



Dear Friends,

As we continue this year of the anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, Arthur Lenti has given us two segments this month, entitled respectively Part One and Part Two, for they belong together as “history of the founding. Part Two can exist without Part One, but not the other way around. We thank him for the scholarship and thoroughness which gives us all something to reflect upon in our continuing formation.

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## DON BOSCO FOUNDER

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### PART I. EXISTENCE OF AN EARLY CONGREGATION OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES (SINCE 1841) AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN RELATION TO THE FOUNDING OF THE PIOUS SALESIAN SOCIETY (1859)

Francis Desramaut, *The Founding of the Salesian Family* (1841—1876) (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A Don Bosco Pamphlet Publication), 1985. — This is a translation of “La Fondazione della Famiglia Salesiana,” in *Costruire insieme la Famiglia Salesiana* Atti del Simposio di Roma, 19-22 Febbraio 1982, ed. M. Midali (Roma: LAS, 1983), p. 75-192. — This in turn is a rewriting of “La storia primitiva della Famiglia Salesiana secondo tre esposti di Don Bosco,” in *La Famiglia Salesiana*. Colloqui sulla Vita Salesiana, 5, Lussemburgo 26-30 Agosto 1973 (Torino-Leumann: LDC, 1974), p. 17-45 and 337-343.

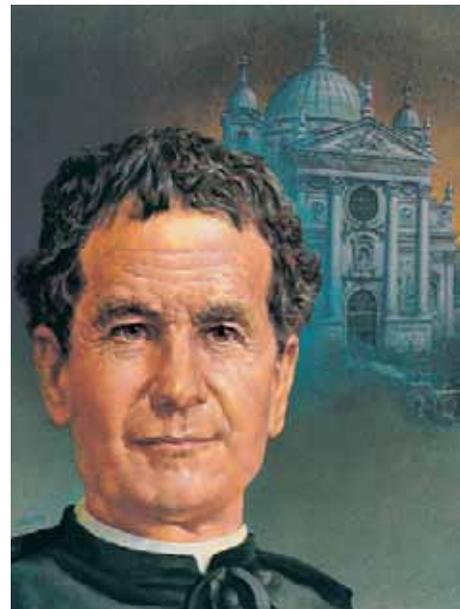
#### 1. The Case for a Preexisting Broadly-Based “Congregation”

In the essays of 1973 and 1983 Fr. Francis Desramaut cites documents that tend to prove the existence since 1841 of a broadly based “Congregation” composed of priests and lay people, men and women, engaged collaboratively in the work of the oratory with Don Bosco as religious superior. This *Congregation of St. Francis de Sales* of cooperators is said to have received ecclesiastical approval from Archbishop Fransoni by Decree of 1852. On the strength of this decree as well as of indulgences and spiritual favors repeatedly granted by the Holy See Don Bosco describes this ecclesiastical approval as “*de facto* official and canonical.” This same “Congregation” is said to have been the matrix out of which arose this *Salesian Society*, when in 1858/1859 the preexisting Congregation was divided into two families—one that opted to live in community and professed the three canonical vows; the other (“promoters, benefactors, cooperators”) that did not form community or take vows, but continued to help, in a variety of ways and with various degrees of commitment, with the work of the oratories.

Two of the documents, on which this scenario is based, stemming from Don Bosco himself, are the most important and relevant, but also the most problematic. One is entitled *Cooperatori Salesiani*, the other is the chapter appended to Don Bosco’s early Constitutions with the title of Extern Members.

#### 2. The Document *Cooperatori Salesiani* (Salesian Cooperators) of 1877

The document entitled, *Cooperatori salesiani*, is a manuscript in Don Bosco’s own hand dating from 1877.



It was probably meant for publication in the *Salesian Bulletin*, but it was set aside and replaced with a softer document (“Storia dei Cooperatori Salesiani” in *Bollettino Salesiano* 3, September 1877, p. 6). The rejected document, filed in the Central Salesian Archive (Rome), was first published by Ceria in IBM XI, 84-86, and translated in EBM XI, 73-75.

To be noted: In this document that the terms “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales” or “Salesian Congregation” refer to the collaborative ministry in the work of the oratories (Salesian Cooperators). This designation must be carefully distinguished from “Society of St. Francis de Sales” or “Pious Salesian Society” of Don Bosco’s constitutions.

Significant excerpts follow.

#### [(1) The Congregation of St. Francis de Sales]

The history of the Salesian Cooperators dates back to 1841 when a start was made in gathering together poor

homeless boys in the city of Turin. [...] Several lay persons joined together to perform the many and varied tasks [on behalf of these boys], and they contributed to the support of the so-called Festive Oratories either by their personal services or with donations. [...] They were called benefactors, promoters, and also Cooperators [members of the *Congregation* of St. Francis de Sales.

The Superior of these Oratories was the Rev. [John] Bosco, who acted under the immediate supervision of Archbishop [Louis Fransoni] and with his authorization. The necessary faculties for the exercise of his duties were granted to him both orally and in writing. [...]

The so-called Salesian Promoters and Cooperators, who had banded together in a regular Congregation known as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first received a few spiritual favors from the Holy See by a rescript dated April 18, 1845. [...]

In 1850 Don Bosco informed His Holiness that a Congregation had been legitimately established in the city of Turin with the name and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales and implored more extensive favors on behalf of its members, as well as other spiritual benefits for the non-members. These favors were granted by rescript dated September 28, 1850. [...]

The Congregation of Salesian Promoters was thus established *de facto* in the eyes of the local ecclesiastical authority and of the Holy See. [...]

To ensure unity of spirit, of discipline, and of administration, and to establish the oratories on a firm basis, the Archbishop appointed the Rev. [John] Bosco as director and granted him all necessary and proper faculties by decree or certificate dated March 31, 1852. After this declaration the Congregation of Salesian Promoters was always considered as *canonically instituted*. [...]

**[(2) The Division of 1858/59: Salesian Congregation and Salesian Society]]**

Several favors and spiritual benefits were granted to the Congregation of Salesian Promoters between the years 1852 and 1858, when said Congregation was *divided into two branches*, or rather, families. Those who believed they had a vocation and had no impediment joined together to live in community, forming the association known as the *Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales* (a name that the Holy Father himself suggested and by which it has been known to this very day). The rest, that is the lay externs, kept on living in the world with their own families but continued to work on behalf of the oratories. They retained the title of *Union* or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*. However, they were subject to the members [who were living in community] and worked jointly with them on behalf of destitute boys.

In 1864 the Holy See commended the *Pious Salesian Society* and appointed [Don Bosco] its Superior [for life].

In this commendation of the Salesian Society was also included the part that concerned the Extern [non-religious] members, who were always referred to as promoters or benefactors and recently as Salesian Cooperators.

In 1874 [the Holy See] gave definitive approval to the constitutions of the Pious Society, continuing to regard the members of the original Salesian *Congregation* as promoters and cooperators of the works that the Pious Society undertook. Then on July 30, 1875 the Sacred Congregation of Briefs empowered the Superior of the Salesian Society “to extend the indulgences and spiritual favors of the Society (granted to him by the Holy See) to his benefactors, as if they were Tertiaries—with the exception of those favors that pertained to life in community.”

These benefactors are none other than those who were always known as promoters or cooperators. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of “External Members.”

Therefore, when the Holy See graciously granted new and more generous favors to the Salesian Cooperators, reference was made “to the pious Association of the Faithful, canonically erected, whose members have the special aim of caring particularly for poor and neglected boys.”

This reference was to be understood as applying to:

1. To the original promoters, who for ten years were accepted and considered *de facto* as genuine cooperators in the work of the oratories, a work formally recognized by the decree of 1852. To this work they continued to give [of their time and effort] as laypersons, even when some of the cooperators in 1858 began to live a community life under their own rules.

2. To the religious members, that is, the Pious Salesian Society, which always regulated the activities of these benefactors. In compliance with the rules given to them, the latter offered themselves with zeal and charity to give moral and material assistance to the religious members.

**3. External Members: Last Chapter or Appendix in Don Bosco’s Constitutions (1860-73)**

Francesco Motto, *Costituzioni SDB, Testi Critici* (Roma: LAS, 1982), 210-211. The articles on External Members first appear in constitutional draft of 1860 and were first presented in Rome in the Text of 1864. One of the 13 critical observations received at this time called for the removal of these articles. Don Bosco, however, persisted in retaining them and resubmitted them in 1867 and 1873, at which time they were forcibly removed.

External Members, Text of 1860	External Members, Text of 1864
1. Any person ( <i>persona</i> ), even one living in the world, in one’s house, in the bosom of one’s family, can belong to this Society.	1. Any person ( <i>persona</i> ), even one living in the world, in one’s house, in the bosom of one’s family, can belong to this Society.

<p>2. He (<i>Egli</i>) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition.</p> <p>3. In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the Society he must at least promise the Rector to use his wealth and his powers in the manner that, in his judgment, will redound to the greater glory of God.</p> <p>4. Such promise, however, shall not be binding under pain of sin, not even venial sin.</p>	<p>2. He (<i>Egli</i>) takes no vows, but shall try to practice those portions of the present rule that are compatible with his age and condition. He might teach or promote the teaching of catechism in behalf of poor children, work for the spreading of good books; he might help organize tridiums, novena, retreats and similar works of charity that have the spiritual good of the young and of the common people especially in view.</p> <p>3. In order to share in the spiritual benefits of the society he must at least promise the Rector to engage in those things that, in his judgment, will redound to the greater glory of God.</p> <p>4. Such promise, however, shall not be binding under pain of sin, not even venial sin.</p> <p>5. Any member of the Society who leaves from the same for a reasonable cause is regarded as an external member, and shares at once in the spiritual benefits of the Society, provided he keeps those parts of the rule that are binding on external members.</p>
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should be read in a different light. Stella makes the following comments:

(1) There is no record of the existence of such a “congregation.” In his *Memoirs of the Oratory* (which, written in mid-1870s, tell the story up to 1854) Don Bosco speaks of groups and societies, but never mentions a “congregation” dating back to 1844 or 1841, presided over by himself and made up of priests lay people, both men and women. Secondly, contemporary documents, such as letters, registrations, public and private appeals, lottery circulars, newspapers, etc. are completely silent on the existence of such a “congregation.” Thirdly, apart from the documents on the Cooperators cited by Desramaut, we find no mention of such a “congregation” in the archives of the Salesian Society, of the Turin Chancery or of Murialdo’s Society of St. Joseph, etc.

(2) How, then, is one to explain the language of the documents cited by Desramaut, chiefly of the document, *Cooperatori Salesiani*? It is noteworthy that this document, probably meant for publication in the Salesian Bulletin, was set aside and substituted by a milder one bearing the title, *Storia dei cooperatori salesiani*.

*Storia* is a manuscript in the hand of Father Berto that was corrected by Don Bosco and published in the *Bollettino Salesiano* [# 3 (Sep.-Oct. 1877) pg. 6]. Here Don Bosco speaks of “a kind of congregation” (*una specie di congregazione*). Stella believes that this document merely aims at encouraging the cooperators by reminding them that they were part of the work from the beginning. The readers knew well he did not mean that in the 1840s or 1850s he had established, and won approval for, a “congregation,” over which he presided as Superior and that included men and women from every walk of life.

The withdrawn document (*Cooperatori Salesiani*), on the contrary, is a manuscript in Don Bosco’s own hand, that is bolder and explicit, for in it there is mention of a “congregation” that had been *de facto* and “canonically” established. Stella points out that the basis for speaking of the group gravitating around Don Bosco in these terms was the concession of spiritual favors as well as Archbishop Frasoni’s decree of 1852 appointing Don Bosco spiritual director-in-chief of the three oratories. Neither of these events, however, established a “congregation.”

(3) On the strength of the document, “*Cooperatori Salesiani*,” Desramaut argues that in 1859 there was a “restructuring” in the earlier, more generic society. This restructuring was preceded by the first constitutions of 1858, and it entailed a division reflected in the distinction between “internal members,” living in community in accordance with those constitutions, and “external members” as described in an appended chapter in the early constitutions. (See above.)

Stella remarks that the chapter on the “external members” was not part of the first constitutions, but was

#### 4. Fr. P. Stella’s Critique to Fr. F. Desramaut’s Interpretation of the Documents

Fr. Pietro Stella, in reviewing the matter [Cf. *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 2 (1983) 451-454] maintains that *no officially approved society* of any sort existed before the approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales by Rome in 1869; and that no project for such a society was set forth *officially* before the constitutions of 1858 and the founding of 1859. (As will be seen, unofficially Don Bosco was gathering and cultivating some young people through the 1850s in view of binding them to himself and to the work of the oratory.)

Neither the granting of indulgences, nor Archbishop Frasoni’s decree of 1852 amounted to an ecclesiastical (canonical) approval of a society. It follows that if there was no society, neither was there a “division” of a society in 1858/1859. Hence the documents cited by Desramaut

inserted later by Don Bosco [in 1860] and first presented in Rome in 1864, when it was ordered removed. Therefore the concept of the “external member” is to be understood not as the carry-over from the earlier, more generic congregation, but only in reference to the religious society of men that Don Bosco was establishing and that won commendation in Rome with the decretum laudis of 1864. Stella’s conclusion is that in the two documents on the Cooperators Don Bosco uses the term “congregation” in a figurative and looser sense to describe a group engaged in some form of collaborative ministry. Perhaps, according to Stella, Desramaut did not take sufficiently into account the “character” of the writer and the “bias” of the documents in question.

### 5. The Salesian Cooperators of 1876 and the Case of their “Approval”

Between 1874 and 1876, Don Bosco developed the concept of the Cooperator apart from the constitutions, and wrote appropriate regulations. The Association of Salesian Cooperators was presented to Pius IX in early 1875, who encouraged the project, and a few months later granted a commendation and spiritual favors by a decree of July 30. Don Bosco presented the associations on March 4, 1876 *as already established*, and therefore not for “canonical approval” but only for “recognition.” Pius IX commended it on these terms and granted copious indulgences by decree of May 9, 1876. The papal brief was clearly worded to that effect. It read as follows:

Pope Pius IX

For perpetual remembrance:

It has been reported to Us that a Pious Sodality of the Christian faithful, which goes by the name of Sodality or Union of Salesian Cooperators, has been canonically established. Its members are pledged on the one hand to undertake a great variety of works of piety and charity, and on the other to care for poor and neglected children in a special manner. We, therefore, relying on the mercy of our omnipotent God and on the authority of God’s blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, in order that this Sodality may grow from day to day, do hereby grant to the Christian faithful of both sexes enrolled or to be enrolled in this Sodality, [the following indulgences:]

*Plenary*, at the point of death;

*Plenary*, once a month, with Confession and Communion;

*Plenary*, applicable to the Faithful Departed;

In addition, all *indulgences*, both plenary and partial, of the *Franciscan Tertiaries*.

These favors shall be valid, all things contrary notwithstanding, for the present and for the future in perpetuity. It is also Our will that copies of this Letter, handwritten or printed, signed by a notary public and bearing the seal of

the ecclesiastical Authority, be given the same faith, upon presentation, as would be given to this very Decree.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter’s, under the ring-seal of the Fisherman on May 9, 1876, the thirtieth of Our pontificate.

[Seal]                      [Signatures]

Don Bosco had not meant to request the Holy See’s approval of a new association. He had merely requested spiritual favors for an association *already in existence* and (as far as he was concerned) *canonically erected*. As discussed above, he argued this point in the famous memorandum written in late 1876 or early 1877, entitled “Salesian Cooperators.” Here Don Bosco argues that the Salesian Cooperators were in existence since 1841, were identified with the collaborative work of the oratories, and were known as “the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales,” of which Don Bosco figured as “Superior.” This “congregation” received encouragement, faculties, and spiritual favors at various dates from the Holy See. By decree of 1852 Archbishop Luigi Fransoni appointed Don Bosco Spiritual Director-in-Chief of the three oratories (St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel). This action of the Archbishop confirmed Don Bosco’s position as director of the three oratories, and at the same time gave approval to the “congregation” of oratory workers (cooperators, promoter, benefactors) over which he presided as “superior.” It was Don Bosco’s understanding that the Archbishop’s action amounted to a “canonical” approval.

In 1858/1859 this “congregation” was divided into two families: one bound by vows and living in community (Salesian Society), the other (still known as “*Union* or *Congregation* of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*”) continued “to live in the world while working on behalf of the oratories.” This is the “congregation” that the 1876 papal decree of “approval” and granting indulgences assumes to have been in existence and canonically approved.

### 6. Final Comments

(1) The term “congregation” as used in these documents does not have the connotation of “religious congregation” in the modern sense, or even in the sense of “sodality” or of “association of the Christian faithful.”

(2) However, these and other documents show that a lot of people were involved *collaboratively* in various capacities and with various degrees of commitment in the work of the oratories (promoters, cooperators, benefactors...).

(3) Neither spiritual favors received from the Pope nor Archbishop Fransoni’s Decree of 1852 amounted to an ecclesiastical canonical approval. That may be the reason why Stella could not find any attestation of the existence of such a “congregation,” apart from Don Bosco’s statements in the documents cited above.

(4) That Don Bosco was convinced that a “congregation”

of collaborators had been canonically established may be confirmed by the manner in which he applied to the Pope for “approval” of the Cooperators in 1875-76. He presented the association as already in existence and approved by the Church. This must have been his conviction, unless (as Stella suggests) this representation was due “to the character of the writer and to the bias of the writing.”

(5) The crucial point in any interpretation, however, has to deal satisfactorily with the nature of the “division “ of 1859. Don Bosco writes:

“[In 1858] the Congregation [of cooperators, promoters...] was divided into two branches, or rather, families. Those who believed they had a vocation and had no impediment joined together to live in community, [...] called the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. [...] The rest, that is the lay externs, kept on living in the world with their own families but continued to work on behalf of the oratories. They retained the title of *Union* or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators*. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of *External Members*.” [Crucial final portion of the document *Cooperatori Salesiani* excerpted above]

We note, in the first place, that the people who in 1859 opted for living in community with vows (besides Don Bosco and Father Alasonatti) were all in sacred orders or aspiring to ordination, and were all young people trained by Don Bosco at the Home. Hence realistically, in spite of Don Bosco’s statement, the division (if any division there was) was not a division in the broadly based “congregation” of cooperators or promoters involved in the work of the oratories.

Secondly, the chapter on Extern Salesians, which (so Don Bosco states) was “dedicated to the *Union of Promoters or Cooperators*” (extern family resulting from the division) even if not factually true may represent Don Bosco’s (unsuccessful) attempt to unite all forces, old and new, involved in oratory work under the constitutional umbrella of the Salesian Society. If that is the case, Don Bosco’s statement transcends historical factuality.

Finally, In 1864 the Salesian Society received the Decree of Commendation (*Decretum Laudis*) together with 13 critical observations. One of these ordered the removal of the chapter on Extern Salesians. Don Bosco, however, persisted and retained the chapter (appendix) until forced to remove it in 1873, before the definitive approval of the constitutions in 1874. But the idea, under a different form, was shortly thereafter more successfully realized in the re-organization (the “founding”) of the Salesian Cooperators (1876).

## DON BOSCO FOUNDER

### PART II. FOUNDING OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY (1859)

Giovanni Bonetti, *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1908) pp. 343-358

*Biographical Memoirs* (IBM and EBM)

P. Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications) pp. 133-179

F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps* (Turin: SEI, 1996) pp. 495-508, 571-586

#### I. PROCESS BY WHICH DON BOSCO PREPARED THE GROUND FOR THE FOUNDING

The process may be said to begin with the year 1849, at a time when the oratory crisis was looming ahead. Don Bosco began to cultivate certain young men who could serve as catechists and leaders in the oratories, as well as at the Home (Casa Annessa). The process gains new momentum in the year 1854, a watershed year that, Don Bosco’s words, closes the book on the oratory era and opens the era of the Salesian Society.

Biographer J. B. Lemoyne describes the process both in *Documenti* and in the *Biographical Memoirs*. There we are given a view of the process that is vastly different from that gained from the documents on the Cooperators discussed in Part I.

The summary that follows relies on the *Biographical Memoirs*.

1. *EBM* III, 383-386, 402-403 (July 1849) — Don Bosco picked out four young men for special consideration and started them on Latin: Felix Reviglio, James Bellia, Joseph Buzzetti and Charles Gastini. (Buzzetti became a Salesian.) Don Bosco’s interest in these young men as a “group” would indicate that he was looking for “helpers” among promising lads as early as 1849. (These four should be distinguished from the second, vastly more important group of four of 1854.)

2. *EBM* IV, 63-64 (September 28, 1850) — Don Bosco submitted a petition and obtained the first papal document addressed to the “Director of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales,” granting indulgences to oratory workers. P. Stella notes the existence in the Central Salesian Archive (ASC) of a similar document addressed to the Director of the Congregation of the Guardian Angel. This shows that the group of oratory workers is what’s meant.

[The editor of *EBM* notes: “This petition is particularly important because Don Bosco for the first time mentions the Salesian Congregation,” (meaning, “Salesian Society”)!]

3. *EBM* IV, 96-98 (October 1850) — Don Bosco petitioned Archbishop Frasoni to have the above-mentioned “four”

take examinations to don the clerical habit, hence with the priesthood in view. Furthermore, Michael Rua is mentioned as object of Don Bosco's special care. Other boys are mentioned, but it is not clear just where they stood. The "four" received the clerical habit in the Pinardi chapel on the feast of the Purification (February 2, 1851), coupled with the external celebration of the feast of St. Francis de Sales. [EBM IV, 161]

4. EBM IV, 262 & 527 (March 31, 1852) — Archbishop Fransoni's decree confirmed Don Bosco as spiritual director-in-chief of the three oratories. Don Bosco will henceforth refer this resolution of the "oratory crisis" in his favor as an official "approval."

5. EBM IV, 294-298 (June 5, 1952): The "Seven Joys of Mary Group" — On this date Don Bosco gathered a group of 15 select young men for a conference—during which they resolved to recite the Seven Joys of Mary every Sunday for a year. Michael Rua recorded the event and the names. Six of these were in the founding group of the Salesian Society in 1859: Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John B. Francesia, Angelo Savio, Joseph Buzzetti, Joseph Rocchietti (who left the Society).

6. EBM IV, 337-338 (October 3, 1952) — Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchietti receive the clerical habit from Fr. Anthony Cinzano in the chapel of the Holy Rosary, set up in the house of Don Bosco's brother Joseph's at Becchi.

7. EBM V, 7-8 (January 26, 1854) — A new "group of four" met in Don Bosco's room. Fr. Rua later recorded the event: "On the evening of January 26, 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco's room. Present were Don Bosco, [Joseph] Rocchietti, [James] Artiglia, [John] Cagliero, and [Michael] Rua. Don Bosco suggested that, with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales, we should engage in the *practical exercise of charity* toward neighbor [i.e., the work of the oratory]. This would be in view of making a promise of it—and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow to the Lord. From that evening on those who committed, or would in the future commit, themselves to this exercise were called Salesians."

[This *late* note by Fr. Rua is not reported in Lemoyne's *Documenti*. It is thought that the name "Salesian" for this early date probably is "read back."]

**[8. Transitional Comment — Significance of the Pivotal Year 1854]** — The year 1854 is especially significant for the forward movement that culminated in the founding of the Salesian Society. Speaking of the *Memoirs of the Oratory* just completed, as Fr. Julius Barberis reports, Don Bosco said: "Truly the story of the beginning of the oratories is at once so memorable and so poetic that I myself would very much like to gather our Salesians together and relate it in detail. [...] I have set down the main events up to the year 1854 [in the *Memoirs*]. *It was at that point that the Oratory acquired stability and gradually took on the present*

*shape. One might say that with that year the imaginative poetic period came to an end and the practical prosaic period began.*" [Barberis, Autograph Chronicle, January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 46-47, FDBM 835 D9-10]

During the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales of 1876, Don Bosco again stressed the importance of the year 1854. As Barberis reports, Don Bosco said: "As for me, I have set down a summary account of events relating to the oratory, from its beginnings to the present [referring to one of several historical summaries he produced]; and up to 1854 [in the *Memoirs*] the narrative goes into details in many instances. From 1854 on, the discourse begins to be about the Congregation, and matters begin to loom larger and put on a different face. [...] I realize now that Don Bosco's life is totally bound up with the life of the Congregation; and therefore we have to speak of things. [Barberis, Autograph Chronicle, February 2, 1876, Notebook IV, 41, FDBM 837 D1].

It is significant that 1854 was the year in which the Cavour-Rattazzi bill against religious corporations was introduced in Parliament. It was the year of the first building expansion of the Home (*Casa Annessa*), a new building, capable of housing some 100 boys. (Don Bosco had plans on the drawing board for a secondary school to be established at the Oratory.) It was the year in which he drafted the regulations for the boys' oratory and for the Home. That same year 1854, Don Bosco gathered the famous second group of four for "a practical exercise in the work of charity"—an event that marks Don Bosco's resolve to move forward with the formation of a religious society—but how, and what sort of society?

## II. THE SALESIAN SOCIETY COMES INTO BEING (1854-1859)

### Sources and Bibliographical Note

Besides the sources and literature listed above, in the paragraphs that follow below use is made of the documents critically edited in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani*...

EBM V, 452-464; 523-603 (based on Bonetti's *Storia*); VI, 180-183

### 1. The Concept of a Group to Continue the Work of the Oratories

In the early 1850s, Don Bosco was trying to find a way to make his work permanent. A number of priests and lay people had been associated with him in the work of the oratories; but the bond that united them among themselves and to him was loose at best. They each had their commitments and their ideas. Don Bosco may indeed have wished to band them together by some tighter bond under him and under some kind of rule. The *Regulations for the "festive" Oratory* of 1852-54 were written (so he states in the Introduction) to "serve as a norm in the exercise of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the fairly numerous priests and lay people who devote their labors

to this ministry with love and concern.” [“Historical Summary,” in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 33]

As late as 1852-54 (therefore the years in which those regulations were elaborated) Don Bosco was still cherishing the hope of being able to bind the group together. Hence we may deduce that he had not succeeded in unifying that charitable, devoted, but very heterogeneous group of volunteers. In spite of statements by Don Bosco in later documents, a society gathered under common rules and recognizing Don Bosco as superior had never come into existence either *de jure* or *de facto*. [See discussion in Part One above.]

As he sought to make the work permanent, at one point he may have considered attaching the oratories to some existing religious institute, such as Fr. Rosmini’s Institute of Charity, provided he be allowed to continue the work he had begun. However, his option lay in a different direction—to look among his boys (the inner circle of the students in the *Casa annessa*) for his helpers. In 1854, as discussed above, he had judged “the four” to be suitable candidates, and proposed to them the ideal of the “practical exercise of charity toward neighbor,” though he carefully avoided any reference to a religious congregation.

## 2. The Idea of a Religious Society

It should be borne in mind that by mid-1850s Don Bosco had a small group of followers already converted to a form of life that would even then be recognizable as a kind of religious life. Don Bosco had a close associate at this time in Father Victor Alasonatti, who had not been one of the early oratory workers. There were also a few young men, such as Rua, Cagliero and Francesia, that he could count on.

Father Alasonatti and clerical student Michael Rua made a vow or promise in 1855, and clerical student John Baptist Francesia in 1856. Their commitment was to engage in the exercise of charity toward neighbor, not in the nature of canonical vows. But the little group that was gathering lived at the Home (*Casa Annessa*) under the regulations in force at the time and under Don Bosco’s direction. He may by this time have been thinking of some kind of religious congregation; but the available evidence suggests that Don Bosco reached such a decision only in 1857, when he met with Minister Urban Rattazzi and received illumination from his suggestions.

## 3. Don Bosco’s Meeting with Minister of Interior Urbano Rattazzi (1857)

Our source for the historic meeting between Don Bosco and Minister Rattazzi is Father John Bonetti’s “Storia dell’Oratorio,” referred to above. [DB’s Early Apostolate, 343-350] EBM V, 452-464 depends on Bonetti.

The meeting and connected conversation took place in early May, 1857 at the ministry of the Interior, whither Don

Bosco had gone perhaps for the purpose of thanking the minister for his support of the raffle and for the decree of April 30. It may have been the minister himself, who was deeply interested in the juvenile problem and admired Don Bosco’s educational endeavors, who raised the question of how Don Bosco’s “humanitarian” work might be continued after his death.

We give essential excerpts of Bonetti’s report of the exchange.

[Rattazzi:] “[...] You are mortal like everyone else. [...] What measures do you intend to adopt to secure the permanent existence of your institute?”

[DB:] “To tell you the truth, your Excellency, [...] I have thought about procuring some help for the present, but not about the means of carrying on the work of the Oratories after my death. [...]”

“Now, [...] by what means do you think it possible for me to establish such an institution on a safe footing?”

[R:] “In my opinion,” replied Rattazzi, “you should select a certain number of laymen and ecclesiastics, form a society under certain rules, imbue them with your spirit, teach them your system, so that they may not merely give you assistance [now], but may carry on the work after your departure.”

[*Bonetti’s Comment I:*] *It seemed strange to Don Bosco that this very same man [who had authored the law of suppression of religious orders] should advise him to institute another of these congregations. He therefore replied:*

[DB:] “But does your Excellency believe it possible to found such a society in these days? The Government two years ago suppressed certain religious communities, and is perhaps preparing now to do away with the rest!” [...]

[Rattazzi:] “It should not be a society that has the character of mortmain, but one in which each member keeps his civil rights, submits to the laws of the State, pays the taxes, and so forth. In a word, the new Society, as far as the Government is concerned, would be nothing more than an association of free citizens, united and living together, and having the same charitable purpose in view.”

[DB:] “And is your Excellency sure that the Government will allow the founding of such a society, and its subsequent existence?”

[Rattazzi:] “No constitutional or regular Government will oppose the founding and development of such a society, just as it does not prevent, but rather promotes, commercial, industrial and other similar companies. Any association of free citizens is allowed as long as its purpose and actions are not opposed to the laws and institutions of the State.”

[DB:] “Well,” said Don Bosco, in conclusion, “I shall think the matter over [...]”

[*Bonetti’s Comment II:*] — The words of Rattazzi [...] were for Don Bosco as a ray of light, and made things that he had thought impossible before appear feasible. [Bonetti,

St. JB's Early Apostolate, 1934, 344f.]

**[Comment by this writer I]** — In view of what was said above, Don Bosco (contrary to his own disclaimer) had indeed already considered the matter of how to make the work of the oratories permanent. Furthermore he had already banded together a group and bound it to himself and to the work by a promise (or vow). He may have stated the contrary so as not to show his hand. Bonetti [*Comment I* above] seems to imply that Don Bosco at first understood Rattazzi to be suggesting some kind of religious congregation. But his subsequent words [*Comment III* below] make it clear that Rattazzi meant no such thing and Don Bosco knew it.

Probably the minister himself had raised the question of how Don Bosco's humanitarian work might be continued after his death. When Don Bosco expressed his fears that an association, humanitarian but also clearly religious, might be suppressed by the government, Rattazzi explained the point of law applicable to the case. An association of free citizens exercising their individual inalienable rights, regardless of their religious beliefs, would not incur the government's sanctions.

Here Rattazzi refers to the first of the two basic principle of liberal jurisprudence. Individual right is inviolable because it is from nature (God). Hence individual liberties exercised within the state's legitimate laws cannot be interfered with. On the other hand, corporate right is from the State, and from it alone. Therefore, only the State has the power to approve any corporation, including religious corporations (such as congregations). The Church is a spiritual entity that cannot generate a juridical order of its own. It was with this understanding that Don Bosco, even after requesting and obtaining the Church's approval, maintained (the fiction?) that the Salesian Society was an association of free citizens making use of their civil right of association, and was not a corporation of any kind.

It is with this understanding that Don Bosco wrote the "civil right(s)" article into the constitutions, in the chapter, *Form of the Society*. Naturally the Roman authorities would have none of this, for they rejected the principles of Liberal jurisprudence and claimed the right to establish religious corporations by the principles of Canon Law.

Later Don Bosco would credit Rattazzi with making the Salesian Society possible, indirectly. The much-quoted passage is reported by Barberis. One evening, Don Bosco was speaking of the providential guidance that enabled the Salesian Society to come into existence and to survive "in evil times." In this connection he made comments on such political figures as Camillo Cavour, Urban Rattazzi, Paul Vigliani, etc. Don Bosco said:

Several ministers of state, the very worst types on the political scene [dei più cattivi che ci fossero], gave me

encouragement and help: Cavour, Rattazzi, Vigliani. [...] Rattazzi for one came to the Oratory several times and had the greatest respect for poor Don Bosco. He even spoke of me as a great man. One might say that it was consequent to his suggestion that I could write into our rules certain provisions that define our society's stance vis-à-vis the civil authorities and the State. One might therefore truly say that if we never had any trouble with the civil authority we owe it all to him. [Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, January 1, 1876, Notebook III, p. 57, FDBM 835 E8.]

Bonetti continues:

**[Bonetti's Comment II]** — [Don Bosco] began by framing and writing down certain rules according to the purpose of the new Society. [...] He then mentioned the matter to his seminarians and to some of the best boys of the Oratory, and in a short time he was surrounded by a dozen individuals on whom he thought he could rely. Some of these members stayed at their own homes, limiting themselves to help in the Oratory [...]. Others, on the contrary, lived at the Oratory in common with Don Bosco, and were always at his beck and call. [Bonetti, *St. JB's Early Apostolate* (1934), p. 346.]

**[Comment by this Writer II]** — Looking down the road, Don Bosco began to wonder whether such a society of free citizens bound to him by a promise or vow and working together for a religious purpose, might not at the same time figure as a religious congregation in the eyes of the Church. For this additional element he would have to see the Pope. Bonetti expresses this further "speculation" of Don Bosco.

**[Bonetti's Comment III]** The foundations thus laid, Don Bosco soon perceived that [...] much more was needed. The society suggested by Rattazzi was a purely human one [...]. He therefore began to reflect, and to ask himself: "Cannot this society, whilst having a civil character before the Government, acquire also the nature of a religious institute before God and the Church; cannot its members be free citizens and religious at the same time?" [Bonetti, *St. JB's Early Apostolate* (1934) 346]

**[Comment by this Writers III]** — Bonetti's words in Bonetti's Comment II, above, would indicate that before his trip to Rome in 1858 Don Bosco had already mentioned the project for some kind of society to a number of individuals who, though accepting the idea, made two different kinds of commitment. (Note that no mention is made of vows or promises).

Fr. Victor Alasonatti also, in a letter written before Don Bosco's Roman trip to clerical student Angelo Savio (working in a boys home in Alessandria), without making refer-

ence to vows or promises confirms the existence of such a group “united as confreres in spirit under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales.” He cautions him not to speak about it in public, “until we see more clearly whether it is the Lord’s good pleasure to prosper the group or to dissolve it—and this might shortly be decided when Don Bosco journeys to Rome at the beginning of Lent.” [Letter of February 6, 1858 in ASC 270: Alasonatti.]

Likewise, in the Historical Summary (Origine di questa Congregazione) in the earliest constitutions (Rua draft of 1858) Don Bosco states that 15 individuals had “professed” (meaning, “pledged to observe”) “these constitutions, that is, 5 priests, 8 clerical students and 2 laymen.” [Motto, Cost. SDB, 70] Though written after Don Bosco’s audience with Pius IX (March 1858) and his return from Rome, the statement would certainly indicate the prior existence of a group that had already made a commitment to Don Bosco and to the future.

#### **4. Don Bosco’s Trip to Rome on the Business of the Congregation (February 19-April 16, 1958)**

*(1) Don Bosco and Pius IX according to Bonetti and Lemoyne’s Interpretation*

Don Bosco left for Rome on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 1858 with Cleric Michael Rua as “secretary.” According to Rua’s incomplete diary, the two spent much time sightseeing, for it was Don Bosco’s first visit to the eternal city! The basic statement made by Bonetti is that Don Bosco went to Rome with a previously written text of the constitutions that he intended to present to the Pope. Apparently on a first audience (March 9), Don Bosco did not submit the text he had brought with him, but made a oral presentation the burden of which may be deduced from the Pope’s reply:

It is necessary that you should establish a Society with which the Government cannot interfere. At the same time, however, you must not be satisfied with binding its members through mere promises, otherwise you would never be sure of your subjects, nor could you count on them for any length of time. [*St. J. B’s Early Apostolate* (1934) p. 356]

Later Don Bosco stated that Pius IX had laid the foundations (*basi*) for the society, [Appeal to Pius IX, Feb. 12, 1864, in Motto, Cost. SDB, p. 228] and that the Pope himself had traced out “its plan.” [*Breve notizia*, 1864, cf. *IBM VII*, 892 (omitted in *EBM*)]

The two foundations (Don Bosco explains) are (1) that the Society should such as to prevent government interference. (Don Bosco “rephrased” this in terms of civil right(s), as Rattazzi had explained, though there is no attestation that the Pope ever mentioned “civil rights”); (2) that the

Society would have to have vows “simple” and “easily dissolved” to be a true religious congregation according to Church law. (Don Bosco’s understanding of “simple” and “easily dissolved” is debated.)

Bonetti seems to have understood the above to mean that the Pope worked over the manuscript of the constitutions that Don Bosco (supposedly, see below) had submitted. He writes:

Don Bosco, during the time that still remained to him in Rome, revised the rules of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales, already written in the previous year; some he omitted, and made alterations here and there, in order to make them more conformable to the sentiments of Pius IX. His Holiness read them carefully, adding certain observations in his own writing, and sent them to his Eminence Cardinal Gaude. [...] Before leaving Rome, Don Bosco held several conferences with him [Gaude] on the subject, and they agreed together that the Rules should be practiced for a time in their amended form, and then forwarded to his Eminence [Gaude], who was to present them to the Holy See for approval. Unfortunately the Cardinal soon afterwards was called to his reward. [Bonetti, *St. J. B’s Early Apostolate* (1934), 358]

Lemoyne follows Bonetti closely for the first audience (March 9), but expands the scenario for the two subsequent audiences merely mentioned by Bonetti. He has Don Bosco hand the manuscript to the pope in the second audience (March 21), the audience in which Pius IX urged Don Bosco to put his extraordinary experiences down in writing. Then in the third audience (April 6) he has the pope hand the manuscript back. [Audiences described by Lemoyne: March 9 (*EBM V*, pp. 558-562); Sunday, March 21 (pp. 575-579), April 6 (pp. 594-596).

*(2) Correction of Bonetti-Lemoyne Regarding Previously Written Constitutions and Three Papal Audiences*

It is now known how things fared in Rome. Don Bosco did not bring with him to Rome a previously written draft of the constitutions. At first he had intended only to present his plan for a religious society orally. In Rome, however, he asked his friend, Cardinal Gaude, for guidance in the matter; and the Cardinal advised him not to see the Holy Father without a written plan. Don Bosco then, on the basis of what was already being done in Turin, worked up a “brief plan for a religious congregation.”

Before his audience with Pius IX, Don Bosco wrote to the General of the Rosminians, Fr. John B. Pagani, asking him to review “a brief plan for a religious congregation” that he had just set down. [*Rosminian Archives*, A1. Box 11: S. Giov. Bosco 87-88; Motto, *Epistolario*, I, p. 339]

[Rome], 49 Quirinale Street  
March 4, 1858

Most Reverend and Esteemed Father General,  
I need a big favor from you. Please read the enclosed brief plan for a religious congregation, and make any observation that you may think fit to make in the Lord. My intention was simply to make an oral presentation of my idea [to the Holy Father], but Cardinal Gaude advised me to put something down in writing. Hence, in the past couple of days, working from memory as well as I could, I set down [this brief plan] guided by what is being done in the Home of the Oratory. I thank you for the great and kind help you are giving us these days, and I pray God's abundant blessings on you and on the congregation entrusted to your care. With gratitude and high esteem, I remain  
Sincerely yours, — Father John Bosco

Don Bosco did most likely present the written plan (not a copy of the constitutions!) to the Pope at the audience of March 9 (first audience). But it is not very likely that the Pope read it, personally annotated it, and returned it to Don Bosco, as Lemoyne would have it. No such annotated document is extant, nor did Don Bosco ever show such a document to anyone, or even ever refer to it.

Then there is the matter of the audiences themselves (according to the Lemoyne, on March 9, on Sunday, March 21, and on April 6). Bonetti's principal source for Don Bosco's activities in Rome is the Rua diary. [Viaggio a Roma, 1858, in ASC 132, FDB 1,352 E3 - 1,354 A5]. Unfortunately the diary is incomplete. It covers the period from February 18 (departure from Turin) to March 20, in detail. For the week of March 21-28 it provides only a summary in an uncertain hand. The remaining days (to April 16, return to Turin) are not chronicled.

If we are to credit the last summary entries, trivial sight-seeing activities (and a social call on a cardinal) for March 21, Sunday, are briefly enumerated, whereas an important audience with the Pope (if it took place) is overlooked! This presumed audience therefore appears to be an inference by Lemoyne (interpreting Bonetti) to make room, (1) for a presentation to the Pope of the constitutional text that supposedly Don Bosco had brought with him (audience of March 9); (2) for revising the constitutional text in accordance with Pius IX's twin foundations, and returning it to the Pope in an inferred second audience (on March 21), and (3) for taking back the constitutions (annotated by the Pope) in a third audience (on April 6).

This construction collapses when we learn that Don Bosco had not brought a copy (nor even a written sketch) of the constitutions with him to Rome, as his letter to the Rosminian General makes clear.

## 5. First Draft of the Salesian Constitutions and Form of the Society

After thanking the Pope in a second audience Don Bosco and Cleric Rua left Rome on April 14th and were back in Turin two days later. In late 1858 or early 1859, Cleric Rua produced the earliest known draft of the constitutions from texts authored by Don Bosco himself.

The first two articles of the chapter, "Form of the Society," reflect the Pope's twin foundations: (1) that the Society must have "simple" public vows, not mere promises, to be a true religious congregation according to Church law; (2) that the Society should be such as to prevent government interference, which Don Bosco "rephrased" this in terms of civil right(s), though there is no attestation that the Pope ever mentioned "civil rights."

1. All the associates live the common life, united only by [the bond of] fraternal charity and the simple vows, which bind them so as to form one heart and one soul in order to love and serve God.
2. No one on entering the congregation shall forfeit his civil right, even after taking vows; therefore he retains ownership of his goods [...]. [Motto, Cost. SDB, p. 82]

The simple public vows of obedience, poverty and chastity reserved to the Pope made the Society a religious corporation in accordance with the juridical system of the Church's Canon Law—though Don Bosco claimed that the Society was not a corporation of any kind, and believed that as Superior he had control of the vows.

The civil right(s) clause that the Pope (in Don Bosco's interpretation) placed as one of the twin foundations met with strong objections from the Roman authorities, since the Liberal revolution the policy of the Holy See was to reject any formula that could be construed as a capitulation to the lay state's legal system.

This first draft of the constitutions served as starting point in the subsequent development of the constitutional text. Over the next four years, Don Bosco labored to improve and expand the text in view of obtaining the Holy See's approval. Over the next ten years (1864-1874) the struggle for approval required many interventions by Rome and many compromises and concessions on Don Bosco's part.

Through this process, the Salesian Society, a novel creation as conceived by Don Bosco in the years 1854-1858, was forced by stages into the common ecclesiastical mold. Don Bosco's acceptance testifies not only to his realism, but also, and above all, to his uncompromising spirit of faith and obedience to the Church.

## 6. Immediate Developments after Don Bosco's Audiences with Pius IX in 1858 and the Founding of the Salesian Society in 1859

The significance of the year 1858 with reference to the origin of the Salesian Society and its immediate develop-

ment may be gauged from the decisive forward movement that followed. Referring back to the year 1858, Don Bosco in 1877 described the first step taken in setting up the society:

The Congregation was divided into two categories, or rather two families. Those who were free and felt the calling came together to live in community [...]. The others, namely the externs, continued to live in the world in the bosom of their families, but did not cease to promote the work of the oratories.

This text (referring more appropriately to the year 1859) raises a number of critical questions that have been addressed in Part One, above, with special reference to Desramaut's and Stella's views. Suffice it here to say that the group that had coalesced around Don Bosco prior to his trip to Rome and the resulting constitutions, would have existed as a *religious association* with a simple promise to engage "in the practical exercise of charity" and with the option of living in community or not. Don Bosco was not slow in moving the group that had been forming around him, and that was at least open to the idea of a *religious society*, toward a decision.

At a historic meeting held on December 9, 1859, Don Bosco finally announced to his group of twenty young men his intention of founding a *religious congregation*. It would be for those only "who, after mature reflection, *intended to take vows poverty, chastity and obedience in due time*," and gave them a week's time to come to a decision. The thought of a religious congregation filled those young men with apprehension. But in the case of most of them, Cagliari's struggle and final decision were typical: "Monk or not, I'll stay with Don Bosco."

Out of the original twenty, eighteen returned to keep the appointment on December 18, 1859. Don Bosco, as "initiator and promoter," was asked to accept the post of Rector Major; he accepted on condition that he could appoint his own Prefect-Vicar. He confirmed Father Victor Alasonatti in that post, and the other officers were elected. The stated purpose of this Society, as the founding document states, was: **"to promote and preserve the spirit of true charity that is required by the work of the oratories on behalf of young people abandoned and at risk. [...] [and] to help one another toward personal holiness."**

#### THE FOUNDING DOCUMENT

Minutes of the Founding Meeting of December 18, 1859

The three-page Manuscript is in ASC 0592 Consiglio Superiore Verbali, FDBM 1,973 D9-11. As stated in the document, it is the work of Fr. Victor Alasonatti who acted as secretary at the meeting. The text is edited in EBM VI, pp. 181-183.

Italian Text  
Nel Nome di Nostro Signor  
Gesù Cristo. Amen

[p. 1] L'anno del Signore mille ottocento cinquantanove alli diciotto di Dicembre in questo Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales nella camera del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni alle ore 9 pomeridiane si radunavano, esso, il Sacerdote Alasonatti Vittorio, i chierici Savio Angelo Diacono, Rua Michele Suddiacono, Cagliari Giovanni, Francesca Gio. Battista, Provera Francesco, Ghivarello Carlo, Lazzero Giuseppe, Bonetti Giovanni, Anfossi Giovanni, Marcelino Luigi, Cerruti Francesco, Durando Celestino, Pettiva Secondo, Rovetto Antonio, Bongiovanni Cesare Giuseppe, il giovane Chiapale Luigi, tutti allo scopo ed in uno spirito di promuovere e conservare lo spirito di vera carità che richiedesi nell'opera degli Oratori per la gioventù abbandonata e pericolante, la quale in questi calamitosi tempi viene in mille maniere sedotta a danno della società e precipitata nell'empietà ed irreligione.

Piacque pertanto ai medesimi Congregati di erigersi in Società o Congregazione che avendo di mira il vicendevole ajuto per la santificazione propria si proponesse di promuovere la gloria di Dio e la salute delle anime specialmente delle più bisognose d'istruzione e di educazione.

[p. 2] Ed approvato

English Translation  
In the Name of Our Lord  
Jesus Christ. Amen

In the year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, on the eighteenth of December, in this Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, at 9 in the evening, the following gathered in Father John Bosco's room: [Don Bosco] himself, Father Vittorio Alasonatti, the Seminar-ians Deacon Angelo Savio, Subdeacon Michele Rua, Giovanni Cagliari, Gio. Battista Francesca, Francesco Provera, Carlo Ghivarello, Giuseppe Lazzero, Giovanni Bonetti, Giovanni Anfossi, Luigi Marcellino, Francesco Cerruti, Celestino Durando, Secondo Pettiva, Antonio Rovetto, Cesare Giuseppe Bongiovanni, and the young man Luigi Chiapale. All [present were] united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the oratories on behalf of young people neglected and at risk. For in these disastrous times of ours such young people are liable to being corrupted and plunged into godlessness and irreligion to the detriment of the whole of society.

The Gathered group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification.

The project met with unanimous approval. Hence,

di comune consenso il disegno proposto, fatta breve preghiera ed invocato il lume dello Spirito Santo, procedevano alla elezione dei Membri che dovessero costituire la direzione della società per questa e per nuove Congregazioni se a Dio piacerà favorirne l'incremento.

Pregarono pertanto unanimi Lui iniziatore e promotore a gradire la carica di Superiore Maggiore siccome del tutto a Lui conveniente, il quale avendola accettata colla riserva della facoltà di nominarsi il prefetto, poichè nessuno vi si oppose, pronunziò che gli pareva non dovesse muovere dall'ufficio di prefetto lo Scrittore il quale fin qui teneva tal carica nella casa.

Si pensò quindi tosto al modo di elezione per gli altri soci che concorrono nella Direzione, e si convenne di adottare la votazione a suffragi segreti per più breve via a costituire il Consiglio, il quale doveva essere composto di un Direttore Spirituale, dell'Economo e di tre consiglieri in compagnia dei due predescritti ufficiali.

Or fatto Segretario a questo scopo lo Scrittore, ei protesta di aver fedelmente adempiuto l'ufficio [p. 3] commessogli di comune fiducia, attribuendo il suffragio a ciascuno dei Soci secondochè veniva nominato in votazione; e quindi essergli risultato nella elezione del direttore Spirituale all'unanimità la scelta nel chierico Suddiacono Rua Michele che non ne ricusava. Il che ripetutosi per l'Economo, riuscì e fu riconosciuto il Diacono Angelo Savio il quale promise altresì di assumerne il relativo impegno.

Restavano ancora da eleggere i tre consiglieri, pel primo dei quali fattasi al solito la votazione venne il chierico Cagliero Giovanni. Il secondo consigliere sortì il chierico Gio Bonetti. Pel terzo ed ultimo essendo riusciti eguali suffragi a favore dei chierici Ghivarello Carlo e Provera Francesco, fattasi altra votazione, la maggioranza risultò pel chierico Ghivarello, e così fu definitivamente costituito il corpo di amministrazione della nostra Società.

Il quale fatto come venne fin qui complessivamente esposto fu letto in piena Congrega di tutti i prelodati Soci ed ufficiali per ora nominati, i quali riconosciutane la verità, concordi fermarono che se ne conservasse l'originale, a cui per autenticità si sottoscrisse il Superiore Maggiore e come Segretario

Sac. Bosco Gio.  
Alasonatti Vittorio Sac. Prefetto

after a short prayer and the invocation of the light of the Holy Spirit, the group proceeded to elect the members that would make up the central body of the society and would lead this and future communities, if it should please God to grant increase.

The group then unanimously requested Him [Don Bosco] who has been the initiator and promoter [of the work] to accept the office of Major Superior, as is becoming in every respect. He accepted the office on condition that he should have power to choose for the office of prefect the present writer [Alasonatti], who has held that office in the house up to the present.

The group then considered the method to be followed in electing the other members of the central governing body, and it was decided to hold the election by secret ballot. This was deemed the speediest way of setting up the council, which was to consist of a spiritual director, of a financial administrator, and of three councilors, in addition to the two already mentioned officers.

The writer [of these minutes] was appointed secretary and [now] solemnly declares that he has faithfully discharged the task entrusted to him by general agreement. As the balloting progressed, he recorded the votes by the name of the individual concerned; and this was the result of the elections: the Seminarian, Subdeacon Michele Rua was unanimously elected spiritual director, and he accepted [the appointment]. The same procedure was followed for the financial administrator, with the result that Deacon Angelo Savio was elected. He also accepted, pledging to discharge the duties of that office.

Three councilors remained to be elected. The balloting for the first of these resulted in the election of Seminarian Giovanni Cagliero. The second councilor to be elected was Gio[vanni] Bonetti. The balloting for the third and last [councilor] resulted in a tie between seminarians Carlo Ghivarello and Francesco Provera. A second balloting produced a majority favoring Seminarian Ghivarello. Thus the central administrative body of our Society was definitively established.

The report of these proceedings, as summarily described herein, was read before the assembly of all the members and elected officers and was approved as true to fact. It was then unanimously resolved that this original record should be kept on file, and to guarantee its authenticity the Major Superior and the Secretary affixed their signatures.

Father Gio Bosco  
Father Victor Alasonatti, Prefect

## 7. Towards Profession of Canonical Vows

F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, pp. 636-640 (detailed)

P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, pp. 295-297

The General Council (then called “Superior Chapter”) held its first meeting on February 2, 1860, and admitted to the “practice of the rules” (that is, “novitiate”) the first Lay Salesian, Joseph Rossi. It met regularly thereafter to pass on admission of candidates to the “practice of the rules.” Paul Albera (not quite fifteen years of age) was admitted on May 1, 1860 and Seminarian Dominic Ruffino, on May 3, 1861. Financial Administrator Angelo Savio’s priestly ordination took place on June 2, 1860; and Spiritual Director Michael Rua’s, on July 29, 1860, the first two Salesians of the group to be ordained. The first Extern Salesian (Father John Ciattino), referred to as a “tertiary,” was received on May 21, 1861. [ASC 0592: Cons. Sup., Verballi 1860-1869, *FDB* 1873 E3; *EBM* VI, 571. After the word “tertiary” Lemoyne interprets: “what today we would call a Cooperator.

Up to this point, these “clerics and priests of Don Bosco,” as they were commonly known, were bound to Don Bosco and to each other only by a *personal commitment to the exercise of charity (the work of the oratory)*, rather than by any ideal or structures of religious life. This changed with the first official profession of canonical vows in accordance with the constitutions, which had been in the process of development since 1858 took place on May 14, 1862. The minutes read:

The confreres of the Society of St. Francis de Sales were convened by the Rector [Major], and most of them re-committed themselves to the Society by the official profession of triennial vows. [...] Then [when the prayers were over] the confreres in sacred orders all together pronounced the formula of vows loudly and clearly, [...] Then each signed his name in the book prepared for that purpose. The following were professed: Father Victor Alasonatti, Father Michael Rua, Father Angelo Savio, Father Joseph Rocchietti, [Deacon] John Cagliero, [Deacon] John Baptist Francesia, and [Subdeacon] Dominic Ruffino; the seminarians Celestine Durando, John Baptist Anfossi, John Boggero, John Bonetti, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, Louis Chiapale, Joseph Bongiovanni, Joseph Lazzerio, Francis Provera, John Garino, Louis Jarach. Paul Albera, and the lay members Chevalier Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano and Joseph Gaia. [...]. [ASC 0592: Cons. Sup. Verballi, May 14, 1862, *FDB* 1873 E5-6; *EBM* VII, 101]

In his chronicle, Bonetti also records the event: “Twenty-two of us, not counting Don Bosco, [...] took vows as prescribed by the rules. Because of the number, we repeated

the formula as Father Rua read it phrase by phrase.”

He also records Don Bosco’s words on that occasion. Among other things Don Bosco is quoted as saying:

“Did Don Bosco,” someone may ask, “also take these vows?” Yes! As you were making your profession before me, I too was taking my vows in perpetuity before this same crucifix. I offered myself to the Lord, ready for any sacrifice for his greater glory and for the salvation of souls, especially of the young. [ASC 110: Cronachette, Bonetti, Annali III. *FDB* 992 E10; *EBM* VII, 102]

### Scripture Reading: Mt 13: 44-52

<sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angel will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup>“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

### Salesian Reading

#### Draft Constitutions of the SS (1858, Preamble, It. Rua Ms)

At all times has it been the special concern of the ministers of the church to promote, to the best of their power, the spiritual welfare of the young. The good or evil moral condition of society will depend on whether young people receive a good or a bad education. Our Divine Savior himself has shown us the truth of this by his deeds. For in fulfilling his divine mission on earth, with a love of predilection he invited children to come close to him: *Sinite parvulos venire ad me* [Let little children come to me].

The Supreme Pontiffs, following in the footsteps of the Eternal Pontiff, our Divine Savior, whose vicars on earth they are, have at all times by the spoken and written word promoted the good education of the young; and consequently they have favored and supported those institutes that are dedicated to this area of the sacred ministry.

At the present time, however, this need is felt with far greater urgency. Parental neglect, the abusive power of the press, and the proselytizing efforts of heretics demand that we unite in fighting for the Lord's cause, under the banner of the faith. Our efforts must aim at safeguarding the faith and the moral life of that category of young people whose eternal salvation is more at risk precisely because of their poverty.

This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first established in Turin in 1841.

#### **Draft Constitutions of the SS (1860 Purpose of the SS, It. Boggero Ms)**

1. It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] [as] its members: priests, seminarians and laymen too, in order that they may strive for perfection through the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Savior, especially in charity toward poor young people.

#### **Draft Constitutions of the SS (1873 Form of the SS, Latin Printed)**

1. All the members lead the common life bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and of the simple vows, which binds them (together) so that they form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtue of obedience, poverty and holiness of life, and by a committed Christian way of living.
2. No one who has entered the Society, even after making his vows, forfeits his civil rights. Therefore he retains possession of his goods, and he shall likewise pay the public taxes as prescribed by civil laws; he may validly and licitly buy, sell, make a last will, and also succeed into [possession of] goods of others. But for as long as he remains in the society, he may not administer his possessions except in the manner and within the limits that the Rector Major will judge right in the Lord.

#### **Constitutions of the Salesian Society (1984)**

Art. 1. [...] The Spirit formed within [Don Bosco] the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys." [EBM XVIII, 216]

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic projects, first among them our Society.

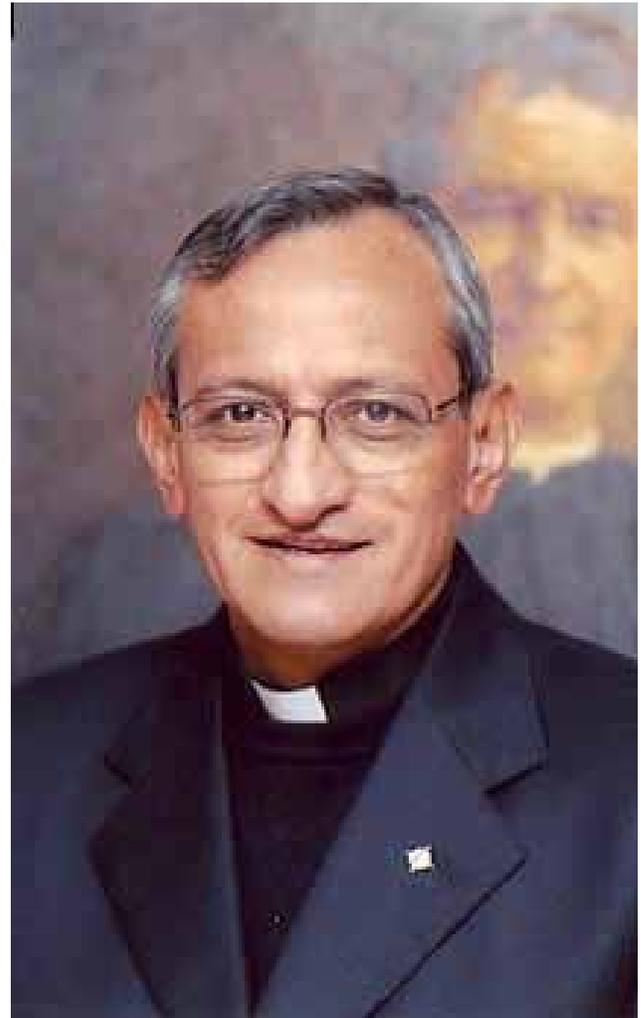
The Church has acknowledged God's hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

[...]

Art. 2. We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a

community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan is a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor.

By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness.



#### **MESSAGES OF THE RECTOR MAJOR ON THE B.S. - A VAST MOVEMENT FOR THE YOUNG**

#### **MAY : THE FRUITS OF THE GOOD SEED Saints and Founders of the SF**

In this way was born a true school of holiness which continues in our own time. From Don Bosco the founder, subsequent founders of new groups drew inspiration and guidance, spirituality and pastoral method (CIC 1).

A good tree does not give bad fruit (Lk 6,43). The passage in Luke is significant for the history of the development of the Salesian charism. Don Bosco gave his life a gospel meaning putting it at the service of the young to help them to be holy and to be upright citizens.

He stands for the good seed which became a good tree whose fruit is excellent. He was the pattern on which saints were modelled. His first successor Blessed Michael Rua, was seen as a new Don Bosco; he made fidelity to the Founder his own plan of life and action, and under him the Salesians grew from 773 to 4000, the houses (schools, institutes and missions) from 57 to 345, the Provinces from 6 to 34, in 33 countries. Paul VI beatified him in 1972, saying: "He made the spring a stream, a river". Blessed Philip Rinaldi, his third successor, gave a new impetus to the interior life of the Salesians, putting absolute trust in God and in Mary Help of Christians; he sent 1800 Salesians to the missions, founded the VDB – Volunteers of Don Bosco Movement, who lived consecrated lives without leaving their families or their places of work. Saint Mary Mazzarello, was the co-foundress of the FMA the Salesian Sisters, intelligent, strong-willed, endowed with great emotional balance. After a period of illness she devoted her life to the education of the girls in Mornese, through a sewing and dress-making workshop, a festive oratory and a home for little girls without parents. A meeting with Don Bosco (1864) was decisive as he suggested to her a way of broadening her desire for the apostolate. Together therefore on 5 August 1872 they founded a new religious family for the benefit of the young. From this splendid fruit grew a great new apostolic enterprise which today numbers about 15 thousand Sisters with such splendid examples of holiness as the three Blesseds Maddalena Morano, Maria Romero, Eusebia Palomino and many other women of God ...

Among the Salesians-Cooperators Blessed Alexandrina da Costa whose life was marked by the serious accident she had in escaping from a violent attack which left her immobile for over 30 years, sustained spiritually, but also physically by the Holy Eucharist (for 13 years her only food was the consecrated host). She made her promise as a Cooperator and offered her sufferings for the Salesian mission to the young. Then there is the Servant of God Attilio Giordani who decided to leave for Brazil with his wife, and with his children devoted his life to voluntary service; and again Cardinal Giuseppe Guarino, who welcomed the first Salesians to Sicily, and gave them an inheritance which enabled them to open the houses at Ali for the FMA and at Messina for the SDB, and with a Salesian spirit in 1889 founded the "Apostles of the Holy Family." Blessed Luigi Variara, a Salesian dedicated to the welfare of the least fortunate, especially the lepers in the leper colony at Agua de Dios, where he transformed the lives of the eight hundred sick people and the other inhabitants helping them in a way that was both full of cheerfulness and deeply spiritual;

then he gathered together from among the lepers a group of young women to share his apostolic passion and founded in 1905 the "Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary." Also highly significant was the life of Bishop Giuseppe Cognata, Bishop of Bova Marina, founder of the "Oblates of the Sacred Heart". The indescribable suffering brought about by the calumnies which led to him having to put aside his role as Bishop for 22 years, did not weaken his faith. He was rehabilitated and now work is in progress to move forward the cause of his beatification.

The few lines of an article are not enough to speak about Salesian holiness; the list is a long one: Blessed Artemides Zatti, Zephyrinus Namuncurà, Laura Vicuña, Simon Srugli, Maria Troncatti, Fr Giuseppe Quadrio Bishop Stefano Ferrando, Fr Carlo dalla Torre, Saint Luigi Versiglia, Saint Callisto Caravario, Fr Vincenzo Cimatti, the martyrs in Spain and in Poland. The tiny seed has indeed become a large tree "weighed down" with good fruit! However, I should like to finish with one of the "Volunteers with Don Bosco", Nino Baglieri, who died two years ago: a life considered worthy of a future process of beatification. A builder, at 17 years of age falling from a scaffolding he was totally paralysed. At first he lived in a mood of rebellion, but then the Spirit entered into his heart. He began to make of his situation an intense offering and prayer becoming for many people a spiritual focal point. He had learned to write using his mouth and this enabled him to leave behind some precious testimonies: "No one is excluded from holiness, it depends on us, on how we say our "Yes" to the Lord. And if someone hears in his heart the voice of the Lord calling him to follow Him in consecrated life don't be afraid to say your own complete "Yes". A yes to life!" Today the Salesian Family has eight Saints, one hundred and ten Blesseds, eight Venerables, twenty-eight Servants of God ...

Holiness is waiting for us.

MAY  
THE  
MONTH  
OF  
MARY.  
HELP  
OF  
CHRISTIANS

