be disrupted. I said all I thought could be helpful. The canon approached His Excellency, stayed with him some ten minutes, and then returned to say that the archbishop would not budge and that he [the canon] was sorry. "I am very sorry too," I replied, "but you are not to blame for the response you bring. Put this refusal into writing so that I can give it to Father Tarizzo and thus discharge my task." He agreed and I had it delivered that same day.

Please accept my respects and believe me, dear Father,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. Charles Zucchi

[No date]

Most Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

His Excellency the archbishop instructs me to write as follows concerning Father Rocca. Both Father Rua and you have repeatedly stated in writing that before admitting anyone into the Salesian Congregation you have requested testimonials of the archbishop. Now, Father Rocca is precisely one of those clerics against whom His Excellency has had to lodge serious, reiterated complaints because he had been dismissed from the diocesan seminary and yet was admitted into your Congregation. In your letter of May 29, 1873, you wrote of Rocca: "Cleric Rocca has not been admitted either as a member of our Congregation, or as a diocesan seminarian, but *solely* as a patient for a few weeks of convalescence at the Lanzo school. This was granted him under the explicit condition that he have written permission of his ecclesiastical superior."

Obviously, when a cleric deserves to be dismissed from the seminary, he is certainly unfit for a religious congregation. This has been the constant policy for all seminarians of any and every diocese, Turin included.

Your reassurance led His Excellency to assume that Rocca had left the Salesians. Only recently did he discover to his surprise that Rocca is now a priest, ordained he knows not by whom. Furthermore, Father Rocca believes he has the privilege not only of a private chapel but even of a portable altar, reserved to bishops, and he celebrates Holy Mass at his home in Rivara.

His Excellency can now only lodge another serious complaint against such glaring illegal procedure.

Yours devotedly,
Fr. Francis Maffei
Archdiocesan Pro-Secretary

Up to November 9 it was commonly supposed at the chancery that Rocca had left the seminary "with no one's knowledge,"²⁵ but [in a letter] of December 4 the same chancery stated that he had been dismissed. The contradiction is flagrant. We assume that the second statement reports erroneous information received after the first—just as we can readily believe that the request for testimonials may not have been passed on to the archbishop by those about him.²⁶

The pastor of Rivara also wrote a letter but it went astray, and so he wrote again to Don Bosco on December 26:

²⁵Letter from pro-secretary Father Maffei to Father Rua, Turin, November 9, 1877. This agrees with the assertion of Father Rocca, previously cited, that he had left the seminary *ipso invito*, against the archbishop's wishes. [Author]

²⁶Father Rocca, when asked by us about the testimonials, wrote as follows:

Cuornè, March 4, 1831

Dear Father Ceria:

I recall very well, when I decided to enter the Congregation, that Don Bosco told me to apply to Archbishop Gastaldi for the required testimonials. Receiving no reply, I personally spoke to Father Soldati, the seminary rector (it was at the end of October 1873) and he said he would ask the archbishop. On my return the next day, he told me in the following exact words: "The archbishop will never grant you a testimonial letter because you should not have left the seminary." Such precise, clever reasoning! Please note that I left the seminary for reasons of health with my superior's permission. Don Bosco then had to obtain the testimonials directly from Rome.

Later on, I ran into further trouble when I celebrated Holy Mass in our family chapel at home. This was due to a misinterpretation; it was certainly not intended to be a violation of his orders. Two years later, with no difficulty at all, he granted me a *celebret* in his own handwriting. If you wish further information, please write.

Cordial regards. *Memento mei*.

Your affectionate brother [in Christ],
Fr. Angelo Rocca

. . . Having asked good Father Rocca to deliver the eulogy in honor of St. John [the Baptist], our parish patron, with no thought at all at the time to the ruling stated in the [diocesan] calendar, I immediately wrote to the chancery for the required authorization. A brother priest pointed this out to me when he learned that Father Rocca had accepted my invitation. My request was denied. Father Rocca came again for a few days' visit to his parents at Rivara, and, knowing the diocesan calendar's ruling, did not even ask for permission to celebrate Holy Mass. This is what really happened.

A last comment to wind up this matter. The altar in the Rocca private chapel was old, beautiful and conforming to the rubrics. Although it was fitted out nicely, no one ever used it. It was properly restored when Father Rocca said Mass after heaven knows how many years.²⁷

However, the raveled skein now became more tangled than ever. At the beginning of December, the Camilla and Bertolero Press put out a "Letter on the Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales." Its aim was expressed by the subtitle "A Ray of Light." It had been written to enlighten readers about the anonymous pamphlet which had appeared in February. This letter was also anonymous, addressed to an unnamed vicar. It was signed by "A Former Oratory Pupil Who Is Honored To Proclaim Himself a Salesian Cooperator." The open letter began:

Last winter I learned of a leaflet written by His Excellency Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi concerning the Salesian Congregation, but I could not get a copy of it until now when you graciously made me a gift of it. I heartily thank you, all the more so for assuring me of its authenticity as coming to you directly from the hand of the archbishop himself. I have read it with some anxiety, and since I am one of the first pupils of the Salesian Oratory, I think I can conscientiously pass judgment on the truth of its statement and supply the explanations you have requested.

It cannot be said that the facts presented in the letter were untrue, but its harsh and acrid presentation spoiled the contents. Copies

²⁷Letter from Father Rocca to Father Berto, La Spezia, December 29, 1877. [Author]

were sent to many pastors, Salesian superiors, and others who, in the author's view, took an interest in Don Bosco's undertakings. All the Salesians disapproved of the letter, especially of its closing paragraphs. The archbishop himself was outraged and notified Don Bosco by mail that the publication was "a string of lies and inaccuracies aimed at the sacred person of His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin and, consequently, Don Bosco—or Father Rua, if he were absent—should issue a statement of condemnation, censure, and disavowal of that letter before the 15th of the month. "If the archbishop is not in receipt of this statement by December 15," the pro-secretary wrote, "he will do all he deems proper to vindicate the dignity of his authority."

This letter was dated December 5. Meanwhile, assisted by his loyal secretary, Don Bosco had finished compiling the list of favors granted him by the Holy See, as he had been instructed to do by Cardinal Ferrieri, and on December 6 he sent it to Rome with a covering letter:

Turin, December 6, 1877

Your Eminence:

I am honored to submit an authentic copy of all the spiritual favors and privileges granted by the Holy See to the lowly Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. For easier reading, I had a few of them printed up in little booklets; I have enclosed a copy of each. I did not judge it necessary to list temporary privileges which have expired. However, should you wish further documents or explanation, I shall be only too honored to comply.

I am sorry that I must now distress Your Eminence once more. Our archbishop, who had already admitted our clerics to the forthcoming sacred ordinations, informs me today, with no explanation, that he has excluded all Salesians. I pray that God will preserve Your Eminence for the welfare of the Church and the support of our Congregation.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

After the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which always piled work upon him, especially in the confessional, Don Bosco wrote the archbishop a confidential letter concerning the anonymous publication.

Turin, December 9, 1877

Most Reverend and dear Excellency:

The day before yesterday a member of this house received a printed letter which he immediately passed on to me; the letter referred to a pamphlet dated much earlier²⁸ which concerned the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. I cannot tell you how much it distressed and upset me as I read it. I have always abhorred and detested defending myself through the press.

I can assure Your Excellency that:

1. I did not and still do not know the author or the compiler of that letter.

2. I took no part whatever in either printing, writing, or lithographing it, neither directly nor indirectly nor through any of my subjects.

3. I deeply deplore and censure the disrespectful manner in which it speaks of Your Excellency. As I have already had the honor of informing you, I would never avail myself of such dastardly means to make my views prevail, especially now that Your Excellency has referred our differences to the Holy Father, the ultimate arbiter in ecclesiastical disputes, to whose decision I now beforehand gladly and humbly defer.

I do beg Your Excellency, however, to note that whoever it was who signed himself "Salesian Cooperator" does not seem to be the one who published this letter, but that it was rather the vicar who sent him the first and second pamphlet.²⁹

In closing, I implore you not to have anything else published on this matter, for the sole reason that your enemies and mine anxiously await any pretext to issue more insulting material. Rest assured that you will never find enemies among the Salesians, but merely humble persons who do their utmost to benefit this diocese in spite of the obstacles they encounter.

As for myself, I shall always be honored to remain in deepest respect and veneration,

Your most humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had promised the novices that he would have dinner with them after all had received the cassock. The last of them had

²⁸The anonymous pamphlet of the archbishop. [Author]

²⁹This may be deduced from the following postscript: "Just as I was about to close this letter, I received a second pamphlet entitled: *The Archbishop of Turin and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales*, etc. I am deeply grateful and will answer you very soon." [Author]

been vested on the eve of the Immaculate Conception. However, hosting many guests at his own table, he could not keep his promise till the next day, after he sent his *confidential* letter to the archbishop. An answer came on December 10. His Excellency was miffed.

Turin, December 10, 1877

Very dear Father:

His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop has instructed me to state that he received your letter of the 9th and to add that it is your bounden duty as soon as possible and in your own name to publish a forceful protest in either *Unità Cattolica* or *Emporio Popolare* in which, both for yourself and for the entire Salesian Congregation, you *condemn and disavow* this entire slanderous libel widely circulated throughout Turin and both within and outside the diocese.

With due esteem, I remain,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. Francis Maffei
Archdiocesan Pro-Secretary

Don Bosco was tied up with meetings of the superior chapter on both December 10 and 11. He also had to touch up the deliberations of the general chapter before time blurred his memory, as had been decreed.³⁰ The minutes had to be reread in their entirety, the articles rechecked, and the entire data coordinated. He answered the chancery's latest communication in a letter to Archbishop Gastaldi:

Turin, December 12, 1877

Most Reverend and dear Excellency:

The letter you ordered written to me the day before yesterday has given me much food for thought. I earnestly desire to please you, but at the same time I would not want to compromise the poor Salesian Congregation in the eyes of the Roman Congregations. Therefore, kindly let me know just what, besides the insolent tone, *I am in bounden duty obliged to condemn and disavow*.

I repeat once more that I had nothing to do with the letter in question and that neither I nor the Salesian Congregation will ever accept responsibility for it. I am very reluctant to give the matter additional

³⁰See pp. 215f. [Editor]

publicity which, I feel, might give rise to more of the same.

Nevertheless, I will obey and publish whatever you show to me to be erroneous and hence to be disavowed and condemned.

I assure you also that I have never borne and do not now bear you any ill-feeling and that I consider it to be an honor to profess myself,

Your most humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop did not reply. But on the evening of December 12, Canon Chiaverotti summoned two clerics, Amerio and Bonora, to the chancery, showed them the letter of the self-styled Salesian cooperator, and asked them to sign the following formula which had been appended by Archbishop Gastaldi in his own hand: "I condemn everything contained in this letter." It was either-or: either offer your signature or forfeit your ordination. Not only had both clerics never read the letter; they had not even heard of it. Dumbfounded, they asked if they might look at it. They were shocked by what they read. They knew nothing of the matter, they protested, and before signing any statement they felt they had to consult their own superior and follow his counsel. By their refusal they risked not being ordained. However, the archbishop had good reason to be very cautious before putting his threat into execution.³¹

Not a few readers may feel that the ignorance of these two clerics was feigned, since it seems impossible that any Salesian living at the Oratory would be unacquainted with these recent developments. And yet we have to admit it was so, because the community was entirely in the dark about what went on behind the scenes. In fact, Father Vespignani who kept in close touch with the Oratory superiors and most of the community while at work, at table or in the playground, heard so little about the matter that when we asked him about Father Perenchio, the Masses, and Father Lazzero's suspension, he assured us, to his and our astonishment, that it was the first time he had ever heard of it. This was due to Don Bosco's strict reserve and unquestioned self-mastery.³²

³¹See pp. 249f. [Editor]

³²Father Giacomelli was one of those who received the anonymous letter. He quickly brought it disapprovingly to Don Bosco, who likewise disavowed it and silenced one who wanted to defend it. (*Positio super virt. Summ.*, No. 5, #496). [Author]

Moved by his own desire to heal the rift between the archbishop and himself, Don Bosco decided to go to Rome on December 15, but an unforeseen event caused a brief postponement. That day, just after lunch, Father [James] Margotti³³ and [Caesar Trabucco] the count of Castagnetto, former cabinet minister and senator of the realm, unexpectedly walked into the dining room. The elderly statesman was so anxious to see Don Bosco that, on being mistakenly told that he was having lunch with the pastor at the Crocetta,³⁴ he had exclaimed, "Patience! I'll look for him there!" He came from the archbishop himself, who asked to see Don Bosco so they could reconcile their differences in a friendly manner. Father Margotti was overjoyed, firmly hoping for an early settlement, but Don Bosco, a keen observer, immediately realized from the count's words that the archbishop was using this ploy to prolong the whole affair. Still, he raised no objection but quickly agreed, postponed his trip and twice called on the archbishop. But he became even more aware that he had to be on his guard, for the archbishop was only trying to sound out his thoughts and plans and discover how he intended to handle the affair in Rome.

On his visit to Don Bosco on the 15th, the count of Castagnetto had offered to be an intermediary. A man of learning, experienced in the ways of the world, and a staunch Catholic, he first listened to both sides and agreed to continue his efforts and act as Don Bosco's fully empowered aide at the right moment. He asked for Don Bosco's written disavowal of the anonymous letter. Don Bosco agreed but with two stipulations: that the archbishop consider the Salesian Congregation no different from the others in his archdiocese and that, as a sign that the rift was healed, he celebrate Mass or officiate at a public religious function in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Now, without comment, we offer our readers two documents which tell the whole story. The first is a letter from Don Bosco to the count, which he wrote on the eve of his departure for Rome.

Turin, December 17, 1877

My dear Count:

I have postponed my departure for Rome to tomorrow, awaiting the

³³Founder, editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*, a Catholic weekly. [Editor]

³⁴A neighborhood in Turin. [Editor]

outcome of your kind offices with His Excellency our archbishop. You have been able to verify my fondest desires for some kind of settlement. Now to my keen regret, I have learned that your enlightened efforts have proved of no avail. Let us be patient. In this too we have reason to praise God's dispositions. The fact that I head a Congregation, some of whose clerical members have been denied holy orders and priests forbidden to preach or hear confessions or even celebrate Holy Mass, forces me to appeal to my lawful supreme superior to seek his instruction and counsel.

Should you again see His Excellency the archbishop, please assure him that I go to Rome not to lay charges against him, but solely to answer those which His Excellency personally thought he should press against me before the Holy Father himself.

I indeed most especially thank you for the trouble you so graciously took upon yourself to help this poor Congregation, which will unceasingly pray that God may abundantly shower His blessings upon you and your family.

You have always been a distinguished benefactor of ours. Please continue your kindness to us, especially by your prayers, that God may mercifully aid us to overcome the obstacles which keep hindering the salvation of souls.

With deepest thanks I am very honored to remain

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

The illustrious Turinese patrician had no further opportunity of reporting on his mediation efforts to Don Bosco, but our saintly founder needed a written report and so he had word sent to the count who obliged.

Turin, December 23, 1877

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

Following up our talks on the lamentable controversy between the archbishop and you—particularly centering on the anonymous letter of the *Salesian cooperator*—I called on His Excellency, not without having first asked for a convenient appointment.

I told him the gist of our discussion and of your earnest desire to live in peace with your ecclesiastical superior, bound as you are to each other by so many memories. I told him you could not help seeing the disastrous consequences of this rift for your Congregation and the lamentable effects on public opinion.

I then showed His Excellency the article prepared for *Unità Cattolica*,

adding that I was sure Father Margotti would promptly publish it.

The archbishop read it through twice and then remarked: "Without stretching things out with a long declaration, Don Bosco should have adopted the very brief statement that I sent to him a few days ago. Here he decries the language of the anonymous letter, branding it scurrilous and shameful, but he does not condemn the incriminating facts. Don Bosco makes no mention of his subordinates' rejection [of the letter].

I then remarked that, by the trust His Excellency had put in me by authorizing me to act as arbiter, he should allow me to speak freely.

I told him that I thought the letter sufficiently condemnatory in your declaration and that such a statement from a superior of a congregation understandably extends to all his subordinates. I also reminded His Excellency of the problems of our times and how eager the wicked are to foster any rift within the clergy.

I pointed out that never before had unity been so needed, and that a conflict between him and a priest who has deserved so well of the Church as you have could only stoke the fires of an irreligious press with disastrous consequences. For my part, I said, I fondly hoped that all memory of this rift would be wiped out by friendly accord and that His Excellency would become a protector of the Congregation, choose a Sunday and go there to celebrate Mass and give his blessing to the Oratory.

His reply was that the time had not yet come for such things, that it was up to him to select both time and manner, and that a lot of things still had to be regularized, adding that he would personally write an article and send it to me.

That evening, as I awaited the article, I received an envelope from the archbishop containing Don Bosco's own draft of the article and the archbishop's calling card with his compliments.³⁵ I understood that my intervention in this matter was over. At the request of my friend and nephew, Count Cays, I now send you this account with my respectful regards and ask you to pray (but in a very particular manner) for my dear wife who is seriously ill.

With respect and love,

Yours devotedly,
Count of Castagnetto

"Don Bosco's draft of the article," mentioned by the count, consisted in the following statement which was to be published, with the archbishop's previous consent, in the Catholic press.

³⁵The card read: "Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin, sends his respects and good wishes to His Excellency the Count of Castagnetto, cabinet minister." [Author]

Because negotiations broke down, it appeared in the *Salesian Bulletin*.

STATEMENT

Some days ago an anonymous publication bearing neither date nor address and signed only "A Salesian Cooperator" was circulated. A would-be response to previous writing of the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin, it presumes to discuss events which concern the archbishop and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. Refusing to stoop to cheap publicity, I would refrain from making any comment, but I fear my silence might be taken for approval of the offensive language and scurrilous style the letter uses in referring to the person of our revered archbishop, for whom in my position and as a priest I profess the highest and most sincere veneration. Secondly, I am using the media to state most explicitly that this leaflet was printed without my knowledge, that I have absolutely no idea of its author, and that I thoroughly reject both for myself and for my subjects any responsibility for its printing and its distribution.

Finally, I must resort to the media as a means of informing the anonymous author that I deplore his unsolicited defense and that, abhorring any public discussion of affairs which do not concern the public, I hereby disavow any further publication concerning this matter.

I trust that this statement will counteract that shameful letter and reveal the respectful homage which I have always cherished and firmly purpose to cherish for the rest of my life, with God's help, for the ecclesiastical superior of our diocese, our revered archbishop.

Of this statement Abbot [Maximilian] Bardessono wrote to Don Bosco [on January 20, 1878]:

Your most prudent statement issued in the latest *Salesian Bulletin* concerning the letter written by a [Salesian] cooperator has made an excellent impression on all people who sincerely possess the spirit of God. It has shown honest-minded persons that God's spirit is manifest in you, a spirit constantly and wondrously shown in all your works. Your calmness, prudence, discretion, dignity and conciseness have made a striking impression upon people of thought. They are above all in sharp contrast with the restlessness, agitation and argumentative tone of His Excellency, the archbishop.

On December 18 Don Bosco set out for Rome. Later we shall follow him through the Eternal City, where Providence led him not just as a spectator, but as an agent in some important events.

However, before closing this chapter we must narrate later happenings in Turin which locally climaxed and closed the great conflict.

Summoned by the archbishop, the cathedral canons held two meetings, the first on December 17, exclusively for canons in active service. There it was proposed to sign and send to the archbishop a formal protest against the anonymous letter with the intent to make people believe and see for themselves that it had been Don Bosco himself who had published it. However, staunch opposition arose, especially from Canon [Joseph] Ortalda and Canon [Peter] Peinetti who defended Don Bosco against this charge. Consequently, the protest, drafted beforehand, was rewritten and toned down by deleting this accusation. The vote on the decision to send the document to the archbishop passed by a single vote and bore the signature of only Canon [Joseph] Zappata, vicar general and chairman, and Canon [Camillus] Pelletta, secretary of the cathedral chapter. The canons had understood that this matter was to be handled privately. Imagine the astonishment of the majority when they saw it published in the December 20 issue of *Emporio Popolare*.³⁶

This was the spark touching off a huge conflagration. Until then the anonymous letter was known to only a handful of people, but now it was searched out, read and commented on extensively in all kinds of newspapers—the overall impression being that the anonymous letter had come from the pen of a Salesian. Some Oratory alumni demanded that a response be made in Don Bosco's defense, and were ready to affix their names to it, but they were dissuaded from doing so. Several pastors agreed that, should any other public action be taken to discredit Don Bosco, they would sign a petition asking the Pope to intervene. *Unità Cattolica* was sharply rebuked by Canon Chiuso for not having published the cathedral chapter's protest, but Father Margotti sent Father Scolari with the reply that: 1. he had decided to publish no further protest, for it would only increase the scandal; 2. the Holy Father personally read *Unità Cattolica* or had it read to him every day and he did not intend to grieve the Pope at his age by such gossip.

Canon Soldati had forced the seminarians to sign one letter and several priests of the Consolata to sign another, intending to publish

³⁶Letter from Father Rua to Don Bosco, Turin, January 6, 1878. [Author]

them, but he dared not do so for fear of embarrassment.³⁷ Father Tresso, vicar at Lanzo, was summoned to the chancery and charged with being the one to whom the anonymous letter had been addressed. He parried the thrust skillfully, and when pushed to persuade the priests of his vicariate to sign a letter of protest, he cleverly declined. In a word, the affair had created a general upheaval.

We now resume our account of the various meetings held to agree on declarations. On December 17 the canons met a second time and were asked to sign a petition to the Pope that he condemn Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation. The vast majority would not hear of it, and a lengthy discussion arose, until they finally agreed to write a letter to the Holy Father expressing their best wishes and asking him to intervene between the archbishop and Don Bosco with conciliatory words. The petition was signed by December 22, also by the honorary canons, and was ready to be sent to Rome that day. It contained nothing hostile to either Don Bosco or the Salesians. But the general feeling was that once it was given to Canon Zappata and by him to Canon Chiuso, it was never mailed.³⁸ The truth is that nothing was ever heard of it in spite of all attempts to trace it.

On December 21, the city pastors were also summoned in council and asked to follow the precedent set by the cathedral chapter. Of twenty-two pastors only fourteen attended. Their discussion, pro and con, was followed by a vote on the advisability of issuing a protest. The ballot was split evenly: seven for, seven against. This time also the protest had already been drafted and remained on the desk of the chairman, in whose home the meeting was held.³⁹ "The pastors' vote," wrote Father [John Baptist] Bertagna,⁴⁰ "was a bombshell meant to blast all the machinery that had been lined up to destroy the effect of the letter to the vicar."⁴¹ Father [Felix] Reviglio,⁴² pastor of St. Augustine's, had been

³⁷Letter from Father Anfossi to Father Berto, December 1877. [Author]

³⁸Above-mentioned letter from Father Rua. [Author]

³⁹Letter from Father Bonetti to Don Bosco, Turin, December 22, 1877. [Author]

⁴⁰An outstanding theologian and professor of moral theology at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, Father Bertagna was later consecrated auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda, archbishop of Turin. [Editor]

⁴¹Letter to Father Berto, January 2, 1878. [Author]

⁴²Father Felix Reviglio first met Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1847 at the age of sixteen. He was also his first pupil to be ordained a priest. [Editor]

foremost in defending Don Bosco, who, as soon as he heard of it, wrote to him to express his fatherly thanks.

Rome, Christmas Day, 1877

My dear Father Reviglio,

From various sources I have learned of the meeting of Turin's pastors on the 20th (sic) of this month. You spoke out in favor of your "papa," and I am grateful to you for that. The way the meeting turned out was providential also for the archbishop because he himself, as a preventive measure, had already referred the contents of that letter to the Holy Father and to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and the publicly expressed opinion of Turin's parish priests while the case is pending would have significantly prejudiced its outcome. Such is the opinion of one important person on learning of meetings of the cathedral chapter and Turin's pastors. I would really hope that someone would point out the lies printed in that letter. I would be very thankful to you if you could get me a detailed account of the summoning of the meeting and of the things discussed along with particulars.

Yesterday the Holy Father left his bed to universal rejoicing in Rome. Still, his age tells heavily upon him, as do his various ailments. May God extend the life of this precious treasure of ours!

Merry Christmas! Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Bear in mind that the infamous letter was provoked by four pamphlets of His Excellency the archbishop,⁴³ and that had not someone intervened, he would have published a fifth and sent it to the Sacred Congregation of Briefs. Why the wonder that a rebuttal is published?

Touched by Don Bosco's graciousness, the priest sent him a detailed report of the meeting, as follows:

Turin, December 29, 1877

Very Reverend and dear Father, Don Bosco:

Words cannot express the intense joy I felt on receiving your cherished letter. The moment I saw the handwriting, I remembered my special friend

⁴³The "four pamphlets" are the four printed documents which Archbishop Gastaldi had sent to Rome. Don Bosco will soon say that they rather helped the defense of his Congregation. [Author]

and gentle father, and I was moved to learn that I had pleased Don Bosco, who is always on my mind, on my lips and in my heart! I read the letter over and over again, kissing the lines written by my benefactor who generously showered his love upon me in the days when I was poor, homeless, and deprived of everything! You say, "I am grateful to you," and my heart aches and my face reddens. To thank me, my own Don Bosco, when, after God, all I have I owe to you, and when, were it not for you, I would now be the least blessed of men! To thank me for what I have repaid not merely in gratitude but in justice overwhelms me with shame! Never thank me again, I beg you, but just make known your bidding.

Now let me pull myself together and give you the information you anxiously seek. The meeting of Turin's pastors was in no way enthusiastic. Even the vicar of St. Francis of Paola, who as senior member invited us to his home, repeatedly stated he had been ordered to call it. When he started, "You may already know the purpose of our meeting," all answered with one voice that they had not the faintest idea. The general talk is that it was the archbishop who hinted to one of the canons that the situation called for a show of esteem and sympathy to bolster his position.

Several pastors, still smarting because the first assembly had caught them unawares, now made it clear that they would turn down any further meetings unless the agenda were stated and the balloting secret. Some pastors, having an inkling of what the meeting was about, boycotted it, so that in all only fourteen were present. It was proposed to them that they should follow the lead of the cathedral chapter and assure the archbishop that they sincerely shared the keen distress caused him by the anonymous letter then in circulation and that they repudiated the shabbiness of his treatment. But objections arose: the pastors felt they could not just criticize the style of the letter and ignore what it said, as had the communiqué of the cathedral chapter—and that was something they saw beyond their competence. Then, too, the facts stated by the letter had been referred to Rome's final judgment, a verdict they had no right to pre-judge. Furthermore, the times are such that we must not provide our enemies with material to discredit us and spread scandal—a situation which should have been censured when the cathedral chapter's statement appeared in the newspapers. Also, the Salesian Congregation had the Holy Father's approval and merited their respect. Finally, they repudiated the smear that the anonymous letter had been written with Don Bosco's approval. A heated debate followed and a secret ballot was called for on whether they were to go along with the cathedral canons. The vote was split down the middle, seven for, seven against. No action was taken. It should be noted, however, that, even had the vote favored the proposal, only the style of the anonymous letter was to be censured, and that would have been of little help to His Excellency. It was obvious that regardless of

any declaration we might make, the archbishop would accept it and it would be read by all as a vote of censure against Don Bosco. Likewise, even if all the city pastors had attended, the majority of them would certainly have voted against the proposal. I naturally spoke as best I could, and it was really Father Arpino and the pastor of [Our Lady of Mount] Carmel who, in concerted action with me, carried the day. To my knowledge, the pastors' stand won the approval of fair-minded people. Now we can disregard the statement of the cathedral canons, because it is no secret that even among them there were some who were opposed to a written statement. Furthermore, just about every one of them deplored reading their private letter to the archbishop in the newspaper. Lastly, the discussion always centered on the style alone, never the contents. In fact, one canon told some pastors, "His Excellency, the archbishop, thinks he is helping his cause by soliciting such statements, but he is only achieving the opposite." The general feeling is that no further meeting of pastors will be called, but, should there be any, Don Bosco will come out more triumphant than ever. This occasion gave us a tangible proof of how Turin cherishes the indescribable good you do for both Church and society! The prayers of sincere persons are beginning to be efficacious. I regret I cannot write any longer. I would love a papal blessing, if you can obtain one for me. I ask your blessing too and profess myself through life in fond esteem and fervent gratitude,

Your most grateful son,
Fr. Felix Reviglio, *Pastor*

Another pastors' meeting was called for January 2 by Archbishop Gastaldi at his residence. Father Bertagna describes it as follows:⁴⁴ "This afternoon, at 3:30, we met with His Excellency. He was very subdued and restricted the discussion to the matter of catechetics. In closing, he bade us to stand united in friendship. So much the better!" It would appear that the last item on the agenda was the purpose of the meeting, and that an attempt was being made to induce the pastors to accept another ballot.⁴⁵ However, some very critical public events were in the offing, and they would have diverted attention from these and other private disputes.

Left alone to fill the breach in Turin, Father Rua kept in close correspondence with our saintly founder, to whom he sent a concise

⁴⁴Letter previously quoted. [Author]

⁴⁵Letter from Father Reviglio to Don Bosco, Turin, January 2, 1878. [Author]

overall report on the situation in a Christmas letter. After the festivities, Don Bosco wrote in reply:

Rome, December 27, 1877

Dear Father Rua:

This is a trial which Our Lord has laid on our poor Congregation. He will help us out of it as He has done on so many other occasions. Let me do the worrying. Silence, prayer and strict observance of our rules!

If it is too late to include the well-known statement⁴⁶ in the *Salesian Bulletin*, you might add it as a supplement, for this is something we must do. In doubt consult Father Rostagno, our good friend. I'd also like Father Cagliero to call on Canon Nasi and Canon Pelletta and caution them to ease off their involvement, since they may well find themselves very embarrassed when called upon to prove the charge sent to Rome: "The anonymous letter is to be attributed to Don Bosco."⁴⁷ He can point out too that four times the archbishop provoked responses with his statements in the newspapers, and he sent all of them to Rome. Why does he not take the trouble to point out the errors⁴⁸ and blast them? This flood of letters and articles—without ever seeking information from me—is really our defense.

I should think it very advisable to pay a visit to all those pastors who took our side and, on my behalf, express respects and thanks. Keep an account of all that happens and send it to me.⁴⁹

The year is at its end, and I am very sorry to be so distant from my dear sons. Greet them all for me. Here are the family practices I suggest for the coming year:

1. Break up the habit of smoking and grumbling.
2. Exactness in the duties of one's state of life from Father Rua to Julius.⁵⁰
3. Holy Communion and prayers for those houses recently opened and others that are being set up in mission territories, where God has prepared an abundant harvest for us.

Draw up the directory of confreres. Send me the brief biographies of the

⁴⁶This is the statement which appeared in the *Salesian Bulletin*, January 1878, page 12. But it is not found in every copy, having been inserted perhaps only in the copies meant for the Turin archdiocese, so as to contain the scandal. [Author]

⁴⁷This is in quotes, since Don Bosco is quoting his accusers. [Author]

⁴⁸In the anonymous letter. [Author]

⁴⁹Obedient in everything, Father Rua obeyed this too in his letter of January 6, 1878. [Author]

⁵⁰One of the janitors. [Author]

deceased and the new calendars.
God bless us all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Lest these overwhelming worries should swallow up all lesser concerns—indeed at their very outset—Don Bosco by a single act ended what we might call an endless cycle of crises which kept recurring during the phase we have just described of this prolonged conflict. On a stopover at La Spezia during his trip to Rome, while he was staying at the house recently opened at the insistence of Pius IX, the following letter addressed to him arrived at the Oratory.

Rome, December 21, 1877

Reverend Father:

The information and documents⁵¹ which this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars requested have been received and, at His Holiness' order, will be carefully examined. I merely need to say that this Sacred Congregation appeals earnestly to your religious principles and prudence to keep all members and cooperators of the Salesian Congregation under your jurisdiction from printing or issuing, even indirectly, any more writings of any kind which deal with your differences with the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin. Confident of your compliance with this order, I wish you every good.

✠ Cardinal Ferrieri, *Prefect*

This letter, forwarded to Don Bosco in Rome, gave him an opportunity to pull together all the strands of the controversy in a report to Cardinal Ferrieri. It briefly summarizes the origins, growth and consequences of the controversy.

Rome, January 7, 1878

Your Eminence:

In your audience graciously granted me some days ago, I omitted to thank you warmly for your very kind letter to me and for the benevolent

⁵¹The authentic list of the favors and privileges granted by the Holy See. [Author]

concern with which you urged me to avoid publicizing matters concerning the rift between the Salesian Congregation and the archbishop of Turin.

I can assure Your Eminence that recently, as well as in the past, neither I nor any of my dependents have ever published anything which could even remotely be interpreted as offensive to our most revered archbishop.

Your wise counsel will prompt me to abide more scrupulously by this rule, especially now that our differences have been submitted to the supreme judgment of the Holy See, to which Catholics of every rank must respectfully yield and whose infallible verdict they must cheerfully accept.

Would God that our honorable archbishop had also maintained such an attitude! Things would not have become as messy as unfortunately they now are, more than ever.

For months the Salesians have been flooded with letters threatening canonical censures, denial of holy orders, and actual suspension from the office of preaching and hearing confessions. The latter involved the rector of the motherhouse and the superior of the Congregation himself. In writing I pleaded with high-ranking persons for their kind services to ease such severe measures, especially since the archbishop had appealed to the Holy See. It was all in vain. Then, bolstering his own position and making it impossible for us to use similar weapons, he wrote me two threatening letters, one couched in the following terms: "I inform you that should you . . . communicate. . . ."⁵²

Their lips thus sealed, the Salesians could in no way voice their side of the argument, and I was left with no other choice of action than to appeal to Mother Church, mistress of truth—this at the price of serious inconvenience and hurt, for I was forced to lay aside the care of the Congregation in Europe and in the foreign missions in order to come to Rome for guidance and justice.

After I left Turin, Archbishop Gastaldi continued to send out letters, in his own hand or printed, to many influential persons. On December 18, 1877, he assembled the cathedral canons to have them condemn a letter which, without the slightest claim, he blames on the Salesians.

The canons did not go that far. They merely deplored the insolence of the letter toward the archbishop. He sent this statement to *Unità Cattolica*, but the editor firmly refused to print it, and so it appeared in *Emporio Popolare* on the 20th.

He then wrote to the pastors in Turin to summon them to a second meeting, proposing that they condemn the Salesian Congregation as the source of that anonymous letter. However, noting that the points of their discussion had already been submitted to the judgment of the Holy See, they refused to consider the motion.

⁵²See Archbishop Gastaldi's letter of December 1, 1877, in this chapter. [Author]

The archbishop summoned the cathedral canons again on the 22nd, to elicit from them an explicit rejection of the anonymous letter and of the Salesian Congregation. But they too refused, and, as some who were present testify, they restricted themselves to asking the Holy Father to intervene through his office and put an end to the controversy.

Displeased by these results, His Excellency wrote a special circular to summon the pastors of Turin to his residence once more on January 2. After recommending the children's catechism to their attention, he began to stress the need of unity between parish priests and their bishop, recalling all he had done for them and asking for their support in a matter of supreme importance which he would later make known to them. As I have been told, they all took this as an intimation that he would shortly appeal to them to rally about him, all to the detriment of the Salesians.

The press gets wind of all these things and publishes them with fanciful guesswork, and the enemies of religion in turn gloat over it and flaunt it in the face of the Church.

To give Your Eminence an idea of this, I am enclosing some periodicals sent to me obviously as an ugly joke.

I am sure that all this publicity and spiteful commentary would have been avoided had Your Eminence's recommendation been followed.

The archbishop is striving at all costs to blame the Salesians for circulating the anonymous letter, and, to make this stick, he keeps up a barrage of accusations, spoken and written, in Rome and elsewhere. It is downright calumny. Time and again I have reassured His Excellency that no Salesian ever had anything to do with it, and in several communications I have censured the shameful treatment it metes out to ecclesiastical authority, stating that I therefore unconditionally disclaim all responsibility for it. The archbishop has refused to believe me and still persists in his demand that I declare the whole thing to be a lie.

But it is not a lie, and I cannot and will not deny the truth. I have begged the archbishop to point out falsities in it so that I might immediately condemn them publicly, but he has never seen fit to reply.

In the face of such stonewalling and in this wild barrage of publications, I can see no way that these differences of ours can be reconciled.

The facts are these:

1. In the diocese of Turin there are Salesian priests who have been suspended from hearing confessions or preaching or celebrating Holy Mass, and [Salesian] seminarians who have been denied holy orders—and this while everywhere there is a crying need for priestly work and His Excellency himself bemoans the alarming scarcity of priests in his diocese.

2. During the last Christmas ember days he incardinated into his

diocese one of our clerics, perpetually professed, and gave him tonsure and the four minor orders, although the latter kept protesting that he was a Salesian and intended to remain so unto death and, prior to his ordination, had presented dimissorial letters from his superior.⁵³

3. He has given the Salesian Congregation a bad name all over Italy and has discredited it in the city of Turin, causing such loss of heart in the Salesian Congregation that several postulants have changed their minds and some professed members have no longer wished to stay in a Congregation thus disgraced and have walked out. Salesians suffer all kinds of insults to be heaped on them, but they are forbidden by threats of censure to defend themselves.

4. In addition, he has hurt us both morally and financially. I have had to disrupt needed work, meet traveling expenses, and neglect my normal business—and all this at a time when I should be concentrating my attention on the houses already operating and on those which are about to open in several parts of Europe and overseas.

5. He has also gravely hurt our houses, which rely entirely upon good will contributions. Thus publicly maligned, how can Salesians appeal to the faithful for funds in order to meet the needs of boys whom they now shelter—well over twenty thousand—to feed them and give them a Christian education?

I beg Your Eminence's indulgence if I sound rather exasperated. I am convinced that here God's greater glory and the welfare of souls are being blocked and that a religious Congregation, approved by the Holy See and placed under its effective, fatherly protection, is being sorely tried without reason.

Your Eminence alone can put a stop to these hardships and take opportune measures to keep them from recurring.

I hope that Your Eminence, in your noted and proven goodness, will grant me a further brief audience, that I may clarify points which I have here merely highlighted. In the meantime, accept my deepest thanks and most respectful, heartfelt esteem.

Yours most gratefully
Fr. John Bosco

Two other consequences arose, but Don Bosco certainly could not mention them. The difference in his character and that of Archbishop Gastaldi was very well known in Turin, and it was broadly commented upon in favor of Don Bosco, but to a serious erosion of ecclesiastical authority. Then, in Rome, the relentless

⁵³This was Count Cays, who to be ordained had to set up the required patrimony with the chancery. [Author]

flow of charges about the slightest things which the archbishop felt had hurt his dignity were gradually discrediting Don Bosco and his Congregation among the cardinals who did not fully know the facts. Also, this endless characterizing of Don Bosco as a headstrong and almost lawless man played upon the mind of Pius IX whose warmth toward Don Bosco had cooled somewhat, especially since a few prelates had taken the archbishop's side.⁵⁴ True, cardinals, bishops and other very distinguished persons sought to reassure His Holiness, but some aversion toward Don Bosco did exist within the papal court, with the lamentable consequences which we shall later relate. But we shall also see that Don Bosco *conducted himself in all circumstances as God's minister, in great patience . . . in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in unaffected love . . . in the power of God, with the armor of justice on his right hand and on the left.* [Cf. 2 Cor. 6, 4-7].

⁵⁴On November 6, Attorney Menghini wrote to the archbishop: “Cardinal Ferrieri himself said this to me, ‘I think that the Holy Father is not well informed, and favors him excessively. . . .’” The original letter is in the possession of Father Franchetti in Turin. [Author]

CHAPTER 12

March to November, 1877: Don Bosco's Words and Deeds

IT is time now that we gather together into one sheath, as it were, the many scattered memoirs of Don Bosco which still lie ungleaned throughout the furrows of the year 1877.

1. PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

We are told by those who lived with Don Bosco or under his care that his conversations were never mere chitchat. Especially his Salesians, who found much instruction and incentive to virtue in all he said, long remembered his words and most solicitously wrote them all down. The one who was most persistent in recording those intimate conversations was, for a time, Fr. Barberis, whose notebooks we have often quoted in the past and shall continue to quote—not for long, however, because after 1876 his jottings become briefer, and in 1878 and 1879 there are gaps of months at a time, until they cease altogether.

On April 2, while conversing with a few older Salesians about various aspects of school life, he offered some hints which can be very helpful in correcting school disorders. “When we notice disorders in our houses,” he said, “we are never to lose hope of improvement, as long as holiness and spirit of work prevail among the Congregation’s superiors. . . . When it is clear that certain clerics should be dismissed, a final attempt to save them can be tried by suggesting they make a three-day spiritual retreat. . . . Rather than let a situation deteriorate, it is better to cut the schools’ enrollment by half. Yes, it is better to dismiss half the students to

preserve the wholesomeness of our schools. . . . Moral scandals which may arise in a school should be dealt with quietly. If the ringleaders are known, expel them one by one at intervals. With the troublemakers gone, our resolute action, abruptly sprung without fanfare, will put fear into the others and morality will be completely restored in the school. . . . A community free of grumbling and partiality enjoys perfect peace.”

The following day, in an after-lunch stroll with Don Bosco, Fr. Barberis spoke of a confrere of the house who was somewhat given to gluttony. “Every time this topic comes up,” he noted in his chronicle, “Don Bosco becomes worried.” “Keep a watchful eye on him,” Don Bosco replied. “When one surrenders to this vice, no determination or good resolve can hold out; the evil is too hard to correct. And gluttony will soon bring in other problems. St. Jerome says that wine and chastity cannot coexist.” He then went on to relate some incidents he had experienced in his seminary days and at the Convitto¹ with Father Cafasso² and Father Guala,³ who often would say about those who succumbed to alcoholism: “Even if they were to work miracles, do not think that they have overcome the habit; sooner or later they will fall again.”

Don Bosco was wary of every tiny beginning of such an abuse. At the Oratory, on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, in addition to a book fair there used to be a refreshment stand where the boarding pupils could pay for their snacks with coupons,⁴ and others with cash. At this time there were already novices and young clerics at the Oratory, and they too availed themselves of the refreshment stand. In 1877 the superior chapter decided that this practice should stop and that this decision was to be made public so that the boys too would know it. Don Bosco was then asked if, to avoid hard feelings, the clerics might be served refreshments in the dining room outside of meal time. His answer was a firm no, as it had been when he had once been asked if he would let the Salesians have money to buy knickknacks at the fair. “We promptly provide

¹An ecclesiastical college in Turin specializing in pastoral theology. It was here that Don Bosco started his work for boys while attending courses immediately after his ordination. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 54-61. [Editor]

²Now St. Joseph Cafasso. He was canonized by Pope Pius XII in 1947. For further information *see* the Indexes of preceding volumes. [Editor]

³Founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 96f. [Editor]

⁴*See* Vol. XI, p. 222. [Editor]

whatever they need under any and all circumstances," he remarked. "In the course of time, some concessions turn into rights, and unpleasant consequences can result."

On April 3, the conversation veered to grumbling. "This is another pest," Don Bosco said. "Once grumbling seeps into a religious community, all goes to ruin! Hardly any hope of salvaging things remains. There's but one way to get rid of it: lopping off the infected branch mercilessly. Yes, little by little we'll have to follow the example of other religious orders. The rotten member must be cut off, and all hope abandoned of his correction."

Then, as they went on to speak of the spiritual retreat which Father Barberis had just given to the noble students of Valsalice College, Don Bosco brought up a topic which was so dear to his heart.

During a retreat—he said—the concept of vocation must unfailingly be treated. Use an approach like this: "In creating a man the Lord expects something special of him. He sets him, so to speak, at the head of a path which He has strewn with graces. At some moment in his life, this man must make a decision to tread resolutely the road before him. This road can be seen as twofold: life in the world or the priestly life. The latter branches out into two paths of its own—the diocesan priest and the religious priest, who withdraws from the world for greater spiritual safety."

There followed a discussion about developing the topic as an exhortation, unceasingly urging the young not to proceed haphazardly, but with serious thought and much prayer, since this matter is of capital importance. At this point Don Bosco offered this advice:

After saying that, you can add: "Does one feel particularly drawn to the priestly or the religious life? Then let him follow his inclination and seek counsel during this retreat. Is there an older person who has never felt moved toward either of these two paths? Such a one has not been called; let him stick to the way of life he is now living." I think this is the way to speak of vocation, regardless of the kind of school one is addressing or the social status of the audience—nobility, workers, or farm people. But this topic is a must in every boys' retreat.

The sodalities, we know, were founded with an eye to promoting

priestly and religious vocations. While their immediate aim was the members' Christian training and setting good example, the sodalities inflamed the heart with a yearning for a life of perfection far from the world's spiritual dangers. In view of this, Don Bosco wrote to Father Bonetti, director of our school at Borgo San Martino, while the boys were making their retreat:

Turin, April 4, 1877

Dear Father Bonetti:

Remember to boost the altar boys, the Blessed Sacrament and St. Aloysius sodalities, and, if possible, the Immaculate Conception Sodality. Promote talks and prayers for vocations. Tell those who feel the promptings of a vocation to sever all ties with the world and cooperate with God's grace.

Mention this to Father Lazzero, Father Lemoyne and Father Scarabelli.⁵

God bless you all. Pray for this poor, but

Loving friend of yours,
Fr. John Bosco

All writings which in one way or other touched upon the Oratory's residents or activities had to pass Don Bosco's personal scrutiny before publication. "Such writings," he said, "should not be overly laudatory. In fact, while we boost our Congregation, we are not to slight others, even though the praise is perfectly truthful and we may justifiably publicize it." In his recorded remarks, Father Barberis calls himself lucky because, while Don Bosco frequently gave him writing assignments, he always personally corrected them before they went to press. Moreover, he was also generous with writing advice. "You first search for ideas and then you line them up so as to put together a single theme," he commented. "Rather, you should first conceive the whole theme, order it properly and then build your ideas around it." He also pointed out linguistic errors, saying, "Always keep your sentences short. When possible, break up a long sentence into two or three

⁵The first was the Oratory's vice-director; the other two were respectively director and catechist [the priest in charge of religious activities] at Lanzo. Father Bonetti was known to his confreres as a tireless promoter of religious initiatives; that is why Don Bosco used him to pass his ideas on to others. [Author]

short ones. A long sentence concluding with the verb is all right for other writers, but we who write for the common people must always avoid that construction. Some writers keep repeating themselves in different ways. They are amateurs. Once you have said something, go on promptly to another thought.”

He loved to look into the future. However, as the Oratory kept steadily growing, he did not want to lose the traces of what the original Oratory had been. On one occasion, December 27, while speaking of the Oratory’s beginnings, he stated:

We are wise to preserve the Oratory’s original layout. We have a drawing and we should make copies or even photograph it. Those who follow will love to see the rustic shed from which the Oratory and the Congregation have evolved. Some of the first Oratory boys were artists, among them [Bartholomew] Bellisio⁶ who made an accurate sketch of it and had it printed. Whoever will write a thorough history of the Oratory and of the Congregation might also illustrate it with sketches showing its various phases. Readers will like such sketches which, in turn, will make the narrative more accurate and credible.

He also wished he had had photographs taken or a sketch drawn of the boys in church, to show their number and their grouping. He went on:

I’d especially like to have a painting showing the uniformed policemen sent by the city authorities to find out if Don Bosco was preaching revolution and lawlessness. You can see the picture: several hundred lads docilely hanging on my words, with six uniformed policemen, two by two, standing stiffly at attention in different spots of the church, arms folded, listening to my sermon. They were a great help in supervising the boys, although they were there to spy on me. The painting might even be more interesting if it showed the policemen wiping away a furtive tear with the back of their hand or muffling their faces in their handkerchiefs to hide their emotions. Or they could be shown kneeling among the boys who thronged my confessional, waiting their turn. My sermons, you see, were directed more to them than to the boys, because I spoke about the four last things: sin, death, judgment and hell. They had to report to their superiors

⁶See Vol. II, p. 416; Vol. IV, p. 332; Vol. VII, p. 52. In his well-known book *L’Oratorio di Don Bosco* [Don Bosco’s Oratory] Father [Fedele] Giraudi unwittingly gratified this wish of Don Bosco most excellently. [Author]

and to the mayor, who wanted to know if Don Bosco had preached revolt. "He certainly made me revolt against myself," each one would reply. "I too made my Easter duties after years of neglect. . . . He talked of death as though we were already laid out or about to die in minutes. . . . And then hell! I've never heard such a description! And to think that Don Bosco ended by saying his description was but a shadow of the real thing!"

And what about the scenes between Don Bosco and Marquis Cavour—Pegleg they used to call him—father of Gustave and Camillus? . . . And remember the meeting of government officials with the archbishop to decide whether the festive oratories should continue to operate?

As he talked, he relived the most typical scenes of those heroic days, and we almost lived them with him. Even though there is no painting or sketch portraying those episodes, his words provide enough material for a picture to be painted someday.

Under the dateline of May 1 Father Barberis recorded several cherished confidential views of Don Bosco as the two of them paced in the library adjoining Don Bosco's room. Don Bosco went there when he needed to ease his mind or stretch his limbs. How much transpires between the lines!

I truly realize—he remarked—that I cannot attend to everything myself and that the superior chapter must not be tied down to the routine matters of the house; in fact, each councillor should have a personal secretary. If I had five or six priests with nothing more to do than handle the minor tasks I could pass on to them, they too would be overloaded. Up to now I've heard confessions every day, but I know I can't keep that up. Certainly it is a matter of prime importance. I have always done my share and shall continue as long as possible, but now I just cannot. I shall have to say Mass in my own room so as to have some time to concentrate on our affairs. What with confessions and visitors, my morning hours are all taken up. In the past I used to receive people only in the morning, but now that they have found that I can be reached in the afternoon as well, they do so. Consequently, I must either neglect the Congregation's affairs or never leave the house at all, in which case my health will break down and our boys will go hungry because of lack of funds. Our benefactors are generous if Don Bosco calls on them; otherwise they give nothing.

Again, in early August he spoke of his exhausting work to Father Barberis. "I might keep this pace up a bit longer, but not forever,"

he said. "Just now I am making my last-ditch efforts!"

Father Barberis comments:

Notwithstanding his declining health, he is back at his desk at two in the afternoon, after a full morning of audiences, and stays on until supper time at eight-thirty. To concentrate his efforts on the Congregation's affairs he no longer leaves the house. From this he will not budge, in order to give our Congregation the direction it must have for wholesome growth. Recently he said, "I stay home and sit at my desk, handling a mountain of paperwork! Sometimes I am surprised at the enormous amount of work I can accomplish in one day. Generally I put everything aside, except matters pertaining to the Congregation. Yes, indeed, I am daily concerned that I may die and unwillingly leave a mess for my sons."

On June 30, during his usual after-lunch stroll in the dining room, he spoke of spiritual direction and confession. Abruptly he remembered that he had to ask Father Barberis to answer in his name a pastor who had written for advice on guiding a scrupulous, headstrong woman penitent. She was considering changing her spiritual director, but the priest, fearing she would only get worse, counseled against it. Don Bosco's answer was that, should the woman remain his penitent, the confessor was to demand her obedience. On the other hand, he said, a confessor, besides always allowing a penitent to go to others, should make it easy to do so and even advise a change of confessors. However, once penitents returned to a former confessor, they were to be welcomed and obedience demanded of them; yet they should still be free to go to a confessor of their own choice.

One evening after supper, during a conversation with Monsignor Ceccarelli and some of the Oratory's priests, the words "overly pious" came up in reference to certain women who are given to religious practices in an exaggerated and unwise manner. Don Bosco listened. Convinced of the good that these pious women did, he disliked hearing them spoken of slightly, and he quoted Father Cafasso as so saying.

Generally these pious women are the religious backbone of a village or parish. Shunning or ridiculing them only leads to a general dropping off from the sacraments. Often enough good use can be made of these pious souls to raise the level of piety in an entire community. They may be burdensome because of their ignorance and scruples, but mostly they are

harmless and live year after year without a single deliberate venial sin, let alone mortal. Let them feel they are being crossed, and they will not come near us. They will talk with their women friends and gossips, harboring discontent in their hearts and dampening everyone's devotion. I remember how, years ago, the pastor of Castelnuovo used to inveigh against these pious old ladies both privately and in the pulpit, claiming they wasted his time, that they did not have to drown him in words, and so on. Well, [after that] nobody ever went to him for confession; his alienated parishioners preferred going to his curate. When he complained of it to me one day, I just reminded him of what Father Cafasso had said and suggested that he not talk that way about these good women, but rather urge his parishioners to go to confession often and assure them they would always be welcome. I also stressed that he treat these women very gently, especially in the confessional, showing them much kindness and patience and suggesting they lead others to the sacrament. He followed my advice and soon the whole village was going to him for confession. Communions also increased.

Concerning boys' confessions he remarked:

Boys may come to confession and say nothing even when questioned. Such lads it is better to receive face to face, not behind a screen, for greater ease in talking. It may help, in this case, to hold the boy's head between your hands to keep him from fidgeting. Lads will speak freely this way, but, as you begin, be very, very patient, keep asking questions and get them to open up. Sometimes I have met boys who refused to utter a single word, and I'd get them to speak by using a little trick of my own. If I got no reply to my questions I'd ask, "Have you had your breakfast?"

"Yes."

"Were you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any brothers?" and similar questions. After that, they kept responding when I passed on to more serious ones.

2. FEAST DAYS

The Oratory's greatest feast always was and still is that of Mary, Help of Christians. For the occasion a schedule of the novena and of the day's solemn services, entitled *A Holy Invitation*, was beautifully printed on thin blue paper. It also contained the musical program: Rossini's great Mass in four voices, Vespers with its

hymn *Saepe dum Christi* celebrating the battle of Lepanto, and Father Cagliero's *Tantum ergo*. A notation in small type read: "This year's offerings of members of the archconfraternity and of the faithful will be used to renew the church floor and choir and to gild the statue of Mary, Help of Christians." The statue, standing atop the dome, was turning an unsightly black because its gilding had worn off.

Twice during the feast's preparations Don Bosco gave the boys a "Good Night," the first before the novena, the second before the triduum. On May 13, after night prayers, he spoke as follows:

Periodically I feel I must come and speak to you. Just now a flurry of good things is going on. The days ahead offer us many fine opportunities to acquire merit. We are in Mary's month, in the novena to the Holy Spirit, within the Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius and in the novena to Mary, Help of Christians—all wonderful events, all channeling God's grace to us.

It is particularly during the novena to the Holy Spirit that I usually urge you to consider your vocation, for it is the best time to learn what the Lord asks of us. Put your mind to it, then, all of you, especially those who now wear the cassock, having entered upon a clerical career. These need perseverance. Let them seriously consider their spiritual condition. During this novena let them reflect upon their conduct—what they must do or correct—and let them ask God's grace to carry out their well-pondered resolutions. The Lord will hear them.

Not only the clerics are to consider their vocation, but all students, especially the seniors, for theirs is a year of decision. Juniors too and even some lower classmen should begin to think about their future so as to assure themselves of success in life. An early decision, based on good counseling, will help them end the year with a sense of content and self-confidence. Ask for this grace wholeheartedly. The Lord will grant your request, and He will bless and strengthen your good resolves.

Throughout this month, within this novena to Mary, Help of Christians, I ask all to seek Our Lady's grace to be freed from this world's contagion. You do not know the world, but my experience has shown me many dangers which threaten your friends and relatives. Here, you live in a Noah's ark—a little bigger than the ark, of course—but a safe ark, secure from the thousand dangers which engulf it. Here we live aloof from scandal and evil companionship. We have every opportunity to be good. But on leaving this ark you will be sadly and gravely tested to fall from grace because you are, as yet, innocent of the world's ways! How little you

know of the dangers hovering about so many of your classmates who have unfortunately chosen to stay with the world.

Furthermore, we at the Oratory are blessed to know that Mary, Help of Christians stands at our side to protect us, daily showering us with Her favors, even earthly ones: a blind person regaining his sight; an epileptic completely healed, as happened just this morning; a person crippled for eight years now beginning to walk, which happened yesterday. I could go on and on telling you of so many other marvelous extraordinary healings generously and continuously wrought by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary for those who call upon Her.

While this Mother of ours, as I say, kindly and generously showers graces upon the body—which lives to serve the spirit, for this poor body will one day be buried and fall into dust—how many greater things will She do for the soul, destined to enjoy the Lord forever! How many graces has She in store, ready for the asking! Remember, my dear sons, that the Blessed Virgin has reserved those bodily and spiritual graces needed by us, our parents, relatives and friends. She is ready to grant them, waiting but to be asked. If She has them in readiness for us and awaits our requests, how devoutly are we to pray to Her, particularly during this novena!

Consider, too, there are times when a mother more readily gives her children gifts and more gladly grants them their desires. Think of a birthday, a name day, a First Communion or confirmation, or anniversaries recalling joyful events. Mothers always keep special treats in reserve for their loved ones, but they like to be asked. How sadly they sometimes see these occasions slip by with no requests from their children.

That's the way earthly mothers are. Is our good heavenly Mother different? No, trust me, She is far better, infinitely more loving and powerful than our earthly mothers. She can give us anything and She loves to do it! If we pray to Her from our heart, She will promptly aid us, because we are Her special children.

Let's use this month, this novena, this solemnity, to give ourselves to the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians. What magnificent favors She has in store for us, enough to meet all our desires—favors of soul and body, favors of health and studies, favors for our parents to help their business, their harvest. Let us pray to Her. May She keep you from life's perils! May She lead us all to the goal we mightily strive for! Let each of you make good resolves and keep them. Our Lord and Mary Most Holy will preserve you unscathed from every touch of sin. Good night.

On the evening of May 20, Don Bosco stood at the "Good Night" stand again. A boy came up to him, politely kissed his hand,

and, as was the custom, handed him a lost object wrapped in a scrap of paper. Don Bosco used it to amuse his listeners and to introduce the topic of his talk.

What have we here? A banknote? No, it's a five-cent gold piece. (*Laughter*) Since you're not allowed to keep money, no one will come to claim it, and so (*putting the coin in his pocket*) we'll use it to pay the Oratory's debts (*laughter*) and to keep you all happy on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

Today is the feast of Pentecost, within our novena to Mary, Help of Christians. During this month not one but many favors are daily obtained from Our Blessed Lady. People come here to our church to pray and give thanks for favors received, or the mail brings in letters and reports of miraculous cures attributed to the intercession of our good Mother Mary, expressing Her clients' thanks.

But the most astounding graces are those which are not talked about: countless souls who have been helped to set things right with their conscience due to Our Lady's intercession. Within our own family here at the Oratory, countless graces were granted and are still being granted to benefit many boys who called upon Mary, Help of Christians, to seek spiritual favors. Bad habits have been overcome, difficult virtues have been acquired.

As much as I can, then, I urge each of you to pray to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary during this novena, for this loving Mother of ours readily gives us the graces we need, especially spiritual graces. Having all power in heaven, She instantly receives what She asks of Her Divine Son. The Church teaches the power and kindness of Mary in the hymn: *Si caeli quaeris ianuas, Mariae nomen invoca*—If you seek the gates of heaven, call upon the name of Mary. If just calling upon Her name opens heaven's gates, we must admit that She has power. One of Her titles is "Gate of Heaven," and all who wish to enter it are to entrust themselves to Her.

We [quoting Holy Scripture]⁷ particularly seek Her assistance at the hour of death. The Church says that Mary, even standing alone, is as awesome as any army set in battle array, striking out against our spiritual enemies. Although these words of Scripture literally refer to the Church's enemies, the Church itself spiritually interprets them as the individual enemies of our souls. At Mary's name the demons take speedy flight. Hence she is called "Help of Christians" against our enemies both internal and external.

We especially must entrust ourselves to Her—we who keep this Her

⁷Cf. Cant. 6, 10. [Editor]

feast as our very own though the whole Church celebrates. So, I urge you as best I can—may my words be engraved upon your minds and hearts—to call upon the name of Mary, specifically saying, “Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us!” Brief as it is, it has been found to be a most effective prayer. I have suggested it to many, and all or nearly all have told me of the happy results they obtained. I have heard the same from people who regularly and of their own accord say the prayer without having been previously advised.

We all have our problems, we all need help. When in need of a spiritual favor, make a habit of repeating this invocation. Spiritual graces mean being freed from temptation, from grief of soul, from lack of fervor, from shame which keeps us from admitting our sins in confession. If you want to be freed of a persisting temptation, overcome a passion, dodge the many perils of life, or acquire a cherished virtue, all you have to do is to call upon the name of Mary, Help of Christians. Such spiritual favors are most generously granted. They are unknown, but they do our souls the most good.

I don’t intend to read off a long list of people who received Mary’s graces through this invocation, but I can’t count the persons whom I advised to say, “Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us!” They number hundreds and thousands, some in this house, and I asked them to tell me if their prayer was not answered. So far no one has complained that his favor was not granted. No—let me correct myself—one man came today to tell me his prayers had not been answered, but on being questioned he admitted he had not really prayed to Mary, but had only meant to. In this case it is not Mary who fails us, but we who fail Her by not praying. Mary does not refuse our prayer; it’s we who do not want our prayers to be heard. Prayer must be earnest, persevering, prompted by faith, with conviction that it will be heard. Try it, all of you, and tell all your relatives and friends to try it too.

On this forthcoming feast of Mary, Help of Christians, whether you see them or you write to them or somehow get in touch with them, tell them for me: “Don Bosco assures you that if you need a spiritual favor and pray to Our Lady with the words, ‘Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us,’ you will obtain it. Of course, let it be a prayer! If your prayer is not answered, let me know.”

If I hear that one of you prayed sincerely with no results, I will immediately write to St. Bernard and tell him he was wrong when he said: “Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who implored Your help was left unaided.” But, don’t worry, I won’t have to write to St. Bernard. Even if I did, that saintly Doctor of the Church would quickly spot some fault on your part. You laugh at the idea

of sending St. Bernard a letter? Don't we know his address? Isn't he in heaven?

"There will be some problem with the mail," interjected Father Rua, "and they would not know where to deliver the letter."

True—Don Bosco went on—they will need a speedy courier, and who knows how long it will take him to get to St. Bernard. Nor will telegraph do, for although electricity travels at lightning speed it still needs wires. But we have faster ways of reaching the saints, and you need not worry about the mail. Even now, as I speak, my thoughts soar over the heavens and stars, and they are swifter than lightning, covering incredible distances until they bring me to the throne of St. Bernard, one of heaven's prominent saints. Do as I say, and if your prayers go unanswered, we'll easily get a letter to St. Bernard.

Joking aside, let me repeat that during this novena you should engrave these words upon your hearts, "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us." Say it in time of need, danger or temptation, and always ask Mary, Help of Christians for the grace of calling upon Her. I promise you, Satan will be defeated. Do you know what I mean? I mean he will have no more power over you, he won't be able to get you to commit a single sin, and he'll just have to give up. And I shall pray to the Lord for you at Mass and in my devotions that He may help, bless, and protect you and shower His grace upon you through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. Good night.

One day, during the triduum, the very many silver hearts which covered the still bare walls or were set around Our Lady's picture disappeared, but the mystery was soon solved. As the boys filed into the church on the eve of the feast, they saw the massive painting of Our Lady tastefully draped in crimson velvet, on which the hearts were neatly hung—a silent tribute of gratitude of so many devotees of the Blessed Virgin for graces received through Her intercession. The array of newly polished hearts prompted another talk of Don Bosco which is remembered, but of which there is no written account. "This is what we have to do for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians," he said in substance. "We must purify our hearts by a good confession and offer them to the Virgin Mary, pin them on Her, in fact, so that we can always be close to Jesus, a favor we will obtain by frequent fervent Communions."⁸

The miraculous recovery which Count Cays had witnessed on

⁸Rev. G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 76. [Author]

the eve of Mary's feast and which determined his vocation was but a foretaste of the graces which the Blessed Virgin meant to grant on Her feast day. That woman had brought her daughter first to the sacristy, where Father Vespignani sat at a table recording graces and giving out medals. The woman asked if she could see Don Bosco to beg his blessing on her daughter. Sympathetically he told her to sit the child down in the chair Don Bosco used while hearing confessions. Then, when the audiences began, he had someone escort her to Don Bosco. We know what happened.⁹

The solemn feast, heralded by nine eloquent sermons of Father Dominic Pampirio, a Dominican, who later became archbishop of Vercelli, witnessed a show of devotion such as is seen only at the most renowned shrines. Sixty-seven Masses were celebrated in the church, and some five thousand people received Communion. With Archbishop Gastaldi's consent, Bishop Dominic Agostini of Chioggia pontificated. The following day, while still in Turin, he received official communication of his promotion to the patriarchal see of Venice.

Devotion to Mary, Help of Christians was on the increase, as could be seen from the distant pilgrimages and Don Bosco's petition to the Pope that the archconfraternity in Turin be allowed to absorb other confraternities of the same name and nature, over and above the faculties granted in 1870. The petition read:

On April 5, 1870, the Rev. John Bosco obtained Your Holiness' approval that the pious association known as *The Devotees of Mary, Help of Christians*, formed in this church specifically consecrated to Mary, Help of Christians, be constituted an archconfraternity, with permission to join to itself other associations in the diocese of Turin. Since similar requests have come from several places, it would seem to redound to God's glory and the welfare of souls that the association extend further. I humbly implore Your Holiness to allow your permission to include other dioceses as well.

A brief of Pius IX had graciously extended the faculty to the Piedmont region in perpetuity on March 2, 1877.

An eminent Salesian cooperator who came on pilgrimage to Valdocco for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians was Father Paul

⁹See pp. 160f. [Editor]

Taroni, spiritual director of the Faenza Seminary, a saintly priest renowned for zeal and tender devotion to Don Bosco's Madonna. He chose to make that long-desired pilgrimage because his former student, Father Vespignani, was then at the Oratory. On May 16, at dusk, just as Don Bosco, who was anxious to meet him, was re-entering the Oratory, a coach pulled up at the gate and a priest alighted. It was Father Taroni, who greeted him politely and asked, "Are you going into the Oratory?"

"Yes, are you too?" answered Don Bosco. "Do you know anyone there?"

"I know a Father Vespignani. Do you know him?"

"Yes. We shall see him in a moment."

They entered the Oratory together just as the community was coming from Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Vespignani, spotting Don Bosco, hurried to him, kissed his hand, and greeted him, "Good evening, Don Bosco!" Then he turned immediately to Father Taroni, who, with a puzzled look, echoed, "Don Bosco? Did you say Don Bosco? Where is he?" Father Vespignani pointed to the priest beside him. Father Taroni fell to his knees, raised his hands and, clasping them together, exclaimed, "Oh, Don Bosco! I did not recognize you!"

Don Bosco raised him from his knees, embraced him and, on learning his name, exclaimed, "I understand! Of course! This is Don Bosco's great foe! Father Vespignani will take you to your room and help you settle in, because you need a little rest. Tonight you will sit in my place at supper and impersonate Don Bosco. Tomorrow we shall make our peace." He then aimably dismissed him. As Father Taroni went to his room, he said to Father Vespignani, "Now I see why Don Bosco has accomplished so much! Did you notice how calmly and unhurriedly he moves and talks? It's plain he's a saint!"

Father Taroni stayed at the Oratory ten days, observing and taking many notes. On May 18 he went to Don Bosco's room for his first confession to him and later joyfully told Father Vespignani: "I put myself completely at his disposal to do as he wished, but he said categorically that I was to return to the seminary and foster priestly vocations, because this is my ministry, and I was to do so as a Salesian cooperator, distributing good literature, especially *Letture Cattoliche*." Spreading this publication then became a

driving force with him. He obtained well over four hundred subscribers, his slogan being: "Always keep the number on the rise!" Later he used to say, "Since Don Bosco did not want me, I'll take my revenge by sending him my spiritual sons." And he sent many vocations.

His diary comment for May 23 reads: "I was with him in his room until midnight, telling him of the graces that I intended to request of Mary the next day, among them fortitude and bravery. His response was: 'Add, "Make my soul to glow and melt with the love of Christ my Lord."' On leaving his room, I asked for his blessing, which he gave." On May 25 he wrote: "Friday morning, May 25, about eleven o'clock, I again made my confession to Don Bosco in the sacristy, where he was still administering the sacrament. I asked him to bless my seminarians and, as a saint would do, he replied, 'Yes, let us pray that they all become saints and that, God willing, some become Salesians.'"

To his journal Father Taroni also confided these words of Don Bosco: "This morning Don Bosco told me he wouldn't mind tipping his hat to the devil if the devil would let him by to save a soul." A similar concept—bold at first hearing—was expressed by Pope Pius XI to secondary school students at Mondragone¹⁰ on May 24, 1929: "We would dare to bargain with the devil himself when it comes to saving a soul or sparing greater harm to souls."

On returning to Faenza, his heart filled with ineffable joy, Father Taroni gave vent to his ardent love into verse. Throughout his life he had a gift of simple and heartwarming poetry. He sorted out the feelings and recollections of his pilgrimage, entering them into a notebook and prefacing them with the words of *Oedipus*: "The friendship of a great man is a favor from the gods."

The feast of Mary, Help of Christians was followed by Don Bosco's name day, which we have already described [in Chapter 5], and that was succeeded by the feast of St. Aloysius, which used to be deferred to the first Sunday in July. Bishop Formica of Cuneo presided over the feast, and that evening, as customary, there was the solemn presentation of awards to the artisans. Don Bosco closed the ceremony with the words: "Bishop Formica of Cuneo is delighted with the excellent show you have

¹⁰*La Civiltà Cattolica*, June 1, 1929. pp. 466f. [Author]

presented and asks me to thank you. Now, speaking of awards, I'd say that Don Bosco deserves a prize too. Our chairman¹¹ got his, and so did all the other gentlemen, and so I should have one too. You may say I've already been rewarded by the gratitude my boys have shown me. Yes, that is a fine thing. But give me another award as well, a medal for my good behavior. . . . This reward, however, cannot be expected from men. They judge wrongly because they go by appearances only. What joy one feels in working hard and well, not for the cheap purpose of gain, but out of a sense of duty! What a blessing it is to reach out in works of charity! This is a man's real reward for labors in this sad world of ours. We must not set our sights on earth, for our aim is far and beyond nobler than that. We await our reward in the land of the blessed, amid imperishable heavenly joys. Count [Charles] Conestabile cited this awards celebration in his memoirs.¹² He wrote 'Some months ago I attended an awards ceremony at the Oratory. It was a red letter day for Don Bosco and his sons. A Piedmontese gentleman, friendly to the Oratory, generously funded the celebration, and God rewarded him with the sight of happy youngsters who enthusiastically called divine blessings upon their benefactor. But when Don Bosco rose to speak, a deep hush fell over all, for it was not an orator but a father, a friend, who was speaking, and his words went straight to every heart. Cheers of love and filial pride greeted him when he finished speaking. Turning to me, he said with a chuckle: "I just love to hear these boys cheer. Haven't they got powerful lungs?" I had to agree and chuckle with him.'

As for the solemn celebration of the Immaculate Conception of 1877, we have only one talk given by Don Bosco to his boys. It is an exhortation to devotion, and he gave it on the evening of November 29.

Here I am to greet you and talk to you a while. I'm happy to say that tomorrow evening we open the novena to Mary Immaculate, whom you have always most especially loved. When Dominic Savio lived here at the Oratory, he made this novena with extraordinary fervor. We still have the

¹¹The chairman of the festivities that year was the civil engineer Joseph Casalegno (*see* Vol. VII, pp. 133f). Professor [Vincent] Lanfranchi delivered the opening address. [Author]

¹²*Opere Religiose e Sociali in Italia* [Religious and Social Undertakings in Italy] by Count Charles Conestabile, Padova Press, 1878, p. 30. [Author]

Immaculate Conception Sodality, which he founded and to which only the best boys could belong. He and his friends drew up regulations which still hold and which you can read in his biography. The sodality members still observe them, and there are many who distinguish themselves in every virtue.

What advice can I give you to make this novena well? Two words: *exactness and cleanliness*. They go well together and are related. *Exactness* in observing all school rules without showing off; promptness in going to class, to play, to lunch, to supper, to bed; promptness in rising, going to church and so on; exactness in fulfilling all one's duties throughout the year but most especially during this novena.

Then *cleanliness*. I don't mean keeping your clothing or shoes neat, but your soul. Yes, keep yourselves neat and clean, but, better yet, keep your conscience clear of sin. If anyone hasn't yet made a general confession, he may very well do so in these days. If you find you lacked sorrow or good resolve in past confessions or that you failed to examine yourselves well or that your confession lacked humility, sincerity, completeness—well, take advantage of this novena to put things right. If someone feels a twitch of conscience and on reviewing past confessions sees that they were repetitions of the same faults, the same fibs, the same wasting of time, the same disobedience, so that they became a cycle of confession and sin, sin and confession—well, let him say this to his confessor. Following the confessor's judgment, let him review his past life in a general confession or perhaps confess only those things which he feels he must.

A lad may feel uneasy at heart and say, "I am afraid I made a bad confession and am doing poorly. I forgot a sin, but I forgot on purpose." This boy may well have made several confessions after that without ever being brave enough to straighten things out. In that case he should go to his spiritual director, tell him of his fears and trust him completely. With friendly kindness the spiritual director will check out his state of conscience from one confession to another until he finds the last properly made. Then order will be restored in that soul, and that youngster will feel peaceful and secure.

Someone may admit, "I'm so ill at ease, I have doubts, I am scared." Well, let him open up to his spiritual father and, if he likes, make a general confession as his confessor directs him. Now is the time to do this.

Some, to tone down their sin, foolishly confess, "I did this or that three or four times," though they know quite well that it was four. Or they say, "I only did it two or three times," when they know that it was five. This confession is faulty. Supposing you owed four lire and you told your creditor you owed only two or three, or three or four. Wouldn't he quickly reply, "Be honest! You owe me four and you must pay me four!"

Let us, therefore, straighten out our conscience. I recall how Dominic Savio began the novena to the Immaculate Conception with proper resolve. He came to me and asked if he could make a general confession, something, as far as I know, he had never done before. Throughout the entire novena he kept his conscience free of sin so that he could receive Holy Communion every day. Imitate him.

Just think: were you to die this night what kind of a confession would you make? Well, make your confession as though you had to die at the end of this novena, as though it were your very last confession. Go as often as you can to Holy Communion; keep your conscience always pure so as to make good Communions.

The Church strongly wishes all Christians—I don't mean just grown-ups but children too—to keep themselves always free of sin in order to be able to receive Holy Communion every day. How careful Dominic Savio was in this, how prompt in carrying out his duties. By a good confession and by good behavior he was able to approach the eucharistic table every day. During the day he would visit the church and urge his companions to go with him to the feet of Jesus. This was the true model of a youngster who on making his First Communion at the age of seven and a half wrote as a reminder: Death, but not sin.

Two things, therefore, I urge: exactness and cleanliness, cleanliness of soul and body. Follow my counsel during the novena and the Blessed Virgin Mary will give each of you a cherished gift, a choice spiritual blessing to benefit your soul. Good night.

3. SPIRITUAL RETREATS

On the evening of April 12, while giving the dates of the forthcoming spiritual retreat for the boys, Don Bosco developed some topics which have come down to us in summary form.

During the year, many boys wish to discuss matters of conscience or of their future with me but they have no opportunity, and so they put it off to the feast of All Saints, then Christmas, then Easter, always intending to put at rest their qualms of conscience, some of long standing, but never actually doing it. Others have reached the age and that point of studies when they must decide upon a calling in life, and, having done nothing about it, feel some anxiety. Well, matters like these are generally taken care of in a spiritual retreat. The time is drawing near when you will have every possible chance to benefit your souls.

On retreat the Lord usually showers us with special favors. So let no one postpone such a highly important matter. Follow your heart's longing, draw upon this grace, and you will live a full life of peace and joy.

The students' retreat opened on Sunday, April 15; Father [John Baptist] Francesia gave the instructions,¹³ Father [Francis] Dalmazzo the meditations.¹⁴ Don Bosco addressed the retreatants that evening at the "Good Night."

There are a lot of things I'd like to say, but I'll limit myself to just a few. You began your retreat this evening. I am glad. In the next few days each of you will have time to give serious thought to personal problems and concentrate on them alone.

I fully realize that many may not need a spiritual retreat because they are already very good boys. In fact I dare say most of you, the students especially, have lived up to your superiors' hopes as true Christians. *True*, I say, for there are some who are Christians only because they have received holy baptism but do not respond in deed to the dignity of God's children. Others are Christians because they follow Jesus' teachings and live up to them. For these a spiritual retreat is not a prime necessity, though it can of course do them much good by making them more determined to persevere in their choice, resisting the souls' enemy, who will in these days intensify his assault.

Along with these good boys are a few who were on the verge of being dismissed before the retreat. Their names were given to me a few days ago. I have the list up in my room. I studied the reasons for dismissal and found them reasonable. These boys are both lower and upper classmen. But, enough! I kept putting off action on this distasteful matter day after day, and now the retreat is upon us. I realized that, should these students miss the Oratory retreat, they might never have an opportunity for another retreat to give serious thought to their souls. So, I took the list and laid it at the feet of the crucified Lord and of Our Lady, commending these boys to Him. His will be done! If Our Lord touches their hearts, fine; it will be a blessing for them. They are here listening to me right now. I shall neither name them nor shall I send for them, but each of you can know if he is on my list.

The charges are as follows: ill conduct, foul talk, reading and passing of

¹³Talks centering on the Commandments, the practice of virtue, a good confession, the choice of one's calling in life, and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin. [Editor]

¹⁴Sermons dwelling on God's love for us, our destiny, death, judgment, heaven and hell and similar topics. [Editor]

bad books. This very evening I burned a number of such books, for, had they fallen into other boys' hands, they would have been very harmful. I will not permit that the good seed we have sown be ruined by a few nasty weeds.

The culprits who now hear me will know I mean them. This retreat is especially for them. Let them profit by it and amend their ways in such a way, at least, as not to force us to send them home. When Don Bosco—and by Don Bosco I mean all superiors—enrolls a lad, he is eager to do his best for him and let him stay on until he finishes his studies. We dismiss Oratory pupils only when we have to. Those who deserve to be dismissed are not many, some fifteen or sixteen at most, and out of an enrollment of seven or eight hundred, this is not much. Let's wait and see if they mend their ways, show signs of regret and improve their behavior; otherwise we shall have to dismiss them.

Also, there are a few—very, very few—who are chronic gripers, stirring discontent in the student body by moaning, "We can't read the books we want without having someone dash up and snatch them away. Everyplace we go, the superiors have their eye on us!" And on and on. How thoughtless they are! Your superiors would be cruel if they were not to act this way: it is their duty, and your good requires it. If they were to choose their personal interests, they would have plenty of other things to do. If supervising you were not their explicit duty, they wouldn't have to worry. They act as they do in order to prevent evil, and this for your own good. The superiors, furthermore, will have to account to God if they neglect their pupils and consequently allow their boys to fall into sin. I say this only for those who need to hear it.

There are some lads, too, who should concentrate on their vocation during this retreat, especially the upperclassmen and the Sons of Mary. They must decide whether they care to embrace a worldly or a priestly life. Let them seek their confessor's counsel because this is the time to do so. I will say no more on this topic because I'm sure it will be treated during the retreat. I shall try to be available to anyone who needs me.

In conclusion, let the good boys make their retreat well. Let those who are troubled in conscience make it better, and let the rest follow their example. Let us ask the Lord's help, so that we may all profit from this retreat, that we may begin to lead a holy life, and that finally we may all sing a solemn *Te Deum* together in heaven! Good night.

Father Barberis' chronicle comments: "With God's blessing and aided by cool, overcast skies, the preachers did a great deal of good in the house. . . . The boys behaved as well as anyone could have wished. At least twenty have decided to join the Salesian

Congregation and others to enter the diocesan seminary.” Some days later, speaking to all the boys, Don Bosco again touched on the topic of vocation, stressing those points which he considered to be of prime importance.

We have achieved something of value and are spiritually in good shape by making our retreat. Not all of us, true, since only the students have done so, but the artisans will soon make theirs. You always give me such pleasure! Yes, it is really Don Bosco’s huge delight to minister to your souls. This is the sole reason of our work, the very purpose of this house: that youngsters take good care of their souls. The students have made their spiritual retreat, and I am pleased. Some, however, much as they wished, could not make a general confession and correct the mistakes of the past. The upperclassmen in particular had no chance to talk over their vocation.

Tomorrow and the days following we will have time to do all this properly, and I’ll make sure I am available. Those of you who would like to discuss their vocation at ease with me may come to my room on Sunday after evening Benediction. This is the best time, and I’ll be sure to be free to give them my full attention.

I was asked for a general rule by which to recognize a vocation. The first rule I offer you already know: if you have no leaning toward the priesthood, don’t become a priest. Likewise, if you have no inclination for life in the world, don’t stay in the world. If, despite all your inclinations, you fear that a particular way of life poses a danger for your soul, seek counsel. The same applies to anyone who feels no inclination either way. If you are not only not inclined but even find the priesthood distasteful, such an aversion may be a temptation of the devil, and so you should make no decision without examining yourself and seeking counsel. Some other signs of vocation are mentioned in the *Ecclesiastical Statutes*; also, good morals and a desire for holiness are effective means to draw God’s blessings on us.

Let me show you another way to help determine your call in life. Look at a crucifix and say, “God, I want to choose that state of life which will give me the deepest satisfaction at my moment of death. Enlighten me; make known to me Your holy will.” Then say the Our Father and silently wait to hear what your heart tells you. Many who have followed this counsel have often decided upon a very different career from what they had first planned. The Lord grants this grace to one who is sincere and determined to follow a divine call.

Another question I am often asked: What is the difference between a Salesian priest and a diocesan priest? My answer is: no difference at all as

far as priesthood and Holy Mass are concerned because neither person nor Mass changes.

However, there are many who choose to become Salesians after I tell them I would not advise them to join the diocesan clergy because of the serious dangers they would be exposed to. In the past, during their summer vacations, they experienced how fatal life in the world can be for them. When they seek my advice, I ask them: "How are you doing in boarding school? Are you at ease there?"

"Everything is great in school," they answer. "I am in no danger there! My conscience is always at ease. It is the vacations that hurt."

Well, now, if vacation can be a threat, how can one expect to stand on his own two feet when living always in the world or when on seminary vacation? He would easily fall into the devil's snares, whereas in the Congregation he can be a good priest and save his soul.

Most people think that greater holiness is required for religious life. It is not true. If one is a saint, all the better, but holiness is not as vital to the religious as to those living in the world [as diocesan priests]. The Lord will help him in proportion to his good will. Hence, while a man may not be a good diocesan priest, he may still be a good Salesian, Dominican, Augustinian, or Franciscan. A religious always has someone to raise him when he falls. Frequent confession and Communion, meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, superiors' admonitions, frequent community conferences—all these things will prop him up and immediately lift him up if he has fallen. Surely, diocesan priests do not enjoy such benefits.

Not just our students, but the artisans too must think about their vocation. If any one of them were to say he'd like to become a Salesian, you may be sure I'd take that lad to my heart and do all I can to hold on to this precious pearl for the sake of the Oratory.

Now then, let's all pray that God may help each of you draw maximum profit from the retreat you have made or are about to make, that He assist those who have already decided on a priestly career, and that He enlighten those who are now in the process of discerning whether they should enter upon any other way of life. May we all live out our earthly pilgrimage virtuously and, after a holy death, find ourselves together singing His praises in heaven. Good night!

The artisans' spiritual retreat began on May 27, but our records tell us nothing of Don Bosco's involvement. They do give us two of Don Bosco's "Good Nights" and one homily during the second retreat at Lanzo for postulants, novices and professed members.

SEPTEMBER 22: *A candidate for Salesian life must love work.*

Time flies. We have hardly begun our retreat and we find it is half gone. Tomorrow evening is the mid-point. Every day we have been given more material. This morning we began with confessions. There was not enough time for everyone, but there will be in the next few days. Tomorrow those who want to join our Congregation and the novices who want to take vows may hand in their applications. We'll discuss that tomorrow. Those who want to join the Congregation should see Father Barberis, who handles these matters. He knows how to use a fine tooth comb when needed. In the meantime I want you to understand this well: if you join the Congregation you will want for nothing, but you must work. Sometimes a superior tries to give someone an assignment and all he gets is, "I'm already too busy with my teaching load." If the superior suggests something else, he gets a lot of excuses, so that he finally gives up and leaves the confrere alone to do what he wants. This is not the spirit of our Congregation, and no one should enter if he intends to sit around twiddling his thumbs.

SEPTEMBER 23: *Have no ulterior motives when taking your vows.*

We are now at the very heart of our retreat. So far we have been sowing the seed; now we must begin to harvest it. Today a fine group applied to enter the Congregation, and there will be time tomorrow for others who would like to join. Now it's just time for those who have completed their novitiate to knock the devil's horns off and smash them to bits, severing all ties with him, with the world and the flesh, by pronouncing their triennial or perpetual vows. I see little difference between these vows, since I look for one's intent to persevere in the Congregation. If anyone were to try to deceive me, knowing he could not make it elsewhere, he would indeed be blameworthy. Someone might say, "I'll stay with Don Bosco one year so I can have my meals and continue my studies at his expense and the Congregation's," or "I'll stay three years at the Oratory, so I won't have to worry about food or clothing, and later I'll look around for a better place." These individuals would do better to go to their superior in all honesty and tell him frankly, "I have no desire to stay in the Congregation. I just want to study and I have no funds. Please give me this opportunity." Then the superior will try to help him out some way. Such a boy may go wherever he wishes to seek his fortune, but he should not take vows. Last year I said these very words, and there were some who were of that mind: they never changed, but left just a few months ago. We hope it won't happen again this year.

Those who are well-intentioned must not be afraid of taking final vows in the fear that they cannot leave the Congregation when an urgent necessity arises, because, in such a serious event, the superior may release them from their vows. . . .

SEPTEMBER 26: *Homily at religious profession. Joy of the religious in life and at death.*

If worldly people were to attend the ceremony we have just witnessed, they might think: these young men are in the flower of youth—all the pleasures and honors of the world can be theirs—but they have withdrawn into the cloister like lunatics, stupidly passing up the delights which might be theirs. And they would pity us. But we are wiser than they, and say: If we don't give up material goods now, we shall have to later on, the difference being that now we are trading them in for goods a hundredfold more valuable even in this world and for the happiness of heaven. In so many ways the Lord pays us a hundredfold: first with peace of heart. . . . Then too even as religious who have forsaken the world we achieve fame. How renowned are such people as St. Vincent de Paul, St. Sebastian Valfre, St. Charles Borromeo and others. And we want for no material things on earth because, despite our poverty, we have all we need. We left brothers and have acquired others who are much better, who help us and will console us on our deathbed. If any one of us falls ill, he has special prayers offered for him day and night, and we all slip into church to pray for him. If he lies near death, practically the entire community kneels before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for his soul. But in the world a sick man finds himself hemmed in by a swarm of relatives and friends who are only waiting to claim his paltry belongings. A notary comes with a witness, while the priest must politely settle into a corner. Should he try to get near the sick man, some cousin or other of his will whisper, "Father, please tell him to leave me a share of his estate. Tell him not to leave it all to so-and-so." What will happen to the dying man's poor soul in the maelstrom of material values?

In our Congregation one need not worry about temporal matters. If he is sick there are others who will work and care for him. When he is well he will work and do what others have done for him. On his deathbed he has no anxiety about the world's sorry possessions, for he has long given them up. He dies surrounded by his dear confreres who pray for him, and after death he is remembered for years and centuries, for his memory lives as long as the Congregation lasts.

When a person of the world dies, others instantly grab at all that he ever owned. Some gripe because he left too little, while others criticize the will. Another tenant takes possession of the house he used to own. "That poor man lived here," he says. "May he rest in peace! Good health to us. Where's that fine watch he had? Where did he leave his handsome new suit? I hope it didn't get lost!" They pounce upon all his belongings with never a thought for him. Indeed, as he lies dying, they fear he may recover. They are glad to see him go to heaven, asking only that he die soon and leave this world so that they may help themselves to his things.

We are poor, but poverty brings us little pain in our lifetime. We left one home but have gained many others. Our home is in Turin, but when we come to Lanzo we are still at home, and when we go to Borgo San Martino that is our school. At Varazze we need not beg hospitality, for that boarding school too is ours. We have residences at Alassio and Nice. Even in distant America hospitable homes await us, and we can go there as owners. Not even a wealthy lord or prince owns that many houses. When we must endure discomfort of some kind, we must learn to endure patiently and not act like those who want to be poor but refuse to accept the attendants of poverty, or like so many who want to be known as poor on condition that they lack nothing and have all they wish. To this day, thank God, we have never wanted for necessities. Still, should it happen, we must readily endure the consequences of poverty.

Let me ask you: Has the Congregation ever left you in want? Rather, the Lord often gives us more than we need, and we must be alert not to become attached to material things. "We have already abandoned the world," you will say, "and want no part of earthly possessions." Fine. Neither do I want you to set your hearts on them. I have said that only to show you how well the Lord treats His servants in this life. As for the spiritual advantages the Congregation affords us, who can list them all? They have been partly enumerated in the retreat talks, and were I to start commenting on them now, we would be here forever! Let me cite just one. To the men of the world the Bible says: "Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up." [Eccles. 4, 10] We, instead, can say: "How good, how delightful it is to live together like brothers." [Ps. 133, 1]

A word of advice: much as I have other things to say, take my one usual counsel: "*Shun idleness, practice temperance, observe the rule.*" When you see an unhappy person in the Congregation, be assured that he is unhappy because he does not keep the rule. . . .

4. SUMMER VACATION

Although the barrage which beset Don Bosco during the summer, treated in the preceding chapter, forced on him the unpleasant task of preparing a defense in Rome with endless correspondence and a well-reasoned and documented presentation of facts, still it did not keep him from serenely counseling his boys in the ways of virtue. On the evening of August 21 as vacation was approaching, he stepped up to the pulpit, paused till the artisans had time to line up next to the students, and, after a word for silence and full attention, inspiringly spoke to them of the presence of God

as a very effective means of enjoying their vacation without falling into sin.

Now let me have your silence. I have something important to say. I want you to know that despite the intense heat, more stifling than January's, we are still healthy, thank God, and have excellent appetites. In past years some boys felt they were losing their appetite around the end of June, but this year I haven't heard our baker complain that we're eating less bread. We should be pretty happy about this and heartily grateful to God.

Now, on to another topic. Vacation is at hand for both students and artisans. The students can rest their brains, the artisans their muscles. I should give each group suitable advice for enjoying the vacation, but let one general counsel do for all. As I always tell you, by all means enjoy your freedom on vacation, raise Cain if you wish, but do it someplace where the Lord can't see you—an isolated room at home, a deep cellar a church steeple, or in the dark of the forest, any place where the Lord cannot go. Of course, I doubt that you would be so silly! You realize immediately that it is impossible to hide from the eyes of God, who in a flash sees everything in heaven and on earth. We must never lose this awareness, wherever we go, whatever we do. How could one dare offend God who can wither the hand raised in sin, who can paralyze the tongue on the verge of uttering a foul word? Well, then, when at home your friends and companions try to keep you from attending Mass or get you into dangerous situations and lead you into sin, answer as Joseph of Egypt did when someone tried to do that. "How can I offend my God in His presence?" he asked. We Christians must say more: How can we offend Our Lord in His presence—the all-powerful Lord who created us, the merciful Lord who redeemed us, the God, infinitely good, who showers His blessings upon us every moment, the just God who could snuff out this wretched life of ours in one instant by a single act of His will?

Isn't it possible that while now we go to our rest, we may not be able to rise tomorrow morning? Couldn't some of us be found dead? What if tomorrow morning you were to hear, "Someone died last night"?

"Who?"

"Don Bosco!"

"Oh, poor man! Yesterday evening he was so cheerful, talking to us, and now he is in eternity!"

It could happen to me, it could happen to you. Many people die while eating, studying, walking, or playing. Two or three days ago, for instance, a priest of Lanzo, Father Oggero, was happily pacing in his garden with his pastor after church services. The latter was congratulating him for having given his listeners a good sermon, when suddenly the pastor missed

him at his side, turned back, and saw him lying on the ground. He called out his name and took his hand. "What's wrong, Oggero?" he pleaded, but Oggero was dead. We need not fear for this priest, a former pupil of ours at the Oratory and a holy man. But that's how death comes! Another priest who was our guest for a while last year at the Oratory and at Lanzo died in Father Cagliero's arms in the Church of San Nicolas, where he was pastor. I mention these two, but I could tell you of countless other sudden deaths that occurred in so many different ways. So we must strive to live free of sin at all times, conscious of God's presence, for His destroying punishment may strike us in an instant.

When I speak of avoiding offense to God, I also mean that if you are aware of a sin on your conscience, you must try to return to the state of grace immediately. You know what to do. The Lord keeps an eye on all we do, but not only to punish us. True, He is just and so He punishes evil and rewards good, but he is also merciful, not inflexible. No, He is all goodness, all love, and therefore more anxious to forgive than to punish. The more the sinner should fear God, the greater should be the joy and contentment of one in God's grace. Ask yourself now: "Can I say that my soul is free of anything that may displease my Lord?" If you can say yes, don't be afraid. Be tranquil, run, jump, eat, laugh, sleep peacefully at night, for all will go well with you and you need not fear God's judgment. But if you cannot say yes, try to repossess God's grace immediately, so as not to fear death at any time. Good evening.

Final examinations began on August 1. The Oratory boys did very well, with two achieving special honors. From the "Good Night" of August 24, we infer that some of those who had already taken their exams were still there. For the rest of the boys, exams were to begin Monday, August 27, and run through the week. Don Bosco wished that the aspirants would forego their vacations at home. Besides his address on August 24 he spoke again on August 31, condensing many beautiful thoughts into these two talks.

AUGUST 24: Seeking counsel on vocations. Keeping busy on vacation.

I speak to you with pleasure at this "Good Night." Some upperclassmen and several Sons of Mary have asked to talk to me about their vocation and similar matters and have written me notes which I shall have to answer. Although I did set some time aside to talk with them, I just never got around to it. If you want to talk to me, come to my room after Benediction on Sunday so we can reach some decisions. As for the

upperclassmen, I trust that they have enough know-how and are brave and smart enough to be able to skip a grade and go straight into philosophy. We can do it here because our two-year philosophy course also includes Latin and Italian literature.

Exams are drawing near, and this is good news because they are followed by vacation; you couldn't go without passing your exams. Still, I so love my sons that I would regret to see them spend their vacation far from me. I love you all very much, and there is enough to do here for all of you. This does not mean that you may not go home to see your people. Yes, go if there is reason, because grave family matters demand your presence at home. For such a reason permission is readily granted. But if one were to go just for the pleasure of going, he might do better to stay with me. I am overjoyed to have you stay at the Oratory. Don't worry, we'll go somewhere for our entire vacation together and it will be long and full of fun. What I said concerns only those who have finished their exams and, still undecided about the future, are thinking of going home. Let them stay here and be at peace; the same goes for our clerics and coadjutors. The underclassmen, instead, who have not yet taken their examinations and are scheduled to go home on September 3 may freely do so, but let them shun idleness. The same holds for those who have finished the year and have taken their examinations.

Now, let me give all of you some advice on spending your vacation well. Everybody has some subject that he was weak in during the school year, and so now is the time to go into it in depth. There are lessons you never really memorized, things you did not fully understand, subjects you hardly passed and which, without a review, you will certainly fail. Now is the time to straighten all these things out. Review your Latin and Italian, and your Latin authors so as to read them with ease and understand them. Remember, to learn you must read. Read useful books—something you cannot often do during the school year. Do it now while you have time on your hands. Read to learn, not just for pleasure, now that you have no pressure of assignments piled upon you. Thus you won't waste your time. Bear in mind the Holy Spirit's warning not to lose even a second of time.

I don't mean you have to study all the time and never play. No, enjoy your games as long as they are harmless and give you useful amusement to restore your bodily health and strengthen your spirit. Just make sure they are not a silly waste of time. So I repeat that, within reason, it is your duty to review subjects you will find useful later on. I wish I were your age! I'd gladly spend my time better! If I just had tiny fractions of the time which I spent, I won't say uselessly, but which I could have spent better! I'd read loads of good books and put my hand to many tasks. I had time once, but not any longer, and I won't ever have it. So I tell you: use your time well now while you have it!

If there is anybody with nothing to do, let him come to me, and I shall find him work. Or he can go to Father Rua, Father Guidazio, Father Lazzero, and Monsignor Ceccarelli. They'll give him all the work he wants.

Just now, talking about examinations, remember that Mary is the Seat of Wisdom. Commend yourselves to Her morning and night and say, "Mary, seat of wisdom, pray for us." Good night, and have successful examinations!

AUGUST 31: *Etymology of "vacation." Helping with work at home. Temperance. No resting in bed after the noon meal.*

Good news! Vacation begins on Monday. I see you're glad, and so am I! Let me say that many have asked to spend their vacation with me at the Oratory. I am delighted, of course, and I'll gladly have them here as long as they don't drive their assistants and teachers mad. Though their vacation will be more secluded and less perilous, they will have plenty of time for games and outings.

I earnestly ask all—those going home and those staying here—to avoid idleness. I know that some don't think it fun to go home on vacation and work, but the verb *vacare* does not mean to sit back and do nothing, as some believe, but rather "to be busy, to be occupied." Thus, the Latin expression *vacare studio* means to attend to study; *vacare agriculturae*, to be busy with farming; *vacare deprecationibus*, to spend time in prayer.

I want you to be ever busy and not to waste a single moment, because, while on vacation, either you will work while the devil sits idle, or you will be idle while the devil works. Does that mean you have to work all the time, without a moment's rest? Well, understand what I mean. When I say "avoid idleness" I mean you are not to be totally unoccupied, but I am saying that you should be continually busy with manual work, study or prayer.

Yet, to be honest, continual work is in no way a sorry situation. In fact I suggest it. I remember how on my vacations I used to cut patterns out of leather to make shoes which I gave away. I would buy cloth and cut and sew it into pants or underwear to wear myself or give away to others. I liked woodwork and with my own hands I'd make benches, chairs, tables and furniture. In fact the tables and chairs I made are still in the family homestead. Many a time I'd mow the meadow or turn the hay and read Virgil while resting. At other times I must have looked funny with a pitchfork in one hand and Virgil in the other! Truly, there's hardly a skill I did not put my hand to then, and I can honestly say not a single moment of my time was idle. I don't mean that you must do what I did, but I just mention this to show you how many things you can do on vacation.

While home with your family can't you do things to make them feel you care for them? Can't you sweep the house, clean the kitchen, set the table, wait on your family, help your dad or mother, give them a hand with the garden and vineyard? You can turn over the hay in the meadow, chop wood, wash out barrels and so on, to keep yourself forever busy.

If you just hang around with your arms folded, doing nothing, the devil, who is always busy, will say, "He's mine!" and he will forever pester you and make you fall into his clutches through your friends and through the thoughts he will excite in your minds.

Does this mean you have to work forever and never have fun? Well, work means many things. Even fun can be an occupation. If you have a vineyard at home, go and eat some grapes—just make sure they are ripe! Eat peaches, figs, pears and apples if you have them, as long as they're good. What I really mean is you are to have loads of fun: play *boccie*,¹⁵ handball, soccer. Play games with your family: cards, dominoes, tarots, chess, any game you find relaxing. Most of all, let me suggest long, fun-filled hikes. And you will still have plenty of time left over for reading and studying, to finish some books you just never got around to.

Have breakfast and a hearty lunch. But make sure you are moderate. You know well that we Piedmonese have some proverbs which are funny but truthful. I won't quote them all, but I'll just mention one or two: "A stuffed belly is a temptation. Everything in the belly belongs to the devil." The Fathers of the Church¹⁶ tell us that we live hand in hand with an enemy, and this enemy is our body. Yield to all its demands, and it waxes bold to harm us. Feed it sparingly, and it yields to us, like a horse which is sparingly fed its hay and oats. Tucking its ears back, it obeys its master. Remember too the teachings of the Doctors of the Church¹⁷ that gluttony and chastity cannot coexist. St. Paul, in advising various categories of persons, tells young people only this: be sober. [Tit. 2, 6] Really, you ask, didn't St. Paul have anything better to tell them than that? No, because when a young man is sober, he will make great strides in virtue. Without sobriety he lies open to the devil and will repeatedly fall into sin.

One more thing: while on vacation, sleep also a little longer, but look out

¹⁵Italian lawn bowling played on a long narrow court. [Editor]

¹⁶Theologians and writers of the first eight centuries who were outstanding for sanctity and learning and whose unanimous acceptance of doctrines as divinely revealed has been regarded as evidence that such doctrines were so received by the Church in line with apostolic tradition and Sacred Scripture. [Editor: from *The Catholic Almanac*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, Indiana 46750]

¹⁷The Doctors of the Church were ecclesiastical writers of eminent learning and sanctity who have been given this title because of the great advantage the Church has derived from their work. These writings, however, were not necessarily free of error in all respects. [Editor: from *The Catholic Almanac*, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, Indiana 46750]

for that certain rest which is known as “the noonday devil.” [Ps. 90, 6] He is a most fearful demon to encounter. I am talking about the customary snooze after the noon meal. That’s when the noonday demon comes along. What harm he does! He sneaks up and whispers an evil word and recalls many a past conversation. He stands before you with a tantalizing glare in his evil eyes and conjures up an ugly picture which you may have seen in a foul book. Then he sidles over and whispers a memory or two, best forever forgotten, to rekindle the imagination. These are lingering temptations not easily shaken off, for the imagination pursues them ever more closely, until one sadly falls and the demon gloats over his victory.

Don’t form the habit of lying in bed after the noon meal until you are old and tottering. It’s not a habit to acquire [at your age]. If you have to rest, sit on a chair and doze a bit. It will be enough and will do you good.

My, how I chatter on and on! Let’s go back to the beginning and put it all in a nutshell.

Have a pleasant vacation, but don’t stay idle. If you don’t work, the devil will. Throughout the day work, play, and talk. Have your three square meals daily, but always keep busy, even at night. How? By sleeping! Yes, sleeping! Be moderate in eating, don’t overeat, and you will not only keep physically fit, but also spiritually healthy.

I could say more, but I’ll wait until Sunday or Monday, before you leave. The next two days are the last you will be with us, and I’d like all of you to come and see me because I have something to say to each one. Now I ask you all to do me a favor: write down my suggestions for a happy vacation to remember and keep. Experience will show you how my advice helped you have a fun-filled and happy vacation. When you come back to the Oratory, you can let me know how helpful my advice was and you will bless the moment I gave it to you. Good night.

The students had their awards ceremony on September 2. Monsignor Ceccarelli, in giving the opening address, later printed at the Oratory Press, interpreted everyone’s joy at Father Cagliero’s arrival that very day from America and concluded his speech with a rousing greeting of welcome. Don Bosco did not speak at this ceremony. The following morning, however, he spoke in church like a father deeply concerned about his sons who are ready to leave his side.

Every dad worries that some mishap may befall his dear ones when he must leave them or when they go on a long trip, even though he trusts them and they know how to take care of themselves. When they are gone he

lives in anxiety and fears they may fall into a pit or tumble into a frightful mountain precipice, or be attacked by forest wolves or become victims of an assassin's knife in some wilderness or other. He wonders if they are suffering discomfort and hardship while making a lengthy journey in bad weather or in an unfriendly environment. How long does he worry? When will he be at peace? Only when he can again hug them to his heart as they return to their father's house.

Honestly, I am such a worried, unworthy but most loving father, and you are my sons, about to leave me for distant places as you go for your vacation. You have done your school work and are ready for a deserved rest, but I look at the school year as one more year gone by, of which we must render an account to God, another year of merit or blame. Who is to say whether the Lord may take one of you to Himself soon and, instead of letting you enjoy a vacation, call you to account for the way you have spent this year?

With warmth racing through your veins, you all cry out enthusiastically, "Vacation! Vacation!" This is your only thought, your only desire, and you have ears for nothing else.

Very well, now, you start your vacation not with evil intent, but rather with good resolves. Yet I fear that the enemy will come along to wrest your good resolve from you, to ruin your spiritual life. How many pitfalls await you! Those which I have just enumerated—wolves, precipices, murderers—are all symbols of spiritual dangers which you will encounter. The thought chills my heart and makes me warn you to be on the alert. Unless you are strong in your good resolves, it can happen that while you are home, unprotected, free to roam in an environment open to wrong-doing, you will let yourselves go little by little and in the end you will fall into sin. You may go into your parish church, for instance, and, noticing that some people don't bless themselves with holy water, you will not take it either, for fear that they will mock you. You may see others neglecting to genuflect or doing it sloppily, and in your silly concern for others' opinions, you may deny to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament this sign of adoration, or you will kneel so clumsily that you will seem to be mocking Him. Someday one of you may be asked to serve Mass and respond, "I could, but what will my friends say if I do? They'll think I'm just a sacrilege bug!" And you will go and sit in a corner so you won't be noticed and will let someone else serve, while you will be satisfied to watch. Let me add that when someone chooses a dark, hidden nook in the church so as not to be noticed, he will not attend Holy Mass the following day. Then, he will meet his friends. "Hi, there!" they will greet him. "We haven't seen you in ages! Come on; let's have a soda together!" They will go to their games and begin to talk smut, and that lad will go back home under the influence

of what he heard in that conversation. He will become less respectful to his parents, squander his money, no longer listen to his mother, and even filch a few coins from her now and then. That lad, so good at the Oratory, is now unruly and wayward. I'd rather not say more on vacation's tragic consequences. Fear of human opinion and bad companions opens the way to many a sin! Too many boys have to be dismissed on their return to the Oratory because they misbehaved or because they did not receive a statement of good conduct from their parish priest, who could not have done otherwise because of the boy's unsatisfactory conduct. I hope this won't happen to any one of you, and so let's put aside these depressing thoughts and say some positive things to help you behave during your vacation.

Listen now. As soon as you get home greet your parents, hug them, and give them my most heartfelt regards. Respect and obey your parents; do all you can to make them happy. Then drop in on your pastor or the priest in your neighborhood, give him my regards, and ask him to keep an eye on you. Offer your services. Ask him if there is anything you can do around the church while on vacation. Let him know he can call on you to write letters, to serve at church functions or to work around his garden or vineyard. Your priest at home always enjoys the company of good boys on vacation from a boarding school, students or artisans, and he will gladly ask you in for lunch or breakfast or a snack. He will be happy to have you join him on his walks, and you should be thrilled to say yes.

First and foremost, keep yourselves always busy and live in God's presence. I have mentioned these things to you already, but I insist: don't waste your time at home, and, whatever you may do, always remember that Our Lord sees you. Endeavor, therefore, to live as good Christians, as you do here at the Oratory. Serve Holy Mass every morning. If you can't, attend Mass devoutly. Spend some time in meditation—during Mass if you can't before or after. Continue your excellent practice of receiving Communion every Sunday or some day during the week. I'd love to have you go more often, but I advise at least once a week. It is Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament who will guard you during this dangerous period. So that you may receive Him with better dispositions and greater benefit, don't forget the meditation I suggested before or after Holy Mass.

There is a whole list of other things I could tell you, things you do here and should continue to do at home: morning and night prayers, attending Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and participating in parish devotions. Avoid bad books and bad companions. I know I've said this before, but I hope you'll heed my words. Like a father who dearly loves his sons, I urge you to do these things so that you may enjoy your vacation.

A brief summary, item by item: avoid laziness, keep in God's presence, daily Mass and meditation, weekly confession and Communion, morning

and evening prayers. They will make for a true vacation, and, more importantly, a sinless vacation.

Still, as I've said before, I fear you may be hurt [spiritually]. True, my boys have been going home for vacation for some twenty years now, but I don't recall anyone returning to tell me he had behaved better at home than at the Oratory, nor do I recall anyone telling me that his vacation had brought him spiritual advantage. On the contrary, every year I have often had to deplore many falls from grace. This is something I fear and shall continue to fear until I see you all back again. You are scheduled to return between October 15 and 20. Most boys are usually back by October 18. Please be punctual so that you won't find someone else in your place and you won't keep us waiting or, worse, find that you have to go back home—as has happened in former years. In all events, first come, first served!

And yet, who knows if you will all return? I fear that the Lord may call one or more of you during this vacation. I hope not, but anyway let's be prepared. Not long ago one of your companions merrily left the Oratory hoping to return and make a spiritual retreat at Lanzo. Just days later he was in eternity. He meant well but could not carry out his plans.

I say goodbye with the hope of seeing you again, but it is certain we shall not all meet again. Some may change their plans; some will have to stay home and work; others will feel they will do better if they transfer to another school. But whether you return to the Oratory or not, whether your vacation is joyful or sad, the only thing I urge is that you do not sin. Be as wary of sin as you would of serpents, and you will have a holy vacation. You will come back in good health and enjoy another year of study and prayer until the time you will receive your coveted final reward.

Till then, best wishes to all for a joyful vacation and a happy return!

The boys were scheduled to return to the Oratory between October 15 and 20, but by October 7 a fair number had already come back, some of them to take or repeat exams. On the evening of October 7, Don Bosco welcomed them back and addressed his remarks also to the clerics, who usually joined the boys to hear his message.

My greetings to all, and those greetings are all the more cordial because this is the first time that I have seen you since your vacation. True, not all have returned yet, but I can see that many of you are back—enough, I suppose, to do ample justice to a hearty meal if we had one!

Most of you are back to prepare for your entrance examinations into

secondary school or higher grades or to take repeat exams, and so you all need time to study. Those who have to make up for what they missed or failed last year must also study hard—and I include all the clerics in this number.

How about those who have no specific work to do—are they to continue their holiday? If our library and bookstore were not properly stocked or if you had read all those books, I'd say, "Sure, take a rest!" But as long as there are books to read, I shall always say, "Read!" Some of you are ready to begin philosophy. I advise you to read up on the courses you will be taking this year. You would also do well to read or memorize a book of Virgil, Horace or Ovid or maybe a canto of Dante. You might also go over the authors you studied in your Latin courses.

There is one book I advise everyone to read—*The History of Italy*. Even if you've read it five times, I still urge you to read it again. Why? Because nowadays history books are doctored, and the Church's enemies search history to find pretexts to defame and slander the Church by distorting or even inventing events. But this book tells you history as it really happened—in summarized form, of course, but enough to start young readers on studying in greater detail both the history of Italy and the history of the Church, bound as they are, I might say, by mutual ties. I am not saying this to praise my own work, but because I realize its real usefulness.

I have just received word that Father Cerruti's father has passed away. We shall pray for his soul tomorrow. This is not the only death notice which has reached us these last few days. I've been told that recently a well-known actor dropped dead on stage and that another actor working with him died suddenly of shock. The audience left the theater thoroughly stricken by the grimness of the tragedy. It is not the only time things like this have happened, so let's be prepared, should death come upon us, to reply as Abraham did to the Lord's summons: "Here I am, O Lord!" Meanwhile, have a good night.

On October 16, Bishop [Peter] Lacerda [of Rio de Janeiro] and two of his priests stopped at the Oratory and left on October 19 for France and Lisbon. No further details of this visit are known to us.

On the evening of October 28, Don Bosco announced a new event: the decision taken at the Lanzo meeting to open every school year with a triduum of evening talks. The Oratory chose the three days before the feast of All Saints for this practice.

I asked for this general assembly to greet you and speak to you briefly after your vacation. I begin with some very recent good news. Just before

supper this evening, I got a telegram from Father Ronchail to tell me that a new house is about to be opened at Cannes, a town not far from Nice. It will be our gateway to Marseille, Navarre, Bordeaux and other French cities, as well as, later on, coastwise to Barcelona, Utrera, Seville, and other cities of Spain. Then we shall take a long, long leap to Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo—a leap which takes fifteen days and nights by sea. How many missions this giant step means, how many requests for Salesian hospices and boarding schools!

So, I tell you, grow up to be good priests, good teachers, good men who can be sent throughout the world to do good. I know you are all here because you want to become saints.

But what I wanted to tell you is this: you are all back from vacation and, though on the way you found no mud to befoul you, there may have been dusty spots and splashes of dirt to soil your clothing. When people receive a traveler from afar, they check to see if his clothing is dusty and mud-stained so as to brush it clean at once. I want to do the same thing, and you too should be the first to do it. One way or another, you have all been on vacation, and so you are like people returning from a long journey. Check your clothing to see how clean it is. I don't mean your actual clothes, but your conscience, your soul. See whether it bears any unsightly stain of your vacation. Look carefully and then remove what is bad and keep what is good. Clean off whatever evil you have picked up on the way, that it may not harm you during the year, and cherish the good things you brought back that they may help your progress and perseverance in virtue.

What are these good things? Well, one boy told me that his pastor had given him this thought as a keepsake: "Every moment of time is a treasure, and every moment well spent is a treasure gained." Another fellow, an artisan, said that his father had told him, "Learn your trade well. Becoming rich or poor is beyond your control, but with your craft you will be able to own a farmhouse and make an honest living." One mother told her son as he was returning, "Be devoted to Our Lady." I am glad to hear you say the fine things you have learned on your vacation, and I am anxious to see you benefit by them. However, if you realize that you also brought something bad back with you, some bad habit, an attitude of grumbling or disobedience, then correct it!

If, unfortunately, we have lost the treasure of God's grace, let us endeavor to regain it so that we may always be on the safe side. How many lads get up in the morning healthy and happy, only to sup that evening with Father Pautasso, the cemetery chaplain. We are to be prepared lest it happen to us, so that we may have nothing to fear.

The coming feast of All Saints gives us a chance to examine our conscience. To make this easier for you we have decided to hold a triduum

with a sermonette each evening. Try to live up to what you learn from these brief talks. In these days dedicated by the Church to the souls of the faithful departed, I urge you to offer prayers for them. If you can go to Communion, do so. Pray, all of you—pray intensely. Gain indulgences and offer them for the holy souls in purgatory. This act of charity is the best way to help them—especially the souls of your deceased parents and relatives. Your prayers and assistance to the souls in purgatory will ultimately help you effectively. It is like putting food into your mouth: the mouth consumes it, but the hand that brought it to the lips and the entire body are nourished.

I urge you to spend these days seriously, examining your conscience and offering your good deeds for the benefit of the souls in purgatory. Then, as we shall pass into eternity, we shall find our many good deeds stored up for us to save us from the flames of purgatory and open heaven's gates to us. Good night.

The boys cleansed their souls during the triduum and serenely resumed their school duties. The house was jammed and overflowing. Since there was no room for more who kept flocking in, the missionaries moved to Lanzo to ease the space problem. Besides the boys, there were many laymen and priests—"an army," the records say—enrolled as postulants. Their presence increased the discomfort and tightness which they too had to share. Eventually these men of varied careers—lawyers, teachers, army and navy officers, railway employees, priests, pastors and canons—soon left, almost to a man, once they saw at close range the sacrifices awaiting them in the dream-life they had planned.

The confreres shared the various duties of the house. Because of Father Bonetti's coming to the Oratory and the presence of Father Cagliero, the other superiors hoped for some relief in their work, but the Congregation's growth only multiplied their tasks day by day and their burden was not lessened.

The final feature of school orientation was the public reading of the regulations, done in the study hall on November 5 and 6 in the evening in the presence of all the faculty. These newly printed regulations, meant as much for all the schools as for the Oratory, cost Don Bosco long thoughtful hours through the summer months. The articles concerning the faculty he had presented to the directors at the St. Francis de Sales annual conference; afterward he asked Father Rua to edit them singly, and Father Barberis to study carefully the articles dealing with discipline, to make sure

that they were inspired by the principles they had often discussed together. Subsequently, he personally went over each article, pondering every word and filling the pages with corrections. Finally Father Vespignani copied them in good penmanship while he was on Father Rua's staff. The regulations were quickly printed and sent to all the houses in November. A second printing was made in 1899. In 1906 and 1920, new editions were made incorporating the old text with additions determined by the general chapter. However, the original core of regulations was respected and retained in its entirety. Don Bosco's spirit could be seen in the wording with but very few slight amendments. "Despite the concise wording of the text," wrote Father Vespignani, "I found every article imbued with piety and charity."¹⁸

5. DINNER INVITATIONS

Father Lemoyne has written much about Don Bosco's accepting dinner invitations, but we have little material in this regard for this period of his life—just an item or two which we pass on to our readers.

Don Bosco was very close to the wealthy, charitable Ruggieri family of Turin, and his presence at dinner was a cause for celebration for everyone. After the parents' death the invitations ceased, as did his visits to the family, but Joseph, the lawyer son, wishing to resume the former friendship, in May of this year asked Don Bosco to honor his home by coming to dinner as he had done while his parents were alive. One day, while with his wife, he met Don Bosco and repeated his invitation. Don Bosco accepted, saying he would set a date. Later, in writing to recommend a boy named Clary, who later became a priest, Joseph Ruggieri reminded Don Bosco to set a date when he might welcome him to his home, and Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, May 22, 1877

My dear lawyer,

What is postponed is not canceled. Just now I cannot set a date but I shall come. I'll let you know one day before, so that your cook can have

¹⁸Rev. G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 47. [Author]

time to prepare some choice dishes. Father Bologna will see about *Chiari*.
God bless your family.

Your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Wherever he went, Don Bosco's presence always brought love and inspiration. One day he went for dinner at the home of Marchioness Durando. Present were many ladies who were most anxious to talk to Don Bosco. They were very elegantly dressed, but with arms almost bare. As soon as he entered, Don Bosco looked about and remarked, "I thought a priest could enter this home without embarrassment. I am sorry to see that so much of the fabric went into the ample folds of the gowns and so little to cover the arms." He turned and started to leave. Blushing, the ladies begged him to stay as they draped their arms with shawls and kerchiefs. He remained and relieved their embarrassment with pleasantries that came so easily to him.

On feasts and celebrations local directors did their best to have him with them. Their other guests, learning that Don Bosco would be present, considered themselves very lucky to have the opportunity of enjoying his pleasant conversation. In 1878 he was having dinner at our Valsalice College with quite a group of learned, distinguished people. Their talk turned to mathematics, particularly on a new system of numbering recently explored by a renowned professor. Don Bosco was silent. Finally, half in jest, half in earnest, they asked his opinion. They quickly realized that he had been following their conversation. Speedily he brought out the inherent absurdity of the theory, expressing his views so clearly and persuasively that everyone had to praise him, and one asked in wonder if he were a mathematician. "I once had a gift of sorts in mathematics," he answered, "and in my school days I always won first prize."¹⁹

6. PREDICTIONS

God often gave Don Bosco special insights into the personality of those men who were destined to inherit his spiritual legacy so that he might train them and prepare them for their lofty mission.

¹⁹This was related to us by Father [Angelo] Caimo, an eye-witness. [Author]

As with his first successor as superior general of the Congregation, so with his second, Don Bosco was given special insights. This, at least, is our conviction, based on our study of one event which happened in 1877. Whenever possible, Don Bosco went to our junior seminary at Borgo San Martino to celebrate its patronal feast of St. Charles, a celebration often postponed to allow him to attend. In 1877 it was held on November 22. A young man of 22, Philip Rinaldi, had been invited and was sitting with other guests a little way from Don Bosco at a table honored by the presence of Bishop [Peter] Ferrè of Casale. The conversation turned to Father Albera and his initial problems with the priests of his parish and with Archbishop [David] Riccardi, who had done his utmost to draw him away from Don Bosco after high school. Bishop Ferrè listened attentively to Don Bosco and asked whether Father Albera had won out. "Certainly!" Don Bosco replied. "He is my second. . . ." Abruptly, as he spoke, he brushed his hand over his forehead, as one does when organizing his thoughts and choosing his words. None of the guests at the table noticed either his words or his gesture, but Philip Rinaldi, well acquainted with the Salesians, began to wonder: Father Albera, he thought, was not the second person to enter the Congregation, nor was he second in position or even a member of the superior chapter, and he was not the Congregation's second director. Could Don Bosco mean that he would be second in the line of succession? His conclusion he kept to himself, awaiting confirmation with time.

Thirty-three years went by, and Father Rinaldi was prefect general. On February 27, 1910, on realizing that Father Rua's condition had become critical, he wrote his never-revealed secret on a sheet of paper and sealed it in an envelope, on which he wrote: "To be opened after the election held after our beloved Father Rua's death. Philip Rinaldi." He gave the envelope to Father Lemoyne, secretary of the superior chapter, without a word regarding its secret contents. When Father Rua passed on to his reward and his successor had been elected, Father Rinaldi went to the latter's office, broke open the envelope and read what he had written to everyone who was present. The listeners felt they could again hear the voice of their father, who had returned to encourage the newly elected superior and to reassure those who had chosen him.

There are other short-range predictions of 1877 we must cite.

They were the usual predictions of boys' deaths at the Oratory. In foretelling how many would die within the coming year, Don Bosco never gave any indication of either the time of death or the group to which one belonged. He did so later, on two different occasions, the first being toward the end of the carnival season. One evening at the "Good Night" he remarked, "Let's enjoy this season, but also let's be careful! One of you listening to me now will not see the end of it." On February 10, the eve of Quinquagesima Sunday, young Stephen Mazzoglio, an upperclassman from Lu Monferrato, died. His illness lasted but a few days, and no one could imagine death was so imminent.

The second prediction Don Bosco made during Lent, at a "Good Night." He first recalled the memory of Stephen, commending him to his schoolmates' prayers as he always did, and then continued, "If one of our friends could not live to see the end of the carnival season, there is another who will not finish the Lenten season and will not celebrate Holy Easter with us." It all happened as he said. In those days the Oratory boys fulfilled their solemn Easter duty on Holy Wednesday. The day before, as the priest celebrating Mass in the infirmary was making his Communion, one of the sick boys came up to receive the Sacred Host. The priest, not having been advised in time, had not consecrated any and suggested he receive Communion the following morning. However, the boy did not live to see the next dawn. He died suddenly, with scarcely time to receive the Anointing of the Sick. It was March 28 [1878] and the lad's name was John Briatore. He lived at Deversi di Garesio (Cuneo) and was a first year student.²⁰

²⁰Father Vespignani [in his book *Un anno alla scuola di Don Bosco*, p. 60] was the only one to recall these two predictions which he himself had heard. He was also the priest who celebrated the Mass in the infirmary. We found names and dates to corroborate his witness in the annals of 1877. [Author]

CHAPTER 13

Matters Concerning Lanzo, Albano, Mendrisio, Milan and the Oratory in the Year 1877

THIS chapter will cover only matters related to existing schools and to plans for foundations which were not realized, putting off to a later time the history of the houses which were opened in 1877 and 1878.

In its meeting of April 11, 1875, the town council of Lanzo had decided to terminate Don Bosco's lease of the former monastery where he was conducting the town's elementary school. Under the lease terms, notice of closure was to be given five years in advance, and so, with the opening of the 1875-76 school year, Don Bosco still had five years before vacating the premises. The municipality's excuse was that it needed money for the railway and hoped to raise it from the sale of the building. Father Louis Botto, a native of Lanzo and a fellow student of Don Bosco, got word of this and immediately urged him not to lose such an excellent opportunity to obtain definitive ownership of the premises, especially since the price was only some thirty or forty thousand lire. He even offered to act as his agent. Don Bosco replied to him on February 17, accepting his offer.¹

Meanwhile the Department of Public Education adopted a resolution of the Council of State voiding all contracts made by townships with individuals or corporations for running and administering town schools, since such tasks were the immediate and exclusive responsibility of the municipality. It was an underhanded maneuver to drive even more religious congregations

¹This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

from the field of elementary education. In view of this, at its meeting of December 17, 1877, the provincial school board decided that the existing contract between the township and the Rev. John Bosco concerning the operation of the school was to cease at the end of the current school year. Don Bosco, who was then in Rome, backed by the opinion of skilled Roman lawyers, was firmly convinced that no resolution of the Council of State could annul a legal contract, and so he felt that he should begin asserting his rights. To this end, he wrote to Father Rua to contact the Oratory's lawyer in Turin and then to instruct the director of our school at Lanzo to call on the mayor for clarifications.² Later on, however, he gave up his idea of demanding a review of the case, since his lease at Lanzo had already been extended for one year beyond the time limit set by the provincial government. On its expiration, he waived his rights, gave up his plan of buying the property, and in September 1879 vacated the premises, relocating the elementary school to the adjoining building which he had previously built for resident grammar and secondary school students.

At Albano Laziale he was concerned with providing his sons with better accommodations for the next school year, 1877-78. Their residence—far from comfortable for various reasons—was too far from the school, and walking that distance four times a day was anything but pleasant, especially in winter. In addition, since it had become necessary to increase the Salesian personnel beyond the contract terms, their lump salary was now inadequate. Don Bosco referred the problem to the vicar general and to the mayor—the former to use his influence with government officials, the latter to put direct pressure upon them. Don Bosco had never looked upon the existing setup as permanent. It was but a first temporary step toward opening a boarding school of his own at Albano—a move he felt impelled to make at the insistence of many government employees of northern Italy who had been relocated in Rome when the capital had been established there and were most anxious to have the Salesians take care of their sons' education. We must add, however, that not everybody in Albano liked the Salesians, whether for sectarian or political reasons.³

²This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

³See Vol. XII, p. 404. [Editor]

Rumors also had it that some people planned to forestall Don Bosco by opening a boarding school with a different orientation. Aware of this, Don Bosco alerted the vicar general with a letter dated August 12, 1877. Then, on the same day, he also wrote to the mayor stating his just needs frankly and clearly and with a firmness that implied a prior unjustifiable reluctance on the mayor's part.⁴

Despite this, the situation remained unchanged until 1879, when new, unfavorable circumstances pressured the Salesians into pulling up stakes and moving elsewhere to work with greater freedom and better results.

Negotiations for assuming the administration of a boarding school at Mendrisio in the Swiss canton of Ticino in 1877 took six months of lengthy, thorny, and heated discussions. The youngsters of the area were in sad need of a sound education. The Freemasons had turned the place topsy-turvy, and they were followed by radicals, who kept the canton in their grip for several years. [Joseph] Mazzini⁵ had a house in Mendrisio. However, despite such hostility, the conservative party remained so strong that in 1877 it won the elections and, after assuming power, favored the proposal to reform the boarding school of Mendrisio. The idea came from a Mr. Croce whose son had been an Oratory student. Backed by the canton's representative in the legislature, Mr. Croce negotiated energetically with both the government and our superiors to bring the Salesians to Mendrisio, his home town. Father Rua, after protracted correspondence with Mr. Croce, visited the town on April 30 to look over the building and get exact particulars. He reported his findings to the superior chapter at their May 3 meeting. In the midst of his report, Don Bosco was called out to greet the bishop of Susa, who had just arrived. During his absence, the councilors studied the proposals for the new school, whose lay director had already submitted his resignation to the government. Serious difficulties had to be faced: they would have to hire lay personnel so as not to antagonize the radicals; a German teacher was indispensable; the school curriculum was quite different from ours; the frequent change of the political party in power made for much uncertainty. In short, the superior chapter

⁴This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

⁵See Vol. I, pp. 8f. [Editor]

could not see its way to voting in favor of this first foundation in Switzerland.

Just then Don Bosco returned. He had not heard anything of their discussion, but as soon as he opened the door, he said to them, "The bishop of Susa has told me he favors our accepting the boarding school at Mendrisio, because it could help Switzerland to get on her feet again. Certainly, it means walking into a maze of confusion, but it will be a real step forward for our Congregation. Besides, we shall find vocations there. Hiring lay teachers will not be a problem, and, if we are forced to, we can always send clerics and let them wear secular clothing until their ordination. Their dress won't prevent them from studying theology, following our rules and carrying out their practices of piety. However, we shall have to write to Mr. Croce and ask him to find out if some of the present teachers, who are good Catholics, want to stay on with us. They could spend a few weeks with us at the Oratory and brief us on the teaching system that they have been using. After this, we can write to the present school director and assure him that we have no intention to harm or oppose him and that, since we know of his resignation, we will come, if asked to. The school curriculum should be sent to us immediately. To date, the teaching staff was paid ten thousand lire, but now they want to give us only six thousand. We shall ask for eight thousand to meet initial expenses and then we shall see what we can do about cutting down on salaries. We should go for a five-year contract, with notice to be given by either party five years in advance. However, we should study the civil constitution to see how long the present canton government can remain in power. We should send it a copy of the contract we have with Alassio."

It was decided then and there to continue negotiations, and all seemed to be going well when an obstacle arose. The strategy was that the legal responsibility for the school was not to rest with Don Bosco, but with someone else, either an Italian or a Swiss, whom he could trust. Don Bosco did not consider this an insuperable obstacle. He successively approached three secular priests, asking that they lend their name. The first was refused permission by the bishop of Como, to whose diocese that part of Canton Ticino belonged. The second declined for personal reasons. The third was the pastor at Mendrisio, and his name was entered into the draft of

the contract which Don Bosco sent from Turin on August 7, but at the last moment he also withdrew.

Such was the situation when the government unilaterally appointed a layman, Professor Cattaneo, to be head of the school. On the letter sent to him for ratification, Don Bosco jotted the following memo for Father Rua's answer: "Not to our advantage; an 'actual' head would deprive us of our freedom." He used the word "actual" because—as he and his advisors understood it—any legally appointed head was to have been only nominally in charge, leaving Don Bosco a free hand in running the school. Father Rua's answer to the government representative was: "In my last letter I asked you to hold up all deliberations on the boarding school at Mendrisio. I had good hopes that the matter could be settled, as we had been advised, by having a priest of Canton Ticino act as our legal head. Regretfully, none of the priests whom we contacted is willing to take this responsibility. I am therefore informing you confidentially that you are free to disregard my previous letter, and to take whatever action you may think best. If a statement signed by Professor Peter Guidazio, a member of the town council, is enough, we shall send it immediately with a copy of the stipulations. In conclusion, feel free to make whatever arrangements you wish. We are withdrawing to respond to other requests from several towns and rural districts in Italy and elsewhere." Still, Don Bosco's Swiss friends felt that negotiations had not been ended, but merely suspended.⁶ In fact, some years later they were resumed.⁷

In 1877 Don Bosco also had a lot to do with matters affecting the Oratory school and workshops and the layout of the buildings.

A ruling of the Department of Education gave him good reason to fear that the scholastic authorities were about to create problems for the Oratory secondary schools by mandating certification of all teachers. True, the Congregation had a good number of men with degrees and others holding temporary licences, but they barely filled the needs of our boarding schools. A letter of Don Bosco to Commendatore Barberis, his former schoolmate who headed the Department of Education in Rome, explains the management of the

⁶Letter of Professor Cattaneo to Don Bosco from Locarno, September 7, 1877. It is the last document in order of date in our archives regarding this lengthy transaction. [Author]

⁷We are omitting another lengthy and inconclusive transaction about a boarding school in Milan. [Editor]

Oratory secondary school and Don Bosco's efforts to meet the emergency.

Turin, October 1, 1877

Dearest friend:

Let me appeal to our friendship and ask you to look into a matter in which you can really help me. Up to now, the school authorities have not bothered our secondary school for the poor lads whom we shelter here in Valdocco, mainly because our teachers have been working without pay for the underprivileged. This year, however, the Department of Education has informed us that, as of October 15, every class is to have a certified teacher.

It is impossible for me to readily meet this demand; besides, I could never pay certified teachers. I have therefore petitioned Minister Coppino for a three-year authorization for our present teachers to give me time to meet the new requirements.

The minister seems to favor my request, but he informed me that he wanted to bring this matter to the attention of the superior school board of which you are chairman.

For my sake—or, better, for the sake of these poor boys at the Oratory—please put in a good word for us. You will have the thanks of many lads who will invoke blessings upon you and your family.

Please be kind enough also to drop me a few lines for my information.

Graciously accept the trust I put in you. May God grant you happiness in this life and the next!

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

His request must have met with some success, for the school year went on as usual. Then, in January 1878, while he was in Rome, Don Bosco decided to try a plan which, if successful, would have settled the matter for good. In a carefully worded petition⁸ to the Department of Education, he pleaded that the Oratory teaching staff be exempted from the requirements of academic certification.

At the same time, he sought the support of other government departments with minor changes in the opening paragraph of his petition.⁹

⁸Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

⁹This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

As long as Minister Coppino was in power, the Oratory was never bothered, but when the cabinet fell in March 1878 and Coppino was succeeded by De Sanctis, matters changed, as we shall see later.

Don Bosco's concern for the artisans was as great as that for the students. The shops needed to be improved. Every machine, save for those in the printshop which were operated by a costly steam engine, had to be run by hand, requiring more labor with less efficiency. He applied to the municipal authorities for permission to extend to his workshops the water line of the Ceronda—an underground canal that carried water from the Dora River to the Po under the street now called Corso Regina Margherita. The canal supplied water to generate steam for several nearby industrial plants, and its main turbine was located where the Societa Editrice Internazionale now stands at the edge of Piazza Maria Ausiliatrice. In November Don Bosco filed an application for a 30-horsepower supply and instructed the engineer [Anthony] Spezia to design a suitable motor. Apparently, he had firm hopes of obtaining his request, for a second petition reads: "Please consider the following facts: construction work is already under way; this institution lives on free-will donations alone; several people are employed; we have been among the first to apply. Please allot to us—if not the 30-horsepower promised—at least as close to that as possible." The mayor refused to grant more than a third of the amount requested, regardless of reports sent in to show its inadequacy.

In two other matters involving the municipal authorities Don Bosco was more successful. First, the city's master plan for Valdocco called for extending Via Fiando with the result that it would bisect the Oratory's vegetable garden.¹⁰ Don Bosco, who always eyed the future and was concerned about having enough property for future development of the Oratory, was quite worried. He therefore wrote to the mayor on November 21, and, while assuring him that it was not his intent in any way to embarrass city hall or raise difficulties in matters of public interest, he added: "The undersigned merely wishes to point out that extending Via Fiando would practically slice in half a walled vegetable garden which is an integral part of our institute. To get to it we would have to cross the

¹⁰We are omitting a detailed explanation of the proposed city plan. [Editor]

public street.” His argument was heeded, and subsequent revisions of the plan did not include extending Via Fiando.

A similar situation involving the municipal authorities was also resolved that year. At first, the city’s master plan called for a new street to be named after Carlo Botta. Intersecting Via Cottolengo and running parallel to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on the north side, it would have cut across the Oratory’s land. A memo, drawn up by the engineer [Anthony] Spezia and signed by Don Bosco on July 17, cautioned—in view of the institute’s future growth—against authorizing expropriation of land which would curtail further expansion clearly needed to provide adequate headquarters for the institute. The planned street disappeared from future city plans. Thus, thanks to the prudent foresight and firm action of our founder, the Salesian motherhouse was enabled to expand to its present size.

CHAPTER 14

The Twilight of One Pontificate and the Dawn of Another

SEVERAL well-placed persons in Rome who were friendly to Don Bosco urged him to go to Rome and clear up his problems. He himself realized that there was no other way out of his straits than to appear in person and refute the charges which could hang over the Salesian Congregation indefinitely and jeopardize its very existence during its critical period of definitive organization. Today, as we look back, we can see in all this the hand of Providence which imperceptibly guides human events.

That trip, besides being so cheerless in its prospects and so out of character for Don Bosco, was also foreshadowed by sinister omens, predictions or whatever we may want to call them. Before leaving Turin, he made it clearly understood that the Oratory was in for hard times during his absence. Cleric Vacchina,¹ then teaching first year of secondary school, told us he would never forget how, just before leaving for Rome, Don Bosco stated in a "Good Night": "This year two prominent persons will leave the scene of life, and their passing will be talked about in the world. The Oratory too will see death—very much of it."

After a two-day stopover at La Spezia, he arrived in Rome on December 22. This time he and his secretary lodged in Via Tor de' Specchi, in a convent annex to which he and his Salesians

¹Bernard Vacchina (1859-1935) donned the clerical habit in 1876 and took his vows in 1877. In 1879 he was assigned to Uruguay and later became secretary of the internuncio in Buenos Aires where he was ordained a priest in 1882. In 1887 he was appointed pro-vicar apostolic of Central Patagonia. After nearly thirty years of missionary work, he retired to St. John the Evangelist School in Buenos Aires where he continued his priestly ministry until his death in 1935. [Editor]

would have free access from then on.² It was not a spacious apartment—just five small, low-ceilinged rooms entered off the street by a narrow, rickety stairway, stifling hot in summer and freezing in winter.

Housed in such poor quarters, Don Bosco spent his first week in Rome trying to assess how the cardinals felt about his dispute with the archbishop of Turin and to pinpoint the charges being brought against him. In strictest secrecy he was allowed to see several key letters, three of them addressed to Pius IX. One stated that Don Bosco pressured very young men to join his Congregation regardless of whether or not they had a vocation and actually forcing them into that decision. The second accused him of disregarding Church canons and openly flouting them so as to boost his Congregation's membership. The third letter maintained that the Salesians had no idea of order and discipline and were insidiously taught to look down upon their bishops.

Once he knew the charges he was faced with—some of which we have already seen—Don Bosco set about collecting and arranging documentation for a vigorous defense. His secretary wrote many letters requesting information from persons who were in a position to know the facts on which the charges were allegedly based. Several of his friends, knowing why he was in Rome, sent him accounts of meetings called in Turin [by Archbishop Gastaldi] and other information which would bolster his defense. Back in Turin, Father [John Baptist] Rostagno [S.J.]³ and Father [John Baptist] Bertagna were compiling a legal brief in his defense. On December 30 Father Berto wrote to Father Rua: "Please tell Father Rostagno to send us quickly whatever he has readied because the time is ripe. You would do well to see him personally and ask him to send whatever he has." Father Bertagna, former dean at the Convitto Ecclesiastico,⁴ told of his earnest endeavors in a letter of January 2 to Father Berto: "I have everything ready and will send it by

²We are omitting the history of this annex (demolished over fifty years ago) which Don Bosco was allowed to use for the next thirty years in repayment of books supplied to the convent by the Oratory Press for resale. [Editor]

³Don Bosco had brought along a letter from his very learned friend presenting in its true light the most serious accusation [the Salesians' unlawful celebration of Mass outside their diocese] with helpful instructions on how to refute it in the Sacred Roman Congregations. [Author]

⁴See Index of Volume II under "Convitto Ecclesiastico." [Editor]

registered mail no later than the feast of the Epiphany [January 6] with comments clarifying certain areas which need further investigation and attention. I have also included material on the most recent publications on the matter. In a word, we will not leave a stone unturned. . . . Very best wishes from me and from the friends of Don Bosco, who labors untiringly for the welfare of all and is beloved by all.”⁵

Don Bosco was so pressured by urgent work that he did not hasten to apply immediately for an audience with the Pope. “We are swamped with work,” Father Berto wrote to Father Rua on December 30. “Things are happening all around us.” Again on January 15 he wrote, “We have not yet been able to see the Pope because of all the work engaging us.” Don Bosco must have applied for an audience by mid-January, but, as we shall soon see, he did not notify Father Berto. Don Bosco knew only too well “the time to be silent.” He kept his peace and asked others to do the same, but he worked unceasingly. On January 3 he wrote to Father Rua, “Our silence and our prayer will achieve God’s greater glory. But I am not idle. Kindness toward all. Loads of work to do! I have an extra secretary.”⁶ A few days later: “Our case is proceeding well. Troubles, endless pains, but all for the good. Silence, prayer, and no fears!” On January 13 he wrote to Father Francesia, “The business which brought me to Rome is moving along favorably on all levels, though slowly. Patience.”

In an undated letter to Father Rua, certainly written in mid-January, Don Bosco lists several reasons which made him feel so hopeful. “You may tell [the superior chapter] confidentially,” he

⁵After twenty-two years of lecturing on moral theology at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, Father John Baptist Bertagna had been abruptly relieved of his duties in September 1876—a painful downfall which he endured with heroic humility, living in retirement at home in Castelnovo until he became grievously sick. In 1879, Bishop Savio of Asti called for him and appointed him vicar general. That was the year the Convitto Ecclesiastico was closed down. Having lectured there for many years and later at Our Lady of Consolation, Father Bertagna was the former teacher of all the Turin clergy and of many priests of neighboring dioceses. All looked up to him as a master in the art of spiritual direction. He has rightly been considered one of the past century’s leading moral theologians. In 1884 Cardinal Alimonda consecrated him auxiliary bishop and later appointed him rector of Turin’s archdiocesan seminary and of all the other diocesan seminaries. He resumed teaching moral theology at the seminary and at Our Lady of Consolation. As vicar general he made the pastoral visitation of the archdiocese. He died in 1905. [Author]

⁶This new secretary was Father [John] Turchi of Castelnovo, deeply loyal to Don Bosco, now [1932] teaching in Rome. [Author]

wrote, “that our case is making very fine progress. The consultor [of the Sacred Congregation] of Bishops and Regulars⁷ has already checked out Archbishop Gastaldi’s charges against us and is convinced that they don’t hold water and that our Congregation has not acted blamefully against him. I have just sent in a bundle of threatening letters [from him]. The cardinals are shocked and don’t know what to think. They are all on our side and anxious to set up a normal, peaceful relationship.”

Only one cardinal did not go along with that trust in him—Cardinal Ferrieri, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who favored Archbishop Gastaldi and shared his philosophical outlook. A short time before, while speaking to his staff, he had remarked that he intended to be on his guard when personally meeting Don Bosco, lest he [the cardinal] be taken at his word.⁸ They met at the beginning of the new year [1878], and Don Bosco wrote him the letter of January 7 which we quoted at the end of Chapter 11. Stating that he wanted to fill in some matters they had discussed, Don Bosco then set forth his arguments concisely, but quite clearly. Another important document, dated somewhat later, sheds further light on that interview. It is a letter of Don Bosco, dated September 8, 1882, from San Benigno Canavese and addressed to Father Dalmazzo,⁹ who was then representing the Congregation at Rome. Referring to Cardinal Ferrieri he wrote: “Five years have passed since he deigned to give me a hearing. Since then, I have never been able to obtain either an audience or a written answer to my letters. At that one interview, he charged me with the archbishop’s accusation that we did not ask for testimonial letters when admitting candidates to the Congregation. I replied that we had always requested them but that, when difficulties arose, I availed myself of faculties granted me by the Holy See. Somewhat angered, he demanded, ‘Who gave you such faculties?’ ‘The Holy Father,’ I replied, ‘the well-deserving Pius IX. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has a file on it, and I

⁷Father Tosa, a Dominican. [Author]

⁸Letter from Canon Menghini to Archbishop Gastaldi, Rome, December 29, 1877. The original is in the possession of Father Franchetti of Turin. [Author]

⁹Francis Dalmazzo entered the Oratory as a rhetoric student in 1860. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 453ff.) After his ordination in 1868, he filled important positions in the Salesian Society, his last assignment being rector of the Catanzaro diocesan seminary, where he died on March 10, 1895. [Editor]

have an authentic copy.’ ‘As of today,’ he countered, ‘that faculty is revoked! Be sure not to use it again!’ I question whether the prefect of a Roman Congregation has power to revoke a favor granted in such a formal manner. Nevertheless I merely replied that I yielded to his orders. I have never again made use of that privilege.”

On January 8 the news that King Victor Emmanuel II was gravely ill was flashed from the Quirinal. The following day he died. This unexpected death came like a bolt of lightning to the Salesians at the Oratory; they suddenly understood the reason for a directive which Don Bosco had issued toward the end of 1877. Since 1862 the liturgical prayers for the reigning sovereign were hardly ever said in Piedmont’s churches, nor was the king’s name publicly mentioned in the Good Friday and Holy Saturday liturgies or other Church services. At first some zealots had immediately called the government’s attention to this, but on March 24, 1863 Minister Pisanelli stated that the omission was not a violation of law. The Oratory went along with the current practice. However, some time before leaving for Rome, Don Bosco gave orders to resume the prayer for the king at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament without giving any explanation. So, at a “Good Night” Father Lazzero taught the Oratory boys the response to the prayer, “Lord, save our king, Victor Emmanuel.” That puzzling directive seemed to hint that the king would soon be in spiritual need.

We have a single trace of Don Bosco’s reaction to the king’s death. On January 12, 1878 he wrote to Count Cays, “Here I am, as a farce says, between a funeral and a dance.¹⁰ Preparations were afoot for the Pope’s [expected] death and the ensuing conclave, but now it is instead said that the Quirinal Palace is to be draped in mourning [for the king’s death]. God disposed otherwise. The Pope’s condition has improved, and we may say that his health is as good as it can be at his age. He is eating and receiving visitors and is in good spirits. His physicians are confident that he will again walk the halls of the Vatican in the spring. Contrariwise, the Quirinal Palace is draped in mourning for the one who had ordered its preparations [for Pius IX]. But we have good reason to praise the Lord. The king received the Last Rites and thus, we hope, ensured his eternal salvation. The death of a healthy and robust

¹⁰An allusion to a farce for school staging entitled “Funeral and Dances.” [Author]

king in the prime of life, after an illness of just three days, will put a scare into all of Europe. He spared the Church the very embarrassing situation of having to refuse him Christian burial. It is said that the cardinal vicar has a formal statement of recantation signed by the king. What is certain, however, is that in his dying breath he called for pen and paper but was refused because it was feared the effort would be too hazardous.”¹¹

The rumor of the royal court’s preparations for the imminent demise of Pius IX were true. The Pope’s death was definitely expected before rampant pneumonia so abruptly ended the king’s life. As the Pope’s health kept deteriorating from September on, Victor Emmanuel grew concerned and issued orders on December 31 for mourning and funeral preparations, but through the following month the Pope daily gained strength, easing fears throughout Rome and the world. The news that papal audiences were being resumed kept hopes soaring.

The royal funeral gave rise to deplorable controversies and legal actions against some bishops. As we know from private letters of Turinese priests, Catholics censured Archbishop Gastaldi’s language and actions, but the Catholic press touched on the matter only once, when the liberal press began bandying Don Bosco’s name about. The *Nazione* of Florence informed its readers on February 1 that Don Bosco had gone to Rome expressly “to protest against the actions of the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin on the occasion of King Victor Emmanuel’s death.” This vicious charge could have done Don Bosco considerable harm had not an official notice appeared in *Osservatore Romano* which quoted the Florence newspaper’s reason for the “eminent Turinese priest’s” journey to Rome and then stated: “Knowing where this statement comes from saves us the trouble of branding it a senseless fabrication.”

Don Bosco stayed on at Rome for much more serious reasons besides those we already know. He was still hoping for the

¹¹The following news item appeared on January 11, 1878, in *L'Osservatore Romano*: “As soon as the Holy Father was told of Victor Emmanuel’s critical condition he hastened to send an eminent ecclesiastic to the Quirinal to ask news of the king’s condition and to do all he could for the soul of the sick man to make him worthy of God’s mercy when summoned to appear before his Maker. The ecclesiastic was barred from the king, but we know from another source that the king did receive the sacraments, asking the Pope’s pardon for the wrongs for which he was responsible.” [Author]

privileges he sought [for the Salesian Congregation] and with undaunted singleness of purpose set about searching for new avenues of approach, as we can see in his letter to the Dominican Father Tosa, consultant of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.¹²

Rome, January 11, 1878

My dear Father Tosa:

I enclose a copy of the rescript granting the Redemptorists' privileges to the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary *per communicationem* [through communication].

I have added to it Leo XII's apostolic letter, which commends, approves and grants the needed faculties permanently and unchanged. If you could only obtain as much for us! You would forever be our distinguished benefactor.

Meanwhile problems keep cropping up: more newspaper releases, more priests' suspensions, increasing turmoil in Turin.

Do what you can to put a stop to these evils, and we shall endeavor to repay you by our feeble prayers.

I ask your holy blessing upon me.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Indeed, he was receiving very sad news from the Oratory. The prefect for externs wrote to Father Berto:¹³ "Tell Don Bosco to send a blessing quickly to the entire Oratory because it seems that this year sickness and death have set up their headquarters here." Don Bosco promptly addressed this reply to Father Rua:¹⁴ "I sympathize most warmly with you for the sickness which is plaguing our house at Valdocco. Let us always bless the Lord in prosperity and adversity. I will remember you all in a special manner at Mass; the Oratory priests should do likewise, and both artisans and students should receive Holy Communion and say a Hail, Holy Queen and an Our Father to the Blessed Sacrament every evening at night prayers for the next two weeks. I shall also

¹²We quote from Father Berto's copy of the original made at Rome in October 1894. [Author]

¹³Letter from Father Bologna, January 21, 1878. [Author]

¹⁴Letter of January 24, 1878. [Author]

ask the Holy Father, with whom I have not yet been able to speak, for a special blessing. I hope to have an audience with him soon.”

At the Oratory over a hundred boys had been obliged to go home because of sickness during the short span of thirteen days; by February 1 there had already been seven deaths, and several more were dying.¹⁵ On February 4 Father Rua informed Father Berto: “We have truly devastating news to give you about the boys in general. . . . Please be tactful in giving the news to Don Bosco. After Omodei’s death, five more boys died at home. Yesterday our good cleric Arata died of a violent sickness at Lanzo, after only four days in bed. Here we have yet another boy fighting for his life. . . . Perhaps a fifth or more of our students are home because of illness; so you see how badly we need prayers. Please, do pray and ask Don Bosco to do so too, although there is really no need. I am telling you these things confidentially; we are not letting the boys know everything lest they and their parents become alarmed.”

In an undated letter, which seems to have been written after receiving this information, Don Bosco wrote: “Enormous amount of work!” Then he went on to tell Father Rua: “When you visit our beloved patients, give them all my love and tell them I am praying for them at Mass and sending them my fatherly blessing from the bottom of my heart.” Some slight improvement then took place, and by mid-February the plague—possibly a typhoid epidemic—had ceased.

As of January 24, Don Bosco still had not been able to see the Pope. As soon as he had heard that the Holy Father was once again giving audiences, he applied but received no reply. He was aware that Pius IX’s days were numbered; he was therefore extremely anxious to see once again his most eminent benefactor, all the more so since his heart ached at the thought that Pius IX, as he had been told, was grieving because of him. Twice more he renewed his request for an audience, but in vain. He went several times to St. Peter’s and roamed the precincts of the Vatican, with the hope of some chance encounter that might help him gratify his wish. Pius IX, too, was expecting him. Don Bosco came to know that Pius IX had repeatedly lamented, “I know that Don Bosco is in Rome, but he does not even bother to see me. I have some important things to

¹⁵Letter from Father Bologna to Father Berto, February 1, 1878. [Author]

tell him. I never treated him that way. Oh no, I treated him well!" Don Bosco manifested his grief to Cardinal Oreglia, and the latter took the matter to heart. Finding that there was some intrigue going on, he informed Pius IX and reprimanded [Monsignor Macchi] the Pope's personal chamberlain, but it was all to no avail. Yet, if that monsignor had so important a position in the Vatican, he owed it to Don Bosco himself, as Father Lemoyne explained in detail.¹⁶ Thus it happened that Don Bosco never again saw the angelic Pope Pius IX alive.

This reveals how powerful were Don Bosco's adversaries in Rome. But he had even further proof of it. Archbishop Joachim Lluch y Garriga of Seville had called on him to plead for a Salesian school in his diocese. Don Bosco told him that he would agree if the archbishop would obtain the communication of privileges for him from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

"Oh, that will be very easy," the prelate replied.

"Don't be so sure of it," Don Bosco rejoined.

"You will see that I can obtain it for you immediately."

The archbishop called on Cardinal Ferrieri and spoke to him about it with all the confidence in the world. To his dismay the cardinal cut him short with a very brusque "No" and turned his back on him. Some time before, Cardinal Ferrieri had told the Pope, "If they want to grant the privileges to Don Bosco, they can wait until I am dead!"

The impossibility of communicating directly with Cardinal Ferrieri daily made Don Bosco's position more difficult because he urgently needed to solve several problems without having to wait for a final verdict on the entire question. The recent liturgical calendar of the archdiocese of Turin contained new rules and underscored older ones which ran counter to the legitimate autonomy of the Salesian Congregation. Furthermore, a recent occurrence was discrediting the Salesians in the eyes of the archdiocesan clergy, while the irregular and highly embarrassing suspension of Father Lazzero had gone into its sixth month. Finally, Archbishop Gastaldi's letters threatening to suspend Don Bosco himself were still in full force. Under these circumstances, knowing of no better course, Don Bosco turned to Archbishop

¹⁶See Vol. VIII, pp. 255f. [Editor]

Bianchi of Mira, secretary to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who was kindly disposed toward him, and sent him a memorandum or petition accompanied by necessary documentation.

Rome, February 4, 1878

Most Reverend Excellency:

Very regretfully I must inform you that the archbishop of Turin has not desisted from the measures which, oppressive as they are for all religious congregations, are exceptionally so for the Salesian Congregation.

The Holy See forbade this prelate to publicize anything concerning our present litigation, but Archbishop Gastaldi has resorted to publicity through the diocesan liturgical calendar and his pastoral letters.

In this year's calendar he has confirmed the admonitions and decrees of past years and has added new ones. He wants to interfere in the internal administration of religious houses, perturbing their cherished autonomy by which they are bound to the Holy See, which approved them and to which they are directly responsible. I enclose an authentic copy of these admonitions and decrees.

On January 8 he published a circular in which Number 8 reads: "As usual, the reverend superiors of religious orders will send directly to the chancery the faculties of their confessors and preachers in alphabetical order and will comply with the regulations governing diocesan priests in all which may concern them, specifying expressly if their members frequently receive the sacrament of penance."

Members of religious orders who reside in Turin have declared that they will not abide by such regulations. This puts us in the difficult situation of either acting differently from the other religious or risking the threatened suspension of all Salesian confessors active in the sacred ministry in this diocese.

Then, on January 12, a pastoral letter was sent to all parish priests to be read in their churches. Those who have read it unanimously declare that it is a sequel to the pastoral letter of August 4, 1877 and that it contains two blatant allusions harmful to the Salesian Congregation.

The first is that we are guilty of exercising moral coercion in inducing our pupils to embrace the religious life. The archbishop has already made this accusation against us to the Holy See, though his allegation is utterly gratuitous and could never be substantiated by fact.

In the second allusion he lists boarding schools to which parish priests are to direct their young students, pointing out that these are the only schools that provide clerics for the major seminary. He does not mention three boarding schools of ours which from 1847 to 1877 have turned out three-quarters of the present clergy of the Turin archdiocese. I am told that

other publications of the same kind are now in preparation.

While most respectfully informing Your Excellency of the above, I feel I am doing my bounden duty to express a humble but fervent wish that Your Excellency and—thanks to your good offices—His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect will deign to exercise your weighty authority to revoke the six-month-old suspension to which Father Lazzero, director of the motherhouse in Turin, has been subjected without cause and without canonical procedure.

At the same time, I ask that the refusal to confer orders on Salesian clerics cease, so that the present-day scarcity of priests in our Congregation may be remedied. Finally, I plead that the letters threatening suspension of the superior general of the Salesian Congregation be declared null and void.

Such steps are indispensable if peace of mind is to be restored among the unfortunate Salesians who are really downhearted and hindered in their work for the welfare of souls, a work they are eager to do and whose need is greatly felt.

In profound esteem and greatest respect I am truly honored to remain,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

The death of Pius IX was soon to stall any action on these matters. Hopes of his recovery and return to health had been heightened by the description of the audience he had granted to the parish priests of Rome and representatives of chapters and religious orders at the customary offering of candles [on the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary] on February 2.¹⁷ On that occasion the Pope had delivered an address in a strong voice, ending with an earnest recommendation for religious instruction of children. That feast marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of Pius IX's own First Communion—a happy event which inspired crowds of children in Rome and elsewhere to receive Holy Communion and pray for the Holy Father. Those prayers offered up by so many pious souls and innocent children were to accompany him into eternity, for the ailment which had long troubled him suddenly

¹⁷This feast commemorated Our Lady's observance of the Old Testament law requiring the mother of a newborn son to go to the temple to be purified. Although Mary's divine motherhood exempted Her from this law, She submitted to it out of obedience. This celebration is now called the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and is still observed on February 2. [Editor]

worsened during the night of February 7. The next morning the Holy Father received the Last Sacraments, and, as city bells pealed the evening Angelus, the great and long-lived Pontiff fell asleep in the Lord at the very hour foreseen by Don Bosco on February 7 of the previous year.¹⁸

To his dying day the saintly Pius IX spoke of Don Bosco who, despite endless preoccupations and troubles, had organized the first congress of Salesian cooperators on January 29, feast of St. Francis de Sales, at Tor de' Specchi; Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, the Pope's vicar, attended. Some days later, the Pope requested a detailed report of the whole meeting and expressed his fatherly gratification. Almost on the eve of his passing, he again spoke of Don Bosco to Cardinal Simeoni, secretary of state. "Don Bosco is a man who does a vast amount of good," he told him. "He is a man of wonders, and I respect and love him very much. But the people he sends out to the missions are too young, and I fear his missions will end like those of . . ." These fears, springing from his love for Don Bosco, proved groundless, but it is only fair to say that if he spoke thus it was not out of personal knowledge, but due to the reports of one who strove to discredit the Salesian missions in the Pope's eyes lest he keep favoring them. On the day of Pius IX's death, Don Bosco wrote these memorable words to Bishop-elect [Edward] Rosaz of Susa:¹⁹ "At 3:30 this afternoon²⁰ Pius IX, sterling and incomparable star of the Church, ceased to live. You will read details in the newspapers. Rome—and I believe the whole world—is in a state of consternation. . . . Certainly, before long, he will be elevated to the altars. . . ." Petitions from Italian Catholics for an immediate start of the cause of his beatification began to pour into Rome as early as March of that same year. In 1907, Pius X approved the introduction of the cause, appointing a tribunal

¹⁸See pp. 25ff. [Editor]

¹⁹Corrected from "Bishop-elect of Aosta." [Editor]

²⁰At 3:00 P.M. on February 7 [1878], Della Rocca, the secretary general to the Department for Home Affairs, issued an official bulletin in the Chamber and the Senate, announcing that the Holy Father's death had occurred at 2:00 P.M. The Stefani News Agency spread this erroneous government announcement throughout Europe. Toward 4:00 P.M. a second bulletin was posted in the lobby of the Parliament Building at Montecitorio announcing that as yet there had been no official notification of the Pope's death. Don Bosco must certainly have written this letter after hearing the false bulletin. [Author]

under the chairmanship of Cardinal Cretoni, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.²¹

One curious detail, missed by journalists, was recorded by Father Berto and confirmed by Don Bosco. Toward 5:45 that same evening, as Don Bosco was coming down from the Campidoglio with his secretary, the two wolves which the city of Rome kept caged on the hill to recall the age-old legend began to howl so loudly and mournfully for more than five minutes that passers-by stopped and a gentleman standing near Don Bosco and Father Berto exclaimed: "You may weep, you may well weep, for the Holy Father is dead!" "He had in fact died that very minute, as was later confirmed," Don Bosco wrote in the margin of Father Berto's reminiscences.

Blocked from seeing Pius IX alive, Don Bosco was finally able to see him in death as he lay in state in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter's from Sunday morning at 7:00 on February 10 until 4:00 in the afternoon of Wednesday, February 13. According to ancient custom, the feet of the Holy Father extended beyond the closed chancel. An immense crowd of people came and went constantly throughout the four days. On February 12, Father Berto wrote: "We went to St. Peter's to view the body of the Holy Father. We were able to kiss his foot and touch it with several objects."

Don Bosco came away deeply grieved, but his sorrow changed to joy when he returned to his lodging. On January 27, almost despairing to obtain an audience with the Pope, he had sent him a petition²² for papal titles of honor for distinguished Salesian benefactors. Two days later the Holy Father had graciously condescended to grant his petition on behalf of Count [Prospero] Balbo, withholding action in regard to the other two [Chevalier John Frisetti and Mr. Emmanuel Campanella]. The brief was

²¹Monsignor Mercurelli, secretary of briefs to princes, mentioned this in his polished Latin oration *De eligendo Pontifice*, which according to tradition was read after the Mass in honor of the Holy Spirit prior to the conclave. Addressing himself to the blessed Pontiff's soul, he exclaimed: "God allowed you to leave our earth, noble victor in an age of iniquity. He rewarded your virtue by the love, longing, regret and praise of the entire world. One day He may allow your memory to be hallowed with the highest honors reserved to God's heroes." *L'Unità Cattolica*, in its issue of March 1, 1878, wrote: "Pious souls the world over, imbued with God's spirit, feel that it will not be long before the cause of beatification of the great Pius IX will be introduced." [Author]

²²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

drawn up, signed, and put together with other papers for delivery. That day Monsignor Peter Lasagni, secretary of the College of Cardinals, delivered the document to Don Bosco which made Count Prospero Balbo a "Commendatore" of St. Gregory the Great. This was then the last proof of affection which the great Pius IX gave to Don Bosco shortly before entering eternity.

Since the office of secretary of state ceased with the Pope's death, Cardinal Pecci, camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, took over the reins of government together with Cardinals Di Pietro, Asquini and Caterini. During the official nine-day mourning, the greatest preoccupation of the Sacred College centered on preparing for the imminent conclave. Would the cardinals be able to meet in Rome, and would the election proceed freely and smoothly without rioting, intrigue, pressure or interference of any kind from the Italian government? Here and there attempts were being made to urge the Italian government to interfere despite the Law of Guarantees which forbade such action. There were also noisy anticlerical demonstrations in several Italian towns with shouts of "Down with the guarantees!" These and other reasons gave the government much worry. On February 13 under the heading "Ministerial Fears" *La Capitale* wrote: "Judging from what we have seen, there have been some highly apprehensive hours in the cabinet for fear that a majority of cardinals might vote to hold the conclave away from Rome. Such a possibility was viewed as a frightening, irreparable mistake." *La Libertà* too, under the same date, carried an article entitled "Conclave and Parliament" which stated: "One should not misstate the present situation. Serious as it is, it could become far more serious through some imprudent act. As of now, it is in our best interests that the conclave perform its lofty function in Rome not only in the midst of absolute order, but in an atmosphere of such security as to make it impossible for fanatics to claim that it would be preferable to hold it elsewhere."

Don Bosco's good offices were extremely valuable during those days of fearful uncertainty. Unofficially he was asked to investigate the government's actual intentions, and Cardinal Pecci found the choice excellent and timely. He therefore called on Minister Pasquale Stanislaus Mancini, chancellor of the Department of Grace, Justice and Cults, but was received most rudely; the

minister would not even deign to look at the humble priest who stood before him, hat in hand. His answers to Don Bosco's respectful questions were so curt, almost ironic and contemptuous, that on taking his leave Don Bosco felt justified to say with dignified composure: "If nothing else, sir, you might at least respect those who sent me."

His main task, however, was to confer with Minister Crispi of the Department of the Interior. The first meeting in Crispi's office was far from encouraging. As Don Bosco entered, the minister was slouched in an armchair, legs crossed, smoking. Don Bosco remained standing, but the minister did not alter his position.

"Who are you?" he asked curtly.

"I am Don Bosco."

"What do you want from me?"

"I have come to inquire if the government intends to protect the freedom of the conclave."

"And who are you to ask me such a question? What's your authority?"

"I am to bring the reply to the cardinal camerlengo."

"Well, the government will do its duty!" the minister answered curtly.

"What do you mean by 'duty'?"

"Who sent you here to question me?"

"Do not go into that," Don Bosco answered quietly. "I need a prompt reply. If the government does not intend to guarantee full and complete freedom for the conclave, I must know immediately. The cardinals do not wish to delay their decision. All plans have already been made for any contingency. The conclave will meet at once, unfailingly, in Venice, Vienna or Avignon, as circumstances will dictate.²³ But permit me to point out to Your Excellency that it would be to your interests that the Pope be elected in Rome. You gentlemen should not forget the Law of Guarantees; bear also in

²³Among the curia cardinals the prevailing opinion was that the conclave would best be held away from Rome. In fact at their first meeting, on the evening of February 8, when they were to decide where to hold the conclave, only eight of the thirty-eight cardinals voted in favor of Rome. Even Cardinal Pecci himself read out a rather lengthy address in favor of leaving Rome, without, however, suggesting another location. But at their second meeting the following evening thirty-two voted in favor of Rome. Cardinal Pecci first suggested Malta, but later settled for Rome. (R. De Cesare, *Il Conclave di Leone XIII* [The Conclave of Leo XIII], pp. 157-165, Città di Castello, Lapi, 1888.) On the other hand, on the strength of an article in the Law of Guarantees, Crispi had at first claimed the right to send government

mind that the European powers are watching the developments of an affair which touches the whole world.”

Crispi sat quietly for a while in deep thought. Then, rising to his feet, he held out his hand to Don Bosco, saying: “You may assure the cardinals that the government will itself respect and enforce respect for the conclave, and that public order will not be disturbed in the least.”

Sitting down again and motioning to Don Bosco to do the same, he exclaimed, “So you are Don Bosco!” He then went on to chat familiarly about Turin and the newly rising Valdocco Oratory which he had known in 1852 when he dwelt in a small apartment in Via delle Orfane near Our Lady of Consolation Church, to which he now and then went to pray. After recalling these distant memories, he asked: “Don’t you remember that sometimes I came for confession to you at the Oratory?”

“I don’t recall,” Don Bosco smilingly replied, “but if you wish, I am ready to hear you here and now.”

“I really would need it!” the minister added, laughing at the words which had escaped his lips. He also showed that he had not forgotten the bygone years when he used to talk with Don Bosco, receiving comfort and assistance from him.²⁴ He asserted that in those days his troubles had been less than they were now. “But then I had faith,” he added. “Yes, I had faith; but we have none anymore!”

Crispi also asked Don Bosco about his undertakings, and gradually the conversation veered to various educational methods, the minister deploring the disorders which occurred in juvenile prisons. It was a lengthy conversation, during which Crispi listened to Don Bosco’s opinions and expressed the hope that those reformatories where juveniles, instead of improving, deteriorated morally would be entrusted to educators trained at Don Bosco’s Oratory. He also asked Don Bosco for a brief description of his

officials into the Vatican to supervise the conclave. The article stated: “During the vacancy of the Holy See, no judiciary or political authority may, for any reason whatsoever, prevent or curtail the personal freedom of the cardinals. The [Italian] government shall ensure that no exterior violence perturb the meetings of the conclave or of any ecumenical council.” He was dissuaded from this action by the forceful intervention of Bismarck, who, in view of his future plans, was anxious that a Pope of indisputable canonical legitimacy be elected by the conclave. (*Civiltà Cattolica*, Year 34, Series XVIII, Vol. IX, 1903, p. 392.) [Author]

²⁴As regards Crispi’s relations with Don Bosco in 1852, see Vol. IV, pp. 289f. [Editor]

educational system so that he could examine it. Don Bosco knew quite well how impossible it would be for the minister to adopt such a course of action; nevertheless, he let him talk and promised that he would send him his own views on the matter. Their conversation could not have ended on a more cordial note.

Without delay, Don Bosco went [to the Vatican] to report on his semi-official mission. There the minister's reply was considered satisfactory. Crispi was indeed a forceful man and kept his word. Thanks to his energetic action, the demonstrations which had begun to disrupt public order came to an end as if by magic.

At the Vatican Don Bosco made a singular encounter. He was eager to talk with Cardinal Simeoni, former secretary of state, but, not knowing where he could find him, he roamed through the stately halls and corridors where day and night masons and carpenters were busily erecting rows of roomettes, as in a seminary, and setting up temporary accommodations for some four hundred people, as prescribed by Church law. The cardinals alone numbered sixty-one. Never before had there been such a large group, except in the conclave of Gregory XV, in which sixty-seven cardinals had participated. Pressed by time and limited by space, workmen had to improvise all necessities because conclaves had formerly been held in the Quirinal Palace, where a section of the magnificent building, known in Roman parlance as "the long sleeve," offered suitable accommodations for the cardinals and their attendants. The work was supervised by Cardinal Joachim Pecci, camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church. As Don Bosco reached a turn on a wide staircase, he met the prelate. Don Bosco's guide quickly whispered, "It's His Eminence, Cardinal Pecci." Facing the cardinal, Don Bosco approached him and in a filial tone said, "Please allow me to kiss your hand."

"Who are you to approach me so confidently?"

"Just an ordinary priest who would now kiss the hand of Your Eminence while praying very hopefully to kiss your sacred foot within a few days."

"Think of what you are doing. I forbid you to pray as you said."

"You cannot forbid me to ask God to do what is pleasing to Him."

"If you pray for this, I must threaten you with censures."

“So far you have no power to do so. When you will have it, I shall respect it.”

“But who are you to talk so self-assuredly?”

“I am Don Bosco.”

“For heaven’s sake, enough of this! There is work to be done. This is no time to joke!”

So saying, the cardinal went on his way to inspect and give instructions.²⁵

What Don Bosco had said was fulfilled. The voting began on February 19, and the next morning Cardinal Pecci was elected Pope. He took the name of Leo XIII, in memory of Leo XII²⁶ for whom he had always felt great veneration. It was astonishing how, once the outcome of the election was known, everyone—friends and foes alike—unanimously acclaimed him. Allegedly, even Bismarck, chancellor of Germany, said that no better choice could have been made. Within twenty-four hours Don Bosco professed his devotion for the new vicar of Jesus Christ in the following letter:

Rome, February 21, 1878

Your Holiness:

Your extraordinary election as supreme ruler of the Church filled the hearts of all Catholics with the greatest joy. The Salesians, religious of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales, humbly but most affectionately and respectfully share the joy of all your spiritual children.

The Salesian Congregation was advised, guided and approved by Pius IX of revered memory, but it still needs the protection of Your Holiness in order to attain a necessary degree of stability for the greater glory of God.

All the Salesians unanimously venerate and acknowledge Your Holiness as successor of St. Peter, supreme ruler of the Church and vicar of Jesus Christ. Along with the boys entrusted to their care, they offer with filial affection their efforts, solicitude, property and life, both in Europe and in foreign lands, to Your Holiness should you see fit to avail yourself of their services.

With supreme veneration and unswerving devotion they implore your apostolic benediction. For the first time, and on behalf of all the Salesians,

²⁵Rev. G. Bosco, *Il più bel fiore del Collegio Apostolico* [The Fairest Flower of the Apostolic College], pp. 57f, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1878. [Author]

²⁶Leo XII was Pope from 1823 to 1829. [Editor]

the undersigned has the inestimable honor of prostrating himself at the feet of Your Holiness.

Your most affectionately and devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco,
Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation

Leo XIII granted his first public audience on Saturday, February 23, to a large group of French pilgrims who came to pray at the tomb of Pius IX and offer their homage to his successor. They were received in the west wing of the second floor loge. A vast number of people, including Don Bosco and his secretary, had been admitted to the papal antechambers to see the Holy Father as he made his way to the audience hall.

The Pope and his retinue emerged from the apartment of the secretary of state. When His Holiness passed by Don Bosco, Monsignor Cafaldi, temporary chamberlain and papal master of ceremonies, said to him: "I wonder if Your Holiness already knows Don Bosco." "Who does not know Don Bosco?" the Pope answered. "He is known everywhere for his zeal." Then, turning to Don Bosco, he added: "I hear that you are thinking of opening a house here in Rome." "That depends on Your Holiness," Don Bosco said. "Of course, of course," the Holy Father replied. In a few words, Don Bosco presented the homage of the whole Salesian Congregation and requested a special blessing for everyone.

The new Pope may well have first met Don Bosco's Salesians at Ariccia during the summer of 1877. One day, at about four in the afternoon, a gaunt and pale-faced prelate, readily recognized as Cardinal Pecci, a regular vacationer in that area, knocked at the very simple Salesian residence. What an honor and joy, but at the same time what an embarrassment for the Salesians! "My dear Salesians," the cardinal kindly said, "I am terribly thirsty! Please give me some water." They had no soft drinks at all, just cold water and a little sugar. After quenching his thirst, the cardinal asked some information about the house and then left, expressing his thanks.

Despite his gracious words at that general audience, it is certain that in the early days of his pontificate Leo XIII was quite set against Don Bosco—so much so, in fact, that he refused to grant him a private audience. Bishop Manacorda of Fossano called on

the Pope several times to pay his respects and also to sound him out, but no sooner would he mention Don Bosco than the Pope would change the subject and extol [Father Joseph] Cottolengo,²⁷ adding that he truly was a saint. The bishop would then remark that holiness could manifest itself in different ways according to the persons and the mission entrusted to them: in some, the gift of efficacy of speech, in others knowledge, heroic penance, contempt of riches and so on. Father Cottolengo, for instance, had distinguished himself by his utter abandon to Divine Providence, whereas Don Bosco did all he could to accomplish his goals while entrusting himself blindly to God's providence. In conclusion, it did take some time to erase the prejudices which, doubtless, other people had sown in the Pope's mind, but, at last, this was achieved. The truth will out.

The sharp eye of Leo XIII could not but read between the lines of a letter which Don Bosco sent to him as a sequence to his first message of homage. Father John Turchi, a former Salesian pupil who tutored the children of Rome's Count Mirafiori, testified to this. One evening, when calling on Don Bosco to take a brief stroll with him, the count found him intent on finishing a lengthy letter of several pages. With his customary familiarity to former pupils, Don Bosco told him, "Let me finish this letter to the Pope. It's about *de modo tenendi* [what course to follow] at the present time." Father Turchi, however, never knew whether this letter was addressed directly to the Pope or to a commission of cardinals. The letter must still exist somewhere. Among the copies which Father Berto made of Don Bosco's several manuscripts, one seems to be a summary of this very long letter mentioned by Father Turchi. Although we cannot assert that Don Bosco, acting under superior orders, submitted a lengthy report to a commission of cardinals concerning the matters summarily listed in Don Bosco's manuscript, this is what it said:

A lowly servant of God, who at times called the attention of our Holy Father, Pius IX, to matters which he judged to have come from the Lord,

²⁷In 1832 Father Cottolengo opened La Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza in Turin, a vast institution which at the present time shelters over seven thousand patients. Father Cottolengo died in 1842 and was declared a saint in 1934. [Editor]

now humbly but literally informs His Holiness, Leo XIII, on matters which seem to be of no slight importance to the Church.²⁸

Preamble of Things Most Necessary for the Church

A voice says:

“They seek to scatter the stones of the sanctuary, to demolish the wall and the rampart and thus create confusion in the city and in the house of Sion. They shall not succeed, but they will do much harm.

“The Church’s supreme ruler on earth must take action and repair the damage wrought by the enemy. This evil stems from the scarcity of evangelical workers. It is hard to find Levites in the midst of comfort; they must be sought without delay among farmers and workmen, irrespective of age and status. They should be gathered together and trained until they can bear the fruit the nations are awaiting. All effort and sacrifice toward this end is always inadequate to the evil which can be prevented and the good which can be accomplished.

“The religious who now are scattered should be reunited; if they cannot form ten communities, let them strive to form even one and faithfully observe their rules. The laity, drawn by the light of religious observance, will join the children of prayer and meditation.

“Our times need new religious congregations. By their steadfast faith and undertakings they must wage war on the idea that human beings are only matter. Worldly-minded people despise those who pray and meditate, but they shall have to believe what they see. These new congregations need assistance, support, and the good will of those who have been chosen by the Holy Spirit to guide and rule God’s Church.

“Therefore let it be borne in mind that evangelical workers for home and foreign missions will be obtained by promoting and fostering priestly vocations, by bringing together the scattered members of religious orders and restoring the observance of their rule, and, finally, by helping, encouraging and guiding the new congregations.”

In a third letter Don Bosco petitioned the Holy Father to approve a formula he had composed for the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. Although he had done this when he was still in Rome, the dateline of the petition was “Turin, March 10, 1878.”²⁹ It was approved on May 18 by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, although

²⁸Here Father Berto later added the following remark: “This lowly servant of God is none other than Don Bosco, who wrote this summary in his own hand. I copied it and had it delivered to Cardinal Bartolini so that it could be given to the Holy Father shortly after his election while Don Bosco was still in Rome.” [Author]

²⁹This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

the rescript was not received until late in December. This is the formula now [1932] found in the appendix of the Roman Ritual.

Don Bosco tried to reach the new Pope through letters, since then and there he had no way of obtaining an audience. Some feared that he might reopen the subject of the Conceptionists. Others thought that he sought to win the Pope to his side in his dispute with Archbishop Gastaldi, all the more so when the latter unexpectedly showed up in Rome on February 28 with his secretary, Father Maffei. They were guests of the Rosminians, with whom a dear friend of Gastaldi, Cardinal Hoenlohe, also resided. Monsignor Macchi, the former papal chamberlain reconfirmed in office, sided with both of them [against Don Bosco]. Of all people, this monsignor had no reason at all to oppose Don Bosco; rather he owed him an obligation because in 1867 Don Bosco, impressed by his courteous manners, had won him the favor of Pius IX, who had not been kindly disposed toward him. It was only after he had paved the way for his Vatican career that Don Bosco became aware of his true character, and then it was too late, and he had to suffer the consequences of his own influential recommendation.

A rather revealing incident occurred during Don Bosco's stay in Rome. Monsignor Macchi was doing his utmost to avoid him. One morning Don Bosco went to celebrate Mass in the convent of Tor de' Specchi. While he was at the altar, the papal chamberlain arrived at the convent. Without saying a word about the monsignor's presence, the mother superior invited Don Bosco to have a cup of coffee and he obliged. The monsignor, in turn, had no idea that Don Bosco was there. When they came face to face, Don Bosco was astonished, but the other managed to assume a nonchalant air. He had two elegant, somewhat impudent young Swiss ladies with him. As soon as he saw Don Bosco, the monsignor, nodding toward them, remarked, "What pretty girls God made!" Don Bosco remained silent. Unabashed, the other went on, "What do you think of these young ladies?"

"I am not a connoisseur and don't know what to say," Don Bosco replied, "but I do not think that such manner of talk befits a priest."

"Well, if all priests were like you, things would be much better!" the other exclaimed ironically.

"Do not say if they were like me, but rather if they were as Our Lord would have them be," Don Bosco corrected him.

Interrupting this unpleasant exchange, the mother superior asked the monsignor, "When can you get Don Bosco an audience with the Holy Father?"

"Well," he replied, "the Holy Father has so many things to do that he can't very well see Don Bosco now, but we shall see. . . ."

"Oh! We have already had four audiences with the Holy Father this month!" the two young women boasted.

Upon hearing this, Don Bosco could not refrain from saying, "You have been received by the Holy Father four times in one month, and I have been waiting several months with so many things to attend to, and I still cannot get an audience with the Pope and return to Turin."

Monsignor Macchi then repeated that he would try and kept up his compliments to the young ladies. In disgust Don Bosco rose to his feet and walked out, remarking to the mother superior who followed him, "I never thought you would spring this kind of a surprise on me."

"Forgive me, Don Bosco. I did it only so that you could meet the monsignor and ask him personally for an audience."

"Well, do me the favor of seeing to it that I never meet him again."

During the month of February Don Bosco gave an example of Christian charity and unselfishness which stirred the admiration of all who came to know of it. On March 1 Anthony Francis Sertorio of Pieve di Teco, a very close friend of his, died in Rome. Don Bosco stayed by his side almost constantly during the last two days and was with him when he breathed his last in a third-floor apartment where he lived. He had once loaned Don Bosco forty thousand lire at 5½% interest. No document other than a simple receipt on a scrap of paper existed to prove the dead man's credit. There had been some hope that, having no direct heirs, the kind gentleman would donate this sum to the Oratory—a possibility he had several times mentioned. However, he was the kind that keep putting things off, and he never got around to drawing up a will. In his illness he asked that Don Bosco visit him. Don Bosco obliged and found him living alone with a maid servant, while all his relatives resided in Liguria. None of them came to see him. Don Bosco called on him daily for a full two weeks, and was, so to speak, master of the house. His friend made no reference to the

forty thousand lire loan, nor did Don Bosco remind him of his promise lest he upset him, and so the patient died without canceling the debt. After the man's death, Don Bosco immediately wrote to Father Rua to get together forty thousand lire to pay the loan.

Some time later, Father Rua informed Father Cerruti, director of our school at Alassio, that the attorney's two brothers would be calling on him to discuss the repayment of their diseased brother's loan. Residing at Oneglia, no sooner did they hear that he had died intestate than they rushed to Rome to make an inventory of his belongings. They found Don Bosco's receipt and immediately went to Alassio to see Father Cerruti. One brother, an architect and an irreligious man, deeply moved by Don Bosco's honesty, told Father Cerruti personally, "Nowadays honesty can be found only among priests. When I heard that Don Bosco had been at my dead brother's home alone as lord and master, with no witnesses, owing him forty thousand lire, I said to myself: *How is this? He could easily have destroyed that receipt in a matter of seconds, and yet he did not do so and honors a heavy obligation. Don Bosco truly is a thoroughly honest man; it would be hard to find another like him.* In 1878 Don Bosco was still the same person he had been when, as a young boy in 1829, he could have taken the money which Father Calosso had left him, without the deceased's relatives being any wiser for it, and he did not.

This is what happened. When the dead man's brothers came to Rome, Don Bosco told them that he was truly indebted to them and asked if they were willing to donate that money for his boys. The two Sertorio brothers replied that they needed it, and the architect acted in concert with Father Cerruti on transferring the money with the least possible expense to Don Bosco in notary fees and government taxes.³⁰ From then on the architect never stopped praising Don Bosco, becoming far more well disposed toward priests in general than he had ever been.

Two days after the attorney's death, Don Bosco attended the magnificent ceremony of the papal coronation in St. Peter's, where he was able to watch at close range the entire sacred rite as Cardinal Oreglia's attendant. Nevertheless, gaining access to the Pope constantly weighed on his mind, and he grew even more

³⁰This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

concerned the following day when he read in the Turin newspapers that a serious, totally unforeseen setback had struck his plans for building the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as we shall soon narrate. Tired of waiting for an answer to his request for an audience with the Pope, he decided to complain to Cardinal Oreglia. The latter knew of the Pope's desire to talk with Don Bosco and promised to take action, but it was no easy task even for this influential cardinal. Nevertheless, after several unpleasant incidents better left unmentioned, he finally succeeded. On March 14, Monsignor Macchi, the papal chamberlain, sent him Don Bosco's ticket for a private audience at six-thirty on the evening of March 16. Don Bosco arrived at the Vatican punctually but had to wait nearly an hour before he was ushered in. He entered the chambers of Leo XIII at seven-thirty with an eight-point memorandum³¹ and emerged at eight-thirty. He also handed the Pope a petition for the appointment of Cardinal Oreglia as protector of the Salesian Congregation.³²

Since this was his first audience with Leo XIII, who was very gracious toward him, the event seemed so important to Don Bosco that he felt he had to write a detailed account of it. We reproduce it here in its entirety.

I am committing to paper the recollections of my first private audience with Pope Leo XIII so that the very important matters we discussed may not be forgotten, but may serve as guidelines to the Salesians.

1. First we talked about the Church of St. John the Evangelist [in Turin], the Salesian house and church at Ventimiglia, and our work at La Spezia. I told him that these foundations had been zealously promoted by Pius IX, especially because they benefited the young by stemming the influence of Protestantism which practically controlled those areas through kindergartens, hostels and churches.

"I can only value and support such institutions," the Holy Father commented. "Nowadays everyone must earnestly strive to combat error or at least lessen its consequences. This can be achieved by such charitable institutions. Two banners are raised: one symbolizes the Church militant, revealing to the world its existence and its true, unflinching doctrine. If heresy cannot be extirpated despite the efforts of

³¹Omitted here, but described in a pro memoria in the next pages. [Editor]

³²This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

the faithful, let its pernicious consequences be lessened by safeguarding children from the poison they are offered by the bait of food and education. Oh, how well-deserving are those devout, faithful souls who use their wealth to support such charitable undertakings. I regret that the present straitened circumstances of the Holy See rule out any large-scale contribution, but I will do all I can, morally and materially.”

2. Then, I humbly begged him to permit us to enroll him among the Salesian cooperators as Pius IX and several cardinals had done. He asked me for more information, but as soon as I told him that it was an association promoted by Pius IX for the purpose of fostering Christian morals, especially among homeless and neglected children, he interrupted me, saying, “That will do! As of now I am not only a cooperator, but an active worker both as Pontiff and as an ordinary member of the Church. I will readily support all institutions working for the well-being of society, particularly those which care for derelict children. I am convinced that there is no more meritorious undertaking than turning juvenile offenders into upright citizens and good Christians.

“Not long ago, passing through a neighborhood known as the ‘New City,’ I saw a large crowd of youngsters fighting and cursing. I spoke of it with my predecessor Pius IX. A good-hearted man, he realized the need to care for those unfortunate lads, but then and there it was impossible. Can something be done now? Think it over, make plans, and together we shall do what we can.”

“Holy Father,” I replied, “for many years it has been my hope to have a few of my Salesians join forces with Rome’s diocesan priests to care for boys who are in moral straits, especially those who are from out of town. What we badly need is a hostel, a festive oratory, and day and evening classes for the poorest of them.”

“How can we do this?” the Holy Father asked.

“I think we can go about it this way,” I replied. “I will send Your Holiness a memorandum outlining the need of such facilities and naming a great benefactress, the duchess of Galliera. Your Holiness might then recommend such an undertaking; in turn, I would ask Father Margotti³³ to call on this beneficent lady with me. Being a good Catholic, devoted to the Holy See, she will hopefully support our plans.”

“Very well,” the Holy Father concluded, “do as you think best and I will go along with it. However, get in touch with my cardinal vicar. Let him or you report to me, and I shall spare no effort to achieve this goal for God’s greater glory and the welfare of souls.”

3. I asked that a cardinal protector be appointed to act as our

³³Editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*. [Editor]

spokesman to the Holy Father. At first it seemed as if he himself wished to be our protector, but I pointed out that this cardinal would act as our representative with the Pope on matters which we could not personally discuss with the Holy See's congregations because of distance. Actually, the Holy Father himself would be our real protector, while the cardinal would manage our affairs with the Holy See. Hearing this explanation, he concluded, "Then it's all right. I shall so inform the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars." And so, His Eminence Cardinal Oreglia will become the protector of our missions, the Salesian cooperators, the Sons of Mary, the archconfraternity of Mary, Help of Christians, and the whole Salesian Congregation in all matters which have to be cleared through the Holy See.

4. We also talked about finalizing several affairs of our Congregation. They have already been brought to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and in due time we shall receive an answer.

The Holy Father also spoke of our litigation with the archbishop of Turin. He informed me that he is awaiting an official report from the aforesaid congregation and that he has a plan which may hopefully be acceptable to both parties.

5. I mentioned to the Pope a petition for honorific papal titles for two of our benefactors, Chevalier [John] Frisetti and Architect [Emmanuel] Campanella. The favor had been granted by Pius IX, but had been blocked by his death. Pope Leo XIII read the memorandum in which I renewed my petition; then he put it on his desk and assured me that it would be granted.³⁴

6. I then handed over to the Holy Father a letter with a hundred francs from Miss Lorenzina Mazé, and another with seventy francs from Father [Maurice] Arpino. He was pleased. He would have liked to answer them personally, but, unable to, he asked me to write them a note in his name and assure them of his special blessing.

7. As I took my leave, I asked him for a message to us Salesians, our pupils, Salesian cooperators, novices and missionaries.

"Tell your Salesians," he replied, "never to forget the great boon God has conferred on them in calling them to a Congregation where they can do so much good for themselves and their fellow men.

"The establishment of your Congregation, the pupils who receive a Christian education in your several schools, the churches you have opened to worship, the foreign missions which have already borne gratifying fruit, and the fact that all this has been accomplished without material funds is a clear proof of God's blessing. I believe that those who deny miracles

³⁴The two gentlemen became Knights of St. Gregory the Great. The pertinent briefs were issued by Cardinal Franchi, new secretary of state, on May 27. [Author]

would have to say ‘This is God’s doing’ if they tried to explain how a poor priest could feed, house, and provide other necessities for twenty thousand boys. The Salesians should be grateful to the Lord for His goodness and show their gratitude by exactly observing their rules. Religious constitutions help to promote and ensure Christian perfection, but no matter how perfect they may be, they do not bestow that perfection on the religious, who will attain perfection only by putting them into practice. Tell your Salesians to study their rules and to strive to understand and practice them in an exemplary manner. Thus, to their great astonishment, they will see their numbers increase daily and they will save many souls. Our merciful God will help and bless them in all their endeavors.

“As for the boys entrusted to you by Divine Providence, let them bravely fight a formidable spiritual enemy—the fear of what people may think. Teach them their faith; instruct them constantly on the authority of the Holy See and of the Roman Pontiff, the center of all truth! May they learn early in life to know and love Holy Mother Church, their infallible teacher and anchor of salvation. Let them cling to her if they want to be saved. I know that they are praying for me and that they are deeply loyal to the Holy See. Thank them, and tell them that I love them and pray that they may grow in age and in the holy fear of God to the credit of their families and the glory of the Church.

“Tell the Salesian cooperators that they have a very vast field in which they can do a lot of good work. Though they live in the world, they acquire the same merits as those who live in a religious community, for in God’s eyes nothing is more meritorious than to cooperate in the salvation of souls. The mission of the Salesian cooperators, therefore, is to sanctify their own families by their good example, by carrying out their religious duties, and by helping the Salesians in those things which have to be done among the people but can better be achieved by the laity. Remind them of the Gospel message that earthly riches are thorns, and that their possessors must put them to good use, so that at the end of their lives the thorns may turn into fragrant flowers for angels to weave into a glorious heavenly crown.

“As for your novices, let me use the figure of a fenced-in garden rich in exotic plants. How sad if the fence is thrown down, for thieves will rob the fruits and damage the plants. These novices represent the hopes of the Salesian Congregation; recommend to them seclusion and the virtues which they should practice throughout their lifetime. Take good care of their health, which is a very powerful means in benefiting themselves and their fellow men. Remind them often of St. Jerome’s wise words: ‘Never forget what you were when you lived in the world; never demand more than you enjoyed or owned before becoming a religious.’ Take stock of the

virtues they acquire, not of those they must still attain. The novice master must be very strict on this point.”

When the conversation turned to the missionaries, he asked how many they were, where they worked and how many churches and houses they had already opened. I told him we had twelve foundations, between churches and houses, and sixty Salesian missionaries from Europe, one of whom, in his great zeal, had died at his post. I also informed the Pope that we had over thirty native novices³⁵ so that, all told, there were a hundred members between Salesians and postulants. Our boarding schools at Colón, Buenos Aires, and San Nicolás de los Arroyos served as three junior seminaries and would hopefully produce many evangelical workers.

“*Deo gratias,*” the Pope exclaimed. “When speaking of missions and missionaries, the Pontiff has to assume a special attitude, for the missionary who offers his life for the faith is entitled to special consideration. I think of missionaries as so many ambassadors of the Church, sent forth to bring civilization and religion to far-off countries. It is their duty to preserve the faith in countries already evangelized and to spread it among savages. The toilsome journeys, privations and pains which are necessarily their lot in various climates among ignorant and sometimes dangerous foreigners and their discomforts in eating and sleeping and in so many other ways demand our recognition and win for missionaries the gratitude of the Church and of civil society. Thank them in my name for the service they are rendering to the Church. Tell them I love them, esteem them highly, and pray that God may keep them in His grace, protecting them from moral perils and blessing their efforts.

“I bless them with all my heart. Do not forget to remind them to be rigorously vigilant over themselves. What they teach others is very helpful, but what they do in their exemplary lives must, like a beacon, enlighten the minds and warm the hearts of all who see their work and hearken to their words.

“In choosing missionaries, always give preference to those of proven virtue. This is a must for Catholic missions. I realize that, in the midst of their anguish, separated from their country, relatives and friends, they will sometimes lose heart. Then they should recall that they came to those distant lands to promote God’s glory, and that a great reward awaits them in heaven. *Si delectat multitudo praemiorum, non deterreat magnitudo laborum. Momentaneum est quod cruciat, aeternum est quod delectat.* [If the lavish rewards delight us, let not the many travails deter us. Momentary are our tribulations, eternal our delights.]

“I bless you, your Congregation, your pupils, your benefactors, your

³⁵Argentinian or Uruguayan adolescents or young adults who wished to become Salesian priests or coadjutor brothers. [Author]

cooperators, and the sick you have recommended to me. May God's blessing, etc. . . ."

We have absolutely no idea of many things which Don Bosco did while in Rome. Some, for example his conference to the cooperators, we shall describe later in a more suitable context; others will be briefly touched upon in the next chapter, as we put to good use the very few available bits of information.

Those three months in Rome were long engraved in Don Bosco's mind. One February evening in 1879, while reminiscing with a few confreres at Alassio about his many vicissitudes, he made them realize how much he had suffered then because of obstructed audiences, intercepted letters, secret and open opposition on several sides, harsh and humiliating words. . . . He further recalled the dream in which he had seen the Vatican devastated and prelates dragged down the stairs, as though being punished for having failed to listen to advice. He also revealed—with regret—that he had destroyed his correspondence with his adversaries as they died, so that about a third of the confidential information on his life was no longer available.³⁶ The vice-director, Louis Rocca, who heard it all, could never forget the emotion and feeling with which Don Bosco spoke. Contrariwise, Father [Francis] Cerruti, when speaking of it, stated that he had not detected any excessive or wrathful tone. But, suddenly, Don Bosco stopped talking, remained pensive a moment, and then said in front of them all: "I have talked too much." That same evening he made his confession to Father Rocca.

³⁶Don Bosco so believed, but that much less was lost is due to Father Berto, who constantly retrieved the scraps of torn correspondence from the wastepaper basket and most patiently pieced them together so that they could be read and he might copy the contents. [Author]

CHAPTER 15

Don Bosco's Windup of Activities in Rome

ON Sunday, March 17, Don Bosco was invited to dinner at the Irish seminary where he had already often been hosted. Other guests included Cardinal [Paul] Cullen, archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal [Alexander] Franchi, the new secretary of state, and Cardinal Falloux, a curial prelate. Toward the end of the banquet, Cardinal [Henry Edward] Manning, archbishop of Westminster, arrived and requested that Don Bosco see him the following Thursday on some important matters. Don Bosco obliged and spoke at length with the cardinal, who sought Don Bosco's opinion on matters concerning relations between the Holy See and the Italian government. All we know is that the topic had been broached in several meetings of cardinals and that the Holy Father had instructed Manning to seek Don Bosco's opinion on it. Those early days of Leo's pontificate had been marked by much passionate talk of a conciliation. Early in January, a landmark book, *Il moderno dissidio della Chiesa e l'Italia* [The Present Dissension Between the Church and Italy], by Father [Charles] Curci, a former Jesuit, had been published, championing the opinion that it was both necessary and possible to heal the breach between the two. Some months earlier Cardinal Manning himself had issued a pamphlet¹ on the same topic, one whole chapter of which contended that it was absurd to speculate on the likelihood of an agreement. The two publications fueled the polemical controversy and raised to fever pitch the people's expectation of what Leo XIII would do concerning the Roman question. Don Bosco's feelings on this burning problem had been no mystery to both

¹*The Independence of the Holy See*, Fleury S. Kins & Co., London 1877. [Author]

Pius IX and some leading figures in the Italian government. Conciliation of Church and state in Italy “was truly uppermost in his mind and heart—the mind and heart of a truly wise and faithful servant who would never settle for a meaningless agreement, such as many had long been attempting to achieve, only to create greater confusion and misunderstanding. The conciliation Don Bosco aimed at was one which would above all ensure the honor of both God and Church and the welfare of souls.” So proclaimed Pope Pius XI in his solemn address of March 19, 1929, in the decree approving Don Bosco’s miracles, confirming that he himself had heard these words from his lips some forty-six years earlier.

On St. Joseph’s feast day, March 19, Don Bosco chanced to come across a recent pamphlet by Monsignor [Louis] de Ségur, *Tous les huit jours* [Every Week], and, liking it very much, he immediately decided to have it translated into Italian and published in one of the forthcoming issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. The booklet, treating of the fruitfulness of weekly Communion, was translated and published in July 1878.²

On March 21, the feast of St. Benedict, Father Gregory Palmieri, O.S.B. accompanied Don Bosco to the basilica of St. Paul’s Outside-the-Walls, a most delightful surprise for the Benedictine monks and their superior, Abbot John Francis Zelli. It was Don Bosco’s first visit to that monastery and he shared their festive dinner.³ In 1915 Father Palmieri still recalled how, after dinner, during the customary withdrawing into the abbot’s quarters [for coffee], the conversation turned to Archbishop Gastaldi and his opposition to Don Bosco. At a certain point Don Bosco exclaimed, “And yet it was we who made him archbishop!” Father Palmieri, who was also monastery librarian, invited Don Bosco to visit the library. The first signature in the register of illustrious visitors was that of Pius IX. Under the dateline of March 21, 1878, Don Bosco wrote: *Joannes Bosco, sacerdos, amico suo patri Gregorio vita et gaudium* [Best wishes for health and happiness from Father John Bosco to his friend, Father Gregory]. At the age of ninety, but still healthy and mentally alert, Father Gregory, lovingly and reverently reminiscing about his friendship with our

²This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

³See pp. 9f. [Editor]

founder, fondly repeated that Don Bosco's good wishes for him had proved most effective. He always remained a benefactor of the Salesian Congregation.

Having finally obtained a papal audience, Don Bosco hastened to make his good-bye visits. On the evening of March 23 he and Father Berto called on the cardinal vicar, who assured Don Bosco that he would do his best to find a house for the Salesians in Rome. Moments later he asked: "Do you hear confessions here in Rome?"

"Yes, if Your Eminence will allow me."

"Then hear my confession."

Don Bosco had received similar signs of trust from other cardinals. Some not only recommended themselves to his prayers, but also asked for his blessing. They liked, too, his respectful frankness. When a cardinal would make it hard for him to obtain favors he needed for the consolidation and works of his Congregation, he would say, "I need your help in overcoming obstacles, not in creating them. I would like you to fix your consideration on the well-being and profit of the Church and of souls, rather than my own."

On the eve of his departure from Rome, he expressed his views on the war Turin was waging against him in a letter to Cardinal Oreglia, whom he already considered protector of his Congregation, as he had requested of the Holy Father.

Rome, March 25, 1878

Most Reverend Eminence:

I trust that Your Eminence, who has known and blessed our humble Congregation from its beginning, will kindly advise me in my present difficult position.

I trustingly appeal to your kindness because our beloved Holy Father has graciously granted our wish as Salesians to have you appointed as our protector. Your Eminence is well aware of the relentless harassment we have borne for years from His Excellency the archbishop of Turin, without our ever being able to discover the true reason for it. Matters have deteriorated to such an extent that I have been threatened with automatic suspension if even orally or in any other way, personally or through others, I discuss with anybody things that might be unfavorable to the archbishop. The only exceptions are the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the secretary of state and the Holy Father. This severe order is still in force, even though the archbishop himself has

published and continues to issue pastoral letters and pamphlets against us, to which we have made no reply whatsoever, this being our policy and your counsel. Furthermore, with no canonical formalities, Archbishop Gastaldi has suspended several of our priests; those suspensions have been in effect for the past six months and still are. He has also refused holy orders to every Salesian cleric presented to him, with grave prejudice to our houses in Europe and particularly our American missions, which ceaselessly call on us for more workers, so that they may make headway among the native tribes of the Pampas and Patagonia.

Having thus bound the Salesians hand and foot, the archbishop has lodged charges of non-existent facts to the Holy See with the result that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued a written reprimand to our poor Congregation.

In view of this situation (being unable to obtain any answer to my request for instructions), I came to Rome and was assured of prompt action by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Unfortunately, because of painful events which have recently upset the whole Catholic world and the weak health of Your Eminence, after four months of vain efforts I am now forced to return home, having achieved nothing, and possibly having put myself into an even worse predicament than before. The fact is that answers which could offer him quite a number of pretexts for plaguing us further are now being readied to the archbishop's queries. What could be worse? This Friday, instead of remedying the situation, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars will discuss the confirmation of our privileges; rumors have it that it is unlikely for the Holy Father to confirm all of them. This would indeed be very humiliating for our Congregation, which was born in serious straits and which has thus far been granted so few privileges in comparison with other Italian congregations. It would be a severe blow to all Salesians if, notwithstanding heroic personal and financial sacrifices to achieve their objective, they should find themselves totally or partially deprived of the favors which the kind-hearted Pius IX had granted them. The Salesian Congregation obtained certain spiritual favors from several Roman congregations, but very few privileges. It is a fact that all the religious institutes and congregations which were definitively approved here in Italy have been granted the communication of privileges.

So far, we Salesians have been unsuccessful in obtaining this signal favor, which would have freed us from all the harassment to which we have been and still are being subjected. Now, the material and spiritual welfare of my boys (over twenty thousand as Your Eminence is well aware) necessitates my departure from Rome. I would have liked to discuss this painful situation in person, seeking counsel and guidance from

Your Eminence whom I have always found to be a benevolent father, but, unfortunately, during this period you have been troubled by endless ailments which still cause you pain, and it was impossible for me to reach you. I did think of presenting a formal report of our situation to the Holy Father or to Cardinal Ferrieri himself, who has always been very gracious toward me, but, as this would have necessitated bringing up delicate and, I might add, risky matters, I did not care to take such a step without your enlightened advice.

Should you suggest that I return home and keep my peace and wait for time to set matters right, I shall accept your counsel with total submission, but then I fear painful consequences and a serious drop in the morale of poor Salesians. If Your Eminence finds my language seemingly intemperate, please forgive this troubled soul of mine which, seeing these happenings as a real obstruction to God's greater glory, cannot but feel profound sorrow. I had an audience with the Holy Father and was quite enchanted by his angel-like goodness; profound indeed was my consolation. But in my present situation I am forced to acknowledge that roses and thorns go together.

At this trying moment I commend myself to your kindly and holy prayers, asking you to be a father to my poor Salesians, who have no other goal than to work for the Church and the welfare of souls. In lasting gratitude to Your Eminence, they will pray that God will preserve your good health so that you may continue to labor for our holy faith.

Most devotedly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

We do not know if Archbishop Gastaldi's reasons to go to Rome toward the end of February had anything to do with his conflict with Don Bosco. Apart from that, he had some thirty litigations with his priests pending before the Holy See's congregations and had to answer the harsh criticism aroused by the way he had conducted himself at the time of the deaths of Victor Emmanuel II and Pope Pius IX. These were reasons enough for his trip to Rome. Nevertheless, no sooner did he return to Turin than he wrote to Father Tosa, O.P., consultor with the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, asking several questions concerning Don Bosco. Apparently he had done something about this matter while he was in Rome, but had not obtained a verdict. Most likely, his letter was then prompted by his anxiety over the outcome of the

case. Three months previously, Attorney Menghini had advised the archbishop to write to Father Tosa:⁴

Don Bosco has now been in Rome for about a week. I can assure you that the Very Reverend consultant Father Tosa, rector of the Pius Seminary, has been informed of recent gossip and has received the pertinent documentation. This morning Cardinal Ferrieri instructed me to write to Your Excellency *to assure you that nothing will be done without first consulting you*. This is in answer to your last letter addressed to him personally. I'll do my best to keep Father Tosa thoroughly informed; it might be wise for Your Excellency to write to him. Both you and Don Bosco know through me that the last suits pending have been entrusted to the aforesaid Father Tosa for his consultative judgment. I trust that this information will be useful to Your Excellency and enable you to see how fearlessly I strive to safeguard the interests of archepiscopal authority and justice. Don Bosco is busy at work, but may it hearten you to know that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is favorably disposed toward you.

Luckily we have Father Tosa's reply to Archbishop Gastaldi.⁵ It pinpoints the focus of the controversy so well and casts such vivid light on its essential elements that, in the interest of history, we bring it to our readers' attention.

Rome, March 28, 1878

Your Excellency:

I reply to your kind letter sent to me after your return to Turin. I am all the more willing to fulfill this obligation of mine as I more firmly hope that a clearer statement on some matters which you pointed out to me may help me realize my ardent wish to see a lasting reconciliation between you and the Salesian Congregation.

⁴Letter of December 29, 1877. The original is in the keeping of Father [Dominic] Franchetti. We find no further indication of any personal or epistolary contacts between Don Bosco and Attorney Menghini in 1878; his lawyer was then Father Constantine Leonori. Good Monsignor [John Baptist] Fratejacci had died on September 3, 1877. "Unfortunately Almighty God has deprived us of our good friend Fratejacci," Cardinal Consolini wrote on October 30, 1877 to Don Bosco in reply to his letter of October 18. In that letter Don Bosco had apparently mentioned the loss of the friendly monsignor, but we do not know its contents. In a funeral oration of which we have the manuscript, Monsignor Cani declared: "His death was lamented by everyone, especially by his friends, the oppressed, the orphaned, and the poor." [Author]

⁵The original is in the possession of Father Franchetti. [Author]

First, I will not disguise my astonishment at Your Excellency's assertion that Don Bosco's Congregation has not yet produced documentary proof of its exemption from episcopal jurisdiction. This means that certain documents which I distinctly recall having seen among the papers sent to me in December by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars were never handed over to Your Excellency; I have returned those documents to the Sacred Congregation in January of this year. True, no brief was issued by the Holy See to confirm the exemption [of the Salesian Congregation], as has been done for other religious institutes approved in this century, and all the privileges usually granted to approved congregations have not, as yet, to my knowledge, been extended to the Salesians. Nevertheless, the Salesian Congregation and its constitutions were definitively approved by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1874. In a formal reply to certain queries submitted by Your Excellency, I believe, concerning the extent to which the Salesian Congregation was exempt from the ordinary's authority and jurisdiction in virtue of that decree, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars informed you that the same Congregation was indeed exempt from the inspection and jurisdiction of any bishop in whatever concerned its internal life and government, without prejudice, however, to the ordinary's rights in other matters. Indeed, since 1874 the Salesian Congregation has enjoyed the first and main exemption proper to religious orders and congregations approved by the Holy See—namely, immunity from episcopal visitation and jurisdiction as regards the internal regimen, for which they depend directly on the Holy See. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Holy See's directory published in Rome at the beginning of this year registers the Salesian Congregation as one of those approved by and directly subject to the Holy See. On page 460, after listing the Doctrinarians, the Oblates of Mary, the Institute of Charity, etc., the last entry reads: "The Congregation of Salesian Fathers: Father John Bosco, *Superior General*; Father Michael Rua, *Procurator General*."

In view of this, therefore, it is quite clear that your Excellency's belief that the Salesian Congregation is not yet fully exempt from episcopal jurisdiction can give rise to countless unpleasant misunderstandings. As for the other questions raised in your letter, I fully agree with Your Excellency that, without a special privilege, no religious order or congregation may accept a novice without his ordinary's testimonials as prescribed by the decrees of Pius IX. But an ordinary may not deny such testimonials to deserving applicants who wish to enter any approved order or congregation, even of simple vows, as declared by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. In this the Holy See still follows,

as it was wont to do prior to the aforesaid decrees, the practice so scholarly expounded by Benedict XIV in his apostolic letter *Ex quo dilectus* of January 14, 1747, in which the great Pontiff lucidly explained to the learned and illustrious Cardinal Quirini, bishop of Brescia, that canon law did not permit him either to order back to his diocese or to take other action against the elderly, exemplary and most charitable archdeacon of his cathedral who, without the cardinal's knowledge or consent, had suddenly gone to Bologna to become a Jesuit. In view of that, the Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars] ruled that the lack of episcopal testimonials made the admission and profession of novices illicit, but not invalid. Consequently when it happened that some bishop, without citing any reasons, refused to grant testimonials to a candidate of proven virtue, canonically qualified and sufficiently well known to the religious superior, I was assured that the Sacred Congregation ruled that such a candidate was to be allowed to enter the order or congregation of his choice, just as if the necessary testimonials had been regularly issued by his ordinary. In a word, the Holy See steadfastly upholds the principle that anyone—cleric or layman, priest or no priest, who feels he is called by God—must be left free to choose a life which is not only more conducive to perfection, but, as Benedict XIV aptly observed, much safer as well.

Here it might not be amiss to point out that if a priest who is reliably known to be upright and free of any censure in his own diocese applies to a religious superior for admission to an order or congregation approved by the Holy See, there is no Church law, ancient or recent, forbidding that superior to accept him at least as a postulant, if not as a novice, until a reply to the request for testimonials has been received from the postulant's ordinary.

As to the most regrettable incident of Sunday, August 26, of the last year, I hope Your Excellency will allow me to say that the *monitum* in the diocesan calendar (questionably restated by your secretary in a letter addressed to the superior of the Salesian house in Turin) was so absolutely worded, both in the original Latin and in the Italian version, that at first sight it did indeed give the impression that it was your intent that no religious priests, particularly no Salesian priests, should be permitted to celebrate Mass in other than their own churches, without Your Excellency's explicit license. I willingly refrain from any observation of this *monitum*, for this deplorable incident is certainly included by Your Excellency in your declaration to forgive everything. In fact, if I accurately recall, in your letter of December 27 to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, you not only consented, but entreated the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to drop proceedings, once peaceful relations could be assured in the future. I did

not know then, nor do I know now, what action the aforesaid Congregation took or may intend to take on the matter. I can, however, assure Your Excellency that in your suggestion and plea I detected and still detect the wisest, most effective and charitable way to end immediately a controversy which has done no good in the past, nor gives any hope for better results in the future, either for Your Excellency, your diocese or the Salesian Congregation.

Your Excellency will forgive the freedom with which I have ventured to tell you the impression made on me by my reading and my impartial study of the documents pertinent to this controversy. I beg you to attribute it to no other reason than my intense interest and desire that you be tranquil and fully at ease in the government of the illustrious diocese God has entrusted to your care. With the deepest veneration, I am,

Yours most devotedly,
 Friar G. Tom. Tosa, O.P.

A marginal note in the archbishop's own hand on the original letter reads: "Father Tosa of Rome: he, too, a friar, champion of all friars' privileges." Alongside this note, his secretary Canon Chiuso added his own comment in pencil: "Friar."

Don Bosco left Rome at two-thirty on the afternoon of March 26, after a stay of three months and three days. He was met at Sampierdarena by all the members of the superior chapter. He had summoned them there to give the last touches to the deliberations of the general chapter and discuss other business because he had to continue his journey to France before returning to Turin. While at Rome he had again petitioned the Pope to confer papal honors on Mr. [Emmanuel] Campanella and Mr. [John] Frisetti, both well deserving of the St. Vincent de Paul's Hospice, but then and there he did not succeed in obtaining the pertinent documents, as he had wished. Later on, he renewed his petition, addressing it to Cardinal Franchi,⁶ secretary of state, who granted his request with a rescript dated May 27, 1878.

We will now turn our attention retrospectively to Oratory events which happened during Don Bosco's absence. In all truth, he always did his utmost to make his absences as unnoticeable as possible. In all his travels he always thought of everyone and

⁶The cardinal died on July 31, 1878, after barely six months in office, and was succeeded by Cardinal Nina. [Author]

everything, the chronicle states. As a matter of fact, he very often wrote to Father Rua from Rome, giving him messages for everyone at the Oratory: notes to the boys, especially to the upperclassmen, who were extremely pleased, and news items to the students and to the artisans, asking for prayers and Communions for his particular intentions. In short, never a day went by [at the Oratory] without there being some reason for speaking of Don Bosco. As soon as he heard of Pius IX's serious illness, he telegraphed the Oratory and other Salesian schools to request extraordinary prayers for the Pope. "Oh, what a shock the news of Pius IX's death was for the Oratory!" wrote the chronicler.

Financial straits kept increasing with no relief in sight; overdue bills poured in and the bursar had to cudgel his brains to evade embarrassment. Recalling those trying times, it is impossible to overlook the intervention of Divine Providence in bringing together Don Bosco and the wonderful Father Rua who, by faithfully following his superior's instructions and imbuing himself with his spirit, managed to work his way out of awkward situations without alerting anyone in the house to those difficulties. Then there was the typhoid epidemic which forced some two hundred boys to go home and claimed fifteen victims, five of them at the Oratory. Even then, Father Rua admirably handled himself to save the community from panic. Don Bosco was informed somewhat belatedly, for everyone hoped that the epidemic would pass quickly and no one wanted to add to his worries. He ordered special prayers, which were efficacious; at the end of the two weeks he had set for particular prayers, the epidemic claimed no more victims.

During Don Bosco's absence the Oratory was honored by the visit of Bishop [Cajetan] Alimonda, recently installed in the see of Albenga. That day he first visited our college at Valsalice with Father Margotti. The Oratory was prepared to give him a solemn reception, but since his visit to Valsalice lasted longer than expected, he arrived at the Oratory while the community was attending the solemn funeral Mass of Count Louis Giriodi of Monasterolo. In 1850, when Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni⁷ had been arrested, this Piedmontese gentleman had been a member of the Court of Appeals, but he elected to resign sooner than sit in

⁷See the Index of Volume IV under "Fransoni, Louis." [Editor]

judgment over such an illustrious defendant, and consequently he forfeited his judicial career. He then continued to serve his country with works of mercy. Don Bosco was one of those who greatly benefited from his bounty. Bishop Alimonda inspected the Oratory workshops and then entered the church as the boys were singing the *Dies irae*. Sensitive to beauty of any kind, he was enraptured and left the Oratory visibly enthused. He was to return five years later as archbishop of Turin and as a comforting angel to Don Bosco, who, by then, was worn out more by travail than by age.

On the first Thursday of Lent, March 17, a solemn funeral Mass was held at the Oratory for the repose of the soul of Pius IX. A majestic catafalque was erected almost to the very base of the dome; the decorations and singing were such as befitted the greatness of the deceased and the Salesians' gratitude. Beautifully engraved inscriptions praising the lamented Pontiff hung from the catafalque and graced the church's main entrance. Days later, the Oratory choir went to Oneglia for the month's mind Mass of Pius IX, where they again met Bishop Alimonda, pontificating prelate who delivered the eulogy. From there the choir went on to Alassio, Fossano, Alba, Cuneo, and elsewhere in response to the invitation of the respective bishops.

We shall close this chapter, as is our wont, with [some of] the other letters sent by Don Bosco from Rome. Since their large number would encumber our narration, we refer our readers to the last chapter of this volume. They tell us of incidents and events as still uncorroborated by further evidence: e.g., Don Bosco's visit to the Salesians at Albany and Ariccia in January and to those at Magliano in February, the government's violation of his mailing privileges, and a few other matters. Generally speaking, anyone eager to understand Don Bosco more thoroughly had best read his collected correspondence.⁸

During the last weeks of his stay in Rome, Don Bosco planned a publication which could not possibly have been more timely and useful. He decided to compile a booklet in simple, popular style, which would instruct the faithful on papal elections and, by introducing them in a dignified manner to Leo XIII, would help

⁸See Rev. Eugenio Ceria, *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Volumes I through IV, Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino, 1955-1959. [Editor]

keep alive the memory of that happy event whose echoes resounded through the world. To conceive a plan and to carry it out were one and the same thing for Don Bosco, and so he instantly set about putting his idea into effect. His own Preface tells us better than anyone else what prompted him to compile that booklet. It reads:

A papal election is a most significant event for all Catholics. Through it bishops acquire their supreme leader and ruler, the vast family of the faithful once more has a father, and the whole Catholic world witnesses an event which testifies to the uninterrupted succession of the Roman Pontiff from St. Peter to our present Leo XIII. Were one to ask from whom the present Pontiff received the authority which is his, the truths which he teaches, the faith which he champions, the reply is that he received it from his predecessor Pius IX, who in turn acquired it from his predecessor, and so back through the ages, until we come to the Prince of Apostles, who was appointed supreme ruler of the Church, shepherd of all shepherds, by Jesus Christ Himself.

All Catholics would be thrilled to witness personally, observe and take note of every detail of such a solemn and important event, but since only very few can possibly do so, I believe I am doing something pleasing to all by thoroughly recounting this extraordinary event. Those who were present can refresh their memory, and all others will at least be able to see it in their mind's eye. All the more gladly do I write because I narrate what I myself witnessed.

After describing events which preceded and accompanied the election of Leo XIII, I will include in an Appendix the outstanding features of his pontificate and a brief biography of each of the cardinals attending the conclave.⁹

To avoid repeatedly referring to my sources, I shall state here and now that they are [renowned Church historians and archaeologists] such as [Anthony] Pagi [O.F.M.], Navaes, Giaconio, [Caesar] Baronio [C. Or.], [Stephen] Morcelli [S.J.], and others. Anyone desiring more details on some topics might consult Moroni's *Enciclopedia dell'Ecclesiastico* [The Ecclesiastical Encyclopedia], and other contemporary publications. I shall endeavor to cite my sources and illustrate the sacred functions with pertinent detail and explanation.

May God bless and keep us faithful to the infallible voice of the

⁹Don Bosco included also the biographies of two cardinals who could not take part in the conclave: Cardinal Goffredo Brossais St. Marc, archbishop of Rennes, because of fatal illness, and Cardinal John McCloskey, archbishop of New York, because of distance. [Author]

Supreme Ruler of the Church, whom Jesus Christ shall assist forever and ever.

Don Bosco gave the booklet a delightful title: *Loveliest Flower of the Apostolic College*. It had three parts: Part I contained historical, canonical and liturgical information on conclaves, an account of Pius IX's death and funeral, and a detailed record of Leo XIII's election and subsequent solemnities; Part II offered with utmost simplicity a profile of the new Pope from childhood through his election; Part III contained biographical sketches of sixty-three cardinals, two of whom had been unable to join in the balloting. Father [John] Bonetti collaborated with Don Bosco in compiling Leo XIII's biography.¹⁰

Don Bosco took the cardinals' biographies from *L'Unità Cattolica*, in which they had appeared at brief intervals between February 14 and June 29. He did not quote them *verbatim*; twelve of them he touched up to eliminate whatever savored of political acrimony.¹¹

He sent a complimentary copy of this booklet, handsomely bound, to each cardinal and to several other curia prelates. First of all, he presented one to the Holy Father with a covering letter, assuring him of the devotion, gratitude and veneration of all the Salesians.¹²

As was customary, he received an acknowledgment from Cardinal Nina through the Secretariat of State. Among other things, the reply stated that the Holy Father "saw in that booklet a new proof of his zeal for the welfare of souls, and of his filial devotion to the Holy See." Prior to receiving it, Don Bosco had learned from a reliable source that the Pope placed the booklet on his desk, remarking to the bearer, "I mean to read it."

Don Bosco had sent the booklet to the Holy Father for a special reason: he wanted the Pope to see how enthusiastically the Salesians worked, how deeply attached they were to the Holy See, and how zealously they strove to instill in others respect and love for Christ's Vicar. He felt that he had attained his goal and was in a

¹⁰This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

¹¹This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

¹²This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

holy way pleased.¹³ He also sent a covering letter¹⁴ to the cardinals to go with the booklet.

Letters of thanks which Don Bosco received from Italy and abroad showed him how welcome his gift had been. Outstanding in their praise were Cardinal [Dominic] Serafini, Cardinal Louis Marchese of Canossa, Cardinal [John] Antonucci, Cardinal [Dominic] Consolini, Cardinal [Thomas] Martinelli, and Cardinal [Aeneas] Sbarretti.¹⁵ Only in Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia's letter do we find two sentences which must surely have pierced Don Bosco's heart like thorns. After giving the reasons for his belated thanks, the cardinal went on: "I sympathize with you for your difficult position, but I cannot beguile you by promising an early solution. The policy of no longer granting the communication of privileges to any congregation is now in force; under these circumstances would it be wise to hope for Cardinal Ferrieri to make an exception just for you?" This was the cardinal's reply to Don Bosco's request that he support his petition for the privileges which he had submitted to Leo XIII toward the end of October through Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, the Pope's personal secretary.¹⁶

The booklet, which was published in September in *Letture Cattoliche* Nos. 309-310, contained also a brief review of Leo XIII's main accomplishments up to the end of August. It ended with the following address to Catholics by Don Bosco:

These achievements and many others which we pass over for brevity's sake rightly prompt us to look to Leo XIII as a dawn heralding great triumphs for the Catholic Church. It is our duty to help him with our prayers, our obedience to our shepherds and our truly Christian conduct. Let us get down to business, let each one in his own sphere of action promote and restore good morals and family religious practices, let each of us banish sin from our lives and from those dear to us, and before long the Lord's day will dawn.

¹³Chronicle of Father Barberis, December 1, 1878. [Author]

¹⁴Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹⁵This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

¹⁶We do not have the letter which Don Bosco wrote to the cardinal on this matter on November 19, 1878. On October 26 Monsignor Boccali wrote to Don Bosco: "I have given to the Holy Father your petition regarding the communication of privileges for your Congregation." [Author]

CHAPTER 16

Don Bosco's Second Journey to France and Illness on His Return Trip

DON Bosco's travel plans included a trip to France once he left Rome. He was to visit our house at Nice and then proceed to Marseille, where Canon [Clement] Guiol had long expected him. From there he would go on to Fréjus to see the bishop or his representatives about opening two houses there.

He prepared his visit to Nice long in advance. First he gave thought to the *sermons de charité* [charity appeals] which were drawing the French in large numbers. Recalling the excellent moral and financial results produced by the appeal of Bishop [Gaspard] Mermillod¹ [of Geneva], he turned to another illustrious prelate highly renowned in France and elsewhere—Bishop [Felix] Dupanloup of Orléans. They knew each other. Don Bosco had first seen him in Rome at the Vatican Council, without, however, making his acquaintance. On May 1, 1877, when the bishop stopped off at Turin as Archbishop Gastaldi's guest, Don Bosco was asked to have dinner with the French prelate, who had expressed a wish to meet him. It was on that occasion that they may have come to an understanding concerning Nice, and Don Bosco was given a formal promise to which he referred in a letter. Be this as it may, he several times renewed his invitation to the bishop from Rome once he felt that he would have time to attend to this matter. Furthermore, Don Bosco was also seriously considering proposals to open new foundations in France. The following letter to Father Ronchail is not dated, but its contents show that it may have been written in mid-January 1878.

¹See Vol. XII, pp. 90f. [Editor]

Dearest Father Ronchail:

1. I am awaiting Bishop Dupanloup's reply, so as to settle the matter of our *sermon de charité*.

2. The regulation handbook for the house at Cannes is out of the question. We must have a clear-cut agreement. Unless we are absolutely free and independent, it is better to suspend all negotiations and move on to St. Cyr or Marseille.

3. Tell our dear boys that I'm sorry I do not have time to write to each of them, but I thank them for their good wishes, which I shall personally reciprocate in February during the carnival season. Among other things we shall offer a most cordial toast to Mr. Audoli²

4. I need a countless number of French priests and clerics. Train them for me. Remember me to all our confreres, friends and benefactors in the Lord.

Please mail the enclosed letter to Baron Héraud.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Most anxious to use Father Ronchail to organize well wishers in Nice and win their good will and financial help, so as to consolidate the Salesian work in the city, he again wrote to him on February 2:

Rome, February 2, 1878

My dear Father Ronchail:

I have written to Bishop Dupanloup twice and so far have had no reply. I do not know what to think. He made me a formal promise. Talk to the baron about it and then either write to the bishop yourself or get someone to do so. If feasible, I myself might preach in a pinch, but discuss all this with our generous friend. I could come anytime between February 20 and March 20, but I need to know somewhat beforehand so that I can work out an adequate program. . . .

You may have learned from the papers of our first meeting of Salesian cooperators in Rome under the chairmanship of the cardinal vicar, who addressed the meeting. Cardinal Sbarretti was there too, with many archbishop, bishops and prelates. It was a great historic event for us. . . .

I am leaving Rome right after the 15th of this month. God bless us all. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

²The often mentioned Audoli had come to live in community with the Salesians, among whom he died. [Author]

Actually, for reasons we do not know, his departure from Rome was deferred to Tuesday, March 26. As soon as he arrived at Sampierdarena, he sent his final instructions to Father Ronchail.

Sampierdarena, March 27, 1878

My dear Father Ronchail:

I enclose a rough draft of an appeal to be printed and distributed to our helpers and their friends. It may be a little hard to decipher, but I have no time to have it rewritten. With a fervent act of contrition you will be able to understand it more easily. Then the baron can polish it up with a few masterful strokes at which he is so good.

After you have neatly translated it into French, call on the bishop and ask him three questions: 1. Does he object to its printing? 2. Will he attend? 3. Will he allow us to add, after the Holy Father's words: "We are equally delighted by the joyful news that your most beloved bishop has graciously condescended to become a Salesian cooperator and as such attend the meeting." If you are unable to go, send Father John Baptist³ and speed things up.

Saturday afternoon, God willing, I shall be with you by two o'clock. Have something well cooked ready for me as befits a poor toothless old man.

I shall remain until after the collection, and then we shall go to Fréjus, St. Cyr, Navarre and Marseille. I have already written to the curate of St. Joseph's about this.

I forgot to tell you that the appeal will be signed by the two of us or by others, if the baron thinks so.

Probably Father Rua or some other miscreant of the superior chapter will be coming with me. We are all gathered here to wind up the work of our general chapter at Lanzo.

We shall talk about many other matters when I see you. Take heart; I am praying hard to God for you and hope that He will listen to me. May He bless you.

Regards to all, and please pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

During 1877-78, the trade school division at Nice got under way and academic courses were begun. To the sixty boarders were added several day students. The festive oratory was, as usual, a

³Father John Baptist Ronchail was the director's cousin and prefect of the house. [Author]

beehive of activity. Don Bosco's circular was a warm appeal to the citizens of Nice to contribute financially to the Salesian work on behalf of needy youngsters and to learn about it by attending the Salesian conference.⁴

He left out the speaker's name on the program because he was still awaiting an answer from Bishop Dupanloup, which finally came on April 5, 1878, courteous, but negative; it was mailed from Hyères, a health resort [where the bishop was resting]. Before leaving Italy, Don Bosco had also mailed a flyer to Salesian cooperators appealing to their charity for the purchase of a former Capuchin monastery which he planned to turn into a motherhouse for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.⁵

He remained three days at Sampierdarena, until March 30. As the members of the superior chapter went back to Turin, he left for the French Riviera with Father Rua. In Nice a heavy outlay of funds for necessary repairs and provisions had emptied the coffers; the bill for food alone was ten thousand francs in arrears. Furthermore, for lack of funds, contributions no longer came from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Still, Don Bosco did not blame or complain, but rather encouraged the confreres and in public praised their work. Such confidence in Divine Providence had an excellent effect; it kindled new flames of charity toward him, so that help began to come in to wipe out his debts and to expand St. Pierre's Hospice.

One of the things he intended to do in Nice was to take Father John Baptist Ronchail, the prefect and the director's cousin, to Navarre or Marseille and install him as director at either house. Father John, who as yet knew nothing of Don Bosco's decision, outdid himself in preparing the best possible reception for his arrival on Sunday, March 31. That day he himself had preached twice, since the director was ill, and that evening he wore himself out to direct a little stage play as a joyful close of the festivities. Don Bosco was very pleased, but this was unfortunately Father John's last effort. The next day, thoroughly exhausted, he slept longer than usual. On Tuesday Don Bosco had to leave for Fréjus, where he was to discuss the contract for the houses at Navarre and

⁴This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

⁵See p. 140. [Editor]

St. Cyr, to be opened at the bishop's request. Father Ronchail sent word to him that he was too tired to get out of bed. Unworried, Don Bosco left. Since the people he was to meet at Fréjus had not been informed of his coming in time, the meeting was postponed until the following Friday, and Don Bosco went on to Marseille.

After his two previous visits to Marseille, the notion of having a Salesian house there had taken root, though not in its eventual final form. One thing was clear: on returning from Turin in May 1877, Canon Guiol was no longer satisfied with a simple festive oratory for his parish; he wanted something similar to what he had so much admired at Valdocco. Bishop Place was of the same opinion, and both men knew what steps they had to take to achieve their end. There was in Marseille the Beaujour Society founded by good Catholics for the purpose of assisting charitable institutes for morally endangered youth. It purchased the premises on which such institutes were to be housed and conducted all legal transactions with the government. The bishop, who constantly kept after Canon Guiol to hurry things along, instructed him to discuss the project with the society's board of directors in August 1877 and achieved good results.⁶

On the street from which it had taken its name, the society owned a building where the Brothers of the Christian Schools conducted an elementary school for the children of poor workmen and a hostel for young apprentices, the so-called *Maison Beaujour*. Father Guiol's first thought was to replace the Christian Brothers with the Salesians. After consulting with the Brother Superior and obtaining his consent, he duly informed Don Bosco. Then, for reasons of health, he had to take a vacation, and negotiations came to a standstill. Since information from Marseille stopped, Don Bosco, who was then presiding at the general chapter at Lanzo, had [Father Ronchail] write to the canon [on September 19, 1877] to inquire about the matter. Three days later, Don Bosco himself wrote, stating how anxious he was to hear from him about the progress of the negotiations. In the meantime, the board of directors discussed the proposal to leave the elementary school in the

⁶Minutes of the Beaujour Society, August 17, 1877. We will avail ourselves of our Father Riviere's examination of the minutes of the board of directors of the *Maison Beaujour*, especially in regard to the entries of 1877 under August 4 and 11, September 22, and November 6 through November 27, 1877. [Author]

Christian Brothers' care and entrust the trade school to the Salesians. The board voted in favor but then an unforeseen event caused a setback. The provincial transferred a brother who was a mainstay of the *Maison Beaujour* and who was deeply beloved by the pupils. Displeased by this decision, the board sought to have it revoked, but the superior was adamant. Naturally all talk about the Christian Brothers staying on after that ceased. The entire *Maison Beaujour* was to pass into Don Bosco's hands. His arrival to finalize a contract was set for early December 1877.

Our readers know very well that Don Bosco could not possibly go to Marseille at that time. Now it was Canon Guiol's turn to fret at the many delays which seemed to him unreasonable. Father Ronchail sent him an explanation from Nice [on December 10, 1877], and, two days later, Don Bosco himself wrote to him with his usual serenity.

December 12, 1877

Dear Father:

I was truly glad to learn from you that the negotiations for a boys' home are practically completed. I thank God and you too.

I intended to come to Marseille immediately, but an urgent matter forces me to leave next Monday for Rome to oblige the Holy Father who asks us to open, at his own expense, a hospice at La Spezia—a stronghold of Protestantism and Freemasonry—and a house in Rome. Therefore, I shall not be able to get to Marseille until the end of next January. If need be, however, I can empower Father Ronchail to visit you before that time and do whatever has to be done. You can address all correspondence to me in Rome at Torre de' Specchi.

Somewhat belatedly, I wish to thank you most sincerely for your thoughtfulness and charity toward our missionaries. They were all very enthusiastic about your goodness to them and wrote unanimously: "The parish priest at St. Joseph's is a genuine Salesian cooperator. God grant him a long life!"

All our missionaries are still on the high seas. The first group will arrive tomorrow at Montevideo, and the others will land at Buenos Aires the day after.

We all recommend ourselves to the charity of your holy prayers.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

His allusion to the missionaries recalls to mind a somewhat singular occurrence. Besides Father Costamagna's party, Monsignor Ceccarelli's companions had also experienced Father Guiol's goodness of heart under exceptional circumstances. They set out from Nice and, figuring that it would be night when they arrived in Marseille where they knew nobody except Canon Guiol, they decided to send him this telegram: "Four Salesians arriving ten o'clock tonight." Since no one in the group was known to him, they signed it "Don Bosco." The canon, convinced that Don Bosco himself was coming, prepared a solemn reception. No sooner did the train steam into the station than our Salesians found themselves solicitously approached by noblemen who invited them into their handsome coaches, while Canon Guiol raced up and down the platform anxiously asking, "Where is Don Bosco?" Only then did the embarrassed missionaries realize their blunder. They felt even more chagrined when they were ushered into a splendidly illumined hall, with a sumptuously laid table, and were welcomed by a group of noble women who kept looking toward the door in the hope of seeing Don Bosco. The missionaries wriggled out of this awkward situation as best they could. Whether or not Father Guiol believed Monsignor Ceccarelli's explanation that Don Bosco had been obliged to remain at Nice on unexpected business, he showed no sign of vexation after his initial disappointment. Taking leave of his invited friends, he gave the four visitors a most cordial welcome.

Meanwhile the weeks flew by and Don Bosco still could not say even approximately when he might be able to leave Rome. In January 1878 he sent word through Father Ronchail that he hoped to be in Marseille toward the end of the month and that, if there was urgent need to sign the contract, Father Ronchail could personally go there with full powers to commit the Salesians anywhere in France.⁷ In Marseille, however, they preferred to wait until Don Bosco himself could come. Thus January and February went by, but pressing matters did not permit Don Bosco to leave Rome. He so informed Canon Guiol in a letter dated March 14.⁸

At long last, Don Bosco arrived at Marseille with Father Rua on April 2. While a guest at the rectory of Canon Guiol, parish priest

⁷Letter from Father Ronchail to Father Guiol, Nice, January 4, 1878. [Author]

⁸Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

of St. Joseph's, he met two people who were destined by Divine Providence to serve as God's instruments—Madame Prat-Noilly and Father [Louis] Mendre. While attending Mass in St. Joseph's Church, Madame Prat-Noilly was struck by the priest's bearing at the altar. His demeanor, exact observance of the rubrics, unconstrained composure, an air, in short, of holiness, caused her to exclaim, "That priest must be a religious." An irresistible urge to know him better led her to the sacristy to inquire who the priest saying Mass so edifyingly might be. Canon Guiol amply satisfied her curiosity.

"May I meet him?" the lady asked somewhat hesitantly.

"Immediately, madame," Father Guiol replied.

She was introduced to Don Bosco then and there, and nothing more was needed to win the good lady's heart and soul to Don Bosco's cause and let her put her full trust in him. God alone knows how much she did for St. Leo's Oratory after that; let it suffice to say that she was truly its mother to her very last breath.

Father Mendre, too, became Don Bosco's friend in a very simple way. Until April 1878 he had no idea who Don Bosco was. Then one day Father Guiol, whose vicar he was, called him and said, "Don Bosco is about to start something here in Marseille. Do all you can to help him." Don Bosco proved to be a magnet for Father Mendre, for from the very start this good priest gave himself to him. The French Salesians still recall Don Bosco's words, "Father Mendre stole my heart." With even greater reason one could reverse the words because for some forty years Father Mendre, first as vicar and then as pastor, constantly showed his benevolence to Don Bosco's sons.

While thus making new friends and renewing contact with older ones, Don Bosco concretized his plans with Canon Guiol, to whom he entrusted the drafting of a contract with the Beaujour Society according to the terms they had agreed upon. He also asked the canon to forward the contract to him at Alassio or Sampierdarena.

Shortly after his arrival at Marseille, Don Bosco wrote a cryptic letter to Father Lemoyne, of which we do not have the original but only this note in Father Lemoyne's handwriting: "One day I was in [Don Bosco's] antechamber, deeply anguished, worried about something I no longer recall. A few days later, perhaps the next day, although I had mentioned my problem to no one, I received a

short letter from Don Bosco which came as a healing balm for my grief. When he returned to the Oratory, he said to me, 'I wrote you that letter to assuage the deep anguish afflicting you here! I really was at the Oratory on that unhappy day.'” On the same sheet of paper, Father Lemoyne quoted Father Francis Ghigliotto’s recollection of a revealing statement Don Bosco made in 1877 when Ghigliotto was a young cleric at the Oratory. In a “Good Night” after the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco said, among other things, “Let us thank the Blessed Virgin because this year, more than in the past, She has granted me the grace of seeing everyone’s conscience as clearly as in a mirror.”

On the appointed day Don Bosco was again in Fréjus where he finalized plans for the forthcoming opening of a Salesian house at Navarre, the name given to a very large parcel of land in the municipality of Crau, where an agricultural school, St. Joseph’s Orphanage, had been founded by a Father James Vincent. The land had been donated by a Mr. Roujou on condition that it be used for charitable purposes. Ten years later, Father Vincent leased the orphanage and the rest of the land for ninety-nine years to three diocesan priests who hoped to resurrect the third order of Trinitarians. The lease also carried the obligation of using the premises for charitable purposes. Less than five years later the tenants, hopelessly in debt, followed their bishop’s advice and handed over the entire property to Don Bosco for twenty thousand francs as a refund for capital improvement and another seventy thousand to repay a loan made by several benefactors to their institute. Don Bosco, however, was still bound to use the property for charitable works; should this condition be not accepted, the whole property was to be handed over to the hospital at Hyères.⁹

As we have already said, Bishop Ferdinand Terris of Fréjus and Toulon was the prime mover and staunch champion of this transaction, but unknowingly he was also the instrument of Divine Providence. His first letter concerning the agricultural school reached Don Bosco in August 1877. Two things are noteworthy: first, the bishop’s offer was totally unexpected, as there had not been negotiations of any sort or the faintest likelihood of any such proposal being made; secondly, Don Bosco had always shown

⁹This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

himself averse to opening agricultural schools because, in his opinion, they did not provide sufficient guarantee of safeguarding the students' morals. The night before he received the bishop's letter, Don Bosco had a dream which rid him of this fear and disposed him to receive such a proposal favorably. During the September retreat at Lanzo he narrated his dream. Count Cays, then a cleric, Father Barberis and Father Lemoyne were among those who heard it. Father Lemoyne wrote the account as follows:¹⁰

I dreamt that I saw an area which did not resemble the open meadowlands outside Turin. A small rustic cottage facing a small threshing yard seemed to beckon me to its shelter. It was a bare cottage, like that of peasants, and the room in which I stood had doors opening into several other rooms both above and below its level. All around I saw racks for farm tools, but no people. I looked through the rooms, but they were all empty. The house was totally deserted. Then, hearing the voice of a small boy singing loud and clear, I stepped outside and saw a lad, ten or twelve years old, sturdily built, dressed like a farmhand. He was standing erect and motionless, staring at me. Beside him stood a peasant woman neatly dressed. The youngster was singing in French:

Ami respectable, [Respectable friend,
Soyez notre père aimable. Be our kind father.]

"Come in, come in," I said from the doorway. "Who are you?" Still staring at me, the young lad repeated his song. "What do you wish from me?" I asked. The same song was his answer.

"Please say something," I insisted. "Do you want me to let you in? Do you want to tell me something? Would you like a present, a medal perhaps, or money?"

Ignoring my questions, the youngster looked about him and then started to sing another ditty:

Voilà mes compagnons [Behold my companions
Qui diront ce que nous voulons. Who will tell you what we want.]

¹⁰In his two-volume biography of Don Bosco, on p. 190 of Volume II, Father Lemoyne states that Don Bosco had this vision in September during the spiritual retreat while the General Chapter was in session at Lanzo. But Don Bosco's reply to the bishop of Fréjus was dated August 3, when there were no retreats at Lanzo in September; this cannot be doubted because Father Lemoyne was present. We may also be certain that Don Bosco had his dream the night before receiving the bishop's letter, but there must certainly be a miscalculation about the date when it happened. [Author]

Instantly, a multitude of boys appeared from nowhere, heading toward me through the untilled fields. They sang in unison:

<i>Notre père du Chemin,</i>	[Father of the Way,
<i>Guidez-nous dans le Chemin;</i>	Guide us along the Way;
<i>Guidez-nous au jardin,</i>	Lead us to the garden,
<i>Non au jardin des fleurs,</i>	Not to a flower garden,
<i>Mais au jardin de bonnes moeurs.</i>	But the garden of good morals.]

“But who are you all?” I asked in astonishment, as I got close to them. The same lad again replied in a ditty:

<i>Notre Patrie</i>	[Our country
<i>C'est le pays de Marie.</i>	Is the land of Mary.]

“I don’t understand!” I said. “What are you doing here? What do you want from me?”

They all chorused:

<i>Nous attendons l'ami</i>	[We are awaiting the friend
<i>Qui nous guide au Paradis.</i>	Who will lead us to Paradise.]

“That’s fine!” I exclaimed. “Do you want to come to my schools? You are too many, but we shall manage somehow. If you want to learn your catechism, I will teach you; if you want to come to confession, I am at your disposal. Or would you like me to train you in singing or teach you or give you a sermon?” Gracefully they again chorused:

<i>Notre Patrie</i>	[Our country
<i>C'est le pays de Marie.</i>	Is the land of Mary.]

While listening, I asked myself: *Where am I? In Turin or in France? Just yesterday I was at the Oratory! How strange this is! I don't understand!* As I was immersed in these thoughts, the good woman took the youngster by the hand and, pointing to a further, more spacious farmyard, told the crowd, *Venez avec moi* [Come with me], and led the way.

All the boys who had clustered about me followed her. As I joined them, new groups of boys arrived carrying sickles, hoes and other farm tools and joined the crowd. I gazed at them more astonished than ever. Surely I was neither at the Oratory nor at Sampierdarena. I kept saying to myself: *I can't be dreaming because I am walking.* If occasionally I slowed down, the throng surrounding me jostled me forward.

Meanwhile, I kept my eyes on the woman who was leading us and who aroused my keenest curiosity. Modestly dressed, she wore a red kerchief around her neck and a white blouse characteristic of young highlanders or

shepherdesses, but I sensed an air of mystery about her, although her appearance was quite ordinary. Adjacent to the larger farmyard stood another rustic cottage, and not far from it was a very beautiful home. When all the boys were gathered in the farmyard, the woman turned to me and said, "Look at these fields, this house! Look at these boys!"

I looked. The boys were a multitude—well over a thousand times as many as at first had appeared.

"All these boys are yours!" the woman went on.

"Mine?" I echoed. "By what right can you give them to me? They are neither yours nor mine. They belong to God!"

"By what right?" the woman continued. "They are my children and I entrust them to you."

"But how can I look after so many energetic youngsters? Don't you see how wildly they chase each other through the fields, leap over ditches, and climb trees? Look at those boys fighting. How can I keep order and discipline alone?"

"Shall I tell you?" she exclaimed. "Look!"

Wheeling about, I saw a second huge crowd of boys surging forward. Over them the woman cast a broad veil, covering them entirely. I had no idea where she got it from. Some moments later she pulled it away, and all the boys had turned into priests and clerics.

"Are these priests and clerics mine?" I asked the woman.

"They will be if you train them!" she replied. "If you want to know more, come here." She bade me draw closer to her.

"Tell me, my dear lady," I asked, "what place is this? Where am I?"

She did not reply but motioned to the first crowd of boys to gather about her. They came running and she cried out: *Attention, garçons, silence. Ouvriers, chantez tous ensemble* [Attention, boys, silence. Sing all together, you workers]. At her signal, the boys broke into a vigorous chorus: *Gloria, honor, gratiarum actio Domino Deo Sabaoth* [Glory, honor and thanks to the Lord God of Hosts]. Their singing was full of harmony, voices ranging from the lowest to the highest register, the lowest notes apparently rising up from the ground and the soprano voices blending into the highest heavens. Their hymn ended with a resounding *Ainsi, soit-il* [Amen]. Then I woke up.

Don Bosco's reply to the bishop is quite noteworthy, for it is written in an almost lighthearted tone of self-assurance unusual for him at the start of any transaction. Perhaps Father Guiol knew the bishop's intentions and, unbeknown to Don Bosco, prepared the ground for the meeting mentioned at the beginning of Don Bosco's letter.

Turin, August 3, 1877

Your Excellency:

Nothing could have been more welcome than Your Excellency's gracious letter. Had it not been for a slight indisposition which I suffered on my way back from Marseille I would have gladly seized the honor of paying you my respects in person with Father Guiol.

As regards the two orphanages which Your Excellency has offered me, I accept them in principle, and with entire trust in you I leave the implementation of this matter in your hands. Furthermore, I will send you Father Joseph Ronchail, director of St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice, so that I may more particularly carry out your revered wishes and you may more clearly grasp the aims of our Congregation. Father Ronchail has full authority to negotiate and conclude whatever Your Excellency may judge most conducive to God's greater glory.

As I pondered the tenor of your letter, a thought came to me which I now offer for your approval. We [Salesians] are particularly interested in gathering poor boys who are in danger in festive oratories, and in sheltering the most destitute among them in hospices where they can learn skills and trades. The more congested a town, the better it is for us. We already have orphanages at St. Cyr and Navarre; couldn't we open a house in Fréjus with a boys' festive oratory and Sunday school, a night school for adults and an orphanage similar to the ones we have in Turin and Nice? May not God inspire Your Excellency to find the necessary funds should the need arise?

You may think me idealistic. True, but before taking action one should first discuss the matter at hand. To avoid pitfalls, then, I am submitting this idea of mine and other ideas as well to your enlightened wisdom, assuring you that your decision shall be my guide for all I do.

In the meantime I humbly pray God for your good health. Invoking your holy blessing on myself and my boys, I am deeply honored to be,

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The meaning of Don Bosco's dream was made clear in the proposals which he received from France a few hours later. Events made it certain that there could be no other explanation for it. When Father Lemoyne visited the new house shortly after its opening, he was given the first proof. Walking up from the main floor, where the director's office was located, to the second floor, he entered a room with wall racks and doors leading to other rooms on other floors. He also spotted a small barnyard and a huge,

neglected meadow encircled by trees in front of the building. A little further away was a much larger barnyard where the first boys' home was later built.

The dream came true to its last details. Father Lemoyne, unprepared for such a shock, wrote to Don Bosco immediately, but a still greater surprise awaited Don Bosco himself, when he went there on his second visit. As he was strolling across the property, the boys, headed by one who was holding a bouquet of flowers, ran ahead to meet him.

When he was but a few steps from the boy, Don Bosco blanched, so strong was his emotion, for the boy's build and features fitted the dream exactly. He was Mickey Blain, who became a Salesian and who at this date [1932] resides in our school at Nice.¹¹ That same evening an assembly was held in Don Bosco's honor. As the choir accompanied Blain's solo, Don Bosco pointed him out to Father [Peter] Perrot, the director, and said, "That boy looks like the boy of my dream."

Don Bosco's dreams often carry prophetic overtones, but one must be cautious of hasty interpretations since often enough predictions may be fulfilled only after a long time. What is a commentator to say if prophets themselves do not always grasp the significance of their own prophecies? Until a few years ago an enigma overshadowed the second group of boys who in the dream were not carrying farm tools and were transformed into priests and clerics. Attempts were made to solve it, one interpretation being that Don Bosco foresaw priestly vocations rising from the pupils of the agricultural school. This explanation, however, was unsatisfactory as being too vague to explain the clear-cut symbolism of the tableau. But when, with total oblivion of the dream, the decision was made to open a house at Navarre for the Sons of Mary—later also a novitiate—the true meaning of that prophecy began to show itself. Father Candela, a councilor of the Superior Chapter, was the first to draw attention to it in the fall of 1929. While preparing to confer the clerical habit on twenty postulants who had been trained there and elsewhere, he marked them out as the ones who fulfilled the transformation which Don Bosco had foreseen fifty years before.

¹¹Father Blain, born at Toulon (France) on September 29, 1865, became a Salesian in 1884 and a priest in 1888. He died at Bourbilly (France) on August 7, 1947. [Editor]

Let us now return to Friday, April 5, 1878. On that day Bishop Dupanloup of Orléans and Don Bosco agreed on the overall outline of the foundation, but [as the saying goes] things are easier said than done. The negotiations whose results we shall soon describe were thorny. The difficulties were complicated by three other projects already in progress: the orphanage at Saint-Cyr, founded by Father Vincent; a Salesian house at Cannes, initially planned as a large-scale institution; and the house at Marseille, which demanded an adequate start in view of the city's importance.

Bishop Terris [of Fréjus] was also interested in the Saint-Cyr project, as we have seen from Don Bosco's correspondence on this matter through Father Ronchail. After Don Bosco's prompt acceptance of the bishop's proposal, the latter took it for granted that the Salesians would be available for the new school year 1877-78, and so, as summer ended, he became uneasy and kept prodding Father Ronchail and Don Bosco. Sometime between October and November, Father Ronchail wrote to Don Bosco, "I have just received a letter from the bishop of Fréjus pressing us to open the two orphanages. He says . . . that he has written to you and has received no reply. I have also written to you three times after my return from my spiritual retreat and have not had a reply." Don Bosco passed this letter on to Father Rua with a few scribbled lines: "Word was sent to Father Ronchail to start doing something at Saint-Cyr with a priest and the nuns; next he was to draw up a contract, and then he was to give his attention to Cannes and Navarre." Here is the letter that Don Bosco had written to Father Ronchail:

[No date]

Dear Father Ronchail:

My overload of work quashed my good intentions, but it's now time to act. Take Father Perrot, your cousin Father John Baptist and a coadjutor brother and call on the bishop of Fréjus. After placing our two confreres somewhere, tell them to grow in numbers. Then take a look at the house set for the nuns and tell me how many you need; we can send them at once because they are ready. Finally, find out what we can do for Cannes and Navarre and let me know without delay.

I have already written in these terms to the bishop of Fréjus. For your information I will send you a priest; I hope you will be satisfied with his work and talents. You yourself will have to work a miracle and see to it that everything proceeds smoothly. . . .

Warm regards to our dear sons, brothers and friends, our good Mr. Audòli among others. Tell him that I want him to become a saint and to help others do the same.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The personnel mentioned in the letter was not sent at that time. When Don Bosco visited our house at Nice in April 1878, Father John Baptist Ronchail was still there as prefect. As we have already said, he was in poor health when Don Bosco left Nice for Fréjus. Then, compelled by alarming reports, Don Bosco speedily returned to the bedside of his beloved son whose condition became very critical with the onset of pneumonia. On April 7, Passion Sunday, he seemed to have survived the crisis, but the next day complications wiped out all hope. He himself realized his extreme condition and was fully resigned to God's will, his sole regret being that he could no longer help his brother Salesians who were so fond of him.

On the morning of April 9 he asked for confession and Holy Viaticum, comforted by the thought that Don Bosco would be at his side till he breathed his last. With holy resignation, Don Bosco kindled in him a fervent sharing in Our Lord's passion and death. Father John Baptist Ronchail gave back his soul to God on April 11 as Community Mass was being celebrated. During his few months' stay in Nice he had won the esteem and love of all both within and outside the house. Don Bosco mourned his loss very deeply. He did not let it show, but the Salesians sensed his profound sorrow when he gave them his blessing before taking leave of them.

In his fatherly concern Don Bosco worried that after his departure the director would feel even more acutely the void left in his house. Therefore, as he was leaving Nice, he recommended him to the kindly Baron Héraud in a letter dated April 12, 1878. After thanking the baron for his continual financial help and benevolence toward St. Pierre Hospice, he asked him to boost Father Ronchail's morale by visiting him as often as possible.¹²

¹²This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

In the meantime, Father Guiol, pastor at St. Joseph's, unaware of this sorrowful event, did all he could to speed up the negotiations in the happy belief that he would soon have the Salesians in Marseille. On Don Bosco's departure, he lost no time in drawing up a lease for the premises with the Beaujour Society in Don Bosco's name. The lease was for fifty years with satisfactorily equitable clauses and terms. The draft of this agreement is in our files and sets April 21, 1878 as the date for the start of the lease. In his eagerness for the arrival of the staff which was to replace the Christian Brothers, Father Guiol mailed the draft to Don Bosco and followed with repeated letters, all unanswered. Unaware that Don Bosco also had himself become seriously ill, he began to be deeply worried. At last, on April 22, Father Rua allayed his fears with a letter which so faithfully reflects Don Bosco's spirit that we believe our readers would like to know its contents.

Sampierdarena, April 22, 1878

Dear Reverend Father:

Our beloved Don Bosco, indisposed and confined to bed, has given me the welcome task of answering your kind letters of April 10 and 15. Before all else he instructs me (and I feel I too must personally do so) to thank you most fervently for the cordial, brotherly warmth with which you welcomed and hosted us during the few fortunate days we could spend with you. We have no way of repaying you, but God who keeps account of all that is done to others for His sake will do so. On our part we shall fervently pray that in His fatherly generosity He may shower His blessings on you.

How many hard times we have gone through since we left your peaceful residence! You may have heard that when we left Marseille the prefect of our house in Nice was gravely ill. The Lord summoned this beloved confrere of ours on the 11th of this month. He was the one we were mainly relying on for the house we are to open in your city. As if this were not enough, we also received news that another of our priests had died in Turin.¹³ Then death claimed three of our young clerics—all teachers—despite their youth. No wonder that Don Bosco fell ill! He is completely resigned to God's will, but his heart, wounded in its deepest affections, is sorely aching. And how are we to meet our commitments now, especially at Marseille, which we have so much at heart? Despite all this, Don Bosco

¹³Father Joseph Lumello who was stationed at the Oratory but was not a Salesian. He died on April 8. [Author]

was concerned to study at once the draft you sent and to promptly tell you his views on the matter, but his illness would not permit him. We trust you will understand. His health is now on the mend and he hopes that he can soon examine it, present it to the Superior Chapter and give you as favorable an answer as possible. I only ask that you wait patiently a while, since we hope that before long we will be able to give you the reply you are awaiting. Should you need to write again, please address your mail to Turin, for we expect to be there shortly—barring nothing worse.

Meanwhile, pray that the Lord of our little vineyard will send us workers to meet our many spiritual demands. Pray also for our Don Bosco and for me.

Respectfully and gratefully yours,
Fr. Michael Rua

After leaving Nice and stopping briefly at Ventimiglia, Vallecrosia, Alassio and Varazze, Don Bosco fell very seriously ill at Sampierdarena. Exhausted by the wearying journey and foul weather, he was simply too weak to venture on to Turin. The sudden death of his beloved Father John Baptist Ronchail, the staunchest pillar of the house at Nice, on whom he hoped to rely for another important assignment, struck him a severe blow. His grief had been all the harder to bear because he had forced himself to appear calm and almost cheerful so as to boost the low feelings of the confreres. The effort to appear undistressed and to conceal his inner grief was the final straw which broke his resistance. Shaken by such bitter heartaches, his stamina gave way. In total exhaustion he still tried to stay on his feet, but finally he had to take to his bed. To Peter Enria¹⁴ who had been transferred to the St. Vincent de Paul Hospice a year before, he confided that his thoughts kept constantly running to Father Ronchail's death. This coadjutor brother, who nursed Don Bosco with filial devotion, wrote three letters to Joseph Buzzetti¹⁵ describing his patient's condition in the early stage of his illness better than anything we could say.

¹⁴Peter Enria, born in 1841, entered the Oratory in 1854. He later became a lay Salesian and nursed Don Bosco during several illnesses, including his last. He died in 1898. [Editor]

¹⁵Buzzetti and his brother Charles had been among the first boys to attend Don Bosco's festive oratory before it acquired permanent quarters. In 1849 Don Bosco persuaded Joseph to study Latin and prepare for the priesthood. He donned the clerical habit in 1852, at the age of twenty. Unfortunately, the loss of his left finger shortly afterward (*see* Vol. IV, p. 253) disqualified him from priestly ordination. He remained with Don Bosco and greatly helped him in many tasks. In 1877 he took his vows in the Salesian Society as a coadjutor brother. He died at Lanzo in 1891. For further details *see* the Index of preceding volumes. [Editor]

Sampierdarena, April 17, 1878

Dearest Joseph:

Our good father Don Bosco got here from Varazze with Father Rua last night at 11 o'clock. I met him at the station and noticed that he looked exhausted but in good spirits. I took him home and asked if he needed anything. He said no and bade us good night.

The next morning, at about eight, we became very worried when he did not come down to say Mass. After some delay, we went to his room. He was up, sitting in an armchair, very pale, his head bent over a basin into which he was retching. We rushed him something to drink, but his heaving continued until one afternoon, when he was seized by violent shakes. Toward three o'clock we warmed his bed and persuaded him to get into it. He was feverish and his temperature kept rising till past midnight. He fell asleep about one in the morning.

The doctor came that evening and found him thoroughly exhausted. His trouble was not indigestion because you know how little he eats; all he had at Varazze was a light soup.

Peter Enria

Sampierdarena, April 18-19, 1872

Dear Mr. Buzzetti:

Don Bosco was feverish all day, his cheeks constantly aflush with two little red spots which kept appearing and vanishing. He looks as though he is about to have another attack of miliary fever. It must be the consequence of the strain of his long journey, his change of diet and his rundown condition. It is midnight and he keeps tossing over and over, unable to sleep. It seems impossible that he should have become so exhausted solely because of the effort of vomiting. This morning he again had an upset stomach, perspired profusely and then became so weak that he could not even pull up his pillow. I am afraid that a bad cold is complicating his illness.

It is now one in the morning and he has not yet closed his eyes. At this very moment he is freezing, despite the many blankets we have heaped on him.

Father Rua has left for La Spezia and is due back tonight.

Try to send me some choice breadsticks. Don Bosco has not asked for them, but if we wait for him to ask, he will certainly never do so. He would for anybody else, but not for himself.

It is now four o'clock. About an hour ago, I gave him a little hot broth

and he felt a bit warmer; perhaps the fever causes the change. He dozed off immediately afterward but kept waking up every two or three minutes.

He slept peacefully from 4:30 to 5 o'clock. It looks as though he will sleep some more. I hope that his day will be better than last night. If you see Baron Bianco and Countess Corsi, give them news of Don Bosco.

Peter Enria

Sampierdarena, April 20, 1878
2 A.M.

Dear Joseph:

I had hoped that Don Bosco would have a restful day, but, no, he was feverish all day long. The doctor said that his illness was a sort of nervous stomach upset brought on by excessive fatigue, and he prescribed a mild laxative.

What worries me most is his insomnia. Some moments ago he cried out so loudly that I jumped from my desk and dashed to his side. He was dreaming. I tried to make out what he was saying, but his stifled, labored cries were hardly intelligible. Once he said, "Hey there, halt!" followed by other mumbled words. Concerned for his labored breathing, I woke him up. He stared up at me. "Oh, it's you!" he exclaimed.

"What were you saying when you cried out just now?" I asked. He did not answer, became pensive and then dozed off. Later this morning I shall ask him about his dreaming. I am sure that he was dreaming about his beloved sons, especially those at the Oratory whom he has not seen for the last four months.

He is quite distressed by his absence from the Oratory. Now and then he says: "I have so much work waiting for me in Turin! But we must be resigned and patient! The Lord wants it this way! May His holy will be done!"

He seems a little better tonight because, after crying out, he slept peacefully for nearly two hours, awakening only once. It is now four o'clock and he is still asleep. At six I changed his nightshirt and sweater because they were both soaked with perspiration; he fell asleep again quite peacefully.

Father Rua has just come back from La Spezia, and I believe that he is now writing to Father Lazzerò.

I shall look after Don Bosco day and night until he has fully recovered. I will do it even if it costs me my life. No matter what sacrifices we make, we could never repay him sufficiently for what he has done for us.

Peter Enria

The sorrow that struck the Oratory when Father Rua sent a short letter blandly breaking the news that Don Bosco was somewhat ill is indescribable, but when Enria's letters arrived their grief ran riot. The boys flocked into the church to pray, the novices wanted to spend nights in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, several asked God to let them take Don Bosco's illness on themselves, and others offered their own life to God. Quite a few boys radically improved their conduct so that their prayers might more readily be answered and Don Bosco might be happy over their change. The other Salesian schools vied with the Oratory, and devout people everywhere added their prayers for Don Bosco's recovery. God heard them. On April 21, Easter Sunday, a telegram arrived from Enria for Father Lazzero, the Oratory's director, shortly after midday: "Prayers answered. Father better. Dining with us. Rejoice!" This was the second Easter alleluia which resounded through the house amid untold rejoicing.

At Sampierdarena people immediately flocked to our hospice to call on Don Bosco: benefactors, Church and civil officials, Mr. [Maurice] Dufour [outstanding Salesian cooperator] foremost among them. Delegations from nearby areas also came to seek the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians for themselves and their beloved sick. Don Bosco was overjoyed at their visits. A very wealthy gentleman also came with his wife to offer him a generous sum of money for his boys and missionaries. Don Bosco blessed them both, and they were relieved of a burdensome worry. Father Lemoyne, who had been waiting for Don Bosco at Varazze and had accompanied him to Sampierdarena, jotted down this note: "I saw the couple enter Don Bosco's room in great sadness and come out extremely joyful."

Most visitors did not come empty-handed. There was truly reason to give thanks to Divine Providence! During the four months that Don Bosco could not go in search of financial help, the Oratory was in bad shape, but this charitable flow of donations replenished the empty coffers. One day Don Bosco said to Enria, who committed his words to paper: "How much the Madonna loves us! We were in dire financial straits, we never had enough money, but little by little God provided what we needed. Thanks to Him from all our hearts!"

During one of his more troublesome nights Don Bosco had one

of his usual dreams. Enria had some inkling of it, as we have gathered from his third letter, but Father Lemoyne heard it from Don Bosco himself and left us a record of it.

I sat at Don Bosco's bedside during the night of Good Friday until about two in the morning. Peter Enria came so that I could retire to the adjoining room and get some sleep. Don Bosco's stifled cries made me think that his dream must have been an unpleasant one and so at dawn I inquired about it. Here is what he told me:

I found myself with a family which had decided to kill their cat. Both verdict and sentence were passed down to Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda [of Fossano], but he wouldn't listen. "What have I to do with all this?" he objected. "It's no concern of mine!"

Confusion wrought havoc in that household. As I stood leaning on a walking stick, a black-looking cat, fur bristling, fearfully terrorized, raced toward me, hotly pursued by two huge mastiffs at close range. When the cat got within a few feet, I called it. It hesitated a moment, but when I called it again and slightly raised the hem of my cassock, it swerved toward me and crouched at my feet. Within seconds the two dogs faced me, growling menacingly.

"Away!" I shouted. "Leave this poor cat alone."

To my utter astonishment the dogs answered me in human speech: "Nothing doing! We must obey our master, who ordered us to kill it." "By what right?"

"It freely chose to serve its master who has the absolute right of life and death over a slave. We have our orders and shall carry them out."

"The master has rights over the slave's work, but not over its life," I retorted. "I shall never permit you to kill this cat."

"You won't? You?" So saying, the two mastiffs lunged furiously in an attempt to seize the cat. I raised my stick and frantically struck out at the two assailants, screaming at them to back off.

The struggle lasted a long time as they alternately lunged forward and fell back. I was exhausted. As the beasts stopped to catch their breath, I glanced at the poor cat still at my feet and was astounded to see that it had changed into a lamb. Still amazed by the phenomenon, I turned to the two dogs, and they too had changed, alternately taking on the appearance of bears, tigers, lions, frightening apes, and even more terrible creatures. Finally they became two horrible demons. "Lucifer is our master," they roared. "The lamb you are protecting gave itself to him, so we must drag it before him and kill it."

I turned to the lamb but it was no longer there. In its place stood a very frightened boy, pitifully crying, "Don Bosco, save me!"

“Don’t be afraid,” I told him. “Do you really want to become a good boy?”

“Oh, yes, indeed I do, Don Bosco! But how?”

“Have no fear,” I replied. “Kneel down, hold Our Lady’s medal in your hand and pray with me.”

The boy obeyed. The demons stood there, eager to pounce on him, but I kept shielding him with my stick. At this point, Enria, seeing me so upset, woke me and thus prevented me from seeing how it all ended. I know who the boy was.

A second telegram on April 23 informed the Oratory that Don Bosco was on his way home and would arrive in Turin that evening.

In an instant all the boys suddenly went crazy with joy. “They were jumping up and down,” wrote the chronicler, “running about and shouting, beside themselves!” The brass band and the choir hurriedly rehearsed a selection or two, and others busily began setting up a candlelight illumination. All of them were genuinely convinced that their prayers had obtained a miracle. As a matter of fact, although not perfect, his recovery had nevertheless come about instantaneously, to the doctor’s surprise.

When Don Bosco told Enria that he wanted his suitcase ready by eight the next morning, Enria tried with loving simplicity to dissuade him from undertaking that trip because he was not yet fully recovered. “Don’t worry,” Don Bosco reassured him. “I am strong enough. I am made of wood,¹⁶ and hard wood at that! Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin will assist me. I shall never forget you.” He got up early and said Mass at an improvised altar in the room adjoining his own. Then he set out for the railroad station, walking between Father Rua and Father Albera. The train pulled in when he had covered only half the distance from the station. Enria, who had gone on ahead to buy the tickets, pleaded with the stationmaster to hold the train for Don Bosco. “I shall do all I can for him,” he answered. Enria rushed back to hurry Don Bosco along. The train’s departure was delayed six or seven minutes without complaint. Indeed, the news that Don Bosco was coming brought many passengers to the windows of their coaches for a glimpse of him, and when he appeared, accompanied by the

¹⁶A pun on the word “bosco” which in the Piedmontese dialect means “wood.” [Author]

stationmaster and his children, they stood watching in respectful admiration.

We close with one more incident which occurred a month later, when Enria went to Turin. On seeing him, Don Bosco gave him a fatherly welcome, saying, "I have meant to write to you for some days but never found the time. But I can tell you now what I meant to write. I thank you for your love for me. Believe me, I pray for you every day during Holy Mass. I am sorry if I upset you by leaving Sampierdarena against your good judgment. But now I am feeling fine. Are you glad?" Deeply moved, Enria stammered that he felt bound to do much more in return for all that Don Bosco had done for him. "Before you leave," Don Bosco said as he walked off, "I want to see you again."

CHAPTER 17

Back at Work at the Oratory

DON Bosco arrived in Turin late in the evening of April 23 after a stop at Asti for important matters. As he reached Mary, Help of Christians Plaza he could already hear the hubbub at the Oratory. When he appeared at the entrance, a delirious ovation drowned out even the loudest strains of the band. Our chronicler has anonymously copied a boy's letter to a friend who was home because of sickness. The letter opened, "What more joyous news can I give you than that our beloved Don Bosco is safely back?" Then, after telling of his recovery and grand welcome home, the writer continued:

Everyone crowded about him to get a close look and kiss his hand, making it almost impossible for our superiors to open a path for him. Since he was immediately escorted to the dining room, and everyone wanted to see him, a huge crowd of boys milled about outside the door, opening it now and then for a peek inside. Just a glimpse of Don Bosco at the far end of the room was enough to have them heave an affectionate sigh, as though they had been relieved of a heavy burden.

The anonymous writer could never have imagined that his simple letter would be recorded in the Oratory chronicle and thus make history. It is a small document but certainly quite significant.

After dinner the following day, representatives of each grade in turn welcomed him back in prose or poetry in both Italian and Latin. Then, to the accompaniment of the brass band, the choir beneath the arcade sang a hymn. At this point, Don Bosco emerged from the dining room and sat down to listen, surrounded by a group of distinguished guests and superiors. When the song

ended, three artisans stepped forward to perform a little sketch and then presented him with a framed picture of the church and Oratory. Quite moved, the good father greeted them with smiles and expressed his thanks.

He was still so drained of all strength that for three days he was unable to work at his desk or hear confessions. However, he listened to the reports of each member of the superior chapter and gave directives and instructions on everything. He also attended to some outside business, as we may see from two letters dated April 15.¹ We will dwell on the first, addressed to Count De Maistre, in the next chapter, but we will discuss the second here, since it is connected with his trip to Rome and his interview with Minister [Francis] Crispi [of the Department of the Interior].

1. REFORMATORIES

This letter was addressed to Commendatore John Baptist Aluffi, secretary of the Department of the Interior and later a provincial prefect. Always deeply attached to Don Bosco, he retained a loving recollection of him after his death.

Turin, April 25, 1878

Dear Mr. Aluffi:

I would like to resume the fruitful talks I began with Minister Crispi,² but I need your advice on how to go about it.

If the papers about honorific titles for John Albertotti, doctor and professor of medicine, are still on file, I renew my request; if not, I shall provide another copy. I likewise need your advice about a tentative project to open hostels for the prevention of juvenile delinquency among boys exposed to dangers. Minister Crispi formally asked me to go ahead with such a project.

For your information, in the past I was always on good terms with Minister Zanardelli, who consistently treated me very graciously.

I already saw the director of our school at Lanzo and trust that your protégé will receive the consideration we both wish for him.

¹On both letters the date is at the bottom of the letter with the remark, "I arrived yesterday." [Author]

²Crispi was premier of Italy from December 26, 1877 to March 23, 1878. When a new cabinet was formed, [Benedict] Cairoli became premier and [Joseph] Zanardelli was appointed Minister of the Interior. [Author]

I arrived in Turin yesterday and am now picking up the threads of interrupted business.

May God keep you in good health and in His holy grace.

Yours very gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

We do not know exactly what ensued after this letter regarding "hostels for the prevention of juvenile delinquency." That it was truly a project is apparent in a letter of July 23 addressed to Minister Zanardelli, Crispi's successor. Seemingly this letter has some connection with Don Bosco's letter to Aluffi on behalf of Dr. Albertotti. For reasons of his own, Don Bosco had not wanted to overlook completely Crispi's academic suggestion during their historic interview in February.

Turin, July 23, 1878

Your Excellency:

Last February the Minister of the Interior asked me to state my views on the preventive system [of education] and the possibility of looking after children who, though not yet corrupt, were in danger of becoming so in various cities, particularly in Rome.

Wishing to oblige and benefit the young I drew up a memorandum of practical suggestions which would cost the government very little.

After I had submitted the memorandum and discussed the matter, a change of government caused the plan to be held in abeyance. Should Your Excellency too be interested in such a plan I would most willingly cooperate, and should my memorandum no longer be available I will quickly send you a copy.

Whatever your considered decision, I assure you of my firm, steadfast intention of doing whatever I can to help lessen the number of juvenile offenders and increase the ranks of law-abiding citizens.

I am honored to remain,

Yours very truly,
Fr. John Bosco

We eventually found the memorandum which Don Bosco first presented to Minister Crispi and was later sent to his successor Minister Zanardelli. The memorandum was accompanied by a letter dated February 21, 1878; in it Don Bosco listed six buildings

in Rome, any of which could have been turned into a youth hostel.³

Here too belongs a report on a meeting Don Bosco held with the prefect of the province of Turin. There is some uncertainty as regards the exact date of the interview and the people then in office, but it does seem likely that there is some chronological connection between the above-cited memorandum to Minister Crispi in regard to the city of Rome and a proposal made by the prefect of the province of Turin for the state reformatory known as “La Generala.”

The unrest that troubled La Generala was such as to give the authorities deep concern. At one time the decision had been taken to open fire against the young rioters, and there had been victims. One day the prefect of the province had the opportunity of speaking with Don Bosco and pressed him to take charge of the reformatory. Don Bosco replied that he personally saw no difficulties, but that he felt quite sure that the government would never entrust such an institution to his care.

“Why not?”

“Because it is said that Don Bosco wants too much piety. The fact of the matter is that I am convinced there can be no self-betterment among boys unless they are given sound moral values.”

“Oh, do not say that! We against religion? Far from it! We are the first to recognize its necessity and would be very grateful to you if you could use it to tame these young rascals. If you will allow me, I shall write to the Minister of the Interior to suggest that you assume charge of La Generala.”

“I repeat that my system of education will not be quite to the government’s liking.”

Then Don Bosco explained his own educational system: frequent reception of the sacraments, religious instruction, preventive supervision, persuasive charity and its relative advantages.

The prefect listened attentively and found no serious difficulties. “Let’s try,” he said. “I shall write to the minister and we shall see.”

“I think it very unlikely that the government will agree.”

“I believe the contrary.”

The prefect wrote immediately, and the answer was not long in

³This paragraph is a condensation. Since Don Bosco’s preventive system of education is well known to most of our readers, we refer the rest to Volume IV, Chapters 47 and 48, which substantially reflect the contents of Don Bosco’s memorandum. [Editor]

coming. It was full of eulogies for Don Bosco and approved the plan. It also declared that there was no better solution than to entrust the management of La Generala to Don Bosco as a guarantee that the deplorable disorders of the past would not be repeated. The prefect sent for Don Bosco immediately to give him the good news. "You see, I was right," he told him.

"It sounds too good," Don Bosco answered, shaking his head. Nevertheless, he did begin negotiations, not wanting this feeble ray of hope to die through any fault of his. However, he demanded utter freedom in imparting religious education and total independence in management. Furthermore, the government was to pay eighty centesimi a day for every juvenile offender and guards were to be dismissed, leaving at the very most a picket of police to guard the entrance. The prefect found nothing unreasonable in these demands, but the Minister of the Interior answered that Don Bosco wanted to turn all the boys into priests, of whom there were already too many. Thus died a noble initiative. We conjecture that the same thing happened to the project for Rome.

2. CONTROVERSY WITH THE ORDINARY

In looking through the mail which had piled up during the preceding two weeks, Don Bosco's eye immediately spotted an envelope from Rome. It contained two documents signed by Cardinal Ferrieri and a list of privileges which had been sanctioned as lawful. Attorney Leonori was the sender.

We will speak first of the privileges. Our readers will recall that on November 14, 1877, Cardinal Ferrieri had first ordered Don Bosco to produce documents proving the authenticity of papal concessions made to him, and then on December 21, upon receiving them, had notified him that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would examine them. Now, after dubious privileges were discarded, an official list of authentic ones was in preparation in Rome. In the shuffle Don Bosco definitively lost the privilege upon which he relied so much—exemption from the obligation of requesting testimonials for his postulants from their respective bishops. But the matter of privileges was not the main reason for the cardinal's letter. The prelate was informing Don

Bosco that he was enclosing a copy of the rescript sent to the archbishop of Turin regarding the controversy between him and Don Bosco, assuring the archbishop that the measures adopted would put an end to all contention. The copy of these measures contained six “petitions” submitted by Archbishop Gastaldi and the replies from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, including the annulment of the more important privileges granted by Pius IX.

Rome, April 1, 1878

In order to eliminate the controversies between Your Excellency and the Reverend John Bosco, superior general of the Salesian Congregation, regarding privileges which the aforesaid priest claims within the archdiocese of Turin, this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has judged it opportune to ask the aforementioned superior to produce documentation proving the authenticity of such privileges. Some documents showed that several privileges had been granted through rescripts which were not formally authentic. As regards other privileges, particularly the dispensation from requesting the ordinaries’ testimonial letters—as prescribed in the decree *Romani Pontifices* of January 25, 1848, by this Sacred Congregation *Super Statu Regularium* regarding the admission of postulants to religious congregations—the only claim was that this and other privileges had been obtained *vivae vocis oraculo* [orally]. Before proceeding to the examination of these matters, this Sacred Congregation informed Your Excellency of this intent. In turn, Your Excellency, wishing to remove any cause of dissent, on December 27 presented the following petitions:

1. That the Salesian Congregation be formally obliged to abide by the papal rescript of January 25, 1848.
2. That it should not engage in preaching or administering the sacraments except in conformity with the sacred canons.
3. That it should not publish reports of miracles as having taken place in Turin or within my diocese during my tenure of office without my consent.
4. That it should not publish the granting of indulgences within my diocese unless I myself first verify their authenticity.
5. That it should not permit any non-Salesian priest to celebrate Mass in its churches without my consent.
6. That in general the Salesian Congregation be obliged to operate with due submission to the archbishop, save in those things in which its statutes, approved by the Holy See, grant them exemption.

“I do not ask for more and earnestly beg the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to refrain from any investigation of past incidents, since I gladly forgive Don Bosco and his Congregation for the very serious troubles they caused me and for all the rest, in order that things may proceed peacefully from now on.”

This Sacred Congregation carefully examined all this and accurately reported its findings to the Holy Father on March 22, 1878. In turn, His Holiness ordered that you be informed of the decisions reached on the above-noted items. They are as follows:

1. Even granting that the Reverend John Bosco received, as he maintains, an oral dispensation by the late Pontiff Pius IX from the aforesaid decree of January 25, 1848, one must nevertheless hold that Pius IX did not intend to deviate entirely from so salutary a principle of universal discipline governing religious orders, congregations and institutes. He held this principle very much at heart and made this known to this Sacred Congregation prior to his death. Therefore, we hereby declare that the decree in question is to be faithfully observed by the Salesian Congregation.

2. The aforesaid Congregation shall not engage in preaching or in administering the sacraments other than in strict conformity with the sacred canons and other canonical prescriptions.

3. It may not publish information regarding miracles without first obtaining permission from the bishop of the diocese in which such miracles allegedly occurred.

4. It likewise may not publicize particular indulgences it has received without first submitting the pertinent documentation to the archbishop for his verification.

5. The Salesian Congregation may never permit any priest to celebrate Holy Mass in its churches in the Turin archdiocese without the *celebret* or written permission of the chancery office.

6. The Salesian Congregation is bound to operate in submission to the archbishop in all matters in which he has jurisdiction, according to the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions, save in those things in which the [Salesian] constitutions, approved by the Holy See, and the privileges which the Salesian Congregation may have obtained from the same through rescripts, decrees, resolutions or other documents issued in authentic form, exempt it from episcopal authority.

It is our hope that in view of the above-stated decisions all dissent will cease. Nevertheless, desiring to forestall any deviation from the correct interpretation of what was granted to the Salesian Congregation, the Holy Father, after being fully briefed about the favors and graces granted to it by his predecessor, has ordered that an accurate summary thereof be made

out in triplicate. The first copy is to be signed by both of you and mailed to this secretariat's archives.

This Sacred Congregation hopes that after the implementation of the measures you requested, everything will proceed smoothly, as you yourself stated in your letter of December 27. This Sacred Congregation will send a copy of this letter to the superior of the Salesians for his guidance in complying with all that is herein stipulated.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
✠ Cardinal Ferrieri, *Prefect*
✠ A., *Archbishop of Mira, Secretary*

While stating his own dissatisfaction with these decisions, Attorney Leonori advised Don Bosco to carry them out blindly by calling without delay on Archbishop Gastaldi and acting in concert with him. He also suggested that he discuss with him the [Salesian] priests' suspensions.

As regards obedience, Don Bosco never needed advice on the matter. As for his calling on the archbishop, we do not know exactly when this occurred, but it was probably before May 4. Don Bosco went to the episcopal residence with Father Lazzero, who from the waiting room overheard the archbishop's boisterous voice. When Don Bosco emerged, he appeared lost in thought and for the next fifteen minutes did not utter a word as they walked to La Consolata Church. Finally, Don Bosco smiled and said, "What a man! He would not let me say a word; he talked all the time." Nevertheless it did seem that the ice had been broken, for on May 4 the archbishop wrote a confidential note asking Don Bosco to call on him the following day as he urgently needed to confer with him. Don Bosco obliged. Then on May 6, the archbishop wrote to him again from his seminary summer home. His letter began, "If any of your clerics are ready for ordination at the next Ember Days, notify the chancery office without delay. Give their full name, diocese of origin, age, and a statement that they are perpetually professed members of the Salesian Congregation. Specify also what sacred orders they have already received, if any." He then added that if by May 24 he felt certain that a certain matter⁴ regarding Holy Martyrs Parish and its pastor was proceeding as desired, he would

⁴The letter very specifically spoke of "the matter"; this leads us to assume that it had been discussed in their May 4 meeting. [Author]

keep his promise to Don Bosco of coming to give thanks to Mary, Help of Christians. Likewise, in conjunction with another matter for which he was awaiting an answer from Cardinal Bartolini, he repeated that if things would take a turn for the better before May 24, he would "visit the new house of Mary, Help of Christians to thank Her." He then continued, "If, through your prayers, those of others, or in any way, you might obtain this favor, we could hopefully start on an era of peace and harmony." The letter closed with, "I am here for two or three days to rest mind, heart and body amid the memorials of the holy hermits who sanctified this solitary spot⁵ for centuries. I'll be back at my desk next Friday at the latest." Don Bosco replied the following Thursday.

Turin, May 9, 1878

Your Excellency:

My fervent thanks for admitting our clerics [to holy orders] at the forthcoming Ember Days. I enclose the required statement and will send all other pertinent documents to the chancery office.

Most willingly will I pray and ask others to do so for a favorable solution of the litigation you mentioned. To this end I have already arranged for special prayers to be offered throughout this month at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. We shall also say special prayers for your precious health because you really look exhausted.

When I arrived home on Sunday I found a letter from Cardinal Franchi, seeking in your name an explanation of my appeal for the Church of St. John the Evangelist without ecclesiastical approval and in competition with your appeal for the Church of St. Secundus. I gave him the same reply I gave to Your Excellency, namely, that my appeal was addressed exclusively to Salesian cooperators through a bulletin printed in Genoa, explaining that this church has been in construction since 1870 with Pius IX's approval and the encouragement of the local ecclesiastical authority. Since I have ordered that nothing more be said about a "monument" [to Pius IX], I trust that there will be no more difficulties.

Hoping that you will honor us on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, I remain in deep veneration and esteem,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

⁵See p. 135. [Author]

We shall dwell on the matter raised by Cardinal Franchi in Chapter 18. Archbishop Gastaldi again asked Don Bosco to call on him on either May 11 or 12 concerning the ordinands. Don Bosco obliged on May 12 and also mentioned to him a forthcoming confirmation. Later that day he wrote to him about setting a date for it and informed him that a conference exclusively for Salesian cooperators would be held at the Oratory the following week.⁶

3. SANITATION PROBLEMS

Immediately after his return, Don Bosco had to meet a serious threat to the Oratory. Toward the end of March an outbreak of conjunctivitis in Turin prompted the authorities to appoint a medical committee to inspect all public and private schools. Public schools were the first to be closed because of a widespread epidemic among the pupils, and then it was the turn of the Consolata boarding school, directed by Canon [Joseph] Ortalda, and of the Oratory. The inspectors made a thorough investigation which lasted several days, but their seemingly excessive zeal aroused the superiors' suspicion, prompting Father Veronesi, the catechist, to play a trick on them. On the second day of the inspection he mingled a few boys who had been declared badly infected with those who were to be examined. Unsuspectingly, the doctors gave them a clean bill of health—only to be extremely embarrassed when they discovered the ruse. The infection, however, did truly exist. After examining the pupils, the medical team inspected the house, reporting that sanitary norms at the Oratory seemed to be neglected. They also suggested two emergency measures: total isolation of the infected boys and construction of new premises or renovation of existing ones with better sanitary provisions. This second measure amounted to closing down the Oratory. The prefect of the province, however, showed better discretion, for, instead of formally ordering the implementation of the proposals, he left the matter to Don Bosco's good judgment, merely informing him that in due course there would be a second inspection to ascertain if the recommendations had been followed. Notified of the prefect's order, Don Bosco

⁶This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

apprised him of the measures that had already been taken during his absence.⁷

While a second inspection was awaited, a formal order to close the Oratory arrived on May 13 from the province's prefect on the basis that the second inspection revealed that the recommended measures had not been taken. This time Don Bosco had a trump card to play when he replied on May 14 that no such inspection had ever taken place.⁸

The Oratory was not closed down, but the harassment continued. On June 12 Don Bosco was informed by the provincial school board that a medical team led by Dr. Secondo Polto, assistant director of the provincial health department, would soon inspect the sanitary conditions at the Oratory to see if they were adequate for the number of pupils. The word "soon" was evidently a loose term, because the inspection was not made until September.

Dr. Polto was a very fair-minded gentleman. During the inspection of the dormitories, some doctors on his team remarked that the ventilation was inadequate. With irritation he replied, "Have you ever seen attics where parents live with three and four children? Their quarters serve as kitchen, dormitory and everything. They can't even stand up straight without bumping their heads on the ceiling." The inspectors finally determined that the Oratory could adequately accommodate only two hundred and seventy-five pupils. Anyway, this averted its closing. Faced with the necessity of curtailing the enrollment, Don Bosco began telling the mothers who came to recommend their children: "I may not take them in. Go to the prefect of the province and ask his permission." It is said that, facing an endless parade of mothers, the prefect lost all patience and sent word to Don Bosco: "Enroll all the boys you want, but see that no one else comes to bother me."⁹

The false report made to the prefect about an alleged second inspection confirmed the suspicion that there were sinister maneuvers afoot to close the Oratory. As a matter of fact, when this attempt failed, the [provincial] school board tried to close the secondary school department. Since this plot began in 1878 but did

⁷Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

⁸This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

⁹This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

not enter its crucial phase until 1879, we will defer the full account of it to the next volume.

4. SCHOLASTIC PROBLEMS

An unfavorable wind was blowing on the Oratory not only from the prefecture but from city hall as well. In the latter half of May, the board of aldermen, totally without reason, slashed a subsidy of three hundred lire for the Oratory night school from the budget. This subsidy had been authorized thirty years before in recognition of the fact that Don Bosco had been the first to introduce evening classes in Turin. Municipal authorities had found them exceedingly well run; hence, a subsidy to cover the lighting expenses. On May 12 Don Bosco complained with a few of his priests that the aldermen were acting very coldly toward him, whereas the Oratory had always treated them with every consideration; furthermore, the Oratory itself was something the city could be proud of for its charity. The reason for this hostility could only be the one advanced [in 1876] to justify the revoking of a subsidy for the Oratory's elementary summer and fall courses for day pupils.¹⁰

What other reason could determine the closing of the day boys' elementary school? Don Bosco had conducted it for many years, but on October 31, 1878 the provincial school board asked him to close it because, in their opinion, the classrooms were in a very deplorable condition. Prior to that date Don Bosco had petitioned the municipal authorities to provide that district with adequate elementary school facilities, and his petition had been favorably received and acted upon. Well aware of the people's needs, Don Bosco, on November 2, 1878, respectfully remonstrated in writing to the provincial authorities.¹¹

Seeing him so determined to continue his charitable work, the provincial school board formally requested a list of teachers as well as precise information on the location of the classrooms and on the number of pupils in each class. Don Bosco's replies must have been satisfactory, for there was no further correspondence on that matter, but just about this time came the imminent threat of closing the secondary school department.

¹⁰See Vol. XII, pp. 255ff. [Editor]

¹¹We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

5. DEATH OF THREE GREAT BENEFACTORS

We have already mentioned the grave financial difficulties experienced by the Oratory during Don Bosco's prolonged absence. Donations had not ceased altogether, thanks mainly to the *Salesian Bulletin* which stirred the charity of the cooperators, but, nevertheless, the outstanding debts were enormous. Divine Providence then willed that a gesture of exceptional generosity, joined to deep sorrow, should alleviate Don Bosco's straitened circumstances. On April 27, Baron Camillus Bianco of Barbanía, with whom Don Bosco shared a reciprocal closeness and affection, passed away in Turin. Since the heir, in whose favor he had made his will several years before, had died, he had altered his former testament to name Don Bosco his sole heir and the executor of several legacies. Thus many substantial debts were paid off. Special prayers had been offered for the repose of Baron Bianco's soul before his last will and testament became known, since he had always been a benefactor, friend and father to the Salesians. In fact, on April 28 the young Oratory clerics attended the wake at his residence and in groups of four took turns throughout the day to recite the Office for the Dead and say the entire rosary before his coffin.

Don Bosco, who could barely stand on his feet, had called on the baron during his last few hours. Although unable to recognize anyone, he came out of his coma at the sound of Don Bosco's voice, seemed delighted by his visit, and received his blessing with evident pleasure. Don Bosco always cherished a fond remembrance of Baron Bianco. Shortly before his own death, Don Bosco took a photograph from his desk and handed it without a word to Father Lemoyne. He looked at it and said: "This is Baron Bianco."

"Yes, a very dear friend of mine," Don Bosco whispered with tears in his eyes.

Father Lemoyne made as if to give the photo back to him. "No," Don Bosco went on, "keep it. Take care of it." Father Lemoyne interpreted this to mean that he was to keep alive the memory of so distinguished a benefactor. Doubtless, Don Bosco's gesture impressed his future biographer, who saw an element of mystery in it.

Baron Bianco was one of an outstanding group of Piedmontese

noblemen who distinguished themselves by their love for the Church and their devotion to the Pope. As things changed in Italy, he too resigned from public office rather than betray his conscience and continued to give generously to the Holy See and to the poor. We believe that some expressions in his will, dated January 22, 1877, are noteworthy. After naming Don Bosco as his sole heir and referring to him as "his great friend," the baron declared that he was "convinced that this would please His Holiness Pope Pius IX, whose blessing he invoked." He then went on, "Since this great man, Don Bosco, has enemies, I think it necessary to state that he is unaware of this decision of mine, and this I pledge with my word of honor."

Although slanderers could find no fault with this, they found other reasons for wagging their tongues. The wildest rumors began circulating about the size of the fortune inherited by Don Bosco; colossal sums were bandied about on every tongue. Supposedly heaven had rained millions and millions of lire upon Don Bosco, and he no longer needed to seek charity. The real sum, instead, was far below all these exaggerated speculations. Since such wild rumors could adversely affect people and divert their charitable donations, the June issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* promptly set the record straight. Then, as a public tribute of his gratitude, Don Bosco invited many people to a solemn month's mind Mass offered for the baron on May 28 in the parish church of St. Theresa.

On May 3, very shortly after Baron Bianco's death, Don Bosco again had to grieve for the death of another great benefactor of his—Marquis Dominic Fassati—a fervent Christian very loyal to the Pope. For him too, many prayers were offered by the family and by the Oratory. Later, on May 5, Don Bosco sent a short but touching circular¹² inviting the public to a month's mind Mass for the repose of the marquis' soul.

On April 6, shortly before the deaths of both Turin noblemen, another dear friend of Don Bosco, Cardinal Joseph Berardi, who had been in very poor health since the summer of 1877, died of a stroke and passed on to his eternal rest. He had been a cardinal for ten years, an honor bestowed on him for his outstanding services to

¹²Omitted in this edition. |Editor|

the Holy See since the beginning of Pius IX's pontificate. He was born at Ceccano on December 28, 1810.

The demise of these three elderly and well-deserving friends of his caused Don Bosco profound sorrow. From his sons they deserve undying gratitude.

CHAPTER 18

Don Bosco's Memorial to Pius IX

CERTAINLY it was a great day for Don Bosco when the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist was laid; he had waited well nigh twelve years. True, it was only in 1869 that he had decided to build a church in Viale del Re and name it after the saint, but for years previously he had been trying to buy the land to expand the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory. In putting up this house of worship his intention was also to honor the person of Pius IX, who had been baptized John after the beloved disciple, for he felt deeply indebted to him. Though he made no public announcement of his plan until after the renowned Pontiff's death, it is clear that his intent preceded it because in 1877, having found a benefactor to sponsor the main entrance doors of the church, he commissioned Professor Joseph Boidi of Castellazzo Bormida to design them and emblazon upon their panels emblems of Pius IX's achievements.

Architect Count Edward Arborio Mella, an outstanding student of medieval ecclesiastical architecture, designed the church in thirteenth century Lombard-Romanesque style, rectangular, approximately sixty meters long and twenty-two meters wide, having three naves, the central nave being twice the size of the side naves in both width and height. The main nave and transepts, eleven hundred square meters in area, would comfortably accommodate twenty-five hundred people. The facade's center would be topped by a bell tower forty-five meters high. Don Bosco's plans also included a boarding school alongside the church to serve as a branch of the Oratory, housing three hundred students with suitable facilities for a festive oratory and for classes on Sundays, weekdays and evenings for the boys of the neighborhood who were being lured away by the nearby Waldensian church.

Where did Don Bosco expect to find funds to finance this costly enterprise? His faith made him rely upon Divine Providence and the piety of the faithful. He had already appealed to the public in a circular dated October 12, 1870, voicing his hope that construction would be completed within two years. However, he had not reckoned with the non-Catholics of the area who tossed a thousand varied obstacles in his way, with a disastrous loss of time and money. But once Don Bosco was convinced that a project was for God's glory and the welfare of souls, the devil might unleash all the powers of hell against him, only to be forced finally to back down in painful defeat. As it was, in May 1877, after tenaciously and skillfully overcoming every obstacle, he succeeded in submitting the blueprints of both buildings to Archbishop Gastaldi. On May 13 the archbishop approved them in writing, as follows: "Having examined the plans for the new Church of St. John the Evangelist to be built in this city of our archdiocese, we gladly endorse them." His signature followed. This was the last formality. Under the management of engineer Anthony Spezia, work progressed apace: the foundations were dug, and by August 1878 the walls were rising and the concrete floor was being poured.

Don Bosco himself tells us something of the way he went about building a church. In 1877, a lady who was on a committee to erect a church at Castagneto of Pisa sought his advice on fund-raising. He replied:

April 11, 1877

Dear Mrs. Marianna Moschetti:

Really, we should discuss face to face what projects can be initiated and their probable success, but let me tell you what I think is feasible in the Lord.

1. Pray and have others pray and receive Holy Communion as the most efficacious way of meriting His favor.

2. Ask your parish priest to chair two extensive committees, one of men, the other of women. Each member of these committees should sign a pledge to be met in three yearly installments.

These committee members are to endeavor to find donors who will contribute cash, work or building materials. One can be asked, for example, to sponsor an altar, the pulpit, candlesticks, a bell, a window, the main portal, side doors, stained glass windows, etc., one sponsorship per person. Should I be able to discuss this with your pastor, I could make

other confidential suggestions which I am not inclined to put down in writing.¹

I shall pray for your success. My own sole support has always been prayer to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians.

God bless you. Please pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Yours sincerely,
Fr. John Bosco

This plan of having his more generous benefactors bear the cost for individual items of the building had already been tried by him and had proved very successful. He tried it now, and with good results. On August 28, 1877 he also published an appeal in *Unità Cattolica*. The article, after reviewing past work on the church, called upon its readers to “contribute money, building materials, labor, objects of art and sacred appurtenances.” To give weight to the appeal, the paper dug up a recommendation made by Church officials of Turin on behalf of the enterprise, somewhat old but still timely. “With deepest satisfaction.” Vicar General Zappata had written on October 30, 1870, “we have studied and approved plans submitted by the good and zealous priest of our diocese, Father John Bosco, so deserving of both Church and society for his many religious and charitable enterprises.” He then expressed the hope that the enterprise would soon be completed. To bolster his recommendation he prefixed his signature with the words: “This at the order and in the name of His Excellency the Archbishop,” who was then Archbishop Alexander Riccardi.

For some reason we do not know, this announcement displeased Archbishop Gastaldi, who, after notable delay, had a letter written to Father Rua, as the Oratory's acknowledged superior, dated October 14, stating that no copy of this document was to be found in the chancery files, and so, at his request, could he please be sent the original as soon as possible so as to have an authentic copy made. However, in a report entitled “Esposizione ai Cardinali del Concilio” [An Explanation to the Cardinals of the Council]² we read: “Since the original was actually in the chancery files, the only thing that could be done was to give him a copy. This did not satisfy

¹Very probably he was alluding to wills and legacies. [Author]

²Tipografia di San Vincenzo de' Paoli, Sampierdarena, 1881, p. 34. [Author]

him, and he kept on harassing us, demanding that we give him a document which was already in his possession." Some time later Father [John Baptist] Anfossi wrote an article for *Unità Cattolica* pointing out the need for both the church and the boarding school of St. John the Evangelist, but the editor rejected it, claiming that the archbishop would not permit him to publish it.³ The storm clouds were gathering afresh.

The real blow came while Don Bosco was still in Rome. After having initiated work on the Church of St. Secundus in Turin, he had been forced to withdraw, so that construction remained at a standstill.⁴ The parish priest of the area, Father Leo Prato, recognizing its grave need, launched a campaign to make it into a tribute of Turin's people "to the noble soul of Pius IX" through their generous contribution toward its construction, and on February 17, 1878 *Unità Cattolica* published a brief item to this effect. Informed of it,⁵ Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua:⁶ "Tell Father Bonetti to write an article for the *Salesian Bulletin* on the Church of St. John, stating: 1. This undertaking was suggested, blessed and subsidized by Pope Pius IX. 2. One could hope for no better memorial than to finish a work which the Pope himself had begun and to dedicate it to his honor as being in keeping with his last recommendation: 'Take care of impoverished youth.'⁷ 3. It is a duty of our cooperators to complete a work initiated by the man who founded the Salesian cooperators."⁸

Father Bonetti wrote the article immediately but held it for April, since the March issue was totally devoted to the deceased Pontiff. The article was entitled: "The Salesian Cooperators to the Everlasting Memory of the Great Pius IX." The proposal so delighted the cooperators that they immediately responded by sending donations every day for this noble enterprise. The magazine amply acknowledged their exquisite kindness in its May issue.

³Letter from Father Anfossi to Father [Joachim] Berto, Turin, February 10, 1878. [Author]

⁴See Vol. X, pp. 89, 171. [Editor]

⁵Letter from Father Anfossi to Father Berto, Turin, February 19, 1878. [Author]

⁶Rome, undated, but evidently between February 20 and 25, 1878. [Author]

⁷Allusion to the last allocution of Pius IX, on the feast day of Our Lady's Purification. [Author]

⁸Cf. Vol. XI, pp. 73ff. [Editor]

However, a new wrinkle had developed in the meantime. On February 27 Turin's archbishop issued a pastoral "concerning a monument to be erected to the great Pius IX in Turin." It was obvious which monument he meant. On March 3 *Unità Cattolica* carried a column entitled "Turin's Monument to the Sacred Memory of Pius IX." It hoped to see a monumental building whose dome would be topped by a lofty statue of Pius IX in the act of blessing "Turin, Italy and the world." The archbishop then forbade the *Salesian Bulletin* from making any mention of its own monument and notified the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars as well as the Secretariat of State; both opened a correspondence with Don Bosco which is an important part of our saintly founder's biography.

Don Bosco first heard from Cardinal Franchi, secretary of state, recently appointed by Leo XIII to that high office, who died just months later on July 31. Basing himself on what he was told by Archbishop Gastaldi, he wrote:

Rome, May 2, 1878

Reverend and dear Father:

The April issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*, published by you at Sampierdarena, has urged the faithful to consider as a monument to Pius IX, of sacred memory, the new church which is being constructed in Turin under your sponsorship in honor of St. John the Evangelist. However, the archbishop of Turin has already invited the same people to contribute to a monument to the glorious Pius IX by erecting a *new parish church* in the recent development named St. Secundus. A dual appeal to Christian charity for one and the same purpose seems inadvisable, especially since the initial appeal was made by the local ecclesiastical authority and the second by a priest unauthorized by that authority. People may well see this as a slight to that superior. Such considerations are strengthened by the fact that you are reportedly not on the best of terms with His Excellency. Furthermore, he will hardly be pleased by this kind of public rivalry in a matter of this nature.

In view of these and other considerations of which you can easily become aware, please find a way of clearing up all misunderstandings in this matter and keeping harmony with the archbishop in a project so

closely linked to his name, or else take some other course of action that will not cause him grief or vexation.

With this trust I remain,

Yours affectionately,
✠ Alexander Cardinal Franchi

Blamed for something assuredly not his fault and realizing where the charge came from, Don Bosco sent the cardinal the requested explanation, as follows:

Turin, May 8, 1878

Your Eminence:

I thank you sincerely for the letter you graciously sent me, since it gives me a chance of offering an explanation which alters the situation as you described it.

It would appear that I am being charged with appealing to the faithful of the diocese of Turin to erect a monument to the late lamented Pius IX in conflict with a similar previous appeal, and doing that without my superior's authorization. Graciously let me offer some clarifications:

1. The Church of St. John the Evangelist was begun some years ago as a monument to Pius IX. As early as 1870, His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli wrote me a letter of encouragement in the Holy Father's name, sent a blessing to donors and enclosed the first donation of two thousand lire, commenting that His Holiness was contributing to this church because it would be a line of defense against the Protestants who had opened a hostel, a school and a place of worship of their own in that area. The origin of this church therefore by far predates the archbishop's appeal.

2. This construction was begun with the consent of the local ecclesiastical authority. In fact, Archbishop Alexander Riccardi of Turin directly urged and encouraged me, issuing [on October 13, 1870] a warm recommendation to the faithful to contribute to the project.⁹

3. The *Salesian Bulletin* is not published in Turin but at Sampierdarena, with the approval of the archbishop of Genoa, who in his great kindness befriends and favors the poor boys of our schools.

4. The *Salesian Bulletin's* appeal was not addressed to the faithful, as you have been led to believe, but solely to Salesian cooperators, who are the ordinary benefactors of our houses in Italy, France and America.

5. It is worthy of note also that, due to one outstanding person's

⁹See Vol. X, p. 88. [Editor]

opposition, the apostolate of the Salesian cooperators is tightly restricted in the archdiocese of Turin.

My clarifications will make Your Eminence realize that all was done with the approval and recommendation of the Holy Father and of the local ecclesiastical authority, that the appeal in question by far antedates that of Archbishop Gastaldi, that the cooperators to whom it was addressed are very few in the archdiocese of Turin, and that the *Salesian Bulletin* is published with the authorization of the archbishop of Genoa, and it is sent only to our benefactors, to whom we account for our projects so that, seeing the results of their charity, they may more gladly continue their assistance. Since such misunderstandings have given rise to unpleasant events, I earnestly ask Your Eminence to let me know when complaints of this kind are brought to your attention.

With deep thanks and reverence, I am honored to remain,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Not long after, Don Bosco received an admonition from the cardinal prefect of [the Sacred Congregation of] Bishops and Regulars. One sentence lifted from Don Bosco's letters where he refers to the appeal to the charity of the Salesian cooperators seems to indicate that Cardinal Ferrieri had seen Don Bosco's letter [to Cardinal Franchi] and was commenting on Don Bosco's fourth point.

Rome, May 18, 1878

Reverend Father:

Recently the archbishop of Turin informed the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars that you addressed an appeal to the Salesian cooperators for funds to build in Turin the new Church of St. John the Evangelist *as a memorial to Pius IX*. The project is in itself highly commendable and merits high praise from every standpoint. But at this time, since it appears to rival an identical project of the local archbishop, as he announced in his pastoral letter a month ago—namely to erect *a monument* to the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX in the Church of St. Secundus in Turin—I request that you desist for the time being from soliciting funds for your project so as not to give wavering Christians occasion to complain that you are opposing your archbishop. With this understanding, I wish you all success in the Lord.

At your service,
✠ Cardinal Ferrieri, *Prefect*

Two days later a third admonition reached Don Bosco, this time from Cardinal Franchi who very tactfully reaffirmed his stand.

Rome, May 20, 1878

Dear Father:

Your letter of May 8 and the clarifications you felt you had to give me in reply to my official clarification No. 29089 makes it clear that you have valid reasons for having put your hand with commendable zeal to building a church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. This leads me to believe that, since these are the motives of your action, you have no need to solicit funds from the faithful by adding a further reason of erecting the church as a monument to the sacred memory of Pius IX, especially since the archbishop has in mind to put up such a monument by building a church for the faithful of the new parish of St. Secundus.

I firmly trust that you will defer to the archbishop and refrain in every way from promoting or urging completion of your church as a memorial to Pius IX. I am also confident that by so doing the understanding which should exist between you, as superior of so many pious institutions, and the local ecclesiastical authority will be strengthened.

Yours sincerely,

✠ Alexander Cardinal Franchi

Don Bosco felt that he had to affirm, clarify and thoroughly explain the points he had made to Cardinal Franchi. Hence, upon receiving the above reply, he immediately answered it before responding to Cardinal Ferrieri. He contended that he had appealed to his cooperators from Genoa rather than from Turin, and that therefore his own archbishop had no valid reasons for pressing charges against him.

Turin, May 28, 1878

Your Eminence:

Please permit me a further clarification in reply to the kind letter you graciously sent me. My reply is further made necessary by the letters sent by our most reverend archbishop about me on this subject to the Sacred Roman Congregations.

Please bear in mind: I did not contend with others, they contended with me; ten years ago I publicly initiated work on both the church and hospice of St. John the Evangelist; the *Salesian Bulletin* is published at the St. Vincent Hospice in the borough of Sampierdarena, Genoa, at the expense

and under the responsibility of the director of the orphanage, and I do not believe that Turin's archdiocesan authority reaches that far; the *Salesian Bulletin* is sent only to Salesian cooperators or benefactors in cities and countries where we have houses. We account to them for what we do with their funds or, more exactly, their donations. Furthermore, their number in Turin is very limited because of the archbishop's opposition. However, since it is my intent always to yield to authority without excuse, the archbishop has been assured that, save for the issue now in print, future reference will be made only to the Church of St. John the Evangelist with no mention of a monument to Pius IX—and this despite the protests of the Salesian cooperators who feel that it is unfair to prohibit them from erecting a memorial of gratitude to the founder of their association. Although the archbishop showed that he was content and fully satisfied with our acquiescence, he has not stopped writing to Your Eminence and to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, complaining and using up time that should conscientiously be devoted to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls. I now plead with Your Eminence to graciously take our humble Congregation under your strong protection. Please, tell our archbishop to let me know of difficulties when they arise and ask him why he keeps appealing to the Holy See once we have settled matters between us. For years now I have been forced almost daily to send clarifications to Rome concerning charges brought against us by the archbishop. This is damaging to our young Salesian Congregation, which so badly needs to consolidate its structure and meet the needs and distress of the present time. Please be indulgent if these pages contain expressions less than reverent. My sole intent is to be honest in stating things as they are to the Church's supreme tribunal, as I hope I can use the little bit of life which God deigns to grant me to benefit the Congregation that the Holy See has graciously entrusted to me.

Please excuse the bother I am causing you and accept the prayers which the Salesians daily offer to the Lord that He may give you un failing health and happiness. In their name I am honored to remain,

Your humble and grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

After a while, perhaps to find out if the Secretariat of State had other complaints, he replied to Cardinal Ferrieri. The fourth point raised in his letter is particularly worth our consideration.

Turin, June 1, 1878

Your Eminence:

I have received your letter which asks me to refrain from soliciting

donations from the Salesian cooperators to continue work on the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as this seems to conflict with an allegedly previous appeal made by the archbishop of Turin for the Church of St. Secundus.

Will Your Eminence allow me to repeat the explanations I have already sent to the Cardinal Secretary of State, who received the same complaints?

1. First let me state that I personally made no appeal of any kind. The publication cited was issued in my absence and without any involvement on my part, having been printed at the boys' home in Sampierdarena, Genoa, at the expense and in the name of the home's director and with the ecclesiastical approval of that archdiocese.

2. Nothing was published in the diocese of Turin. Hence there seem to be no grounds for complaint from the local ordinary.

3. It must be borne in mind that the Church of St. John the Evangelist was begun more than ten years ago with the blessing and a donation of two thousand francs of the late beloved Pius IX. He supported this work as a line of defense against the Protestants who run a school, hostel, hospital and church in that area. The local ecclesiastical authority [of that time] approved and commended the project, urging the faithful to support it, as may be seen from the enclosed statement. I do not believe that this approval is to be considered withdrawn.

4. As for the Church of St. Secundus, I began to construct it many years after that of St. John the Evangelist. After I had spent considerable funds, the archbishop decided to intervene in the construction. I willingly turned everything over to him because he was my ecclesiastical superior.

Hence I have set up no conflicts; others have set them against me, hurting a work begun over ten years ago which brought me indescribable problems on the part of the Protestants.

5. This notwithstanding, no sooner did the archbishop raise objections than I immediately reassured him personally *pro bono pacis* that, save for the issue then on the press, the *Salesian Bulletin* would in the future never refer to the church and hospice of St. John the Evangelist as a monument to Pius IX.

Convinced that I have dutifully responded to your appreciated letter, I state my readiness to obey any order or counsel of yours to show that I am and have the honor to remain,

Yours sincerely,
Fr. John Bosco

This exchange of letters, unknown to the public, did not free the *Salesian Bulletin* from its obligation of explaining its former

statements on this matter to its Turin readers—for the problem centered on them—before it could silence the whole affair. Hence the *Salesian Bulletin's* editor had every article dealing with the Church of St. John written in two versions, one addressed to the Turin cooperators with no mention of “monument,” and the other to cooperators in general, retaining the word “monument.” The June issue ran an article called “Justifying the Church of St. John the Evangelist as a Monument to Pius IX” in which Father Bonetti [the editor] briefly recounted its history and then went on to say:

Certain considerations have made us restrict our fund-raising for this project to Salesian cooperators alone, showing them how wonderful and praiseworthy it is of them to raise this sacred monument to our first and greatest benefactor, our association's eminent promoter.¹⁰ Despite all this, however, we have recently been told that we are causing someone embarrassment. Regretting that unintentionally we should have embarrassed anyone, we merely remark that, even if the great Pius IX had not died, the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as that of St. Secundus, would still have been built. What harm then can be done to one church by designating another as a monument? As for us, we earnestly commend the Church of St. John the Evangelist to our cooperators because it must remind posterity of the great Pius IX and of the cooperators' indebtedness to him. At the same time, with all the effort we can muster, we urge the faithful to contribute to the Church of St. Secundus, which will also be a fitting memorial to that glorious Pontiff. We firmly trust that God will supply the friends needed to raise both these churches for His greater glory, for the welfare of souls, and for the honor of His most faithful servants.

The article closed with a reference to two documents of 1870, assuring the readers that the plan to dedicate the Church of St. John the Evangelist as a memorial to Pius IX dated years back, and that everything had been done with the full consent of the ecclesiastical authorities [of that time]. News of this controversy was upsetting Don Bosco's many friends, and they did not hide their keen regret.

Archbishop Gastaldi hinted at this article in a letter to Don Bosco of July 20:

¹⁰A footnote here ran: “Bear in mind that ‘cooperators’ means our benefactors not only in Turin, but all over Italy, France and America, where we have opened houses to safeguard endangered youth. We ourselves do not have steady income to initiate and bring to completion the works that God entrusts to us, and so we regularly voice our needs to our cooperators to seek their charitable aid.” [Author]

Again I most earnestly ask you to instruct the *Salesian Bulletin's* editor not to keep harping on the archbishop of Turin and other bishops. The arrogance of some self-styled Catholic writers who have set themselves up as teachers, censors, judges, and reprimanders of bishops, who were given the mandate *Docete omnes gentes*, is a most grave scandal, wreaking immense damage on our most holy faith. I object with all my strength to this arrogance as essentially *irreligious* and schismatic. And caution him once more against publishing any *notice, any invitation or exhortation* concerning the Church of St. John the Evangelist as *a memorial to Pius IX*. I assume that in your prudence and good judgment you realize the importance of what I say, and so I hope that I shall be given no further reason to make me alter my attitude of benevolence toward the Salesian Congregation.

Meanwhile Don Bosco was cudgeling his brain to find funds. In 1877 he had been given some help by the department of railways of northern Italy in transporting materials, but only up to thirty-eight tons. He now petitioned, on December 14, almost on the eve of his departure for Rome, that this ceiling be removed. In a reply the director general cited the forthcoming transfer of railway transportation to another private company¹¹ and stated that the relief measures that had been in effect until now would cease as of May 31, 1878, nor would the tonnage limit be changed. On April 24, 1878, Don Bosco renewed a request for a reduction in freight rates beyond those limits, but the reply was still negative.

He also called upon his brother priests for help, requesting that they offer Masses and ask brother priests to do the same, letting him use the stipends. On the feast of Mary, Help of Christians—and again on that of the Assumption, with due modifications—he addressed a circular¹² to a great number of priests. The *Salesian Bulletin* too, of course, did its share each month. The July issue contained a two-page spread of the architects' plans of the church and hospice—the first time the *Salesian Bulletin* ran an illustration.

One more ceremonial ritual remained—the solemn laying of the cornerstone. Don Bosco turned his mind to that as soon as he returned to Valdocco. [On April 25, 1878] he wrote to Count

¹¹The administration of railways in northern Italy was to be turned over to another company by July 1, 1878. [Author]

¹²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Eugene De Maistre: “. . . I have a favor to ask of you. Within the first two weeks of next May, we will have the blessing of the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist . . . in honor of the late beloved Pius IX. Would you do me the honor of laying this cornerstone? I ask this of you for the love of that Pontiff for whom you so often risked your life.¹³ Choose a day most convenient for you.”

The count could not accept because, with the onset of fine weather, he usually left for France with his family. Don Bosco went higher and sent his request to the duke of Genoa, who replied on June 6 that he was due to leave Turin very soon and could not accept “the courteous invitation.” He then passed the invitation on to Prince Eugene of Carignano, who felt that he could not accept since he always declined invitations for similar ceremonies.

In former days, princes of the House of Savoy had not declined opportunities to honor the Oratory by their presence, but conditions of public life had changed and it was felt that a certain restraint was needed. Nevertheless, Don Bosco always enjoyed great esteem at court. In fact, the children of Prince Amadeus, duke of Aosta, used Don Bosco's *Bible History*, *Church History* and the *History of Italy* as textbooks in their classes under the tutorship of Father Violino, a former Oratory pupil. When the young princes would ask who Don Bosco was, their tutor would reply, “He is a saint, a saint of today.” Anxious to meet him, they asked him to take them to Don Bosco. “Gladly,” he answered. However, though he did take them periodically to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he never set foot inside the Oratory, for Prince Amadeus would not give the press any opportunity for gossip by having his children introduced to Don Bosco.¹⁴

There was also need to provide for the ritual blessing which accompanied the cornerstone laying. Don Bosco, who, despite all their problems, had constantly kept in touch with the archbishop both by letters and by visits, called on him on July 19, encouraged by a personal invitation from His Excellency, who had asked for “a

¹³The count had served in the Papal Zouaves. [Author]

¹⁴The noble and fearless Father Violino tactfully declined to accompany Prince Amadeus and his family when they moved to Rome, and he retired to Mondovì. Far from being upset, the prince continued to pay him his salary and, on returning to Turin, reinstated him in his service. [Author]

brief interview” with him. Capitalizing on the opportunity, Don Bosco mentioned the ceremony, and the following day the archbishop wrote, “Yesterday you mentioned the blessing and laying of the cornerstone for the new Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin as being imminent. Since I do intend to officiate personally at this sacred ceremony, as liturgical rules prescribe, but also have other commitments to meet, please send me as soon as you can the approximate date of this sacred function so that I can set my calendar.”

Twenty-four hours later he had second thoughts and wrote once more: “While reflecting on the cornerstone ceremony for the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, I thought that you might wish to officiate yourself. If so, I grant you all permissions with this letter. You may carry out the service according to the Roman Ritual on whatever day you choose. However, bear in mind that, given the present circumstances, if the archbishop of Turin does not personally bless the cornerstone—especially should the mayor, the prefect or a prince be present—the door would instantly be flung open to the father and author of lies, who would sow the seeds of hell with both hands, filling people’s minds and spreading gossip in the press, the taverns, the stores and the coaches, destroying both truth and charity and wreaking untold havoc among souls. Neither you nor I would then be totally blameless for the scandal. Hence I think it very advisable that everything proceed as I told you this morning and as I wrote you yesterday.” It had never occurred to Don Bosco to preside at the ceremony himself. No doubt the usual mischief-makers must have been busy to bring about this unwarranted sermon.

Since he could not have a prince of the House of Savoy at the ceremony, Don Bosco sent Count Cays to invite Mayor Ferrari of Turin. The mayor felt that he ought to consult the board of aldermen. On July 31 he replied: “No one can question your zeal on behalf of the poor most in need of learning and education. Without getting into a discussion about the results you may achieve in terms of improved learning, we all acknowledge the diligence with which you carry out your plans. The city administration, restricted to its own domain of action lest it prejudice its own functions, applauds private initiative, neither obstructing nor encouraging it. It is therefore out of place for the mayor to take part

in, much less preside over, a ceremony which certainly has prominence of its own and needs no further embellishing.” Realizing that the “neither obstructing nor encouraging” meant that the mayor was diplomatically washing his hands of the matter, Don Bosco so informed Archbishop Gastaldi in his reply to the latter’s communication of July 20 concerning the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Turin, August 6, 1878¹⁵

Your Excellency:

After some delay the mayor of Turin has replied that he cannot come to lay the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

I have, therefore, invited a banker, Mr. Joseph Ceriana, who has accepted. The ceremony will take place next Monday morning, August 12, at 10 o’clock. This is at the gentleman’s request, but he will accommodate to a change of schedule if needed. Should Your Excellency decide to come and perform the ceremony, you would delight everyone, and I humbly beg you to do so. However, if you cannot come or judge it wiser to be absent, I shall preside by virtue of the faculty you so graciously granted me in your letter of July 21. If you will honor us, please let me know where I may send a coach to fetch you.

I have passed on the sense of your letter to the editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* as per your instructions. He sent me a confidential reply, which I now enclose with equal confidentiality—not that I approve it, but only that I may share it with you.

I heartily thank you for the benevolence you have promised our humble Congregation and assure Your Excellency that we shall make every possible effort not to be unworthy of it.

All I ask is that we be treated equally with the other religious congregations in this city. To begin with, there is one favor I would like to ask: that our priests, particularly our directors, when they are transferred to one of our houses in this archdiocese, be excused from any further examination for confessions once they have taken the examination elsewhere and have had some years’ experience in the holy ministry. I am expressing but a wish. I shall abide by whatever you decide.

On August 10, the feast of St. Lawrence and Your Excellency’s name

¹⁵Don Bosco, usually hasty in jotting dates, not only made sure not to omit the date on any of his later letters to the archbishop, but took pains to write it out in full. There was a reason for this. In the archdiocesan liturgical calendar for the year 1878, Section 6, entitled *De die scriptis apponenda* [Concerning dates in documents] stated: “We strongly reprove the style of abbreviating the date on letters and documents by using a number for the month and indicating the year by its two last digits. This innovation invites ambiguity, misunderstandings, possible alterations and errors.” [Author]

day, all our boys will join me in praying and offering our Holy Communion that you may regain and long enjoy your health. I am greatly honored to remain,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The “confidential reply” to which reference is made above came from Father Bonetti at Sampierdarena and expressed the opinion of his editorial staff. Don Bosco forwarded it with the caution: “Not that I approve.” In all truth, a very subtle irony runs through it, especially the piece about the *Atheneum*—as was easily noticed by those who knew that the periodical favored Rosminian philosophy and mirrored the archbishop’s own views. We reproduce it here because it may well be seen as the final word in this controversy.

Sampierdarena, August 1, 1878

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

We have just received your kind letter passing on the earnest recommendation of Archbishop Gastaldi to instruct “the *Salesian Bulletin*’s editor not to keep harping on the archbishop of Turin and other bishops. . . . And caution him once more against publishing any notice, any invitation or exhortation concerning the Church of St. John the Evangelist as a memorial to Pius IX.”

Admittedly, the first part of this directive particularly both surprised and alarmed us. It sounded as if the editorial staff of the *Salesian Bulletin* had until now waged war against the archbishop of Turin and other bishops. Actually, all we have been doing is trying to promote the good of the Church among our benefactors or cooperators.

We immediately reread our articles in the *Salesian Bulletin* but failed to find a single phrase that in our opinion smacked of irreverence toward any bishop or indicated any pretense of ours *to behave like teachers, censors, judges and reprimanders of bishops*, such as was stated. Apart from any other prelate, we made two references to the archbishop of Turin, and with a good intention, convinced that we were faithfully interpreting his mind. First, in the June *Bulletin* we wrote the following in describing the feast of Mary, Help of Christians: “Enhanced splendor was imparted to the ceremony by the presence of the devout Bishop Stanislaus Eula of Novara, who pontificated with permission of our venerated Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi.”

There seems to be nothing irreverent in this statement, especially considering that in granting another bishop permission to officiate that day

in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, the archbishop had required that public announcements explicitly state that the bishop had received his permission to pontificate.

Second, the July issue of the *Bulletin* replied to the *Illustrated Atheneum* which, claiming to have the imprimatur of the archdiocese of Turin, arbitrarily interpreted the decrees of Urban VIII to prove that Catholic newspapers are not allowed to publicize any miracle claimed to be obtained through the intercession of Pius IX until that miracle has been recognized by the Holy See. In that case, far from *acting as teachers, censors, judges and reprimanders of bishops*, we raised our voice against the periodical for the way it blamed not only the journals which had reported such graces prior to the Church's final judgment, but also the bishops who authorized the statements. Our article makes it evident that we were attacking the irreverence shown by the above periodical, which claimed to know more than the official episcopal and archepiscopal censors of Italy, including Rome itself. At the same time we defended the archbishop of Turin who directly was made to appear by the *Atheneum* as opposing the views of many illustrious, honored prelates. Well, now, are we not rightly astonished to find that he calls us irreverent to episcopal authority and accuses us of upsetting the archbishop of Turin?

Furthermore, if he regards our conduct in this matter as "a most grave scandal wreaking immense damage on our most holy faith," all we can say is that we are not to blame. The fault should lie with the censors of the archdiocese of Genoa, who authorized our articles without comment or criticism. You know very well that this little publishing house of ours puts out nothing without the prior approval of ecclesiastical authority. It would seem in this case that we are giving people the impression that the learned, devout and zealous archbishop of Genoa had authorized "an irreligious and schismatic" publication. We therefore humbly and earnestly beg His Excellency, Archbishop Gastaldi, to point out the blameworthy errors in our articles, and we assure him that his observations will gladly be taken with due respect.

As regards the Church of St. John the Evangelist, the problem was the word "monument." The archbishop asked us no longer to call this church a "monument to Pius IX," since he wishes the Church of St. Secundus to be Turin's only monument to this great Pontiff. Once we knew this wish of his, we took great care to avoid using this word in any issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* which reaches our cooperators in either the city or the archdiocese of Turin. Our pressmen can vouch for this, because we stopped the presses and had the typesetters alter the composition. We shall continue this policy in the future. We do not believe that we can completely hush the purpose of this church since the cooperators who

donated and are still donating funds toward it have a right to know how work on this house of worship is progressing. Let it be understood, however, that such information is in no way being sent to the general public but only to our own benefactors and cooperators, and there are very few of them in the archdiocese of Turin.

This is a confidential letter, but do with it as you wish. We only ask that you let our archbishop know that we hold him in high esteem and veneration, that we pray God to preserve him for the welfare of the Church and the faith, and that we shall conscientiously publish only what our ecclesiastical superior judges to redound to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

The Editorial Staff

Something happened in connection with the construction of the Church of St. Secundus which throws some light on the archbishop's circle of friends who fed him biased reports and left him the role of victim rather than agent.

The Buzzetti brothers, Charles and Joshua, building contractors of the church, had agreed with Archbishop Gastaldi that he would pay them a stipulated sum until the church was finished. He paid on account at irregular intervals and received a receipt each time from one of the Buzzetti brothers. Their account books show that they received fourteen partial payments amounting to eighty thousand two hundred lire between July 1, 1874 and November 6, 1877.

On February 1, 1878, Joshua Buzzetti went to the archbishop's residence to ask for another payment. The archbishop received him very graciously and started by saying that he felt it would be wiser to make out a single statement of all the sums of money paid over those years so as to simplify his bookkeeping. Then he gave him another three thousand lire, and, disregarding the previous fourteen receipts, made out one overall receipt for eighty-three thousand two hundred lire. This final receipt made no mention of any extant partial receipts. Although Buzzetti asked him to void them, he refused and simply asked him to sign the receipt.

Understandably Buzzetti felt uneasy. He preferred having those receipts in his possession before signing, but he also realized that it would be both discourteous and distrustful to insist upon his demand with the head of the archdiocese. The archbishop had meanwhile called in his secretary Father Maffei and notified him of this last payment of three thousand lire. Yielding to pressure,

though still uneasy, Buzzetti signed the receipt. While Father [Francis] Maffei was signing as witness, Canon [Thomas] Chiuso suddenly entered to announce some French visitors, immediately ushering them into the room. Archbishop Gastaldi snatched the receipt and, taking Buzzetti by the arm, hastily let him out by a small, secret door. He kept the partial receipts.

Joshua Buzzetti went home very upset, his head in a quandary, for he felt that something was wrong with the way he had been dismissed. He told his brother Charles what had happened, and Charles, equally disturbed, told him that he had been wrong to act in blind trust. Afraid of losing his hard-earned money as well as the money advanced to the masons, he insisted that Joshua return to the archbishop and ask for the partial receipts. Joshua did so but could not get an audience.

On May 9, 1878, Joshua Buzzetti received the final payment of ten thousand lire from the archbishop himself. He made bold then to mention the duplicate partial receipts, but the archbishop demurred, so that Joshua felt that he wanted neither to return nor to void them. From then on, despite all his insistence, he could not speak to the archbishop again, for the secretaries kept shunting him to Canon Chiuso's office. The canon always found excuses for not letting him see the archbishop, reassuring Joshua that he himself would personally deliver the partial receipts to his working site at the Church of St. Secundus—but he never showed up. It is to be noted that, prior to this, Buzzetti had always had free access to the archbishop and that when, occasionally, the archbishop could not receive him immediately, he was asked to wait until the prelate was free.

For about two years Joshua kept calling on Canon Chiuso every other week, and he was always given the same reply. The Buzzetti brothers were worried, but they tried to comfort themselves with the thought that such people would not stoop to dishonesty. Toward 1881, Joshua tried to sound out the archbishop's intention indirectly, writing to ask for a statement of the total sum paid out to him, saying that he needed it for the engineer supervising the work in order to settle outstanding accounts and verify how much was still owed to the bricklayers. He never received a reply.

Archbishop Gastaldi died in 1883, leaving Canon Chiuso heir to all his estate, which amounted to over a million lire since all his

income as archbishop, by legacy or otherwise, was legally received as a private citizen. Consequently, under the law, Canon Chiuso did not have to account to anyone for what had been handed over to him.

Joshua Buzzetti lost no time in calling on Canon Chiuso to retrieve those ill-starred receipts. Chiuso listened with unconcern, as though he had no obligations in the matter, but, lest Buzzetti create a scene, he slowly led him out of the office into a waiting room, where through a glass partition the chancery staff could see whatever took place. There, acting as if he had no idea of what Buzzetti wanted, he asked him to repeat his request. Then, claiming that he was in no way indebted to him, he took out the partial receipts and said, "If you come to me for payment and goad me on, I will pay you with these receipts. Go for your money to the pastor of St. Secundus." This was a blatant swindle to force the Buzzetti brothers to demand their payments from the pastor of St. Secundus. Buzzetti replied that he had signed the contract with the archbishop, no one else, that he did not intend to forfeit his rightful money, and that pressure of this kind had been put upon him even during the archbishop's lifetime.

Thunderstruck by this intimidation, his head in a turmoil, Buzzetti was so beside himself that he could neither cry nor speak. He was being swindled of eighty thousand lire, and a priest had contrived it! The poor man hastened to unburden his heart to Don Bosco, who already knew of the situation. "I know that you have already spoken ill of Canon Chiuso," Don Bosco replied. "That was wrong." In turn, Buzzetti retorted that he was so disgusted with Chiuso that if he ever attended Mass at the cathedral and found him on the altar, he would walk out.

"At the altar a priest is always a priest," rejoined Don Bosco. "Do not worry. . . . It will all blow over. . . . Don't lose heart. If I ever see you depressed, I will tweak your ears." He did not say a single word that might in any way slight Chiuso or recall unpleasant incidents. Buzzetti greatly admired him for that.

We will summarize the sequel. Since Canon Chiuso maintained that he knew of no contract between Archbishop Gastaldi and the Buzzetti brothers regarding the construction of the Church of St. Secundus, saying he had no idea that the Buzzetti brothers even existed and he owed them nothing, the Buzzetti brothers went to

court. They were supported by their master ledger, by Father Maffei who testified for them, and by other proofs. Yet problems remained which could have led to complications.

Canon Chiuso was subpoenaed by the claims court. At the hearing he began reading a statement prepared by his defense attorney, but the magistrate interrupted him, instructing him to reply to his questions with a simple yes or no. "Did a contract exist between Gastaldi and the Buzzetti brothers?" . . . "Do you know the Buzzetti brothers?" . . . "What is the sum owed by Gastaldi to the aforesaid brothers?" Such resolute insistence forced Chiuso to answer, lest he be brought up on criminal charges. Thus a settlement was reached. Chiuso paid the amount which had been agreed upon and handed back the partial receipts.

Now let us turn to more pleasant matters. The long deferred cornerstone ceremony took place on the eve of Our Lady's Assumption. Don Bosco announced the news "with great joy" in his letter of invitation on August 12, 1878. Archbishop Gastaldi imparted the blessing with all the solemnity of the Roman Pontifical. Then Baron Joseph Ceriana, bank president, as chairman of the celebration, troweled the cornerstone within the sanctuary of the future church, in a niche alongside the pilaster nearest the gospel side of the main altar. The ceremony was heightened by the presence of a large number of priests, many distinguished ladies and gentlemen, and a considerable gathering of Salesian cooperators. Just before the liturgical blessing, Don Bosco read aloud a formal record of the event and then gave a brief talk to go with it. He spoke as follows:

Your Excellency, Honorable Gentlemen:

At this solemn moment, I express the warm gratitude which floods my heart for you and for all who by prayer and by material and moral support have helped to raise this memorial of love and thanks to the great Pius IX. Unable to repay you as you deserve and as I would wish, I promise daily prayers to be offered up to God in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and before long in this church which we now erect in honor of the beloved apostle and in memory of Pius IX, who bore the name John. We pray for all here present, and for all who either have worked or will work with us to bring this project to a happy conclusion, particularly for the Salesian cooperators. May the merciful Lord grant you lasting good health, a long and happy life, peace within your families, and success in all your

undertakings and concerns. May Jesus Christ reward you a hundredfold in this present life, and even more abundantly in the future.

Meanwhile, all you distinguished benefactors who have taken on this work of piety and now see it progressing so well, please keep up your support and charity, for I have no doubt that it will be brought to a happy end for the good of the people and of the faith, to your own glory and happiness. As long as you are on your earthly pilgrimage, you will be honored and blessed by all and by heaven itself, and after you have left this world, those who follow you will continue to pray for you in this church and bless your memory. Indeed, while admiring your achievement, they will come to respect and love the faith which inspired you to it. Long after your celestial harmonies will join the angelic melodies in heaven, this church, built by your alms, will echo with the gentle songs of your grandchildren and great-grandchildren who will try to outdo you in singing the praises of the all-holy God. While you enjoy in eternal peace the victory given to the soldiers of Jesus Christ, worshipers in this holy temple will be inspired to fight the Lord's battles, to eat of the bread of the strong, and to temper their weapons of prayer and piety, so that they too may win the palm of glory. You will have achieved your blessed repose at the end of your pilgrimage, and other chosen souls will join you who, after God, will attribute their eternal salvation to this church. On that day, looking down upon the immense good being done in this church and its adjoining school, witnessing the glory of God, the honor of the Catholic Church, the benefit to civil society, and the welfare of our beloved city of Turin, your souls will exult in heaven's purest joy and your crown of glory will be adorned with new splendor.

After this talk, the parchment record was signed by Archbishop Gastaldi, Baron Ceriana, Count Reviglio,¹⁶ Engineer Spezia and Don Bosco. It was placed inside a glass cylinder with several other items, such as the photos of well-deserving citizens, the church and school plans, the April issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*, a list of existing Salesian houses and their members, and several coins and recently coined medals. The glass cylinder was put inside a leaden tube, hermetically sealed, and placed into the hollow of the cornerstone. Then, placing his right hand on the stone, the archbishop began the sacred rite, after which he spoke, citing the

¹⁶Count Charles Reviglio della Venaria was a zealous Salesian cooperator, a staunch Catholic, and an accomplished architect. Through him Don Bosco succeeded in overcoming all the obstacles which opposed the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, some of them seemingly insurmountable. [Author]

glories of Christian Turin, praising the new church's patron and concluding with these words of praise and foresight: "I acclaim the erection of this church in honor of an apostle so beloved of Jesus Christ, so devoted to Mary, so deferential to the Chair of Peter.¹⁷ May the sight of this church kindle our hearts ever more with devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. May it warm us as devoted sons of the Pope. As long as Turin professes these three devotions which are her glory, the Catholic faith shall be maintained among its people."

Thanks to the heroic fortitude and undaunted fidelity of Don Bosco, we may rightly assert that the archbishop's threefold hope has been amply fulfilled.

¹⁷His speech cited Sts. Linus, Cletus and Clement, and mentioned how St. John might have stepped forward to captain Peter's ship, for all Christians would have gladly acknowledged him as their head, but he yielded to those saints who succeeded the Prince of Apostles and revered them. [Author]

CHAPTER 19

Organizing the Association of Salesian Cooperators

IN an undated sketchy note going back a number of years, Don Bosco set forth the aim, means, and membership requirements of the Association of Salesian Cooperators. “The aim of this association,” he wrote, “is to bring together a few individuals, both lay and ecclesiastics, to accomplish good works that may redound to God’s greater glory and an active charity that adopts all spiritual and material methods which may contribute to this purpose, without ever seeking material gain or worldly glory. No branch of learning will be disregarded if it can contribute to realizing the association’s purpose. Any practicing Christian determined to work for the above-mentioned goal in accordance with the means proposed may become a member.” The words “a few individuals” and the missing reference to poor and abandoned youth seem to date this note to a time when Don Bosco was pondering the idea of an association without as yet envisioning the vast growth it achieved when it became a reality. However, this idea was the seed from which grew the first set of regulations of 1874, later amplified in both 1875 and 1876. In the next two years, Don Bosco did his very best to consolidate and broaden the association. His far-seeing mind could already foretell its providential worldwide development.

Nothing is more essential to an institution’s solidity than the unity of spirit of its members. The *Salesian Bulletin*, desired by Don Bosco notwithstanding contrary opinions from near and far, was finally brought out by him in August 1877. Its aim was to maintain an unwavering unity of thought and harmony of action among the members of the new pious association for the realization of this common goal. From the very beginning the *Bulletin* was

issued as an official publication, free of charge, to all Salesian cooperators. Written very plainly and in an almost intimate tone, it gradually created a sort of family environment among the members and between them and the Salesians, thus effectively promoting a common outlook.

Another indispensable condition to ensure the association's permanent stability was to come to a perfect understanding with ecclesiastical authorities. If a self-governed religious organization extending beyond diocesan boundaries was to be firmly and lastingly integrated into a diocese, it had to prove both its usefulness and its legitimacy. This took time and thought. In a brief of May 9, 1876, Pius IX, while granting the association certain spiritual favors requested by Don Bosco, affirmed its canonical existence in particular dioceses, gave it his blessing and expressed his earnest desire for its future growth. In Turin, however, the worth of the papal recognition was challenged since the association had not been canonically recognized by the diocese. Consequently it found itself in a difficult situation, which worsened in November 1877 when Archbishop Gastaldi banned as "irregular" the publicizing of papal indulgences in the *Salesian Bulletin*. He even threatened to caution all his clergy about it, and twice he appealed to Rome. Another fact ensued, however, to prove beyond doubt the association's diocesan recognition elsewhere. Archbishop Magnasco of Genoa had sanctioned the Association of Salesian Cooperators in his archdiocese three years before, but the fact had not been publicized. Now, since the *Salesian Bulletin* was being published at Sampierdarena, the archbishop realized that he was unavoidably involved in the controversy, and he issued a decree on December 15, 1877, confirming the approval given prior to May 9, 1876, reviewing it most explicitly and assigning the association a central headquarters for the territory under his jurisdiction. This very telling document reads as follows:

SALVATORE MAGNASCO

By the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See

Archbishop of Genoa

Abbot in Perpetuity of St. Sirius

and Overseas Legate, etc.

As far back as 1874, Father John Bosco presented us with a project entitled "Association of Salesian Cooperators" whose main objective was

to promote education and Christian instruction, especially among poor and abandoned youth. The sacredness of this objective as well as the regard for ecclesiastical authority embodied in the association's rules so favorably impressed us that we readily approved and commended it. Now, considering the advantages which this pious association offers our archdiocese in religious instruction, especially at St. Vincent's Hospice in Sampierdarena, and wishing to promote catechetical instruction everywhere—in view too of the fact that the Roman Pontiff has already enriched this association with spiritual favors—we have decided to approve it within our archdiocese. The present declaration constitutes formal approval. We hereby also establish its central headquarters in the aforementioned St. Vincent's Hospice, provided that this organization remains always subject to our ordinary jurisdiction.

Given at Genoa, the Archbishop's Residence,
December 15, 1877.

✠ Salvatore, *Archbishop*
Fr. Luigi Rossi, *Secretary*

Once the archbishop's decree reached Turin, the controversy about the association's approval came to an abrupt end. However, the actual *coup de grace* was given at a papal audience on March 16, 1878, as a result of which Don Bosco was enabled to proclaim far and wide that the Salesian cooperators had won the encouragement, praise, and blessing of the new Pope, Leo XIII. The fact was commented upon in the *Salesian Bulletin* of April. Without exaggeration, this event may be considered a milestone in the history of Don Bosco's glorious association.

A third requisite to hold the association together was to have solid ties to the Salesian Congregation. We are not faulting Don Bosco's closest co-workers when we say that they were not all readily disposed to favor his aim of creating such a vast organization, since he already had so many irons in the fire. But in a case like this he never gave the appearance of rushing, and he let things ride for a while, acting when the time came. Gradually the reasonableness of the idea broke down all resistance, until the desired moment of unanimous approval and willing cooperation came. It was a procedure which took three years, but Don Bosco was able to achieve his desired goal. At the general chapter of 1877, the general opinion was formed in favor of the association, and its basic rules were incorporated into the constitutions of the

Congregation. Thus a solid juridical link was forged between the two, and the pious association became an integral part of the Salesian Society.

Let us examine the statutes that were ratified. There were only eight, but they covered all essential points.¹ The first identified the association as “most important for us” and “the strong right arm of the Congregation”; the last stated that “the regulations already printed separately” are commended and approved. The association’s purpose and means were outlined in the second article: “The Salesian cooperators are good Christians who, while living at home, preserve the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales in the world and support it materially and spiritually, especially in the Christian education of youth. They form a kind of third order whose purpose is performing deeds of charity for the benefit of their neighbor, especially poor and abandoned youth.”

The third article stipulated the conditions required for membership: “To become a Salesian cooperator one must: (a) be sixteen years of age and free of any criminal record; (b) be free of debt and in a position to give some kind of moral or material assistance to the Salesian Congregation and to its undertakings, and (c) follow the association’s rules.

The fourth article specified the function of the *Salesian Bulletin* within the association: “The *Salesian Bulletin* is the sign of unity between the cooperators. To those who prove unworthy of membership, the *Bulletin* will no longer be sent; that will terminate their membership.”

The fifth and sixth articles referred to institutional membership: “Educational institutions may belong to this pious association. In their case the names of the superior and of the institution alone need to be registered; however, all members must do their share of good deeds in accordance with the regulations so that they may all enjoy the spiritual benefits. Since membership in the association is not a binding matter, any religious may participate. This is especially true of Franciscan and Dominican tertiaries.”

The seventh article specified the Salesians as the ones responsible for determining how membership drives were to be carried out. “The directors and Salesians in general should exert

¹Deliberations of the *General Chapter of the Pious Salesian Society*, Distinction V, Appendix Articles 3-10. [Author]

efforts to increase the number of cooperators. Hence, they should always speak well of the association and mention that the Holy Father himself is the foremost Salesian cooperator;² furthermore, they should stress that its aims are totally non-political. Since the association aims only at benefiting society, especially by saving poor and abandoned youth, membership is open to all. However, only those should be recruited whom we personally know for their piety and good morals or who are recommended by people whom we trust.”

In order to strengthen the bond between the cooperators and the Congregation, certain obligations were imposed, as for instance the observance of this rule: “At the end of each year the members will be informed of the good works that should preferably be undertaken in the course of the coming year.” We can trace to this rule the origin of the circular letters that the rector major has been sending to all cooperators every New Year’s day. The first, dated January 1879, contained also a review of the work of the preceding year, setting both tone and content for all subsequent letters. Since both these elements are so important, we quote this first circular letter as a part of the cooperators’ history:

My dear benefactors:

How comforting it is to me, my dear cooperators, to share with you the accomplishments we have achieved this past year, thanks to your zeal and charity.

I must first fulfill my own duty of thanking you for the zeal and generosity with which you have responded to the appeals made to your goodness, whether in terms of cash donations or in other personal sacrifices. I trust that you will be gratified to learn of the achievements resulting from your kindness.

The aim of my letter is twofold: first to give you a brief summary of all that has been done; second to propose some good works to be undertaken next year. I do this to carry out Article 7, Chapter V, of our regulations.

ACTIVITIES OF THE YEAR 1878

Thanks to your help, we were able to accomplish many things which hopefully have redounded to God’s glory and the benefit of our neighbor.

²This was said of Pope Pius IX, but it continued to be true even under Leo XIII. [Author]

Twenty-two houses³ opened this past year for poor and abandoned youth in Italy, France, Uruguay and Argentina. Our missions in those distant lands have expanded into a vaster and very promising evangelical field.

We were therefore forced to send a new group of Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to open new hospices and schools and to staff those already existing. The result has been an increased number of youth saved from impiety and restored to self-respect, to the honor of their country, and to the benefit of their families. We were also overjoyed to rescue thousands of boys from moral dangers and even from prison. We have led them back to the right path, taught them the way of goodness, and helped them at the same time to earn an honest living.

Another undertaking enthusiastically received was the church and boarding school of St. John the Evangelist. The construction has been completed except for the roof, and we hope to resume work the coming spring.

Heavy personal and financial sacrifices were called for to sustain all these undertakings, but, thanks to you, Divine Providence has not failed us. You should be happy for the holy use to which your charity was put, and for the moral and material achievements resulting from it for the good of souls and of society. It was this consideration which prompted the boundless charity of Pope Leo XIII, who also came to our aid. May God preserve him for us! Learning of our need, he kindly sent us a generous contribution of two thousand lire with a very heartening fatherly letter which you may read below. But we still needed ten thousand lire more to finance the cost of our new missionary expedition, and this sum was provided by the charity of a Salesian cooperator, a bountiful Christian who wishes to remain anonymous. With his offering, he enclosed the following note:

“I have read that our Holy Father, despite his own financial straits, has sent you two thousand lire for your various charitable works. Touched by such a noble example, I enclose the sum of ten thousand lire for the particular needs of your missionaries. This sum represents savings which I made through labor and thrift in my younger days, and I am happy to offer it to you now to be a beacon lighting my road to that eternity which is drawing near to me. A Salesian Cooperator.”

May heaven bless the heroism of this pious donor and grant him a generous reward in this life and the prize of the just in the life to come.

With this kind of help, we have been able to send out new missionaries, outfitting them with whatever they needed for their work. We have also

³Included in these were the houses of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and also the branch houses, so named because of the limited number of sisters in them, as well as the houses opened toward the end of 1877. [Author]

been able to provide for the further necessities of those already carrying out their ministries in distant lands.

PROPOSED UNDERTAKING FOR THE YEAR 1879

Several undertakings might be initiated in the coming year. The first is to use every possible means to promote parish catechism classes and any other activities on behalf of abandoned and endangered youth. They must be rescued from the perils and evils about them, even from possible imprisonment; they must be helped to become honest citizens and good Christians.

A second worthy undertaking is to expand the Sons of Mary Program, whose goal is to foster belated vocations to the priesthood and religious life. With headquarters at St. Vincent's Hospice at Sampierdarena, this program has already borne good fruit. A sizable number of adults have made a decision on their vocations; some entered diocesan seminaries, others chose religious life, and still others opted for the foreign missions.

Then there is the Church of St. John the Evangelist with its adjoining hospice. Since this memorial of the Salesian cooperators is to honor the glorious Pius IX, you should all be inspired to support it, in the trustful hope that at least the church may be completed during the current year.

My dear cooperators, where will we find the means to carry out so many charitable undertakings? I put all my trust in your charity. God has helped us through extremely difficult times in the past. He will certainly continue to inspire your generosity now and provide you with the necessary means.

Since we are presently faced with the need of feeding and clothing the many boys already in our hospices, we have sponsored a lottery with the approval of civil authorities. The prizes will be paintings and antiques donated for this charitable purpose. Tickets will be mailed individually to all our cooperators. I hope that you will accept them yourselves or dispose of them through good-hearted relatives or friends. You will be informed of the details in the *Salesian Bulletin*.

In the meantime, my worthy benefactors, allow me, along with all the Salesians and the boys you have benefited, to thank you from the depths of our hearts. You have our undying gratitude and the assurance of God's imperishable reward.

Each morning and evening, prayers are offered in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and in all Salesian churches and houses for your health and happiness, for harmony and peace in your families, and for prosperity in all your undertakings. We also invoke God's blessings upon you so that after a happy and peaceful life here on earth, you may all also reap the fruits of your charity in heaven.

We especially commend to your prayers our first Salesian cooperator,

Pope Leo XIII, all those who labor for the welfare of our Church, and those cooperators whom God has called during the past year. Finally, I ask your prayers for myself.

Ever gratefully yours in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

These annual reports kept the cooperators informed of what was going on and aroused greater benevolence for Don Bosco and his Congregation. Another pious practice which increased the people's good will was the knowledge that many prayers were being offered throughout the Congregation for deceased cooperators. This practice was fostered by printing extended obituaries for better-known cooperators in the *Salesian Bulletin* along with a list of all deceased cooperators. The first such list appeared in the June 1878 issue, introduced by the words: "Special prayers are said in Salesian houses for deceased cooperators as soon as word of their death is received. They are further remembered every morning [at Mass]. In addition we publish the full name and place of birth of each deceased cooperator at the beginning of the year, so that cooperators all over the world may also pray for them." Fifty-three names were listed, people of different social levels, many of them variously ranking priests, first and foremost among them Cardinal Berardi. A third factor which attracted devout souls to the cooperators was the treasury of spiritual benefits which they shared with the Salesians. To a cooperator who had said that he wanted to become a Franciscan tertiary so as to gain the abundant indulgences of that order, Don Bosco replied: "You need not become a Franciscan tertiary. Our cooperators have been granted the very same indulgences, and you are already a member. Read our little booklet and try to earn more indulgences, and you will gain their merit." As a reminder to the cooperators, the last page of the *Salesian Bulletin* always carried a list of indulgences to be earned at any time, underscoring those particular ones which could be earned within the month. This practice was followed from August 1877 to April 1883—that is, as long as Don Bosco could

⁴Letter to Deppert, Turin, May 28, 1877. More recently, the indulgences granted to the Franciscan Third Order, among others that of Porziuncula, have been revoked, but others, no less precious, have been granted. [Author]

personally give detailed attention to the magazine before entrusting its editing to someone else who faithfully followed his instructions.

Having described the consolidation of the cooperators' association, we would like to make an observation before going on to describe how Don Bosco promoted the spread of the cooperators during the years 1877 and 1878. In his circular letter reported above, Don Bosco spoke of promoting "parish catechism classes and any other activities on behalf of abandoned and endangered youth." That a cooperator should call himself a "Salesian" only because he supported the Salesian Congregation was always as far from Don Bosco's mind as from his program. Those who were not well informed may have thought so, but there is not a single word of our founder to sustain such a limited concept.

Don Bosco's real mind on this subject can be found in his first circular letter and also in the very first issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*. Here, in an article entitled "First Efforts of Some Cooperators," he offered the members of the association an example of what their activities might be. In a village near Turin, a parish priest, concerned about the poor attendance at catechism classes, had repeatedly striven to attract more children, but his efforts had all failed. Suddenly it dawned on him that there were some Salesian cooperators in his parish and that he was one himself. He called them all to the rectory, explained the sad plight of the parish, commenting on the tragic consequences of religious indifference among youth, and begged his fellow cooperators for their help. They immediately set to work. They called on their friends and acquaintances for a friendly chat or to discuss some business. Then they brought up the subject of catechism classes and found no difficulty in convincing those good people of the value of religious instruction. The more enterprising ones even went to the homes and shops of strangers. Before long, some four hundred pupils were attending local catechism classes. Then another problem arose: Where could teachers be found for so many classes? The very same ones who had found the pupils solved the problem by volunteering their services as either monitors or teachers for the Lenten instructions. Thus, as the priest wrote, a handful of willing helpers who were willing to go out of their way reaped an abundant harvest with lasting effects. The cooperators' official bulletin cited

examples such as this from the first issue on under Don Bosco's personal supervision.

But it was not only a question of consolidating the association; it had to be expanded. The idea met with widespread approval. One Oratory alumnus wrote, "How many of us boast of having been nominated Salesian cooperators!"⁵ The expression "nominated" explains Don Bosco's usual way of drawing new members to the association. Most of the time he did not wait for people to apply for membership. As long as he had no reason to fear that he would run into resistance from the good laymen and ecclesiastics he approached—some known to him by name only—he simply sent them a certificate of enrollment with an enclosed copy of the regulations. This certificate read: "The undersigned respectfully offers this certificate stating that the bearer is a Salesian cooperator and asks that it be accepted. Should any of your acquaintances wish to share in the same spiritual favors, they need only apply and a certificate will be sent immediately. Praying to God to grant you every benefit, I remain your grateful servant, Fr. John Bosco."

Don Bosco used every opportunity to gain new cooperators in this manner. In 1876, for example, when giving Father Rua a list of twenty-three eminent citizens of Turin to whom token gifts of grapes were to be sent, he also instructed him to include the cooperators' booklet.

To persons in high positions he usually sent a personal invitation to join. Just as he had personally asked Leo XIII, with saintly simplicity, to allow his name to head the list of Salesian cooperators, so he too humbly asked bishops and cardinals in writing to join in entourage about the Vicar of Christ. He also appealed to leading lay persons of the aristocracy to grace the membership rolls of his pious union with their names. One such appeal was addressed in 1878 to the Count and Countess of Chambord, pretenders to the throne of France, whom he contacted through their secretary, an intimate and frequent guest of the noble Maistre family.

⁵Letter from Father Anfossi to Don Bosco, October 12, 1877. [Author]

[No date]

Your Royal Majesties:

The Catholic principles which Your Majesties so proudly profess, together with your well-known and commendable piety, inspire me humbly to request your permission to add your august name to the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators. Instituted and endowed with spiritual favors by Pope Pius IX, of sacred memory, it has been confirmed by the present Pontiff, who is himself a member.

Trusting that your Royal Majesties will wish to join, I herewith enclose a certificate of enrollment with a copy of the regulations. I also pray to God that He will bestow every blessing upon your Royal Majesties.

Your humble, devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

And there is the gracious note of the celebrated historian, Caesar Cantù, to Don Bosco acknowledging receipt of an enrollment certificate: "Feast of the Epiphany, 1878. You have picked a very puny cooperator. I admire your zeal and your inexhaustible charity, but I have neither the capacity nor the strength to emulate you. I can only rejoice in sharing in your prayers, of which I am in great need. Please accept the enclosed modest offering. Most respectfully yours, C. Cantù."

A skilled organizer, Don Bosco realized that as the cooperators increased in number, it became all the more imperative that they be organized. He therefore set up groups under local leaders whose duty it was to assist the members and to act as trustees of the rector major of the Salesians, who was the presiding superior. When there were about ten cooperators in a town or city which had no Salesian house, Don Bosco appointed a leader with the title of "decurion," in some instances an exemplary layman. We find as yet no mention of diocesan directors. We have a copy of a letter written personally by Don Bosco in 1878 appointing a parish priest, whose name we do not know; it may be the original of a circular letter of which no copies have survived.

Turin, 1878

Dear Reverend Father:

While I am happy to welcome you and several worthy parishioners of yours into the ranks of the Salesian cooperators, I would also like to ask

you respectfully to assume the office of leader or decurion of these cooperators, in accordance with Article V of the regulations.

Should your work or other circumstances keep you from accepting this responsibility, I would appreciate your suggesting the name of another priest or deserving cooperator who you think can fulfill this function.

Trusting in your assistance, I take this opportunity to send you my very best wishes. With esteem and gratitude, I remain,

Your servant
Fr. John Bosco

Another effective means of recruiting members for the association were the two annual conferences prescribed by the regulations on the feasts of St. Francis de Sales and Mary, Help of Christians. These conferences spread the cooperators' name far and wide because admission was free, newspapers published reports, and the conferences occasionally generated publications which were widely distributed. These conferences were not held prior to 1878; it was then that Don Bosco held the first model conference in both Rome and Turin.

Don Bosco expressly organized the Rome conference, held on January 29, 1878, to serve as a model for all others wherever they might be held.⁶ He set it up carefully, choosing a place that would attract Roman aristocracy: the chapel of the noble Oblates di Tor de' Specchi. He also sought the support of several noble men and women and prelates and priests and succeeded in persuading the cardinal vicar of Rome, Monaco La Valletta, to act as co-chairman with Cardinal [Aeneas] Sbarretti. He sent out personal invitations with a printed program which read:

January 25, 1878

CONFERENCE OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN ROME
JANUARY 27,⁷ 1878

With the authorization and participation of His Eminence the Most Reverend Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, vicar of His Holiness, the first conference of the Salesian cooperators will be held, as prescribed by

⁶Letter to Father Rua, Rome [January 23], 1878. [Author]

⁷Typographical error. Read "January 29." See *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. III, Letter 1701. [Editor]

Chapter VI, Article 4 of the regulations, at the church of the distinguished convent of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, known as Tor de' Specchi.

Entrance will be through the convent gate. Participants are asked to go directly to the chapel.

All Salesian cooperators are cordially invited to attend. His Holiness most graciously grants a plenary indulgence to all who take part in this meeting.

As the regulations prescribe, a collection will be made for the Salesian missionaries of [South] America, for those who are about to leave for there, and for new Salesian houses about to be opened in areas where their need is most felt.

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco could not have chosen a better audience in terms of numbers and nobility of rank. At three that afternoon, a Salesian priest ascended to the platform especially set up for this occasion and read aloud the chapter, "The Saint's Love for the Poor," from Galizia's *Life of St. Francis de Sales*.⁸ The audience listened with rapt attention. Next, a celebrated woman singer, accompanied by organ, rendered the beautiful motet *Tu Es Petrus*. Lastly, Don Bosco took the stand, wearing biretta and short cape, and delivered a forty-five-minute address.⁹

Your Eminences, Reverend Fathers, honorable ladies and gentlemen—he began—on this solemn feast day dedicated to St. Francis de Sales—the first time the Church honors him as a Doctor of the Church—we hold our first conference of the Salesian cooperators. It is my great honor to address you today. The Holy Father has sent us his apostolic blessing, granting us the precious gift of a plenary indulgence, and his cardinal vicar is graciously presiding over our meeting. We chose the church of the noble Oblates of St. Frances of Rome as our conference site because it has been this city's first institute to go to the aid of poor boys who are cared for in Salesian houses. I had another engagement, but strong reasons held me here and enabled me to take part with great pleasure in this first

⁸Canon Pier Giacinto Galizia, two-volume *Vita di S. Francesco di Sales*, Brescia, 1856. Tipografia vescovile del pio Istituto dei Figli di Maria, Volume VI, Chapter 2, #16, p. 342. [Author]

⁹Reports on it were carried in *L'Osservatore Cattolico* of Milan (No. 27), *Unità Cattolica* (No. 30), the *Spettatore* (Feb. 5 and 6) and the *Salesian Bulletin*, March issue. In our files we have Father Berto's notes on this speech. [Author]

conference of Salesian cooperators. Blessed be the Lord! May His divine dispositions always be adored! In keeping with the aim of this first conference, I do not intend to deliver an academic discourse or a sermon. Let me just run through a history of the origin and growth of the Salesian cooperators.

After narrating the history of the cooperators from their earliest beginnings, he broke into a fervent exhortation to all his listeners to help the Salesians in their mission of saving youth.

My illustrious audience—he pleaded—Protestants, unbelievers, and sectarians of every hue leave no stone unturned in their attempts to harm our guileless youth; like ravenous wolves they stalk the streets, seeking to devour the lambs of Christ. They resort to every possible means to corrupt innocent souls, wrest them from the Church's maternal bosom, and enslave and ensnare them in the clutches of Satan. They do this through publications, pictures, kindergartens, schools, subsidies, promises, theats, and slander. What grieves us most is that instructors, teachers, and even parents cooperate in this campaign of destruction. How can we remain cold and aloof when faced with such heart-rending sights? Never let it be said, generous souls, that the children of darkness are more eager to do evil than the children of light to do good. Let each of us become a guide, teacher and savior of children. Let us react against the deceits of evil with loving efforts of charity, countering our publications to theirs, our classrooms to theirs, our boarding schools to theirs. Let us vigilantly watch our children within the family circle, in our parishes and schools. Vast numbers of poor boys and girls are everywhere exposed to the gravest harm, because of either their parents' neglect or extreme misery. Let us be parents and foster parents to them as our means and position permit, so as to save them from the allurements of vice and from the attempts of the evil ones to corrupt them. Ever more to drive us and strengthen our resolve in this task, let us often recall the loving care and concern which the Son of God lavished upon the young during His earthly days. Let us recall, too, the rich reward He promises those who benefit His little ones in word, deed, and example: a hundredfold in this life and an eternal crown in the next.

Don Bosco anticipated two possible objections of his listeners. The first concerned the relations of the Salesians with civil authorities. Rome, more than other areas of Italy, acutely felt the change of status that religion had undergone under the new regime, and insurmountable difficulties seemed unavoidable.

There is—Don Bosco averred—no such danger. The work of the Salesians and their cooperators promotes good moral conduct and cuts down the number of juvenile offenders who, were they abandoned to their own devices, might easily end up in prison. Educating such young persons, teaching them a trade, helping them and, if necessary, sheltering them—in brief, sparing no effort to forestall their ruin and turn them into good Christians and honest citizens—these are works which cannot fail to command respect. They are the concern of every government and political party. Doubtless, in our wicked times we must combine to the highest degree the simplicity of the dove with the cleverness of the serpent. On our part, we shall use that cleverness to save souls, inviolably upholding sound moral principles, but always sparing and respecting individuals.

The second objection Don Bosco faced was the broad expanse of charity that the people of Rome were being asked to cover. Their own city was already faced with so much poverty. How could they justify spreading their charity so thin, however admirable the work, especially if it was outside Rome?

Those Romans who have always been so very generous in helping the Salesians—Don Bosco went on—can take comfort in the thought that they have also benefited Rome. We have always taken Roman boys into our houses; many of them are with us now, while others are on our waiting lists. Be that as it may, feel free to work for the welfare of this great city's young people. The Salesians themselves nourish the hope that God will soon allow them to join you and your zealous clergy in working for the poor youth of Rome. In the meantime, though, let us bear in mind that Rome is a Catholic city, indeed the very center of Catholicity. Roman charity has always reached out to all nations and all Catholics. From Rome and by means of Roman aid, bands of missionaries have continually set forth to spread and nurture the faith in foreign lands. Thus, by helping the Salesian work at home or abroad you are really promoting Catholicism and working for the Church as a whole, that Church whose sovereign head is located in Rome while her children are scattered all over the world: *Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur Ecclesia* [Throughout the world the holy Church acclaim You, O God].

Don Bosco was followed by the cardinal vicar, who opened his address thus:

I can only praise the work of the Salesian cooperators. While aiming at promoting good morals for the benefit of society, they do not neglect to instill and spread the sound principles of our holy Catholic faith. Let us

take heart. But do not neglect Rome, presently so much in need of your help. Concentrate your efforts and your concerns here. Make it your task to bring a Salesian house here as soon as possible so that the Salesians may join their forces to our clergy and save those poor and abandoned boys who have no future unless a charitable hand reaches to hold and lead them to a life of work, faith and virtue.

The cardinal then went on to develop St. Paul's exhortation, "Never grow weary of doing what is right, brothers" [2 Thess. 3, 13]. And he urged the cooperators never to tire of doing good. Three obstacles, he said, usually stood in the way: boredom, discouragement, and fear. Rather than be overcome by boredom, they should grow daily in fervor. Nor should they be overwhelmed by discouragement, when at times no fruits are visible; rather they should seek comfort in the thought that the good seed they have sown will one day certainly produce good fruit. Lastly, they should fear neither peril nor persecution, but steadfastly persevere even unto death. This talk was followed by the motet, *Panis vivus*, after which His Eminence imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, thus closing the conference.

Don Bosco wrote that very evening to Father Rua: "Today we held our conference, at which the cardinal vicar presided. He delivered a magnificent short address. You will get the details. It will make history." Doubtless, he meant the history of the Congregation, but why not the history of the Church as well? After the formal approval of the Association of Salesian Cooperators on May 9, 1876,¹⁰ this conference, presided over by Rome's cardinal vicar, was practically a public reaffirmation of the association's canonical existence. The conference marked the triumphal entry of the association in the field of Catholic apostolate. This new army, grown beyond expectations, paved the way for the Congregation everywhere, affording reliable support for all its endeavors and strenuously coming to its defense at all times. If the Salesian Congregation has managed to win high standing in the history of the Church, the Association of Salesian Cooperators, making a name for itself before the Church, has certainly deserved to share in the honor and merit of the Congregation.

¹⁰The Association of Salesian Cooperators was canonically erected by Pius IX in a brief of May 9, 1876. See Vol. XI. p. 66. [Editor]

It should not surprise anyone, therefore, to learn that Satan tried to intervene. Father Turchi, who attended the conference, sent articles to two Turin newspapers. One was *Emporio Popolare*, edited by Father Vasco, S.J., who requested the archbishop's permission to print one article, since he had made it a standing order that anything having to do with Don Bosco had to be referred to him. Permission was denied. *Unità Cattolica*, however, did print the other article, but rumors had it that Father Margotti, the editor, did not get away with it. Monsignor Ighina, then canon and rector of the Mondovì seminaries, did not publish a digest of the article in his *Apologista* for fear of displeasing the archbishop, who had already protested the periodical's publication of the Salesian cooperators' regulations. The archbishop's personal explanation for his denial was that he considered all such articles to be directed against him. Father [John Baptist] Anfossi informs us, however, that *Unità Cattolica's* article "gladdened the hearts of the faithful and those who loved Don Bosco, while it disheartened the wicked. . . . They took it as a resounding blow to knavery. Don Bosco continues to be admired for both his energy and his love of goodness."¹¹

A publication did appear about that time, however, directed against the archbishop, and it carried a great deal more weight than any harmless newspaper article. It was an eighty-six page pamphlet published by the Tipografia Bruno [Bruno Press] of Turin, entitled *A New Year Gift to the Clergy; or a Critique of the 1878 Liturgical Calendar of the Archdiocese of Turin by a Chaplain*. The anonymous author subjected the newly-published diocesan calendar to a rigid examination for the sake of ridiculing the archbishop. He went at it with devilish zest, criticizing him for a large number of misspellings and grammatical errors, as well as for many inaccuracies in history, dogma and liturgy. He also took him to task for having several times wronged Don Bosco. For example, in the appendix, among twenty-four uses of "It is said . . ." three had reference to Don Bosco. One of these, the ninth, read:

It is said that the archbishop has forbidden *Emporio Popolare* from publishing anything that might in any way be favorable to Don Bosco. The

¹¹Letters from Father Anfossi to Father Berto, Turin, February 10, 1878, and to Father Turchi, Turin, February 13, 1878. [Author]

journal carries this to the point of having to pass over in silence facts and correspondence which are not just to the credit of Don Bosco to whom the journal owes so much, but also to the honor of the Salesian Congregation, the cardinals, and even the Pope. The aforesaid journal may not even publish data which would reflect favorably on the archdiocese itself and which would be of historical interest, such as the missionaries' departure, etc.

This booklet caused quite a stir in Turin. Priests particularly were very anxious to learn the author's identity. It was supposed that Don Bosco knew, but to all questions he invariably answered that he had no idea at all. Rather, he showed very great displeasure. The pamphlet managed to get into the Oratory, where many read it. To inquiries whether he had read it, Don Bosco's reply was, "No, I have not, nor will I."

One day at mealtime, Father Barberis good-humoredly let slip the remark that it might be a good idea to know the contents of that booklet because, after all, it should be brought out into the open so as to relax so much tension. Father Vespignani, who was present, tells us that Don Bosco reprimanded Father Barberis. The latter, however, writing in his chronicle which at that time had only sporadic entries and was soon to cease altogether, stated under the dateline of May 11 [1878]: "This booklet does honor to Don Bosco in the eyes of the clergy, but he grieves for the other side of the picture." For us only the latter half of his statement is valuable.

It was difficult to publicize the Roman conference in Turin, but nothing could prevent the holding of a similar meeting in Turin. Indeed, after Rome, Turin was the most appropriate place for it. Furthermore, at this time the rainbow of peace seemed to be about to appear between the archdiocese and the Oratory. The [forthcoming] feast of Mary, Help of Christians [May 24] provided the opportunity for an assembly of the Salesian cooperators on May 16 in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. The printed invitation read:

MEETING OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN TURIN

May 16, 1878

Turin, May 10, 1878

My dear cooperators:

Our regulations (Chapter VI, Article 4), call for two annual conferences

to be held wherever the number of cooperators warrants it. Because of our ardent desire that our first conference in Turin take place with the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians, we have chosen May 16, the second day of the novena in preparation for the great feast of Our Lady, Help of Christians, which will be celebrated most solemnly on May 24.

I therefore invite all cooperators to do their utmost to attend. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and pray that God may shower His heavenly blessings upon you.

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

He enclosed the meeting's agenda of seven items, the last two of which were : "The Supreme Pontiff grants a plenary indulgence to all who take part in this conference, and a collection will be taken up to benefit the Church of St. John the Evangelist and to support the Salesian missionaries in [South] America, who need our aid."

At three o'clock, May 16, some two hundred and fifty persons gathered into the tastefully decorated little church. It was not a select audience as was true of the one in Rome. It was rather a fraternal gathering of a cross-section of Turin's social ranks. The same passage was read from the *Life of St. Francis de Sales* as had been read in Rome, followed by a motet sung by the boys. Don Bosco then took the podium and reviewed the history of the Salesian cooperators, which began in that very church, and where they had launched their first undertakings. Many were present who from the very beginning had aided the "poor priest" who came to them without money. They had often made sacrifices in order to give. Now they were able to corroborate Don Bosco's words and were delighted at the progress made by the work which they had themselves begun. It was important for us to preserve Don Bosco's talk for posterity. Impatient readers may skip to the conclusion of this chapter, but what follows came from Don Bosco's heart:

My dear cooperators, I am not sure whether I should thank you first or ask you to join me in thanking the Lord for having brought all of us into one body to achieve so much good and for having called us together today to hold our first conference of Salesian cooperators in Turin.

But before going into my main address, let me first give you a brief résumé of what the Salesian cooperators have done here in Turin even before they were known by this name. Then I shall touch upon the task we are still to do.

Thirty-five years ago the very spot now occupied by this church used to be a hangout for idle gangs of boys who came here to fight, quarrel, and blaspheme. Two houses of ill repute were standing nearby. One was a tavern frequented by drunkards and crooks; the other, once occupying the place of this pulpit, was a house of prostitution. In 1846 a penniless priest arrived with his mother and rented two rooms in the second house at an outrageous price, hoping to do some good for the poor people of this neighborhood.¹² Everything they owned, a few scattered things, fit into a small hand basket. This priest, spotting the youngsters at their mischief, got close to them, and the Lord made sure that what he said was listened to and accepted. It was all too obvious that what this place needed was a church where God could be worshiped.

There used to be a kind of lean-to or shed starting here on the “epistle side” of the main altar and extending to the far right, as you would see it now. It was for sale and it was easily adapted into some kind of a chapel, since nothing else was available. Little by little the young toughs were attracted to the little chapel. Their number kept growing, and they spilled over into the open space before it, where you are seated now. Here catechism was taught. That priest was alone, though he was sometimes blessed with the help of the zealous Father John Borel, who did so much good in Turin. But Father Borel was already so busy with his own work for prisoners, especially those on death row, and so involved in the charitable undertakings of Father [Joseph] Cottolengo and of Marchioness [Juliette] Barolo and others, that he could devote little time to the boys. Still the Lord provided what was needed.

Little by little other worthy priests came to the help of that poor priest by hearing confessions and giving sermons or religious instruction. They kept the Oratory going, but there weren’t enough of them. To meet the needs of evening classes and Sunday school a handful of priests hardly sufficed. Then a goodly number of laymen lent a hand. They were clearly a Godsend, and much more good was done through them. These priests and laymen were the first Salesian cooperators. Heedless of discomfort and fatigue and noting how many young lads were turning to the practice of virtue, they willingly sacrificed themselves to help out the others. I have seen many of them give up the comfort of their homes to come here not just on Sundays but on every day of Lent to teach catechism at hours most inconvenient for them just for the boys’ sakes.

Meanwhile it was very obvious that these boys had to be helped also materially. Some of them wore trousers and jackets that hung in tatters, torn all over even to the embarrassment of modesty. Others had nothing better to cover their backs than miserable unwashed rags. Then the good

¹²See Vol. II, pp. 420ff. [Editor]

woman cooperators were moved to pity and resourcefulness. I'd like to tell you, to the glory of many of Turin's ladies, how, even though they came from prominent and genteel families, they still picked up those trousers and jackets without disgust, mending them with their own hands, taking these ragged shirts which had perhaps never seen water and washing and patching them and then clothing those poor lads. Drawn by the sweetness of Christian charity, these boys were motivated to stay on at the Oratory and persevere in virtue. How many of these same worthy ladies sent clothing, money, food, and all kinds of things! Some are here today, hearing me praise them; others have been called by the Lord to their reward for their works of charity.

Thus, by the help of many hands, we were enabled to do things we could never have achieved alone. What was the result of such powerful help from so many priests and lay people? Thousands of boys came for religious instruction to the very place where once they had learned to curse. To a home which had once been a den of debauchery they came to learn virtue. Evening classes and Sunday school became a reality. The poorer, more abandoned youngsters were given a home. In 1852 the little square became this church, the house became a hospice for poor boys, and all of this has been your work, my dear cooperators.

With the continued contributions of these first benefactors and with the coming of others every day, we found it possible to open two more festive oratories in two other sections of the city. One was at Vanchiglia, called the Guardian Angel Oratory, which moved to the parish church of St. Julia when it was built; the other, named for St. Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova. Just next to it the Church of St. John the Evangelist is being built.

But the needs felt so acutely in Turin were also felt elsewhere. Always with the help of our cooperators, we found it possible to consolidate the festive oratories already in existence and to extend their work beyond the confines of Turin.

The cooperators had to recognize the acute shortage of priests which was showing itself throughout Piedmont and Italy. What was to be done? Catholicism is not restricted to any one town or locality or person. It is universal and demands that more be done where more is needed in terms of charity. And so we opened a school at Mirabello, then another at Lanzo, and more after that, so that presently we have more than a hundred institutions all told, including churches and houses, and over twenty-five thousand boys are being given religious instruction in our houses, both as boarders and as day students.

Whose achievement is this? Mine? No! That of two, ten, or fifty priests? No! Twice that number could not have accomplished so much. It was

rather the many Salesian cooperators who everywhere, in every city, town and village, united their efforts to help the few priests committed to the task. Yes, you cooperators! But not only the cooperators. Indeed, we must recognize God's hand in all this. How else could so great a work have been created out of nothing? Yes, it was Divine Providence who sent such abundant means to save so many souls. If the good Lord had not willed things to turn out this way, I know that it would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to have brought it about. The need was both real and vast, and the Lord meets the greatest need with the greatest help. Indeed, the need increases day by day. Can we fear that the Lord will abandon us?

When I say that these material and spiritual needs keep growing every day, I am telling you a painful fact that no one can deny. If you could only read the requests that pour in for homes for poor and abandoned boys! There was a time when only large cities had to take care of destitute youth, body and soul, unhappy victims of misery, vice and crime. Now we must meet these needs even in small towns if we are to save society. It is mind-boggling to see the reality of even a fraction of so much misery.

But there is more. Growing mission needs call for more aid and more zeal. Bear in mind, too, that I am not talking about risking one's life in pain and martyrdom, for the Indians themselves are beginning to recognize their miserable lot and are begging to be taught. They are the ones who reach out to us, begging for someone to go to civilize them and teach them religion, without which they know that they can never be happy. The demand for opening missions comes from everywhere. Requests for missionaries pour in from India, China, Brazil, Santo Domingo and Argentina, so much so that if I had two thousand trained missionaries right now I would have a place to send them, certain of the harvest each could reap. Great work has already been done in mission lands through the festive oratories. With the Salesian cooperators' help and support, we hope that this good work can be increased a thousandfold for God's greater glory.

There is another good work which has gone forth from these oratories, one that I would not care to publicize but that you should know about. This is the work of recruiting young men of good will and giving them the means to reach the lofty state of priesthood. It is plain to see the number of God's ministers diminishing every day in a frightening manner. Everywhere we have looked for young men who show promise of a serious priestly vocation, we have brought them together and have given them the opportunity of study, and, lo, thank God, hundreds and hundreds of priests have already gone forth from our houses as a result of this work. Shall I tell you in strictest confidence how many seminarians donned the cassock last

year? All of our houses together, in Italy, France, Uruguay and the Argentine Republic, turned out over three hundred clerics last year. Most of them have gone back to their own dioceses. For example, of the forty-two seminarians in the diocese of Casale thirty-four came from our houses. Others have joined religious orders or have gone to the foreign missions, and a few remain with us to add their support to our efforts. Do you see now where your contributions, support and charity are going?

Another task of ours, by no means insignificant, is to erect a bulwark against heresy which threatens to engulf countless cities and nations. Already it has wrought havoc in Catholic countries, spreading wildly with the growth of political liberty. When evil runs rampant with the blessing of political liberty and the efforts of good men are thwarted and stopped, the consequences are disastrous. And so we have endeavored to raise a bulwark against heresy and irreligion in the first place by producing wholesome books and distributing them widely among Catholics. But more than books was needed. We saw that we had to post a sentry, as it were, in localities where the enemy was expected to strike, and we assigned an entire squad to where the danger was greatest and most persistent, where we felt we could quash the evil at its start. Here in Turin, then, in 1849 we opened the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory alongside the Protestant church, and there, also, after much study and work, we succeeded in laying the foundations of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, now under construction. Heresy also threatened Sampierdarena, and so we set up a hospice there. In Nice, nudging the Protestant church, we erected the St. Pierre's Hospice. At La Spezia heresy was beginning to spread among all the boys attending the imposing Protestant school, drawn by its many facilities. We made one great thrust, and behold we have a school there!

But rather than enumerate a list of things, let me tell you what happened at Ventimiglia. Here, owing to a population explosion over the past few years, the valley of Vallecrosia witnessed a boom in home construction. The population increased by hundreds and even by thousands. The homes were all new, and, while they were being built, nobody even thought of building a church. Sensing the situation, the Protestants put up a huge building right in the heart of the valley to serve as a hospice, a school and a church. Since the villagers had no other school, they were constrained to attend this one, and eventually some began attending the Protestant church as well. The bishop was in a quandary. Today no single person can possibly build a church and erect a parish. When we were asked to help, we gladly offered our services. Really we had no money to build, but Providence came to our aid. We rented a house, scrubbed and remodeled a storeroom on the first floor, and installed an altar, and all at once we had a working church. In adjacent rooms at its right and on the second floor we

set up two classrooms for boys; in the rooms to the left we opened a class for girls, taught by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

How things changed! The festive oratory now draws both youngsters and adults on Sundays, and people of the surrounding countryside are able to hear Mass there. Classes for both boys and girls are full. Everything was done with such a sense of commitment that the Protestant schoolrooms soon stood empty; not a single boy or girl attends them today. Even those who had been enticed to the Protestant church, once they were kindly invited to receive the sacraments at Eastertide, willingly left the church which threatened to become the heresy headquarters of Liguria.

One man alone cannot possibly carry on all these works. Cooperators are needed. Their donations help us to break into new areas to gain a foothold; once we are established, new cooperators join up and keep us going from there. Without the cooperators, the Salesians would be greatly hampered in their work and their zeal would end up in frustration. True, obstacles are always to be encountered in trying to accomplish good works, but the Lord always intervened so that we might overcome them.

This year our problems have actually increased, yet we can see the Lord's hand always sustaining us. This year our incomparable benefactor, Pope Pius IX, passed away. He had approved this association and had enriched it with precious indulgences; he wanted to be considered the first Salesian cooperator and never lost an opportunity to help us. Pius IX is dead, but God has been pleased to have a man like Leo XIII succeed him. I have already spoken with him about the Salesian cooperators in a private audience, and I have even asked him if we might include his name among them, as we enrolled his august predecessor. After questioning me about our association, Leo XIII said: "I want to be an active Salesian *worker*, not merely a cooperator.¹³ Should not the Pope be foremost in fostering works of charity?" So you can see that, having lost a father, we have now been given another father by the Lord, no less benevolent than the first. This was a year too in which a number of distinguished Oratory benefactors died, and again the Lord provided for other benefactors to take their places. The charity of the faithful has never let us lack anything necessary.

What, then, is the main purpose of the Salesian cooperators, their main concern? They must bring to completion the good works that I have just described—indeed, multiply them a hundredfold. To achieve this we need both people and resources. We continually offer ourselves and daily the Lord sends us persons ready to sacrifice everything, even their lives, for

¹³A play on the Italian words *operatore* (worker) and *cooperatore* (co-worker). [Editor]

the salvation of souls. But people are not enough; we need material means. My dear friends and cooperators, you have to obtain these means for us. This is the charge I give you. Let it be your task to provide these means. Be aware of the Lord's abundant grace as He gives you the means of cooperating in the salvation of souls. Yes, in your hands rests the eternal salvation of many souls. From my words you have become aware how many have found the way to heaven through the help of good people.

Now would be the best moment to thank you from the bottom of my heart. And yet, what thanks can I give? None. All thanks of mine would be far too paltry a recompense for your many good deeds. I will leave it to the Lord Himself to thank you. Yes, the Lord. He often said that He would take as done to Himself whatever we do for our neighbor. Furthermore, it is certain that spiritual works of mercy have even greater merit than mere corporal ones. Not only greater merit, I say, but even something which is divine. Do you want to do a good deed? Educate the young. Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young. Something even holier? Educate the young. Do you want to do divine work? Among divine works this is the most divine of all. The Church Fathers agree with these words of St. Denis: "The divinest of divine deeds is to cooperate with God for the salvation of souls." St. Augustine's explanation of this passage is that carrying out such a divine task is an unailing pledge of one's own salvation: "When you have saved a soul, you have predestined your own." By cooperating in good deeds which the saint speaks of, you may be confident that you are securing the salvation of your own soul. And so, I do not especially thank you myself. However, I do want you to know that in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, special prayers are offered for you morning and evening, indeed throughout the day, that the Lord may thank you on the last day when He will tell you: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because you have been faithful over a few things I will set you over many; enter into the joy of your Master" [Mt. 25, 23]. You are making sacrifices, but remember that Jesus Christ made the far greater sacrifice of Himself, and that we shall never even begin to come up to the sacrifice He made for us. Let us then take heart! Let those who strive to imitate Him, and to do all they can to help save souls, be at ease for their eternal destiny. *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*. This is no exaggeration. I hope and pray that you will be crowned with the words, "Enter into the joy of the Lord."

Don Bosco concluded his address with his blessing, and all then went into the playground, crowding around Don Bosco and conversing with him for almost an hour. After 1878, these conferences were held twice a year wherever there was a nucleus of

cooperators. The January and May issues of the *Salesian Bulletin* unfailingly informed its readers of these meetings and widely publicized what was going on in the various centers.

Father Michael Rua, who had personally been involved in the organization since its very beginning, explained Don Bosco's intent for the Salesian cooperators. Don Bosco, he said, had three aims in mind: first and foremost, to give his benefactors adequate thanks by offering them an opportunity of sharing in all the spiritual advantages of the Salesian Society; second, to inspire them to continue supporting his work and recruit other cooperators; third, to unite all his benefactors into a union of auxiliaries for parish priests and, through them, for the bishops, loyal sons and daughters of the Church's Supreme Pontiff. The facts make it luminously clear that Don Bosco achieved his threefold goal.

CHAPTER 20

Unrealized Plans for Houses in Italy

MANY projects arose for new houses in Italy during these two years—as many as a hundred perhaps, though we have no way of verifying the number. Some lingered on as mere proposals.¹ Others led to negotiations which were stymied somewhere along the way. However, just as the above proposals, vague as they were, confirmed the popular esteem and veneration for Don Bosco all over Italy, the negotiations tell us much of his words and deeds that enrich this biography and, possibly, trace out a pattern for his followers to imitate.

1. CASTELNUOVO D'ASTI

We begin with Don Bosco's home town of Castelnuovo d'Asti. The town fathers wanted their renowned native son to open a secondary school there and to send the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to run the girls' elementary school and the kindergarten. The pastor, Father Rossi, sounding him out, confidentially told him of the city council's plans and tentative conditions. Don Bosco, who had long been seeking an opportunity to do something for his own people, immediately instructed Father Rua and Father Cagliero, the latter a native of Castelnuovo, to check out the project as sketched by the parish priest and accepted by the town officials. Having done so, both priests, with the saint's approval, drew up tentative plans² for a boarding school. As regards the girls' elementary school and the kindergarten, Don Bosco submitted well-tested plans prepared by the Sisters of St. Ann.

¹This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The municipality reneged and did nothing but raise difficulties. In the hope of an agreement, the original terms were proposed again, but nothing came of the matter.³ No one seemed to see the advantages which Don Bosco was trying to bring them. The negotiators were convinced that the townsfolk felt it was Don Bosco's duty to do something for his birthplace.

2. CASTELNUOVO DI GARFAGNANA

We now turn to another and far more distant Castelnuovo. Bishop Tommasi of Massa Carrara needed two certified teachers for both upper and lower grades of his seminary at Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, the district capital, not far from Lucca. Father Dominic Bonacossia of the diocese came to Turin in April 1877 to discuss the project with Don Bosco, who seemed willing to accept the proposal for the forthcoming school year, as long as the Minister of Public Education would schedule special examinations for teaching certification. The minister did schedule them and Don Bosco sent in a dozen applications for his Salesians. However, to qualify, conditions had to be met which had never before been laid down in similar cases; consequently, nearly all the Salesian applications were turned down. Although Don Bosco's hopes were shattered, he had Father Durando write to the bishop that efforts would be made to meet his seminary's needs. He was concerned to keep the little seminary from being shut down by the school authorities, who threatened to do so if the teachers were not properly certified. No Salesians were available, but seemingly Father Durando managed to send two good lay teachers to fill the breach.

Again, in December 1878, from Castelnuovo di Garfagnana came a proposal of Monsignor Landi, secretary of Cardinal Oreglia, that Don Bosco purchase a handsome building which was on sale at reasonable terms and open a private secondary school. Don Bosco, who as a rule never gave an immediate refusal, held out good hopes, but not for the near future. "Your religious could do so

³This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

much good in Garfagnana!" wrote Abbot Zanotti.⁴ "They would certainly find an environment that would be helpful to moral growth as nowhere else, and they would be hailed and welcomed in glory." The town officials were also interested, and as negotiations proceeded, Don Bosco sent Father Marengo, director of the new house at Lucca, to represent him. He found both Church and town officials ready to agree to anything so as to get their desired secondary school. However, negotiations ended there for reasons we have not been able to discover.

3. SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF MELLEA

Negotiations for the Shrine of Our Lady of Mellea at Farigliano near Mondovì were more complicated. Don Bosco was looking for a place for a novitiate and house of studies for his clerics, and he saw Farigliano as an ideal location. In 1825 the town had become the legal owner of a Friars Minor monastery and adjoining shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Mellea. The deed of transfer held the town to two obligations in the event that expropriations similar to those of the Napoleonic era were ever to be renewed. The first one was that a priest be assigned to the church, to be chosen jointly by the town and the temporary parish priest. When, as a matter of fact, the Italian expropriation took place, the chaplain was a monk of the Friars Minor, its former custodians. At this time, in the growing wave of anticlericalism, it had been proposed and energetically sustained that monastery and shrine be sold. Once word got around, favorable bids were made, the most enticing by a group of Genoese businessmen who wanted to establish a large cotton mill. Alarmed by the prospect of profanation, the pastor and more balanced minds of the community thought of offering the use of the monastery to Don Bosco on the sole condition that the church never be closed to public worship. When asked, Don Bosco agreed to consider the proposal, personally visiting the place in the latter part of April 1877. He was delighted by its peaceful atmosphere and bracing air, which he found ideally suited to his purpose of setting up a novitiate and house of studies. It could also serve as a

⁴Letter, Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, January 24, 1879. [Author]

midway house for his schools in Piedmont and Liguria, with the added advantage of having the railway about half a kilometer away.

But obstacles immediately arose. On his visit, Don Bosco, knowing that the Friars Minor were the real owners, spoke of his plans to the monk representing the order. Distressed, the latter quickly contacted his provincial at Saluzzo. He in turn hastened to inform Don Bosco of the second of the two conditions cited above—namely—that should the existing laws of suppression ever be abrogated and the rights of religious orders restored, the Friars Minor were to regain possession of their former property. The provincial therefore registered a formal protest in his order's name based on the aforesaid clause. Don Bosco hastened to answer him on April 28, 1877 that he only intended to use the premises and thus save them from profanation; anyway, he was terminating negotiations, regretting that his action was opening the door to industrial concerns interested in converting both monastery and church into a factory.⁵

Don Bosco's letter failed to calm the provincial, Father John Peter Monti [O.F.M.]. However, Don Bosco, having sent the town officials of Farigliano a first-draft agreement⁶ perhaps a few hours previously, thought it best not to break off negotiations so abruptly, knowing that there would be time enough to clarify matters or to let the whole thing drop.

The most determined champion of the Salesian cause was Father Louis Mellonio, the parish priest. As fellow trustee of the monastery and shrine under the deed of transfer, he zealously did his best to ease the Friars Minor's opposition. The margin of his letter of July 12 on this matter contains Don Bosco's jottings to Father Rua for drafting an answer: "Let Rome know that we abide and shall forever abide by the directives of the Holy See." At this point, with some urging from Bishop Placido Pozzi, the parish priest wrote to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, explaining the situation and stating that Don Bosco had agreed to staff the shrine, which would still belong to the town, and to abide by the Holy See's guidance in all matters. This, he declared, "was the only way to stop the imminent profanation and ruin of Our

⁵This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Lady's monastery and shrine, to restore both to their former splendor, and to rebuild the shrine's lost popularity." Cardinal Ferrieri's answer, dated December 11, 1877, authorized the bishop to use his own prudent judgment after conducting the usual inquiries and forbidding the opening of any boarding school in the monastery; only students of the Salesian Congregation were to be allowed to reside there for the sole purpose of maintaining and staffing the shrine.

All things considered, this was not much of a concession; the bishop feared that a Salesian school might hurt his own apostolic school. Alluding to the bishop's directives, the parish priest wrote to Don Bosco: "I hope that you will not abandon us in this complex matter. The project is good and holy."⁷ It was thought by some that an outright sale would solve all problems⁸ but the way things were going dampened Don Bosco's enthusiasm. The parish priest, instead, held his ground. In July 1878 he won a second decree from the Sacred Penitentiary, hinted to in a letter from the bishop to Don Bosco.

Mondovì, August 12, 1878

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

This morning the parish priest of Farigliano showed me a rescript of the Sacred Penitentiary, dated July 24, authorizing me to act according to your wishes. I am also mindful of your reassuring letters of last year concerning your petition [for the use of the Friars Minor's monastery and shrine].

To comply with the Sacred Penitentiary's ruling I need two things: 1. That you would kindly send me the rescript issued last year in this matter. I understand you still have it. 2. That you tell me precisely what kind of school you intend to found in the Mellea monastery and what help you could give me to make up for the sad scarcity of priests which I too lament.

I am rushing to Biella for the episcopal consecration of Monsignor Riccardi, hoping that at my return I shall find your welcome reply. Yesterday I met and blessed your young clerics and their director.

Most devotedly and affectionately in Jesus Christ,
✠ Placido, *Bishop of Mondovì*

⁷Letter, Farigliano, September 18, 1877. [Author]

⁸Letter from Mr. Occelli to Father Durando, native of Farigliano: Farigliano, January 18, 1878. [Author]

Don Bosco's reply, scribbled on the bishop's original letter, tells us his feelings on the points it raised. Regarding the rescript he wrote: "We do not have it." As to the nature of the school he stated, "House of studies and novitiate for the time being." As to supplying priests, "We will do all we can." He then passed the letter on with these comments to Father Rua with this notation over the top of the page: "Just a memo for Father Rua." Obviously he felt that the matter was momentarily suspended, if not totally shelved. In situations like this, he never forced matters. His friends at Farigliano still kept their hopes alive until 1885, but they were mere straws in the wind. Don Bosco paid them no heed.

4. CREMONA

We now turn to Cremona. Canon Manini, former parish priest of Soresina, had founded throughout the city seven houses, called Houses of Providence, for boys and girls, for young women in moral danger, for nuns, and for other groups. The public applauded his initiatives and generously supported them. Each house, an autonomous unit, he daily visited to direct its operation and particularly to check its financial administration. A saintly priest, he spent his entire wealth on charity. Having founded homes for others, he had none of his own, but slept wherever night overtook him, often knocking at his brother's door for a bit of food. As regards the spiritual direction of the Houses of Providence, he had the help of only one young priest who went to hear confessions from home to home whenever he could. The government recognized Canon Manini's homes as charitable institutions. Father [Anthony] Sala visited them and described their routine to Don Bosco. With a sad smile he commented: "Bear in mind that when the sacraments are neglected in these institutions, they will never prosper." Subsequent events proved him right.

On August 31, 1877, when Canon Menini was still pastor at Soresina, Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli of Cremona had recommended him to Don Bosco, inviting him to take over the management of a home for vagrants and derelicts in order to assure its survival. "I feel that I don't have to plead any further with you to assist this priest in his saintly endeavor," the distinguished prelate

wrote, “for the tireless zeal and unique charity which Our Lord has kindled within you need no urging but are rather an inspiration to all.” Canon Menini went to Turin the last week of November for a personal meeting with Don Bosco. They seemed to find some common ground of agreement, so that the bishop again wrote to Don Bosco: “May God grant me the consolation of having your sons with me in this city and being blessed by their presence. Please remember that my home is yours. It will be my joy to welcome you.”⁹ However, the terms were such that on the founder’s death the Salesians could be asked to leave. Suggestions were made to reword the agreement so as to assure their ownership, but they fell on deaf ears and negotiations stopped.

The following year, on September 9, 1878, the bishop wrote to Don Bosco to suggest opening a Salesian school in Cremona. On September 21 Don Bosco replied that the following spring he would send someone to look over the premises which had been offered and that negotiations would then commence. We will see the sequel in its proper place.

5. LUGO

Lugo is at the heart of the Romagna province. Here a zealous Salesian cooperator, Father Francis Grilli, interpreting also his fellow townsmen’s wishes, called a meeting of all the local cooperators and invited them to find a site for a Salesian house in their city. Quickly a committee of lay people was set up to check out the possibilities and make proposals. In due time a report was sent to Don Bosco. Replying on Don Bosco’s behalf, his faithful spokesman, Father Rua, stated that their wish had been thoroughly considered, that Don Bosco was grateful for their trust in the Salesians, that he really wanted to oblige, but that for the time being he had neither personnel nor funds. Hopefully, personnel might be ready by the following year and the Lugo cooperators would provide the necessary funds.¹⁰ However, it took fourteen years to get Don Bosco’s sons to Lugo.

⁹Letter, Cremona, November 30, 1877. [Author]

¹⁰Letter, July 20, 1878. [Author]

6. BOLOGNA

Curiosity draws our attention to Bologna. Toward the end of November 1877 a priest visiting Turin chanced upon the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. He stopped briefly to study its façade and dome and then decided to drop in for a moment of prayer. He kept gazing at the main altar and then asked to whom the church and adjacent buildings belonged. To Don Bosco, he was told, who sheltered and educated a large number of boys. Having himself been looking for a home to place a boy, the priest called on the prefect to discuss the case, came to an agreement with him and instantly paid the lad's tuition and fees. Might he see Don Bosco, he asked, just for a few minutes? He had often heard people talk about him, and he wanted to know more about his work. Accompanied to Don Bosco's room, he stated his case with native blunt abruptness. "I am Father Anthony Fusconi," he said. "You have probably received my circular stating that, with the permission of my ordinary, Cardinal Parocchi, and the blessing of our Holy Father Leo XIII, I am planning to set up a retreat house in Bologna to receive priests who are sent there by their bishops to reform their lives or who wish to leave the world and seek a life of prayer. I am just passing through Turin, and mere chance or rather Divine Providence has led me to your church and inspired me to call on you, for I know how enlightened you are. What do you think of my plan?"

"Who told you of this project which I have been studying for several years?" Don Bosco instantly rejoined. "For some time we have been successfully doing this apostolate, and several priests have been settled in some of our houses. However, I doubt that your proposal, as described in the circular, will work. In the first place, no priest would want to go to your home because he would be openly admitting that he is a problem priest. Should any come, how would you keep them busy? Try this: stay here at the Oratory for a time to observe our routine. Afterward, we shall discuss the matter together and study our plan more carefully. Meanwhile, we'll have a chance to discuss other things as well."

Father Fusconi listened to him as to a voice from heaven. He stayed for lunch. While talking with Don Bosco he came to the decision that he had best come to an understanding with him and

even become a Salesian. Since he had taken town lodgings, he slept out of the Oratory but returned there at eight each morning, staying and working until eight at night. One day he told Don Bosco how happy he was that he had things to keep him busy. Indeed, Father Rua had no problem finding suitable work for people who dropped in at the Oratory, for he could never bear to see anyone idle, no matter who that person might be.

A few days later Father Fusconi went to Novara where a friend of his, Father Paracchini, was preaching Advent sermons. They discussed the project thoroughly and decided to place it entirely in Don Bosco's hands. But they had not reckoned with their ordinary. Father Paracchini wrote to his archbishop, Cardinal Parocchi, to tell him of their decision. He laid out their well-founded fears that both government and people would rise up in arms against the project and the difficulty of keeping problem priests occupied during their extended stay at such a place. He wrote of Father Fusconi's chance meeting with Don Bosco, their exchange of opinions, and their plan of establishing such a home in the care of a Salesian house. He stated that he favored the plan but that both he and Father Fusconi would fully defer to the cardinal's judgment. Having already discussed this excellent project with both of them, the cardinal answered on December 21 that if both priests felt they could not achieve their goal, he intended to retain full freedom of action for himself. "Only the ordinary can invite a religious congregation into his diocese," he wrote, "and this matter is so ticklish that it cannot be left to the initiative of anyone else. I reserve it for myself to act as I see best." Both priests were literally stunned and, as simply as they had taken the initiative, with equal simplicity they dropped it without further ado. Father Fusconi returned to Bologna, never to forget Don Bosco's kindness.

Don Bosco, informed of how the matter had ended while he was in Marseille in January 1879, sent Father Barberis a memo on the reply he was to make in his name to Father Fusconi: "1. Tell His Eminence that Don Bosco never spoke of opening a house in his diocese. He only proposed or, rather, offered all his Salesian houses should His Eminence wish to send there priests who had failed in their obligations and desired to return to the right path. There have been and still are a good number of such priests in our houses. 2. Were we ever to choose from the very many requests we

have for Salesian foundations one from the diocese of Bologna, we would first present our plans to the ordinary before taking definite steps, as our constitutions prescribe. 3. Finally, Father Fusconi is perfectly free to choose a more perfect way of life, e.g., the foreign missions, and leave the care of his institute for priests to anyone whom the ordinary of Bologna might appoint. Greet him affectionately in the Lord and tell him that I pray that God will grant him constant good health.” Father Barberis followed these instructions in his letter and thus ended the entire episode.

7. CECCANO

The proposal of a Salesian boarding school at Ceccano came up again while Don Bosco was in Rome. Toward the middle of January, Cardinal Berardi sent for Don Bosco to tell him that the Scolopian priest who was director at Ceccano could no longer continue in office. The cardinal wanted a Salesian priest at any cost to fill in for the time being, and he definitely expected Don Bosco to take over the entire school by the next school year, 1878-79. “As things stand,” Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua, “it is morally necessary for us to accept the work. But can we? Could we take Father Guidazio, one cleric and one coadjutor brother and send them to run the Ceccano school? In that case, Father Durando would have to get back into harness,¹¹ as he has been doing for a number of years. Just now the school has twenty boarders and about ten day students. The course of studies is technical and academic. All the teachers are laymen, live in town and come in only during school hours. Discuss it and let me know what we can do. I told the cardinal that I would write to Turin and that we would do all we can to please him.”

The phrase “discuss it” refers to the first paragraph of Don Bosco’s letter: “You might wisely call a meeting of the superior chapter together with a few others to discuss the staffing of the school at Ceccano as requested by Cardinal Berardi.” Father Rua obeyed. In a telegram of January 16 Don Bosco asked if the Ceccano project was feasible, and, if so, to send the personnel to Rome “as soon as possible.” Father Rua telegraphed that it was

¹¹That is, resume his office as school principal at the Oratory. [Author]

not feasible. The cardinal reluctantly accepted the decision, but he insisted that by fall the personnel had to be ready.

By autumn, however, the good cardinal had been dead for several months. During the summer his brother renewed the prelate's request. Father Tassinari, director of the school, who had been ordered to leave, was reluctant to abandon a project which was so promising, and he too intervened. He wrote to Don Bosco on August 9, vividly describing the moral and religious devastation of some areas on the outskirts of Rome, and he begged that Don Bosco, who sent "wonderful, generous men of his Society" to distant lands, would send a few there too, to take over the administration and teaching of that boarding school. Don Bosco could not be insensitive to such a heartfelt appeal, and he suggested that Father Tassinari discuss the matter with Father Monateri, the director at Albano. At this seminary things were not turning out as Don Bosco wished, and he had decided to recall his Salesians and send them elsewhere. With this in mind he wrote to Father Monateri about Cardinal Berardi's intentions in regard to the school at Ceccano.¹²

But in the end it was all so many words and no action. The school later got a new lease on life by receiving government recognition, and it remained under the temporary direction of a Scolopian Father of the Tuscan province. Fearing that this priest might be recalled by his superiors at any time, Marquis Berardi again toyed with the idea of asking the Salesians to assume direction of the school, but Don Bosco, who wanted to keep his freedom of movement, paid no heed to this renewed pressure, especially since scholastic strictures were going to be added to administrative checks.

8. ROME

All these concerns did not cause Don Bosco to lose sight of Rome, where he was still very anxious to establish his Society. As we have seen, he did confer with the government, but without harboring fond illusions, for his main hope lay in the support of the ecclesiastical authority. Before leaving Rome in March 1878, he had submitted a petition¹³ to Leo XIII, seeking permission and funds to open a hostel in that city.

¹²This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

¹³Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The petition—as we shall see later—was most likely turned over to the cardinal vicar, who was directly in charge of the pastoral needs of the Eternal City. Four months later, *Unità Cattolica's* issue of August 3 published in Turin an instruction which the Pope had asked the cardinal vicar to send to Rome's parish priests in regard to heretical attacks being made against the capital of Catholicism. "Now that temporal power has been usurped from the Holy See, heretics and anticlericals are making very huge efforts, with the gold plentifully supplied them from overseas. Besides the many churches and lecture halls which they have daringly opened in Rome's most congested areas, they have also set up ten elementary schools and some boarding schools and kindergartens. The Protestants run them with the manifest intention of spreading their poisonous heresy as they generously dispense food and material assistance to their pupils and listeners, whose poverty they exploit." Such news caused Don Bosco's heart even more poignant grief, prompting him to write a very down-to-earth letter to the cardinal vicar:

Turin, August 6, 1878

Your Eminence:

A few months ago I had the honor of speaking with you about the growing perils to which poor children are being exposed. At that time you paternally urged me to look into the possibility of opening a hostel in Rome so that we Salesians might do our own humble share to defend the capital of Catholicism against the onslaught—the invasion, we should say—of a host of enemies.

We noted also the need to do something to ease the tragic consequences effected by the scattering of religious orders and by Protestant efforts to attack and break down the faith centered in this city, where its supreme head resides. All this time I have been studying how to bring this project into reality. Then came your magnificent circular advising Catholics to be vigilant and warning of the progress now being made by heresy to the prejudice of truth.

This situation has moved me deeply and resolved me to put a few of my Salesians at Your Eminence's disposal. They may achieve little, but they will at least show their willingness to work and, if necessary, to sacrifice all, even their lives, to defend our holy Catholic faith.

Consequently, I submit a plan of mine to your enlightened judgment. The Salesians who are now in Albano find their field of labor too

restricted. We have twelve certified teachers there and only thirty-five pupils between seminarians and day students. I would put all this staff, or part of it, at your disposal, so that you might use their services either for school work or for the holy ministry, as you deem best for God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

Where are they to live and on what? With Your Eminence's hopeful support, we shall forge ahead. Elsewhere we have succeeded in opening houses with no funds at all, gathering, feeding and educating some twenty-five thousand boys. Why should we not succeed in opening a hostel in Rome with Your Eminence's help and that of Divine Providence which has never failed us?

Monsignor Dominic Iacobini, who is up to date in our affairs, agrees with my plans and will call on Your Eminence to obtain your consent and start working.

We are all determined to act only as Your Eminence wishes, and it is our intent not to cause you the least inconvenience.

I am writing with filial confidence. Please help me always with your counsel.

I have been assured that the duchess of Galliera, who is still in Paris, will be coming to Genoa at the end of this month. At that time I shall endeavor to deliver the papers into her hands and keep Your Eminence informed as to the outcome.

While I beg you in charity to bestow your holy blessing on all the Salesians, I pray you to accept my own humble respects and deepest gratitude. I am honored to remain,

Your most humble and grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

His Eminence promptly replied on August 9:

You will readily understand how gladly I welcome your offer of opening a home for boys here in Rome under the direction of the Salesians, and of sending me twelve workers for this beloved vineyard of the Lord. But I think it wiser to await the reaction of the duchess of Galliera, for Rome is not accustomed to supporting pious institutions by private charity. Others who ventured into this endeavor now cannot remain solvent. We shall discuss our plans after receiving the duchess' reply.

Marie de Ferrari, duchess of Galliera, was born in Genoa in 1812. She usually resided in Paris, where she died in 1888. Mistress of an immense fortune, she spent millions in works of

charity, among others Genoa's leading hospital. Either personally or through a third person, the cardinal vicar had passed on to her Don Bosco's petition to the Pope, together with a covering letter¹⁴ dated from Rome by the signer,¹⁵ although it had been drawn up by Don Bosco who was to deliver the entire packet.

Monsignor Iacobini, secretary of briefs, aided by charitable Romans, was zealously striving to found a school in Rome for young artisans and dedicate it to St. Joseph. The monsignor had visited the Oratory at Valdocco, probably in July, to discuss the house and its location. A place was available outside Porta Cavalleggeri at reasonable cost, the building and lot covering some twenty thousand square meters. The property was flanked on one side by St. Peter's colonnade and on the other by Via del Sant'Ufficio; it reached out to the Lungara and encompassed the hill at whose summit stood the house. Several noblemen and prelates seemed quite eager to raise funds to buy it. In his discussion with the secretary of briefs Don Bosco personally drew up the articles which were to form the basic elements of an agreement¹⁶ between him and a committee, still to be appointed under the secretary's chairmanship and the special assistance of Chevalier Adolph Silenzi.

When the duchess of Galliera returned to Genoa, Don Bosco handed over the Roman correspondence to her through her agent, Mr. Angelo Ferrari. Meanwhile, the owner of the property, Mr. Pascucci, had asked Don Bosco for a binder,¹⁷ since other bidders were bringing pressure on him. Don Bosco reported this to the superior chapter on the evening of December 27, asking, "What are we to answer? We do need a house in Rome. The building is adequate, it can be enlarged, and it is in a very healthy spot. We hope that we won't run into further expense other than fitting it out with furniture. There is also the added benefit of being rather close to the Vatican." The chapter's reply was favorable and Don Bosco wrote in that sense to Rome.

¹⁴Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹⁵In a letter from Sampierdarena to Father Berto (September 19, 1878), Don Bosco asked him to send "the papers . . . addressed to the Holy Father for a house in Rome, with a letter from the cardinal vicar to the duchess of Galliera." It seemed that the cardinal himself signed it. [Author]

¹⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹⁷Letter from the attorney Ignazio Bertarelli, Rome, December 22, 1878. [Author]

Two things were conspiring against the success of this initiative. First, a government printshop was on the same premises. Although the lease ran up to the end of 1881, the manager was ready to vacate the premises in 1879 since the place was too small, but we have no way of knowing whether the difficulties involved were overcome. A second setback was the negative reply of the duchess whose generosity had been most heavily relied upon. The messenger bearing her letter at the end of February told Don Bosco that most regretfully she could not possibly contribute to the opening of the school in Rome for artisans since she had committed herself to enormous outlays in building and maintaining several charitable institutions, among them two large hospitals in Genoa.¹⁸ When Don Bosco got back to Rome in March 1879 he heard no further talk of the house near Forta Cavalleggeri; a place was being sought elsewhere. Monsignor Iacobini and Cardinal Oreglia were thinking of adapting a monastery for the purpose, and they pushed the issue with the Holy Father's approval. Don Bosco requested the needed authorization from the prefect of Rome, but once negotiations ended, the Roman noblemen felt that they no longer needed Don Bosco and could go ahead on their own. They would have liked him to take charge of the scholastic and spiritual administration, but only under their overall supervision. Don Bosco refused. This was the initial cause of Cardinal Oreglia's ensuing coolness toward him.

Of all enterprises undertaken by our saintly founder, not one did he ever have to abandon because of imprudence in starting it. That same prudence, which his constitutions of the Salesian Society require to be "utmost" in opening new houses, he always practiced to an eminent degree throughout his life. We see a proof of this in the decision he took in December 1878 to send Father Cagliero and Father Durando to check out all requests of major importance and report on them. He chose them because that year he had asked them to handle all the nitty-gritty work entailed in accepting any undertaking. They completed their task, which took them as far as Sicily, in February 1879. Nor did Don Bosco restrict such caution to Salesian enterprises. Sometime during that summer or fall, Father Cagliero had accompanied him to Quargento, Alessandria,

¹⁸Letter from A. Ferraris to Don Bosco, Genoa, February 27, 1879. A few years later this gentleman was on trial for having embezzled over ten million lire. [Author]

because he wished to see at first hand the situation that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, would be in if they accepted the local kindergarten. Eventually three sisters did go there on November 21, accompanied by Father Cagliero, their general spiritual director, who officially installed them in the first public kindergarten accepted by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

How many headaches Don Bosco could have spared himself had he, personally or through others, turned down several proposals! Such hasty action is typical of shirkers, not of saints. His norm of conduct in such matters is summed up in these few lines written to some monsignor on August 30, 1877: "You know I do all I can at every opportunity. Is it matter of accepting or buying? Start negotiations and tell me what your intentions are. On my part I will spare no effort in trying to win souls to God."

CHAPTER 21

New Foundations in Italy

EACH new foundation, with its own history, adds one more thread to the fabric of Don Bosco's biography, which, already so rich and varied, gains in splendor and breadth, to our readers' edification and to the greater glory of God, who is wonderful in His saints.

1. MATHI

The activity and continual expansion of Don Bosco's printshops [at the Oratory and at Sampierdarena] made it imperative that he find an independent supply of paper. Furthermore, he was anxious to support the Catholic press by providing publications of excellent quality, printed on good paper, at a low price. His anxiety to meet this need inspired him to go into a daring enterprise. A widow, Clothild Varetto, had a paper mill for sale in Mathi, a small town on the Turin-Lanzo rail line. Don Bosco set his eyes on it, started negotiations with the owner, and, since the price was reasonable, decided to buy it. Through an informal written contract he agreed to pay the lady an annual sum of twelve thousand lire. The formal deed of sale, drawn up on April 26, 1877, alleged that a down payment of one thousand lire had already been paid. The simplified transaction, however, soon became quite complex in practice.

The legalities completed, Don Bosco hired a technical expert to run the mill for him and manage its operation. He was a man named Dominic Varetti,¹ a Genoa dealer in knitted wear and a long-standing friend of Don Bosco, to whom a year earlier he had

¹Official documents list his name as Varetto, but he always signed himself Varetti.
[Author]

confided that he intended to close shop for lack of business and hopefully take up residence in Turin. There it would be easier for him to look after the production of knitted wear which was made at Bosco Marengo and Lanzo. In fact, long before Don Bosco offered him the job, he had been searching for a home for his family in Turin.

When sent for, then, he very gladly agreed with Don Bosco and stated that he would like to go into business with him. Don Bosco consented and asked him to draw up a tentative contract, which he did. The first article stated: "Acting on behalf of this company, Don Bosco purchased a mill in Mathi." The contract went on to read as if Varetto were a partner not only in the business but in the property as well. Obviously, the Genoese was stretching the facts, for Don Bosco had bought the mill for himself and not for the company. Don Bosco, therefore, made a counter-proposal² [the first article stating]: "Father John Bosco purchased a paper mill in Mathi from Mrs. Clothilde Varetto on his own account and at his own expense."³ Unheeding, Varetto continued obstinately to claim part ownership, causing a rift never again to be healed.

Another source of contention was that Don Bosco, hoping to cut down on expenses and supervise the work at the plant, had arranged for the business office, as well as the warehouse, to be located at Valdocco, but Varetto, even at higher cost, leased out space for both office and warehouse elsewhere. Don Bosco had assigned two Oratory rooms for Varetto's use, but, seeing that his partner ignored them, he used them for other needs. It is worth noting that Varetto also used to return to Turin each evening, where he was living with his family.

The plant in the meantime was keeping up its steady production. Mr. Varetto, though acting as Don Bosco's agent, kept running the plant as an owner, never signing himself "for Don Bosco," but in his own name, collecting payable accounts without reporting to Don Bosco. Furthermore, whenever he supplied the Oratory with paper, he billed it at a higher cost, and, on collecting the scrap

²On the original first draft Father Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, wrote: "Of no importance whatever!" Evidently, at the Oratory, important matters were known only to interested parties. Equally manifest is Father Berto's inborn instinct to carefully preserve even scribbings. [Author]

³We are omitting the rest of the articles. [Editor]

trimmings from the Oratory bookbinders, he would credit them at a lower price. Also, he made many very expensive innovations and purchases of supplies, mentioning only a few to Don Bosco and hushing up the rest. It would not have been too bad if they had helped matters. In brief, he was the boss, so much so that in the summer he housed his family at the mill and even took in other people without saying a word to Don Bosco.

Naturally, raw materials, maintenance and innovations ran into big money. It was hoped that Varetti, as self-styled co-owner, would assume half the cost or at least a considerable part, but all he did was to keep issuing IOU's, which, however, were not honored unless co-signed by Don Bosco or Father Rua. To make matters worse, he did not meet his obligations when the terms expired, so that Don Bosco, at great personal loss, had to make good on them and pay out the exorbitant sum of over seventy thousand lire in the space of a few months.

The mill was headed for bankruptcy. By the end of 1877, facing heavy financial losses and drawing no adequate profit, Don Bosco was ready to give up the venture. Varetti agreed, telling him, and others too, that they would be well rid of it. In keeping with such talk, Don Bosco asked the former owner if she were willing to buy it back or to help him sell it and reimburse him for improvements. He may have done this purposely or just to see Varetti's reaction. Realizing that the mill might revert to the former owner or be sold outright, Varetti fought the plan, despite Don Bosco's assurances that he would suffer no loss. When he found out that the former owner insisted on buying it back or at least rescinding the contract, he declared that he would go to court to fight her claims.

At this stage of events, Don Bosco asked Varetti for a full report on the mill's operations so as to ascertain if it might be worthwhile to continue them. It took a month to come in, late in February, and then it covered accounts only to the end of January. Don Bosco had the report analyzed by competent people, who questioned certain items. Time and again Varetti was asked for an explanation, but to no avail. Finally, in May 1878, Don Bosco asked to see the ledgers and study the accounts, insisting again that the business office be set up at the Oratory. At long last, after repeated insistence, Varetti handed over one ledger containing little in the way of accounting and going only to the end of January. It was impossible to get a

clear picture of the business or even to ascertain creditors and debtors.

All the while Don Bosco was treating Varetto like a friend. In June, through a third party, he asked him to hand over the mill voluntarily, assuring him that he would be repaid for any money he might have invested in the business and for any work he had done. But there was no persuading him. On the contrary, he first wanted to be indemnified for substantial sums. Meanwhile the mill ran into further debt, so that to continue operations would be folly. Varetto was advised by lawyers that he was to be fired and that it was best for him to resign his position and avoid both unpleasantness and harmful publicity. He stubbornly refused and finally was dismissed, and a statement was issued publicly to that effect.⁴ However, since he disregarded the order and kept working with no sign of giving up the mill operation, Don Bosco had to cite him to the court of commerce, which found him guilty. His sentence, dated August 30, 1878, declared: "The Court of Commerce of Turin . . . states that an inventory is to be made by an appraiser herein appointed; that the said Varetto must consign the Mathi paper mill with all annexes, equipment, machinery and goods to Don Bosco and is barred from any further management of the said mill; he shall hand over all records and account ledgers to the liquidator appointed by this city, Charles Cereseto, to whom he shall also give a list of all creditors and debtors. This order is to be executed, appeal without security notwithstanding. Court expenses are to be borne by the said Varetto."

At this point a mutual friend stepped in to negotiate a friendly settlement. With the agreement of both parties, Charles Dovo, a surveyor, was asked to draw up the inventory, while Manfred Panso, a merchant, and Michael Fumelli, a lawyer, were chosen as arbiters; these last called in a third arbiter, the lawyer Armisoglio. Don Bosco submitted some observations to the arbiters in his own hand, as follows: "Let it be remembered in each case that none of the damages claimed by Mr. Varetto were caused even in the slightest way by Don Bosco, who, when a final accounting is completed, will have to recoup heavy losses due to the inept management of the paper mill. As regards the director's salary, it

⁴*Supplement to the periodical newsletter of the Royal Prefecture in Turin*, legal notices (July 5, 1878, n. 62, p. 719). [Author]

must be noted that at no time ever was Mr. Varetto director of a paper mill and that he served his apprenticeship in administration at the expense of the said mill of Mathi." In further proof that Varetto never acted as director we find that all sales of paper were drawn up by Don Bosco and signed in his own hand.⁵

After a long transaction, the arbiters awarded the following to Varetto:

Salary.....	4,500 lire
Indemnity	8,500 lire
Share of profits	14,410 lire
	Total 27,410 lire

Later, agreeing to objections submitted by Father Rua, the arbiters reduced this total to twenty-three thousand lire. With Varetto out of the way, Don Bosco hired a director and a technician, and he sent notice of this to his clients in a letter of which we have the original handwritten copy.⁶ The technician he hired was Mr. Constantine Pancaldi, whose contract was very precise. As plant director he chose a Salesian coadjutor, Andrew Pelazza. Gradually a small community was formed at the paper mill with Fr. Anthony Varaja as superior, and life settled into a regular routine.

2. LA SPEZIA

Don Bosco's ardent zeal inspired him to enter upon a truly providential project in 1877. What is today La Spezia was in those days well on its way to becoming a very large workers' neighborhood. Unfortunately, however, Protestants had made inroads into the growing community and were exercising a brisk proselytizing program funded from abroad. But Divine Providence was alert in the person of the apostolic missionary, Father Joseph Persi, who was then preaching May sermons in the collegiate abbey of the Assumption of Our Lady, at that time the only parish church in the area. He grasped the desperate situation of those people as far as Christian living was concerned: few priests engaged in ministering to them, still fewer in preaching and teaching the young

⁵We are omitting the copy of an advertisement sent to potential customers. [Editor]

⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

their catechism, most children attending the free Protestant schools. The original families of La Spezia were practically all gone or swallowed up by a motley array of immigrants from Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria and the south: a boiling pot of laborers, contractors, merchants and soldiers. Father Persi was afraid to think of what would happen to that multitude of people in the near future. He talked it over with the pastor, Father Dominic Battolla, a very pious, charitable priest who was still living in the past, when people would spontaneously flock to his church. Father Persi suggested that he open a Salesian oratory. But where was the money to come from when even the banks were in trouble and money was scarce? Keeping this concern in mind, when Father Persi a little later went to Rome, he opened his heart to Pius IX, who, touched by such sad conditions, answered, "Oh yes, I shall write personally to Don Bosco. . . . We are such great friends!"⁷

The Holy Father wrote directly not to Don Bosco but to Bishop Joseph Rosati of Sarzana, whose diocese took in La Spezia, stating that he intended to offer a monthly stipend of five hundred lire to a religious order which would be able and willing to give special care to the young people of La Spezia. The bishop lost no time in contacting Don Bosco on July 11, 1877. "Without any doubt," he wrote, "what La Spezia needs is a religious congregation such as yours to care for our boys and, if possible, to evangelize the people and administer the sacraments to them. Even if you cannot do all of this, you could still do much good." This was enough to get Don Bosco moving, for he had been thinking of La Spezia for some time, and more than ever since he had heard that the Protestants were building a church of their own there. He jotted down two phrases to guide Father Rua in drafting an answer: "We accept in principle. Let the bishop make arrangements and notify us."

The bishop was delighted. He quickly hunted about for premises but got nowhere. Father Battolla seemed willing to give up his own quarters, since he was due to move into a new rectory which he was then building, or even to let the Salesians have the new residence themselves if necessary. There was also another building under construction, but occupancy did not seem possible by November, and an exorbitant rental was being asked. Torn by both his

⁷*Nuovo Tempio di Nostra Signora della Neve*. Reminiscences of the Bishop of Lunisarzana and Brugnato, pp. 16-17. [Author]

impatience and his inability to choose between these various alternatives, the bishop wrote to Don Bosco from Sarzana on August 16, 1877: "Loath to decide anything without first consulting you or without your knowledge, I have no choice but to ask you to hurry in person to La Spezia, see things for yourself and make your own decision as you judge best. In that case, we can discuss the situation together—it is only half an hour from Sarzana to La Spezia—and I can tell you what I have in mind. My dear Don Bosco, I speak in all sincerity: if you do not make this small sacrifice of coming personally to La Spezia, I see that this matter will either drag out to great lengths or little will come of it. I warmly beg you to grant me this favor. Give heed, I pray, to my desire to see in this city as soon as possible a shelter for imperiled youth and a line of defense stemming the overwhelming tide of indifference and unbelief."

Don Bosco sent Father Rua, who then wrote back to the bishop from Turin on August 27, 1877 to state his views on the three places he had visited: the new rectory complex, a whole floor on Marsala Street, and a new building near the proposed Protestant church. The first had seven rooms and a small playground; the second had eight small rooms at an annual rental of seven hundred lire; the third was large enough for a church, school and living quarters, but had no playground, and the rental was twenty-two hundred lire. Father Rua's choice was the rectory complex adjacent to the parish church. In his report to Don Bosco he stated that too many things were still missing, and preparations were nil. Father John Garino, who was present and heard him, recorded his words. Don Bosco then asked Father Rua in Piedmontese, "Is there at least a little skillet to fry a couple of eggs?" Yes, replied Father Rua, there was. "Well then, we can go and set up house there," was Don Bosco's answer.

The bishop ruled out the rectory, saying that some six months were needed to get it ready. He rather suggested the third premise inspected by Father Rua, the property of the Chiappetti brothers, which he thought the most suitable. The owner agreed that he could easily make all needed changes during construction and wrote to Father Rua on September 3, 1877 asking for a sketch of how he wanted the rooms laid out. Father Rua obliged. Then Father Angelo Bruschi, vicar forane of La Spezia, leased the aforesaid

house on Via Aranci in the bishop's name,⁸ and lodgings were rented elsewhere until the house was ready for occupancy. Work progressed at lightning speed in the hope that all could be ready by the beginning of November.⁹

At this time Don Bosco had one eye on La Spezia, and the other on Vallecrosia, where construction was under way to stem the rising tide of Protestantism. At the beginning of October he wrote to the Pope to ask for further financial help for the latter enterprise. After explaining how both places were equally open to the inroads of heresy, he said of La Spezia: "Your Holiness' charity has provided for La Spezia. Work is briskly progressing to adapt a building and to provide equipment needed for day and evening classes, Sunday school and a public church in the neighborhood of the Protestant school and church. I feel I can assure Your Holiness that by the end of this month, no less than three of our teachers will go there to do all they can for those poor endangered youngsters. They may not succeed in stamping out heresy altogether, but they will at least join forces with the local clergy and do everything possible to halt its advance."

However, Don Bosco had miscalculated the time schedule: came November 25 and work still lagged behind.¹⁰ Not until December 10 could Father Cagliari accompany the first group of pioneers—Father Angelo Rocca, director; cleric Charles Pane, prefect; cleric Joseph Descalzi; coadjutor Dominic Clara—to their temporary lodgings in an apartment on Via Fazio, owned by Chevalier Pontremoli. The next day Father Cagliari introduced them to the bishop, who embraced them heartily and lavished all his attention on them. Father Cagliari then went to Lucca to make arrangements for a new house which we shall speak of later.

Don Bosco first visited the new community on December 19, interrupting his trip to Rome by two days. They were still very unsure of themselves, somewhat timid and shy of the people who they knew looked askance at the new endeavor. Besides, they were not at all happy with their permanent premises; the classrooms were too small, they had no playground, and there were other

⁸Letter to Father Rua, September 10, 1877. [Author]

⁹Letter from the bishop to Don Bosco, October 4, 1877. [Author]

¹⁰Letter from Father Bruschi to Father Rua, November 25, 1877. [Author]

inconveniences. The good father comforted them with recollections of the early Oratory days, when things had been far worse.

“Now, Don Bosco, who will be the patron saint of our new house?” the director asked.

“I have given it thought,” was the reply, “and I am entrusting you to the care of St. Paul the Apostle. Be sure to study his life and writings, and make him your model in all things. Let him lead you. Don’t worry, he carries a sword and can fight a fierce battle to destroy God’s enemies.” They were talking this way upon returning from the new house when Canon Isengard caught up with them. After asking Don Bosco what his Salesians planned to do at La Spezia, he strongly insisted on the dire urgency of a hostel for the poor homeless youngsters who abounded in the city. Pausing for a moment to gaze into the future, as it were, Don Bosco replied, “Yes, but let’s be patient—a bit at a time. We are in La Spezia and intend to stay here. In due time we shall see what Our Lady, Help of Christians can do for us with the aid and cooperation of charitable people, of whom this city certainly has no lack. We shall have a hostel for students and artisans, as well as a beautiful church, which we shall dedicate to Mary Most Holy. The house of La Spezia will rank among the greatest and most flourishing of our Congregation.” These words, later to be fulfilled literally, gave great comfort to the director and to the confreres in the storm of problems and opposition which they encountered after Don Bosco’s departure.¹¹

The Chiappetti brothers did not seem to be in a hurry to hand over the building. Funds were not coming in, and the poor Salesians had hardly enough linen and clothing with them. Father Rua had left all these things in the hands of the kindly bishop.¹² Worse still, a slanderous newspaper, spokesman for the sects, wrote: “The crows are here! Let’s hope they find no food.” The theaters gave plays calculated to arouse animosity against the Salesians. One in particular was billed: “Friar Paul Sarpi, Slain by the Jesuits: i.e., The Harm Done by Religious Instruction.” The Protestants were intensifying their efforts to strengthen their gains and push their conquests further.

¹¹Cf. letter of Father Rocca in a memorial issue, *Il Beato Don Bosco*, La Spezia, June 17, 1930. Cf. also Father Rua’s article in the memorial issue *I Salesiani alla Spezia*, December 1902. [Author]

¹²Cf. letter of Father Rua to the bishop, Turin, September 3, 1877. [Author]

But the lack of comforts did not keep the Salesians from starting their work. By day they taught a few boys who wanted to learn and in the evening they instructed boys and young men for First Communion. On February 14, 1878, the chapel on Via Arandi was completed and on March 1 they were able to take possession of their house. Then the bishop launched a vigorous counter-campaign against the Protestants, resorting to severe measures against Catholic parents who sent their children to Protestant schools. The change for the good was immediate. The children deserted the schools in a body and rushed to the Salesians. May devotions did the rest, attracting both children and adults.

In the midst of this constant progress the Salesians escaped by a hair's breadth the closing down of their school. No one had applied to the provincial superintendent for a school license, nor had any of the teachers thought of having their own certificates on hand. The director was convinced that the superiors in Turin had handled everything, but nothing had been done. And so, toward the middle of May the school inspector suddenly turned up at the house. He sharply criticized the director for presuming to open three tightly crowded classrooms and threatened to shut them down if he did not comply with regulations within a week. The director wrote to Turin, then telegraphed and actually rushed there, and he still recalls the "very embarrassing scolding" Father Rua gave him for his emergency trip. He picked up two school certificates, which were enough to fend off the ire of the school inspector.

School supplies and equipment were short. Knowing where he could get lots of needed materials, Don Bosco addressed an appeal to the Department of the Navy.¹³

Meanwhile, since Leo XIII was keeping up the monthly grant which his predecessor had promised, Father Rocca, at Don Bosco's suggestion, sent the Pope a report, through Cardinal Nina, secretary of state, during the Christmas holidays, informing him of the school's progress.¹⁴ The report read:

The school has seven Salesians. Some three hundred students attend classes, of whom more than one hundred were snatched from the

¹³Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹⁴At his suggestion Don Bosco added an extensive sketch for the report. Father Rocca testified to the same and availed himself of it as we can see from the phrases he used—phrases habitual with our founder. [Author]

Protestant schools; the rest were preserved from their grasp. On Sundays the chapel, dedicated to St. Paul the Apostle, is filled by our pupils and some of the city's faithful. We offer our youngsters here all that is offered in our other houses: religious instruction, sermons, conferences, sacraments. We need a larger church for the convenience of the adults and a bigger playground to offer many more boys a chance for healthy recreation, to save them from dangerous leisure time. We cannot do any of this without funds to support us. Another work so much in demand and sorely needed by this city would be a home to shelter the most destitute and homeless youngsters and to teach them a trade or skill which will rescue them from the path of vice and enable them in due course to earn an honest living for themselves. To accomplish this, we need generous help from the townspeople, but, although all the faithful appreciate our endeavors and give us moral support, we have not yet managed to obtain or even hope for financial assistance or funds. We would find ourselves in dire want for even essentials were it not for the occasional help sent us by our superior.

Cardinal Nina answered: "His Holiness instructs me to express to you in his name his sincerest and heartiest thanks for the excellent results you have so far achieved. He voices his sure and unwavering hope that this will encourage the good Salesians to push on with greater zeal and effort in their holy efforts to benefit, step by step, the young people of that city."¹⁵

Don Bosco seriously wished to open both the hostel and a larger church. In October 1878, thanks to a private gift and to the state's waiver of public domain, he acquired possession of two adjacent pieces of land along Viale Militare under the condition—which he accepted—that he use the land to build "a church and added facilities in honor of Our Lady of the Snow" and, adjacent to it, "a charitable institution of moral education" similar to "those to which the Reverend Don Bosco had dedicated his entire life and which, thanks to him, were to be found in many cities of France and Italy." The efficient mediator in these negotiations was Chevalier Joseph Bruschi, postmaster general and a very close friend of Don Bosco. This notable benefactor became a Salesian at the age of seventy and was ordained a priest in 1895. He saw his heart's

¹⁵*Salesian Bulletin*, March 1879, pp. 4-6. [Author]

desire fulfilled when the image of Our Lady of the Snow,¹⁶ La Spezia's special devotion, was transferred to this new church, whose dedication ceremony he attended on April 27, 1901.

As the reader can see, all this took time, but the obstacles that kept cropping up did not halt the plans which had been conceived and brought to some success by Don Bosco and were eventually realized completely by his first successor. Today [1932] some thirty Salesians work in La Spezia. Their humble beginnings have not been forgotten, for they are still known as "the little priests," the name given them by the people who were struck by their very youthful appearance.

3. LUCCA

We noted earlier that in 1877 Father Cagliero went from La Spezia to Lucca, where it had already been decided that the Salesians would settle. This foundation went through several phases, but here we shall discuss only its early beginnings. Several times the Salesians had been asked to go to Lucca. In 1875, with persuasion and much prayer, Monsignor Eugene Nannini, dean of the collegiate Church of St. Michael, tried to get Don Bosco to send Salesians to run the entire seminary program "from the elementary grades to theology." Again, in 1876, a young priest, Father Alphonse Cristofanini, was commissioned by some wealthy citizens to discuss setting up a boarding school with annexed workshops. At that time Don Bosco, who usually would not reject such proposals offhand, made inquiries himself, but later the whole project was shelved. Finally, in 1877 he received a proposal which he could heartily welcome, that of opening a festive oratory. Archbishop Nicholas Ghilardi, understanding from all the previous correspondence that Don Bosco wished to do some good also in Lucca, asked Father Anthony Menesini to write to Don Bosco and let him know that he, the archbishop, would gladly discuss such a

¹⁶For centuries an image of Our Lady of the Snow had been venerated in a chapel near the waterfront of La Spezia. When it was torn down to build a new arsenal, the image was transferred to the Abbey of St. Mary. The people, unwilling to have their image housed, as it were, by others, in the very heart of their city, wanted to give it a home of its own with a vast piazza. Their wish was fulfilled when the painting was placed in the new shrine built for it by the Salesians. [Author]

project with him. Meanwhile, Father Barberis and Father Lazzero, while on their way to Rome, were instructed by Don Bosco to stop at Lucca, to keep their eyes and ears open and to report back to him, while assuring the archbishop of Don Bosco's cooperation. Heartened by this, the archbishop personally contacted Don Bosco on September 12 and gave him to understand that funds were available to begin the project. Don Bosco replied [probably from Lanzo on or about September 20 during the general chapter]:

Your Excellency:

I thank you sincerely for your kind letter telling me that Divine Providence has already supplied funds to start a home for poor apprentices in your city. This is precisely the main purpose of our Congregation.

Since I am most eager to exert our humble efforts on behalf of these young lads of Lucca, I shall endeavor to set up the needed personnel as soon as possible.

Because I must provide personnel for our boarding schools by next October, I really cannot send you the priests you requested for November. However, during that month I do hope to come myself or to send one of my priests to check out the most suitable premises and take some essential steps with Your Excellency for this important enterprise.

The entire Salesian Congregation joins me in thanking you sincerely for your kind consideration of us.

I pray that God will grant you a long life and ask for your blessing. On behalf of all, I remain, in highest esteem and veneration,

Yours truly,
Fr. John Bosco

Father John Cagliero made the promised visit in December. He was shown an adequate residence for the Salesians, a handsome church dedicated to the Holy Cross, and a fairly spacious playground for the festive oratory. The staff, however, did not arrive until June 29 of the following year. It consisted of Father John Marengo, cleric Charles Baratta and coadjutor Philip Cappellano, who were accompanied by Father Cagliero.

Don Bosco's peaceful contingent was not received in peace; in fact, all hell seemed to break loose. The alarm was first issued by the local scandal sheet, *Il Fulmine*, which blazoned the following glaring item on June 30: "Jesuits driven out of Europe take up

residence in Lucca, 1242 Via della Croce. Church opened yesterday, the 29th. Will the city fathers tolerate such a plague? Signed: DEVIL.” This cable, seemingly from the netherworld, had its effect. Suspicious characters kept roaming the streets bordering the residence and church, but the real battle was set for Sunday, July 7. Toward morning, stones rained upon a few lads in the playground from the house facing it. Alarmed neighborhood women dashed out into the street and screamed so loudly that by the time the police came the stone-throwing had ceased. Toward midday the police chief came to warn Father Cagliero and Father Marengo of plots against them, but said they were not to fear; they would not be harmed as long as they did not lean out the windows. Until late that evening, the Salesians attended to their priestly work. They were finishing supper at about ten o’clock when they suddenly heard people running and halting briefly at the playground gate in Via della Croce. Then, at orders barked out in a ringing voice, the crowd turned about, streamed through Via del Biscione and stopped directly beneath the windows of the Salesian residence.

“Here they come!” exclaimed Father Cagliero. The first roar exploded from hundreds of lungs: “Down with the Jesuits!” Cleric Baratta, a quiet and timid soul, was so terrified that his fright lasted through the next day, but no one was hurt. They all listened, safely indoors, to the infernal racket lasting some fifteen minutes. “Down with the Jesuits!” roared the mob. “Down with Jesuit schools! Down with the Paolotti!¹⁷ Down with the city fathers!” Town elections had been held shortly before and the Catholics had come out on top. These shouts were interspersed with others: “Long live Garibaldi! Hurrah for Trent and Trieste! Long live the Repub. . .” but this last word was bitten off lest trouble arise. A voice was also heard to shout, “Get the kerosene!” But then the chief of police took action; whistles were blown, and the mob dispersed. All told, they may have numbered some four thousand, between demonstrators and onlookers. Though a mounted squad stood ready, it did not go into action. The following day a bunch of loafers gathered at the corner to sing a silly ditty rhyming with the word Jesuit. For a

¹⁷The members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society were then satirized as “Paolotti” or little Pauls—a term of derision like “pious Joes,” used to stigmatize clerics and pious persons. [Author]

month the police patrolled the neighborhood in the evening hours, until the quiet manner of our Salesians disarmed all suspicion and erased all plots of ill wishers. The Salesians were admired and praised by the townsfolk for keeping their calm and peace and avoiding all confrontation. Father Cagliero had set up a cooperators' meeting, but he called it off so as not to appear to be provoking trouble. Many of the clergy and the laity stopped in to visit the Salesians and lend moral support. What is more, the July 14 issue of *Il Fulmine* beat a retreat in an article entitled "We Are Not Paolotti." The article boasted of its anticlerical victories, but strove through this refrain to justify its own turnabout of opinion toward the Salesians. "We are not Paolotti," they boasted, "nor do we stick up for priests. However, from a friendly source and from certain persons who love their city and serve it gladly we have received some detailed information after the July 7 demonstration." The details were that those priests were not Jesuits, but Salesians, belonging to a Piedmontese congregation which deserved the people's support; that, days before, a young man of Lucca had returned to his family after receiving from those same priests an excellent training in a trade known only to a very few people in the city; that the Salesian festive oratory had nothing to do with politics; finally, that it would be wise to wait before pronouncing judgment on them.

Not so honest a tune was sung by another Lucca paper, *Il Progresso*, which took occasion of the demonstration as described in the July 11 issue of *Riforma* and the July 14 issue of *Telegrafo* to assure its readers, that, yes, indeed, "some monks of the Company of Jesus" had sought refuge in their city, but, "always true to form," they were hiding "their odious identity under the name of other religious congregations. However," it continued, "we know from a fully reliable source, and can conclude as much, that several *Sanfedists*¹⁸ were the ones who called them in and are protecting them. We know that they belong to an order which is not

¹⁸During the Parthenopean Republic of France and after its fall in 1799, the Neapolitan soldiers, led by Cardinal Ruffo to reconquer Naples, were known as "Sanfedists," a name originating from "santa fede" (holy faith), since the battle was waged in defense of the faith against the revolutionary principles hailed by the republicans. It was later used for all enemies of the French Revolution, the Carbonari and other secret societies. Finally, it also applied to people opposing new ideas of freedom and independence for Italy insofar as they opposed the Church. [Author]

religious, but politically reactionary, and that they deserved to be expelled from wherever they were. In fact, they were once suppressed by a pope as sworn enemies of social and cultural progress. Under the guise of that same freedom which they daily abuse they are now trying to worm their way among our people by enticing our youngsters and promising them financial aid, so as later to use their sway over youth to reach their families, spread subversive doctrine, and make converts to their reactionary party.” On and on the paper rambled, concluding: “Let’s be on the alert. Let our responsible officials take heed and act.” The same issue elsewhere railed against the city fathers for allowing a Jesuit to “preach subversive doctrines with impunity” and for tolerating “the most outrageous and infamous allusions” against liberal institutions.

Such writings were inflaming Mazzini’s¹⁹ followers and enraging the local Protestant minister. It was therefore not surprising that a protest was drawn up to the Department of the Interior, prompting members of both sides to dash about in search of signatures. The anticlericals suffered a setback; they barely managed to collect five hundred signatures from men and women, real and imaginary—as it turned out, people of no standing, mere rabble. The prefecture thought it wise to intercept the list. Honest folk did not stand by idly. With their bishop’s backing they too got up a subscription of their own, entrusting the responsibility to the Catholic newspaper *Il Fedele*, which soon gathered some eight thousand signatures. No one knows whatever became of the whole affair, but one fine day the director of the Salesian community received a communication from the Education Department which essentially stated that if the Salesians wished to open schools in Lucca, they had best abide by the laws and, to the best of their ability, avoid provoking disorders. Secret instructions, however, were also given to the prefect of the province to investigate whether any ill feelings against the government were being instilled into the boys in sermons. One Sunday morning, as Mass was about to start, a plainclothesman

¹⁹Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was an Italian patriot who associated himself with the Carbonari in 1830. Imprisoned for six months, he was released only after he pledged himself to leave Italy. In 1832 he organized a secret revolutionary society *La Giovane Italia* [Young Italy] whose purpose was the unification of Italy under a republican form of government. He instigated rebel manifestations in several parts of Italy and aided in organizing Garibaldi’s expeditions. Until his death he remained an uncompromising republican. [Editor]

entered the church. He knelt throughout the morning prayers, the Mass and the entire sermon—which that day dealt with sin—so as not to draw the boys' attention to himself. He dared not leave early because the door was closed and he did not want to open it himself or ask someone else to do so. At the end of the service he sneaked out never to be seen again.

By now the Salesians, all so young and a mere handful, were masters of the field. "If the good your Salesians do is equal to the respect they have inspired," wrote Father Marengo to Don Bosco, "they will perform miracles." Indeed, the festive oratory was doing extremely well, and people were thronging the director's confessional, but more personnel were needed. "Aid us, dear Father!" implored Father Marengo. "Help your sons who are like men starving for food. The boys need much supervision, but there are so many of them that it is beyond our strength. Moreover, we don't want to run the risk of criticism concerning the boys' moral conduct. You must know that these lads are more restless and street-wise than the boys in our towns. At the very least we need a priest, a cleric and a coadjutor." Harassment did not frighten them. "Despite all the happenings about us," he added, "we mind our own business and carry out our practices of piety and rules. We are undismayed by the roars of evil and fear only God's disfavor. Isn't all this disturbance of bad men a sign of the special protection and kindness of Jesus and Mary, Help of Christians?"²⁰

Drawn by curiosity, a few priests took a look at the festive oratory and told the Salesians that they wished to help, but once they noticed the "shirtless, shoeless, dirty, uncouth lads" they all left, one by one. They told the Salesians, however, that they were to demand respect, gesturing all the while with their hands as though flogging somebody. The most persevering of all was Father Cristofanini, whom we spoke of before. He had the best of intentions but was afraid of the boys.²¹ During the week the older boys who needed special tutoring were given instructions in preparation for their First Communion. When the archbishop was told of the ever increasing work, he began to search for a place with bigger playgrounds and classroom space. The long-awaited help, expected from Sunday to Sunday, finally arrived about the middle

²⁰Letter, July 16, 1878. [Author]

²¹Letter from Father Marengo to Don Bosco, July 22, 1878. [Author]

of August. Once a routine was established, the director formally and solemnly enrolled ninety boys into the festive oratory in the presence of the parents. By the sixth Sunday, everything was running smoothly. Father Marengo wrote to Don Bosco: "At first we were told that we would never keep the work up because we did not know these boys. Now these same people watch them devoutly attending services, catechism classes and sermons, and they remark, 'This Salesian system is really something!' They'd like to see all the boys stand around stiff as statues during recreation, but, following your teaching, we seek quite the opposite."

There was another initial obstacle which had to be nicely overcome. The pastors were afraid that the Salesians would disrupt parish life, but in a speech to the priests which he gave in the archbishop's presence, Father Marengo banished all their fears. Even the elderly religious had misgivings of their own. One day Father Marengo and the confreres were invited to dinner by the Franciscans, who, with their novices, gave them a hearty welcome. One of the older friars, however, stood apart, silent and sad. When asked if the celebration was not to his liking, he shook his head and muttered, "No, it's not that! I fear that these young Salesians, so full of life, are destined by Providence to oust and replace us."

There is no doubt that Don Bosco, by example, showed those who are dedicated to the apostolate how to survive and not cut themselves off from real life. This was the reason for his caution to steer clear of politics. The archbishop asked Father Marengo to act as diocesan moderator to the Lucca Catholic Youth Movement. "Should I accept?" he asked in a letter to Don Bosco on November 4, 1878. We have not found the reply, but Father Nardi, then a member of that house, says that, to the best of his knowledge, the director never held that post. Had he done so, Father Nardi would certainly have been aware of it. Very likely, Don Bosco advised against it. In fact, the year before, dampening Father Vespignani's enthusiasm in a similar case,²² Don Bosco had stated, "This is not our spirit. We only ask to be allowed to work among the young. Let us steer clear of politics. We are out of our depth when doing anything but working with youth." For a thorough understanding of these words we must remember that at that time Catholic Action

²²Giuseppe Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 26. [Author]

did not just aim at propagating Catholic social principles by example and religious zeal. Because the Italian government passed laws openly encroaching on the freedom and rights of the Holy See, it was only natural that the Catholic Youth Movement should get into the political arena to defend the faith. After all, it was a field of activity which no one could forbid, considering the militancy among the various parties. But Don Bosco would have no part at all of politics. Whenever possible he would gladly welcome members of the Catholic Youth Movement to religious services and rallies and urge them to do good, but he personally took no part in their activities.

This determination of his to eliminate all obstacles from doing good to others throws light on the advice he once gave in this regard. Turin's Count Victor Thaon de Revel, brother of Paul, Duke of the Sea, had finished his classical courses at our Valsalice College, and after graduation he asked Don Bosco if he should join the newly organized Catholic Youth Movement. Don Bosco paused to think, and then in a friendly voice replied, "No, do not join. Your family's position and your intent to enter upon a diplomatic career give you ample possibility of doing good. Joining the movement would only create problems." In speaking to Father Philip Rinaldi about this incident, the count remarked, "Don Bosco had such foresight! If I had not taken his advice, I would certainly not have gone far in my career."

Another episode gives a better understanding of the practical norms which guided Don Bosco in the conflict between politics and religion [of his day]. On December 11 and 12, 1878, Turin held the first regional conference sponsored by Pope Leo XIII to discuss religious matters of prime concern and to coordinate the efforts of Italian Catholics to stem the tide of sectarian abuse. Apart from sending a token contribution of twenty lire, the Oratory took no part. The conference met in the chapel of the archbishop's residence under the joint chairmanship of Archbishop Gastaldi and Count [Caesar] Trabucco of Castagnetto. The Pope had invited Duke [Scipione] Salviati to attend, and Cardinal Nina had given him a letter of introduction. However, when the duke graciously asked the archbishop if he had any reservations, the latter not only sent him no reply, but told his friends that he preferred not to have him. The Roman nobleman then left his Migliarino estate near

Pisa, where he had gone to be closer to Turin, and returned in disappointment to Rome.

It was at this conference that, when Bishop Bodoira of Ivrea mentioned Don Bosco's name, saying that he hoped he would open a house at San Benigno Canavese in his diocese, the entire body broke out into spontaneous applause, with the repeated cry of "Long live Don Bosco!" Some immediately saw it as a kind of compensation for the address which the archbishop had given, in which he had spoken at length of Rosmini, his writings and religious families, and had totally ignored Don Bosco and Joseph Cottolengo.²³ *Unità Cattolica's* report of the conference's first session,²⁴ after listing the bishop's delegates who were absent, remarked, with no mention of anyone else, that "the venerable founder of the Salesian Congregation, Father John Bosco," had sent in his endorsement in advance. Such things were to our father's credit, but he was not pleased because he knew very well that the government's bloodhounds were keeping careful watch over persons and organizations that took a stand against its anticlerical policy. He realized that, were he ever suspected of having joined their ranks, the whole world of political power would vent its wrath upon his undertakings. More knowledgeable ecclesiastics understood and appreciated his wise stance, as we know from the fact that in those days there was at the Oratory a constant coming and going of bishops and their staffs, and of journalist priests and influential theologians of the day, who wanted to consult Don Bosco.

4. ESTE

The Manfredini boarding school at Este, dating from 1878, has always been one of Italy's finest schools. It cost Don Bosco a minimum of fuss to get it started, for within a few months, thanks mainly to the work of Father Augustine Perin, the zealous pastor of Our Lady of Grace Church in Este, everything was arranged satisfactorily. This priest, distressed by the harm being done to pupils by the humanism permeating the public schools, was anxious

²³The Turin Conference was not officially listed among the Catholic conventions of that year. [Author]

²⁴*Unità Cattolica*, No. 290, December 12, 1878. [Author]

for his native Veneto to have a boarding school which would impart a thorough Christian education. He also knew that Don Bosco was the man to achieve that. After a brief first exchange of letters, he went to Turin in June to speak with him. He returned to Este, rejoicing that within a year Don Bosco's sons would be there.

Father Perin was eyeing a palatial mansion, popularly called *Ca' Pesaro* after the Venetian family who built it in the eighteenth century. A spacious building of magnificent architecture, ideally situated at the foot of the Euganian hills and facing the Berici mountain slopes, it was encircled by meadows and fields which could readily be converted to playgrounds, orchards and gardens. No one could have asked for a better location. Although the owners originally meant it for a vacation villa, a place of leisurely rest, they had not occupied it for some time. Alterations were needed to adapt it to school use, but the work could be done in stages; in the meantime the house was available. As always, Don Bosco sought the bishop's opinion. Father Perin took care of this by stopping off to see the bishop of Padua on his return home from Turin, not without some apprehension that the seminary's concerns would stand in the way. However, he found the bishop in fullest agreement and was instructed by him to express his thanks to Don Bosco for such an exquisite offer of charity, with the assurance of his brotherly embrace and blessing. This was June 24; on June 25 Father Perin drew up a lease on the property, and on June 26 he asked Don Bosco to look over the place and give orders to start alterations.²⁵ He was indeed moving with lightning speed. Don Bosco sent Father Sala to oversee the work, which began immediately on receipt of his instructions, as the owners had agreed even before signing the deed. Meanwhile the news spread, to everyone's delight, including that of the liberals.²⁶ On August 24 the bishop wrote to Don Bosco: "Assuredly your new foundation gives intense pleasure not only to me but to my zealous archpriest of Este, Monsignor Augustine Zanderigo, who, at my request, thus stated his views on this project, 'If it succeeds, I will bless God with all my heart, for He causes good to spring up alongside evil.' I honestly admit that the Este schools, elementary and secondary, weigh heavily on my heart. I have no pastoral influence whatever

²⁵Letter from Father Perin to Don Bosco, June 26, 1878. [Author]

²⁶Letter of Father Perin to Don Bosco, July 3, 1878. [Author]

on them. In such a situation I see your project as a truly providential act for those families who desire a Catholic education for their children.”

The deed was drawn up on September 16 in the office of the Este notary Nazari; the parties were Father Perin “on behalf of and in the name of” Don Bosco, “in his interests and with his funds,” and the Counts Gradenigo of Venice, owners, for the sum of thirty-five thousand lire, excluding notary fees.

The deed specifies “his [Don Bosco’s] funds,” but it would be more truthful to say “with funds of Divine Providence.” One episode will show what we mean. Chevalier Benedict Pelà of Este, starting out as a common day laborer, had accumulated a fortune of several millions by dint of hard work, thrift and talent. Generous to the poor, but not overly so, he had no direct heirs and had assigned a dowry of two hundred thousand lire to each of two nieces about to be married. Once Father Perin won Don Bosco’s promise of opening a school in Este and entered negotiations to buy the *Ca’ Pesaro*, he stood in dire need of immediate cash. He brought this to the attention of one of the nieces, Mrs. Bettina Legnaro, asking her to appeal to her uncle. She needed little persuasion and one morning broached the topic to him.

“Uncle,” she said, “you know how much I love you. You were so generous to give me such a handsome dowry. But, you know, I would be ready to return it to you and go back to my former poverty sooner than let your soul suffer for it. You have always been a very honest man, but might it not have happened at some time, in your many contracts and dealings, that justice was somehow violated? Such a thing can happen! I will not mind foregoing my dowry if it will secure your eternal salvation and happiness.”

Chevalier Benedict listened attentively, puzzled as to what she was driving at. “May I know what you want me to do?” he finally asked.

“I want you to do one more good deed.”

“I think I’m doing enough already. Don’t I support the hospital, the kindergarten and other projects?”

“Yes, my dear uncle, but there is something else that needs to be done.”

“And what is that?”

“You have money, and there is a deed of charity awaiting you.”

“Tell me what it is, and I’ll do it!”

“Well, you know that here in Este youngsters are not getting a Christian education. Father Perin has invited Don Bosco to come here and has pledged himself to buy him a house. But he has no money and Don Bosco is poor. At least eighteen thousand lire are needed right away.”

“What are you suggesting?”

“That you perform this work of mercy.”

“Is that all? Why didn’t you say so outright? My cash box is over there, and here are my keys. Help yourself to what you need and give it to the parish priest.”

She took the amount Father Perin needed to close the contract. Some time later, when Father Sala came to Este, the chevalier gave him another six thousand lire. From then on he was always very bounteous to the Salesians and in the course of years financed the school’s development to the tune of about one million lire.

The first director at Este was Father John Tamietti, whose appointment Don Bosco had predicted eight years before. In 1870 Anthony Venturini, one of many outstanding benefactors, had suggested that our good father open a boarding school at Este. At that time a Franciscan monastery could have been purchased at a bargain price, along with its adjoining church. But the proposal was premature. One day that same year, as Don Bosco was strolling along the Oratory arcade with Father Tamietti, he suddenly asked, “Shall we go to Este?”

“Let’s go!” replied Father Tamietti with a chuckle.

“Ah, you shall see,” Don Bosco answered. “You shall see.” Father Tamietti did see, when, on October 10, 1878, with five hundred two-lire notes in his wallet, he and schoolmaster John Vota set foot in Este. Father Perin was waiting for them with open arms. He took them to his own home for supper and then introduced them to the Mistrello family, at whose home they were to stay that night. Father Sala had preceded them by a few days. With him and Father Perin they walked to their new residence the next day. They expected to see a royal miniature palace, having been told that not a nail was missing in *Ca’ Pesaro*, but were they disappointed. Everything was topsy-turvy, with workmen everywhere. Not a window or door worked properly; the walls of the empty rooms were still damp. How could anyone live there? Divine

Providence again came to their aid. Mr. and Mrs. James Grandis, who lived just five minutes away, had no children and owned a large house. When the four dropped in for a visit, Mr. Grandis invited them to dinner and, having grasped the newcomers' predicament, immediately invited Father Tamietti and his companion to stay with him once Father Sala and Father Perin left. They resided there until November 18, when Father Thomas Calliano, the prefect, arrived with three other Salesians,²⁷ and all went together to take possession of what became and still is the Manfredini Boarding School, so named in honor of Bishop Frederick Count Manfredini of Padua.

At Don Bosco's wish, the prospectus was identical to those of other Salesian boarding schools, except that the monthly board and tuition was twenty-five lire, due also during the one month of vacation. Reporting briefly on that first school year in a summary chronicle Father Tamietti wrote:

It's hard to say just how we spent that year. Alternately, we felt cheerful and hopeful and then downhearted. Sometimes the future seemed bright; at other times there seemed no future at all because of the overwhelming problems. Every day we were short of something. We could not have held out even a month were it not for Mr. Augustine Pelà, Benedict's brother, who extended us credit at his store for necessities throughout the year. Moreover, the winter cold was aggravated by heavy snows and exceptional humidity. Having no stoves, all we could do to keep warm was to pace briskly up and down. Still, our spirits bounced back, and we had as happy a year as we may perhaps ever know again. We felt that God was with us and we trusted in His aid.

Despite all reversals, the director enjoyed the satisfaction of paying back the one thousand lire which Father Rua had given him the day he departed from the Oratory for Este. Our saintly father made Father Tamietti a prediction which was fulfilled to the letter: that he would work to the age of fifty and that he would not reach his seventy-second year.²⁸ Born in 1848, Father Tamietti fell victim to a typhoid infection in 1898, and it so affected his brain that, though he was strong in body, he lived the rest of his days in

²⁷Cleric John Bima and coadjutors Peter Enria and Hamilcar Rossi. [Author]

²⁸See his obituary letter written by his provincial, Father Costa. [Author]

total amnesia, dying on October 18, 1920, some two months before his seventy-second birthday.

Don Bosco also predicted that his successor as director of Manfredini would die away from his school while on a business trip. And so it happened. He had a stroke on May 14, 1914 while riding the trolley in Bologna, where he had gone to negotiate a special student fare for a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Mount Berico. He died on May 20 in the Salesian house in the city. When word of his tragic death reached Este, one family recalled that, while he was having dinner with them just a short time before, he himself had told them of Don Bosco's prophecy.

5. MONTEFIASCONE

We now turn to a much smaller undertaking. It was no outstanding event to send a single Salesian to Montefiascone, but the request came from a high source, the newly appointed Bishop Louis Rotelli, a protégé of Leo XIII, who later promoted him to the position of nuncio to Paris and made him a cardinal. At the Pope's bidding he was striving to restore the diocesan seminary to its former prestige and was looking for qualified personnel. Don Bosco, disappointed at being unable to open a boarding school at Albano, looked to Montefiascone for better results, and his response to the bishop's request was rather positive. Since a definitive promise was slow in coming, Monsignor Gabriel Boccali, papal secretary, renewed the request to Don Bosco in Leo XIII's name, saying that even one Salesian was enough for a start. "The person we need for at least this coming year," the secretary wrote, "must be certified to teach the fourth and fifth year of secondary school, though he will not have to teach both classes, possibly neither."²⁹ The Pope's request brooked no delay. Don Bosco gave his formal word and at the same time pushed a point. Might not a prelate so close to the new Pope put in a good word concerning the communication of privileges? There was no harm in trying. In his answer to Monsignor Boccali, therefore, he enclosed a petition to Leo XIII to this effect. The monsignor delivered the petition to the Pope but informed Don Bosco that it would then be referred to the Sacred Congregation which had competency in these matters. . . .³⁰

²⁹Letter from Rome, October 11, 1878. [Author]

³⁰Letter from Rome, October 26, 1878. [Author]

Well, Don Bosco must have thought, *at least he tried*. Clearly he had not lost sight of this crucial matter but skillfully sought every opportunity at least to probe the situation in the new papal administration.

For Montefiascone Don Bosco chose Father [Peter] Guidazio. It was a happy choice, for Father Guidazio won everyone's heart. Four months later, on March 23, 1879, the bishop wrote to Don Bosco, "This man is above reproach. He is active, exemplary, and very knowledgeable, and not only has he won his bishop's good will and esteem, but he also enjoys a unique reputation among laity and clergy alike. I tell you this so that you may rejoice to know that your disciple lives up to the fatherly attention you have bestowed upon him." But despite this personal achievement, Father Guidazio was unable to influence the scholastic program and educational policy, and because of this he felt very ill at ease. "I am ready to leave this very year, 1878," he wrote Don Bosco in December. "I cannot endure such senseless discipline which makes it impossible for me to do one-tenth of the good I should. I consider myself wasted here. My superiors all like me, and I might claim that they bear me a tender affection, even exaggerated respect. But I cannot break through a disciplinary tradition which has held for two centuries and has driven this school into the ground."³¹

Don Bosco further aided the bishop by sending him several certifications of Salesian teachers to present to the superintendent of schools for authorization to keep open the secondary school department in the seminary, which, in reality, was more of a boarding school. However, once he realized that he would never be entrusted with the running of the entire seminary, Don Bosco told Father Guidazio to make it clear to both the bishop and the rector that Don Bosco would neither allow him to remain beyond that one school year nor send others to replace him.

However, at the Pope's urging, the bishop came up with another plan. The building, "five times the size of our Valsalice College" at the time we were there, was empty, nor would it ever be filled in view of the existing educational laws. The bishop therefore asked Don Bosco to staff a classical college. It was useless for Father Guidazio to try to convince him that Don Bosco could not provide

³¹Letter, Christmas 1878. [Author]

the personnel, nor would the bishop heed Turin's declared refusal, either because he was banking on the Pope's support or because he had not the slightest idea of government regulations controlling that type of school. By August Father Guidazio's mission could be considered ended; he returned to Turin for his spiritual retreat and a reassignment. His stay at Montefiascone did, however, bear fruit, for it was soon apparent that he had opened people's eyes to the reality of the situation.

6. MAGLIANO SABINO

The situation at Magliano Sabino was ripe for Don Bosco's plan for a boarding school, which was very badly needed because the entire region had but one secondary school, and that was at Rieti. When he passed that way at the end of January 1877, on his return from Rome, he wrote to Cardinal Bilio, bishop of Sabina, and expressed his desire to set up a secondary boarding school within the [junior] seminary building. The cardinal, pleased with the very fine example and excellent teaching of the two Salesians he had there, did not want to refuse him, but he hesitated to give full approval because Don Bosco was also asking for the mayor's concurrence, since the school would greatly benefit the town. The mayor was not a man to inspire confidence, and, furthermore, a recent ruling issued by Minister Coppino of the Department of Education had just about put all schools receiving public assistance at the mercy of the local municipal authorities. In view of this, the cardinal waited about four months before answering Don Bosco; he wanted time to think things over and to hear the opinion of those who were entrusted with implementing the decrees issued by the Council of Trent.

This committee, made up of three noted ecclesiastics, felt that Don Bosco should not just take care of the curriculum but also administer the seminary finances. They wrote to him as they had to their bishop, stating among other things, "In view of the remarkable progress of the boys being taught by your beloved Salesians and of the great good which will come to our town and diocese, we ask you to assume full responsibility for the seminary's direction . . . both to benefit our students and to promote God's glory as you judge best in the light of your knowledge and experience. In this we are one with our cardinal. Were we not convinced, too, of your selfless and

noble dedication to the education of youth, we would not have ventured to make this request of you.” In view of his committee’s consideration, the cardinal asked that action in this matter be speeded up.³²

On May 29, 1877, Don Bosco, who was mainly concerned with the boarding school, sought clarification from Canon Tondinelli, vicar general and head of the committee in the following matters:

1. What is the present financial situation of the seminary—its assets and liabilities, funds to meet salaries of teachers, administrators and domestic staffs?
2. May we enroll boarding students who seek admission, as long as they follow the overall [seminary] regulations?
3. May town boys enroll as day students or part-time boarders?
4. Is the present staff under contract? Can their services be relied upon, or is a new staff to be recruited?

When I shall have information on the above and similar matters—Don Bosco continued—I shall draw up a contract which will respect both the committee’s rights and our own position as an exempt religious Congregation in the Church. Other matters will need to be discussed orally; I’ll come to Rome within a short time.³³

Don Bosco received the information promptly. There was no objection to boarders—“to boys from outside the diocese,” as the canon put it—as long as they followed the house rules and wore the clerical garb. As for the day students from town, it was feared that enrolling them might jeopardize the seminary’s rights but they could be permitted to attend classes, provided that they applied directly to the bishop. In regard to the teaching staff, all that was needed that first year was the secondary school faculty and teachers for the third and fourth elementary grades; the higher grades would be taught by the seminary staff and by outside teachers.³⁴

Don Bosco, temporarily putting aside his plans for boarding students, drew up a first draft of a contract which he sent to the cardinal, who passed it on to the committee. In turn the committee submitted a counter-contract which radically changed Don Bosco’s

³²Letter from Father Daghero to Don Bosco, May 5, 1877; from the committee, May 17; from the cardinal, May 24. [Author]

³³We have omitted the introductory part of Don Bosco’s letter. [Editor]

³⁴Letter from Canon Tondinelli, Magliano, June 8, 1877. [Author]

stipulations on several matters. However, it was on the basis of Don Bosco's draft that the cardinal made his amendments. Finally, after further editing, the contract containing eight articles³⁵ was signed on August 21 by Don Bosco and on August 25 by the cardinal.

The proposal of mixing seminarians with other students, even though it was "in conformity with seminary regulations and until then a current practice," was not to Don Bosco's liking. Hence, once the seminary passed into his hands, he began planning for a distinct boarding school for boys to be housed in a rented section of that huge building. He promptly had his plan put into writing—a mere formality, just to make sure, as Father Rua privately noted, "that no one could get his hands on it." The note added that no rent was to be paid [for the boarding school] and that the house would always be available for the Salesians' use. This matter was handled by Mr. Alvin Donato of Saluggia, whom Don Bosco purposely sent to the seminary and charged with drawing up an inventory and with getting the place ready for boarders by the fast approaching new school year.

Alvin Donato, an excellent family man, was very devoted to Don Bosco and was always glad to do him a favor. He was one of a certain number of zealous, trusted laymen who were always at Don Bosco's call to help in legal and business matters. In addition to Donato we may cite such men as Mr. Vincent Provera, Father Rua's brother, Father Rota's father, Chevalier Ribaldone, Count Cays (before becoming a Salesian), and many others. They felt highly honored when Don Bosco showed them his fullest trust and allowed them access to the inner doings of Salesian life, even inviting them to take part in the confreres' spiritual retreats.

We shall pass over the usual difficulties raised by the prefect of the province and the school superintendent of Perugia. Father Daghero had his problems but he managed deftly to sidestep them. The seminary-boarding school of the Immaculate Conception, as it was named, continued three more years under the direction of its former rector, Father Francis Rebaudi, but the real animator of the entire house was the Salesian superior, Father Joseph Daghero, a doctor of letters. Shunning responsibility for the whole seminary because, he protested, he could not handle it, he kept insisting that

³⁵Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Don Bosco and Father Durando send him as a teacher to our college at Alassio. But, notably virtuous, learned and capable as this son of the Oratory was, he could not long remain hidden like a light under a bushel basket. He was put in charge of the seminary in 1881-1882, and he efficiently held that office until 1889.

Throughout the above negotiations and throughout his whole life, for that matter, Cardinal Bilio gave Don Bosco and the Salesians extraordinary proofs of his good will.

7. CHERI

We are now ready to narrate the history of an undertaking which was begun in 1878 in Chieri, where several priests, headed by Jesuit Father Louis Testa, were running a festive oratory while waiting for Don Bosco to find available personnel to assume its direction. Father Matthew Sona, the oratory's factotum, wrote as follows to Father Testa on November 9, 1877: "As to the festive oratory, or rather boys' club, we have received substantial donations from friends and additional pledges. Hopefully, with the help of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Don Bosco, our enterprise will be much more efficient and fruitful next year." However, as it was, the festive oratory underwent a drastic change the following year, for, in the place of a boys' oratory, Don Bosco opened the St. Theresa Oratory for girls.

This is how it happened.³⁶ In 1870 Mr. Charles Bertinetti left Don Bosco his entire estate. Don Bosco would have gladly turned one of the Bertinetti houses into a school, but, because of some local opposition, notably from Canon Anthony Oddenino, rector of the cathedral, he first sold the lands and put also the houses on sale. This caused many hard feelings in the town, and several prominent citizens asked him not to go ahead with it. Don Bosco then held on to the main house, hoping that the time would come when he might be able to start some work to benefit the people. The time did indeed come in 1876 when two women, legatees of Mr. Bertinetti's will, joined forces with other ladies in Chieri, and, after seeking Don Bosco's advice, began gathering girls together in the courtyard of his house on Sunday afternoons to give them a chance for some

³⁶A letter of Father Testa to Don Bosco casts some light on the many ups and downs of the Chieri oratory. [Author]

wholesome recreation and, later, for catechetical instruction in the parish church. This was in all reality a girls' festive oratory.

As time went on, it became obvious that it would be better for the girls if they had catechism classes on the premises, and so the good ladies convinced some devout influential parishioners to ask the pastor for permission. He willingly acceded, going personally or sending another priest on late Sunday afternoons to teach the girls. He continually insisted that older girls attend the oratory, especially, as he put it, girls who chased after the sounds of the streets. He encouraged them by saying that attending the oratory was like attending their own parish church. Still, progress in this holy enterprise was quite slow. Don Bosco, who was then taking over, decided to send the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to live in the house, and in 1878 he addressed this petition to the archbishop:

Turin, May 19, 1878

Your Excellency:

In my desire to meet the moral needs of poor girls in this city of Chieri, I have set up a home and chapel in honor of St. Theresa in the former Bertinetti residence.

I request Your Excellency to allow the sisters known as the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to take up residence in the house and assume care of the girls, as has already been granted to the same sisters who teach in the school adjoining the church at Valdocco.

Secondly, would you please send someone to look at the chapel and, if it meets the standards, to bless it according to the Church's ritual?

Your humble petitioner,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop jotted on the back of the petition: "Please present the request on official stamped paper for proper filing in the chancery records; a decree will then be issued." The actual decree, dated June 29, praised Don Bosco's zeal and piety and granted all necessary faculties with the sole condition that all be done to the full satisfaction of the local diocesan superior. On July 20, this local diocesan superior, Canon Oddenino, acting as the archbishop's delegate, blessed the chapel of St. Theresa, which Don Bosco had set up in the residence. On August 10, permission was also granted

for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament “for one year,” provided that the pastor of Santa Maria della Scala consented. All these permissions, reservations and concessions were not needed because, as should have been known, the Holy See’s brief of September 12, 1876 granted similar faculties in perpetuity to all churches and public chapels belonging to the Salesians. But Don Bosco left matters as they were.

The sisters took possession of their residence on June 28. Father [Anthony] Sala and Sister Elisa Roncallo, members of their respective superior chapters, following Don Bosco’s instructions, had taken care of all renovations and repairs. Don Bosco delegated Father Bonetti to act as the sisters’ spiritual director; he went to Chieri every Saturday evening. To do things properly, Don Bosco provided him with a letter³⁷ formally appointing him to that office.

The sisters were great workers, and Father Bonetti was an inspiration. Girls flocked to the festive oratory in great numbers. How, then, could Satan refrain from interfering? The parish priest felt that the religious services at the oratory violated synodal laws, especially since they were conducted at the same time as services in the cathedral. On December 3 he notified Don Bosco that they were an “infringement and an abuse.” Don Bosco, then pained by sore eyes, delayed his answer, whereupon the priest brought his charge to the archbishop, informing Don Bosco of his action. Don Bosco asked Father Bonetti to handle the problem, and Father Bonetti notified the parish priest that (1) what was being done in Chieri was no different from what they did in Turin, where the local ecclesiastical authority had never objected to holding Sunday services in all the festive oratories at the same time as in the parish churches, and that (2) this was the most convenient time for the girls of Chieri.

Meanwhile, the archdiocesan vicar general had summoned Father Rua to inform him officially of the complaint lodged by the parish priest of Chieri. After the interview, in a written report sent to the archbishop, Father Rua outlined in detail the schedule of the Chieri girls’ oratory, showing persuasively that the vesper services could not possibly be shifted to another hour. Canon [Matthew] Sona, suspecting hidden motives in a plot to close down the oratory

³⁷Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

which was so dear to him, earnestly pleaded with Father Bonetti, in all charity and prudence, and “with Don Bosco even more in his charity, prudence, great-heartedness and fortitude,” not to back down and not to deprive the people of Chieri of such a great boon, all because Satan was raising obstacles. Then, giving Father Bonetti some good advice, he suggested that he keep all letters already exchanged by both parties in the dispute, should any juridical procedure ensue. No prophet could have hit the mark better.

On December 21, after meeting with the archbishop and consulting with Don Bosco, Father Bonetti proposed a compromise to Canon Lione, vicar forane of Chieri, informing him also of the papal faculties which he could not disregard. The compromise was that when religious services were held at the oratory at the same time as catechetical instructions at the parish church, the older girls would be barred from the oratory classes and the younger ones would be given a choice. The vicar rejected the plan outright. Then he and the parish priest insisted that all girls above the age of thirteen be *dismissed* from the oratory. Yet, was it not the older girls who were in greater need of religious instruction and a place where they could be protected from the dangers of the holidays? Replying to these sensible objections, both priests told Father Bonetti, “If these girls do anything wrong, you don’t have to account for them.” It was impossible to come to terms with such logic. Later in our account we shall narrate what happened. Just now our readers should know two things: first, that although Canon Oddenino was an exemplary priest, his mind had been poisoned by the Jansenistic teachings instilled into him during his priestly formation; second, that Father Tamagnone, pastor at San Giorgio Canavese, kept egging him on to prolong the dispute. The latter was a well-known troublemaker in the eyes of the chancery, as Father Notario, who knew him, has assured us.

At the beginning of the 1878-1879 school year, the Chieri convent, as did the Nizza Monferrato community, opened its doors to a number of boarding girls. The school prospectus stated that applications for admission could be addressed to the superior of the school or to Don Bosco. Thus did Don Bosco react to harassment: by firmer and more effective action.

CHAPTER 22

Striving to Make Ends Meet

IF Don Bosco had trimmed his activities to the size of his budget, he would not have accomplished one-tenth of all he did. During 1878, over and above the extraordinary expenses incurred by new foundations, he was being hard pressed for funds to give his existing houses firmer stability. The college at Valsalice was no exception. In December of this year our saintly founder discussed with his chapter ways and means of putting that precariously funded college on a stronger financial basis. The rent alone amounted to fifty-five hundred lire a year. The Brothers of the Christian Schools, the actual owners [willing to sell it], first asked for two hundred and thirty thousand lire, then two hundred thousand, and finally cut the price to one hundred and eighty thousand. On the basis of a professional appraisal of the place, Don Bosco offered them one hundred and thirty thousand lire, which the Brothers accepted after lengthy negotiations. The chapter approved the contract, which was closed in 1879.

As we shall see, other urgent needs cropped up elsewhere, but Don Bosco's usual sources of funds were being entirely used up to meet everyday expenses. However, he relied on Divine Providence, and God never allowed him to run into dire need. Still, he was not spared the labor of racking his brains to find new ways of paying off his creditors. His efforts to multiply his cooperators constantly increased the number of those who were sympathetic to his work and opened their purses to him. Then, too, he kept up a constant flow of appeals. Before leaving Rome in March 1878, he directed four such appeals in a letter to Leo XIII:

Most Holy Father:

Kneeling at Your Holiness' feet, I, Father John Bosco, humbly inform

you that, with material and moral support from Pius IX, of beloved memory, the Salesian Congregation has been enabled to initiate, among other things, the following projects:

1. In South American missions in Uruguay and Argentina, some one hundred Salesians now labor in the pastoral care of the faithful, especially in the Christian education of youth.

2. Work on the church and boarding school of St. John the Evangelist in Turin, in the vicinity of a Protestant church, day school, kindergarten and hostel, has progressed well and the walls are steadily going up.

3. At Vallecrosia, near Ventimiglia—a development which has grown these past few years—the Protestants have set up a church, a day school and a boarding school and have practically monopolized the education of youth and the instruction of adults.

To raise a line of defense against this steadily swelling tide of error, we rented premises with the encouragement and financial aid of the Holy Father [Pius IX] and have opened separate classrooms for boys and girls. We also put up a temporary church for the adults. Four Salesians and three Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are now working there, and, thank God, their efforts have been so effective that the Protestants were forced to shut down their schools and suspend adult lectures because their pupils and others walked out on them. We have now bought property on which we intend to build adequate accommodations to provide for permanent and dignified Catholic worship.

4. La Spezia, a city rife with Freemasonry and heresy, experienced a rapid population boom these past few years from five thousand to twenty-five thousand souls. Furthermore, a number of churches and monasteries were turned to profane use, so that, with the drastic drop in clergy and churches, the Lord's vineyard fall almost entirely into the hands of the enemies of our faith. When the Holy Father was told of this situation, he asked the Salesians to open a hospice there for boys. Last November we rented a house which serves partly as a public church and partly as a boys' school and a residence for four Salesians. Whenever we appealed to the Holy Father in our direst need, he generously granted us subsidies for our overseas missions, for Ventimiglia, and for the boarding school and Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin. Furthermore, he allocated a monthly grant of five hundred lire on our work at La Spezia.

These undertakings, set up to strengthen the people in their faith, have no steady income of their own and consequently run the risk of dying out and no longer attaining their goals. I therefore humbly recommend them to the charity of Your Holiness, father of all and mainstay of wavering Catholics.

Having thus described this situation, I kneel at Your Holiness' feet to

implore your apostolic blessing on these new endeavors and on those who work in them.

Your humble, obedient son,
Father John Bosco

We have already written about [the Church of] St. John the Evangelist and [the hospice at] La Spezia, and we shall speak of South America later. As regards Vallecrosia, Don Bosco had already mentioned his needs and difficulties in a statement to Pius IX in October 1877:

. . . But the town of Ventimiglia needs Your Holiness' help far more [than the city of La Spezia]. These past few years, just outside the city, a whole new development has grown up amid a welter of homes and factories in the beautiful plains known as Vallecrosia. The Protestants, the first to settle there, quickly built schools and a church and opened a youth hospice. In an effort to set up some sort of bulwark against this heretical assault, I, your humble petitioner, leased a house with the consent of Bishop Biale of blessed memory. Three Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have come to care for the girls and there are three male teachers for the boys, while one priest holds worship services in a section of the house set up as a makeshift church. God blessed their humble efforts, for in a few weeks they managed to gather the Catholics together and force the Protestants to limit their activities to a few unfortunate lads from distant towns.

Bishop Biale was much pleased with the progress being made, but then he was summoned to his eternal reward and we lost our strongest support, for it was he who paid our rent and supplied a monthly subsidy for our teachers and the sisters. Bishop Reggio has already told us that he can no longer promise a subsidy of any kind. Because this whole endeavor is centered on the good of the Church and is meant to act as a barrier to the encroachment of heresy, we make bold to petition Your Holiness to graciously take these works under your fatherly care and provide whatever financial aid you can in your thoughtful kindness.

While appealing for help Don Bosco kept things moving. He was then getting ready to build a church and school at Vallecrosia, so as to expand and intensify his apostolate there. In 1877 he purchased property and immediately began building.

The hospice at Sampierdarena was in deep financial trouble because of new construction and the setting up of new printshops in

September 1877. To meet this obligation he appealed to public charity through a lottery.

Fund raising through lotteries—he explained in his circular—has become so common that we would not use it unless we really had to, in order to raise money we could not otherwise provide. However, we feel that this lottery is justified by the needs we frankly bring to your attention. We think that this is the best way of reaching out to all for any assistance, great or small, which they can give, and to appeal trustingly to both the worthy citizens of our city and to the wealthy people of neighboring towns in our province.

His circular was written in the name of the committee, whose co-chairmen were Marquis Cattaneo and Marquis Marcellus Durazzo. Father Paul Albera, director of the hospice, was his personal representative. The 1,172 prizes—all donated—were listed in a special brochure; outstanding was a beautiful statue of the Immaculate Conception carved in flint from Vesuvius, contributed by Pius IX. Legal approval was given in July 1877.¹

Don Bosco personally supervised the sale of chances. Little packets of them he sent to cooperators he personally knew with a note: “The boys of St. Vincent’s Hospice ask you kindly to accept these tickets, and they assure you of their daily prayers.” He also drew up another circular² announcing the date of the drawing.

The lottery was a great success, raising enough money to furnish the church with a choirloft and an organ, the work of the Lingiardi brothers of Pavia.

Before the end of 1878 Don Bosco ran another lottery to benefit the Oratory, announcing it in a letter to his benefactors, which we mentioned in Chapter 19 of this volume. The Oratory had also run into extraordinary expenses, for in May Don Bosco had bought three of the latest model German printing presses. The lottery, he hoped, would also help him with the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

It was, however, a small lottery, the most expensive prizes being original paintings and antiques bequeathed to him by Baron Bianco. He sent his application to the prefect of Turin on

¹We are omitting such details. [Editor]

²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

November 28, with a draft of the lottery rules, as required by law, and he received his permit on December 2. The drawing was held on August 30, 1879. We shall return to this lottery in the next volume.³

In connection with it, however, we would like to recount Don Bosco's interesting words to the members of the superior chapter on December 2. On that occasion he showed them two letters. The first was from Cardinal Nina, thanking him on the Pope's behalf for the book *Il più bel fiore del Collegio apostolico* [*The Loveliest Flower of the Apostolic College*]. The second was from the prefect of the province authorizing the lottery; in closing the writer stated that he would gladly receive Don Bosco at any hour of any day and that he would willingly pay a visit to the Oratory. Don Bosco commented:

These two replies have achieved my purpose. I sent the Holy Father that book to let him know how efficiently we work and how deeply attached we are to the See of Peter. I wanted him to realize, too, that we earnestly strive to instill veneration and love for the Vicar of Christ in others. I have achieved this. Then there were two things I was seeking from the prefect of the province. First, I really was afraid that we would not get permission for the lottery since legally we are not considered a "pious organization," but rather a private institute of Don Bosco. So I had to resort to a little ruse. In my request I stated that we had received permission on other occasions and that we had also been granted mail franchise and tax exemption. I knew in advance that I would not receive these last two favors, but I did hope that by bringing them to their notice they would at least grant us a permit to hold this lottery. And I achieved that too. Second, I wanted to sound out the new prefect's feelings about us and to see if he intended to keep up the hostile attitude of his predecessors. You know that we've had quite a bit of trouble because of the bout with illness we went through, the pink eye infection, the sanitation committee's report, and government inspections. But I know now that the prefect is kindly disposed toward us and has offered to see me at any time. To my request that he drop in to visit us he has also given a positive answer. Such a visit would be very helpful to us. A friendly visit might assure us that we will have no trouble this coming year. And we have achieved this too. So, you see, we have good reason to give Providence thanks.

³This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 23

Don Bosco's Two Congregations in France

IN 1878 the Salesian Congregation settled on French soil as though on its natural, nurturing element. After expanding in Nice, it established itself at Marseille, was invited to Paris, and finally spread its shoots throughout the region of Crau d'Hyères.¹ Wherever it reached out, it was welcomed with growing interest and good will. We cannot deny that esteem and reverence for Don Bosco grew unchallenged throughout France from the very beginning, steadily gaining ascendancy among the masses, and living on long after his death, as we were able to see at his recent [1929] beatification. On the other hand, we might add that Don Bosco always professed grateful admiration for Catholic France. In private conversations he enjoyed speaking about France; this seemed to be his most favored topic.

1. NICE

At Nice the good seed had fallen on fertile soil. St. Pierre's Hospice experienced three years of steady growth, moving first from the confined quarters of a textile mill to the spacious, lovely Villa Gautier. Later those premises were developed into classrooms, workshops and festive oratory. Finally, in September 1877, three Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians came from Mornese: a superior, mature in age and experience, although newly professed, and two younger sisters who had but recently received the habit. Three months later, Mother Mazzarello came to visit them. Hearing of their very poor living conditions, she had her traveling

¹La Navarre, located here, is not a city or town, but a private estate. [Author]

companion stay behind at Alassio while she continued her journey alone. We are told that she had to boldly assert her authority with her daughters when they tried to get her to change the way she chose to sleep: sitting on a stool, head resting on a table. "You have work to do all day tomorrow," was her reply, "while I have nothing to do." She left very edified, rejoicing that her daughters were preserving the spirit of Mornese in all its purity. She was told by their director also that he was more than pleased with the sisters and was striving to get them more adequate quarters in the hope that more sisters would be sent. In due course, under the sisters' care, the St. Anastasia's Hospice was to develop into a center of charitable service offered to vast numbers of girls in Nice.

Five letters of our saintly founder to Father Ronchail give us some idea of his constant concern for the house at Nice and fill us in with some details of Salesian life there.

Don Bosco wrote the first of these letters the day after the laying of the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. It was also his would-be birthday,² which somehow seems to have been kept festively for some years after that first simple celebration of 1875. In that letter he mentions two Franciscan tertiary nuns of Toulouse, in whose territory was located Saint Cyr, where Don Bosco would be asked to care for an orphanage then being conducted by the Franciscan tertiaries under the direction of Abbot Vincent. The letter contains also a very important norm of conduct, and the postscript adds a few words of private counsel for the director.

August 15, 1878

Dear Father Ronchail:

I will gladly accept the two tertiary sisters of St. Francis from Toulon, but they should first spend some time in Mornese. Let them come at their own convenience. As to finances, you arrange matters yourself. Let them bring whatever they can.

Yesterday we blessed the cornerstone of St. John the Evangelist Church—a magnificent ceremony, as you will read in the next *Bulletin*.

I'll check into the question of the Ursulines, but since they are no longer a legal entity, I don't see how they can claim any rights. I will have someone look into it and let you know.

²See Vol. X, p. 551. [Editor]

I suppose you have already received a letter on what you are to do with Father Perret. Once gangrene sets in, recovery becomes a real problem.

The whole house is astir for my birthday; the artisans' prize-awarding has been set for six this evening.

Heartiest regards to you and all our dear boys. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Never forget that you are the father of all. You are to lead all to Jesus.

Father Antoine Cauvin, who is mentioned in the first line of the second letter, had been a parish priest in New York City and possessed a sizable fortune, which he generously put at Don Bosco's disposal. Back in 1875 he had loaned him fifty thousand francs for the first missionary expedition but then wrote off the entire loan.³ He died at Nice in 1902. Don Bosco had applied to the prefect of Nice in June for the legal authorization he mentions. Obviously he needed political clout to get the application accepted, for this was a critical period for religious in France.

Turin, October 15, 1878

Dearest Father Ronchail:

1. I enclose a letter for Father Cauvin. Read it for your own information, then seal it carefully and mail it to him. Tell him that we are all praying for him both at Nice and in our other houses.

2. Try to find someone who will be your spokesman to the prefect. He is to stress that we keep utterly aloof from politics, concerned only to aid boys who are pretty much in danger of becoming a nuisance to public law and order and for the most part very much on their way to prison. Tell him that we have many French lads in our houses in Italy and are opening hostels in France to curtail their emigrating elsewhere. Perhaps the deputy may be of real help to us. Bring it to his attention too that every country has a headquarters of its own which we call the provincial house.

3. Keep me up to date on everything. Give my regards to the baron and our other friends, to all our dear boys, and especially to Abbot David Siro. How is he? Tell him to please write me.

³We are omitting a thank-you letter by Don Bosco for another donation. [Editor]

Father Rua will tell you the rest in his letter.
God bless us all. May He grant Mr. Audoli a hundred years of life.
Pray for me, all of you. In Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The third letter is a gracious expression of thanks to a cooperator who was ill. With it he sent a widely coveted relic of Pius IX. On October 1 of that year Father [Paul] Taroni had written to him from Faenza: "I was told that you might have a relic of Pius IX for me. Imagine, a relic of Pius IX given to me by Don Bosco—the two priests whom I have loved and still love most. How blessed I am! What a grace this is!" Both *Unità Cattolica* and the *Salesian Bulletin* had reported wondrous favors attributed to the deceased Pontiff's intercession,⁴ the former paper publishing a letter from Cardinal Louis Canossa, bishop of Verona, telling of the instantaneous recovery of a young lad from a violent fit of epilepsy,⁵ a disease which had afflicted Pius IX as a boy and would have kept him from holy orders except that he had been cured by the Blessed Virgin.

Turin, November 1, 1878

Dearest Father Ronchail:

I regret to hear that our friend Mr. Delpiano has suffered a setback in his old affliction. I send him my sincerest humble blessing. I have arranged too for special prayers to be said for him morning and evening at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. I am also enclosing a relic of Pius IX for you to bring him and to encourage him to trust in the protection of this holy Pontiff. Cheer him up. Assure his wife too that we are all praying for him.

At this moment I cannot visit him personally, because I am taken up with our missionaries' departure. Once these most pressing matters are completed, I shall immediately satisfy my desire to see him.

Tell my friend David Siro that his letter was a delight, and I shall answer it as soon as I get a free moment.

⁴*Unità Cattolica*, April 9, May 25, August 21, October 2, 1878; *Salesian Bulletin*, May (from *Echo de Fourvière*), June and September 1878, November 1880. [Author]

⁵This occurred at Rovolone, in the province of Verona. In August the mayor raised doubts as to the veracity of the account in an ill-advised letter to the *Arena* [a local paper]. *Verona Fedele* replied on August 22 in a signed, notarized statement giving a detailed account of the event. See also *Unità Cattolica*, August 25, 1878. [Author]

Regards to all our dear confreres and all my sons, especially my good friend Mr. Audoli.

God bless us all. In our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's reference in his fourth letter to the half-army of Father Ronchail is to a group of Salesians he had sent to the latter for Nice, Marseille and La Navarre. Henry and John were both Ronchails—the former a brother, the latter a cousin. Father Ronchail himself was acting provincial of France, or, more accurately, Don Bosco's personal delegate, since the houses in France were then part of the province of Liguria, under the care of Father Cerruti. The "peace" which Don Bosco was giving France is a humorous allusion to easing the pressure caused by the lack of personnel.

Turin, November 8, 1878

My dear Father Ronchail:

With the men you already have and those on the way, you've already got half an army of your own. We shall see how they do on the front lines. To give France a bit of peace, you had better send Henry to Father Perrot and John to Father Bologna, or vice versa, if this is possible.

You will get the portrait of Leo XIII if it arrives in one piece.

Will ordinations be held at Christmas? I expect to be in Nice the first few days of next January. Shall we arrange a "charity sermon" or something similar for that occasion?

Father Rua went to Paris with Count Cays and left me penniless. What can you spare?

Warmest and most heartfelt greetings to our dear sons, including our benefactors. God bless you all. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I am somewhat annoyed by Mr. Audoli's silence. Tell him to send me either a long letter or ten thousand francs.

The most valuable passage of Don Bosco's final letter is that in which he advises the director how he is to receive the religious profession of two clerics in his stead. He even briefly outlines an

appropriate homily; nor does he forego a human interest story so timely because so recent and so homelike. By publicizing the ceremony, Don Bosco intended to show that the Congregation had native-born French members (one of the two hailed from Luçon) and that it was not his wish to restrict his Congregation to Italy. "I need French priests and clerics," he had written to Father Ronchail.⁶ "Get me as many as you can!" The deceased Mr. Delpiano had made Don Bosco his sole heir before dying. However, since he had left his widow all the interest on his investments with the right to use the capital as well, if necessary, there was nothing left [for Don Bosco] because she used it all for her family. Don Bosco makes particular mention of Mrs. Visconti, whom he used to call the *Mamma* of the house.

Turin, November 14, 1878

My dear Ronchail:

1. May God welcome the soul of our dear Delpiano into heaven. He was a good, fervent Christian. We have prayed and will continue to pray for him. Do likewise yourselves. Give his wife my regards, and tell her that I shall remember her in my daily Mass. Suggest that she spend a few days with our sisters at the hospice. It will help her.

2. I am very sorry to hear of your poor health. Do what you can, no more. Take good care of yourself.

3. Prepare for the religious profession of Macheau and Pirro. I will be sending you proper delegation soon. It should be a family celebration, but you may invite some dear friends, such as Baron and Baroness Heraud, Father Giovan,⁷ Miss D'Amburg, Countess De Saint Michel, Count and Countess Pierlas, Mrs. Visconti and others.⁸

⁶The letter is undated, but was certainly written from Rome sometime between February and March 1878. [Author]

⁷The cathedral organist, a dear friend of both Don Bosco and Father Ronchail. He visited Turin in 1878 on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. [Author]

⁸We have some data on these lady benefactors. Miss D'Amburg had two brothers, one a priest, and all three were generous with Don Bosco. Countess Saint Michel was from Burgundy, but lived in Nice from October to May. Mrs. Visconti, née Labat, was from Bordeaux. She had married a Sardinian army officer in Nice and lived in Piedmont until her husband's retirement as a colonel, when they took up residence in Nice. Father Cartier gave us the following information about her: "She was one of the first ladies to take an interest in Don Bosco's work in Nice. Don Bosco used to call her *Mamma* of the house. She saw herself as our boys' actual mother since she had no children of her own. To her dying day she was dedicated to our works. She died either in January or February 1891 at the age of ninety-one or so." We owe also the information about other people in this letter to Father Cartier. [Author]

4. The boys might sing the *Ave Verum* and the *Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum* by Father Cagliari, or something of the kind. Then you intone the *Veni Creator*, and so forth. Lastly, you give a brief homily on the joy of giving oneself to God in life and in death. A magnificent example of this is your cousin, Father John Baptist Ronchail, whose last words were: "I bless God for having called me to be a Salesian, and I thank Him for letting me die in Don Bosco's arms." This is what I'd say, but you do as you judge best.

5. At the end of October, I requested a dispensation from age for Bianchi and Giordano. They may both be ordained at Christmas. In fact, if Bianchi is ready, he may be ordained sooner. Use your own judgment.

6. Heartiest best wishes for our dear Mr. Audoli's good health, and my regards to his whole family.

Send me Cleric Pirro's precise age, since I want him to be ordained as soon as possible.

Keep Father Giordano⁹ informed. I shall write to him in due time. May God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace. Amen.

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

2. CANNES

Father Ronchail started negotiating for a new house in Cannes, a charming seaside town not far from Nice, in 1877. Father Barbe, the local pastor, had already achieved his dream of starting a youth center, but he wanted it to develop and grow under Salesian management. Don Bosco welcomed the proposal. The priest, an impetuous person, took his words to be a promise about to be fulfilled and promptly notified the lay staff that they would no longer be needed for the school year 1877. Don Bosco, moved by charity, in spite of having committed himself to the bishop of Fréjus in regard to La Navarre and Saint-Cyr, still would not leave the good priest in the lurch. In October 1877 he sent Father Peter Perrot to Cannes with the two clerics mentioned in the fourth letter and one coadjutor brother to take charge of the parish school only.

However, he had no intention of getting more involved until he had a clear picture of the situation. When he asked Father Barbe to

⁹He was prefect at La Navarre. [Author]

give him a sketch of his plans, out poured a vast scheme of an educational project embodying three different training centers, and, finally, industrial training for capable young men. The administration was to be in the hands of a committee headed by the pastor, of which the school's director would be a member. Private charities would supply most of the money. We know what Don Bosco thought of the plan from a letter he wrote to Father Ronchail [probably in mid-January 1878]:¹⁰ "The plan for the Cannes school is impossible. We must have a clear mutual understanding. Unless we can have full freedom and independence, we had better look elsewhere, even as far as Saint-Cyr or Marseille."

But a clear understanding was not in the offing; rather, it had become obvious that the good priest could not make up his mind and no hopes could be staked upon his rosy dreams.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Salesians who were there felt too uncomfortable, having to live in one room annexed to a chapel dedicated to *Notre Dame de Bon Voyage* [Our Lady of Safe Journey], today the town's mother church, and to teach classes in a wooden barrack flanked on one side by a vast square forever teeming with traffic and by the sea on the other, exposed to the scorching sun so that they perspired even in winter. Everything suggested that they pull out, and they did, hoping for a more propitious occasion, which never came.

3. LA NAVARRE

Father Ronchail successfully paved the way for Don Bosco's sons to go to Saint-Cyr and La Navarre. At first our saintly father insisted that he draw up a contract donating Father Vincent's property¹² to the Salesians, but that fell through. As a result, in 1879 the Beaujour Society¹³ appeared on the scene. The Salesians went to Saint-Cyr later, whereas in 1878 everything was ready at La Navarre. The director there was Father [Peter] Perrot, whom we have met at Cannes. Being young, he had his misgivings when he realized his inexperience and the size of his task, but Don Bosco

¹⁰See *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. III, p. 270, Letter 1683. [Editor]

¹¹Don Bosco hinted at this in a chapter meeting on May 15, 1878. [Author]

¹²Letter from Castigliole of Saluzzo, October 26, 1877. [Author]

¹³See p. 408. [Editor]

rallied his spirits, encouraged him and gave him generous advice in this brief note.

Turin, July 2, 1878

My dear Father Perrot:

I too am aware that you are only a young man and really need to study and gain experience under a capable teacher. But so what? St. Timothy was a youth when he was called to proclaim Jesus Christ and he immediately preached the kingdom of God to Hebrews and Gentiles alike.

Go then in the name of the Lord. Go not as a superior, but as a friend, a brother, a father. Let charity be your word of command, for it seeks the good of all and wills harm to no one.

Read, ponder, practice our rules. This is both for you and your confreres.

God bless you and be with all who will join you at La Navarre. Pray for me. Ever in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco wisely selected the personnel from Nice rather than from Turin; they were sub-deacon Lawrence Giordano, a teacher, and a young coadjutor brother, Mario Gay, who was to supervise the young farmers. To get money for the journey, Father Perrot, the director, agreed to celebrate thirty Masses, but even so the stipend was barely sufficient. A debt of twenty-seven thousand francs was due on the house. The Salesians arrived at the orphanage at about five-thirty in the afternoon of July 5, 1878. The few boys in the house gave them a warm, happy welcome and showed them signs of sincere affection. There were benefactors too who welcomed them as restorers and new founders, so run-down was the house in both a material and a moral sense. As yet no one knew, as we do today, that the hand of Providence was there.

Once the echo of their joyous welcome died away and they got a night's sleep as best they could, they took stock of the situation. Then dawned their hour of desolation. A building pretty much in disrepair, vast neglected farm fields that had become a tangle of weeds, the ever-menacing shadow of a heavy debt, an empty cash box, the prospect of grueling labor and endless expenses with nothing to show for them—a disheartening situation, to be sure. The wonder is that they did not then get up and leave on the heels of

their discouragement. Rather, trust in God, in Mary, Help of Christians, and in the Lord, the dispenser of God's mercy, prevailed. Nor were their hopes disappointed; they soon began to feel the helpful results of their coming. The simplicity and determination with which they silently went about their impossible task deeply impressed the laity and clergy of the neighboring towns who, moved by their sad plight, quickly rallied to their aid. Don Bosco also was not deaf to their appeal for more personnel to farm the land. At brief intervals he sent as many as six other coadjutor brothers to help Father Perrot meet the most urgent needs of the farm.

But the Salesians had not gone to La Navarre to run a farm. Their mission was to give life to a new undertaking of their Congregation which fitted very well in Don Bosco's program: an agricultural school to teach sons of the rural poor, the orphans and the destitute, how to till the soil while they received a Christian education. With the arrival of sufficient personnel, some forty boys were enrolled, as many as the house could hold. Most surprisingly, as the enrollment began to build up, the Lord sent the means for feeding and clothing them. Soon the Salesians were encouraged by the good conduct of their young pupils, by the recognition of their sacrifices by the people in general, and by the visit from their bishop and, later, from Don Bosco at the beginning of 1879. But they were grieved by the death of a virtuous Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians, Sister Marietta Gariglio.

The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians had followed the Salesians to La Navarre. Once he determined to send them, Don Bosco asked Father Ronchail to escort Mother Mazzarello and one of her sisters to La Navarre in May 1878 so that she might see how best to establish her daughters. Hardly a handful of Father Vincent's Franciscan tertiary nuns were still left, with no prospect of others coming to join them. Further, typhoid had killed many of the orphans, and only one sister remained in charge of the house. She gave Mother Mazzarello the best welcome she could. Father Ronchail then took her to a seaside place at Saint-Cyr, nearly four miles from the town, where Father Vincent had bought a large building, known as "The Castle," and had turned it into an orphanage for both boys and girls. He was still in residence there, but he could not keep up the work. Having neither staff nor funds, he turned everything over to Don Bosco through the bishop of

Fréjus. To be sure, Mother Mazzarello did not like at all to have boys grouped with girls and suggested that the girls stay and the boys be relocated at La Navarre, but only if Don Bosco agreed. We know Don Bosco's feelings about such grouping! Father John J. Franco, referring to a conversation with him about such coeducational institutions, wrote of him: "A man of great intelligence and an especially realistic educator, Don Bosco assured me that evil was spreading there like *an electric spark in a magnetic field*."¹⁴ When the convent of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was opened at Saint-Cyr in 1880, everything was done in accordance with Mother Mazzarello's wishes.

The sisters came to La Navarre on October 5, 1878. For a while, they too shifted for themselves as best they could in the midst of want, sleeping under a ceiling which dripped with rain and from which the plaster often fell. The wind howled through the cracks in the walls; mice and bats, nesting within the wall spaces, scurried about the tiny rooms and rickety staircase like masters of the house. Overwhelmed by the filth, and heartsick for those hungry, needy orphans, the poor sisters wept in silence, not wishing to overburden the Salesians who were already hurting. But God rewarded the sacrifice of both Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians with a quarter-century of untroubled growth, until the disastrous days of the French laws of suppression.

4. MARSEILLE

Of all the Salesian houses in France founded then or later, first place goes to that of Marseille, which was then about to open. We have already seen why the opening had to be delayed and how severely strained was Canon Guiol's patience.¹⁵ Again on May 8, 1878, Father Rua had to excuse Don Bosco for his delay in responding to the contract which had been drawn up and presented to him.¹⁶

The superior chapter took the matter up a few days later. The

¹⁴*La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1895, Vol. I, p. 171. [Author]

¹⁵See p. 420. [Editor]

¹⁶We are omitting Father Rua's letter explaining to Canon Guiol that Don Bosco was still convalescing in Sampierdarena where he had fallen seriously ill. See p. 420. [Editor]

members gladly welcomed the new foundation, grateful for the confidence which Canon Guiol and the Beaujour Society had put in their superior and in the Salesian Congregation. They approved the draft of the contract, asking only that some significant changes be inserted so as to preclude future disputes. While they expressed their full confidence in the zealous promoters as sincere friends of the Salesians, they insisted that the contract avoid “we” and “you” and rather stipulate *our* and *your* successors, for it could happen that their successors might have other views, with no intention of respecting their predecessors’ good will.

Father Rua passed these observations on to Father Guiol in his letter of May 20, concluding: “With this premise, I am pleased to let you know that both director and staff have been chosen for the new house at Marseille. Barring any new difficulties—I trust there will be none—our little Salesian expedition should set out before June 28. How will they manage for their daily needs? Dear Canon, your kindly, generous heart gives us firm hope. Your words assure us that you will not leave our confreres to fend for themselves until they get settled.”

The final contract, revised in Marseille and returned to Turin, was definitely closed June 13, although comments and pressing clarifications were still exchanged so as to forestall any future surprise dispute. Father Ronchail’s presence in Marseille helped to cement relations.

The Salesians were now ready to set out for Marseille. Don Bosco introduced them to Canon Guiol, the pastor of St. Joseph’s, with this letter:

Turin, June 26, 1878

My dear Father:

To start our work, I am sending Father [Joseph] Bologna, who is prefect and vice-director here. He has experience in hostels, trade schools and festive oratories, and I hope he will meet your expectations.

But let’s realize that he cannot work instant miracles and that time will be needed before we can see the benefits we hope to achieve by our common endeavor. With good will, God’s help, and your timely advice, I hope that St. Leo’s will not lag behind our other houses in bearing good fruit. What we could not possibly clarify by mail Father Bologna will do in person. We must think about setting firm foundations for this new undertaking by making the Salesian Congregation independent. Just now

that is not the case, for the Salesians can neither run nor jump, but are tied down to the present setup and can do no more.

Please give this some thought. It is my hope that the Maison Beaujour will last years after we are gone.

Just now only three priests and one coadjutor brother will be coming. Gradually, as the need arises, I shall see that it is met.

My regards to Monsignor Martin, Victor and the rest of the family. Pray for me.

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The three priests were, besides the director, Father Alexander Porani, catechist, and Father Joseph Villanis, prefect of studies. The coadjutor brother was Louis Nasi, who is still remembered with reverence. However, only the first and the last mentioned took possession of the house, but Don Bosco did keep his promise of sending reinforcements when needed, sending four more clerics at different times, among them Louis Cartier, and as many coadjutor brothers, of whom Victor Borghi is still living. The 1879 Salesian Directory lists twelve confreres in the Marseille community.

Don Bosco's letter cites this house as St. Leo. When and how did it get this name? There are two accounts. Tradition says that the Salesians were expected at Marseille on June 28, the feast of St. Leo II, although they actually arrived later. However, this can only have come as an afterthought, since the house's name had already been chosen before the expected arrival. In fact, the minutes of the Beaujour board of trustees' meeting, held on June 11, show that Don Bosco had already suggested this name for the Marseille festive oratory. A second guess is that Don Bosco meant to honor Leo XIII. Both opinions, we feel, are mutually reconcilable. Don Bosco intended to honor the [reigning] Pontiff and thus assure the festive oratory of a patron; hence the contract specifically cites the vigil of St. Peter's feast—when the Church commemorated St. Leo II—as the birth of the festive oratory in Marseille. The Salesians began keeping the feast of St. Leo II as the patronal feast of the Marseille oratory in 1880.

The two first Salesians were to arrive on June 26, but Father Rua informed Canon Guiol in a card mailed from Turin on Monday, June 25, that "due to unforeseen obstacles, our confreres will not arrive before Thursday." Even then, they did not get to Marseille.

Though all was set for their arrival on the evening of June 28, they were forced by an unexpected setback to stay over in Nice for the feast of St. Peter, and they set out for Marseille on July 1 with Father Ronchail.

They could not have arrived at Marseille at a worse time. The whole city was in an uproar. The anticlericals were agitating to remove the statue of Bishop Belzunce, who had been a St. Charles Borromeo to his people during the raging plague of 1720-1722, from the end of the avenue bearing his name. The anticlerical agitators' violence broke out on July 1, and the Salesians had to break their way through fanatical mobs as they screamed their fiendish blasphemies. Undismayed, they realized how urgent and essential a festive oratory was and how much the good people were depending on their zeal. The festive oratory indeed opened its gates with no further ado the following day, feast of the Visitation—a blessed occasion to herald the birth of this new Salesian work.

Father Bologna (in French, Bologne) was far from handsome—short in stature and not a great talker—but he was eminently endowed with Don Bosco's spirit. Kind, gentle, cheerful, and prudent, he had a knack of winning the hearts of others, an uncanny expertise in business affairs, and a genuine zeal to develop the work entrusted to him. In addition, his was a simple and deeply felt piety. Furthermore, he spoke fluent French. He was an orphan when he went to the Valdocco Oratory and lived there for twenty years as student, cleric and priest, and then as prefect for external matters. He was in every way a son of the Oratory. Before leaving his cherished home, he joined in celebrating Don Bosco's name day on June 24. Soon after he left, our saintly founder sent him a fatherly word of farewell:

Turin, June 25, 1878

My dear Father Bologna:

Enclosed are three letters. Read them, seal them, and take them with you to deliver.

Go *in nomine Domini* [in the Lord's name]; be as thrifty as you can, but in need call upon me and your Papa will find a way to help you out.

Go as a father to the confreres, as a delegate of the Congregation, as the dear friend of Don Bosco.

Write me often, good news and bad news. Love me in Jesus Christ. God bless you, our brother Salesians, and your work. Pray for me.

Always your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Thank those who wrote to me for my name day.

Immediately after blessing the festive oratory, Bishop Place was promoted by Leo XIII to the archdiocese of Rennes on July 15. His successor was Bishop Louis Robert, transferred from Oran in September; he was equally well disposed to the Salesians, whose beneficial ministry was already noticeable when he assumed charge of the diocese. St. Leo's beginnings were humble enough. Eager as he was to get started, the director could accept only eight boarders and they had to sleep in a barn. To broaden the range of his charity he had to build. Besides, to run the festive oratory he needed more personnel. Some very important facts of those early days are gleaned from the following letter of Father Rua:

Turin, July 16, 1878

Dear Father Bologna:

You are almost right in chiding us for not writing to you; please forgive us, considering the little we all have to do.

But I think that I did write to you and asked Pentore to deliver my letter to you. Besides, I kept hoping that the superior chapter could meet to consider your various requests. Since we finally met yesterday evening, I now face my task and send you a letter long enough to make up for four.

1. You and the pastor are requesting at least two more priests; despite our best efforts, we cannot send any just now, but we shall keep your need in mind and try to satisfy it as soon as possible.

2. Concerning new construction: the whole chapter finds this to be ill-advised at the time. They suggest that you first fill up all the available space with pupils and then go on to new construction when you are forced to. There are two reasons for this: first, you know how strained our finances are; second, benefactors will more generously come to your aid when they see that your work is moving along and there is need of expansion. The sketch you sent us of the residence is adequate and clear. What we cannot approve is the purpose you have assigned to some of the rooms. I will return your sketch with modifications and hope that you will be able to fit in some forty beds and thus get our work moving. When our

confreres began at Nice they were in tighter quarters than you are, and they held out for several months.

3. Have you heard anything else about the contract?

4. At this time we shall begin by sending you young Victor Borghi, a cabinetmaker who will be an asset to you, especially in his trade. Once you have some thirty boys, we shall try to send you more help.

5. I shall soon write to the parish priest at his present address,¹⁷ in about the same strain.

6. We were delighted by your first letter. When you have anything amusing or important to tell us, let me know so that we can all enjoy it.

Enough for now. Pray to the Lord for us and remember us to our confreres and friends. Don Bosco is well; so are we all. Joseph Rossi may pay you a visit soon.

Yours affectionately in Jesus and Mary,
Fr. Michael Rua

The letter which Father Rua promised to send to the parish priest of St. Joseph's springs on us a new factor which needs explanation. St. Leo's Oratory was barely started in Marseille when Canon Guiol already envisioned a Salesian novitiate in that city. Surprisingly, Don Bosco was not only not displeased by the suggestion but he even replied that he was thinking of the same thing. The good canon, convinced that God had chosen the Salesians to do much good in France, felt that it was indispensable for them to be adequately prepared for so grand a mission and that for its success they had to especially master the language thoroughly. In a letter dated July 11, 1878 he offered a twofold proposal: to set up a French novitiate in Marseille and to send Italian priests there to take up a thorough study of French. Father Rua replied in Don Bosco's name:

Turin, July 20, 1878

Reverend and dear Father,

... You are asking Don Bosco to choose Marseille as the place for a Salesian novitiate; this is also Don Bosco's intention. For the moment, however, we shall have to wait, because we need personnel to staff it. Once the Lord provides it, we shall very gladly open a novitiate in

¹⁷Father Guiol was at a health resort in Contrexeville (Vosges). [Author]

Marseille. Just now we intend to send a priest or two there to learn French; as you say, this is most important.

Besides the first men, we have sent a coadjutor brother to Marseille, but, as I have said, shortage of personnel makes it impossible for us to send any priests. We shall do so as soon as our numbers increase. Just now we call upon the charity of the French people to plan raising funds to meet our many obligations and finance the cost of enlarging and maintaining the residence.

No other word has reached us concerning the contract. We urge you to look into it as representative of both sides so that we can make headway and do so with God's help.

Please accept my humble respects and those of Don Bosco. Remember me in your prayers.

Gratefully and devotedly yours,
Fr. Michael Rua

When Don Bosco first decided to open a French novitiate, the place he chose was Nice. However, he had second thoughts, as we learn from the letter he wrote on July 31 to Father Guiol at St. Joseph's.

Turin, July 31, 1878

Dearest Father:

I received your letter of July 27, and I am delighted that we are both of the same mind.

We cannot do without a novitiate in France. Rather than Nice, which we had already considered, I would gladly switch to Marseille. This is what we shall do: let's start by firming up our work at St. Leo's Festive Oratory [and Hospice] where the cabinetmaking course is well under way and the instructor is experienced, having spent two years in France. I will soon send a tailor, and we'll go on from there.

While the hospice is being firmly established—and this calls for time and patience—we shall work on the novitiate. It is a gigantic undertaking but most helpful, for well over half of our students return to their respective dioceses. This way we shall have good missionaries and good laymen. This year alone some three hundred of our students will enter a seminary upon finishing their high school courses. Here is the breakdown:

Salesian Congregation.....	80
Foreign Missions.....	20

Religious Orders	15
Diocesan Seminaries.....	185
<hr/>	
Total	300

It will take much work to get things this far in France, but, with your help, we shall do so.

There is a string of things I'd like to talk over with you, maybe in another letter or in a private meeting.

God grant you good health. Pray for me.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco was certainly being very daring to think of opening a novitiate at Marseille of all places at a time when Freemasonry was assaulting religious orders with every conceivable weapon and egging the government on to suppress them. It was surprising, too, that he spoke of a novitiate in France when he could not even send one-third of the personnel needed for the work already begun. However, the novitiate would be canonically erected, and soon, at that!

In the above letter Don Bosco for the first time calls the house in Marseille a "hospice." The French have no word corresponding to "hospice," but this makes it clear that he meant St. Leo's to be like the hospice at Sampierdarena, fashioned after the model of the Turin Oratory.

When Father Bologna went to Turin for his spiritual retreat in September, he had ample time to discuss the Marseille situation with Don Bosco and inform him of Canon Guiol's plans. Our saintly founder, who had closed the retreat at Lanzo and was presiding at the retreat in Sampierdarena, wrote his Marseille friend a very long letter from there.

Sampierdarena, September 17, 1878

My dear Father:

Absorbed in the endless business of the last few days, I have had no time to discuss things with Father Bologna and come to some conclusions, and he may leave without my seeing him. He is somewhat upset because he cannot have all the personnel he needs. But let's take things slowly.

For your information, you will soon have Father Bologna back with you with two more priests and a cleric who will soon be ready for holy orders. Later, to meet your needs, we shall send you more men, as you can accommodate them. Be assured that I understand your selfless desires and shall do my best to satisfy them. However, since we are starting a new school year with fifteen more houses to provide for, we are in a muddle as regards personnel. Yet, we do have it and you will be taken care of, because I want you to be happy with the Salesians. You are one of our very finest cooperators.

As for me, no, I will not be able to go to Marseille until late in the fall, but whatever arrangements you will reach with Father Bologna will be fine with me.¹⁸

I realize, of course, that our present premises, becoming tighter every day, have to be enlarged, but where are we to get the money? Just now I have none, but next year I can allot twenty thousand francs for St. Leo's.

Father Bologna may need money from time to time. If so, please help him with a few thousand francs if you can, but let me know and I'll see to it that you will be reimbursed within a few days, unless you wish to make it a donation.

Father Roussel, who would like to insure the survival of his institute after his death by merging it with the Salesian Congregation, has been with us in Turin. Matters like this take time and much prayer. I say this because he intends to stop off at Marseille on his return to Paris to see our St. Leo's Oratory and talk with you.

As you see, I speak to you as to a dear, close friend. Please do the same with me. Approve or disapprove whatever I say, and I shall do my best to follow your wise counsel as I also freely make comments which I think will advance God's greater glory.

May the Lord keep us all in His holy grace. Pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

We have described to the best of our knowledge the lowly origins of St. Leo's Oratory. Poverty reigned there for the first two years. Thus does God usually dispose His works "so as to afford some an opportunity to put their trust in His Divine Providence, and others to gain merit by works of charity, enabling all to admire His omnipotence which can create everything out of nothing."¹⁹

¹⁸Father Rua had given Father Bologna power of attorney within France on June 25, 1878. [Author]

¹⁹*Salesian Bulletin*, November 1878, p. 7. [Author]

5. PARIS

Father Roussel, whom Don Bosco mentions in his foregoing letter, had founded a large orphanage for young workers in the Auteuil quarter of Paris. Already two years before, Pius IX had told him about Don Bosco, who was then in Rome, in order to provide for the continuity of the good priest's work. He discussed matters with Don Bosco at that time. Later our saintly founder showed how favorable he was to the idea by telling Father Roussel, "Call us to Paris and we shall be there within a week." Doubtless, the Paris orphanage did fit in with our Congregation's aims, and this was a further reason not to withhold assistance. To get to know the Salesian system better, Father Roussel visited the Valdocco Oratory in 1878 and was so pleased that, with the consent of his archbishop, Cardinal Guibert, he opened negotiations on October 10.

Don Bosco's presentation of the proposal to the superior chapter was approved unanimously. After serious discussion the chapter agreed on two essentials: that the preventive system was to be in no way hindered in its full application, and that the Salesians were to be given sound assurance of undisputed permanence in Paris even after the death of the founders. Count Cays was asked to draw up all the correspondence in French throughout the negotiations.

Father Roussel eagerly hoped that Don Bosco would go to Paris because he felt that they could more easily come to a mutual understanding, and Don Bosco promised to go soon or to send Father Rua with Count Cays as his delegates, since the worthy Father Roussel knew and liked them both. In fact, they went to Paris on November 16. We know little about their trip, but we can surmise something from Don Bosco's following letter:

Turin, November 16, 1878

My dear Count Cays:

It was a true delight to receive Father Rua's letter from Lyons, then your own, and again another from Father Rua, this time from Paris. I prayed that God might grant you a pleasant trip and, as I now thank Him for having answered my prayer, I beg Him for His lasting assistance in projects redounding to His greater glory.

I had no doubt that Father Roussel would give you a hearty welcome.

The piety, benevolence and charity with which he has always treated us were a sure pledge. All the signs are that we shall arrive at a series of sound and lasting agreements such as Father Roussel has always desired.

I again repeat what I have already written to this dear friend of ours and have also told you and Father Rua: you have full powers to negotiate and reach those decisions which Father Roussel judges to be to God's greater glory.

Do not worry if you must prolong your stay in Paris by a few days. Remember that although the canonical approval of the superior chapter is needed in these matters, there will be no problems, since each of its members is in perfect accord and they agree as a body that Father Roussel is to be given every favor and authority, provided that we are assured of a stable residence in Paris.

As regards setting up a novitiate in the new house right away, I see no problem, but we must request it of the Holy See, which will certainly put no obstacles in the way.

Nor do I see any problems in having someone start residing there. However, I feel that I'd need a couple of weeks to discuss matters with whoever will be chosen—one or more—even if it is Count Cays, so as to cover personally the main features of such an important novitiate. I was very much heartened by the blessing which His Eminence and his auxiliary have given to our project.

I have just been handed two letters from Marseille which tell me that a novitiate is indispensable there—in Marseille, not Paris—and you will have probably received similar notices by now.

However, I have made no commitments. I want this matter to be resolved without a hitch. We'll worry about Marseille later.

The new bishop of Marseille wrote that he would like us to take over the cathedral choir. Let's make sure that one thing does not wreck the other.

Please thank Father Roussel, the hostel's director, for me. Assure him that *coram Domino* I consider him as a true Salesian now and always, for his works proclaim him as such.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ aid us in all things. May heaven's blessings accompany you wherever you go, until I can embrace you once more safe and sound amid the confreres who offer special prayers for you.

Your affectionate friend in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

This letter to Count Cays was enclosed within a confidential letter to Father Rua, who had sent Don Bosco a draft of the contract for his appraisal.

Turin, November 16, 1878

My dear Father Rua:

You may give Count Cays his letter at any time. But, in particular, please note a few things.

1. The main lines of the contract are all right, but they may be altered as long as their meaning is not changed. However, rather than specify direct dependence from the superior chapter, state it as coming from the superior general. This is clearer and more understandable, while it makes no difference to us.

2. It pays to find out if there are mortgages or debts on the building which might revert upon us.

3. Ascertain if there are mandatory scholarships for which the funds have run out.

4. While you both have full powers to act, do not commit us to a definite stay in Paris until every doubt is cleared up and we have a legal certainty that unforeseen circumstances will not force us to pack up and leave.

Let me say that, in general, a house in Paris at this particular time would, in my opinion, be a major moral, religious and political asset to us.

We are conducting our conference²⁰ in Turin. There is no need to rush back. You will find so many houses and so many new things when you get here.

Take care of your health. All send their regards and are praying for you.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

To firmly safeguard the stability of his vast undertaking which had no legal existence, Father Roussel was considering two possible moral entities recognized by law. The first was to register the property (whose value was estimated at three million francs by Father Roussel) as corporate property and then to sell a predetermined number of shares. One-third he would keep for himself; a second third would be given to Don Bosco; the remaining third would be put on the market for sale to any purchaser who was judged to be an honest person. Such a structure would protect the stability of the organization since its control would be in the hands of those who owned the majority of shares. Nor did the annual stockholders' meeting pose any threat, since voting power was

²⁰The usual annual conference of Salesian directors. [Editor]

determined by the number of shares. The alternative was to set up a board of trustees with full governing powers in all matters: eight trustees would be chosen at the very start at a meeting of stockholders. Since they would be selected by Don Bosco and Father Roussel, who controlled two-thirds of the votes, the board would be in their hands. Nor would this kind of organization die out, since the trustees would choose successors to fill vacancies. Furthermore, either structure would exempt the organization from heavy inheritance taxes. Father Roussel preferred the first structure, which was used by the Jesuits and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Father Rua made known his ideas concerning the Salesians' role in the corporation's management and administration, as did also Father Roussel. The superior chapter, as we shall see, would then study the entire issue and come to a decision.

Father Rua and Count Cays returned to Turin on the evening of November 30. Supper was over and Don Bosco was about to go to his room, but he stayed with them while they ate, and they talked until after eleven o'clock. The next day the superior chapter held its meeting. Don Bosco opened it with a pleasantry. "When Christopher Columbus returned home from his explorations," he said, "the court grandees and eminent scholars met with their king, excited and eager to hear Columbus recount his adventures and describe the wonders of those distant lands. So, gathered together, let's hear what Father Rua has to tell us."

The unexpected witty introduction put the chapter members in good spirits and they listened to his reports. No one objected to the choice of structure preferred by Father Roussel, but the question of safeguarding the ownership of the property was not the sole consideration. The one chief problem was the restricted freedom allowed to the [future] directors of the house. Circumstances could place them in conflict either with the corporation's counselors or with the religious superior, who, for all religious, is their superior general. Don Bosco stipulated as a *conditio sine qua non* that the house of Paris be the same as all the Congregation's houses. How was he ever to account for a community over which he was not perfectly free to act? There was always a chance that the corporation's counselors could nullify something which the superior of the Congregation considered to be essential, and the confreres, growing used to being independent of their regular

superior, would form the habit of disregarding the Congregation's rules. The superior chapter, therefore, postponed its decision until this particular issue was fully settled.

Still, setting up a civil corporation was the only way to avoid the expense and perils entailed in succession. Informed of all the above discussion, Father Roussel stated his own conclusions as follows: "I believe that the only reasonable, practical solution is to start by my declaring you as *my assistants with right of immediate succession*." He kept hammering on this point in his Paris talks with Father Rua. He then went on: "I may be mistaken, but I believe I know the French character, and I realize that national pride—no doubt out of place, yet so very real—can make it sensitive and touchy whenever the question of nationality arises. This was indeed the very first objection raised by our two archbishops when I told them of my wish to merge my work to yours." Furthermore, as Father Rua was told, both Father Roussel and Cardinal Guibert really would have liked the Salesians not to take over immediately but to stay on at Auteuil for a year of trial.

Don Bosco was anxious to establish his work in Paris, but not at the cost of embarrassing the Congregation, all the more so since rumors that he was about to go had already aroused a certain feeling of expectation. No sooner had Father Roussel returned from Turin with the good news than the renowned publisher, Lethellieux, stated that he was prepared to turn over his entire publishing house, presses and all, to Don Bosco. The saintly abbot, Father Faà di Bruno, hearing of it while he happened to be in the French capital on business, immediately urged Don Bosco to accept. But if he were to listen to Father Roussel and go to Paris immediately, he would have to go with personnel which was inadequate both in number and in training. As our Salesian craftsmasters were then, they would certainly have found themselves to be fish out of water in Paris, hardly able to stand comparison with the salaried staff of Father Roussel. It was only common sense that he delay his going for a year or so. Besides, Don Bosco did not relish the idea of a trial year, both because of its implication and because of the risk of being asked someday to withdraw, with no little shame to the Congregation. Lastly, as everyone maintained and as the archbishop had hinted to Father Rua, Father Roussel was too softhearted and easily burdened

himself with debts. True, he did not want for money, for the French were enthused by his work and he could raise all the funds he needed. However, what if he left burdensome debts at his death? Don Bosco therefore decided to draw up a contract restricting Salesian work in the beginning and permitting its gradual expansion until it would finally encompass the entire institution.

The plan was made ready and mailed to Paris by mid-December, the superior chapter basing its decision on the oral proposals Father Rua had made in Paris. Setting aside the matter of freedom of action in the internal management of the institution in the eyes of the state and any notion of assuming all moral and material responsibilities, the plan limited itself to establishing a training center within the Auteuil institution to prepare Salesians to help out in the work and eventually take it over altogether. This seemed to fit in with Father Roussel's idea of starting a seminary of some sort to nurture vocations for houses in France, even though he was really thinking of a novitiate strictly so called. Of course, this called for a small Salesian community to form the novices properly, taking no part whatever in the general management and administration, which would be left entirely to Father Roussel. As to the support of the "assistants" of the institute "with right of immediate succession," Don Bosco would abide by the articles of the contract he himself had offered. He sent Father Roussel a signed copy of that contract, asking him to return it with his signature, after which he would send some clerics and coadjutor brothers toward the end of January 1879; Count Cays would be their superior.

It took some time for a reply to come. Meanwhile, Father Roussel's more zealous co-workers at Auteuil most ardently awaited the Salesians' arrival, who would bring them Don Bosco's spirit, especially since the poor young orphans were not faring well at the hands of hired personnel.²¹ A month passed with no word from Father Roussel, who, with the archbishop's consent, had decided to go personally to Turin and make some amendments to Don Bosco's contract.²²

They met in Marseille, not Turin, toward the end of January 1879. After a very brief discussion—for Father Roussel had been

²¹Letter from Father Polin to Count Cays, Paris, January 4, 1879. [Author]

²²Letter from Father Polin to Count Cays, January 12, 1879. [Author]

keenly touched by the enthusiasm of Marseille's people for Don Bosco—he quickly signed the agreement.²³ Shortly afterward, Don Bosco informed him that Count Cays was ready to leave for Paris with one priest, two clerics and two coadjutors.²⁴ That Don Bosco was honestly concerned to meet his commitments in Marseille is evident from a petition he sent to Rome requesting permission to open a novitiate in Paris. It was returned to him stamped *dilata* [postponed], since the Sacred Congregation was waiting for Don Bosco's regular report on the state of his Society.²⁵

We can see how Don Bosco, having made all possible concessions, had every right to expect that the ill-conceived idea of a trial year would be waived, but the archbishop held his ground,²⁶ claiming that one could not possibly adjust in one year to the country's customs, national temperament and overall environment. In turn, Father Roussel was eager to have a novitiate there, but the Holy See would never grant permission as long as the Congregation's presence was temporary. Thus caught in a dilemma, the superior chapter tried to find the most diplomatic way in which it could honestly get out of this trying situation and commitment. It decided to notify Paris that the [Salesian] Congregation had already given ample proof of what it could achieve with God's help, not only in Italy but in France as well—for instance, at Nice and Marseille—and that therefore it was neither fair nor proper for it to go to Paris “on trial.” Furthermore, since the cardinal still insisted on a trial period and there was no hope that Rome would authorize a novitiate under such shaky terms, the Salesians had no other choice but to break off negotiations. Yet they wished to keep in excellent rapport with Father Roussel, ready to go to Paris at any time, as long as they could do so on a permanent basis whenever

²³Letter from Don Bosco to Count Cays, Marseille, January 20, 1879. [Author]

²⁴Letter from Father Polin to Count Cays, Paris, February 7, 1879. [Author]

²⁵Letter from Attorney Leonori to Don Bosco, Rome, May 23, 1879. *Dilata sententia* is a reply to a petition used by the Curia to state that the case has been tabled. [Author]

²⁶The distinguished historian Father Pisani, canon of Notre Dame in Paris, who knew Cardinal Guibert, described him as follows (letter to the Salesian Father [Augustine] Auffray, Asnières, August 4, 1931): “He was a man of a different era. His character reflected his Provençal origins, and his age made him look with mistrust on anything he might term a ‘novelty.’ I do not believe that he would let himself be influenced in any way by a foreign priest so as to treat him any differently than he treated Parisian or Provençal priests. He was shy, prudent, often diffident. I very well recall, for example, his opposition to the founding of St. Joseph's Hospital.” [Author]

Father Roussel and the cardinal believed they had given sufficient proof of their ability.

This letter, probably drafted by Father Ronchail and signed by Don Bosco, both of whom were then in our school at Alassio, was mailed from there on February 9, 1879. The reply, couched in terms of pained resignation and deep respect, reached Don Bosco in Rome. He forwarded it to Count Cays with the following instructions: "Please reaffirm our good will and intentions; we have not withdrawn, but as a religious Congregation our stay must be permanent and with the ordinary's consent, etc. Make it a friendly letter, etc." Count Cays carried out the instructions and wrote a letter which is a masterpiece of Christian courtesy.²⁷

A good man in every sense of the word, Father Roussel zealously sought to achieve something of lasting benefit, and he was aware that his boys were not being properly supervised in the workshops. Not that his teachers and helpers were bad, but they had no pedagogical experience and neither had he; besides, he did not involve himself directly, being almost totally taken up with the periodical *La France Illustrée*. "I cannot look after the boys," he had told Don Bosco. "Let the Salesians come, and once they can orient themselves and take things in hand, I will let them run the place all by themselves and give my attention to my newspaper." Canon Guiol, the pastor of St. Joseph's, and others who were present were surprised at hearing their Father Roussel, whom they considered an eminent educator, so debase himself in their eyes. They were even more surprised that Don Bosco was declining an offer which would give the Salesians added prestige also in Italy. Certainly some would have found the offer very tempting. Father [James] Margotti [editor of *Unità Cattolica*] and Canon [Francis] Marengo [theology professor at the University of Turin] urged him to accept. "Even if your Congregation were not to get much done," Father Margotti told him, "the mere fact of going to Paris would be

²⁷On March 30, 1879, *Unità Cattolica* carried this news item, "The Salesians in Paris—We were pleased to read in *Civilisation* that Father Roussel, director of the Auteuil Orphanage, has invited the Salesians to direct his fine institute. The Paris newspaper pays tribute to the apostolic achievements of our own Don Bosco, founder of the Salesian Congregation and of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. While this Italian Congregation moves to set itself up in the French capital, the Little Sisters of the Poor, well known in that country, have opened their first house in Italy, at Naples." [Author]

an honor for both the Salesians and our whole country.” That was quite true, of course, but Don Bosco was not to be swayed by such worldly considerations. In all he did he was motivated by loftier aims, and all his undertakings were animated by a far-seeing wisdom.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's name began to show up in French literature. Georges Bastard, noted Breton writer, describing in a three-hundred-page travel book a trip of his to Italy, dedicated three brilliant pages to Don Bosco's work. The warmth of his language is such as to win the reader's sympathy to the Salesian apostolate.²⁸

²⁸Georges Bastard, *Cinquante jours en Italie*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1878, Chapter 10, *Turin, Oratoire Saint-François de Sales*. Copies are rare today. We found one in the National Library of Paris. [Author]

CHAPTER 24

Religious and Scholastic Celebrations at the Oratory in 1878

FROM April 23 to the end of 1878, the main celebrations at the Oratory were honored by Don Bosco's presence. Our dear father returned from his journey on the very first day of the month of Mary, Help of Christians. Canon Schiaparelli of Corpus Domini Church was the novena preacher, but, as Father [Joseph] Lazzero jotted in his chronicle, "He could hardly be heard and was too hard to follow. Our devout people need a powerful voice and plain language." On that very day Don Bosco called the first chapter meeting of 1878 and opened it by drawing everyone's attention to our Congregation's heavenly patroness in a letter he had just received from Bolsena. A woman afflicted with cancer for three years had made a novena to Mary, Help of Christians, and on the last day the malignant tumor disappeared.

In those days, too, Don Bosco, always eager to assert and manifest his stand for the Vicar of Christ, wrote to Cardinal Bartolini, asking him graciously to present to the Holy Father a gift which the cardinal mentions in his reply of May 22, 1878: "I spoke to His Holiness about your gift of [Marian] prayers and five thousand Holy Communion to be offered next Friday, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, for the efficacy of his pontificate. The Holy Father was quite touched by such a thoughtful offering and sends the special blessing you requested as a token of this thankfulness."

The cardinal also responded to a matter of a very different nature. When the see of Ivrea became vacant on the death of Bishop [Louis] Moreno, plots were hatched to appoint a bishop

who leaned toward certain policies bound to hurt the Church.¹ On getting wind of this, Don Bosco felt morally bound to recommend two excellent priests whose names have been lost to us. In fact, his entire intervention in this delicate matter would have been lost to us, so great was his reserve in these things, had not Cardinal Bartolini himself revealed it in his letter: "I also mentioned to His Holiness the names of the two candidates whom you consider worthy of Ivrea's episcopal see, and he asked me to pass them on to the Cardinal Secretary of State, who is committee chairman for episcopal appointments."² Monsignor David Riccardi, scion of that noble family, was selected. He was later transferred to Novara and eventually was promoted to the archdiocese of Turin after Cardinal Alimonda's death. He always remained a dear friend of Don Bosco and of his successor.

Don Bosco had hoped that Archbishop Gastaldi would accept to pontificate on the solemn feast of Mary, Help of Christians on May 24, but since he could not oblige, Don Bosco requested permission to invite another bishop.³ Needing also the usual festivity chairman, he offered this position of honor to Chevalier Mark Gonella and his gracious wife.⁴

The Salesian cooperators' regulations prescribed a conference on [May 24] the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, but Don Bosco held it [on May 16] right after the start of the novena. It was the first meeting of its kind to be held in Turin, as we reported in Chapter 19. Don Bosco eagerly wished Salesian cooperators to come even from a distance for this May 24 meeting because he always considered this day as *the* day for their solemn gathering at Mary's feet. He therefore sent out several personal letters⁵ to the more influential cooperators, among them Marchioness Marianne Zambeccari, née Countess Politi of Bologna.

During the novena an attempted robbery in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was foiled when some thief hid in the church on the night of May 18-19, intending to let his accomplices in at an

¹One of Father Berto's notes in our files explains the situation, but it is not a matter that concerns our story. [Author]

²Leo XIII had appointed this committee of cardinals shortly after his election. [Author]

³We are omitting Don Bosco's letter to Archbishop Gastaldi. [Editor]

⁴We are omitting Don Bosco's invitation. [Editor]

⁵Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

agreed time. After vainly trying to pick the locks, the rat gave up his attempts and let himself be caught in his own trap.

The endless flow of devotees throughout the novena reached a climax on the feast day itself. The celebration of Masses—seventy-two in all—began before three in the morning, and people were still lining up for Holy Communion at twelve-thirty. Six priests heard confessions throughout the morning, occasionally relieved by others. Almost at the last moment the bishop of Alessandria, who had accepted an invitation to pontificate at Mass and Vespers, could not do so, and Bishop Stanislaus Eula of Novara had to substitute for him.

Sacred music won the day. The boys' and men's choir, two hundred strong, sang St. Cecilia's Mass, a six-voice composition by Father Cagliero. At Vespers the antiphon *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris* was sung no longer by a triple choir ensemble positioned in three different areas of the church,⁶ but by all of them together in the choir loft, which had recently been enlarged and positioned as it is today [1932]. The crowds and the decorations made the services all the more solemn and inspiring.

The Oratory hosted the student body of our school at Lanzo and many priests and laymen. "As usual, we gave up our own bedrooms," the chronicler wrote, "since there were not enough guest rooms." For the first time entire trains of pilgrims arrived that year from Lombardy and the province of Novara. On May 25 a huge crowd also attended a memorial service for the deceased members of the archconfraternity of Mary, Help of Christians. The endless flow of crowds lasted through several hours of the afternoon. In a brief entry of his diary, soon to cease altogether, Father Barberis again underscored what we have been repeatedly saying: "A number of meetings were held before the feast to ensure its success; year by year a record was kept of precautions taken and of misconduct, so as to prevent recurrences in the future." The claim made in 1878 was that never before had there been such a massive attendance and such impressive church services—a claim to be repeated again and again throughout the years, including this year [1932].

⁶See Vol. IX, p. 128. [Editor]

Keeping his word, Archbishop Gastaldi came to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on June 2 to administer confirmation to more than two hundred resident and day pupils of the Oratory and of our school at Lanzo, as well as to pupils of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. True to form, Don Bosco welcomed the archbishop in the sacristy most sincerely and reverently. However, he could not have been entirely pleased with the archbishop's presence because, according to Father Nardi, who was working in the sacristy, the prelate walked through it waving his right hand in a manner to say that he was not looking for such ceremonial niceties.

That evening the students and the novices began their spiritual retreat, preached by Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio, who also gave the artisans their retreat on June 7. At the "Good Night" the whole community greeted Don Bosco with prolonged applause. It was his first "Good Night" since November 29 of the previous year.

After nearly six months—he began—I can finally address you again. It's really been such a long time since I gave you a "Good Night." Well, even though I was absent physically, my thoughts never left you. In Rome, Nice, or Sampierdarena, wherever I was traveling, I always remembered you in my daily Mass and prayed for you. Then at nightfall, when I was alone in my room, my thoughts would turn irresistibly to you. I saw you in my mind, talked with you, enjoyed your presence, wished you good night from afar, and would not retire without a prayer for you. But now I don't have to fantasize. I have been home several days, and I hope I won't have to go away again very soon. We are all here for your spiritual and temporal well-being.

Tonight I have come mainly to tell the students that they will start their spiritual retreat tomorrow night, and to tell the artisans that theirs will follow right after. All of you should make an effort to put your conscience at ease. All the recommendations I regularly give during retreats can be summed up in a single sentence: be very attentive and practice what you hear in the sermons and spiritual reading. There is always something in them which touches us personally: a shabby examination of conscience, lack of true sorrow or firm resolution, forgetting or disregarding our confessor's advice.

Let's straighten out our conscience during the next few days. Let's think of the past, present and future. Have our past actions been blamable? Were our confessions good and fruitful, our Communion pleasing to Jesus? Did we carry out our work and avoid bad company? How do we stand now with God? What is the state of our conscience? Are we

following the path Jesus marked out for us? As to the future, what are we to do to ensure our eternal salvation? What calling in life will we choose to strengthen our spiritual well-being? Truly this is the most suitable time to think about our vocation. [We can apply to our soul what] Holy Scripture says: "I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" [Os. 2, 16]. The Lord speaks to us in solitude. The spiritual retreat is precisely the time for withdrawal [from worldly things] and for being alone.

The artisans too should think about their vocation. They must seriously ask themselves if God is calling them to our Congregation or if He wishes them to do good in another state of life.

You must all put aside your usual tasks for a few days and give yourselves entirely to spiritual matters. Bear in mind that God sparingly grants His special gifts. The opportunity of a spiritual retreat is one such gift.

During this past year several boys, young clerics and priests who might have heard what I have just said have passed into eternity. I hope they all made a good retreat. If they did not, would they still have had the time to do so now? Oh, that through God's grace we might all be here next year for another spiritual retreat. But who can guarantee that? I certainly cannot. Only Our Lord can, but He does not tell us. Rather, He warns us: "Be on guard. . . . The Son of Man will come when you least expect Him" [Lk. 12, 40]. It is no secret that even young people die. Let us always be ready so that, regardless of when death comes, we may tranquilly face eternity. Let's make a good retreat while we have the chance. Since Holy Scripture tells us: "Before prayer prepare your soul," I urge you to prepare your soul before the retreat by enkindling your desire to benefit from it, putting aside all other tasks. Though I relentlessly foster your well-being, during this retreat I will give myself totally to your spiritual good. At Holy Mass I will always say a special prayer that you may make a good retreat. And all I say for myself I say also for my co-workers and for the preachers of the retreat. All of us are totally dedicated to your well-being.

I hope that I'll be able to talk to you again within the next few evenings so as to help you make a devout novena to the Holy Spirit and obtain heavenly enlightenment. In closing, be convinced that an opportunity for a spiritual retreat is a great grace not easily granted. Therefore, let us make it well by putting into practice what we hear in the sermons and in the spiritual readings. Since all graces come to us from heaven, let us all pray that God will help us to draw from it the greatest possible spiritual benefit. Good night!

Ten days after the artisans' retreat, two of the Oratory's feast days came in rapid succession: that of St. Aloysius and Don

Bosco's name day. One day, returning home after a brief absence, he was pleasantly surprised by a note from Archbishop Gastaldi: "I will gladly celebrate Mass and give Holy Communion in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on the forthcoming feast of St. Aloysius, but it must be very early since I usually say Mass at six in the morning. Please send a coach for me in good time so that I may properly prepare for Mass. Please let me know if you can oblige." Don Bosco promptly replied:

Turin, June 1878

Your Excellency:

I returned from Nizza Monferrato this afternoon at one and found your welcome letter graciously informing me of your wish to celebrate Holy Mass and give Holy Communion in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on the feast of St. Aloysius. I thank you with all my heart.

The Mass schedule is the same as in past years. We shall keep the feast on Sunday, June 23 and I will send a coach in good time.

However, should the hour [for our Community Mass] be too late for you, you are welcome to say Mass at six. We shall reschedule the Community Mass at seven.

I am looking into the matter of St. Michael's Church and Monastery. . . . But as for the money. . . . I have asked Canon Morozzo for more detailed information.⁷ I thank you most heartily.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The novena to the Sacred Heart began on June 17. We have good reason to remember the date because it was the first time that our novices held community devotions in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As soon as the celebration in honor of St. Aloysius was over on the evening of June 23, festivities for Don Bosco's name day began. The program was substantially unchanged from that of past years, but each year the filial love that flowed so fervently and freely from all hearts gave it a newness of its own. The outdoor

⁷On June 2 Archbishop Gastaldi had informed Don Bosco that St. Michael's Church and adjoining monastery, once belonging to the Trinitarians and later to the [confraternity of the] *Maternità*, were about to be sold to the Jews and turned into a synagogue. "Should you be moved in spirit to ransom this church from doomed profanation and scandal," the archbishop wrote, "you would be doing a meritorious act before God and men." The price was over three hundred thousand lire. [Author]

assembly on the evening of June 24 was cut short by rain and had to be continued on the feast of St. Peter. At the end, Don Bosco gave a short talk, expressing more than usual pleasure at the wide variety of foreign languages in which he had been honored, particularly of those countries which had Salesian houses. The distinguished guests and local benefactors included also the Argentine delegate to the court of Spain and the preacher of the spiritual retreat, Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio. So impressed was the monsignor with the celebration that he skillfully included a touching description of the event in a booklet which was published shortly afterward.⁸ In it, after showing how those who defy God are lost in a Babel of their own making, but how those who love Him bask in the light of Pentecost, he wrote:

The miracle of Pentecost still lives in our midst. Let me share with you the joy I experienced on the feast of St. John the Baptist in Turin this year. Like the apostles in the cenacle, the Salesian Oratory boys assembled at the Church of Mary, Help of Christians to celebrate the name day of their founder. Out of that vast assembly youngsters stepped forward to address him lovingly in Italian, French, English, Irish, Scotch, German, Polish, Spanish, even the Indian dialects of Patagonia. With tears in my eyes, I exclaimed, "Behold the miracle of Pentecost!" Don Bosco in turn, a man of God, raised his hands to heaven, proclaiming like the Lord, "How plentiful is the harvest! Let us pray that the harvest master will send us many laborers, so that we may break the bread of eternal life for all our brethren whom Our Heavenly Father invites to the banquet of His Son Jesus. . . ." Sobbing, I then prayed, "Merciful Father, hasten the day when there shall be only one flock and one shepherd!"

The festivities resumed on Saturday evening, June 29, at six o'clock. At their close, Don Bosco spoke from his heart to the whole community.

I must admit that just now a flush of pride surged through me, not because of titles and praises you lavished on me—what you said and wrote is pure rhetoric, you know, better called hyperbole, your way of telling me what you would like me to be—but for another reason. These past days I read all the letters you sent me and I've listened to those which were

⁸*Dio ci liberi, che sapienti!* It was published in the August 1878 issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, pp. 110-111. [Author]

publicly read. In all of them I detected a warm heart (even when self-expression was not at its best) and such an honest sense of thankfulness and love that I could not help but say, "What good boys I have! They will stay that way, because a grateful person is certainly endowed with other virtues too." This thought gave rise to my sense of pride and made me feel good. There was another reason, too: you are in every way better than last year. I thank all who worked hard to help you do so well. I also want to thank all who took part in this celebration with singing, band selections, speeches, and all the rest.

Last Monday evening I was ready to give you some news, but the unexpected downpour broke up our assembly. You may have heard rumors, but only some. They concern two of our missionaries in South America who left Buenos Aires for Patagonia. We learned of their departure and of the storm they encountered at sea, but then nothing more. It was rumored that the ship had sunk. You can imagine our fright. But the Lord eased our cares on the very eve of St. John the Baptist through a letter from the archbishop of Buenos Aires, who informed us that after a thirteen-day bout with a violent storm, with death hanging over them, the battered ship made it back to Buenos Aires with all aboard totally exhausted but unharmed. Archbishop Aneyros then went on to say how fondly he recalled his visit last year to the Oratory on this very occasion and how happy he would be to be here again with us. His letter shows the very favorable impression that the Oratory made on him last year on this feast.

What else shall I say? Courage! Be brave! If any of you wish to become missionaries, you have only to speak up and you can set sail not only for Patagonia but for Uruguay and Santo Domingo as well, where it has been agreed just recently to open Salesian houses and replace the schools, the seminary, and even the cathedral which have shut down. If you don't feel brave enough to go overseas, you can be missionaries in France, Rome, Liguria, and Piedmont. Even if you have not been called to join the Society of St. Francis de Sales, you can live up to its spirit and be missionaries among your schoolmates, your own families or wherever you go by your good example, wholesome advice, and fervent spiritual life. Thus each and every one of you can be missionaries like those whom Our Lord called the "salt of the earth and light of the world." All of you here present will one day be citizens of heaven, and then you will realize how little it took to save a soul as a missionary.

The celebration honoring Don Bosco's name day was repeated some time later in a family reunion of former pupils on August 4. They had already given him a faldstool and two dalmatic sets, red

and white. At the assembly Professor Germaine Candido read his printed address, which was given to all. At dinner the overjoyed alumni toasted Don Bosco repeatedly, but it was Charles Gastini, a born comedian, who outdid them all. Offerings were then collected for a Mass to be said for alumni who had died during the past year. Don Bosco closed the celebration with an address to his beloved sons. We give it as it was reworded in a précis on a single sheet of paper and signed by Father Julius Barberis.

It is always a pleasure for me to have my friends and sons again about me. Seeing you enjoy yourselves so much adds to my happiness today. Dinners usually close with toasts, but, if we are to believe our newspapers, some toasts are only offensive to Christians. Here, however, gathered as brothers who are held by ties of holy charity, we ought to speak of pleasant things only. Let me set aside thoughts such as are now crowding my mind which may be too emotional, lest I be forced to cut short my talk, as I have had to do on former occasions. I just say that I hope we can meet together many times again. In fact, I have already decided that next year we shall hold our dinner outdoors in the cool breeze of the neatly festooned arcades.

Just now I am all taken up with a project which I would like to see started this year: being of mutual assistance to each other. People talk about credit unions and mutual aid societies nowadays. We have to set one up for ourselves. So far this is just an idea, a project I have not yet investigated in detail, but I think it is a very feasible idea.

All of you manage to set some savings aside, some more, some less, so that you can face emergencies like illness or unemployment. I suggest that you don't benefit yourselves alone but reach out in emergencies to some fine students who graduate from the Oratory or to your former schoolmates, to everyone here present. Every year you take up a small collection for Don Bosco which I shall gladly forego and have it used to help needy youngsters.

Such an organization set up by you could be most helpful. I lay down but one condition: that all who join us in these family gatherings and all who seek membership in this kind of mutual aid society be persons of sincere Christian life. Those who live disregarding the teachings of our faith should not attend these reunions, but be disregarded themselves. I'm not talking about a chance fall, an occasional slip such as may happen to anybody, including Don Bosco, but to those who lead lives of disrepute. They are not to be invited to these reunions.

Without exception, you must all try to be a credit to your families, to

your school, to your religion and to your association of Salesian cooperators. This is the way you can always experience an inner joy throughout life.

Shall we meet again then—hopefully many, many times—in these family get-togethers? Shall we form one magnificent, strongly unified vast family in paradise? Shall we now pledge our word that none of us will fail to make that meeting?

Don Bosco had already compiled and published a set of regulations for a mutual aid society in 1850 when he started such a union for the young apprentices of the festive oratory.⁹ Gastini, who headed the alumni and had the task of implementing this helpful service, merely had to invoke the old regulations.¹⁰

The artisans' awards ceremony was held on the feast of the Assumption; the guest speaker was Professor [Charles] Bacchialoni of the Royal University of Turin. It was held in the artisans' playground and attended by the entire Oratory community. Don Bosco's closing words—recorded in a précis by the chronicler—were deeply impressive. "I liked his speech," he wrote, "especially because it again showed us Don Bosco the ever loving, forbearing father who wishes all to lead a successful life and helps them do it. If he is thwarted in one matter, he lets it be, says nothing, and tries something else, or, better still, he takes another approach to the same matter while seeming to put his mind to other things. Instead of overcoming obstacles, he usually goes around them." As the chronicler tells us, Don Bosco spoke in summary as follows:

I intend to spend my life entirely for the well-being of you who hear me. Suffering means nothing as long as I can bring you happiness. I assure you, I have dedicated my life to this purpose. Though my many duties don't always allow me to deal with you personally, everything I do is directed to this one goal. So take heart! Let the students study and the artisans learn their trade. We must all strive to help each other to lead upright lives and be useful citizens. How blessed you are! Many lads your age have to work harder than you without the comfort of a kind word, cheerful company and friendly assistance. Be grateful to those who help you and be a comfort to your teachers by your diligent work and good conduct.

⁹See Vol. IV, pp. 53f. [Editor]

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 518-520. [Editor]

After these few quotes, Father Barberis notes how Don Bosco's talks never brought contempt or dislike upon anybody, even the bad, nor were they negative in reflections upon the times and contemporary society. He did not publicly inveigh against evil organizations. His attitude was to suggest, act, and foster good projects and organizations without wasting time heaping blame upon evil.

Our sources are from here on of little or no value for the topic of this chapter, so we must make the most of what we have.

The students' prizes were awarded on September 1. All we know is that the vicar general of Montevideo presided, not Don Bosco. There is more to say about the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary at Castelnuovo which was observed on Sunday, October 6. On this occasion, Don Bosco went to Becchi too, where he was awaited by the pupils who had remained at the Oratory [for their vacation]. Father Bonetti had preached the well-attended novena, while Father Cagliero gave the sermon on the feast itself, speaking from the doorway of the little church to a square filled with people who overflowed upon the adjacent hillsides. The Oratory brass band made an appearance after an absence of eight years.

In 1870, so close to that ill-fated September 20,¹¹ Don Bosco felt that it would be in extremely bad taste to celebrate while the Pope was in mourning, and so he took only a few choirboys to Becchi without the brass band. His reason for so doing he confided to Father Albera. That ban on external joyful celebrations remained in effect until 1878.

The festival concluded, the boys ate a hearty meal at Becchi, enjoyed a snack at the Bertagna home in Castelnuovo, and then had supper at Chieri. There they boarded their train to Turin, while Don Bosco stayed on at Chieri three more days with Father Lazzero for business concerning the girls' newly growing festive oratory.

No information has been left us about the boys' leaving for their fall vacation and their return, save for a dream which Don Bosco had concerning the effects of vacation. He narrated it after night prayers on October 24 to an audience which became excited the moment he mentioned it.

¹¹The day when Italian troops seized Rome. [Editor]

I am glad to see that my army of soldiers *contra diabolum* [against the devil] has returned—he began. This is Latin, but even Cottino¹² understands it! I have lots of things to tell you since this is the first chance I've had to talk to you after your vacation, but let me just tell you a dream. You know that dreams come in sleep and don't have to be believed. However, just as there is nothing wrong in disbelieving them, sometimes there is no harm in believing them, and they can teach things. So, too, this dream.

I was at Lanzo during the first spiritual retreat, when I dreamed one night that I was in some unknown region, but near a village which had a fine garden and an adjacent huge meadow. Some friend I was with told me to go into the garden. I did so and there I saw a numerous flock of lambs cavorting and prancing about. The sheepgate leading into the meadow was open, and the lambs scampered out to graze.

Many, however, remained inside browsing here and there, though the pasture was nowhere as abundant as in the meadow where most of the lambs had gone. "Let me see what those lambs are up to over there," I said. We went and saw that they were all quietly grazing. Suddenly the sky darkened, flashed with lightning and rolled with thunder.

"What will happen to all those poor little things if they are caught in the storm?" I asked. "Let's get them under a shelter." We all spread out and tried to herd them together toward the sheepgate, but they kept dodging us and their legs were a lot swifter than ours. Meanwhile, rain began to fall in heavy drops, and soon came a downpour. I could not herd the lambs together. One or two did find their way into the garden, but the rest, the greater number, remained in the meadow. "Well," I said, "if they won't come back, all the worse for them! Let's go." And we returned to the garden.

There stood a fountain bearing an inscription in black capitals: FONS SIGNATUS [Sealed Fountain]. It was covered, but now it opened, and as the water shot high into the air, it sprayed out and formed a rainbow vault over us, something like this arch.

Meanwhile, the lightning and thunder grew worse, and hailstones began to pelt us. With the young lambs that had come into the garden, we took shelter beneath that arching vault which shielded us from rain and hail.

"What's this all about?" I kept asking my friends. "What will become of those poor little lambs out there?"

"You will see!" they answered. "Look at the foreheads of these lambs." I did so and read on each the name of an Oratory boy.

"What does it mean?"

¹²A good fellow who was in charge of the refectory and fancied himself a poet. [Author]

“You shall see!”

Too impatient to wait, I decided to dash out and find out what had happened to the lambs outside. *I will gather those that were killed and send them back to the Oratory*, I thought to myself. As soon as I left the rainbow shelter I was deluged with rain. There, on the ground, were those poor lambs struggling in vain to raise themselves and limp toward the garden. I opened the gate and shouted to them, but they were too weak. Rain and hail kept pelting them so hard that they were truly a pitiful sight, wounded in the head or eyes or legs and other parts of their bodies.

The storm gradually spent itself. “Look at their foreheads,” someone at my side told me.

I did. Again, each forehead bore the name of an Oratory boy. “Why,” I cried, “I know these boys but they do not look like lambs.”

“You will see,” was the reply I got. Then he handed me a golden jar covered with a silver lid. “Apply this ointment to the wounds of these lambs,” he told me, “and they will instantly be healed.”

I called out to them, but none of them stirred. Again and again I called, but they would not budge. I stepped toward one of them, but it dragged itself away. “Well, so much the worse for you,” I exclaimed and turned to another, but that too dragged itself away. And so it was with every lamb I tried to reach. Finally I managed to get close to one lamb whose badly battered eyes were protruding from their sockets. It was a pitiful sight. I touched it, and the lamb, instantly healed, skipped off into the garden.

On seeing that, many other lambs allowed me to heal them, and they too scampered back into the garden. Still, many stayed outside, the most battered of them all, but I could not get near them.

“If they do not want to be healed, they can only blame themselves,” I said, “but how can I herd them back into the garden?”

“Leave them alone,” a friend told me. “They will come back.”

“Let’s wait and see,” I replied and, returning the gold jar, I went back to the garden. It was completely changed. Over the gate I read the word “Oratory.” As soon as I stepped in, the lambs that had formerly avoided me now inched forward and entered the garden stealthily, quickly squatting anywhere. But even then I couldn’t get close to them. A few reluctantly let me rub the ointment on them, but it turned into poison on them and reopened their wounds.

At this point one of my friends said, “Do you see that banner?”

I turned around to where he was pointing and saw a large banner in the air, blazoned with the word “VACATION” in tall letters.

“Yes,” I answered.

“All this happened during vacation,” one of my friends told me, as I bewailed the destruction, beside myself with grief. “Your boys leave the

Oratory honestly intent upon avoiding sin and being good, but no sooner come storm and rain—signs of the devil's temptations and assaults—and the pelting hail than the poor little wretches fall into sin. Some recover through a good confession. Others receive the sacrament carelessly or avoid it altogether. Bear this in mind: never tire of reminding your boys that a vacation is a devastating tempest for their souls."

Gazing at those lambs again, I noticed that some were dying of their wounds. Just as I sought ways to heal them, Father Scappini, who was then getting out of bed next door, made some noise and I too awoke.

And this was my dream. Even though it is only a dream, it carries a message which will not harm those who accept it. I can also say that, as I matched the names of the lambs' foreheads with the boys being identified, I could agree that they were really behaving as did the lambs of my dream. Be that as it may, however, let us accept God's mercy and heal our wounds by a good confession during this novena in honor of All Saints. We are all to be determined to wage war against the devil. With God's help, we shall win and will one day receive the heavenly crown of victory.

Doubtless this dream effectively helped give the new school year a good start. Everything was moving along so smoothly during the novena of the Immaculate Conception that Don Bosco remarked with warm satisfaction, "The boys have already reached a point which they would have barely attained in February in past years." On the feast of the Immaculate Conception they once more witnessed the inspiring farewell ceremony of the fourth missionary expedition.

The Immaculate Conception novena was highlighted by the conversion of a sixteen-year-old young man. His mother, Mrs. Guglielminetti, a benefactress of Don Bosco, was at her wits' end about her son. Years before she had put him in our boarding school at Lanzo, but eventually he had to be dismissed. In 1878 she sent him to another school in Pinerolo, but he ran away to join the navy. He was returned by the police. Then she took him to the Oratory. The poor woman was in despair. Don Bosco took the youth aside for a few private words and then loudly asked him, "Would you be willing to spend three days here? You can make a brief spiritual retreat and, during that time, decide what you what to do with your life."

The boy agreed and was given to Father Barberis' care. During his retreat he went to confession, received Communion several

times, and willingly stayed with the novices. When his mother came to see him, he apologized to her and asked if he could stay at the Oratory until the feast of the Immaculate Conception was over. She gladly consented. Meanwhile, he kept reading spiritual books and did some secretarial tasks for Father Barberis. He felt so transformed on the feast of the Immaculate Conception that he exclaimed, "If I stay here a few more days, I will want to become a novice myself." His mother was beside herself with joy.

The Christmas novena, preached by Father Cagliero, stirred the boys to ardent fervor. They were additionally excited by the celebration of the first Masses of two newly ordained priests—Father Secondo Amerio and Father Louis Deppert—on Sunday, December 22. Vocal and instrumental music added to the festive joy.

That evening, while strolling and chatting after supper with Father Barberis, Father Lemoyne, and a few other priests, Don Bosco began remarking how good some boys were. He assured his listeners that not long before he had seen two boys rise into the air and remain aloft for a few minutes while making their confession. "One of them," he continued, "began moving slightly toward me and then rose into the air to almost half the height of the kneeler. After his confession he very slowly descended to his knees for the act of contrition. I doubt that any of the boys grouped about him noticed anything. I feel uneasy when I meet those two boys on the playground. They are extremely alert and active. Their companions rate them as very good indeed, but no one can imagine just how good they are."

Don Bosco sang the Christmas midnight Mass as usual, but he remarked that it might well be the last time. During the Mass he had trouble with his sight which was failing at such an alarming rate that it was feared it might be lost. The thunderbolt which had struck close to him at St. Ignatius' [Retreat House near Lanzo] in 1850¹³ had caused an eye ailment which recurred several times to pain him grievously, especially in 1864.¹⁴ The vision in his right eye was nearly always blurred. In 1878, toward the end of autumn, when he worked longer by lamplight as the days grew shorter, his right eye

¹³The date "1850" is probably a typographical error. The incident occurred in 1856. See Vol. V, pp. 336f [Editor]

¹⁴See Vol. VII, p. 390. [Editor]

worsened so badly that he lost its use by December. Reimon, a renowned ophthalmologist, examined him several times and stated that also the left eye was weak, with the danger that it too might become blurred before long. Don Bosco was ordered not to read or write after dusk.

When the sad news spread through the house, an immeasurable grief gripped Salesians, novices and boys. Students and artisans alike pledged daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament and they organized groups to receive Holy Communion, so that about a hundred youngsters at a time would offer their Communion every morning for Don Bosco. Some few even volunteered themselves as victims to the Lord in order that Don Bosco might not be forced to give up his good work. Many novices asked God to deprive them of their own sight so that Don Bosco might be spared that tragedy. When word reached the other Salesian houses, a noble contest of prayer and sacrifice arose among them to avert the threatening disaster.

Don Bosco's sight remained stable throughout December. His condition did not deter him from packing a suitcase two days before the end of the year for a trip to Genoa, Marseille, and Rome, where we shall find him in our next volume. Before leaving the Oratory, he instructed Father Rua to give the *strenna*¹⁵ for the coming New Year in his stead to the whole community. Its theme was "Unity": unity of the boys among themselves; similarly, unity among the superiors and unity of boys and superiors. Such unity was to be achieved through: 1. The frequent reception of the sacraments. 2. Gracious understanding on the part of superiors. 3. Docility on the part of subordinates. Furthermore, all were to protect that unity by shunning whatever might disrupt it, such as quarreling, backbiting, intimate friendships and the like. In closing his "Good Night," Father Rua revealed one more thing which Don Bosco had told him: that upon his return, he would not find all who were then present, because during his absence one of them would depart for eternity.

¹⁵A New Year's gift customary in Italy. From the very beginning of the Oratory (see Vol. III, p. 433) Don Bosco had started the custom of giving a spiritual *strenna* or gift to his boys and co-workers on the last day of the year. It took the form of a motto or slogan to be practiced throughout the year then about to dawn. This custom is still kept by Don Bosco's successors. [Editor]

CHAPTER 25

Missions and Missionaries: Fourth Expedition to South America

DON Bosco had been in Rome eight days when he sent Cardinal Franchi, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, a memorandum, dated Turin, December 31, 1877, petitioning for the erection of an apostolic prefecture and vicariate in two remote regions of Argentina. Don Bosco's practical, organizing mind had studied the record of his missionaries' two-year experience and had concluded that this was the best means to carry out an orderly, ongoing, fruitful work. To make his point, he drew up a report of the Salesians' achievements, drawing attention to their methods, means and results so that the necessity and importance of those missions would strike the eye. His exposition was most simple, though the enterprises it detailed were quite complex. It convinced the reader of how much had been done and how much more remained to be achieved with adequate means. It read as follows:

Turin, December 31, 1877

In the disastrous times in which we live, good Catholics and religious congregations especially must rally about the Holy See, center of truth, and receive guidance from it so as to succeed, both in civilized lands and in mission territories. To this end, some years ago I had the honor of communicating to Your Eminence the desire of many Salesians to dedicate their efforts to the foreign missions where the shortage of evangelical laborers is becoming ever more crucial.

With prudent, fatherly counsel, Your Eminence advised me to train missionaries. Encouraged also by the Holy Father's blessing, I undertook this task and, relying entirely on Divine Providence, I opened a foreign

mission seminary in Turin.¹ Almost immediately afterward, I opened another in Genoa and others elsewhere. God blessed these feeble efforts of mine. In a very short time I was able to prepare a meaningful number of Salesian clerics and coadjutors skilled in trades and eager to devote themselves to the missions. Then I returned to Your Eminence to seek advice about the best place to start our first missionary enterprise: India, Australia or regions of the Pampas and Patagonia in South America. The last named seemed most suited to the strengths of a new Congregation. The successes already achieved embolden me to seek Your Eminence's support in consolidating the work begun under your auspices two years ago. Please permit me first briefly to amplify three things: the need for this mission, the availability of personnel, and the means we have been using to operate. Following this summary view, Your Eminence will be able to judge what steps should now be taken to promote God's greater glory.

The Need for This Mission

First, please note that the Pampas and Patagonia stretch far beyond Tierra del Fuego as far south as Cape Horn, covering an area almost as large as Europe. The Gospel has never been preached there. At various times a few courageous missionaries have gone among these savages, but it has cost them their lives with nothing to show for their sacrifice. True, there have always been missionaries, especially Franciscans and Lazarists, who ventured as far as the Indian lands, but because of their small number, the enormous distances, and many grave difficulties the rewards of their zeal were insignificant. Under the circumstances, learning from history and the experience of others and taking into account the present state of those countries, we realized that what was called for was a new approach. Let us no longer send missionaries into the midst of savages; rather, let us establish settlements along their borders and there build churches, schools, and hospices, with two ends in view: first, to cooperate in preserving the faith among those who have already received it; second, to shelter and teach those Indians who, driven by necessity or by religious motives, have sought refuge among the Christians. This would enable the missionaries to reach the parents through their children, thus making the Indians themselves evangelizers of their fellow tribesmen.

The Argentine consul in Savona took a major role in putting this plan into effect. With the backing of Archbishop Frederick Aneyros of Buenos Aires and of Father [Peter] Ceccarelli, a missionary born in Modena, the consul formally requested me to provide spiritual ministry to the civilized

¹Don Bosco is alluding here to the group of Sons of Mary [or belated vocations] who had a status of their own within the Oratory. [Author]

communities and to the natives because hordes of savages were attacking the regular army troops, only to be mowed down by the volleys of rifle and machine gun fire.

Once negotiations were completed [with the consul and with the archbishop] a first group of ten missionaries departed on November 14, 1875, followed by a second expedition numbering twenty-four a year later. A third contingent of twenty-seven sailed last November, and another fifteen will be leaving in the spring.

Results Obtained

1. Blessed by the Vicar of Jesus Christ and hence tangibly blessed by God Himself, the Salesian missionaries found a most abundant harvest awaiting them. His Excellency [Frederick] Aneyros, archbishop of Buenos Aires, has a very vast diocese which at certain points borders on lands inhabited by the Pampas and Patagonian Indians. In many villages and even larger towns years pass between visits by a Catholic priest. The archbishop welcomed our missionaries most warmly and almost immediately entrusted to them in the center of Buenos Aires an abandoned church known as Our Lady of Mercy or as the Italian Church.

2. The missionaries opened festive oratories, evening classes, and a hospice for poor and abandoned boys, especially Indian children. It now shelters eighty orphans and is located near a public church.

3. The above hospice having proved inadequate for the need, another was opened with government aid, offering training in arts and trades to three hundred orphans; that too has a public church.

4. The above-mentioned orphanage is adjacent to "La Boca,"² a neighborhood of about twenty-five thousand people. With the archbishop's agreement, a standard parish has been founded there with day and night school as well as festive oratories, and now a church is in construction and almost ready.

5. A school for about two hundred boarding and day pupils has been established at San Nicolás de los Arroyos bordering on the Pampas.

6. A parish church has also been opened in this same city.

7. At Villa Colón, not far from Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, another school, "Colegio Pio,"³ has been established.

8. In this vast republic [of Uruguay], there is only one apostolic vicar, Bishop [Jacinto] Vera, who has neither seminary nor Catholic school. Our "Colegio Pio," with some one hundred and fifty pupils, is the only source of priestly and religious vocations for the missions.

²See Vol. XII, pp. 190ff. [Editor]

³*Ibid.*, p. 392. [Editor]

9. Next to "Colegio Pio" stands St. Rose Church for the people of the surrounding ranches and villages.

10. Not far from Villa Colón, we have established a resident and day academy for homeless girls under the direction of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, a branch of the Salesian Congregation.

11. At the end of last November, Bishop Vera asked the Salesians to take charge of the parish church of Las Piedras, a town of about six thousand inhabitants without a single priest or teacher. It is located some sixteen miles from Villa Colón and is a gateway to the western areas of the country inhabited by Indians.

These are the houses and churches that have been opened in the republics of Argentina and Uruguay to serve both youth and adults. The Salesians have labored hard to preserve the faith in both republics, but they have never lost sight of their ultimate goal, so dear to their hearts—the evangelization of the Indians.

Personnel

Considerable personnel was required to maintain all these festive oratories, day and night classes, secondary boarding schools both technical and academic, and churches. More than sixty European Salesians are now running these institutions.

True, one of our most zealous missionaries died during the current year—as a result, it is said, of his incessant labors. Far from discouraging others, however, this has aroused a real enthusiasm for the foreign missions in all the Salesians. Thirty alumni of our schools [in South America] are preparing themselves for the priesthood and, as missionaries, will bring the Gospel to their friends and relatives who are still sunken in idolatry. Over a hundred more pupils, who have given clear signs of a vocation, have already expressed their desire to become priests.

A regular novitiate and a house of studies have also been opened up in Buenos Aires with Your Eminence's previous authorization.

In Europe we have many houses in which boys and young men of various social backgrounds, most of whom want to become missionaries, are given a secular and religious education. In Sampierdarena alone, for instance, more than two hundred young men live in our hospice, in a section reserved to late vocations in a program named "Sons of Mary."

All things considered, we have well grounded hopes that, God willing, we shall be able to send abroad a missionary expedition every year of priests, catechists, and craftsmen.

Material Means

If we were to show an estimated budget, we would find that we have not

one penny of guaranteed income. Still, always and solely relying on Divine Providence, we have been able to found and furnish many schools and churches, train hundreds of Salesian craftsmen and priests, outfit them and send them overseas. Besides this, we have been providing food, shelter and a Christian education to some twenty thousand boys. To the glory of God and to the honor of the peoples of South America, we must declare that the Salesian missionaries have been most warmly welcomed and so well cared for that they have never lacked for anything for the exercise of their sacred ministry and for the operation of hospices, churches and schools. In utter reality, the Salesians possess nothing at all in Europe and in South America; still, they have never lacked anything they needed to carry out their undertakings.

Our one and only constant, reliable benefactor is the Holy Father who, in his inexhaustible charity, has many times generously come to our aid. Now we can also hopefully count on Your Eminence, and on the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. According to a letter from its president, aid will be forthcoming once our missions receive the commendation of Your Eminence.

Measures To Be Taken

Our Salesian missionaries, while staffing and running the schools entrusted to them by Divine Providence, have frequently taken turns in preaching missions in rural areas and in the settlements closest to Indian territory. There they have catechized a multitude of immigrants from all nations who, for the most part, had never either seen or heard a Catholic priest for years on end. Father Cagliero, who heads our Salesian missions there, has informed us that, thanks to these evangelical excursions, the missionaries have learned a lot about the Indians' temperament, character, languages and customs and have been able to establish extremely useful contacts with them concerning the choice of the most suitable and less dangerous sites for a permanent mission station. Among the likely places, the best are Carhuè and Santa Cruz.

Carhuè is the site of a fort built in 1874 on a newly drawn frontier of the republic of Buenos Aires, more than a thousand kilometers south toward the Pampas, whose Indians have to be kept at arm's length by the military's presence. Crossing into Argentine territory on the pretext of trading, they continually make murderous raids on the settlers.

Carhuè is located in the western part of Argentina and is the outpost closest to the Indians. It is situated at 37° south latitude and 5° longitude, west of the Buenos Aires meridian. As has been truthfully reported in this year's newspapers, serious clashes and massacres have occurred between the Pampas Indians and the Argentinians. But since our missionaries were

not involved in these hostilities, they are on good terms with both sides; in fact, their presence is desired by the Indians and by the settlers since Carhuè is not only an Argentine stronghold but also a border trading center. The Salesians are awaited there. The archbishop of Buenos Aires anxiously looks forward to their arrival so that they can take care of the Indians who often follow their barbarous custom of simply abandoning the children when there are too many of them or when they are a nuisance. At this moment a church is being built with an adjacent hospice to be entrusted to the Salesians.

Santa Cruz is a small settlement in the remotest part of Patagonia east of the Strait of Magellan at 50° south latitude. It is a trading post for Indians who go there to exchange furs or artifacts for food and beverages. The settlement is now becoming quite important since, as the Argentine papers have reported, two hundred Russian families are expected to settle there as tradesmen and farmers. Just now there are no arrangements for worship. If Catholics get a head start, later immigrants will find the Church already established and hence in a more advantageous position. But if the Russians settle in first, it will be very hard for Catholic missionaries to organize and establish themselves. It seems therefore advisable and opportune to open a hospice or a mission station at Santa Cruz and at Carhuè to preserve the faith of the believers, make contact with the Indians, and shelter and educate their children, always with the holy purpose of getting closer to them in their own homelands.

Petition

Having supplied this information on the Salesian missions, I now make bold to request Your Eminence to come to our assistance with your influence and wise counsel. It seems to me that to strengthen and advance the spread of the Gospel it would be opportune and effective to take the following measures:

1. Turn the mission of Carhuè into an apostolic prefecture.
2. Turn the Santa Cruz mission into an apostolic vicariate since its distance would make it practically impossible for another bishop to go there to minister to the faithful.

On behalf of the entire Salesian Congregation I must now thank you for your kindness and pray that you will continue to favor us with your benevolence and advice.

Most respectfully and gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

This written petition opened the way for Don Bosco to give the cardinal prefect a more detailed oral explanation of his aims.

However, the opportunity did not soon present itself, first because of the Holy See's congregations' normal procedural slowness, and then because of the suspension of business attendant upon the death of Pius IX. Don Bosco's only conference with the cardinal took place almost on the eve of the audience granted him by Leo XIII on March 16 [1878], during which he spoke to the Pope about the same subject. Afterward, he promptly informed the cardinal of this audience and privately went into details of his meeting with the Pope that he had not thought wise to include in the account which he wrote for the Salesians and with which our readers are already acquainted.⁴ It must have been as a result of his talk with the cardinal that Don Bosco modified his original plan, for in speaking with the Pope he limited his request to either a vicariate or an apostolic prefecture in areas other than the two places he had originally proposed.

[No date]

Your Eminence:

1. Shortly after the conferences which I was privileged to have with Your Eminence concerning our missions in South America and in India, I promptly called on the Holy Father to acquaint him with what I thought could be undertaken for their gradual development. I briefly pointed out the progress of the Salesian houses and especially of the seminary now in operation in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, the Argentine city nearest to the Indian territory. The present seems to be God's chosen time to manifest His mercy to these savage peoples by making an attempt—hopefully a fruitful one—in Patagonia, where two renowned Indian chiefs have invited our missionaries with the assurance of help and protection.

2. It seems therefore opportune to establish a vicariate or apostolic prefecture at Carmen de Patagónes or at Concepción, a small post on the north bank of the Rio Negro where the natives carry on some trade with the local settlers. Once a secondary boarding school for students and a hospice for young apprentices are opened, it will be easy to contact the natives and start Christianizing them through their children. Our school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos is a proof that this approach works.

3. I briefly explained that within one year I could prepare ten priests and ten catechists for the apostolic vicariate at Mangalore in India or for any other mission of your choice.

⁴See pp. 384-389. [Editor]

With his usual graciousness His Holiness listened to my brief explanations, kindly praised both projects and then directed me to Your Eminence, so that in your own prudence you might advise His Holiness on the suitability of these projects and the availability of material and moral means for their realization. I presented the same petition some months ago to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. I now humbly renew it, hoping it may be granted, because we will otherwise be unable to provide for the desperate needs of the foreign missions and of our Salesian houses in Europe, for which help is also indispensable for God's greater glory and the good of souls.

Along with a copy of this particular letter, we found a memorandum in which Don Bosco jotted down the various items he had explained to the cardinal or had requested in his interview:

1. Faculties needed by the superiors of the Salesian houses in America with authorization to delegate them to their subordinates, especially when visiting the tribes of the Pampas and Patagonia, where there is no established hierarchy.

2. A letter of recommendation to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons for financial help to our ten churches in South America and our schools in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Buenos Aires, and Villa Colón near Montevideo. In another school, serving also as a seminary, we have nearly eight hundred boys who, while pursuing their studies, are considering a vocation and are preparing themselves for the foreign missions.

3. A request for financial subsidies or at least equipment, as noted separately.

4. A serious examination of the Lazarists' mission station in the Pampas which is dying away and is being offered to the Salesians.

5. Carhuè, bordering on the Pampas, where Protestants are attempting to establish themselves; Santa Cruz, a colony in the remotest part of Patagonia, where unfortunately two hundred Russian families will soon be settling, as reported in the Argentine press.

The "equipment, as noted separately"⁵ included liturgical books, sacred vestments, and other items needed by the missionaries for their studies and for their priestly ministry.⁶

Another report on the Salesian missions was reverently sent to

⁵See No. 3 of the above-reported memorandum [Editor]

⁶We are omitting their listing. [Editor]

Leo XIII by our confreres in South America, along with a respectful letter signed by the superiors of the houses there. A letter of greetings to the Holy Father on the occasion of the feast of St. Joachim, his name day, soon followed. After reporting their initial efforts to evangelize the Indians, the Salesians discreetly expressed their view of “the very grave need to establish a base in Carmen de Patagónes at the mouth of the Rio Negro.” These signs of devotion to the Pope and the reports which accompanied them had been doubtless requested by Don Bosco so that the Pope, through various sources, might be better informed about the Salesians’ missionary work in those lands and therefore be better disposed to show his favor to them and to the entire Congregation.

The Pope’s response to the first communication he received was a very encouraging note dated September 18, 1878:

What you wrote about your missionary work—he affectionately remarked—has filled us with joy. Your report has made us aware of your zealous strivings to promote God’s glory and the salvation of souls. For this we wholeheartedly thank the Lord who has given you strength and crowned your efforts with success. Doubtless, He will fill you, beloved sons, with courage, so that, in close unity with the Apostolic See, you may be dauntless and zealous in your mission of causing the children of light to grow in merit and numbers in those lands. The glory and expansion of Christ’s kingdom is our deepest yearning, and so we are very pleased to show you our benevolence by praying that God’s abundant blessings may enable you to be worthy instruments of His glory and the salvation of souls.

Don Bosco’s zeal for the missions was not so all-absorbing as to make him lose sight of the spiritual needs of other countries. His love for souls embraced the whole world. Bishop Rocco Cocchia, apostolic delegate of Santo Domingo, ardently wished that a small group of Salesians would take over his seminary. A sad situation prevailed in that city and in the whole republic as well. The minor seminary was closed for lack of personnel and the major seminary for lack of students; there were no priests to staff the cathedral and neither students nor instructors for the [Catholic] university. The bishop came to the Oratory to plead with Don Bosco for priests, willing to leave everything in his hands. Don Bosco promised to do what he could as soon as circumstances would permit but at the moment he just could not oblige.

Armed with this promise, the bishop rushed to Rome and painted Cardinal Franchi a glaring picture of the spiritual desolation of his diocese, even trying to get the cardinal to compel Don Bosco to accede to his pleas. The cardinal spoke to Don Bosco more to please the apostolic delegate than to persuade our founder, knowing quite well that he needed no prodding in doing what he could for the Church and for souls. Don Bosco assured him that six Salesians would be sent to Santo Domingo within the year and that others would follow in the future. However, he laid down one condition: that the cardinal was to use his influence to help obtain for the Salesians a dispensation from the requirement of obtaining testimonial letters from bishops, as well as the *extra tempus* [for ordinations] and other privileges. Cardinal Franchi thanked Don Bosco, but as for using his influence, he remarked, “Since you have already initiated proceedings through the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, I can only use my influence with its cardinal prefect.”⁷

Cardinal Franchi died fifteen days later. On August 2, Attorney Leonori wrote to Don Bosco: “His Eminence Cardinal Oreglia says that you should not accept the Santo Domingo assignment unless you are granted the privileges you have requested. Do not be misled by promises; once you have agreed to go, that will be the end of it.”

Without delay Don Bosco got in touch with Cardinal Bilio who promised in a general way to help him, as he had always done. However, since he was not a member of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, he frankly admitted that there was nothing he could do concerning the privileges. Don Bosco, he suggested, might appeal to Cardinal Oreglia himself who would perhaps oblige. He could help because, as a member of the pertinent Sacred Congregation, he had more opportunity to study the matter of the privileges; furthermore, he was practically a fellow townsman of Don Bosco and might therefore feel more obligated to be of service.⁸ But when Don Bosco personally approached Cardinal Oreglia, the cardinal did not conceal from him the fact that the wind was none too favorable.⁹ Even Attorney Leonori, in

⁷Letters of July 2 and 16, 1878. [Author]

⁸Letter to Don Bosco, August 15, 1878. [Author]

⁹Letter from Cardinal Bilio to Don Bosco, Rome, August 30, 1878. [Author]

sending Don Bosco rescripts for two deacons who had asked for dispensations from age, noted that the rescripts—contrary to normal procedure—had been issued bypassing the archbishop of Turin. While calling this a good omen, the attorney added, “Let us thank God. I trust that with patience and prudence we shall also succeed in obtaining the privileges. For the present, however, let us bide our time.”¹⁰

But since the Santo Domingo proposal was now in the balance, Don Bosco did not believe that he should bide this time. Trusting in Cardinal Bilio’s goodness, he asked him to present a petition to the Holy Father for the faculty of admitting non-clerical postulants [to the Salesian Congregation] without testimonial letters from their bishops, even if only for a year or for only one occasion. Obviously, he was willing to settle for the minimum, if it might constitute a useful precedent. “I understand your wish,” the cardinal wrote back to him, “but, regretfully, I must tell you that in this particular case I cannot help you at all. I know from personal knowledge based on fact that the Holy Father wants these requests to be made exclusively through the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, and I also know that he has ordered that Congregation not to send him any such requests at all. You see, then, that my intervention would be ineffective.” Then, as if to sweeten the bitter pill, the cardinal added that Deacon Blaise Giacomuzzi of Magliano had applied for ordination and that he would personally ordain him very soon after obtaining the *extra tempus* from the Holy Father.¹¹

Evidently Don Bosco had good reason for persistently requesting certain privileges. In fact, just then he needed testimonial letters for a cleric coming from the Turin diocesan seminary. He was forced to request them from the archbishop of Turin.

Turin, November 4, 1878

Your Excellency,

The cleric John Baravalle of Carmagnola called on me a few days ago with a certificate from the rector of the Turin seminary stating that he had satisfactorily completed his studies, but had shown no signs of a probable priestly vocation. He wanted to join our Congregation in order to

¹⁰Letter to Don Bosco, August 19, 1878. [Author]

¹¹Letter, August 30, 1878. [Author]

volunteer for the foreign missions. I rejected him at once. A few days ago he came back with a statement signed by his parish priest and by Canon Ariccio warmly recommending him as a promising cleric as to morality and academic achievement. On the basis of these recommendations, and especially on the basis of the promises and prayers of the young cleric himself, I would be inclined to give him a chance, provided this meets with your approval and you issue the required testimonial letters.

I have heard from several people that Your Excellency will be holding *extra tempus* ordinations. If so, I would ask you to include some of our clerics, since they are badly needed.

I pray that God will keep you in good health and that tomorrow's synod be very fruitful. May it redound to God's greater glory and give you satisfaction for the hard work you have put into it.

Most gratefully and respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

This letter was personally delivered to the archbishop by Father [Louis] Deppert. The archbishop read it and sent it back to Don Bosco without comment, muttering under his breath as he handed it back to Father Deppert, "I don't need his advice," referring to Don Bosco's best wishes for the diocesan synod that was about to begin. It could not be stated that Don Bosco had been tardy to show his docile submission in the matter of testimonial letters, for he had sent the following request to the archbishop the previous May 25:

Turin, May 25, 1878

Your Excellency:

This morning a cleric named Guanti came from Chieri to see me. He told me he had been sent by the rector of the seminary because he wanted to enter the Oratory as a postulant in our Congregation. I replied that before taking any action I had to write to Your Excellency, as I am now doing, and that everything depended upon your reply.

I therefore beg you to have someone write me even just a few notes to guide me. I need to know whether this cleric was dismissed from the seminary for serious motives or for reasons unrelated to good morals.

If his conduct was satisfactory, or if at least there is hope that he will improve in the future, and if you have no objections, I am willing to keep

him here with us for a while to test his vocation. I take no stand at all on this matter and will gladly do what you judge best in the Lord.

With profound gratitude and esteem, I have the honor to remain,

Very gratefully and respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Whatever the difficulties Turin raised, Don Bosco apparently had no intention of giving up in Rome. Despite advice to the contrary, he renewed his efforts to send his petition to the Pope himself. The attempt was made shortly after presenting the Pope with a complimentary copy of his booklet *Il più bel fiore del Collegio Apostolico* [The Loveliest Flower of the Apostolic College]. We gather this from certain phrases in a letter of December 16 from Attorney Leonori: "I know that you have made another appeal to obtain privileges, but it is all in vain at the moment." In vain or not, Don Bosco did not desist in his attempts over the next six years. Whether the time was ripe or not, he kept at it until, with the manifest help of heaven, he finally succeeded in attaining the prize of his ten-year-long struggle.

We should not be surprised by Don Bosco's making acceptance of the mission in Santo Domingo dependent upon the concession of privileges. If anything, he showed how important they were to him. If they wanted him to take on new missions, it was only fair that they should remove from his path the obstacles which prevented him from obtaining the additional personnel necessary for such efforts.

After Cardinal Franchi's death nothing more was said about Santo Domingo. However, a new request reached Don Bosco from an even higher level. Monsignor Innocent Yeregui, vicar general of the Montevideo diocese, who had come to the Oratory mainly to wrest a promise from Don Bosco of sending a few Salesians to that capital city, and had obtained nothing more positive than kind words, appealed to the Pope himself. After acclaiming the valuable moral benefit which the upper-middle-class pupils had derived from having a Salesian boarding school near Montevideo, he went on to say, "Most Holy Father, it is our ardent wish that these good fathers open a trade school for poor lads who are threatened morally. For this reason we turn to Your Holiness and beg you to get Don Bosco's consent for us by contacting him personally." The

Pope graciously obliged and even added these words to the petition: "We refer this request to Father John Bosco, superior of the Salesians in Turin, that, if it be possible, he grant the petitioner's request. From the Vatican, August 24, 1878. Leo XIII." This wish, however, was realized only after Don Bosco's death.

Paraguay's turn for consideration came toward the end of the year. It was a country which had fallen into anarchy as a result of the internal conflicts following the wars with Brazil and Argentina. To remedy its sorry plight Pius IX had authorized [Archbishop] Caesar Roncetti, his nuncio to Brazil's emperor, to open negotiations with President John Baptist Gill, the first Paraguayan statesman to take office who was more or less amenable after a series of impossible ones.¹² At that time the whole of Paraguay comprised but a single diocese defiantly administered by a renegade priest who had slain the bishop. Negotiations were progressing favorably when President Gill was himself assassinated with, at least, the indirect conniving of the same priest. With the president's death the nuncio's diplomatic mission came to an abrupt end. Pius IX then asked Monsignor Di Pietro, apostolic delegate to Argentina, to go to Paraguay and try to restore some order to that desolate diocese. Warmly attached to the Salesians, Monsignor Di Pietro wished to get them into Paraguay and so he requested the Holy See's intervention. Leo XIII, equally concerned for the welfare of so many souls as had been his predecessor, instructed his secretary of state to take the matter up with Don Bosco, who received the following letter just as he was about to leave for Rome.

Rome, December 28, 1878

Very Reverend Father,

The sad spiritual desolation of Paraguay deeply grieved the fatherly heart of the late Pope Pius IX. Shortly before going to his reward, he took timely steps to remedy the situation there by providing an apostolic delegate and some zealous priests to care for souls that were being lost for lack of proper ministers. The joyful news that reached the Holy See made it clear that the Lord blessed the initiative taken by our late lamented predecessor and rendered fruitful the efforts of these evangelical laborers.

¹²Brief of Pope Pius IX, July 20, 1876 to President Gill, and the latter's reply from Asunción, October 30, 1876. [Author]

However, one serious problem remains: the scarcity of priests to meet the people's ever rising needs and to safeguard the fruits already obtained.

The present Pontiff, animated by ardent concern for the welfare of the whole Church, is anxious not to overlook any possible way to remedy this situation. He has therefore asked me to inquire if you can help the diocese of Paraguay and its apostolic delegate by sending missionaries from Italy or from Buenos Aires, where they have already distinguished themselves by their prudent zeal and apostolic vigor.

I look forward to learning from you whether and in what measure you can respond to the desires of His Holiness, who graciously invites you to share his fatherly concerns.

Obligingly yours,
✠ Lawrence Cardinal Nina

Since every wish of the Pope was a command for Don Bosco, he replied that he would put ten Salesians and ten Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at his disposal. He then wrote to Father [Francis] Bodrato [Salesian provincial in South America] to ask how many priests he could spare for Paraguay; the rest would come from Turin. Bowing to this very grave sacrifice, with the unanimous consent of his chapter Father Bodrato put three priests at Don Bosco's disposal. On his part, Monsignor Di Pietro immediately asked for a vicar general, a seminary rector, and a parish priest for Villa Rica, the most important parish of the nation. During the Easter season of 1879 he took Father [John] Allavena with him so that he could devote himself especially to hearing confessions. So pleased was he with Father Allavena that he thought of appointing him vicar general, but seeing how slowly things were moving and impatient of delays he turned to the Lazarist Fathers, who promptly answered his request. And so, for the time being, the Salesians did not cross into Paraguay.

Let us now glance at the fruitful endeavors of Don Bosco's sons in Argentina and Uruguay. We have already noted that the site of the grade school opened in Buenos Aires in April 1877 was but temporary.¹³ New facilities were formally inaugurated in the city's suburb of Almagro on September 1, 1878. On that day a thorny problem of that teeming metropolis was solved. Though it boasted of several flourishing schools for the sons of the wealthy class, there

¹³See p. 129. [Editor]

was none at all for the poor youngsters who swarmed in its bustling streets and squares. The government had attempted to open a huge trade school well staffed with managers, instructors and craftsmen, but could not recruit selfless people willing to dedicate themselves to such philanthropic work. For instance, an Englishman was hired to initiate the whole enterprise, only to find that later he had to flee the country after squandering four hundred thousand pesos. In frustration the government ditched the whole project. The Salesians then, with the cooperation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, took up the task with incomparably fewer means but with supreme confidence in God, and succeeded.

Several different plans for adequate facilities and a sound foundation for an arts and trade school had been drafted and discarded. Finally, a citizens' committee called on Father Bodrato. Eight years before, they had built a beautiful church dedicated to St. Charles in the suburb of Almagro and were supporting a chaplain, a sacristan, and an elementary school teacher, but they never were really satisfied with the results. Desperate for friends and burdened with debts, they asked the Salesians to run the church. Initially Father Bodrato, judging the conditions too burdensome, stalled for time, but when the archbishop intervened and Dr. Carranza offered to purchase two adjacent lots, the Salesians immediately started holding sacred services and began building next to the church. Initially attendance was only a trickle, but the people so warmed up to the Holy Week services that it soon became impressive. The faithful felt so touched by their new priests that they asked the archbishop to make their church a parish. Their request was granted in July, and Father [Stephen] Bourlot¹⁴ was named pastor. That same month Father Bodrato added a Latin class to the elementary school being temporarily conducted on rented premises to which the artisans had also moved. That Latin class was the seedbed of several priestly vocations. Finally, in August a group of novices was transferred there and a novitiate¹⁵

¹⁴Stephen Bourlot (1849-1910) first met Don Bosco in 1866 and stayed some time with him at the Oratory. In 1871, on completing his theological studies in the Turin seminary, he was ordained. Later he returned to Don Bosco, became a Salesian in 1876, and that same year was assigned to Argentina. [Editor]

¹⁵See Vol. XII, pp. 193ff. [Editor]

was organized, as well as circumstances permitted, under the supervision of Father Vespignani.¹⁶

The cornerstone of the new school building was laid at the beginning of March. Work progressed so rapidly that within six months much of the building was habitable, and dedication ceremonies were held on September 1. The artisans promptly moved in from their temporary quarters and took possession of the fairly well equipped new workshops for tailors, shoemakers, bookbinders and carpenters. The printshop was as yet without presses, but they were already on the way. The school, named "Escuela de Artes y Oficios," was dedicated to Pope Pius IX, who was still being mourned by Argentine Catholics.

The inaugural festivities stirred a great deal of genuine good will in the press and among the public. The most prominent members of the clergy and the laity, headed by the archbishop and by the minister of education and worship, gladly attended. The press coverage was the best to be had for the success of the new school. Father Bodrato gave an up-to-date public financial report from the work's start which earned him the reputation of a capable administrator and unmistakable judge of his fellow citizens' generosity. Although the fund-raising campaign had been low-keyed, nearly a million pesos—some two hundred thousand lire—were donated within a few months.

Other speakers addressed the gathering and, as is our custom, the pupils entertained the audience between speeches with poetry and music. Archbishop Aneyros closed the celebration with an eloquent address,¹⁷ in the course of which he directly spoke to the Salesians in these terms: "You, revered Salesians, have indeed trained yourselves to self-sacrifice and excellence in a way that has aroused everyone's admiration. Therefore I need to offer you neither advice nor incentives. Rather, I must tender you my

¹⁶Father Joseph Vespignani came to the Oratory in 1876, three months after his priestly ordination, to make Don Bosco's acquaintance. He remained there a year, became a Salesian, and in 1877 was sent by Don Bosco to Argentina as novice master. In 1894 he was appointed director and later provincial. In 1922 he was recalled to Turin as a member of the superior chapter (now named superior council) and remained in office until his saintly death in Turin on January 15, 1932. In 1948 his remains were brought to Buenos Aires and entombed in San Carlos Church. As novice master, confessor, writer and founder of nineteen Salesian houses he earned the admiration of all. [Editor]

¹⁷The Italian translation of the archbishop's speech was published in the November 1878 issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*. [Author]

sincerest congratulations and genuine gratitude so richly deserved. I pray God to continue to bless and grant increase to your religious family as He did to Abraham, and, like him, may you stand undaunted and unafraid in the midst of life's vicissitudes. May God always protect you, your pupils, and your benefactors."

That auspicious day did not pass before God kindly responded to the good archbishop's prayer. Father Vespignani was then tormented by a rasping chest cough which kept him from speaking and even threatened his life since he had just recently suffered a debilitating relapse. Aware of the danger, the director, Father Bodrato, was inspired to have him wear at the church services a beautiful surplice once used by Pope Pius IX. Almost magically Father Vespignani's serious ailment abruptly disappeared.

The school's October enrollment stood at a hundred and fifteen boarders—sixty students and fifty-five artisans. Among the latter was the school's first Patagonian Indian sponsored by the archbishop himself. Father Vespignani carefully instructed him in the faith and at baptism named him Vincent Diaz. The youngster learned to read and write and was taught cobbling, eventually becoming a teacher of his trade at our school in Patagónes.

Matters were improving at "La Boca" too where the Salesian school had a very full enrollment and where the state school board had also authorized the Salesians to teach catechism in the city schools of Bocca and Baracca. Far from Buenos Aires, a new parish was established in 1878 at Ramello, near San Nicolás de los Arroyos, and entrusted to the Salesians. Since a residence would not be settled there, Father [Dominic] Tomatis commuted every Saturday night from our school at San Nicolás, covering the eighteen-mile stretch on horseback.¹⁸

The renown of the Salesians and their achievements spread from Argentina and Uruguay to other Latin American republics, stirring a veritable rivalry among the bishops to obtain their services. Don Bosco's uppermost concern, however, was to pull together the already existing undertakings whose steady growth kept demanding increased personnel. Wrote Father Bodrato: "Our activities here in America are developing at practically breakneck speed. I shudder to think of the personnel we shall need, and this is no idle fear: we

¹⁸Letter from Monsignor Espinosa to Father Cagliero, Buenos Aires, March 5, 1878. *Salesian Bulletin*, May 1878. [Author]

need more priests, teachers, craftsman and catechists if we are to run so many houses. Just now we have not a single person available. We are more than sixty here in our schools, houses, and parishes but there is work for several hundred. Could you but send us at least fifty healthy, virtuous, zealous missionaries right away, how much good might we do, how many souls might we save, how many Indians might we lead into the Lord's fold."¹⁹ But where was Don Bosco to find fifty missionaries? At that very time he was trying to assemble a group of about twenty-five Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians for a fourth expedition.

Outfitting them no longer demanded sending circulars long before their departure since the *Salesian Bulletin* and its vast, loyal readership now sufficed to fill the need. The November issue launched an appeal for money, textiles, clothing, and other needs. Nor was it a voice crying in the wilderness, for heartwarming letters such as the following often accompanied contributions. One anonymous donor sent seventeen gold pieces with this explanation: "I was saving these gold coins for a trip abroad, but now I want them to be used for the Salesians who are going to America. Father, pray that mine will be a successful journey into eternity." From Borzonasca, near Chiavari, in the province of Genoa, a family man honestly admitted after reading the *Bulletin*: "I was touched and decided to steal a *scudo*²⁰ from my savings for a large family to help an enterprise as generous and holy as yours. Therefore, dear Don Bosco, please accept my modest donation, small as it is, which I offer with all my heart. Never fear when I speak of 'stealing' a *scudo* from my family. I will restore it in a few days by giving up something unnecessary." A canon from Tortona sent four hundred lire with a note: "This is a very tiny token of my all-pervading admiration and affection for the sons of St. Francis de Sales. Thanks to you, the Salesians have become the new apostles to the nations." Just days before leaving, one of the missionaries had no overcoat and a package arrived for Don Bosco from Mazzo di Valtellina, sent by a priest who, having no ready cash, donated a brand new overcoat for a needy missionary. "I will keep wearing my old one," the priest wrote, "for, to tell the truth, it is still

¹⁹Letter to Don Bosco, Buenos Aires, April 4, 1878, *Salesian Bulletin*, June 1878. [Author]

²⁰A silver coin used in Italy until the nineteenth century. [Editor]

usable.” The following letter, perhaps penned by Don Bosco to Father Joseph Persi,²¹ testifies to a most generous sacrifice:

November 25, 1878

My dear Father Joseph:

There was something very providential about your letter. I have been busy trying to get a ten-thousand-lire loan to outfit our missionaries and as late as yesterday I made several fruitless inquiries. Then came your letter informing me of your exact offer of ten thousand lire for our missions.

I accept it with gratitude, but only on condition that, should you ever find yourself in need, you may request the annual interest as well as whatever capital you consider you need.

As for your formally becoming a Salesian, I see no difficulties. However, we will personally discuss the matter when we meet at either Sampierdarena or Turin.

God bless you and repay you a hundredfold even in this life and grant you your true reward in the life to come. Please let me know how your generous contribution is to reach me.

Your grateful friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Not even on this occasion did Don Bosco forego requesting a contribution from the Holy Father. Even a modest donation from the Pope would clearly demonstrate that he supported the Salesians’ work, thus moving others to do likewise. Don Bosco was in fact vastly pleased to be able to inform his Salesians and cooperators that the Holy Father, notwithstanding the shortage of resources caused by the seizure of Rome, was sending him a donation of two thousand lire with his apostolic blessing.²²

The end result was that fourteen Salesians and ten Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians who were preparing to cross the ocean lacked for nothing. Whatever was needed was delivered within some two weeks.

²¹These words dictated four days later (November 29) for mailing to Father Persi seem to refer to the same subject: “ ‘Every best gift . . . is from above,’ i.e., your good deed was fully carried out. It pleases you; it pleases Our Lord even more. To expedite matters pick up the money and bring it to Turin or let me know where to go or send for it. I am making use of a secretary because I am having trouble with my eyes.” Father Persi, an apostolic missionary, took his private vows before Don Bosco, and turned over to the Oratory all the money he received. He took up residence in our hospice at Sampierdarena. [Author]

²²This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

The always moving farewell ceremony for the missionaries was held on December 8, feast of the Immaculate Conception. Three new features marked this ceremony: in Don Bosco's stead Father Rua bade the missionaries farewell; the missionaries did not directly set out for the railway station after the ceremony but remained at the Oratory, from which they departed at intervals; third, to save money, they omitted the trip to Rome. Moreover, a few missionaries had to postpone their departure until their ordination, which could be held only on three successive Sundays or feast days. In his petition [for a dispensation] to the Holy See Don Bosco had omitted the candidates' names, and this had considerably delayed the reply.²³

One of those leaving was the cleric Charles Peretto.²⁴ "You will work hard," Don Bosco said to him. Then, picking up an orange, he gave it to him, saying: "Take it. You will remember this when you will be in the land of oranges." When Peretto reached Uruguay and saw no orange groves, he thought, *I must be in the wrong place!* Later, on going to Brazil and seeing endless orange groves, he exclaimed, "This is where I am supposed to be!" In fact, on Bishop Lasagna's²⁵ death, he became provincial of the houses in Brazil and worked there for many years.

Don Bosco was at the Oratory during this farewell ceremony, but he preferred to speak later. When the church had emptied and all had a chance to regain their composure, postulants, novices, and professed members—a total of nearly two hundred—assembled in the Church of St. Francis de Sales, where fourteen new confreres, some of them departing missionaries, took their vows in Don Bosco's presence. Then he spoke. After first urging everyone to

²³Letter from Attorney Leonori to Don Bosco, November 24 and December 12, 1878. [Author]

²⁴Peretto was born in Carignano near Turin on March 3, 1860. He made his first vows in Don Bosco's presence on September 13, 1878 and shortly afterward left for Uruguay. On January 20, 1883 he was ordained a priest. In 1895 he was appointed provincial in Brazil. After six years in office he was appointed director in Portugal and in Brazil until his death on October 6, 1923. [Editor]

²⁵Louis Lasagna first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's outings with the Oratory boys. In October Louis entered the Oratory. (*See* Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f.) He received the clerical garb in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial, he achieved remarkable renown in education, social action, agriculture, priestly vocations, and church construction or renovation. In 1893 he was consecrated bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Moto Grosso Indian tribe in Brazil. He was killed in a train wreck at Juiz de Fora, Brazil, on November 6, 1895. [Editor]

thank God for the events of that day, he asked a Salesian to read a telegram that had come from Cardinal Nina while Father Rua was giving his talk to the missionaries. The telegram read: "The Holy Father, pleased by so many missionaries going to Uruguay and Argentina, cordially sends them the blessing they requested." Then Don Bosco spoke, reminiscing about the Oratory's beginning on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady's care of him during his visits to prisons, and the blessings of the first Oratory chapel dedicated to St. Francis de Sales on the feast of the Immaculate Conception while he was a chaplain at the Rifugio. He concluded by leaving them two mementos: always observe the rule even when most difficult; practice religious obedience in a spirit of truth and sincerity.

The ten Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians assigned to Buenos Aires and Montevideo left from Mornese on December 30, although most members of that community had already moved to their new motherhouse in Nizza Monferrato. On the evening of their departure, Father Lemoyne, their director, gave a moving farewell from the altar, comparing them to the ten virgins of the Gospels, but stressing that in their case they were all wise. He gave each a little image of St. Joseph with three souvenirs: "1. Prompt obedience to God's will as manifested. 2. Cheerful resignation to God's will. 3. Selfless indifference to all the rest." They were headed by Sister Magdalene Martini, the first mother provincial in both South America and the institute. They had begun their study of Spanish in Turin, tutored by Father Cagliero, and they had continued it at Mornese. At Sampierdarena they received the final blessing from Don Bosco himself, who had arrived there that same day. As he was about to bless them, one of them said to him, "Father, bless us so that none of us will die on the voyage." "Have no fear," Don Bosco replied after a momentary pause. "There will be no mishap, but even if one of you should end up in the ocean while on her way to the missions, she would be blessed in escaping purgatory."

The sisters embarked on the evening of January 2, 1879, accompanied by Father [Charles] Cipriano, Father [Joseph] Beauvoir, and a coadjutor brother. Deeply moved as he watched them receding from sight, Don Bosco remarked, half seriously, half facetiously, "From now on I shall have to bless our missionaries two weeks before their departure!"

During the years of those first missionary expeditions, Patagonia was a word which electrified the imagination of the Oratory's young men. Their feelings were further enhanced and heightened by a timely stage play written by Father Lemoyne. Many in those days dreamed of adventure among the Indians of those far-off lands, and some of those who asked for the South American missions imagined that they would immediately venture among the Indian tribes. However, before real contact could be made with the natives of those forlorn lands, both time and personnel had to be ready for them. Fathers Costamagna,²⁶ Fagnano,²⁷ and Lasagna undertook extended missionary journeys from Buenos Aires, San Nicolás, and Montevideo to remote settlements in those boundless lands without ever laying eyes on any natives. Still, Don Bosco was anxious to hasten the hour of redemption for so many souls perishing in spiritual darkness. Bishop [James] Costamagna declared: "Don Bosco wrote about Patagonia to Pope Pius IX, to the president of Argentina, to Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires, to Father Bodrato, and also to me. Noting my sluggishness in this vital matter, he wrote again and reproved me for my attitude in these words, 'Neither Father Bodrato nor you understand me. We must go into Patagonia. The Holy Father wants it; God wants it. Bestir yourself, get in touch with the government, speak up, insist that they open up a way for us to enter upon that mission.'"

Acceding to Don Bosco's wishes, Archbishop Aneyros made plans for his secretary, Monsignor Espinosa, to go to Carhué and into Patagonia with two Salesians to try establishing a mission among the natives. Father Bodrato, Salesian superior after Father Cagliero's departure, willingly agreed and chose Father Costamagna and Father Rabagliati to go with the monsignor. On March 7, 1878 they reached Campana on the banks of the Paraná

²⁶James Costamagna entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twelve. He became a Salesian in 1867 and was ordained in 1868. In 1877 he led the third group of missionaries to Argentina, opened the first Salesian house in Talca, Chile that same year, and was consecrated bishop and appointed first vicar apostolic of Mendez and Gualaguiza, Ecuador in 1895. He died at Bernal, Argentina on September 9, 1921. [Editor]

²⁷Joseph Fagnano came to the Oratory at the age of fifteen as a seminarian for the Asti diocese. (See Vol. VI, pp. 433f.) Shortly afterward he returned home, joined the army and served as an orderly at the Asti military hospital. After his discharge he returned to the Oratory, took his first vows in 1864, and was ordained in 1868. In 1875 he took part in the first missionary expedition to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (see Vol. XI, p. 349); years later, the Holy See appointed him prefect apostolic of that area. He died in Santiago, Chile on September 18, 1916. [Editor]

River where they boarded the steamboat *Santa Rosa* for the trip to Bahía Blanca, whence they would continue on to Carhuè and Patagónes. Tracing their tour on a map was easy, but once the journey began, they had to cope with unforeseen ill luck.

The first mishap occurred at San Pedro, not far from San Nicolás de los Arroyos, when a ripping gale battered and nearly sank their boat. Then, on leaving the Paraná River and steaming into the La Plata, they ran aground just in front of Martín García Island. It took the crew three days of herculean efforts to free the vessel, cross the “Inferno” Channel between the island and the Uruguayan coast, and move out into the Atlantic, heading toward the South Pole. It was a most disastrous voyage. Whatever the poor passengers might have read about frightful storms and the relentless buffeting of the sea, all that and more they experienced under the formidable, unyielding assaults of the *pampero* wind. The gale rode at its height for a night and a day. By the time it abated a bit, they had been blown out upon open billows, prey to towering waves, and drifting some one hundred miles off the coast of Cape Corrientes without sails, gunwales, or rudder.

Experienced seamen despaired of the hopeless situation. All three priests, shut up in their cabin and floundering in water, heard each other’s confessions and invoked Mary, Help of Christians, expecting from one moment to the next that the ship would dash itself upon a reef or be broken asunder. Still, they kept encouraging each other to offer their lives for the good of the future mission. Their ordeal lasted several days and nights. On the night of March 15, particularly, things were so bad that they commended their souls to God.

By next morning the weather had broken: the sun was shining, the sea was calm, and hope returned to their hearts. A fourth emergency tiller, improvised from some beams, hung chained to the stern and steered the battered *Santa Rosa* back to Buenos Aires. Three days later they reached shore. On landing, they all—captain, crewmen and passengers—recovering from the shock of their ordeal, flocked to church with their families to chant a *Te Deum*, even those who had proclaimed themselves unbelievers on calm seas.

When the archbishop heard the details of this terrible tempest, he thought immediately of Don Bosco and promptly wrote him this beautiful letter:

Buenos Aires, May 20, 1878

My dear Father and friend,

This letter will reach you just one year after our meeting in Genoa, Rome, and, particularly, Turin. I'll never forget those days. My all too brief stay at the Oratory filled me with so much joy and edification that I would again love to see and embrace all those good priests and dear boys. Please do so for me.

Yesterday, after much heartbreaking uncertainty, I was finally thrilled to see once more my secretary and your two Salesian priests, but I was exceedingly grieved to hear that they had ridden out a most terrifying gale that made it impossible for them to reach Patagonia. Indeed, it was only by a very special grace that their lives were spared. Praised be Our Lord who can derive great good even from this. Our missionaries can boast with St. Paul: "I was shipwrecked three times" in their desire to save souls for Our Lord. Yet, in spite of all we continue to labor with hope.

I greet you affectionately in Our Lord, you and all the Oratory residents. May your forthcoming name day, which your boys will enthusiastically celebrate on June 24, be a happy day for you.

✠ Frederick [Aneyros]
Archbishop of Buenos Aires

Father Costamagna was so exhausted that he waited another twenty-four hours before sending Don Bosco a detailed account of his trials. Don Bosco replied briefly, but paternally, to his long letter as follows:

Turin, August 12, 1878

My dear Father Costamagna,

Your letter describing the storm at sea has been read all over the world. Let us bless the Lord for having rescued us. It was a frightening experience, but a sign also that you will achieve success. Your name and that of Father Rabagliati have become famous in both Europe and America, and you almost achieved that also in the Atlantic Ocean. Time will tell what we shall have to do. Meanwhile we go on praying here. Please give my heartfelt greetings to Father Rabagliati to whom I shall write soon; also to Father Daniele, to Father Ghisalbervis from whom I expect a letter, to the clerics John and Peter Botta, and to Father Cassinis, from whom I am also awaiting word.

If you have a chance to speak with the pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Church and with other confreres, greet them all affectionately in Our Lord

for me. Tell them that I pray every day for them all, and that I also ask their prayers for me. I look forward to seeing all of them in heaven. Woe betide the one who doesn't show up!

Your brother was here with his son, who will certainly become a Salesian. They are both well.

Goodbye, my dear son. Take heart. Let us work here on earth; we shall enjoy eternal happiness in heaven. God bless you!

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

It was generally believed that Our Lady had saved them. Hence Father Costamagna's long letter appeared in the May issue of *Letture Cattoliche* among some fifty favors attributed to Mary, Help of Christians.²⁸ The letter began as follows: "Cheers to Mary, Help of Christians! Everlasting cheers! My dear Don Bosco, recall to mind the story of the prophet Jonah. Tossed into the sea, he survived three days in the belly of a whale which miraculously spewed him safely ashore. This is also the story of your Salesians. Yes, our adventures are pretty much like Jonah's, but praised be forever Mary, Help of Christians!"

The devil might have thought he definitively had the upper hand, but the real match was simply being postponed.

²⁸Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *L'Arca dell'Alleanza* [The Ark of the Covenant], Tipografia San Vincenzo de' Paoli, Sampierdarena, 1879, p. 112. It also appeared in the *Salesian Bulletin* for July 1878. [Author]

CHAPTER 26

Miscellaneous Confidential Matters Regarding Don Bosco in 1878

IN these final pages we shall bring together scattered items for which we had no suitable place in previous chapters. We call them “confidential matters” because they include statements Don Bosco made while conversing in the intimacy of his religious family, either with individuals or with the entire community, very personal letters, and details concerning more intimate associations with others and his soul’s communion with God.

1. CONFERENCE ON CHASTITY

We begin with a pleasant talk on chastity, the last which Father Barberis has preserved for us in its entirety. It was given in the Church of St. Francis de Sales to all the Oratory confreres, novices and aspirants on the feast of the Ascension after the religious profession of five Salesians. This ceremony was usually preceded by a brief spiritual reading from the *Imitation of Christ*. “How much good Don Bosco’s talks do on these occasions,” the chronicle notes, “and how they kindle religious fervor! Vacillating postulants make firm decisions, doubtful and lukewarm novices request permission to take vows, lax confreres regain their fervor and rejoice to see their ranks increase.” Don Bosco spoke as follows:

My dear sons, I have long been very anxious to speak to the Oratory boys and especially to the members of our Congregation, all gathered together, because it has been ages since I had a chance to do so. True, on

returning home, I got to talk privately with some of you at length, but this is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you all together. How happy I have been this evening as several of you consecrated yourselves to God by final vows. By this profession we bid the world farewell with its pleasures and allurements so as to merit the Lord's promise to us of a hundredfold in heaven. Today, the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I would have liked to talk to you about detachment from things of this world—a topic quite in tune with today's celebration. Jesus Christ, ascending into heaven, told us: "I go to prepare a kingdom for you." If we have a kingdom waiting for us in heaven, how little should we value the things of this world! What a comfort it is for each of us to say: "I have a place waiting for me in heaven!" If all Christians can say this, how much more we religious, since we are or soon will be consecrated in a special way to His divine service. Yes, my sons, yours shall be the eternal kingdom you seek. So be brave and raise your hearts today from the things of earth to heaven. *Ibi nostra fixa sint corda, ubi vera sunt gaudia*. Let our hearts be where true joys abound. Let them be freed from and untainted by earthly things; let them be set upon heaven.

As I have said, today's feast offers us a marvelous theme, but because of its vastness, I will treat of something more simple, easier to understand and more practical. Since several of you have now taken vows, I think it fitting to talk about certain things that will make it easier to keep those vows. What I will say applies to all: to those who made their vows some time ago or tonight or will take them later on. We will choose for our teacher that great saint whose feast we kept a few days ago, St. Philip Neri. When asked what he considered the main virtue of a religious, one that would link all the others, he answered: "Chastity. If preserved, it will preserve all the other virtues; if lost, all will be lost. This virtue enables a religious to attain his goal of total consecration to God."

But how is chastity to be kept? St. Philip used to suggest five ways: three negative, two positive. Let me comment briefly on them now.

1. First, St. Philip tells us: "Avoid bad companions." What? Should I caution you to avoid bad company in the Oratory? Do we have bad companions in our midst? I don't even want to think of the possibility. Yet let's be realistic. A bad companion is one who in any way might lead us into sin. It happens often enough that even a person who is not bad at heart may become an occasion of sin to others, and so he also becomes a dangerous companion. We often see particular friendships, warm attachments, harmless in themselves in that no kind of sinful action takes place. Yet, one of the two friends, if not evil, is at least somewhat morally lax and soon neither wants to break off their friendship. Then it becomes noticeable that both begin to slacken in piety, they receive the sacraments

less often, their devotion is cooling down, they are more slipshod in their work, more negligent of certain house rules, converse a lot more freely together. Little by little, even a good boy, by too frequently associating with another, will find that his friend has become a stumbling block for him, and though both are good, one becomes a bad influence upon the other. Unless the superiors do something, both friends may be lost. These special friendships and close attachments are very harmful, even if only as violations of obedience—sufficient reason to say they can't be good. Disobedience, you know, robs us of God's special grace and hence these relationships become gradually harmful.

Some may try to excuse themselves by saying, "There are no bad companions in our house!" But I counter that there may very well be. We learn from the past. Satan has his helpers everywhere. Often enough things may go along great for a long time. Then suddenly, after havoc has been raised in the flock, we learn that this person or that was a ravenous wolf. Through the years we have known some boys who were outwardly very good and now only God knows what they are like. This tells us that either they were not really good, or, if they were, that someone little by little caused their downfall. Thanks to God's particular grace, such cases are few, but real. "They are all good!" you may still say, but it is experience, not the heart, which must guide us in these matters. Experience tells us that even the apostles had a Judas and that even the holiest of religious orders are tainted by dross. Suppose there were a Judas among us? Well, then, shun evil company, and associate with those who gladly visit the Blessed Sacrament and encourage us to do good. In all charity let us treat all our companions with equal concern, but let's avoid fault-finders, those who try to wriggle out of prayer and are exclusive in their friendship.

With such precautions it will become most difficult, not to say impossible, for the devil to rob us of chastity. But what a chuckle he'd have if we were to fall into his clutches. "You said goodbye to the world," he'd mock us. "You renounced me and all my enticements. Now look at yourself. You wanted to wage war on me, and, with all your resolve, you fell into the trap, and I hardly tried to get you."

2. St. Philip Neri's second suggestion to preserve chastity—no less important than avoiding bad companions—is to shun idleness. "Sloth and chastity don't go together," he said. As a vice, sloth has many vicious companions. Those who shun work are lazy; so are the daydreamers and those who sleep excessively. When we see slothful boys, we have reason to fear for them: their virtue is in peril. Some waste time in the study hall staring at the ceiling, yawning in the classroom, lounging in church and at prayer, dozing during sermons, sighing for the end of the service or study periods. Sometimes, indeed, the same boys do not care for recreation.

If you don't keep busy, the devil will. The enemy of our souls is always on the prowl, seeking to harm us. When he spots an idle person, he instantly puts his plans into action. Your mind may be idle, lost in reverie, and the devil instantly stirs up images of what you once saw, heard, read or experienced. Will you remain idle? The images will firmly settle in your mind, hold you captive and make you fall into sin. Even more hazardous is it to indulge in unnecessary rest, especially if it is during the day. I find an afternoon nap most dangerous, for it is precisely then that the noonday devil, as Scripture calls him, steals into even the most innocent soul. Poor King David learned that. This is a moment when the soul is most off-guard and the well-fed body is a choice prey. That is when the devil takes over our imagination, our mind, our will, and then we may well deplore a tragic fall from grace.

So let us keep very occupied. That means not only reading and studying, but singing, laughing and playing. For heaven's sake, let the devil find us always busy because "idleness teaches all sorts of mischief." [Sir. 33, 28] Let us work with all our strength in the Lord's vineyard, helping one another, encouraging each other in God's service with holy enthusiasm. Let us earnestly steel ourselves to promote His glory, zealously seeking every means and sacrificing our all for the salvation of souls; the devil, then finding us ever busy, will be powerless to harm us. Let us keep busy even during recreation and, if it is our duty, let us watch our pupils, leading them in their games and keeping them together in the playground. Even if it is not your task, do your share too, and let recreation time really give you an uplift to dispel gloom, worries, and disturbing and dangerous thoughts.

"But I feel tired!" Well, bear it and try not to overtire or strain yourself and fall sick. But, apart from that, keep working so that you may safeguard the loveliest of virtues.

3. Don't baby your body. I do not mean that we are to deny our body what it needs, but that we are not to cater to its desires. St. Peter cautions: "Be sober, be watchful" [that is, sparing in the use of food and drink]. We are to put the "sober" before the "watchful," or even before the "strong in faith," for we cannot keep watch unless we are sober, nor can we be strong in faith or conquer him who, "like a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour" [1 Pet. 5, 7-8]. Only the sober can be alert and strong to overcome the devil. Chronic complainers at table flout such counsel. For them the bread is never baked enough nor the soup sufficiently well seasoned, the wine is watered down, the main course unappetizing, the meat too lean or too fat, too tough or too stringy, the cheese tasteless, the milk all water, and so forth and so on. When you yearn for a tasty tidbit or on occasion go out of your way to get it, or, worse yet, when you hoard beverages and delicacies to please your palate, you are babying the flesh.

Avoid that! Eat whatever is served at table, tasty or not, without complaining, except when it is really harmful to your health. If a serving is not to our taste, let us make do with whatever else is served; let us make an act of self-denial for God's love. If the soup is watery, add bread; if it's salty, add water; if more salt is needed, it's on the table. And if we do not like a dish, let us eat it just the same as a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. Thus we shall heed the apostle's "be sober" and our flesh will be under control.

Why should we baby this body of ours? The Holy Spirit says: "A perishable body presses down the soul" [Wis. 9 15]. A saintly spiritual director once said that the body is to help the soul in doing good and is to serve it, for the soul is the mistress of the body. The body must be looked upon as a beast of burden for its mistress, the soul. Woe to the soul that gives the body too much free rein. When the body is overfed it enslaves the soul. Then the body is no longer a help, but a burden. This is a monstrous error we must not fall into. Let body and soul keep the place God has assigned to each.

We are to be on our guard against excessive food and especially excessive drink. Many young men, models of holiness, lost their vocation because they neglected these things and now are a stumbling block to others. In conclusion, let us not pamper our miserable bodies; let us keep them in check, lest they rebel. Then we shall live tranquil and happy in God's peace. These are three negative ways of safeguarding chastity; by avoiding them we are freed of the danger of falling into certain sins.

St. Philip Neri also recommended two positive means which can settle this cherished virtue upon a solid foundation: prayer and the sacraments.

4. As for prayer, I am speaking of prayer in general—both mental and vocal, short invocations, sermons and spiritual reading. One who prays will surely overcome every temptation, regardless of how powerful or insistent; contrariwise, one who omits prayer is in imminent danger of falling. Love prayer! It is a weapon that we must always hold at the ready when danger draws nigh. Particularly pray when you go to bed at night, for this is a very perilous time for this lovely virtue. When we cannot promptly fall asleep, the devil stirs up evil thoughts and recalls to our minds things we have seen, heard or done during the day. A good start to ensure our immunity from the snares of the nocturnal demon is to observe the night silence after evening prayers and not to keep walking along our porticoes or in the playground. If you cannot fall asleep, pray. Priests can recite some of the breviary's beautiful prayers: "Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake, watch over us as we sleep; that awake, we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in His peace . . . Visit this dwelling, we beseech You, O Lord, and keep far from it the devil's snares." They can also recite the *Miserere*, the *De profundis*, or Our Lady's litany. Thus we shall fall

asleep in the Lord while in prayer. And if we are fortunate enough to fall asleep immediately, let us first arm ourselves with the Sign of the Cross.

If you awaken during the night, pray, and kiss your crucifix or medal of Mary, Help of Christians, which I urge you to wear about your neck. It is a fact that he who prays at these times overcomes temptation, while one who does not falls into sin. I believe that each of us can say of himself: As long as I prayed, I did not fall, but as soon as I stopped praying, I started to go astray. Let us make our own the prayer of Joseph, called the “Chaste,” when Phutiphar’s wife tried to lure him into sin: “How can I commit this sin in the presence of my God?” We know that God sees us. How could we dare commit such a grave sin in His sight? Joseph knew very well the serious consequences of his refusal—imprisonment and probable death because that powerful, wicked woman would most shamefully calumniate him. Still, the thought of God’s presence, His seeing all that is done, would not let him stray from the path of virtue. Yes, let us say this prayer and often recall this thought to mind; the desire to sin will then leave us. Let us also remember that we are God’s creatures, made in His image, servants of the Lord, who sees all we do and all we think, that we are Catholics and avowed disciples of Jesus Christ, that our bodies have been made holy by the sacraments, that we are religious, more closely bound to the Lord as His ministers and therefore consecrated to His holy and immaculate service which demands holiness. Let us remember that God is our Judge, and in temptation let us say: “How dare I displease God, who has always been so good to me and who will be my judge?”

Sooner than offend God, we must be ready to sacrifice anything, even things permitted. I especially recommend kissing the medal of Mary, Help of Christians and saying *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*, an invocation found to be helpful and effective at all times. Extraordinary results occur when we put our trust in Mary, Help of Christians. You may also be sure that if She helps everyone, She cares for us with a very special love as Her favorite sons. If we call upon Her, She will never fail to come to our aid.

5. Lastly, I urge reception of the sacraments. I need not dwell on this since our rule already calls for it. I merely recommend that you receive Communion very often, and always devoutly and attentively. However, I do have something to say about confession. We know if a tree is good or bad by its fruit. It’s the same with our confessions. Some people keep confessing the same faults. Does this mean that since those confessions did not bear good fruit they were bad? Well, if there is really no improvement after confession, there is grave reason to fear that the confession was not good, or at least null. Either there was no good resolve or it was not kept. Confession sometimes seems to be a pure formality, a way of mocking God.

I very strongly recommend to each of you to be sincerely sorry for your sins when you go to confession, and, from time to time, to look back upon the fruits you have derived from your past confessions. Let us make firm, lasting resolutions. Let us here and now seriously make up our minds to be moderate in food, drink and recreation; to end complaining; to restrain our talk; to speak always of useful things; to strive for greater devotion in church, more attention to study, better punctuality in rising each morning. We are to check our eyes both here at the Oratory and especially outside; we are to mortify our sense of taste; in a word, we must make some effort toward a real improvement in our conduct. The alternative is that we shall keep repeating our sins, and since "he who spurns little things will fall by little and little," we shall certainly risk the very real danger of damnation, being by nature drawn strongly to evil. Without genuine efforts, our virtues will die away; we shall lose heart, grow cold in prayer, and become dull to the horror of sin.

Now look at the other side of the picture. Whoever, moment by moment, takes advantage of God's graces will advance in virtue step by step, almost unaware, and grow "from strength to strength until he shall see the God of gods in Sion" [Ps. 83, 8]. Remember too the words of St. Gregory the Great, valid for all but especially for religious: "Not to go forward is to go backward." We cannot be satisfied merely with our routine practices of piety, no matter how well we do them, but we should pray frequently through the day to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us call on Her with the invocation "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us"—an extremely effective prayer in countless cases. This way, too, we shall keep the virtue of chastity, mother of all virtues, the angelic virtue.

But enough. This evening I wanted to open my heart to you. I am very happy with the way our Congregation is moving along. I am pleased with the professed Salesians, the clerics and novices. There are some exceptions, but they are few, and I have high hopes that such minor problems will be resolved. We have good news from all our houses in South America, France and various parts of Italy. We are being called upon everywhere to open new houses; in quite a few places houses are set up and ready for us. The harvest awaiting us is most abundant. We can see that God is blessing our undertakings. Let's go onward with good will. If God is with us, who can be against us? Let us be steadfast in our commitment to save many souls. Doing this we will most certainly be saving our own. So the Church Fathers tell us: "By saving a soul, you assured the salvation of your own." Many souls await our care in lands both far and near. The call now comes to us from the natives of several places in Patagonia, where we have been so anxious to go. They ask us to bring them the faith of Jesus Christ. Our own houses are waiting for us, but we need the personnel.

Yes, God is blessing us. May He bless us ever more. The Blessed Virgin Mary will never fail to do Her share. Let us bravely live up to such supernatural help. Let us encourage one another in doing good. Then we shall certainly attain that eternal happiness which must be our one unwavering goal, the reward of all our labors.

We have often seen in his “Good Nights” and talks to the Oratory residents how Don Bosco used to expound upon the Congregation’s progress, underscoring the warm acclaim it received everywhere and the praises heaped upon it in so many places by persons in high positions. We can still feel the vibrant satisfaction which fired his words as he ran through the names of houses which had been opened or were about to be opened, the projects going on overseas and the detailed reports of his papal audiences. Don Bosco was not a man who loved to hear himself speak. When he spoke, he had a good purpose. In these instances his vibrant words were calculated to strengthen the bonds of esteem and love which bound his listeners to the Congregation, so that those who had joined it might love it and those who were thinking in their hearts to enter might be encouraged. Truly indeed, such talks kindled his listeners with an enthusiasm which made them love not only Don Bosco, but the Oratory, the Salesians and the good they were doing in various parts of the world. Their enthusiasm, radiating far and wide outside the Oratory, created an environment so well disposed toward the Congregation as to multiply its friends and benefactors.

While chastity was a favorite theme of Don Bosco when speaking to the Salesians, there was another topic which gave him ample material for his “Good Nights” to the boys, for his private talks with persons he thought suited to the priestly or religious life, and for his spiritual counsels to the novices, who often needed to be cautioned against the devil’s deceits and the world’s allurements. This theme was [priestly] vocation.

2. VOCATION

On June 18, Don Bosco gave the boys a “Good Night.” Their retreat had just closed and he dwelt on one aspect of vocation which he often talked about: money or financial aid to one’s family was

not to be a factor in deciding on a priestly vocation. He also spoke clearly of priestly chastity.

What shall I tell you tonight? Well, I can say that I am happy to be with you, but this is not all. I have something else that I must talk to you about quite clearly.

We have already observed and we shall observe solemn feast days, like Our Lady of Consolation, St. Aloysius ("St. John too!" the boys prompted him), St. John, St. Peter and others as well before the end of the school year. One very, very important task before you is to decide on your vocation. Some of you may already have given it thought and week by week have been getting closer to a firm decision. Every year I have made myself available to those who want to talk with me about their vocation, and this year too I will gladly see any of the upperclassmen and all others who wish to talk about their vocation. Come to my room on Sundays or feast days after vespers.

But this evening let me give you a few general pointers. If you feel that you are being called to the priesthood, it is most important to choose whether it is better to be a priest in the world or in a religious order. Anyone who seeks the priesthood must be inspired by a lofty and holy goal, the salvation of his own soul.

How about helping one's family? Helping your family is a sacred duty. You may become a shopkeeper, shoemaker or whatever else you like to support your family and others or you may spend your money as you wish.

But can't a priest give alms to his family when they need it as he might to anyone else? Yes, of course, but not to the point of making them wealthy or raising their social position. The objections put forward here are always the same: "I know many priests who are well off, who own farms, made a lot of money and enriched their families, and so on. Did they all do wrong?"

I am not here to judge anyone. I will only say what Jesus proclaimed by word and example and what Holy Church specifies in its laws. St. Paul [writing to Timothy] said expressly that he who would give himself to God's service must take no part in temporal matters. In fact, he does not merely say "take no part" but *non implicet se*, that is, let him not become entangled in worldly affairs. These words are clear. One Church Father adds that a priest's possessions belong to the poor, and, regardless of what others say, they are not his to keep. He is working for God, and it is God who gives him what he needs to do his work. Hence, whatever may come to him in his work belongs to God, and therefore to God's poor. A priest must have no other concern than the care of souls and their eternal salvation. One who becomes a priest must have this goal in mind.

Let me say too that one who feels no call to the priestly life should not even toy with the idea; becoming a priest would do him no good. One who feels he cannot keep the virtue of chastity is not made for the priesthood. He can follow any other career. As a priest he would only hurt himself and others.

I say these things now so that you may have time to think about them and then make a decision beneficial to your soul.

Don Bosco's thoughts on vocation are also made evident by some incidents of this particular year. After the Lanzo spiritual retreat, several diocesan seminarians who wanted to become Salesians had been accepted at the Oratory along with a few boys from our boarding schools who had arrived late at the retreat but wanted to join the Congregation. In the November 4 chapter meeting which considered their applications, Father Cagliero took the opportunity to express this thought: "Our Congregation is not made for people who wish to reform their past; such persons may enter a contemplative order. We are to welcome those who are ready to plunge into the midst of the world and work for the welfare of souls." Don Bosco listened and approved.

At that same meeting it became also clear that Don Bosco always fostered vocations for the diocesan priesthood. The Oratory then had two seminarians from Mantua who asked if they could attend philosophy classes in civilian garb. Since the Oratory had no category of students into which they could fit, the superiors hesitated to keep them. Don Bosco, however, wanted to help out the diocese of Mantua, which was then in grave difficulties; Bishop Peter Rota, the ordinary, was being harassed and locked out of his own episcopal residence, his seminary was closed and the seminarians were dispersed. Helping him would be helping the Church, and so Don Bosco insisted that a way be found to keep both young men at the Oratory, despite the awkwardness of the situation. His wish was followed.

A third problem—a thorny one which had never really been tackled because the tendency then was to let it lie—was also on the agenda. The Oratory always had some clerics whose vocation was shaky and whose conduct was at best mediocre, and yet they were easily tolerated. When only a few are involved, errant conduct stands out prominently, and so those concerned feel more restrained. Besides, until now Don Bosco had had more time to

look after his young clerics, correcting those who needed it and straightening out their thinking. At this meeting, however, the superiors proposed, and Don Bosco agreed, to dismiss such clerics and be rid of them before they induced laxity among the others through their example. It was a painful decision for the chapter, but it had to be made, and all agreed.

Just as Don Bosco was unyielding in matters of moral conduct, so was he overgenerous in financial situations. Attilio Vercellini, a festive oratory lad who had become a boarder, stayed at the Oratory for two and a half years, until his father, unable to pay the boy's fees, took him back home. He completed his schooling at the Ginnasio Cavour, but he had no way of going any further, nor could he find a job. Father Barberis, who had known him at the festive oratory and had kept in touch with him, seeing that the young man had the makings of a priest, suggested that he write and ask Don Bosco to enroll him among his clerics. A firm believer in St. Paul's "Test everything; retain what is good," Don Bosco replied, "Come to confession tomorrow and I'll let you know if you have a vocation for the priesthood." The young man went, made his confession, and was ordered to don the cassock. Though pleased with the counsel, he informed Don Bosco that his family could not pay for his support, nor could they ever settle his outstanding debt. Don Bosco immediately accepted him without any payment, merely asking him to bring his personal wardrobe. His parents, however, sent him back to Don Bosco empty-handed, without even his books. Don Bosco took no heed of that. Father Barberis commented: "This story is true of two-thirds of our clerics."

On the other hand, there were sons of rich and even noble families who sought to join the Salesian Congregation. Here we shall just say that Don Bosco's concern for religious and priestly vocations was a weighty factor in his decision to keep the Valsalice College open despite difficulties. On December 27, he told the superior chapter, "I have no special desire to run a boarding school for sons of wealthy families. I have kept the Valsalice College open until now because at present there is not a single boarding school in Italy for young men of good social standing where parents can confidently send their sons, knowing that their moral principles will be safeguarded. Furthermore, there is no college which nurtures vocations." To support his decision, he named five boys from

Valsalice who were now clerics either in the diocesan seminary or at the Oratory. "These are the only reasons why we have kept the college open," he concluded, "and they are the only reasons which should guide us in all our decisions."

The minutes of that day's superior chapter meeting named several seminarians who were at the Oratory waiting to know whether they had been admitted to the novitiate. The chapter was inclined to be rather severe in these cases since there was no way of requiring of them a special probationary period apart from their companions. Don Bosco intervened with two remarks. "It would be desirable," he said, "to be stricter in admitting clerics and priests into the Congregation, but I wish to make two observations. First, we should follow St. Paul's counsel: test everything and retain only the good; therefore, let us be lenient in admitting candidates. Second, these candidates are to be admitted only after we have secured reliable information about them."

On December 13, to Father Barberis and others clustering about him after dinner, he humorously narrated this dream concerning vocations.

I seemed to be at Becchi standing before my home when someone approached me carrying a pretty little basket. Peering within, I saw some tiny, featherless baby doves. Moments later I saw them covered with a light down, three of them so dark that they seemed to be crows. I was puzzled. *There must be some magic here*, I thought, and looked about as if expecting to see a magician. Then I realized that the doves had flown off and were disappearing in the distance. Suddenly someone standing by me raised a gun, took aim, and fired. Two doves fell and a third one got away. Dashing to where they had fallen, I picked them up and, grieving for their death, stroked them gently in my hands. "Poor little things," I sighed. All of a sudden, as I was gazing upon them, I know not how, they turned into two clerics. Thoroughly frightened now, I looked around expecting to find a sorcerer. Someone touched me on the arm. I am not sure if it was the assistant parish priest of Buttigliera or of Castelnuovo. "Do you understand this?" he asked me. "Two out of three. Tell that to Father Barberis." There were more than three doves in the basket, but I was not concerned with the others. Then my dream ended. I meant to tell you before, but it always escaped me when you were around, and I would remember only after you were gone. And now let me explain it to you and your friends.

Among the listeners were Monsignor [Andrew] Scotton, Father Anthony Fusconi of Bologna, and Count Cays, who freely exchanged comments. Don Bosco's conclusion was: "The basket with many baby doves represents the Oratory. The number of those in the basket, that is, in the Oratory who become clerics is two out of every three. Have no illusions about this: all are good prospects, but as the result of illness, death, family influence, or loss of vocation, there are always defections, so that two-thirds reaching the priesthood is a good percentage."

A loss then deeply felt by the Congregation, but not really to be termed a loss, was the leaving of Father Louis Guanella.

3. FATHER GUANELLA

We have met Father Guanella several times in these *Memoirs*. Most recently we left him as director of the Salesian house at Trinità of Mondovì. Even before his first triennial vows expired, he was having second thoughts about continuing in the Congregation. A plan of founding a diocesan institute for effectively helping society's derelicts was gradually taking firmer shape in his mind. As long as the plan remained vague, he acted like one troubled by some hidden urge which, for all he knew, might be heaven-sent or earthly, and so he sought the counsel of wise people, while doing his best to live a saintly life in close union with God. With the passage of time, his inner struggle became more pronounced, and he made no effort to hide his aspiration from Don Bosco. After one such baring of conscience, our saintly father wrote to him:

Turin, June 2, 1878

My dear Father Louis,

If you allow yourself to be carried away by the thoughts which daily run through your mind, you will find it hard to discern God's will. *Non in commotione Dominus* [The Lord is not in the whirlwind—3 Kgs. 19, 11].

Anyone who is bound by religious vows must relinquish all counselors and all endeavors which are alien to the substance of his vows and have not been approved by his superior, if he is to take his vocation seriously. Otherwise, there would be as many congregations as there are individuals, and religious bonds would not only be ineffectual but sometimes even harmful.

Therefore *do not speak, write or busy yourself* with any other matter until your triennial vows expire. During this time talk to Jesus Crucified; ask Him to let you know what will bring you the highest satisfaction at the moment of death.

This is the only way to avoid going astray and nullify the many graces God has given and still has in store for us.

My dear Father Louis, help me to save souls. Europe and America are crying out for evangelical workers. Do not forsake me in the midst of battle, but rather fight like a good soldier and your crown of glory will be assured.

Father Defendente Monti is in Nice; he seems very happy there. He is anxious to go to Patagonia, and his wish will be granted.

God bless you and all our confreres. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

When the Holy See invited Don Bosco to prepare a few Salesians for the Republic of Santo Domingo, he looked to Father Guanella as the man to whom he might entrust this difficult mission, and so he gently broached the subject to him:

Turin, July 15, 1878

My dear Father Louis,

I have received your greetings for St. John's day, as well as your most recent news of our dear confreres at Trinità.

I thank you and, through you, all my beloved Salesians who are with you. I am happy with them. Encourage them to be faithful to their resolves and to help Don Bosco in the arduous task Providence has entrusted to him.

In this connection, I want you to know that the Holy Father has ordered that an expedition of missionaries for Santo Domingo be organized this year to assume charge of both the major and the minor seminary, the cathedral and the university. Do you think, my dear Father Louis, that you can be part of this expedition and share in this new endeavor? The language needed is Spanish.

I believe that this is a godsend for you. I pray and ask you to pray for this purpose.

God bless you, your efforts and your confreres. Pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Good Father Guanella had now come to the crossroads: his superior's will was fairly clear on the one hand, but on the other he heard a commanding, though as yet undefined voice, which seemed to brook no delay. Later he wrote in a personal memorandum: "That letter was, and still is, a painful thorn in my heart. Still, I felt that I could and had to do something to benefit my own diocese. Now I am more firmly convinced indeed that such was my duty and that I was being called back there." What reply he made to Don Bosco we do not know. All we have is another letter from Don Bosco to him:

St. Ann's Villa, July 27, 1878

My dear Father Louis,

I received your letter and composition book. It's indeed ready for the press, but it will take some time before work can commence on them since there is a backlog for the presses. As to your own position, do not forget the saying: one who is well off should not budge, neither should one who is doing well seek to do better.

Many have deceived themselves by neglecting this maxim, and while seeking to do better, they could not even do good, for, as another saying goes, "The better is the enemy of the good."

I talk now wearing my heart on my sleeve, because I wish you well and seek your happiness in both this world and the beatitude to come.

My best wishes and encouragement to our dear confreres there. Tell them to pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The "composition books" Don Bosco mentioned in his letter were a manuscript. Briefly, Bishop Frapolla of Foggia, who had resided until 1860 in the seminary of Como, Father Guanella's home diocese, died in Rome during the Vatican Council, leaving several unpublished works. Among them was a translation of the psalms, with philological, historical, hermeneutic and literary notes, intended for publication as a self-contained manual of study and prayer. At the request of the deceased prelate's heirs, Father Guanella edited the manuscript and asked Don Bosco to print it at the Oratory press. After a careful reading, Don Bosco felt that the times were too frivolous for the appreciation of so serious a work and that sales would be meager. Regretfully he decided that he

could not consider publishing it at his own expense; neither could he find a publisher for it.

Father Guanella returned to Como, where he underwent painful vicissitudes until the bishop appointed him director of the Little House of Divine Providence when its founder died in 1881. The work which he then succeeded in founding in the face of bitter opposition has won him a well-known position in Church history.¹ We shall conclude our short account of Father Guanella with the words which he wrote in 1891 to Don Bosco's first successor [Father Michael Rua]: "Father Louis Guanella affirms his very strong attachment to Don Bosco. Without doubt, leaving Don Bosco brought him as much pain as when his beloved parents died in his embrace at brief intervals from each other." We would like to add two observations of our own. In his own mysterious way God set the stage for Father Guanella to serve his religious apprenticeship in the apostolate of charity, which was later to stand him in such good stead, at the school of Don Bosco. However, God did not grant Don Bosco that extraordinary vision which would have allowed him to sense the mission to which He was summoning His loyal servant.

4. THE CLERICS

Most dear to the heart of Don Bosco were the young vocations which were the hope of the Congregation—the clerics.

Don Bosco wanted them to be cheerful, healthy, dedicated to study and to virtue. His mere presence and conversation brought them the greatest joy. He visited the Valsalice College at the beginning of May, but the evening before he and Father Barberis planned a surprise for the novices. "Bring them to the college tomorrow," he told him, "and have them meet me there." Father Barberis did as agreed, and the rejoicing was memorable, especially since most of the novices had never even seen Valsalice. Most important of all, Don Bosco was there to greet them. Then, during the Immaculate Conception novena he had dinner with the novices.

¹Father Louis Guanella (1842-1915) left the Salesian Congregation in 1878 to found two other congregations of his own: the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and the Servants of Charity. His cause of beatification was introduced in 1939; he was beatified on October 25, 1964. [Editor]

What a thrill for them! After they read a few poems in his honor, he spoke to them, to his own joy and theirs.

In 1878 he managed to provide for the novices a real vacation to restore their physical strength and give them every opportunity for a quiet environment to prepare themselves for their religious profession. They could not have asked for a more suitable locality. One of the properties which Baron Bianco had bequeathed to Don Bosco was the magnificent St. Ann's Villa near Caselle, and there Don Bosco decided to send the novices. In early May he had Father Barberis go to check out the house in ample time and arrange for their arrival, which took place on July 5, right after final examinations. With them was Father Barberis to whom Don Bosco addressed a note concerning relations with the local parish.

[No date]

Dear Father Barberis,

No one is to go to Caselle unless you are regularly asked to help with church services. In that case, be respectful and friendly. Should the pastor hint that he would like to visit St. Ann's, graciously welcome him, but express your regrets that you feel you cannot ask him to stay for dinner since your table setting is rather poor and your stay there is so short.

Joy and virtue be yours!

Fr. John Bosco

We have also come across a brief note to the novice John Baptist Fabrici, who was to offer God the sacrifice of his life in 1880, before his twentieth birthday. Don Bosco's words make it clear that the novice was then going through a period of inner turmoil.

Turin, July 19, 1878

Dear John,

Go ahead in your vocation without anxiety. Just try to study and observe the rules. God will do the rest.

I will speak to you at Lanzo very soon, and then we can open our hearts to each other.

God bless you. Please pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

As a good father, Don Bosco had promised to visit the novices on vacation, and they looked forward to his coming as they would for the Messiah. After waiting for about twenty days, they received the news that he would come to celebrate the feast of St. Ann with them. He arrived on the eve of the feast toward evening and was welcomed with rare enthusiasm by the novices, who were joined by local priests, the neighboring pastors, and some town officials. Luckily a gentle rain had cooled the air—"a soothing balm for Don Bosco," the chronicler called it. Turin's stifling heat had been excessively hard on him, so that he passed sleepless nights, while the day's efforts to work drained him; for a while it was feared that he would have to take to his bed. Staying constantly at the Oratory made him weaker still. To those who suggested that he get away for a little rest he answered that he had business on hand which could not be deferred. But the trip to St. Ann's and the fresh air gave him new life. The following day he heard the novices' confessions and toured the villa, the farmhouse and the estate. The local pastor celebrated High Mass. After dinner, sipping coffee under the pergola with a few parish priests, the local magistrate, the town clerk and some others, Don Bosco kept a brisk dialogue going. Long afterward the main topic of conversation at Caselle was the easy, pleasant manner he showed to all whom he met.

The feast of Our Lady of the Rosary marked the beginning of the formal donning of the clerical habit for several candidates. Thus on the feast of the Maternity of Mary, Father John Mellano, still living now [1932], and Marquis Sylvester Burlamacchi of Lucca donned the cassock with others. The marquis' parents attended the ceremony at which Don Bosco gave an opportune homily. On the following Sunday, the feast of the Purity of Mary, it was the turn of Count Radicati's two sons, Charles and Peter, with Father Rua blessing their habits. In those years the instances of young noblemen embracing the humble life of the Oratory in the Congregation were more numerous than one would have thought. Many died very young and their names are today recalled but faintly by older Salesians. There is no doubt that they were motivated by deep religious fervor, but they were chiefly drawn to Don Bosco, whose lovable traits caused them to overlook material privation and discomforts of all kinds which then made life at the Oratory a spartan experience.

We shall not repeat here what we have said elsewhere about studies. Still, there are some interesting items we should record for this year. In 1878 Don Bosco gave permission to the cleric Louis Piscetta, two priests and a subdeacon to take their doctoral degrees in sacred theology at the pontifical faculty of the archdiocesan seminary, since the faculty of theology had been abolished five years before at the Royal University.² They all did brilliantly, particularly Louis Piscetta, whose masterly command of the subject and self-assurance contrasted sharply with the frailty of his frame.

Though all four had been trained at the Oratory, the feeling persisted in the seminary that clerics from the Oratory did not warrant a second glance. Father Vacchina went with several companions for his first year examinations, all of them known to be Don Bosco's clerics. While he was being interrogated, the seminary rector went over to the examining professor and whispered to him, but not too softly, "Don't give Don Bosco's clerics anything more than thirteen or fourteen on a scale of twenty."

"Why not?" the teacher brusquely asked.

"Orders from the chancery."

Dumbfounded but irritated, the examiner shook his head. All Don Bosco's clerics received low marks, while the other Oratory clerics who had been grouped with the clerics of the Cottolengo Institute or the Artigianelli Institute received excellent marks. The final humiliation came for the first year group at the reading of the test marks. The seminarians were lined up along the sides of the great lecture hall, while Don Bosco's clerics stood at the far end, facing the dais. Canon [Joseph] Soldati, standing on the dais, read out the seminarians' examination marks and then stated, "Don Bosco's clerics have very low grades. One made so poor a showing that I blush to read his mark." The cleric, Matthew Grochow, the first Pole to enter the Congregation, did not take this public humiliation lying down. He talked with the cleric Vacchina and asked him to accompany him to the chancery. There—on the pretext that he had not been able to take his examination on time—he asked for two curial examiners and obtained top marks. Both clerics were roundly scolded by their superiors at the Oratory for

²The others were Father [Francis] Paglia, Father [Siro] Meriggi and Father [Stephen] Febbraro. [Author].

this subterfuge of theirs. But they did not mind, thinking, if not saying, "What's done is done!"

We cite another instance to show the scholarly diligence of the Oratory clerics. The previous year—the last of the Royal University's faculty of theology—Father Banardi was a member of the examining board for the doctoral candidates. Don Bosco sent four of the Oratory's clerics, among them Father Joseph Bertello, for the examination. They all did so splendidly that Father Banardi exclaimed, "Don Bosco's clerics don't study? Why, they are the best of all! And I'll tell everyone who ought to know!" In fact, he told Archbishop Gastaldi and Don Bosco and proclaimed it on every occasion. He repeated it to Father Belmonte in 1891.

Let us here record a remark of Don Bosco. While studying theology, his clerics generally taught some subjects as well. True, teaching took up a considerable amount of their time, but Don Bosco firmly believed that, having nothing else to do, they would apply themselves less intensely to their studies. Working under the pressure of outside tasks, he held, taught them how to use their time wisely and made them better students.³ This explains a remark of his passed on to us by Father [Herminius] Borio.⁴ While yet a cleric at Borgo San Martino, Father Borio once complained: "But, Don Bosco, so much of our time is taken up by our work assignments that we have hardly any time left to study." Don Bosco's reply came promptly and forcefully: "That is precisely what I want!" Those who heard his answer fell silent and dared not ask him to explain. Don Bosco wanted his Salesians to study while working, not merely for the sake of studying.

Father Bernard Vacchina has also detailed for us a personal experience of his to show how excellent he wanted his clerics to be. While teaching the first year Latin students at the Oratory, he used to give his poorer students every now and then some money which he would receive from his family, either to help them meet immediate needs or to celebrate a feast. One day, feeling guilty, he confessed to keeping money, in violation of the rules. "And you still went to Holy Communion?" Don Bosco asked.

³Chronicle of Father Barberis, February 19, 1876. [Author]

⁴Father Borio (1853-1934) entered the Oratory in 1866 and was at Don Bosco's side for thirty-two years, thoroughly absorbing his spirit. He held important offices in the Congregation for twenty-four years. [Editor]

“Oh, my goodness!” exclaimed the cleric. “Did I commit a sacrilege?”

“I’m not saying that. You acted in good faith and did it to help your boys. Your intentions were good. Enough . . . I can see that you too are a son of Don Bosco.”

It would appear that he meant: I see that you do just as I do. He thus corrected a shortcoming without causing the young cleric qualms of conscience.

Four professed clerics died during 1878. The first, Stephen Omodei, was one of the victims of the January typhoid epidemic. He came to the Oratory in October 1876, after graduating from secondary school in Sondrio. He was overtaken by a dreadful homesickness, which disappeared as soon as he met Don Bosco and chose him as his confessor. “I’ve never seen a place so likely to make you perfect as this,” he wrote to one of his sisters at home. “If only you could meet him! Don Bosco really is a father to all of us.” Cleric John Arata of Liguria died at Lanzo just days after Stephen. His interesting obituary⁵ reveals an extraordinarily virtuous life. Once, Don Bosco actually went to Sampierdarena, where the lad was finishing his last year’s studies, to see him. On hearing of his death, he wrote to Father Rua:⁶ “I have deeply felt the loss of my beloved sons, especially of our dear Arata.” The other two clerics died in July. Caesar Peloso of Chiavari came from our school at Lanzo. After speaking privately to Don Bosco at length about his vocation, he emerged from his room with such determination to become a Salesian that all the efforts of his family to dissuade him failed to shake his resolve. In his third year as a cleric he fell ill and was advised by doctors to recuperate in his native air at home, but his condition steadily worsened. On being told of this, Don Bosco sent Father Barberis to visit and comfort him, and to give him Holy Viaticum. The last cleric to die that year was Paul Salvo. Don Bosco used to remind him of his surname when trying to shake him out of his darker moods, for the young man was sometimes plagued day and night by doubts, scruples and fear of eternal damnation. At those moments his deepest comfort was to be near his spiritual father who, knowing of his anguish, would look for him, gaze kindly

⁵The obituary is clearly misplaced, appearing at the head of a collection of obituaries entitled: *Biographies of Salesians Deceased in the Year 1883-1884*. Turin, 1885. [Author]

⁶Letter, Rome, February 10, 1878. [Author]

upon him, and, placing a hand on his head, say with a smile: "Here is the young man who is always Salvo [saved]. Even if he were to sin, he is always Salvo, in spite of the devil. Remember that you are always Salvo, Salvo at all costs, and will be Salvo for all eternity." No one ever caught on to the full meaning of these words, but they reassured Salvo, who would forget his fears for a time. He longed to go to Patagonia. When he became ill, the doctor ordered him back to his home in Garessio, from where he wrote to Don Bosco on August 2, 1877: "The Oratory and you, Don Bosco, along with my superiors and companions, are all engraved deeply forever in my mind." After a few months in our boarding school at Varazze he returned to his family, where he died on the evening before the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1878.

We have still a few memoirs belonging to this year which we should not let fall into oblivion, and they concern Don Bosco's relations with the coadjutors.

5. THE COADJUTORS

By 1878 Don Bosco had gathered a substantial group of laymen determined to stay with him, bound by religious vows, and so strongly attached to him in affection and loyalty that he very confidently used their services even in delicate negotiations, unafraid that his trust might ever be betrayed. One of the most prominent was Joseph Rossi, the Congregation's assistant to the economer general. The following letter of recommendation drawn up for him by Don Bosco gives us an idea of the esteem in which he was held by our founder, who freely authorized him to act in his name, almost as though he were Father Rua himself:

Turin, July 17, 1878

The bearer of this letter, Joseph Rossi, assistant to the economer general of all our houses, often travels through France and other countries to buy goods, set up business contracts, and market industrial products manufactured by our pupils. We recommend him respectfully to our friends and to agents who will deal with him. He is an honest man who enjoys our fullest trust, and we hereby authorize him to enter into any agreement he judges expedient.

If he needs funds while traveling, we hereby authorize any public or private commerical concern to lend him money, up to thirty thousand francs.

We guarantee such loans by our own signature in conformity with all regulations set by civil and commercial courts.

Fr. John Bosco

A supplier, it would appear, had treated Rossi so rudely and to such a degree that something had to be done to put an end to it. Don Bosco felt that a polite but firm letter should be written to that man. He personally drafted it and asked Rossi to copy it. We still have Don Bosco's original draft in our archives. It reads:

[No date]

Dear Sir:

Urgent business obligations called me away before I could acknowledge your letter of [July] 17.

Now let me state that though my upbringing will not allow me to use the coarse language warranted by this situation, I must nevertheless defend my own honor and that of the organization I am privileged to represent, and prevent any further recurrence of the treatment afforded me and others of this organization only by your office.

Taking your own advice, I will no longer call upon you personally to make payments; therefore, send your duly authorized agent to my office to collect them. Be assured that he will be treated with the courtesy due to bona-fide businessmen.

Joseph Rossi
Assistant to the Economist General

The following episode reveals Don Bosco's boundless kindness toward the coadjutors. In a moment of ill humor, Brother Cajetan Rizzaghi left the Congregation. Never again at peace with himself, nostalgia often impelled him to visit the house he had so ill-advisedly left to bemoan his lost good fortune. The superiors, noticing his persistence, allowed him to join in the spiritual retreat. He broke down during a sermon about the prodigal son. Immediately afterward, he went directly to Don Bosco, falling to his knees before him and crying out so loudly in broken sobs that he could be heard throughout the house: "Oh, my father, neither am I any longer worthy to be called your son!"

Don Bosco took him by the hand and raised him to his feet with words of comfort. He himself brought him to the director to whom

he said, "Be good to him! He is a great friend of mine." Rizzaghi burst into tears again and exclaimed, "Oh, now I am in heaven! If only I could wipe out this stain!" From that day on, at the mere mention of Don Bosco's name, he would break into tears. On his deathbed he blessed the day of his return.

One day Don Bosco received word that Bartholomew Scavini, one of the coadjutors in Buenos Aires, was vacillating somewhat in his vocation. With genuine concern he dashed off the following note: "My dear Scavini, I have heard that you are thinking of leaving the Congregation. Do not do so. You who are consecrated to God by perpetual vows, a Salesian missionary, one of the first to go to South America, highly trusted by Don Bosco, would you now return to the world and again run so many risks of corruption? I hope you will not take such ill-advised action. Write and tell me what is upsetting you, and like a father I will counsel you, my son, to restore you to happiness in this world and in eternity." Scavini regained his peace of mind and persevered.

In February of this year, Brother Charles Barberis, who had gone to South America on the second missionary expedition, died at San Nicolás. The son of well-to-do farmers, he had become a Salesian at twenty-one, motivated by a sincere desire to enter religious life.

Before going any further, let us linger a while to consider how Don Bosco trained his personnel. A document kept in our archives makes it possible for us to study a case in minute detail. It is, however, but one instance, which, though helpful in showing us our founder's spirit and method, does not justify the inference that he would act exactly that way every time. The case concerns a young cleric.

6. THE STORY OF A CLERIC

Bernard Vacchina, an Oratory student, received the cassock in the fall of 1876. Don Bosco permitted the ceremony to be done at his home parish both to gratify his mother and pastor and, as he stated, to edify the people. After spending a few days at home, the newly vested cleric went to Lanzo for his retreat. There he witnessed the clothing ceremony of some forty companions of his. When the retreat was over, they stayed on at Lanzo for a while, whereas Vacchina was sent to the Oratory to watch over one hundred and seventy newly arrived pupils. He must have been

pretty good at this task, since at the very start of his novitiate he was entrusted with supervising the first year high school students, upper division: thus his whole day was spent in carrying out this duty and in being a novice. Partway through the school year 1876-77, Don Bosco one day said to him after his confession, "Wait a moment. I have been thinking of asking you to teach first year high school students, lower division. What would you say to that?"

"Oh, Don Bosco!" exclaimed the young cleric in fright. "I'm only a boy dressed as a cleric. Really, I can't do it, believe me!"

"Don't you know the subjects taught in that grade?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Well, then, why can't you teach them? I'll help you myself and refer you to others for advice when needed. I will tell you the rest later in my room."

Poor Vacchina walked away in utter dismay. Up in his room, Don Bosco told him, "Look, I am replacing Brother P. because he is too quick to use his hands and assign punishment work. Just think, he makes them copy out [the morning or night] prayers thirty times! How can his hapless pupils cope with that? Come to me whenever you have a problem. Every month let me see a corrected assignment, and do as you have seen others do."

At Vacchina's weekly confession, Don Bosco regularly gave him tips on how to act toward his pupils, how to pray for them and be an example, especially in church, how to tell them edifying stories, how to clarify his own ideas, not talking very much himself but getting his students to talk, giving special care to the slower pupils, and urging all his students to approach their superiors often. He also urged him to work in expiation of his own sins and to acquire merit, to exercise charity to his neighbor, and to avoid temptations. He once asked him if his class was orderly. "Not always," Vacchina answered. "Well, then," Don Bosco answered, "if you want to be obeyed and respected, make yourself loved. But, mind you, no caressing, especially their faces, and no holding hands."

Not all Vacchina's days were invariably calm. He had his problems, his moments of discouragement and prostrating tiredness. He was teaching twenty periods a week, with sixty homework papers a day to correct, and several hours of supervision. Whenever he felt he could no longer hold out, he would go to Don Bosco, who kept telling him: "Have faith [and say]: 'I can do all

things in Him who strengthens me' ” [Phil. 4, 13]. These simple words, said as only Don Bosco could say them, had a magic power over Vacchina's flagging spirits. Some mornings, awakening with the oppressing thought of his teaching duties, Vacchina would leap out of bed and slam the night table with his fist, exclaiming, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me!” Father [Charles] Cipriano, who slept in the adjoining room, used to be startled at first and ask if he were going crazy. “Almost!” Vacchina would answer, but then he would soon be serene again.

One of the things he had learned from his own teachers, and tried to imitate them in, was their zeal in fostering the pupils' piety. One day he told his class that both Don Bosco and the Lord would be very pleased if some of them received Holy Communion every morning. He suggested that they individually choose one day a week in which to approach the Holy Table. Everyone agreed. Then the zealous young teacher took a sheet of fancy paper, adorned it with lace, flowers and gilt decorations, and inscribed the names of his pupils in seven columns. Overjoyed, he brought it to Don Bosco to approve and sign. Don Bosco regarded him affectionately, praised his zeal in urging frequent Communion, and then said, “I will not sign it.”

“Why not, Don Bosco? It's such a good thing!”

“Good, yes, very good, but it has to be spontaneous. Look, if I were to sign it, your pupils would think that Don Bosco is ordering them to go to Communion, and that is not our way. If some of the boys don't go to Communion on their chosen day, don't scold them. Don't even let it appear that you noticed them. Exhort them only, just exhort—nothing more.”

One day he sent for Vacchina for no apparent reason, but the cleric soon found out why. The boarders' prefect had complained about him. Our good father asked minute questions about his work, finally inquiring if all his superiors were pleased with him.

“Not all,” he replied. “The boarders' prefect scolded me for being strict with the band players. They really think they are special. He told me that he would remove me from teaching.”

“Patience!” Don Bosco counseled. “Music too is a help in education. But, tell me, who assigned you to teaching, my dear Vacchina?”

“You did, Don Bosco.”

“Fine! So the one who gave it to you will not take it away. You tell that to those whom it may concern. Despite everything, I am pleased with you. Keep working to the best of your ability. God will do the rest.”

The school year which had opened on October 15 closed the following September 9. Vacchina was happy with the good results of his pupils' examinations, but, feeling tired, he was longing for some rest at home. *Don Bosco will let me go*, he thought. *All the other novices go hiking through the hills at Lanzo. Surely he'll not say no.* Quite confidently, therefore, he asked permission. Don Bosco's only answer was, “Don't worry! I shall take care of that.” Some time later, Vacchina asked if he might go to Sampierdarena. He looked forward to his first view of the sea. “You will take your vacation with me,” Don Bosco replied. Take a vacation with Don Bosco? What could that mean? The days kept passing. No sooner would the cleric spot Don Bosco than he would approach to greet him and look questioningly at him, but there would be no answer. Finally he plucked up his courage and asked, “Don Bosco, when and where shall we spend our vacation?”

“In heaven! Aren't you glad? . . . In heaven together!”

“Oh, but that's far off. . . .”

“Who told you it's far off?”

The poor young man was dumbfounded and uttered not another word.

There was a brief lapse between the last day of school and the Lanzo spiritual retreat. Vacchina handed in his request for final vows. During his retreat confession Don Bosco told him, “My dear Vacchina, you've done your best. I am pleased with you. Next year you shall take charge of the upper division of the first year high school students. Take heart! Have you ever regretted staying with Don Bosco?”

“No, but please listen to me. When the prefect threatened to remove me from teaching, and even Father Barberis gave me a scolding, I said, ‘To work all day only to be scolded! After all, one can earn a living also elsewhere!’ Believe me, Don Bosco, I didn't really mean that! My place is here.”

“I believe you. Will you take your vows?”

“Yes, my final vows.”

“I have no objections, but you know that it is not for me alone to say. There are other superiors too.”

“Then I’ll take them for three years. At any rate, my intention will not change.”

Vacchina took his final vows. The next school year, he taught the upper division of the first year high school. Many of his pupils were later to become a credit to the Congregation, but things did not run as smoothly as formerly, mostly because he had over one hundred pupils. At the very beginning he was faced with insubordination. A student assigned to the lower division refused to go there, and the superiors did not intervene. Vacchina exhorted him to obey, but the lad still refused. The teacher then went up to him, grabbed him and brusquely pulled him out of his seat. The young rascal, who had not been at the Oratory very long, raised his hand as if to strike him. Vacchina gripped him by the collar and thrust him out of the classroom, saying, “You will not return until you apologize!” The prefect of studies sent him back, but the teacher again showed him to the door. The prefect sent him back once more, but Vacchina held his ground. The director himself sent the boy back to the classroom, but the young teacher stood firm. Finally Don Bosco sent for him. “Why do you defy your superiors?” he asked. “It is wrong, you know.”

“Listen, Don Bosco. This boy turned on me threateningly, shocking the entire class. I have one hundred and ten boys, and if I am to keep discipline, I cannot tolerate insubordination. The superiors are aware of what happened and know what I’ve said. I think I’ve been fair. Why don’t they tell him to obey?”

“But you laid hands on him, and when you do that, you put yourself in the wrong.”

“It was the only way I could get him out of the room. I’m not angry at him. In fact, I care for him. But he must repent for his wrongdoing and for the bad example he gave. I cannot yield an inch with such a large class where some of my students are even older than I.”

“If he apologizes, will you shame him?”

“No, Father. I wish him to come back and I am heartsick about the way I acted with my superiors.”

“Very well, send the lad to me.”

The boy listened to Don Bosco’s advice, and obeyed with good grace. He was readmitted, and ever afterward showed a deep affection for his teacher.

In the school year 1878-79, Vacchina was put in charge of the

second year high school. Now he had one hundred and thirty pupils, pretty much of a motley crew: lumped with pupils promoted from the first year lower division were a sizable number who had failed, and of the first year upper division there were only those who were not talented enough to skip the second year. In short, it was a problem class, and after a few weeks the young teacher did not know which way to turn. One day, after dinner, he spoke to the director about his problem while he was still in the dining room. Feeling that he was not really getting anywhere, he lost his temper and began to raise his voice. Don Bosco stood listening from a distance without, however, hearing what Vacchina was saying. At long last, speaking loud enough to be heard, he asked, "What's the matter with that cocky young cleric?" Two days later he sent for him. "The day before yesterday," he said, "you were cocky with your director. How are things now?"

"I just can't take it anymore. I have a hundred and thirty pupils whose level of learning is so widely uneven that they should be broken into sections. I am killing myself, but to no avail. It is an impossible class, and you can see that yourself. The director keeps telling me to be patient. I want to be patient, but with all the patience in the world, I can't work miracles. I need more than patience!"

"You are not altogether wrong," Don Bosco replied. "We shall see what can be done." Some days later, twenty-five of the least prepared pupils were removed from the class; some were sent home, the others put into a lower grade. Seeing Vacchina in the playground, Don Bosco called him. "Now how is your class?" he asked.

"Much better!"

"How many pupils do you still have?"

"Over one hundred."

"Good. That's enough to keep you busy. But your director is upset with you."

"It's not my fault. Yes, I wanted several to be pulled out of my class and that was done, but who put them in, well knowing that they had not been promoted?"

Don Bosco heard him out in fatherly fashion but refrained from comments. Vacchina kissed his hand affectionately and promptly decided to make up with his director.

Now someone may ask: "How about this cleric's studies? How about his health?" As to his studies, we can say that he was tutored in philosophy by a lawyer named Fortis, whom we already know, who gave him lessons in his free hours. In other subjects he did what he could on his own and in consultation with competent confreres. Still, every now and then discouragement assailed him. Once he vented his feelings to Don Bosco, who, deeply sympathetic, replied, "Patience is what we all need. Do what you can, and God will do the rest. If you work for Him, He will not abandon you. Besides, there are many tasks in the Congregation, and they are all in the Lord's service. If one cannot be a director or a prefect or whatever, he can be a sacristan and still earn the same reward. Besides, you will see that teaching will broaden your mind and open up new vistas for you." He was right. That year Vacchina was summoned to military service as a *bersagliere*,⁷ but it was no waste of time. Later he happily resumed his life as a Salesian.

Vacchina was not much preoccupied about his health because he had a sturdy constitution. Besides, he had another very special reason for not worrying. During his secondary schooling at the Oratory, he fell severely ill. While convalescing, his superiors, abiding by the doctor's advice, decided that he should return home. He went to Don Bosco and said, "My superiors want to send me home, but I do not want to go."

"Well, listen to that! You do not want to go! Why not?"

"Because you said that one of us is to die soon, and if it is I, then I want to die here, assisted by you."

Don Bosco was standing at the doorway of his room. He gave the boy one of his characteristic glances, raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Go home tranquilly; you will not die yet. You will have a long life." In fact, notwithstanding several serious illnesses, Father Bernard Vacchina is presently [1932] celebrating his priestly jubilee in Buenos Aires.⁸

Now, with a little patience which will be amply rewarded by the

⁷An infantryman belonging to a special swift corps in the Sardinian and Piedmontese armies. [Editor]

⁸Bernard Vacchina (1859-1935) donned the clerical habit in 1876 and took his vows in 1877. In 1879 he was assigned to Uruguay and later became secretary of the internuncio in Buenos Aires where he was ordained a priest in 1882. In 1887 he was appointed provicar apostolic of Central Patagonia. After nearly thirty years of missionary work, he retired to St. John the Evangelist School in Buenos Aires where he continued his priestly ministry until his death in 1935. [Editor]

usefulness of what follows, let us look into a substantial packet of Don Bosco's correspondence.

7. DON BOSCO'S PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

A fair number of the letters written by Don Bosco in 1878 are scattered throughout this volume. More will be included and annotated in the Appendix.⁹ Here we will go over some, including those addressed to various friends and churchmen, as well as to Salesians: directors, missionaries, or, simply, confreres.

1. *To Mrs. Teresa Lyerre*

Mother of the alumnus Charles, who is mentioned in the letter, she was stenographer for the Chamber of Deputies and, unfortunately, a correspondent for some anticlerical newspapers.

Rome, March 2, 1878

Dear Madam,

Our lives are filled with crosses, but a merciful God does not fail to send help in His own good time.

You left Rome with regret, yet you found a holy bishop to advise you and an excellent confessor to give you spiritual direction.

May God always be praised! Give my respects to Bishop Balletti and Canon Fassini for whom I have great esteem and affection. Write often to your son Charles and always remind him of the shortness of life, of his religious heritage, and of his duty to be a credit to his family: in a word, the practice of his faith. I will not fail to do all I can whenever I see him.

May God bless you and your daughter Seraphina. Pray for me, who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

2. *To Countess Sclopis*

This was a short sympathy note written on the back of a picture of the holy face of Christ which was adorned with flowers taken from the garden of Gethsemane. The countess' husband, Count Frederick, had died on March 8, fortified with all the comforts of religion. As a government minister he had subscribed to the laws

⁹Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

ousting the Jesuits and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, a matter he later repudiated. In 1855, while opposing Minister Rattazzi's proposal to the Senate to suppress religious congregations, he courageously admitted that he had earlier yielded to "mob pressure." He took no further part in senate deliberations after the capital was moved to Rome, and he spent the last few years of his life openly fulfilling his religious duties. A noted jurist, he had many writings to his credit. He was also a close friend of Don Bosco.

Rome, March 15, 1878

To the noble Countess Sclopis:

These flowers culled from the garden of Gethsemane have touched the tomb of St. Peter. May they carry my fullest blessings to all who receive them. Flowers and thorns will weave our crown in the blessed eternity.

Fr. John Bosco

3. *To Mrs. Annette Fava Bertolotti*

A Turinese, she was living in the country at Villa Sterpone, Borto Ajé, near Moncalieri.

St. Ann's Villa near Caselle
Feast of St. Ann, 1878

Dear Madam,

Today, your name day, I celebrated Mass for you and all your family, and now I belatedly reply to your letter of July 8. I believe that the matter of mailing *Letture Cattoliche* has been straightened out.

I am enclosing a relic of Pius IX, a tiny strip of cloth from his clothing. Wondrous things are taking place through the intercession of this incomparable Pope; among them I hope we can also count the favors you now request.

Have a pleasant vacation, you, your husband, and your daughter. God bless you all! Please pray for this poor priest who is always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco occasionally sent this well-deserving lady a token gift, usually accompanied by a few words written on his calling card

in his own hand or dictated to his secretary. We have three such autographed cards dating from various years: 1. "This pear is still green, but we will ripen it in the holy fear of God. It's a little thing, but I hope that you and your daughter will enjoy it. Fr. John Bosco." 2. "Fr. John Bosco sends these bunches of grapes to Mrs. Fava Bertolotti and her daughter." 3. For the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians she desired a seat in the choir in order to better follow the services. To please her, Don Bosco jotted on one of his cards: "Fr. John Bosco requests that one of the best seats be reserved for Mrs. Annette Fava."

These other three cards bore messages dictated by Don Bosco to his secretary: 1. "Fr. John Bosco takes the liberty of sending you a few bunches of grapes which have ripened about the windows of his room in the shade of the shrine of Mary, Help of Christians. Please accept them as a token of his lively gratitude and with his best wishes for many heavenly blessings." 2. "Fr. John Bosco takes the liberty of offering you some bunches of grapes as a little token of his gratitude and wishes you heavenly blessings." 3. "Fr. John Bosco begs you to accept this humble gift of cherries from the garden of Mary, Help of Christians; it comes with his best wishes for every heavenly blessing."

4. *To Mrs. Josephine Mary Armeloghi*

Probably the aunt of the Salesian priest of that name, she was living at Lugagnano. We find here good advice for souls distressed by scruples.

Turin, September 26, 1878

Dear Friend in Christ,

As regards your conscience, always remember;

1. Never repeat former confessions.
2. Thoughts, desires and other such mental things should be no matter for [your] confessions.
3. Confess only the kind of words and deeds that your confessor has [in the past] judged as sinful.
4. Obey your confessor without question. Let your conscience be at ease and pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

5. *To Countess Callori*

This very pious noble lady was sometimes afflicted with depression and anxiety. Her comfort was to receive word of Don Bosco's achievements. Knowing this, he wrote her more often and at greater length than he did to any other ladies.

[No date]

My good Mother,

If my weak prayer in your behalf were so many visits to you, I would be taking up much of your time. I feel uncomfortable at not having written to you and having shown myself an unworthy son of such an excellent mother, one whom I moreover greatly need.

Let me start answering your questions. Father Cagliero is working very hard in preparing an expedition of missionaries and sisters to South America, but perhaps this time he may not be able to leave with most of them. He has assured me that, before going, he will not fail in his duty to see you either in Turin or in Vignale.

I am sad about the news you sent me concerning our pupils from Vignale. I was in Lanzo at the beginning of July and the infirmary was then empty. I was there again at the beginning of this month for ten more days, and still no one was sick. I suppose my dear students from Vignale had to be the ones to fall ill, especially the Ravizza brothers whom I had warmly entrusted to Father Director. I will pray and have others pray for them a good deal so that God may bless them and return them to good health. Let us patiently wait for our prayers to be answered, though.

Unfortunately, the shortage of priests is ever more on the rise. I work very hard to foster vocations. I am getting somewhere but could do more if I had the means. However, it is scarcely more than a drop of water in the desert. Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest" [Lk. 10, 2]. Before the end of next week, however, I hope to send you one of our priests who can give you an opportunity for daily Mass at least for a while.

I am continuing this letter in Sampierdarena, [today] September 16, 1878. As for our sisters, they are so scattered about just now that they cannot continue to take lessons from the excellent teachers of your nursery school. Still, I thank you for your invitation and for the hospitality you offered them.

I do hope to pay a visit to Vignale, but just when I cannot say. What is certain is that I need money. This morning the contractor for the Church of St. John the Evangelist came to tell me embarrassedly that he will have to suspend construction if I don't give him a substantial payment on an

overdue bill. I am literally broke. Could you somehow come to my aid to honor the memory of Pius IX? It would be such a tremendous lift. But I don't know how your treasury department fares!

You ask how things are going with us, and I reply that they are going well, thanks to God's grace. This year three hundred young men will don the clerical habit; an equal number will be ready next year. True, some will return to their respective dioceses, but all are laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

Here in Sampierdarena we have two hundred young men, called "Sons of Mary," who aspire to the priesthood. We consider this sector a veritable treasure house. But here too it's the same story! The baker refuses to deliver any more bread because we already owe him eleven thousand lire.

As you see, we have problems, but we find ample recompense in the good conduct and morality that reigns in our schools. Within the past year we have opened twenty houses, including six in Uruguay and Argentina along the Indian border.

God bless you, my good mother, you and all your family, your daughters and their families.

May God grant to all of you health and holiness in abundance. And please pray for this poor priest who is always, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Twenty-seven thousand boys are now boarding in our houses.

6. *To Marchioness Fassati*

Don Bosco mentioned the opening of twenty new houses also in this letter; later we shall see how this number was arrived at.

Turin, October 23, 1878

Dear Marchioness,

Many times, Madam, you have come to our aid without even being asked. Now, however, I do ask in the Lord's name, and I am sure you will help as much as you can.

The almost relentless growth of our Congregation as it responds to the current demands of the faith has forced us, beyond our means, to open new houses. In a single year we have opened twenty. The missions initiated in South America, the promising abundant harvest in those countries and among those Indians, the cost of outfitting and sending forth more and more missionaries, the construction of the Church of St. John the

Evangelist to stem the surge of Protestants who have moved into one of our city's most populous quarters—all these undertakings have drained us and loaded us with debts.

Should you in your charity find that you can help us, this would be the most opportune moment. I realize all you have already done for us and for others, and I am deeply grateful for all we have received, but now I come to you simply to present our need. I trust in your kindness to aid us within the limits of what you can afford and as God moves you to give.

But please be assured that, whatever you decide, we are still ever so grateful for all you have already done for us. We will not fail to remember your dear departed ones every day, and we will also pray particularly for you, that God may grant you good health, the precious gift of perseverance, and a heavenly crown.

I commend my own poor soul also to the charity of your holy prayers, while I have the honor to profess myself, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I have addressed this letter to Montemagno, where I hope you can read it at greater ease.

7. To Mrs. Teresa Vallauri

This well-known Salesian cooperator, sister of Father Peter Vallauri, died of a very painful illness on March 10, 1879. God gave her heroic patience in the midst of her sufferings. A prudent and charitable woman, on making her will she laid aside an amount which she personally gave to Don Bosco for Salesian works and missions.

Turin, November 8, 1878

Dear Madame Teresa,

The last time I had the pleasure of seeing you I felt very downhearted because I could see that your illness was much more serious than I had realized. Our boys are praying for you morning and evening, as I promised. But now let me add a word or two more.

I would like to storm heaven with prayers, provided we do not go contrary to God's greater glory and the good of your own soul. This is my plan: from next Sunday to the feast of the Immaculate Conception, our boys will every day receive Holy Communion for you; I will celebrate daily Mass for that same intention. A group chosen from the most fervent

of us will spend some time in prayer for you each day before the Blessed Sacrament.

Join with us spiritually, say the prayer which I have suggested and offer all your sufferings to God. I also hope to come some evening to offer you my respects.

God bless you, my dear Lady Teresa. May He restore your health and spare your life for many years to come so that you may see the fruits of your charity.

Pray also for this little orphan, who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

8. *To Countess Callori*

Don Bosco again mentions his eye problem. He was to be cured only in February 1879, while in Rome, in a manner which some have held to be miraculous.

Turin, November 25, 1878

My good Mother,

I was given your letter by your gardener Rizzoglio, who came with his wife to pray in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Overall, we are doing quite well, except that my eyesight is fast becoming worse. God disposed so because I was not using it as I should.

Pray for me and for our work. May God bless you and your family and keep you all in abundant health and holiness. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

9. *To the Minister of the Interior*

This is one of the many petitions Don Bosco wrote requesting honors for his benefactors. In a letter dated from Rome, February 2, 1879, he wrote to the Honorable Francis Crispi to seek a knight's decoration for Dr. Albertotti, who had been donating his medical services to the Oratory from 1872 and was to continue to do so until his death. Don Bosco's letter [the text of which we omit] was favorably received, and the award of the Knight's Cross to Dr. Albertotti was determined upon; however, the award never came through because of the fall of the ministry.

10. Again to the Minister of the Interior

Don Bosco wrote a similar petition on behalf of the contractor Felix Faja. Lacking the exact date, we do not know who the minister was. It was most probably written sometime between 1877 and 1878. The petition obtained a Knight's Cross for Mr. Faja. To celebrate the event the latter gave a dinner to which he invited Don Bosco, some Salesian priests, Dr. Fissore and other guests. In the course of the meal, one of the guests remarked to Don Bosco, "There is something in one of your churches that is not right."

"What is that?"

"The angels look more beautiful than the Madonna."

The reference was to the angels on the bell towers who glittered with gold-leafed splendor, while the statue of Our Lady atop the dome, lightly gilded, had become blackened through the inclemency of the weather.

"You are right," Don Bosco replied. "It is a disgrace which we must remedy." He then raised his voice and said to all the guests, "Listen to what I have just been told. It has been pointed out to me that the angels in our church show up more beautifully than Mary, Help of Christians. We must give Our Lady the splendor that is Hers. So I now appeal to you to help me gild Her statue anew."

"Yes! Yes!" they all exclaimed.

"Dr. Fissore, professor of anatomy, will distribute to each one the part of the statue that shall be his responsibility to gild. No one will suffer if each contributes a little."

Dr. Fissore parceled out the head here, an arm there, half the mantle to one, the other half to another, and so on. They were already counting up their contributions when Don Bosco, who had been quietly smiling up to that point, interrupted: "But, doctor, aren't you taking any part for yourself?"

Everyone burst out laughing at this. "You should take the stomach, doctor," Don Bosco suggested. The doctor agreed.

The program for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians on May 24, 1877 had already mentioned the project of gilding this statue, and a few donations had been received at that time, but not enough. This dinner solved the financial problem. From then on the Madonna on the dome no longer suffered by comparison with the angels on the bell towers.

11. To Mr. Ignatius N.N.

In this letter Don Bosco states his view of a proposed marriage in which the bride's only dowry was her virtue. The groom belonged to a noble, historical family that was not too wealthy.

Turin, July 31, 1878

My dear Ignatius,

On this your name day, I reply to your letter of July 28. "Nothing" is too little. It is true that virtue is more valuable than any other treasure, but one must still have means to live on. If you were my brother I would say: Don't rush. While rating highly the rare qualities of the bride, and hoping to obtain something tangible later if not right now, I would rely on the advice of your mother; she is both prudent and religious, and she loves you.

Be that as it may, I will pray to God to bless you and your future partner and to give you both what is best for your temporal and spiritual well-being.

Best regards to all in your family. Pray for me also. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

12. To Baron Charles Ricci Des Ferres

Turin, September 24, 1878

My dear Baron,

I received your letter with your donation of a hundred lire. The two Masses you requested for your intentions have already been celebrated. Count Cays has offered a special memento for the well-being of your daughter the nun. A special novena is being offered in our hospice at Sampierdarena.

I agree with you that in this kind of illness we must rely more upon God's help than upon human skill. Let us pray. Here we do so every morning and evening at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians. I remain hopeful.

I am enclosing a fragment of Pius IX's clothing. Who knows, we may be able to count among his prodigies also the cure of your daughter.

May God bless you, Baron, all your family, and, especially, the good nun who is ill. And may the Holy Virgin, "the health of the sick," obtain from Her Divine Son all the graces we pray for.

Pray also for me. With all my heart I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

13. To Mr. Anthony Massara

A former diocesan seminarian in his youth, he was the town clerk at Bianzè (Novara) in 1891 when he sent these three letters of Don Bosco to Father Rua. The first letter answered some questions of conscience.

Turin, September 26, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

Your frankness in writing is a sign of your good will and prompts me to respond in all confidence. God is great and merciful. Often we do not think about Him, but He thinks about us. When He sees us running away, He grasps us by the shoulder to make us stop and turn back to Him. Isn't this true? Let us then bless the Lord in all things and adore His wise decrees. If your health were to permit you to resume your studies, I would not be averse to advising you to go all the way to the priesthood. If you were to desire a life in a religious community and wished to come here with me, I would gladly welcome you among my dear and beloved sons.

Meanwhile prayer, work, and self-denial, along with frequent confession and Communion, will guarantee your victory over the ancient enemy of your soul. There are other things to say but not in writing. Goodbye, my dear friend. God bless you. Pray for me who is always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

14. To Mr. Anthony Massara

Don Bosco wrote that there were "other things to say but not in writing." Massara replied that he would come to Turin to hear them. Don Bosco then wrote to him as follows:

Turin, October 17, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

I have just returned to Turin after a long absence. If you think it opportune, come and spend all or part of the novena of All Saints with me.

We can talk freely and reach conclusions which we both judge best in the Lord.

God bless you. Believe me always, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

15. To Mr. Anthony Massara

Massara hurried to the Oratory, but he had to wait three days before he could have an audience with Don Bosco. Don Bosco remembered everything as soon as he heard the name. Massara later wrote: "He received me most graciously. He treated me with such goodness that I was moved to tears. I will always remember standing in front of him as he was still seated at table after supper. He asked me to sit. Because of my emotion, and also because he spoke so softly, I was slow to understand him, so he stood up and asked me to sit at his place at the center of the table. When I finally understood this, I refused and begged his pardon. He invited me to stay, and then jokingly said to Father Cagliero, who had come in at that point, that I would be the successor of Father Bonetti in running the *Salesian Bulletin*. I accepted the invitation. Don Bosco had someone assign me the best room available and picked a certain Alexander Mora of Milan to be my companion and make me feel comfortable. I could never describe the joy which I experienced at finding myself in that holy place after having lived out in the world."

However, Massara's delicate health did not allow him to endure community life. Partly for that reason and partly because of a relative's instigation, he decided to return home. Before leaving, he went to say goodbye to Don Bosco, who treated him with the same warmth. From what he could grasp, Massara realized that Don Bosco was not happy about his leaving; indeed, he made Massara some generous offers, but Massara did not accept them. "That was my misfortune," he wrote. "I soon changed my mind and sometime later I returned to Turin with the intention of accepting the proposals he had made to me a few months before. However, Don Bosco said that he could no longer accept me on that basis. I left him with tears in my eyes. On returning home I wrote him another letter expressing my wish to return no matter what the cost."

Don Bosco replied immediately.

[No date]

My dear Friend,

I praise God for His preserving in you the will to be virtuous and good and thus save your soul. I do not fail to commend you to the Lord every day in my prayers. Your companions do the same. We will always have

the warmest affection for you. As for coming back to Turin, however, it is better that you be positive your health will hold out.

As for the admission exam, it would help to get a copy of the required subjects and begin going over them.

Greet your family for me, and pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

16. To Baron Charles Ricci Des Ferres

The young nephew of Baron du Bourg, private secretary of the Count of Chambord, who accompanied Don Bosco to Frohsdorf in 1883, was ill. There were ties of kinship between the Des Ferres and the Du Bourg families.

San Benigno Canavese, October 3, 1878

My dear Baron Charles Ricci,

As soon as I read your letter I ordered prayers for young Du Bourg who is ill. I do hope that the Blessed Virgin has heard our requests if they redound to God's greater glory and to the greater benefit of this pious family.

May heaven's blessings descend abundantly upon you too, on the Fassati family, and on the respected De Maistre family. With the greatest respect, I am,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I find it hard to write.

17. To Francis Bocca

An engineer from Pollone (Biella), he had in his service a sister of Joseph Sandrone, lay foreman of the Oratory Press. Between the latter and his sister there were hard feelings over financial matters. The engineer asked Don Bosco to smooth over the differences. Don Bosco's report on his mediation is an interesting example of his prudence and charity.

Turin, October 28, 1878

Dear Mr. Bocca,

I have spoken several times to Joseph Sandrone who came to see me with his wife. I will summarize our meeting. Mr. Sandrone fully

acknowledges what his sister Mary has done for him. He acknowledges this and assures me that he would be ready to spend his last penny for her, were she ever truly in need. If, nevertheless, you wish that his sister's interest payments be set forth in writing, he is ready to go along with that. Would you therefore kindly sound out Mary, write up the statement, and send it to me? Joseph has given me his word that he will sign it. Both he and his wife have also formally charged me to convey to his sister their invitation to stay at their home whenever she is in Turin, both to eat and to sleep. If anything, or, rather, if any word from the past has caused these strained relations, they ask her to forgive them. They want to look upon her always as a true sister and mistress in their home.

I also looked into the state of Joseph's own finances, and it appears that they have been conducted honorably though very tightly. He is just about beginning to break into social life. He is quite concerned about paying for his household furnishings and rent, and about his wife, who is in a family way. However, since he has a good weekly salary, as does also his wife though in a slightly lesser degree, they have caught up with past debts and are now putting money aside for future eventualities.

This, my dear sir, sums up my mission. I now place it all in your hands to be brought to a happy conclusion through your prudence and charity.

I am pleased that this matter has brought me into contact with you. I have heard many good things about you. A personal visit from you, if you ever come to Turin, would give me great pleasure.

Please pardon my unsightly scrawl and accept my best wishes for heaven's blessings upon you. I am, dear sir,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

18. To Chevalier Francis M. De Simone

From Acri (Cosenza) De Simone had sent Don Bosco a donation with a request for prayers for his ailing brother.

Turin, November 7, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

May God bless you and your family with you, especially your ailing brother. I thank you for your offering of twenty-five lire. May heaven reward you a hundred times over both in this life and in the life to come.

I am sending you a relic of Pius IX to use as you may need it.

I will pray for you every day at holy Mass. Please pray for me and for my family (thirty thousand boys). Yours always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

19. *To Father Faustinus Confortòla*

Father Confortòla, born in Ghedi, belonged to the diocesan clergy of Brescia. Later he joined Don Bosco. He was the first director of our school in Florence and again the first director and parish priest of our house and parish in Parma. He died at Florence in 1913.

[January] 28, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

Your offer to assist me in priestly work is most gratifying and consoling to me.

The harvest is plentiful!

The openness with which you write gives me much assurance about you. Arrange your affairs, therefore, and I will gladly accept you among my sons. You will have plenty to do here, taking into account both your health and your talents.

Come as a brother, and you will have many other brothers as well as a loving father in Christ. As required by canon law, I need a certificate of good standing from your bishop or from the chancery—nothing else!

I do not ask you to bring material resources—just yourself. However, since our Congregation depends upon Providence, if you are able to bring some material help along with your spiritual aid, it will be put to good use to help support the countless works of charity which daily fall to our lot.

I will be in Rome until the second week of February. You can write to me there. Later I will return to Turin. If you would like to take a trip to Turin to talk with me personally or even to stay permanently with us, I would suggest that you do so after the close of Mary's month.

God bless you and give you the precious grace of working for His greater glory and rescuing souls from this world's perils. Pray also for me who will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

20. *To Father Gregory Palmieri*

Born in Piacenza on April 3, 1828, Father Palmieri was a Benedictine at St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls monastery in Rome and a brother of Father Dominic Palmieri, S.J. From 1877 until 1895 he worked in the Vatican archives. Having come to know Don Bosco sometime before 1878, he faithfully attended Don Bosco's talks in Rome and was often a guest at the Oratory and once at Lanzo. He died on January 19, 1918.

Rome, February 2, 1878

Very reverend and dear Father,

I am grateful for the generous offering you have sent me as a Salesian cooperator. More, I thank you for your note endorsing and encouraging the works we have undertaken.

God bless your charity. May it bear fruit for His greater glory and for the growth of the Benedictine Order which has served the Church so well for so many centuries and in so many ways.

Be assured that it will always be an honor for Salesian houses anytime they can be useful to you or your brother Benedictines.

I ask for the continued charity of your prayers and am honored to be,

Yours gratefully in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

21. To Bishop Edward Rosaz

He was appointed bishop of Susa, where he was a canon, during Pius IX's last consistory on December 31, 1877, and succeeded Bishop Frederick Mascaretti who had resigned for reasons of health. He distinguished himself as a skillful and virtuous prelate and was very devoted to Don Bosco.

Rome, February 7, 1878

Most reverend and dear Bishop,

I have lately learned from Turin and more recently from your letter that our great Pius IX has thought of you in his fatherly kindness and named you bishop of Susa. Frankly, I was surprised because I know how humbly you rate yourself. Besides, I realized that you will have to adopt a new stance in word and deed. However, very quickly, on second thought, I thanked God. I was and am convinced that the Church has in you a bishop after God's heart who will do great good for the diocese of Susa.

I rejoice at this and, with all my heart, offer you whatever services the houses of our Congregation can give you personally or for the diocese God has committed to you.

I do not presume to pose as a teacher, but I believe that you will win the hearts of all if you:

1. Take special care of the sick, the elderly, and poor children.
2. Go slow in changing the personnel assignments of your predecessor.
3. Do what you can to gain the trust and love of those who once held or are still holding important diocesan offices and feel that they have been overlooked and that you have been preferred to them.

4. Be cautious on taking severe measures against any member of your clergy; as much as possible, always hear his side. As for anything else, I will see you personally in March.

Today, at about three-thirty in the afternoon, Pius IX, the Church's chief and incomparable luminary, passed away. All of Rome is dismayed, as I believe the entire world is. He will surely be raised to the altars within a short time.

I trust that Your Excellency will always allow me to write to you with my customary frankness. I pray God to give you wisdom and good health. Asking for the charity of your prayers, I remain, with deepest respect,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

22. To Father Anthony Stoppani

He was archpriest at Varzo (Novara). The letter enclosed a holy picture of Mary, Help of Christians which Don Bosco had autographed with the words, "To Father Stoppani. May Mary be for you and your parishioners a help in this life, a support in danger, a solace in death and a joy in heaven. Fr. John Bosco."

Rome, March 8, 1878

My dear Father,

Your desire will be granted. In Turin I have a piece of the clothing worn by the great Pius IX, and I will save it for you.

Other matters we can discuss in due time. Come personally, or send us good [future] Salesians. The harvest is very plentiful but the laborers are too few.

May God bless us all. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Within a few days, God willing, I will be heading for Turin.

23. To Father Otto Ternavasio

A former classmate of Don Bosco, he was assistant pastor at Venaria Reale. The faculty Don Bosco mentioned in his letter as having been granted to him orally was probably obtained through Cardinal Oreglia, who in those days was trying very hard to get Don Bosco an audience with Leo XIII.

Rome, March 8, 1878

My dear Father Ternavasio,

You are allowed to keep and read prohibited books whenever you deem it useful for your ministry either to verify their errors or to refute them. This faculty was granted to me orally on March 7, 1878.

When will you become a full-time Salesian and not just halfway?

Greet the pastor for me. I want to bring him a beautiful portrait of Leo XIII. God bless you! Pray for me who am always, in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

To the same priest Don Bosco jotted the following laconic note: "My dear friend: a telegram. You are allowed to bless medals, etc., as you wish. Goodbye until I see you in Turin. Be happy, and pray for me, your most affectionate friend in Jesus Christ. Fr. John Bosco, March 14, 1878."

24. To Father Gregory Palmieri

Father Palmieri had found in the Vatican archives several unpublished letters of St. Francis de Sales written in Italian to the apostolic nuncio in Turin. He made copies and sent them to Don Bosco for publication. Monsignor Rosi, however, objected to publishing them in their entirety, suggesting some curtailment. Father Palmieri then gave them to Bishop Gaspar Mermillod. They were subsequently published in full by André Peraté of the "École de France" in Rome, along with four other French letters of the saint which Father Palmieri had also discovered in the possession of Bishop Morandi of Piacenza.¹⁰ The copies with the proposed omissions are in the library of St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls, among the papers of Father Palmieri.

Turin, July 2, 1878

My dear Father Palmieri,

I thank you for your letters which I received with great pleasure.

The problem of publishing St. Francis de Sales' letters is as follows: Monsignor Rosi read them, but he did not consider them very important.

¹⁰André Peraté. *La Mission de François de Sales dans le Chablais*. Unpublished documents from the Vatican archives. Extracts from *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome*, Vol. VI, Rome, Cuggioni, 1886. [Author]

Furthermore, he thought that the saint would not be pleased with their publication because they were private letters meant for certain individuals.

I wrote back to tell him that, in view of the eagerness with which every word of this saint is read, I would be willing to publish them, but would rely on his judgment in the matter. I haven't received a reply. His previous letter was extremely courteous.

I hope that my letter finds you in good health. I pray that God will preserve your life for many years. I ask you also to give my regards to Father Abbot and his confreres who showered me with such affection last winter.

I make another request: please tell Father Abbot and your confreres that, like you, they should feel free to accept the hospitality of our houses whenever they happen to be in the vicinity. And if you could spend some time with us, it would give me great pleasure. I believe, too, your health would benefit.

My secretary sends his respects, and I pray that God will grant your heart's desire. I ask for the charity of your prayers. In Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. Don Bosco

How warmly Don Bosco invited Father Palmieri and his confreres to the Oratory, which received frequent visits from both secular and religious priests! They found nothing that could be called "comfort," but still they wrote glowing accounts of their impressions of these visits. In the summer of 1877, the curate of the cathedral of Ventimiglia stayed several days at the Oratory with two other priests, friends of his. Afterward he wrote to Don Bosco:¹¹ "I can hardly describe the wonderful feelings I experienced during our stay in your little earthly paradise. One breathes such an air of genuine peace and a true brotherly charity. An almost heavenly serenity brightens the faces and a spotless innocence shines through the eyes of those fortunate ones who live with you." Attorney Constantine Leonori, who visited in the fall of 1878, thanked Don Bosco as follows:¹² "I must admit that I left Turin with a yearning to return. God willing, I shall. The kindness and cordiality with which I was treated by you and your confreres made a vivid impression on me, so vivid indeed that frankly I must say I'll have to come back." A Dominican priest, Father Pius

¹¹Letter from Ventimiglia, August 28, 1877. [Author]

¹²Letter to Don Bosco from Rome, October 1878. [Author]

Saccheri, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, wrote in the same vein:¹³ “I again renew from the depth of my heart my thanks for the gracious hospitality I received both in Turin and in Lanzo. I fondly remember it.”

25. *To Father Francis Serenelli*

He was rector of the diocesan seminary in Verona. Don Bosco enclosed a holy picture of Mary, Help of Christians, autographed with these words: “To Father Serenelli. *Maria sit tibi et tuis auxilium in vita, levamen in periculis, solatium in morte, gaudium in coelo. Amen. Ioannes Bosco Sacerdos.*” [May Mary be for you and yours a help in this life, a solace in danger, a consolation in death, and a joy in heaven. Amen. Fr. John Bosco.]

Turin, July 6, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us! Your generous offering and your letter’s Christian tone elicit special thanks from the bottom of my heart, all the more so because of our present extraordinary problems and a great many undertakings. As a benefactor of ours, please consider our Salesian houses as your own. Should you come to Turin, I would gladly discuss a number of matters and projects with you. I expect you. I would write more, but my scribbling is so sprawling that you could scarcely read it.

May God bless you and yours and all your good works. I am,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

26. *To Father William Garelli*

A priest of Mondovì and a former pupil of the Oratory, Father Garelli joined St. Philip Neri’s Oratorians. The “schoolmates in France, Spain, and South America” refer to former Oratory boys who had migrated to those countries.

Turin, August 3, 1878

My dear Father Garelli,

If you do not want to become a Salesian or a missionary, I advise you to pick the one parish of the four proposed to you which pleases you best.

¹³Letter to Don Bosco from Rome, December 11, 1878. [Author]

I also ask you to pray for your former schoolmates in France, Spain, and South America. I look forward to your visit with your mother. God bless you.

Fr. John Bosco

27. *To Father Paul Taroni*

Don Bosco was replying to a letter of October 1 in which Father Taroni had sent him Mass stipends and had mentioned a recent visit of Father Bretto to Lugo and Faenza and the eager desire of a seminarian of his to become a Salesian. "The young man has two questions," Father Taroni wrote, "the cost of room and board and the class he would be admitted to. He is seventeen years old and is quite determined about his vocation. Since he is a good rhetoric student and quite intelligent, he would like to enter a class where he would be allowed to wear clerical garb. Please help us, Don Bosco, with your advice and with your prayers." Don Bosco replied:

Turin, October 4, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

This is a hasty reply. I have received your letter and the ten lire stipend. I myself will celebrate the Masses at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians and our students will pray and offer their Communions as requested. I will also pray for the saintly priest¹⁴ who is ill in the seminary, as Father Bretto requested. The seminarian who would like to become a Salesian will be placed with our clerics and may wear clerical garb. The main condition is that he come; all the rest can be arranged. When will you come and stay with us?

I send you a relic of Pius IX and the greetings of our Salesians. I wish your seminarians health, wisdom, and holiness. I ask their prayers for this poor priest, who will always be,

Yours and theirs affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The seminarian's name was Henry Foschini. His vocation came from something he had read. One day in May 1876, feeling indisposed, he stayed home and began reading a play entitled, *The Vocation of St. Aloysius Gonzaga*. It sparked his vocation. On

¹⁴Father John Spada, pastor of St. Potito's. He became seriously ill during a retreat at the seminary, but later recovered. [Author]

later reading the saint's life in *The Companion of Youth*¹⁵ his vocation became confirmed. In 1877, when Father Taroni, his spiritual director, went to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, he returned with these parting words from Don Bosco: "I will pray that your seminarians may all lead holy lives and that some of them, God willing, will become Salesians." Not long after, Father Barberis and Father Lazzero passed through Faenza on their return from Rome. On that occasion a prayerful alliance was struck up between Don Bosco's sons and those seminarians; all of them joined the archconfraternity of Mary, Help of Christians. Henry Foschini's family opposed his becoming a Salesian, but finally yielded after they received Don Bosco's letter. Their son entered the Oratory on November 13, the first of quite an array of seminarians from Faenza who joined the Congregation. But God called him to Himself from the Salesian house of Lucca barely a year after his priestly ordination. The question Don Bosco asked Father Taroni—"When will you come and stay with us?"—must be understood as a token of Don Bosco's esteem and affection. What he actually told Father Taroni during his visit was quite different.¹⁶

28. To Father Paul Taroni

Turin, October 27, 1878

My dear Father Taroni,

I don't know what reply was sent to the seminarian Rambelli, but to speed things up, tell his mother that if he comes here to become a Salesian, he will be accepted if he is already in his last year of secondary school. If he doesn't intend to become a Salesian but only wants to continue his studies, he can go to Alassio, where he can finish both secondary school and the lyceum.

You give me hope that you will be coming here with a postulant. When?

Everybody here sends you regards. I ask your prayers and those of your seminarians for me. With fraternal affection, I am, in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Mrs. Elizabeth Rambelli wrote enclosing a letter of recommendation from Canon Magnacci.

¹⁵A boys' prayerbook compiled by Don Bosco and first published in 1847 under the title of *Il Giovane Provveduto*. See Vol. III, pp. 6-18. [Editor]

¹⁶See p. 324. [Editor]

29. *To the Pastor of Barbania*

[No date]

My dear Friend in Christ,

I have known for some time that you have a parishioner who is very ill. He is a good man, but he is fooling himself that the end is not near and consequently he is not readying himself for death.

I have included him in our prayers at the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and we shall keep praying for him.

Meanwhile, do your duty, call on him if it's not too late already, and tell him that his time is almost up. God wants to save him, but he had better hurry and prepare himself.

It might also happen that God, moved by his repentance and prayers, may restore him to health.

I do not know the man and have never seen him. Still, you should be able to find out whom I am referring to.

May God bless us all. Pray for me who am, in Jesus Christ,

Yours dutifully,
Fr. John Bosco

30. *To a Pastor in Forlì*

Turin, October 25, 1878

My dear Friend in Christ,

I have received your kind letter and your donation of eighteen lire. Thank you and may God reward you. It comes as manna from heaven in our present straits. Do not worry. Don't talk about giving up your parish. Is there work to do? Die with your boots on, as a good soldier of Christ. If you think you cannot do much, say to yourself: *I can do all things in Him who strengthens me*. Are there thorns? From thorns blossoming into flowers the angels will weave your crown in heaven. Are times very hard? They have always been, but God has never withheld His help. Christ yesterday and today. Do you want my advice? Take special care of the children, the elderly and the sick, and you will win over all your parishioners.

Come and pay me a visit, and we will talk these things over at length.

Fr. John Bosco

31. *To Count Charles Cays*

We have already quoted a substantial part of this letter which we shall not repeat here.¹⁷

¹⁷See pp. 364f. [Editor]

Rome, January 12, 1878

My dear Count,

If my every thought of you and my prayers were a visit, I would be at your side all the time. However, a letter from me is more tangible.

Thank you for telling me about Count Birago's happy death. Blessed be the Lord and blessed be the moment you visited him and spoke of me. I have prayed and will continue to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

.....

The new king has taken the name Humbert I and not Humbert IV.¹⁸ Who knows why? Baron Bianco knows, and he says that the reason is quite meaningful. If you'll pay a visit to this dear friend of mine, give him my regards and tell him that I badly need prayers.

For your information, all of our endeavors are doing as well as expected. Even the archbishop should be satisfied. I will tell you all about it later.

You will no doubt be seeing Count Louis and his family. Please give them my regards.

Give my regards also to our dear confreres, especially to Brother Rossi and Father Barberis, who I understand is not well. Help poor Father Bonetti with his writings as best you can. They keep him more than busy.

May God bless us all. Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Everything will be arranged in time for your ordination.

To help us understand the obscure reference to Baron Bianco, we reproduce here a few lines from Father Lemoyne:¹⁹

In 1875, Baron Bianco of Barbanía—loyal to the House of Savoy like all Piedmontese noblemen—told us personally: "I held in my own hands Don Bosco's letter to the king; with my own eyes I read those words: *Regi nostro vita brevis*; and from that moment I watched the turn of events. . . ."

In a manuscript on the same topic Father Lemoyne added:

¹⁸Humbert I, better known as Humbert Biancamano (1003-1056), may be considered the founder of the House of Savoy; Humbert II (1092-1103) was known as the *Fortified*; Humbert III (1157-1188), as the *Blessed*. [Author]

¹⁹See Vol. VI, p. 175. [Editor]

When Savoy, cradle and glory of our kings, was ceded to France, when Victor Emmanuel was proclaimed king of Italy and ancient traditions ended, I said: "The prophecy has been fulfilled. Victor Emmanuel is no longer king in Savoy; the king of Savoy is dead!"

Besides, we must consider the entire significance of what Don Bosco wrote in his letter.²⁰ The fact is that Victor Emmanuel died in the full vigor of manhood (he was fifty-seven years and ten months old, having been born in Turin on March 14, 1820). Humbert I, brutally assassinated, broke the chronological series of the princes of the ancient dynasty by adopting that name. Here too Don Bosco seems to imply that the ancient lineage was broken when the new king called himself Humbert I instead of Humbert IV.

32. To Father Angelo Lago

Having heard a sermon of Don Bosco on religious poverty at Lanzo in 1872, Father Lago gave up the pharmacy he owned at Peveragno and came to the Oratory to work either in an office or in the infirmary. Don Bosco, however, overcoming Lago's reluctance, persuaded him to become a priest. He was ordained in September 1877 at the age of forty-three and lived a secluded life until his death in 1914, almost always at Father Rua's side.

Rome, February 14, 1878

My dear Lago,

I was pleased with your letter. Please write whenever you care to. I agree entirely with you. We should divest ourselves of everything and put all into the hands of the Lord or—what is the same thing—do all things for His sake. There are so many unhappy people who give up their possessions only when forced to do so at death, where their renunciation is utterly worthless. Those who are prudent follow the Gospel and, giving up everything voluntarily, assure for themselves a hundredfold repayment.

Let us thank God for helping you to perceive how inane is this world and to break with it in fact and not just in words. This has always been my concept: to own nothing at all.

As regards the Third Order, let me think about it.²¹ Be patient and everything will work out. Tell Toselli about this too.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 174. [Editor]

²¹Perhaps Lago was a Franciscan tertiary. [Author]

Regards to Maccagno, Streri, Albinolo, and Peter Gallo. God bless you, and pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

33. *To Father John Bonetti*

Editor of the *Salesian Bulletin*, he was an aggressive writer whose words easily flared into polemics. Here Don Bosco alludes specifically to an article of his entitled, "The Salesian Congregation and Priestly Vocations," which appeared in the February issue. His article on Pius IX, sent to Don Bosco either in manuscript or in galley proofs, was published in the March issue, which also carried the account of the Salesian cooperators' conference in Rome.

Rome, February 14, 1878

My dear Father Bonetti,

Stop fighting and try to write as a man of peace, as I have repeatedly urged you to do. I only skimmed through the article on Pius IX, so make sure that it is not disjointed. Revise the material on the conference in Rome. You wrote that six hundred priests have come from our houses; four times as many is more correct. I recall that when Father Francesia was in his last year of secondary school, eighty out of eighty-four students donned the clerical habit. On the whole, it is better not to cite these figures, lest we bruise sensibilities in civil and ecclesiastical circles. Remember that we are living under hostile powers.

Your very long letter never once mentioned your health. Please take care of yourself as you would care for Don Bosco.

Tell all concerned that everything is stymied here in Rome. I leave for Magliano on Saturday. Next week I will pay my respects to the new Pope, and after that I will go to visit our houses.

Tell Ghione and Ghiglione to strive to become ever better. Keep an eye on Father Barberis' health. Take care of yourself also, if you want to enjoy good health.

God bless all of us. Pray for me,

Your friend in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Remember that you are not to send the *Salesian Bulletin* to Countess Veronica Macchi,²² should her name be on the mailing list.

²²She was the mother of Monsignor Macchi, the papal chamberlain. [Author]

34. To Father John Branda

He was the catechist of the Oratory artisans. We will say more about him when we write about Spain.

Rome, March 2, 1878

My dear Father Branda,

Although I am badly pressed for time, I did not want to delay telling you how happy I was with your letter and with the prayers and Communions offered for me and for the Church's present needs.

Tomorrow I hope to attend the Holy Father's coronation. Tuesday I shall have a private papal audience and present to him the spiritual bouquet of Communions which our good artisans have prepared for him.

Tell them how very pleased I am with their conduct. As soon as I return to Turin I will give them a special token of my affection. Give my regards to Ferraris in the bookstore, to the doorkeeper Marcellus Rossi, and also to my special friends Cottini and Audisio Cipriani.

God bless you and grant you a joyful carnival season free from all dangers.

Keep praying for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

35. To Father John Bonetti

Rome, March 6, 1878

My dear Father Bonetti,

1. Tell Barale to send me about ten copies of *La Figlia Cristiana* ["The Christian Girl"] in deluxe binding, if possible; otherwise commercial copies will do. Tell him also to send a copy to the usual periodicals, to Mr. Lanfranchi and to Attorney Durando for *Unità Cattolica*.

2. The Church of St. John the Evangelist is a work begun by [Pius IX], the Salesian cooperators' founder, and therefore it is their task to complete the project. Even those residing far away from Turin will send in their contributions. Please prepare an article to this effect and let me see it.²³

3. With regard to your role as prefect of the clergy, consult with the house chapter. I will go along with what will be decided. Just bear in mind that, with patience and charity, all our activities should be so managed as to achieve the goals we have set.

4. Be very patient with the cleric Michael Rossi. When you can, take a walk with him.

²³This article appeared in the April issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*. [Author]

5. I have no difficulty with your going to Lu. Try to work things out as best you can. Convey to Messrs. Rota, Ribaldone and all the cooperators a special blessing from the Holy Father.

6. I am enclosing some letters from our missionaries. Keep the confidential sections to yourself. Check with Father Cagliero about the advisability of publishing excerpts.

7. Do all you can to avoid adding fuel to the fire. Rigorously shun even allusions to government affairs. Remember that the inscription, "He made my forehead harder than theirs,"²⁴ was unfavorably received. Patience and very great caution are called for.

8. Regards to Father Barberis, the priests, the clerics, and the clerical postulants.

9. I have a private audience today at eleven o'clock and I will write to you about it afterward. Take good care of your health and that of Father Barberis. Wish all your artisans a hearty "Good Night" from me. Pray for me. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The prayerbook *La Figlia Cristiana* [full title, *The Christian Girl Prepared in the Practice of Her Duties*] was an adaptation for young women of *Il Giovane Provveduto* [*The Companion of Youth*]. On March 23, a Roman bi-weekly publication, *Il Divin Salvatore* [*The Divine Savior*], praised *La Figlia Cristiana*. In its March 24 issue, *Unità Cattolica* also recommended it as follows:

Father John Bosco continues to show the wonderful zeal for the moral well-being of youth which has always characterized him. Having compiled a prayerbook for boys—a best seller of its kind throughout Italy—he now achieves a similar goal for girls by giving them a guide to prayer.

The title "Prefect of the Clergy" was added to Father Bonetti's name for the first time in the directory of 1878. It was paired with Father Julius Barberis, novice master. Both names followed immediately those of the members of the Superior Chapter, separated from them by a wider space. Because of the growing importance of church services, a simple "sacristy prefect" (although this title did continue) no longer sufficed. There was need of someone to be in charge of the services. The office ceased to

²⁴Cf. Ezek. 3, 8. [Editor]

exist when Father Bonetti was elected councilor of the Superior Chapter toward the end of 1880.

The biblical inscription to which Don Bosco alluded²⁵ was most probably one of those placed on the catafalques used at several funeral Masses for Pius IX who was certainly not one to quake before his enemies. This was true of him to the very end of his life, when he confronted the Czar of Russia over Poland and the Iron Chancellor [of Germany] over the latter's religious persecution. It was not surprising, however, that journalists saw in this quotation a reference to Italy's current situation.

The papal audience Don Bosco refers to fell through. We can reconstruct what happened by making use of letters written by Father Berto to Father Rua. On Tuesday, March 5, Cardinal Oreglia took Don Bosco with him to an audience with Pope Leo XIII. Toward noon Don Bosco and his secretary joined a group of gentlemen waiting outside the suite of the secretary of state. Leo XIII came from the papal chambers and, on seeing Don Bosco, asked: "Do you live in Rome?"

"No, Your Holiness," Don Bosco replied. "I reside in Turin. I am here for a time only, and would like to have a brief private audience."

"Very well. Come at the Angelus time this evening."

Don Bosco returned to the Pope's antechamber that evening toward six, but Monsignor Cataldi, who was still acting as chamberlain, said to him, "His Holiness told me that, if you came, I should inform you that he was too busy this evening and that you should return at eleven in the morning."

At that very moment the Pope was meeting with the archbishop of Turin, who was with him from five-thirty to seven. Shortly before the archbishop's arrival, two cardinals had also had a private audience.

Don Bosco returned on the morning of March 6 at eleven o'clock. Just that morning the Pope had reappointed Monsignor Macchi to his office. He walked up to Don Bosco and somewhat haughtily told him: "His Holiness has asked me to inform you that he has too many visitors this morning and cannot see you. I will

²⁵"He made my forehead harder than theirs." God assured the prophet of courage to resist insolent sinners and reproach them for their sins. [Author]

send you word when he can, perhaps this evening or tomorrow evening. Where are you staying?"

"At Torre de' Specchi."

Cardinal Oreglia knew that the Pope wanted to see Don Bosco and so he went to speak to Monsignor Macchi about it, but the latter made excuses and promises, and that was all. Cardinal Oreglia, then, who had business in the Vatican, took Don Bosco along as his secretary since it was customary for cardinals to be accompanied by a priest on such visits. Just before being ushered in the papal chamber, the cardinal assured Don Bosco that he himself would ask the Pope to grant him a private audience. Deferring to propriety we omit the dialogue which ensued when Monsignor Macchi found Don Bosco in the waiting room. Since Leo XIII was holding a public audience right after his meeting with Cardinal Oreglia, he could not talk to Don Bosco right then. The cardinal, hearing what had happened in the meantime, was upset and reproved Monsignor Macchi for his attitude, warning him of dire consequences if he continued to show such hostility toward Don Bosco. It was only on March 16, as we have already narrated,²⁶ that Don Bosco was finally able to obtain his first private audience with Leo XIII.

36. *To Count Cays*

Count Cays became editor of *Letture Cattoliche* and other religious publications after the death of Father [Caesar] Chiala. He also edited other religious works. At this time he was working on *Fabiola*, published for the first time by the Oratory Press in 1878. This is the novel for which Don Bosco offers advice in the following letter:

Rome, March 14, 1878

My dear Count,

My absence from Turin already seems too long. I hope I can leave Rome within a few days. I know that you have a lot to do. I also know that God has many ways of rewarding us, especially since our work is for His greater glory.

As regards the third century novel, let us make sure that it contains nothing that may cause moral harm to the tender, impressionable minds of

²⁶See pp. 384-389. [Editor]

the young or that smacks of contemporary politics. I leave it to your wise judgment.

It is true that you shall have to delay somewhat your priestly ordination, but I believe that by Pentecost you will be a priest.

Solutions to our problems are turning up that are both to our advantage, and, I believe, to God's greater glory. Oh, my dear Count, how many souls there are to be saved in Europe and in South America!

I am aware of the vast work which Divine Providence is preparing for us, but I earnestly urge you to look after your health very carefully. Whatever you do for yourself in that regard I shall consider as done for me.

Please give my regards to our teachers Morganti, Marchisio, Vacchina, and Luca, as well as our friend, Attorney Michael Rossi. I would be happy if you could spend some time with him.

I commend my poor soul to the boundless charity of your prayers, as I wish you health and holiness. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

37. To Father John Bonetti

This letter is not dated, but it is evident from the first line that it was written on March 17.

My dear Friend,

Yesterday I had a long, interesting and cordial private audience with the Holy Father. He wants to become a Salesian cooperator. Gastini²⁷ should make out a certificate for him. I will write you the rest. He is bestowing on our boys a very special blessing, saying, "Tell them to be sturdy in the faith and practice it undauntedly." I'll tell you the rest for the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Our affairs are progressing little by little. Unless something new comes up to prevent me, I hope to be in Sampierdarena on the day I indicated. Call on Mrs. Lorenzina Mazzè, Madame Camp, Clara Mandillo and M . . .²⁸ and tell them that I asked the Holy Father for a special blessing for them; now he has become a Salesian and he blesses them with all his heart.

[No signature]

²⁷Master bookbinder. [Author]

²⁸Don Bosco's handwriting is illegible here and a little above. [Author]

The same day Don Bosco sent this short note to Father John Baptist Rinaldi at Albany:

I, the undersigned, declare that Father John Rinaldi belongs to the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales and respectfully request that he be permitted to celebrate Holy Mass for his private devotion. Rome, March 17, 36 Torre de' Specchi. Fr. John Bosco.

The next day he sent the following telegram to Countess Corsi: "Most cordial congratulations. Holy Father sends blessings to whole family."

38. *To Peter Radicati*

The son of Count Radicati, he was a student in our lyceum at Alassio and wanted to become a Salesian. In the autumn he donned the clerical habit with his brother Charles.

Turin, May 24, 1878

My dear Peter Radicati,

I read your letter with great pleasure. I gladly accept you among my Salesian sons. You will need knowledge and virtue, and you will acquire both with God's help. In due course you may even become a missionary, but we will decide that together.

God bless you, my dear son, and pray for me who will always be,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

39. *To the Cleric Thomas Pentore*

He was one of the first Salesians Don Bosco sent to Marseilles but he did not remain there very long, since the directory for the 1879-80 school year lists him at Alassio. He became an eloquent preacher.

Turin, August 15, 1878

My dear Pentore,

Remember to write *vadano* with an "a," not *vadino* with an "i."

I know that you are good-hearted and care a lot for Don Bosco; that's why I hesitated to ask you to go to Marseille. But now that our Congregation is spreading all over the world, Marseille becomes just a

corner of it. I cannot pay you a visit soon, but I hope that we will be able to talk together during the spiritual retreat.

Give Bianchi a pat on the back for me, say hello to Nasi, and greet for me Father Bologna and also the assistant priest at St. Joseph's, if he has already returned there.

As for yourself, try to keep cheerful. Do not omit the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, examining what you should add, correct and eliminate in order to be a good soldier of Christ.

God bless you, my dear Pentore. Pray for me who will always be,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

40. To the Cleric Charles Baratta

Shy by nature, he felt somewhat lost at Lucca and gave no inkling of the outstanding Salesian he would become. He was eminently both learned and pious.

Turin, August 4, 1878

My dear Baratta,

You are being tested, but with God's help all will go well. Write and tell your mother that you are at Lucca because it is a healthy spot and you can do better work there in studies and music. You would only upset things by going back home. Tell your mother you are praying for her and will go home another time. I'll write to her in the same terms. So, courage, my dear Baratta. One way or another, God willing, I want to put you safely on the way to heaven.

Tell Father Marengo²⁹ that the priest I had promised him became ill, but I will be arriving this week with somebody else.

My warm regards to my friend Father Cappellano and to all our friends and benefactors.

Love me in Christ, and be assured that I am always,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

41. To Father Joachim Berto

Sampierdarena, September 19, 1878

My dear Father Berto,

1. If you have any relics of Pius IX, send me some.

²⁹Father John Marengo was the director of the house. [Editor]

2. Find the papers I mailed to the Holy Father about opening a house in Rome, and send them to me along with the letter of the cardinal vicar to the Duchess of Galliera.³⁰

3. Take special care of any novices who may be at the Oratory in Turin.

4. If Father Bologna is still there, tell him to stop by here with the papers I have requested.

5. Keep watch that no alien hand destroys the young bean plants sprouting up.

God bless you. Pray for me who will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The “young bean plants sprouting up” were both new boys and students returning from vacation who belonged to the so-called “Garden Club” started by Father Berto at Don Bosco’s request to water the potted flowers and bean plants on Don Bosco’s balcony. They were there to provide shade and eliminate unpleasant summer odors.

42. To the Cleric Louis Cartier

He donned the clerical habit at a somewhat older age and took his first steps in a holy and laborious life which he later continued at Nice for a long time.

Turin, November 1, 1878

My dear Cartier,

Your letter was a delight. I too regret that we missed each other before you left for France. But I am glad to know that you like it. I’ll keep you in my heart and pray for you.

I am pleased with the way you are conducting yourself; keep it up and write to me often. Remember, though, that here on earth we are really working for heaven. There we shall be properly rewarded for all our labors. Faithfully observe our rules and carry on. Greetings to all my dear confreres. Tell Father Porani to play a serenade for me. God bless you all!

Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. There are no obstacles to your being admitted to vows.

³⁰See pp. 504f. [Editor]

43. *To Father John Baptist Francesia*

He was director of the boarding school at Varazze. The touching opening words of the letter must be Don Bosco's response to Father Francesia's expressions of sympathy for the trials that were then distressingly testing Don Bosco's patience.

Rome, January 13, 1878

My dear Father Francesia,

The trials besetting us teach us how to sift the gold from the dross. We are continually being tested, but God's help is never lacking. Let us hope we will not become unworthy of it in the days to come.

You would do well to have a meeting with whatever cooperators happen to be at Varazze on the feast of St. Francis de Sales. Hold a conference to boost our undertakings.

The business which brought me to Rome is moving along favorably, but rather slowly. Patience! As soon as I can, I will let you know when I can be expected at Sampierdarena and Varazze.

Please give my most heartfelt regards to all of our confreres and pupils. Tell everyone that the Pope sends them a special blessing. I'd like you to choose a day for a special treat for all. In return, I ask that all receive Holy Communion that morning for my intentions. I need it very badly.

Goodbye, my dear Father Francesia. Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I met Pardini and Pretruccio. They send their regards.

44. *To Father Francis Dalmazzo*

He was director of our Valsalice College. The "general merriment" referred to in the postscript was due to Don Bosco's presence among his sons at Albano Laziale. Forgetting himself and his own troubles, he entertained them all—so reported Father Varvello who was present—with his delightful conversation and especially with his homespun tales of Cuneo told in his own unique way.

Albano, January 23, 1878

Dear Father Dalmazzo,

I thank you for your good wishes and those of your pupils and mine. I

am sorry I can't send each one a long personal letter. Do what you can to take my place. Later I hope that I'll be able to act for myself.

Cardinal Oreglia sends his greetings to the entire Valsalice family, especially to his nephews, Pius, Joseph, etc.

The Holy Father's health is improving, and he sends a special cordial blessing. I will pray for all of you. Receive Holy Communion for me. God bless us all. Tell the community everything else for me. Amen.

Greetings from Father Berto and the Sigismondis.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I am in Albano. Everybody is fine. There is general merriment. Best wishes from all.

45. To Father Joseph Lazzero

He was acting director of the Oratory. Notwithstanding all the things he had to do in Rome, Don Bosco kept minutely informed about what went on at Valdocco.

Rome, March 24, 1878

My dear Father Lazzero,

In my name please thank Ortiglia and the St. Joseph Sodality for their prayers and for the warm remembrance they keep of one who loves them sincerely in Jesus Christ. When I return to Turin I will show my satisfaction in deeds.

In this world there are no roses without thorns. The scandals caused by G. . . do require atonement; proceed as you indicated. Tell Buzzetti that as head of the workshops he should hire a good bookbinder and let G. . . go, but it would be wiser to do this without bringing me into it. Let Buzzetti handle the whole matter. Intervene as the final responsible superior only if you have to.

I have so many interesting things to tell our dear boys. Give them my greetings and thank them for all their prayers for me. The Pope sends them his blessing, and I remember them each day at holy Mass. I will soon be back among them.

Tell Father Rua that, God willing, I will be at Sampierdarena Tuesday night, unless something turns up to disrupt my plans.

Tell Pelazza that I was pleased with his letter; tell him also to keep cheerful. Give my regards to Barale, Buzzetti, Ferrari, and Ghiglione. See only Father Rua about Ghiglione and admit him to our dining room. Ask V. . . if he would like to join us at table, but only if he intends to become an

aspirant. I would regret having him to share our food one day and see him leave the next. Whatever you decide with Father Rua will be fine with me.

Tell Father Rua also to arrange for Count Cays, Bonora, and Amerio to make their spiritual retreat at Borgo San Martino, but he should contact the bishop of Casale and request him to honor us by ordaining a few candidates from Borgo San Martino on Holy Saturday. They are to be considered as residents of that house because I am assigning them there to forestall problems.

God bless us all.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

46. To Father Joseph Lazzero

Don Bosco wrote this letter from Crabbia, of the township of Petenasco on Lake Orta in the province of Novara. He had gone to visit the Fortis family who usually took their vacations there.

Crabbia, August 28, 1878

My dear Father Lazzero,

I enclose a letter to be hand-delivered to the prefect of Turin. Put it in an envelope and seal it with wax. Address it as follows:

To the Honorable Commendatore Minghelli Vaini,
Prefect of the City and Province of Turin.

Have it delivered by a reliable person who should wait a while for a possible reply.

Be mindful of these two very important matters:

1. Whenever an applicant—especially a priest or a teacher—comes to the Oratory in order to join our Congregation, never leave him idle, but always find something for him to do.

2. See to it that at least the priests are assigned a private room.

I hope to be in Turin the day after tomorrow around 7:25 P.M.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

47. To Father John Baptist Francesia

Usually it was Father Rua's job to deal with creditors, but while the latter was in Paris, Don Bosco got the brunt of their attacks.

Turin, November 8, 1878

My dear Father Francesia,

Let's see how influential you can be. Father Rua went to Paris and left me literally no money and a pile of urgent debts. Scrape up all the money you can. Take out a loan if you have to, and by Monday or Tuesday bring me all you have—but no less than twenty thousand lire.

Note that if you bring me a good sum, we will throw a dinner with a few of our friends. Yes, we will. We can also talk things over.

God bless you, my dear Father Francesia. Greet everyone for me, and pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

48. *To Father Nicholas Cibrario*

He was director of the house at Vallecrosia and was having a hard time in trying to purchase land for a church and school.

Turin, November 8, 1878

My dear Father Cibrario,

I am sending the cleric Allavena to you. He has been drafted for military service, but he hopes to be discharged after his physical examination. See to it that everything works out. Get me some information on the negotiations with the Migones. Have the owners come back? Should I write them a letter? How about the Cabagni transaction? What is your cash situation? Will the land you have been trying to acquire be sufficient?

Affectionate greetings to you and all. Pray for me, who will always be to you and them,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

49. *To Father John Baptist Francesia*

After visiting the school at Varazze, Don Bosco sent the director a list of things to be done, especially concerning the coadjutor brothers. [The letter bears only the date 1878.]

Things To Be Done

1. Every Thursday or some other day, after the visit to the Blessed

Sacrament or later, the prefect should give a brief conference, if not to all the Salesians, at least to the coadjutors.

2. It is said that you have too many coadjutors; if so, some could be sent elsewhere.

3. Cantù³¹ seems to be too dictatorial or at least too severe. Besides he eats and drinks whenever he wants and even goes into the wine cellar with others. It is also said that he gets better room service than the director himself. See to it that he takes his meals with the confreres.

4. All the coadjutors, whether triennially or professionally professed, should be given equal treatment. If possible, they should have the same fare as the priests, as is the practice of the Jesuits, Oblates, Franciscans, etc.

5. Hear the monthly manifestation, especially of the coadjutors.

6. There must be but one key for the wine cellar.

7. At least once a week the director should personally—or through someone else who will report to him—drop into the study hall, the school offices, the kitchen, pantry, and wine cellar.

8. Find a way of making confession easily available to the students.

50. To Father Joseph Lazzero

Among Don Bosco's manuscripts we found these memos of things to be done, jotted down at various times for the superiors who were responsible for the administration of the Oratory.

A

1. When all the altar boys are serving at Mass in a body, they should not leave the sanctuary until all the community prayers are finished.

2. A well-studied plan to economize on the use of gas could save as much as a third of our fuel costs.

3. Let's try to do away with the practice introduced some time back of ringing the bell at the *Domine, non sum dignus* ["Lord, I am not worthy"] of the Mass.

B

Let Father Lazzero remember the following for his next conference:

1. After night prayers absolute silence is to be observed until breakfast.

2. Everyone should retire after night prayers.

3. All those in authority—prefect, director, teachers, assistants, catechists, and so on—are expected to have a copy of their respective regulations and observe them diligently.

³¹John Cantù, a coadjutor brother, had made his triennial vows, but did not renew them. [Author]

C

1. Spiritual readings should not be left out, but postponed [when necessary].
2. Silence should be observed from after night prayers to the prayers after Mass the next morning.
3. Boys are not to be allowed in the playground during the hours of school, study, church services, or morning rising.
4. Silence is to be kept while going between study hall and church.
5. Prayers and hymns should not be rushed.

D

Father Lazzero should find a way to enforce the old regulation forbidding the keeping of wine or other such drinks in one's room.

As regards special diets, if one claims to be sick, he should either be sent to the infirmary or be asked to return home. This directive is for pupils, not for confreres.

51. To Father Thaddeus Remotti

For many years he had been and still was a hard-working assistant pastor in the parish of St. John the Evangelist at "La Boca" [in Buenos Aires]. He is still living [1931].³²

Rome, January 12, 1878

My dear Father Remotti,

I was happy to receive your newsy letter and your best wishes. May God grant you the same in greater abundance besides good health, wisdom, and holiness to enable you to do the work of ten people until the middle of the next century. I know that you have a lot to do, but just do what you can.

All beginnings are hard, as we well know. However, we can make our own St. Paul's words: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."

Remember me to Gioia, Scavini and the other confreres. I would be happy to hear from Scavini. Tell Gioia that I do care for him and pray for him. I will answer him very soon.

Give my regards also to our dear pupils in the hospice, and, most of all, to those who have joined us or intend to join us as Salesians. I ask for prayers from everyone. You too pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

³²He died in Uribellarea, Argentina in 1932 at the age of 78. [Editor]

52. *To N.N.*

We publish this confidential letter with the consent of the addressee, but we withhold his name.

Rome, January 12, 1878

My dear D. . . ,

God is allowing you to be put to a grievous test, but you will profit greatly from it. Prayer overcomes everything. Work hard, be temperate as regards food and drink, especially in the evening, do not take a nap during the day, and never rest more than seven hours at night.

Meet the evil at the outset. As soon as you feel yourself tempted, start working; if it is nighttime, start praying, and keep it up until you fall asleep. Put these suggestions into practice; I will remember you at holy Mass, and God will do the rest. Take courage, my dear . . . , hope in God, and carry on without worrying.

Pray for me who will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

53. *To Father Thaddeus Remotti*

Turin, August 7, 1878

Dear Father Remotti,

I received your letters with pleasure and in good time. Cheer up. God wants sacrifices from you, but He also holds in readiness your reward, which will be great. Be very patient. Put up with the faults of others that they may bear with yours. Here we always care a lot for you and pray for you. God bless you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

54. *To Father Joseph Vespignani*

Prefect at Our Lady of Mercy Church and later in our Almagro Hospice in Buenos Aires, he was also in charge of the novices. Don Bosco usually addressed his Salesians with the familiar “tu” form even after they had become bishops. However, he made exceptions for members like Count Cays who had entered the Congregation as adults. He always addressed him in the polite third person form. Father Vespignani, realizing that he too was being thus formally addressed, asked Don Bosco to use the familiar form, and Don

Bosco replied, "I will do so when you become better." Father Vespignani had to wait until 1880 for this.

Turin, August 12, 1878

My dear Father Vespignani,

I realize that you are in fairly good health because you have a strong constitution. I know too that you work a lot. But you must slow down. To get more done, work less, or, at least, no more than your strength permits.

Please, send me detailed news of the hospice, the novice, the novitiate, the course of study, and so on.

Your brother Ernest³³ is doing well and gives great promise. He wants to become a full-fledged Salesian as soon as possible. He would like to visit you.

Give my warmest regards to Father Milanese, to whom I will write very soon. God bless you, your spiritual sons and confreres. Help us fight the Lord's battles on earth so that we can be worthy of a crown in heaven.

Father Nenci is here with us.³⁴ His health is much better and he is anxious to go to Patagonia.

May God's blessing be with us. Pray for

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

55. To Father Michael Fassio

He was the catechist in the Colegio Pio at Villa Colón. Father Augustine Mazzarello, whom Don Bosco mentions, was the prefect.

1878

My dear Father Fassio,

Your letter pleased me a lot. I rejoice for your good health and your good will. God sustain you in them! I pray for you every day. Tell Graziano (who is also very dear to me) that I do not forget him at Mass. I will send him a letter with the next departure of missionaries.

Join forces with Father Mazzarello in kindling a huge fire of charity whose flames may set ablaze the whole school and its environs.

Have no doubts about my affection for you and for all my dear sons in

³³Father Ernest Vespignani died in Buenos Aires [in 1925]. He was highly reputed as an excellent architect. [Author]

³⁴A priest of Lugo who came to join the Salesians. Cf. Vespignani, *Un Anno alla Scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, p. 44. [Author]

South America. As regards your matters of conscience, go on exactly as you wrote to me. Calm comes after the storm.

God bless you. Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

56. To Father James Costamagna

He was director of the Our Lady of Mercy Church in Buenos Aires.

Turin, December 31, 1878

My dear Father James Costamagna,

Your letters have been a delight. Your brother was here and gave me good news about your family. Your young nephew is here with us at the Oratory and is behaving very well. He wants to become a Salesian and join his uncle in South America.

Work hard to train many holy novices for me. Give my regards to all our friends and confreres. Pray for me.

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. When are we going to Patagonia?

57. To Father Francis Bodrato

He was the first provincial of the Salesians in America and director of the St. Charles Hospice in Almagro.

Turin, December 31, 1878

My dear Father Francis Bodrato,

Your letter and those of my dear sons in Buenos Aires reached me in good time. I will try to send a word or two to each one. Then you can distribute my letters through the confreres or through the sisters.

Let us praise the Lord who continues to bless us in such a tangible way.

Here are a few special things I want you to remember:

1. Be ready for any sacrifice to maintain unity and charity with your confreres.
2. Whenever you have to correct or counsel someone, never do it in public, but always between the two of you alone.
3. As soon as you have corrected someone, forget the fault and treat him with the same kindness as before.

This is the last will and testament of your friend and father, Don Bosco. Other news you will have from our dear confreres who are ready to join in your efforts.

Please give my warmest regards to the boys in the hospice. Tell them that I love them in Christ and bless them.

God bless you and your work. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Humble respects and best wishes to Dr. Caranza and to the prior of Our Lady of Mercy Church.

58. To Father Michael Fassio

Turin, December 31, 1878

My dear Father Michael Fassio,

You have certainly received my letter by now, so I only add a few words to tell you how pleased I am with you. I have the warmest affection for you in Christ, and I commend you to Him each day in my prayers.

Sanctify others by sanctifying yourself. Pray for me who will always be,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

59. To Father Thaddeus Remotti

Turin, December 31, 1878

My dear Father Thaddeus Remotti,

I like the frankness with which you have several times written to me. Keep writing that way. But I want you to remember a few basic points which can serve as my testament to you.

1. We must put up with the faults of others even when they hurt us.
2. We must cover up the shortcomings of others and not poke fun at them, if this should offend them.
3. Work, but work for the love of Jesus. Put up with everything rather than break the bonds of charity. "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." [Gal. 6, 2]

God bless you, my dear Father Remotti. Farewell in this world, if such is God's will. A place in heaven is being prepared for us and God's mercy will grant it to us.

Pray for me who now and always am,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

In all of his many letters appealing for alms or thanking people for their charity, Don Bosco included an almost obligatory phrase of assurance that he, all his Salesians, and all his boys were praying for their benefactors. Clearly he was convinced that those prayers were of real benefit and value to his benefactors, a reward for their generosity in the past and an encouragement for future help. In all this he was drawing upon the purest sources of Christianity. When St. Paul asked the Corinthians to be generous to their needier brethren, he gave as one reason the prayers that the recipients would offer for their benefactors: "They pray for you longingly." [2 Cor. 9, 14]

Some of Don Bosco's other reflections during this period can be reconstructed from a number of fragmented reports of conversations.

8. FRAGMENTS OF CONVERSATIONS

Don Bosco was always firmly opposed to engaging in polemics in the press. We have already seen how he urged Father Bonetti to "stop fighting"³⁵ in the *Salesian Bulletin*. Speaking with him and with Father Barberis after dinner on May 18, he substantially told Father Bonetti,

You think that you accomplish something by blowing off steam. You say that it is sometimes necessary to speak one's mind and defend oneself from harassment. But what does one really accomplish by this? Good people are more easily impressed by plain statements than by vehement assertions. You don't convince readers who are not well acquainted with what you are talking about and instead open yourself to attack by people who thrive on invectives. They only too gladly latch on to an imprudent word, an ambiguous phrase, or an exaggeration to vex us all the more.

But what really matters is that we must realize that our times are evil. The government is looking for pretexts to hunt down religious orders. In nearly all cases they have found such pretexts and have made a clean sweep of their houses. Up to now they have left us in peace. Generally speaking, don't think it's because they like us. The reason is that we make it a point of avoiding offense, walking between the raindrops as it were, so as not to get wet. They leave us alone also because we have never reacted against even those who were beginning to bother us, and we have always

³⁵See p. 670. [Editor]

used the greatest caution and prudence in both speaking and writing. I was on all occasions fully aware of all that was going on around me and of attempts being made to trap me, but I never allowed a line to be printed that might possibly compromise us.

We must continue to follow the same policy. Our *Bulletin* already enjoys a very vast field of action in publicizing the good works we have undertaken; there is really no need to get involved in thorny problems. In this way we will peacefully spread our ideas, accomplish great good and continue to move forward. But if you go spoiling for a fight, tomorrow you will find someone all too willing to take up the quarrel, rebutting a statement of yours with an article. The next day some other journalist, angered by your intemperate expressions, will write a ton of evil against us. Then a government official, taking exception at some hasty and ill-taken expression, will make a lot of noise about it and report the matter to higher authorities. Immediately everyone will be glaring at us, will sound the alarm and put our backs to the wall. We shall then be unable to do anything and unnecessarily expose ourselves to harassment.

Take, for instance, *Letture Cattoliche*. How much good it has done! Perhaps no other periodical has been published for as long without running into grave problems and drawing unfavorable attention. Many periodicals have died out, but *Letture Cattoliche* has gone on without hindrance. To achieve this I have often had to contend with writers who at all costs wanted us to publish their pamphlets in our *Letture Cattoliche*. I even had problems with ecclesiastical authorities who wanted me to include political topics. I always resisted this and, so far, things have worked out well. Only once there was minor trouble when the bishop of Ivrea, of happy memory, ordered me to print a pamphlet. I can't even remember its title, but the trouble was short-lived. Believe me: if you really want us to do good and keep on doing it, let us stick to the truths [of our faith], be factual and shun polemics.

The troublesome issue was that of January 1854, in the second year of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled *Il Catechismo Cattolico sulle rivoluzioni* [The Catholic Catechism on Revolution]. It was not a new publication, just a reprint of an anonymous work which had already gone through four editions. The order to reprint it came from Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea, who had then had a major position in the administration of *Letture Cattoliche*.³⁶ Don Bosco, knowing how some people felt, foresaw that the resulting polemic

³⁶For details on this matter see Vol. VII, pp. 95ff, 378ff; Vol. VIII, pp. 177f. [Editor]

would raise many hackles. He hoped to avoid stirring up a hornet's nest, but he had to bow to the bishop's authority. Very soon all the consequences he had foreseen came about; he was called to task by the civil authorities, reprimanded, and embarrassed in many ways. It was only owing to his great prudence that the consequences were not worse.

Let us now jump from May to November, for which we have notes of three conversations. The first centered on the fourth diocesan synod which had ended the day before. Present were some priests in key positions at the Oratory. The main complaint was that the archbishop had been too hard on his priests; instead of encouraging them in their apostolic work, he had heaped reproaches upon them, as if they were to blame for the bad state of the diocese. The upshot of the conversation was that a word of encouragement, a show of confidence, an acknowledgement that the clergy was doing a fine job even though more needed to be done, would have kindled them with enthusiasm, zeal, and stronger motivation. Instead, the archbishop's talk had been one long reprimand.

After these remarks, Don Bosco arose.

"Come, all you scholars and moral theologians," he said, "here we have a moral question to resolve. Has this discussion of ours been sinful? Or can we say that our comments have arisen from our light-mindedness or deficiencies which we now should correct?"

At first nobody said a word; then everyone chuckled. Each explained why he thought the discussion legitimate. One priest remained pensive and then remarked, "There was something wrong with it: idle words."

Don Bosco replied: "If no malice or ill will was intended, we cannot speak even of a venial sin, nor can we say that those were idle words. We are in the midst of grave difficulties; we are like people in frail boats among reefs, constantly on guard lest we dash against them. . . . We have to defend ourselves, and so we must be on the lookout for dangers, study the lay of the land, take stock of the weapons with which we are being attacked. . . ."

Don Bosco's second conversation dealt with various aspects of the internal regimen of the Congregation. After dinner he remarked to those around him that it was imperative to forge even tighter bonds between the Oratory and the individual houses.

I fear—he said—that these ties may weaken. So long as there will be directors who were personally trained by Don Bosco, things will go well. Now, however, we are beginning to appoint directors who have spent little time with Don Bosco and there is danger that cordial relations between confreres in different houses will be lessened. We really need to free the superior chapter of details in running the Oratory so that it can actively look after all the houses. Each chapter member should have as many secretaries as he needs to handle the mail in a careful and timely fashion. Our present work overload, joined to our limited personnel, makes it impossible to answer promptly the correspondence from our schools. This only makes for inefficiency and coldness. Then it will also be necessary to appoint official visitors for each house to check out details and take appropriate measures. Unless we keep in touch personally and by mail, divisions will in time set in. We have been running our affairs so loosely up to now that, if we keep it up, any school director who might wish to break away could probably succeed. Yet to date this has not happened because of the affection everybody has for Don Bosco.

A burning question at that time was the problem of teacher certification. In the next volume we shall see the harassment caused by school authorities because of the lack of certified teachers. It started this year [1878]. The tongue always returns to the aching tooth: the conversation drifted to this topic and, seemingly, dwelt upon it at length. Our notes touch only upon some fragments of the conversation.

So far—Don Bosco commented—our schools have managed to function fairly smoothly. We abided by the law as much as possible and somehow we got by. But now open war has been declared. They would like to see all schools operated by dioceses and religious orders closed down. They are becoming more and more maliciously critical of us. We must forestall them. Then, too, new schools will have to be opened every year, and how will we manage without certified teachers? Until now there was the leeway of unscheduled examinations for those who sought to be certified as secondary school teachers, but this is being done away with. Fortunately we do have men attending the university: Fathers Bertello, Bordone, Cinzano, Caesar Cagliero, Piccono, the cleric Besso Gallo, and others. A few more are preparing to register next year. Thus we can hope to get by the problem. Truly we must be alert and take counter-measures if we are not to lose all we have.

He had hardly said these words when Father Deppert arrived

from La Spezia stating that Don Bosco was awaited there to decide upon an addition to be made to that house. He explained that the people there complained that Don Bosco gave little thought to their house, almost as if it were not his own; even the school's friends felt disheartened because he seemed to have so little concern for a real need.

As regards La Spezia—Don Bosco replied—I intend to proceed slowly and cautiously. I'd rather motivate others than do things myself. Still, had the director only sent me the report I requested eight months ago while I was in Rome, we might have been able to put up a larger building with the aid of the Holy Father and of some cardinals.

Don Bosco then sketched out a report for Father Rocca to help him draw up a petition to the Holy Father.³⁷

The third conversation [we are recording] took place on November 27. Don Bosco was speaking with Father Barberis alone, who had gone up to his room at about five that afternoon; together they walked in the hallway for some ninety minutes, talking about office business, Oratory matters, the progress of the Congregation, and personal confidences.

Your two weekly talks to the novices—Don Bosco began—are part of your duties, but once a month ask Father Cagliero and Father Bonetti to replace you. This way you will have a break and the other superiors will have a chance to speak to the novices, who will come to know them. This will also help strengthen the bonds between the older and younger confreres. The main reason, however, is that certain things need to be repeated a hundred times. If the same speaker does that, boredom sets in. Another speaker, instead, can treat the matter somewhat differently, with fresh examples, comparisons, and so on. With a new approach, truth is more pleasantly accepted in one's heart. Also, certain things have to be said, but not by you. Since it is quite advisable that you assign the topic to them, let them take care also of that.

Don Bosco then made a very important general observation:

Our main endeavor—he stated—is precisely to know how to get others to do the work. When we find someone willing to take on certain tasks, and

³⁷See pp. 517f. [Editor]

he does them gladly and well, our burden is lightened by that much. If one cannot do the task, we look for someone else. In the Oratory's early days, Don Bosco's principal endeavor was to find people and funds to help him.

At that point Don Bosco came down to some specifics:

Teach our novices how to write letters properly—he told him. It is unbelievable how many educated persons and even priests fail in this. For us it is an extremely important matter. People will often appraise not just an individual but an entire school, even our whole Congregation, by a letter written by a confrere. One of our schools lost many pupils because of the prefect's clumsy letters. So I want all the novices to write me a letter during the coming novena of the Immaculate Conception, but tell them I want it written in perfect accordance with the rules of letter writing. I will give a prize for the two best letters. They may write on any topic of their choice: narrate an incident in their lives or wish me a happy feast or say anything at all, but they must write the best way they can. The appendix to our school regulations may help them. Indeed, explain them yourself. This way we will achieve our objective.

The next point of discussion was whether a cleric who was doing very well at the Oratory should be transferred to another school where someone in a similar situation was not doing well. Don Bosco commented: "Let's not spoil one good situation to straighten out another." Then the conversation veered to the good being achieved within the Oratory and within the whole Congregation.

Father Cagliero was right yesterday—Don Bosco remarked. Indeed, how many boys we have who can easily measure up to St. Aloysius. How many have kept their baptismal innocence and continue to keep it at the Oratory, even though they have now come into their very critical years. Others—and they are the majority—have repeatedly been overcome by the devil, but, once they got here, they have changed their lives. For them it is almost like entering into another environment: they forgot all their former bad habits, and their lives, year after year, are such that we can say they have not committed a single deliberate venial sin. This must be our consolation; this is what has always motivated me to spread our work. It really does seem that wherever our Congregation sinks its roots, God's grace abounds.

A recent meeting with Bishop [Peter] Ferrè of Casale, a scholarly and keen observer, had prompted these comments. The

bishop, asking himself why the Salesian Congregation was developing so rapidly and why Salesian schools were doing so well, gave some distinguished persons two reasons for this success. Don Bosco believed they were true and mentioned them that day to Father Barberis.

Don Bosco has two main secrets, the key to all the good accomplished by his sons—Bishop Ferrè had said. First, he so imbues his boys with piety that they become almost inebriated by it. The very atmosphere about them, the very air they breathe, is charged with religious practices. The youngsters are so touched by piety that they no longer dare try anything wrong even if they wish to. The means of doing evil are no longer present. They would have to go head-on against the current in order to become bad. Neglecting any of their practices of piety would make them feel like fish out of water. Hence they are very docile; they act out of conscience and conviction; rebellion becomes unthinkable. Everything moves along well as if by an irresistible force. But how does Don Bosco manage to keep so many clerics and young priests working in a most dangerous ministry without falling when they themselves are at a very critical age? This is where Don Bosco's second secret comes in. He loads them down with so much work, so many cares and responsibilities, that they have no time to think of anything else. No one can be attracted to evil if he scarcely has time to breathe! At Borgo San Martino there are two young clerics who seem to be good for nothing. Yet, they attend to their own studies, prepare for examinations, teach classes, and supervise the boys. How can their morality be anything but sound when they work so hard?

After disclosing the bishop's remarks, Don Bosco commented:

I think he stated two beautiful, sound truths. As for practices of piety, we try not to overburden the boys or exhaust them. We make these practices like the very air they breathe, neither weighing upon them nor wearing them down. At the same time we shoulder the heavy burden, and we are inundated by work. And we work hard—yes, indeed, especially this year. How many houses have we opened this year, Father Barberis? Count them.

Father Barberis added them up, including the houses of the sisters, singling them out by kind. "Twenty houses have been opened in the course of this year alone in Italy," he said, "at La Spezia, Lucca, Montefiascone, Quargento, Lu, Chieri, Nizza

Monferrato, and Este. In France we have the hospice and a novitiate in Marseille, a hospice and school at La Navarre, and our sisters run a school for girls. Then, in South America, we have the sisters at Villa Colón and our hospice at Montevideo and at Las Piedras; at Buenos Aires we have St. Charles Church, St. Charles Hospice, the sisters at La Boca, and a parish at Ramallo.”

It is no effort to count them up—Don Bosco replied—but they represent an astounding achievement. And this does not include houses under negotiation which will be opened later, not to speak of those endless, complicated, wearisome negotiations that almost drove us crazy, only to fall through at the end. It is God’s assistance that triumphs. How grand it stands out for those who can discern its mysterious ways. The virtue of our boys and the growth of our Congregation are its effects. But they are the exterior effects; the interior effects far surpass them.

At this point Don Bosco, taking into his confidence Father Barberis, whose simplicity he loved, turned to more intimate matters.

If only Don Bosco could speak—he exclaimed. For instance, we are sure to succeed in everything we undertake. People sometimes remark that Don Bosco sends a mere lad to run a school, and common sense says that the school will never prosper or run properly under an individual whose limitations and deficiencies are quite known. They also criticize Don Bosco for this. Still, he goes on tranquilly, sure of his step, and never yet have we had to turn back. . . .

Besides, who can see the mysterious work going on in souls? Somebody comes to confessions and tells his sins.

“Anything else?” I ask.

“No, nothing else.”

“How about such and such a thing you did in these particular circumstances?”

“You’re right, and I’ve never dared confess it.”

Someone else comes and, after a string of sins, says: “That’s all!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! I have nothing else.”

“Then I cannot give you absolution.”

At times this kind of penitent may walk out, go to another confessor and continue to conceal his sin. Finally, moved by remorse, he comes back, and, falling at my feet, says: “Don Bosco, I am a hopeless sacrilegious sinner. I have never made a good confession. But now I want to change my

life and will confess everything. I thank God, who in His mercy has saved me!"

Sometimes these penitents are young adults or well-educated students; occasionally it may even be a cleric about to receive major orders. These are truly extraordinary graces. That's why we can go forward unhesitatingly.

And what about the remarkable growth of our Congregation? One can say that everybody opposes us and that we have to fight them all. The government is entirely against us; even some religious orders look askance at us as they see themselves declining while we continue to grow. We are hampered by contrary winds coming from within chanceries, families, society at large. Unless God willed it, we would never be able to do all we accomplish. What obliges us all the more to wonder at the goodness of Divine Providence is that we not only go forward, but the horizons clear up before us, and we know where we are going because our path is marked out for us. . . .

That year [1878] had brought some fear for Don Bosco's health, and even his life. It must have been a warm comfort to hear him speak in a way implying that he did not believe his end was close at hand.

If I were to die now—he said—in fact I would not be leaving our Congregation in good shape, but in a fairly complicated mess. True, I can count on you now and you would be able to carry on as other congregations do. Still, our affairs have not yet reached the point they should be. Steps must be taken of which you have no idea at all. They are seen only by one who has held the reins over the years. Furthermore, various plans have yet to be carried out. I, for one, have plans for our studies which must be realized little by little, but as of now nothing has been done. Then I have plans for a Church history based on an entirely new approach. Lest I forget, I have given Father Bonetti a summary outline of it. My approach is to give first of all a solid presentation of the apostles' teaching and then prove that they died in witness to their preaching and writing, namely, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I would present the history of the first three centuries in such a way as to show that the Church always preserved unchanged the doctrine preached by the apostles and sealed by their blood, and that the martyrs also gave their lives for the selfsame truths. Then I would follow up with a third section, in which everything would become clearer through the uninterrupted succession of the Supreme Pontiffs. I would also prove that the doctrine the Church has held throughout all the centuries is the same

as that preached by the apostles and sealed with their blood, the same as that for which the martyrs gave their lives. . . .³⁸

Here our notetaker leaves us stranded, adding only that “many other things were discussed,” but that he had to cut short his notes “for lack of time.”

The topic of studies naturally leads us to talk about libraries. Don Bosco deeply loved the Oratory’s library. We have evidence of this in his talks with the directors. On December 2, pacing back and forth with Father Barberis, he exclaimed:

This room is large and full of books, but we have to enlarge it to make room for more books. Who would ever have thought it? It has been nearly thirty-three years since poor Don Bosco came to this place carrying his entire library in a single basket—a breviary, a few books for preaching, and that was all. Here we have this huge room with an annex adjoining it, and yet we need more room, and we have to enlarge our quarters.

Father Barberis remarked that plans were afoot to put a stove in the large room and close off the bookshelves with a screen so that books could not be removed without the librarian’s permission. Priests and teachers might then use the room as a study hall. “Do whatever is necessary,” Don Bosco replied, “but let us forget about stoves. In the seminary we had no stoves anywhere, and no one ever complained. Everything worked out fine. Now we practically have a mania for heating everywhere. I find it hard to remain silent when it’s a question of avoiding waste of money. If a room is kept tightly closed and there are several people in it, why do we need heating?”

The increased comforts of our world redouble our admiration for the austerity of our fathers.

9. EXTRAORDINARY CHARISMS

The reading of consciences and the ability to predict a person’s life and death, as we have mentioned elsewhere in this volume, are certainly extraordinary gifts. It is an undeniable fact that Don

³⁸This sentence is repetitious just as in the Italian original. [Editor]

Bosco enjoyed the gift of prophecy. On one of his last visits to Mornese, while leaving the dining room in the company of a cleric and a lay teacher who had come from our school at Borgo San Martino, he laid his hand upon the latter's shoulder, nodded toward the cleric, and asked, "What will become of this cleric?"

"He will be a renowned preacher," the lay teacher replied.

"Or a great sinner," Don Bosco added. As it turned out, the cleric eventually left the Congregation, and, as a diocesan priest, brought deep grief to the Church at Tortona.³⁹

The mother of Father Dominic Belmonte died in 1878. In 1864, while visiting her son, who was then a cleric at the Oratory, she told Don Bosco of her fear that she would not live to see her son's ordination. Don Bosco assured her: "Not only will you see him celebrate Mass, but you will make your confession to him." In all truth, stricken by cancer, she drew near to death. Her son rushed to her side from Borgo San Martino, where he was director. She asked him to summon her parish priest for confession, but, since the priest was away, she told him, "You hear my confession then." And her son did so.

In July 1878, a Salesian at the Oratory dashed up to Don Bosco's room in profound grief to say that his mother was dying at Caramagna. Don Bosco reassured him: "You can be positive that your mother will not die now. She has a few years yet to go. . . . Tomorrow morning, before going home, come to the sacristy at seven-thirty and I will give you a blessing for your mother." The Salesian was there promptly. Don Bosco asked him to kneel and blessed him, adding, "I send my blessing to your mother. When you get home, you will find her completely cured." Reassured but anxious to verify the fact, he immediately left. When he got home, his mother came out of the house to welcome him. At precisely seven-thirty that morning she had suddenly felt very well as if she were being lifted from her bed by an invisible hand.

However, chief among accounts of supernatural charisms is an event narrated by Father [Evasio] Garrone; it includes extraordinary facts such as are encountered only in the lives of the greatest saints.⁴⁰

³⁹Letter from Professor Attilio Caracciolo to the author, August 3, 1931. [Author]

⁴⁰We take this story from a handwritten statement by Father Garrone, and from notes taken by Father Lemoyne, who completed the story with data from Father Garrone's own lips. [Author]

Evasio Garrone entered the Oratory as a student on August 4, 1878 at eighteen years of age. At home he had been a store clerk. It was seven o'clock in the evening when he came to the sacristy door. A long line of boys was filing in. His curiosity aroused, he followed them and saw a priest hearing confessions. He knelt among some boys who were preparing themselves, but his mind was more on home than on his sins.

When his turn for confession came, he was unprepared and could not think of a single sin. So the priest said to him, 'I'll tell you your sins.' One by one, in chronological order, the priest went through all of them, describing the circumstances of each. Then the priest went on to give him some advice, but with such gentleness and affection that each word brought the young man greater comfort. A feeling of content came over his heart, so that he thought he was practically in heaven. The priest concluded by saying, "Garrone, thank Our Lady. She has answered your prayers after an anxious wait of six years. Always be devoted to Her, and She will save you from many dangers."

From the age of twelve, in fact, Garrone had nurtured a hidden desire to become a priest. However, since he knew that his family could not pay for his education, he never breathed a word of his desire to a single soul. At eighteen, when he first heard of Don Bosco, hope was revived in his heart. For the first time he spoke to his parish priest about his desire for the priesthood. The latter listened kindly and helped him get into the Oratory.

We can easily imagine his amazement on hearing himself called by name the very first moment he entered the Oratory and on being told of the precise length of time he had cherished thoughts of the priesthood, as well as all the other extraordinary things which we just recorded.

His confession over, he walked to a corner of the sacristy and knelt down, his hands clasped behind his back, lost to the world around him, puzzling over the mysterious confessor who had unveiled the secrets of his life. He pondered, *Who is this priest who seems to know me so well? Is he from my home town? I've never seen him at Grana. How can he know me so well?* He thought about his confession and all the consoling words. Caught between wonder and emotion, he could scarcely get back on his feet.

The next day, while in the playground, he saw all the boys run toward a priest who was approaching. He joined them. It was the same priest who had heard his confession. As soon as he was near, he heard the priest say to a young boy, "I'd like to have you cooked."⁴¹ Then the priest turned toward Garrone and added, "I'd like Garrone here cooked too." Garrone was astonished. Who was this priest who had called him by name, knew all about him, and wanted to have him "cooked"? At once he asked the priest, "Do you come from my home town?"

"No," was the answer. "Do you know me?"

"I've never seen you before," replied Garrone, who turned to the one next to him and asked who the priest was. "He is Don Bosco, the Oratory's director," was the answer.

"Right, I am Don Bosco," the priest added with a smile.

"But you are not the one who sent me a letter of acceptance, are you?"

Father Garrone later explained to Father Lemoyne that he spoke so boldly because he was impolite and did not know what he was saying. From that moment on, however, he nurtured a profound respect for Don Bosco

Soon after, he met some of the boys of the so-called "Garden Club" and later Father Berto made him a member too. Once, Don Bosco saw him watering the flowers, and remarked, "Good! I will make you my gardener."

"But, Don Bosco, I want to be a priest," Garrone replied.

"Yes, of course, and a missionary as well!"

Garrone did not plan on becoming a Salesian, but, unwilling to displease Don Bosco, he said nothing, finished his work and rapidly left the terrace.

During that winter⁴² he witnessed a miracle. Along with a companion named Franchini he was serving Don Bosco's Mass in the little chapel next to his room. At the elevation of the Host he noticed that Don Bosco was in ecstasy, his face suffused with a heavenly expression which seemed to flood the whole chapel with

⁴¹Perhaps Don Bosco meant making one "palatable" in a figurative sense, i.e., pleasing, agreeable, good. [Editor]

⁴²Father Garrone wrote: "In January 1879." But this was a lapse of memory because Don Bosco was absent from the Oratory from December 31, 1878 until the beginning of spring. This occurrence must have taken place in December 1878. Since it was winter, Father Garrone, who wrote a long time afterward, thought it was January. [Author]

light. By degrees Don Bosco's feet left the altar platform, so that he remained suspended in air for some ten minutes. The two altar boys could not reach up to his chasuble. In utter bewilderment Garrone dashed out to call Father Berto but could not find him. On coming back he saw that Don Bosco was just descending, so that his feet once more touched the floor, but a heavenly aura still seemed to hover about the altar.⁴³

After Mass and the long thanksgiving that followed, Garrone served Don Bosco his coffee as usual and asked, "Don Bosco, what happened to you this morning at the elevation? How did you rise so very high?" Don Bosco glanced at him a moment and then said, "Why don't you have a little coffee with me?" Garrone realized that he did not want to talk about the event, and so he sipped his coffee in silence. On three occasions Garrone witnessed Don Bosco levitating during his Mass.

Along with the flowers they tended, the boys of the Garden Club also cared for a few beanstalks set in boxes outside the terrace windows [of Don Bosco's room]. Along with grapevines, the beanstalks kept the sun from shining directly into Don Bosco's rooms. When the beans were ripe they were cooked and Don Bosco used to give them to the gardeners to eat. "I'll have you cooked too," he used to tell them in those days.

In 1879, he gathered together all his "beans," as he used to call the boys of the Garden Club, and gave them a talk. At its end he said, "Some of you will go home for summer vacation. One of you will go home hoping to return, but he will give in to his family's wishes and enter the diocesan seminary. Others will return and become clerics and stay with Don Bosco. One of you will die. One other will return for his retreat, but will be unable to go to Lanzo because he will have to stay with a friend about to die."

All these statements came true exactly as Don Bosco had predicted. Garrone himself returned on the eve of the retreat only to be told, "Take care of Emili Tavella who is critically ill." He went to the infirmary and found the sick boy who was to live but one more day and night.

⁴³The altar of this miracle ended up in the St. Rose Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, in Moncrivello (Vercelli). However, Mother General Louise Vaschetti, yielding to the desire of the Salesians, arranged to have it brought back to Don Bosco's room, where it is now located. Cf. Giraudi. *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*, p. 132. [Editor]

In 1881, after making his last confession of the school year to Don Bosco, Garrone was told, "Garrone, we will not be seeing each other for some time. You will be drafted into the army and will be assigned far from Turin. Always remember that your guide is Mary, Help of Christians. Always put your trust in Her. She will comfort you and keep you from all harm. Remember the promise you made Her in your first confession at the Oratory."

Garrone, somewhat small and frail, thought to himself, "Don Bosco is wrong this time. How can I be drafted when I'm hardly a span's height and thin as a rail?" Everyone felt the same way, so that on being told that Garrone might be drafted, Father Lazzero, the director, gave him a kindly rap on the head and said, "Come, now. What can King Humbert ever do with you?" Three months later, however, when his number was drawn and he reported for his physical, he was declared fit for service, to everyone's astonishment.

He reported for duty on the feast of the Epiphany the following January, leaving his dying mother behind him. She passed away within an hour after his departure. He arrived at the base late and was immediately jailed for the night. When the reason for his tardiness was learned the next day, he was released. Assigned to the 14th Infantry Regiment he had to go all the way south to Catanzaro. From there he was transferred to Cotrone where, on May 20, with no explanation, he was ordered back to Turin to serve in the medical corps and care for patients in the military hospital.

He immediately called on Don Bosco who, after hearing his confession, told him, "Be kind to your patients and make good use of your time. Study hard and learn all you can. Your military training will stand you in good stead. These are the days when you must do good for others, but be on your guard during the short time that you will be in Susa."

Garrone did not understand these last words. However, some months later, on being promoted to adjutant corporal, he was assigned to the infirmary of the 5th Alpine Regiment. There, except for Our Lady's special favor, he would have been destroyed in both body and soul. When he returned to Turin, he was chided by Don Bosco for having forgotten the Blessed Virgin who had constantly protected him. Then Don Bosco added, "What you went through will help you do very much good for the boys."

Reflecting on his situation, Garrone applied for a transfer to Turin, where he remained until his discharge. Every Saturday he went to confession to Don Bosco. Once after hearing his confession Don Bosco said to him, "Be alert to the needs of such and such a patient. Make sure that he receives everything necessary." But Garrone had not mentioned any of his patients to Don Bosco. On getting back to the base, however, he realized that the patient Don Bosco had meant was a Protestant who was desirous of becoming a Catholic. Since the man was seriously ill, Garrone tried to locate a priest for baptism. Finding no one, he took water and baptized the man conditionally himself. The patient was filled with such joy that he clasped Garrone in his arms. He died ten minutes later.

On being discharged from the army, Garrone could not make up his mind whether to enter the seminary or stay on with Don Bosco. He spent three days at home. Then, on the very day he should have reported to the seminary for his entrance examination, he found himself at the Oratory in Turin, scarcely knowing how he ever got there. He was sent to our school adjacent to the Church of St. John the Evangelist to join the Sons of Mary. Toward the end of that year, on confessing to Don Bosco that he was repeatedly losing patience with a bedridden patient, the latter told him, "Within three days he will trouble you no longer." Three days later the man died.

As a cleric, Garrone left for South America in 1889 with Bishop Cagliero. Adding to the knowledge he had acquired in the medical corps, he went on to learn a great deal more about medicine and medical equipment, obtaining permission to practice medicine in the vast territory of Patagonia. Thanks to him, the first hospital and pharmacy were opened at Viedma. Through a quarter of a century he became one of the most influential figures in the evangelization of Patagonia, adding to his medical skill a spirit of love and sacrifice.

The reputation for holiness following Don Bosco everywhere throughout his earthly days rested undoubtedly upon solid foundations. We shall see how his fame grew and spread year by year throughout the last decade of his life. But even at this particular point of our narrative, the most enlightened people, experienced in God's ways, were already crediting Don Bosco with such holiness.

At the beginning of 1879, Father Rua and Father Barberis

preached a retreat to the Sisters of St. Vincent at the Little House of Divine Providence. Canon [Louis] Anglesio was superior, a worthy successor of [St. Joseph] Cottolengo, who had loved and esteemed Don Bosco for many years. After Father Barberis' last sermon, Canon Anglesio went into the sacristy to thank him, but Father Barberis protested that he should be the one to thank him because he had asked his entire community to pray for Don Bosco's recovery from the eye problem which was then afflicting him. Then Father Barberis told him that all the Salesians hoped that the Venerable Joseph Cottolengo would soon be elevated to the honors of the altar.

The saintly canon, who usually never looked anybody in the eye, gazed directly at Father Barberis, pressed his arm twice, and said in an almost inspired tone, "Yes, yes. Let us hope so. And after him, Don Bosco!"

This remark quickly made the rounds of the Oratory. It was considered prophetic, especially by those who knew how restrained in speech Canon Anglesio usually was. Events turned out according to his wish, prediction or prophecy, whatever one may care to call it. And today the gigantic figure of Don Bosco looms even larger in the background of the past and on to the projection of the future. It is the fervent hope of all that the Church will soon place on the head of this glorious son of hers the greatest crown of all.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Don Bosco was canonized on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1934, by Pope Pius XI. [Editor]

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

C.	Conceptionists
D.B.	Don Bosco
D.M.H.C.	Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.C.	General Chapter
G.N.	Good Night
L.C.	<i>Letture Cattoliche</i>
M.H.C.	Mary, Help of Christians
P.S.E.	Preventive System of Education
S.B.	<i>Salesian Bulletin</i>
S.C.	Salesian Cooperators
S.C.B.R.	Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars
S.C.I.	Sacred Congregation of the Index
S.M.	Sons of Mary
S.S.	Salesian Society

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