

# Community and Mission

## Spiritual Insights and Salesian Religious Life in Don Bosco's Constitutions

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### Introduction

The new Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales issued in their final form to the Salesians in 1984 bear no *outward* resemblance to the constitutions first drafted by Don Bosco in 1858 and approved (after protracted, painful travail) by the Holy See in 1874. However, the principles, the insights, and the spirit which Don Bosco embodied in his constitutions, and which found explication and application in Don Bosco's consistent practice, have been beautifully restated in the new constitutions to produce a comprehensive and coherent rule of life for Salesians. Don Bosco's favorite expressions, embodying important spiritual insights, have also been preserved, as may be seen in the following example.

<b>SDB Const. 1984, Community, #50</b>	<b>DB's Const. 1860, Form, Art. 1</b>
<p>50. God calls us to live in community and entrusts us with brothers to love.</p> <p>Brotherly love, our apostolic mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion.</p> <p>We thus become one heart and one soul to love and serve God, and to help one another.</p>	<p>1. All the gathered-members lead the common life bound only by the bond fraternal charity and the simple vows, which unites them to form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtue of obedience, of poverty, and of holiness of life.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[to be discussed in Part II, below]</i></p>

Clearly, the special commissions and the renewal general chapters worked knowledgeably and well.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* (Roma: Editrice S.D.B., 1984).

The present article is not concerned with the new constitutions. No comparative study will be attempted, nor any reference will be made to them. This would be carrying coal to Newcastle. I shall instead attempt simply to identify and briefly discuss some of the spiritual insights and principles for religious life and action which Don Bosco embodied in *his* constitutions.

To this end, I will first briefly describe the development of Don Bosco's constitutions, as he laboriously worked and re-worked the text in response to critical observations by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, over a period of some 15 years (Part I). I will then try to identify and discuss Don Bosco's chief proposals for the religious life and the apostolate of his Salesians (Part II). This latter part of the work will require a fairly close examination of a number of foundational articles from key chapters of those early constitutions.

Francesco Motto's critical edition of the constitutional texts from archival documents will be my point of reference throughout. Whenever necessary and appropriate, I shall also make reference to the *Biographical Memoirs*, to *Opere Edite* and to other resources.<sup>2</sup> All quotes will be given in English translation.

## Part I. Brief History of the Textual Development of Don Bosco's Constitutions

Writing a concise textual history of the early Salesian constitutions may be compared to writing "A Brief History of Time."<sup>3</sup> It is a long and complex history which parallels and is interwoven with the process of approval. According to the *Methodus* and other norms issued by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,<sup>4</sup> the process by which a new religious institute was approved comprised three phases:

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<sup>2</sup> *Giovanni Bosco, Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*. Testi critici a cura di Francesco Motto, SDB (Istituto Storico Salesiano, Roma. Fonti, Serie prima, 1. Roma: LAS, 1982). [*Motto, Cost. DB*] Besides the critical edition of original texts of Don Bosco's constitutions from the Central Salesian Archive, Motto provides introductory studies and appendices. The Don Bosco files of the Central Salesian Archive [*ASC*] are available to us in Microfiches [*FDBM*].

Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1898-1939), 19 volumes. [*IBM*] The first 16 volumes are translated into English as *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. An American Edition [...], Rev. Diego Borgatello (Michael Mendl), Editor-in-Chief (New Rochelle, New York, 1965-1995). [*EBM*]

Centro Studi Don Bosco, Università Pontificia Salesiana, *Giovanni Bosco, Opere Edite*, ristampa anastatica (Roma: LAS, 1977) 38 volumes. [*Opere Edite*]

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> *Methodus quae a Sacra Congregatione Episcoporum et Regularium servatur in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium* ab A. Bizzarri Archiepiscopo

(1) An examination of the life and constitutions of the institute led to the awarding of a Decree of Commendation (*Decretum Laudis*). This “first approval” was granted after an appropriate period of time had elapsed since the founding, and only if the institute was making good progress and had the support of ordinaries expressed in letters of commendation.

Together with the Decree, a number of observations (*animadversiones*) were usually given; they were designed to improve the constitutions in accordance with the law and practice of the Church.

(2) After an appropriate trial period, a petition for the approval of the institute could be submitted. The constitutions were to have been emended in compliance with the observations given, and new testimonial letters from ordinaries were to have been obtained. The Decree of Approval of the Institute (*Decretum approbationis instituti*) followed. If necessary, new observations were given for a further revision of the constitutional text.

(3) The third and final phase led to the Decree of Approval of the Constitutions (*Decretum approbationis constitutionum*). This was given only after the constitutions were emended as requested, and after their worth was ascertained on the basis of the institute’s performance. To this effect documents and testimonial letters were to be submitted anew.

The approval might be definitive or only for a trial period.

In this first part, I will simply describe the development of the text, making only brief reference, when necessary, to the issues debated and negotiated in the process of approval.<sup>5</sup>

In the critical edition of the constitutional texts referred to above, Motto has studied and classified 56 texts, in both manuscript and printed form. From among them he has identified and described eight drafts which represent eight arrival points, or successive important stages, in the development of the text of the early constitutions, from 1858 to 1875.

## I. From the Earliest Extant Text to the Decree of Commendation (1858-1864): Stages 1-3

### 1. Stage 1: The Earliest Text of 1858

The earliest stage is represented by a manuscript (in Italian) in Seminarian Michele Rua’s hand. To it the critical editor has assigned the letters *Ar*.<sup>6</sup> It

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*philippen. secretario exposita* [Method by which the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is guided in approving new institutes with simple vows ...], in *Collectanea* [...]. (Rome, 1863), 829-830, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 228 (Document 1).

<sup>5</sup> For details of the process of approval, cf. Arthur Lenti, “The Bosco-Gastaldi Conflict (1872-1882): Part I,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 4:2 (1993) 1-83.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 22 (# 1). *Ar* is in *ASC* 022(1), *FDBM* 1,893 E5ff. The editor has arranged the texts in chronological order, and has then assigned alphabetically a Roman (or Greek) uppercase letter to them. The added lowercase

contains 10 chapters: [1] Preamble, [2] Historical Sketch of the Society, [3] Purpose, [4] Form, [5] Obedience, [6] Poverty, [7] Chastity, [8] Internal Government (including articles on election of Rector Major, later to become a separate chapter), [9] Other Superiors, and [10] Admission.

This manuscript is also the earliest extant text, and internal evidence favors a date in mid or late 1858.<sup>7</sup> It was the result of an “incubation” period which led to Don Bosco’s meeting with Prime Minister Urbano Rattazzi, probably in May 1857, and to milestone audiences with Pope Pius IX, in March-April 1858.<sup>8</sup>

That this text was produced after Don Bosco’s meeting with Pius IX is proved by the fact that it features the three canonical vows, which (as Don Bosco was repeatedly to emphasize) was one of the two foundations laid down by the pope.

The Rua draft therefore is regarded as the starting point in the process of development of the text of the early Salesian constitutions.

## 2. Stage 2: The Text of 1860

Clearly Don Bosco regarded the draft of 1858 as a first attempt and as an initial proposal that needed to be developed. He went to work with that understanding, and over the next two years through a couple of intermediate phases he produced a new text.

### (1) The Text of 1860

This second stage is represented by a manuscript in Italian in the hand of Seminarian Giovanni Boggero. It is designated with the letters *Do* in the critical edition.<sup>9</sup>

Notable advances are at once apparent. Don Bosco wrote new, or revised existing, articles and added four new chapters to the original ten: [11] Practices of Piety, [12] Habit, [13] Profession Formula, [14] External Members. An

letter stands for the writer: r=Rua, o=Boggero, b=Bosco. On the other hand, s (=stampa in Italian) designates a printed edition.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Biographical Memoirs* Lemoine published an early text of the constitutions, but it is not, as he claims, the oldest text. Cf. *EBM* V, 635-645.

<sup>8</sup> In the *Biographical Memoirs* Lemoine speaks of 3 audiences with Pius IX: March 9, 1858 (*EBM* V, 558-562), March 21 (575-579), April 6 (594-596). Interpreting his source (Giovanni Bonetti’s *History of the Oratory* published in the *Salesian Bulletin*), he writes that Don Bosco presented to Pius IX a draft of the constitutions which the pope annotated and returned in a later audience. This supposition finds no confirmation in the diary which Seminarian Rua kept of the trip [*Viaggio a Roma. 1858, ASC* 132, *FDBM* 1,352 E3 - 1354 A5]. Furthermore, there is no record that such a manuscript ever existed, or that Don Bosco ever did refer to it.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 25-26 (# 7). *Do* is in *ASC* 022(4), *FDBM* 1,895 B10ff.



important new article (Article 5 of the chapter on Purpose) establishes junior seminary schools for poor lads.

This text was sent for approval to Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, by this time an aging exile in Lyons. It bears the signatures of Don Bosco and 25 Salesians. Among them, beneath the signatures of the three priests (Don Bosco, Father Vittorio Alasonatti and Father Angelo Savio) we note the signature of *Deacon* Michele Rua. Rua was ordained a priest on July 29, 1860. Hence 1860 is the date assigned to this draft.<sup>10</sup>

This text, like the text of 1858, still enjoys the distinction of having been produced under Don Bosco's inspiration and sole control. This is no longer completely true of the text of 1864, and even less so of subsequent drafts for which Don Bosco had to take into consideration critical observations officially handed down by the reviewing authorities.

## (2) Archbishop Fransoni and Critical Observations to the Text of 1860

Archbishop Fransoni himself made a few superficial observations to these constitutions, and asked Father Marcantonio Durando to examine them more carefully.<sup>11</sup> Durando submitted a number of critical observations to the archbishop which have not come down to us. We may assume, however, that they were similar to those he made in 1867 for the new archbishop, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro.<sup>12</sup>

In a letter to Don Bosco, Archbishop Fransoni refers to Durando's critical observations of 1860 and to Don Bosco's less than full compliance. He writes:

Concerning the Society of St. Francis de Sales, I was informed that its rules have been returned to you with some important observations [by Father Durando], [...] so that you could emend and complete them. I seem to remember being told afterwards that you had made some concessions, but that there still remained many notable deficiencies requiring correction.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The date 1860 finds corroboration in letters of Archbishop Fransoni on the subject, the first of which (to his vicar in Turin), is dated July 19, 1860. [ATT Lettere Fransoni, 227, in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 17, n. 12.]

<sup>11</sup> The Servant of God, Father Marco Antonio Durando (1801-1880) came from a well-to-do Turinese family. Marcantonio joined the Vincentian Priests of the Mission and was ordained by Archbishop Fransoni in 1824. From 1837 until his death he served as visitor (provincial) of the Vincentian Turin province. He was founder and director of religious communities, and was a trusted counselor of Archbishop Fransoni before the latter's exile. Subsequently, he was a member of the archdiocesan commission charged with assisting the vicar general in the government of the archdiocese. [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 17, n. 13]

<sup>12</sup> Durando's observations of 1867 [cf. note 27 and related text below] are edited in *EBM VI*, 421-422 by Lemoyne who believed them to be Durando's observations of 1860.

<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Fransoni to Don Bosco, October 23, 1861, in *EBM VI*, 618-619.

### 3. Stage 3: The Text of 1864

From the fact that the Archbishop Fransoni withheld a formal approval we may deduce that the constitutions were found deficient. Don Bosco had also sent a copy of the 1860 constitutions to Cardinal Francesco Gaude in Rome, with whom he had already discussed a preliminary sketch in Rome back in 1858. But the cardinal took ill and died shortly thereafter. Then the archbishop died in Lyons in 1862, and the diocese remained vacant, under the provisional government of the capitular vicar, Canon Giuseppe Zappata, until the appointment of Archbishop Riccardi di Netro in 1867.

#### (1) The Text of 1864

In spite of these drawbacks, Don Bosco decided to press forward with a thorough revision of the text and to petition for approval by the Holy See. The drafts ranging over the years 1862-1864 in particular give evidence of intense, laborious re-working, the final result of which was the manuscript in Don Bosco's hand, designated as *Gb* and dated 1864. It represents the summit of the textual tradition in Italian.<sup>14</sup>

Two new chapters (Religious Government and Local Houses) were added, and the articles on the election of the Rector Major (already contained in Chapter 8) were made into a separate chapter: [1] Preamble, [2] Historical Sketch of the Society, [3] Purpose, [4] Form, [5] Obedience, [6] Poverty, [7] Chastity, [8] *Religious Government*, [9] Internal Government, [10] *Election of Rector Major*, [11] Other Superiors, [12] *Local Houses*, [13] Admission, [14] Practices of Piety, [15] Habit, [16] Profession Formula, and [17] Externs.

Among the new articles written for this draft we may note the following as important: [i] Article 7 of the chapter on Purpose, forbidding political activity to the members (to be discussed in Excursus I below); [ii] Article 1 of the new chapter on Religious Government, recognizing the supreme authority of the pope;<sup>15</sup> [iii] Article 4 of the same chapter, providing for the power of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 28 (# 11). *Gb* is located in ASC 022(6), *FDBM* 1,902 E1ff.

<sup>15</sup> This article generally recognizes the supreme authority of the pope with regard to the Salesian Society. In addition, in a memorandum submitted in Rome together with these constitutions (*Cose da notarsi [...]*), Don Bosco writes: "In these regulations [=constitutions] the Supreme Pontiff, and matters relating to him, receive limited explicit mention. However, one of the purposes of this Society remains that of upholding and defending the Pope's authority by all the means that circumstances of times, places, and persons put within our reach for prudent use. The reason for this failure is to be sought in the fact that [this Society] has been several times investigated by the civil authority. The object of such house searches was to discover (so they hoped) any compromising evidence of a relationship with Rome. If these regulations had fallen into their hands and been found to contain

Rector Major to grant dimissorial letters in accordance with traditional privileges of exemption (later removed). [iv] Article 5 of the chapter on Extern Salesians, providing that Salesians who leave the Society for good reasons be regarded as external members (the whole chapter later to be removed).

Some articles underwent rewriting, Article 1 of the chapter on Purpose (to be discussed later in this paper) being of particular significance in this regard.

(2) The Decree of Commendation of the Society and the Thirteen Savini-Svegliati Critical Observations

Don Bosco obtained letters of support from several bishops and from the capitular vicar of Turin, and submitted the new text to the Holy See with a petition for approval.<sup>16</sup>

The constitutions were reviewed for the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by consultor Father Angelo Savini who compiled 14 critical observations.<sup>17</sup> These were reduced to 13 by the acting secretary of that Congregation, Msgr. Stanislao Svegliati, and handed down to Don Bosco. Don Bosco made a response to them, accepting some, but remaining firm on others.<sup>18</sup> In response to Observation 2, he removed the article forbidding political activity, though he never changed his mind in the matter.<sup>19</sup> On two points especially he stood firm: one concerned dimissorials and exemption from episcopal control of members (Observation 4);<sup>20</sup> the other referred to

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compromising expressions, the Society would have been at grave risk." [For the memorandum *Cose da notarsi* [...], cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 229 (Document 3).]

For the story of the house searches in 1860 cf. *EBM* VI, 306-334. For a critical study of Don Bosco's 1875 memorandum on the house searches, cf. Pietro Braido and Francesco Motto, "Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su 'le Perquisizioni'," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 8 (1989) 111-200.

<sup>16</sup> In his petition to Pius IX Don Bosco mentions letters from "the bishops of Cuneo, Acqui, Mondovì, Susa, Casale, and from the capitular vicar [Giuseppe Zappata]." For the letter of petition, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 228-229 (Document 2) and *IBM* VII, 621 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>17</sup> For Savini's 14 observations, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 230 (Document 4).

Angelo Savini (1816-1890), of the Carmelite order, served as provincial, as professor of moral theology, as penitentiary of the Vatican basilica, and as general of the order for 26 years till his death. He also served as consultor of the Congregations of Bishops and Regulars and of Indulgences. [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 18, n. 19.]

<sup>18</sup> For the 13 Savini-Svegliati Observations and Don Bosco's Response, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 231-234 (Documents 6 and 7); also *IBM* VII, 710-715 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere Don Bosco states that he tried to put the article on politics back in 1870 and 1874, when it was finally removed by the Roman authorities—for which cf. Excursus I below.

<sup>20</sup> Don Bosco made an elaborate defense of this provision in his Response to

buying and selling of property and to contracting debts (Observation 5), on which score he claimed that permission of the Holy See was not needed since the Society was not a corporation and owned nothing! He also stood firm on the Externs (Observation 9).<sup>21</sup>

He failed to win the sought-for approval, but the Society was granted the Decree of Commendation (*Decretum Laudis*), which was a first step toward approval. Don Bosco was made Rector Major for life, and was given the faculty of presenting for holy orders candidates who had been in the Society since the age of 14, and this for 10 years—a tidy package, all things considered.

## II. From The Decree of Commendation to the Approval of the Institute (1864-1869): Stage 4

### 1. Stage 4: The Text of 1867

One of the Savini-Svegliati Observations advised that, as was customary, the constitutions should be presented in Latin for approval. Don Bosco had already begun working on a Latin text, even while he was developing the Italian text for presentation in Rome in 1864. Archival manuscripts datable in 1861-62 and in 1863-64 testify to this. After his return from Rome with the Decree of Commendation and with the Savini-Svegliati Observations, Don Bosco, with the help of several Salesians (Father Rua in particular) and of Latin scholars Tommaso Vallauri and Vincenzo Lanfranchi, further reworked and developed the Latin text through several stages.

#### (1) The Printed Latin Text of 1867

He finally readied a new edition in print (though this was neither required nor even desirable) for submission in Rome. This is the first printed Latin text. It is dated 1867 and designated *Ls* by the critical editor.<sup>22</sup>

In this text the chapters have remained unchanged with respect to number and general content. But instances of revision and rewriting are numerous. For example, Article 1 of the chapter on Purpose has undergone a slight revision to

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the Observations, and kept the article until it was “forcibly” removed in 1874. [Cf. Don Bosco’s Response as in note 18 above.]

<sup>21</sup> The provision for “affiliated” external members was rejected by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars as contrary to custom. In his response Don Bosco claimed that his external members were similar to traditional “tertiaries” [but cf. note 86 and related text below], and asked that the chapter be kept as an appendix. And so he kept it until it had to be removed in 1873. However, he immediately dropped Article 5 (providing for external membership for Salesians who left the Society), probably because such specification seemed unnecessary.

<sup>22</sup> For these developments, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 31-33, and for *Ls*, cf. *ibid.*, 33 (# 21). *Ls* is in *ASC* 022(13), *FDBM* 1,904 C11ff.

regain some of the features lost in the rewriting of 1864. And much detailed rewriting has taken place in the chapter on the Election of the Rector Major.

Of the Savini-Svegliati Observations about half were complied with. For example, the article on politics no longer appears; Article 9 of the chapter on Form has been revised to place perpetual vows (but not triennial vows) under the Holy See's control.<sup>23</sup> The Rector Major's term of office (Article 4 of the chapter on Internal Government) has been reduced from life to 12 years.

On the other hand, Don Bosco failed to comply with other observations. For example, in Article 4 of the chapter on Religious Government the Rector Major still holds the power of dimissorials. And the chapter on Extern Salesians is retained, although only as an Appendix.

## (2) Archbishop Riccardi and Further Critical Observations

At this time in 1867, Alessandro Ottaviano dei Conti Riccardi di Netro was appointed archbishop of Turin, after the diocese had been vacant for 5 years since the death of Archbishop Fransoni in exile.<sup>24</sup> A priority on the new archbishop's agenda was the strengthening of the seminary program and the formation of the clergy. On this score, he did not like what was going on at Valdocco where, in Don Bosco's own words, "some fifty seminarians" were studying for the priesthood while "fully occupied in youth work."<sup>25</sup> The archbishop demanded that all theological students attend the diocesan seminary. Don Bosco rejected this demand, even when the archbishop notified him that he would "no longer let diocesan seminarians teach or supervise boys in any boarding school, and would confer sacred orders only on candidates residing at the seminary."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. also Excursus II below.

<sup>24</sup> Alessandro Ottaviano Riccardi dei Conti di Netro (1808-1870), born at Biella (Piedmont) and ordained in 1832, was appointed bishop of Savona (Liguria) in 1842. Appointed archbishop of Turin in 1867, his tenure, partly taken up by the First Vatican Council and marred by illness, was brief. He died in 1870, before he could get his program of ecclesiastical reform under way.

<sup>25</sup> Don Bosco to Canon Alessandro Vogliotti, June 26, 1866, in Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario*. Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di Francesco Motto. Vol. I and II (Roma: LAS, 1991 and 1996) II, 264. [**Motto, Ep**] There was no proper major seminary established at Valdocco.

<sup>26</sup> Archbishop Riccardi to Don Bosco, September 11, 1867, in *EBM* VIII, 406. Don Bosco gave reasons for his objections: "If I allow my clerical students to reside in the [diocesan] seminary, what will become of the spirit and discipline of our Society? And where will I find the one hundred and more instructors to take their place in as many catechism classrooms? [...] Fortunately, I have for some time anticipated this move; all my clerical students who are candidates for the Society, except a few, are from other dioceses." [Don Bosco to Cardinal Filippo De Angelis, January 9, 1868, in Motto, *Ep* I, 479]

It was under these circumstances that the archbishop received a copy of the new Salesian constitutions. The Vincentian Father Durando was again asked to examine them, and his observations are recorded. He found fault chiefly with the provision that the Society's goods should be held in the name of private individuals (the matter of civil rights); with the provision for junior seminaries to be established without specification of the ordinary's role; with the mixture of clerical students and boys without separate guidance and formation; with the lack of proper constitutions on a program of studies and on the novitiate.<sup>27</sup>

### (3) Petition for Approval Submitted in Rome and Rejected

Don Bosco started the process for approval again, a process which entailed, among other things, collecting more testimonial letters from the bishops. Several bishops wrote letters in support, including Lorenzo Gastaldi recently appointed bishop of Saluzzo.<sup>28</sup> Archbishop Riccardi also wrote a testimonial letter, but at the same time he recorded his grave misgivings with the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He suggested that the Salesian Society should restrict its activity in accordance with its original purpose. He complained that its constitutions failed to measure up to standard in many respects. In particular they did not specify the role of lay members, and they did not provide for a regular program of studies or for a regular novitiate. He expressed concern over the fact that ordinaries did not have control over clerical students at the Oratory, even though they would or might later return to the diocese, that clerical students were engaged full time in teaching and supervising pupils, and that the Oratory was a place where confusion reigned unchecked. He added a number of critical remarks on specific points, one of which concerned the provision for a manifestation of conscience.<sup>29</sup>

The representative of the Holy See in Turin, Msgr. Gaetano Tortone, was asked to conduct an independent investigation. His report to the secretary of the

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<sup>27</sup> For Marcantonio Durando, cf. note 11 above. For Durando's observations, cf. Motto, *Cost. SDB*, 235 (Document 9) and *EBM* VI, 421-422, referred to in note 12 and related text above. The draft of 1867 still lacked proper constitutions specifying the course of studies for priestly candidates and proper constitutions specifying the novitiate program. These two chapters would be added in 1874 before final approval. The chapter on Admission merely spoke generally of "trial periods."

<sup>28</sup> Lorenzo Gastaldi remained a friend and supporter of Don Bosco until his appointment as archbishop of Turin in 1871. Don Bosco had played a key role in Gastaldi's appointment to Saluzzo as bishop and later to Turin as archbishop.

<sup>29</sup> "Osservazioni [...]," [Archbishop Riccardi to Cardinal Quaglia] March 14, 1868, in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 236-237 (Document 10), *IBM* IX, 96-100 (abridged in *EBM* IX, 53-55).

Congregation of Bishops and Regulars contained many of the same objections, and was even more negative.<sup>30</sup>

Consultor Angelo Savini examined the constitutions again for the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He found them defective, and recommended a longer waiting period.<sup>31</sup> On that basis, Secretary Stanislao Svegliati reported to Pius IX and stressed that the new constitutions were not in compliance with several of the thirteen Observations of 1864. He therefore recommended that approval be delayed.<sup>32</sup> Don Bosco's petition was turned down.

In a personal letter notifying Don Bosco of the decision, Secretary Svegliati pointed out "two principal articles" needing attention. One concerns the power of the superior to issue dimissorial letters (which was not acceptable). The other pertained to the absence of a regular course of studies in the seminary (which was a requirement laid down by the ordinary).<sup>33</sup>

#### (4) Approval of the Institute, Not of the Constitutions

After a short period of doubt, Don Bosco decided to make another attempt and left for Rome in early January 1869. In the meantime letters in support had been received in Rome, including a second glowing commendation from Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo.<sup>34</sup>

This time, perhaps even to Don Bosco's surprise, the Society was approved by decree of March 1, 1869. But approval of the constitutions was put off "to a more appropriate time." On this score, the decree read in part:

The constitutions must first be emended in such a way that all of the [thirteen Savini-Svegliati] *critical observations* given earlier [in 1864] are complied with. However, the fourth observation [negating the faculty to issue dimissorial letters] is to be modified as follows: "His Holiness, graciously responding (*benigne annuens*) to Father John Bosco's entreaties (*supplicationibus*), gives him as Superior General of the said Salesian Congregation, the faculty of issuing dimissorials for the tonsure and for the ordination of [Salesian] candidates. But this faculty is valid for ten years only, and concerns only those candidates who prior to their fourteenth year of age were admitted, or will be admitted, to any house of the aforementioned Congregation, and who have joined, or will in due time join, the same. And if,

<sup>30</sup> Gaetano Tortone to Stanislao Svegliati, August 6, 1868, in *EBM IX*, 170-173.

<sup>31</sup> For Savini's Opinion, September 22, 1868, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 237-238 (Document 11); *IBM IX*, 376-378 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>32</sup> For Svegliati's report to the pope, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 238 (Document 12), *IBM IX*, 375 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>33</sup> Stanislao Svegliati to Don Bosco, October 2, 1868, in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 239 (Document 13), *IBM IX*, 378-379 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>34</sup> Lorenzo Gastaldi to Cardinal Angelo Quaglia, January 8, 1869, in *EBM IX*, 220.



for any reason, they should leave the Society, they shall remain suspended from exercising their sacred order until they establish a sufficient dowry and find a benevolent bishop who is willing to receive them."<sup>35</sup>

### III. From the Approval of the Institute to the [Definitive] Approval of the Constitutions (1869-1874): Stages 5 and 6

#### 1. Stage 5

After the qualified success of the approval of the congregation, over two years went by before the process was resumed. Reluctance on Don Bosco's part (a kind of "crisis of conscience") connected with the mandated revision of the constitutions was not the only reason for the delay. Other reasons played a part: the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), in which Don Bosco was enormously interested and peripherally involved; the invasion and occupation of Rome by the Italian army (1870) and the turmoil that followed; the death of Archbishop Riccardi (1870) and *interim* vacancy; the appointment of Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi (late 1871); Don Bosco's near-fatal illness at Varazze (late 1871-early 1872); the final steps in the founding of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872); the initial troubles with the new archbishop, and more.

In August 1872 Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi, undersecretary of state, speaking for the Holy Father, advised Don Bosco to pursue the matter of the definitive approval the constitutions.<sup>36</sup>

#### (1) The Printed Latin Text of 1873

Obviously, Don Bosco must again turn his attention to the text of the constitutions. This effort resulted in a new Latin text, revised with respect to the text of 1867. Completed in manuscript form by the end of 1872, it was printed in early 1873. To it the critical editor assigns the letters *Ns*.<sup>37</sup>

This new text did not differ greatly from the preceding one. Don Bosco was still clinging to positions which he considered basic constitutive elements of his Society in spite of objections from both the diocesan and the Roman authorities.

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<sup>35</sup> For the decree, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 239 (Document 14), and *EBM IX*, 257. Don Bosco would later refer to the approval of the Society in 1869 as implying the tacit approval of basic constitutional provisions that the Roman authorities found unacceptable.

<sup>36</sup> Giuseppe Berardi to Don Bosco, August 27, 1872, in *IBM X*, 673 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 34 (# 25). *Ns* is in *ASC 022(15)*, *FDBM 1,907 C9ff*. The work of revision is described in *IBM X*, 674-682 (omitted in *EBM X*, 303).

The chapter on the Form of the Society remained practically unchanged. In fact, he reemphasized the clause on civil rights (Article 2), adding that, as citizens with right of private ownership, the members would pay taxes as the law prescribed. The provision for a manifestation of conscience to the superior (Article 6 of the chapter on Obedience) was retained. The chapter on Poverty remained practically unchanged. The article on ordination of candidates "in accordance with the custom of other religious congregations," that is, through the superior's dimissorial letters (Article 4 of the chapter on Religious Government), was likewise retained. The Appendix on Extern Salesians was taken over verbatim from the previous text.

Some matters in the chapter on Admission received more detailed treatment. But the constitutions still lacked separate chapters on the Novitiate and on Studies specifying the religious formation of Salesians and the theological formation of Salesian priests.

## (2) Archbishop Gastaldi

Don Bosco was also required to assemble the documents he must present in Rome, the letters of commendation from bishops being of particular importance.

Like his predecessor, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi had serious reservations about supporting the approval of the Salesian constitutions as they lay. In his opinion these constitutions were flawed with failures which reflected the inherent weakness of the Salesian priestly and religious formation. In the first place, lack of a proper program of theological studies within the seminary structure would make exemption from the bishops' control (through dimissorial letters) especially dangerous; the lack of ecclesiastical discipline in the life of Salesian clerical students made matters even worse. In the second place, the religious life, and hence the religious spirit of the Salesians, suffered from the lack of a proper novitiate of at least one year (preferably two years), spent in spiritual exercises and formation in a separate house, under the guidance of a master. Archbishop Gastaldi made it clear that if these failures were not remedied through appropriate constitutional provisions, he could not in good conscience support the approval. These concerns he expressed in numerous letters to Don Bosco and to the Roman authorities over a period of some two years.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Archbishop Gastaldi to Don Bosco, October 24, 1872 [*EBM X*, 304-305]; November 9, 1872 [*EBM X*, 305-306]; Archbishop Gastaldi to Bishop Giuseppe De Gaudenzi, January 11, 1873 [*EBM X*, 312-313]; Archbishop Gastaldi to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, February 10, 1873, [*IBM X*, 927-928, summarized in *EBM X*, 314-315]; Archbishop Gastaldi to Cardinal Prospero Caterini, February 19, 1873 [*EBM X*, 315-316]; Archbishop Gastaldi to Cardinal Giuseppe Bizzarri, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, April 20, 1873 [*EBM X*, 323-328]; July 27, 1873 [*IBM X*, 729, referred to in *EBM X*, 336]; January 9, 1874 [*EBM X*, 348-350].

Archbishop Salvatore Magnasco of Genoa had similar, but not quite so formidable, reservations. On the other hand, Don Bosco had the full support of a number of Piedmontese bishops.<sup>39</sup>

### (3) Don Bosco in Rome in March 1873: Petition for Definitive Approval of the Constitutions Presented

Don Bosco journeyed to Rome with his secretary Father Gioachino Berto, and on March 1, 1873 he presented his petition for approval. With the text of the Constitutions and other documents he included a memorandum entitled "Declaration on the Constitutions," in which he attempted to explain his position regarding the Savini-Svegliati Observations of 1864 and other specific features of the Salesian Constitutions.<sup>40</sup> In his cover letter Don Bosco wrote: "Two things above all are now needed to complete the work [of the establishment of the Society]: the definitive approval of the constitutions and the full authorization to issue dimissorial letters."<sup>41</sup>

Don Bosco was detained in Rome for over a month, involved in feverish activity relating not only to the approval but also to the matter of the *Exequaturs* or revenues for bishops appointed to fill vacant dioceses. Back in Turin by the end of March, Don Bosco awaited the verdict, while his relationship with the Archbishop deteriorated still further.

### (4) Petition Rejected with Further Critical Observations

The constitutions were examined for the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by Consultor Raimondo Bianchi. Consultor Bianchi prefaced his observations with a reference to objections and proposals made by the Archbishop of Genoa and especially by Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin. He then expressed his "surprise that most of the 13 observations officially handed down by the Holy See [in 1864 and reiterated in 1869] had not been complied with, or had been evaded under more or less specious pretexts." After recording Don Bosco's failure to comply with the old observations in 8 cases, he added 30 more critical observations of his own.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bishops Pietro Maria Ferrè of Casale (who had given diocesan approval to the Salesian Society in 1868), Giovanni Battista Cerruti of Savona, Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi of Vigevano, Pietro Anacleto Siboni of Albenga, and (most emphatically) Emiliano Manacorda of Fossano: cf. *EBM* X, 318 and *IBM* X, 933-934, Appendix V, No. 12 (omitted in *EBM*). On the weight of Archbishops Magnasco's and Gastaldi's objections, cf. Cardinal Berardi to Don Bosco, August 8, 1873, in *EBM* X, 336.

<sup>40</sup> *De Regulis Societatis Salesianae aliqua declaratio*, in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 248, *IBM* X, 894-895 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>41</sup> *EBM* X, 317.

<sup>42</sup> For Consultor Bianchi's 38 Observations (May 9, 1873), cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 241-244 (Document 16), and *IBM* X, 934-940 (Appendix 13) (omitted in

Secretary Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi summarized the 38 observations under 28 headings and sent them on to Don Bosco. In a personal cover letter he urged him to accept them and to revise the constitutions accordingly. More officially, in the introductory paragraph of the document he wrote:

It is our will that [the Observations of 1864] should absolutely be *taken into account*. The fear of reprisal from the [civil] authorities which is given as the reason for not accepting some of the observations cannot be regarded as sufficient justification. The same norms have been written into the constitutions of many religious institutes in existence in Italy at present [with no adverse effects]. After all, there is no need to publish the constitutions in print, or to submit them in their entirety to the government.<sup>43</sup>

Among other things, the new Observations called for removal of the first two chapters (the Preamble and the "Historical Commendation of the Institute"); for removal of all references to *civil* rights and to *civil* laws; for specifying the observance of poverty in accordance with canon law; for removing the obligatory manifestation of conscience; for rewriting the constitutions relating to the composition of the General Chapter and to the election of the superior general and his council; for the establishment of a canonical novitiate in a separate house, with no engagement in the works of the institute, under a master of novices; for the establishment of a four-year program of theological studies in a studentate or seminary, with no engagement in the works of the institute; for the appointment in each house of several confessors approved by the ordinary; for obtaining the Holy See's permission to appear in a civil court. The last and most emphatic observation had to do with ordinations and the superior's power to issue dimissorials, which could not be permitted.

(5) Don Bosco's Response and Accompanying Historical Sketch of the Society of 1874 (*Cenno istorico*). The First and Second Revised Roman Editions of the Text

Faced with these new observations, Don Bosco undertook a fairly extensive revision of the 1873 text. But, in the erroneous belief that the observations

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*EBM*).

Raimondo Bianchi (1831-1885) served as procurator general for the Dominican order for 18 years until his death and as consultor for various Roman congregations. As consultor for the Congregation of Bishops and Regular it fell to him to examine, and compile observations for, dozens of constitutions of religious institutes. [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 19, n. 39]

<sup>43</sup> For the letter, Salvatore Vitelleschi to Don Bosco, July 26, 1873, cf. *IBM X*, 728 (omitted in *EBM X*, 335). For Mgr. Vitelleschi's 28 Observations, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 244-245 (Document 17), *Opere edite XXV*, 373-376, and *IBM X*, 941-943 (Appendix 14) (omitted in *EBM*).

were “negotiable,” he stopped well short of compliance. Before returning to Rome to submit another petition for approval, he produced two documents for the purpose of explaining his revision of the text: a point-by-point Response to the observations indicating the degree of compliance or non-compliance, and an extensive Historical Sketch of the Society (*Cenno storico*) describing the Society’s development and character. Special paragraphs in this memorandum are devoted to a defense of his positions.<sup>44</sup>

[i] The First Revised Text Printed in Rome

Back in Rome at the beginning of 1874, where he was to remain until the definitive approval on April 13, Don Bosco had the revised constitutions and documents referred to above printed by the *Propaganda Fide* Press.

A look at this revised text immediately shows that Don Bosco failed to comply with the observations on many points.<sup>45</sup> For example, he retained the Preamble and the Historical Sketch of the Origin of the Society; he retained most of the “civil rights” references; with regard to “poverty” he modified nothing of what he had written in the chapters on Form and on the Vow; he did not comply with the demand that confessors be approved by the ordinary; he retained the power of the superior to dispense from the spiritual retreat and other practices of piety; he again restated his position on ordination and dimissorials; he retained the Appendix on Extern Salesians.

He did add a chapter on the Novitiate and a chapter on Studies as required, but in neither case did he comply with the specific demands of the Observations. The novitiate had to be a closed, ascetical one, in a special house; the novices were not to be involved in the works of the Society; the master of novices must have that sole task. The theological course had to be a four-year course held in a studentate or seminary established for priestly candidates; there was to be no involvement in the works of the Society. None of these requirements were met.

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<sup>44</sup> For Don Bosco’s response to the Bianchi-Vitelleschi Observations, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 245-247 (Document 18), and *IBM X*, 746-755 (omitted in *EBM X*, 346). The Historical Sketch (*Cenno storico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti*), published in *Opere Edite XXV*, 231-250 and in *IBM X*, 949-954 (Appendix 6) (omitted in *EBM*), is critically edited in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: L’<Oratorio>. Una <Congregazione degli oratori>*. Documenti (Roma: LAS, 1988), 112-146, with a study on the same (“L’idea della Società Salesiana”), *ibid.*, 81-111. [**Braido**, *Cenno ist.* and *L’Idea, DB per i giovani.*]

<sup>45</sup> The first revised Roman edition is described and designated with the letters *Os*. [Motto, *Cost DB*, 35 (# 27)] This text is given as *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii* (Romae: Typis S. C. de Propaganda Fide, MDCCLIV) in *Opere Edite XXV*, 235-292, and transcribed in *IBM X*, 896-915 (Appendix 4) (omitted in *EBM*).

## [ii] The Second Revised Text and the Special Commission

Don Bosco immediately began consultations. In February (1874), he was notified that the Special Commission of four cardinals who were to examine the constitutions and debate the approval had been designated. This led to a new but minimal revision of the text, which he again had printed at *Propaganda Fide*. The Appendix on Extern Salesians was removed. Otherwise, except for minor modifications, this second revised text remained substantially the same as the first.<sup>46</sup> This is the constitutional text which, together with all other pertinent documents, was presented to the Special Commission for examination and hopefully for approval.

The cardinals of the Special Commission met on March 24. During and following this meeting, all the grievances against Don Bosco and his constitutions were dredged up, and Don Bosco's failure to comply with the observations received particular attention. If the constitutions were to be approved, the cardinals were determined to correct their deficiencies and to bring them into compliance with the canonical mold. Hence, the text was subjected to drastic revisions. The following are especially noteworthy: (1) the Preamble and the Summary History were definitively removed; (2) the civil rights clauses and references were largely removed, so that the chapter on Form (and the constitutions generally) lost one of their twin "foundations;" (3) the chapter on Poverty was overhauled to reflect canonical practice and language (e.g., expressions such as "radical dominion"); (4) the chapters on Studies and Novitiate were practically rewritten to conform with traditional practice; (5) the provision by which the superior was empowered to dispense from practices of piety was removed; (6) the power to issue dimissorial letters was denied, and the pertinent constitution was suppressed with the suggestion that the matter be referred to the Holy Father, should he wish to grant it by way of privilege; (7) the superior's control over even temporary vows was denied; (8) the article on the manifestation of conscience was rewritten in favor of individual liberty.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Stage 6: The Definitively Approved Text

A second session of the Special Congregation was held on March 31, and the drastically revised text was finally approved, though not without "a fight."

Of this final revised text Father Berto made a calligraphic copy, which Don Bosco presented to Pope Pius IX for approval (later to be filed with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars). A second copy was made for the

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<sup>46</sup> This second revised printed text is described and designated with the letters *Ps* [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 35 (# 30)]. The revisions are noted in *IBM X*, 915 (Appendix 5, N. 2) (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>47</sup> For a complete description of the changes and emendations introduced, cf. *IBM X*, 809-819; and for what regards the novitiate only, *EBM X*, 377-380.

Salesian archive. The approval was given on April 3, 1874, and the Decree signed on April 13. This approved manuscript text is given the letter *Q* by the critical editor.<sup>48</sup>

The definitively approved constitutions contained sixteen chapters: Purpose, Form, Obedience, Poverty, Chastity, Religious Government, Internal Government, Rector Major, Other Superiors, Particular Houses, Admission, Studies, Practices of Piety, Novitiate, Habit, Profession Form.

Through the gradual process of revisions, but particularly through the work of the Special Commission, Don Bosco's novel concepts which made the Society new and special, such as flexibility in structures, freedom of action, relating to new political realities, were either erased or greatly reduced in force. Likewise the first two chapters and all references to times and places, representing historical experiences that he considered charismatic and normative, were expunged. The constitutions on Extern Salesians, an unheard of idea, had to be previously removed. Don Bosco did, however, receive the power to issue dimissorial letters, but separately by Rescript, limited to ten years, and applicable only to members with *perpetual* vows.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Stages 7 and 8: Printed Latin and Italian Editions for Salesian Confreres

Back from Rome, Don Bosco sent the manuscript of the approved constitutions to press. Then on the galley proofs he introduced numerous changes with the help of his friend, Latin scholar Vincenzo Lanfranchi. Latin style was not Don Bosco's only concern. In a private audience with Pius IX on April 8, Don Bosco had obtained by way of privilege concessions which went beyond the limited faculty of issuing dimissorials he had already won. The most significant of these was the concession granted to him by word of mouth (*vivae vocis oraculo*) which enabled Don Bosco to run a type of novitiate different from that which the cardinals had enforced and approved in the constitutional text itself. This he indicated in a note appended to Article 12 of the chapter on the Novitiate, to the effect that the Novices could be engaged in the work of the Society.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 36 (# 32). *Q* (with no additional lowercase letter for Berto) is in *ASC* 022 (18), *FDBM* 1,912 E2ff. It is not a printed text, for protocol required that it be submitted for approval in manuscript form. For the decree of approval cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 253, and *EBM* X, 372-373.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. separate Rescript in *EBM* X, 373. Don Bosco was not to obtain the privileges of exemption (including the that of issuing dimissorial letters), until June 28, 1884.

<sup>50</sup> For a comparison between the approved Latin text and the printed "official" Latin edition, side by side, cf. *IBM* X, 956-993 (omitted in *EBM*). See also Germano Proverbio, "La prima edizione latina ufficiale delle costituzioni salesiane dopo l'approvazione pontificia," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 3 (1984) 93-109. For the footnote in question, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 196; *IBM* X, 989, and *EBM* X, 370.



This “official” printed Latin text of the constitutions, dated some time after the approval in 1874, is designated with the letter *T* by the critical editor.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, Don Bosco saw the need of having an Italian translation of the constitutions. In late 1874 or early 1875, with Father Bonetti’s help, he readied a manuscript,<sup>52</sup> and after making a series of corrections sent to press. Dated 1875, it is designated with the letter *V* by the critical editor.<sup>53</sup>

The text of this “official” Italian edition is neither a translation of the preceding “official” Latin edition (*T*), nor of the text approved by Rome (*Q*). Its style and expression rather hark back to the early Italian texts, especially to that of 1864 (*Gb*). More importantly, further changes distanced it even more from the approved text. Noteworthy is the reduction of the chapter on the Novitiate from 17 to 7 articles.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion to Part I

Our survey of the development of the text of the early constitutions has taken us from the first extant draft of 1858 to the “official” Italian edition of 1875. In spite of the complexities of such development, one thing should be abundantly clear: Don Bosco was able to salvage only a part of his original spiritual insights and characteristic ideas from the sickle of the Roman authorities. Hence the question arises: Which text best represents Don Bosco’s spiritual posture with regard to his ideas of religious life and the apostolate?

It appears that the early drafts, ranging from 1858 to 1864, insofar as they have not yet been subjected to outside pressure to any significant extent, are the more faithful representatives of his original thought. It is to these early texts, therefore, that we shall have recourse. The object is to identify and present in some kind of logical order what might be called “the spiritual contours” which Don Bosco wished to imprint on his constitutions for a definition of the religious life and apostolate of his Salesians.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 37 (# 35). *T* is in ASC 022(19a), *FDBM* 1,916 C5ff.

<sup>52</sup> It is described and designated with the letters *Ut* in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 38-39 (# 41).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 39 (# 44). *V* is in ASC 022(101-3), *FDBM* 1,920 B2ff.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 192-197.

## Part II. Spiritual Lineaments of Don Bosco's Early Constitutions

### I. The Purpose of the Salesian Society as an "Oratorian Congregation"

#### 1. The Work of the Oratories and the Salesian Society

In Don Bosco's understanding, the Salesian Society was a religious congregation that arose out of a singular commitment to the young through the work of the oratories. The Salesian Society and the work of the oratories were of one bloodline; consequently it had to be and remain a pliable, functional instrument for that work. To this effect it had to be "new," and relatively free from the strictures of traditional forms. It is on this premise of continuity (in fact, identity) of Salesian Society with oratory that Don Bosco conceived the many historical sketches and memorandums which he submitted in defense of his constitutions.

This premise, let it be said, was perhaps not clearly understood, or not appreciated, by those who scrutinized the documents he presented. But he himself never had any other understanding of the Society: it existed in embryo in the work of the oratories, and its aim was to serve the young. This idea goes far to explain Don Bosco's repeated claims that the Society, as well as its constitutions, dated back to 1841, or to some other early date in oratory development (1844, 1852, 1854, 1858).

Pietro Braido lists no less than eleven such memorandums authored by Don Bosco during the decade 1864-1874 and presented by him to Church authorities.<sup>55</sup> Later documents also propound the same thesis; it was inevitable that the early constitutions should be prefaced with a historical sketch to the same effect. A few examples are here given.

In the memorandum addressed to Archbishop Riccardi di Netro in 1867 (*Società di S. Francesco di Sales*) Don Bosco traces the story of Society from 1841, marking the dates 1846 (first organization), 1852 (Archbishop Fransoni's decree), 1858 (plan presented to Pius IX), 1864 (first approval). Under the heading, "Origin of this Society," he begins with the sentence:

This Society, which at its origin numbered only a few priests, began in 1841 with the purpose of gathering together poor young people on Sundays and holy days.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Braido, *L'Idea in DB per i giovani*, 91-92.

<sup>56</sup> *Società di S. Francesco di Sales* [1867]: MS. in Don Bosco's hand in ASC 022, FDBM 1,925 A12-B3, IBM VIII, 809-811 (omitted in EBM).

In an Historical Sketch (*Cenno storico*) of 1868 addressed to Bishop Pietro Ferrè of Casale (who approved the Society as a diocesan congregation) Don Bosco begins the story of origins with the words:

This Society had its origin in a simple ministry of catechetical instruction (*semplice catechismo*), which Father John Bosco undertook with the consent and encouragement of Fathers Luigi Guala and Giuseppe Cafasso [...]. Its purpose was to gather together the poorest and most neglected young people on Sundays and holy days, to entertain them with church services and songs, as well as with pleasant recreation.<sup>57</sup>

The Historical Sketch (*Cenno storico*) of 1874 referred to above was written at a critical juncture in the process of approval. Don Bosco was at the time fighting tooth and nail to preserve the suppleness with which he had framed his constitutions against the inexorable canonical molds that were being enforced. Don Bosco begins the first section entitled Origin of this Congregation (*Primordi di questa congregazione*) with the words:

From 1841 to 1848, although there was as yet no community life, [the members] practiced a number of rules established in accordance with the spirit of this Congregation.<sup>58</sup>

In the Summary (*Riassunto*) which followed on the Historical Sketch, also of 1874, Don Bosco simply writes: "This Pious Society has been in existence for 33 years."<sup>59</sup>

In the Brief Historical Notice (*Brevi notizie*) with which he prefaced his Report to the Holy See (*Esposizione alla S. Sede*) of 1879, Don Bosco gives what is perhaps the most succinct and systematic exposition of the thesis, Work of the Oratory–Salesian Society:

In 1841 this Congregation was but a Sunday catechism class and a garden for [young people's] recreation on Sundays and holy days. To this work there was added in 1846 a home for poor apprentices. [...] A number of priests and lay gentlemen helped with this work of charity as extern cooperators. In 1852 the archbishop of Turin approved the Institute by giving of his own initiative to Father John Bosco all necessary and appropriate faculties, and by appointing him superior and head of the work of the oratories. Between the year 1852 and

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<sup>57</sup> *Cenno storico intorno alla Società di S. Francesco di Sales* [1868]: MS. partly in Don Bosco's hand in ASC 132, FDBM 1,924 D11-E2, IBM IX, 61-64, EBM IX, 35-37. The time reference is to 1841 when Don Bosco enrolled in the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) and was almost immediately engaged in the catechetical instruction of young people at risk.

<sup>58</sup> Braido, *Cenno storico*, in *DB per i giovani*, 112[-146], *Opere Edite* XXV, 231[-250].

<sup>59</sup> *Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*, in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 147[-155], *Opere Edite* XXV, 377[-384].

1858 community life got under way, together with a [resident] school and a program for the training of seminarians [...]. In 1858 Pius IX, of saintly memory, urged Father John Bosco to establish a pious Society with the aim of preserving the spirit of the work of the oratories.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, from a purely historical standpoint, Don Bosco's statements are open to challenge with regard both to the general thesis and to detail. This is especially true of the Report of 1879, as the above-quoted passage would tend to show.<sup>61</sup> The bond uniting the Salesian Society with work of the oratories as one identity is a retrospective, ideal projection rather than a historical reality. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that in all these presentations Don Bosco is concerned not with the letter but with the spirit of history. He wishes to throw into the boldest possible relief the bond between the work of the oratory and the Society which grew out of it and because of it. The Salesian Society, as Don Bosco conceived it, is an "oratorian congregation."<sup>62</sup>

## 2. The Special Purpose of the Salesian Society as a Religious Congregation

As noted above, Don Bosco's early constitutions are prefaced with an historical sketch, which is pointedly entitled "Origin of This Congregation (or Society)." It emphatically delivers the same message, namely, that the Salesian Society and its constitutions had their origin in the work of the oratory. Here Don Bosco goes so far as to state that there existed from the beginning "a kind of congregation" for the work of the oratories of which he was the superior.

In the earliest draft of the constitutions (the Rua MS. of 1858), Don Bosco writes:

### Origin of This Congregation

As far back as the year 1841, Father John Bosco, working in association with other priests, began to gather together in suitable premises the most neglected young people from the city of Turin in order to entertain them with

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<sup>60</sup> *Brevi notizie sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales dall'anno 1841 al 1879*, introduction to: *Esposizione alla S. Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (S. Pier d'Arena: Tip. Salesiana, 1879), in *Opere Edite XXXI*, 240[-254]. Edited in *BM* as follows: *IBM XIV*, 216-219 (*Presentazione, Brevi notizie and Stato morale*), *EBM XIV*, 156-159 (Foreword, Brief Historical Notice and Moral State); *IBM, XIV*, 756-763, Appendix 35: *Stato Materiale [...]* [Material State] (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>61</sup> Apart from the general thesis, such details as the oratory being "a garden for young people's recreation," the boarding house being established in 1846 (1847!), the archbishop approving an institute, Don Bosco's being appointed superior of the oratories (of three oratories!)—are historically incorrect [cf. Pietro Stella, *Piccola Guida Critica alle Memorie Biografiche* (Typescript. Course Notes 1989-1990) 12-14.]

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Braido, *L'Idea in DB per i giovani*, 90 and 92.

games and at the same time break the bread of the divine word to them. Everything he did was done with the consent of the ecclesiastical authority.

After describing step by step the development of the work up to the time of writing (1858) and how “God blessed these humble beginnings,” Don Bosco adds:

In order to maintain unity in spirit and discipline, on which the success of oratory work depends, *as far back as 1844 a number of priests banded together to form a kind of congregation while helping one another by mutual example and instruction. They did not bind themselves by any formal vow; they merely made a simple promise to devote themselves solely to such work as would, in their superior's judgment, redound to the glory of God and to the benefit of their souls. They regarded Father John Bosco as their superior. And although no vows were made, nevertheless the rules that are here presented were [already] observed in practice.*<sup>63</sup>

Clearly here work of the oratory and Salesian Society coalesce ideally as one. Hence, the purpose of the Salesian Society is to do the work of the oratory. Don Bosco however was not content with prefacing his constitutions (and the chapter on Purpose in particular) with such historical reference point. He wished to begin his constitutions with a Preamble intended to set forth a theological rationale for the work of the oratories and the Salesian Society. In this Preamble (I quote again from the earliest draft) he writes:

At all times it has 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]. [...]

At the present time 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

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<sup>63</sup> Rua MS (*Ar*, 1858) in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 62-70. Italics mine. Here, as elsewhere [cf. note 65 and related text, below], the year 1844 is given as the point of reference because it was in October of that year that Don Bosco, reassured by the recurrence of the vocation dream, left the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) of St. Francis of Assisi, took a chaplaincy at Marchioness Barolo's institution (*Rifugio*), and put the oratory on a new basis as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. It was in these circumstances that the work became a collaborative ministry involving the priests of that institution and others as well.

risk precisely because of their poverty. *This is the special purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first established in Turin in 1841.*<sup>64</sup>

In the light of these emphases, it is understandable that Don Bosco would resist the Roman authorities' demands that these two initial chapters of the constitutions (the Preamble and the Historical Sketch) be removed (it was not customary to include "historical commendations of the institute"). Don Bosco regarded the oratorian experience as charismatic and normative, that is, as embodying the spirit that was to power all Salesian work of charity. After receiving the critical observations in 1864, he thought he could meet the demand half-way by retaining the two chapters (now in italics) merely as a general introduction. But he was finally forced to remove them in 1874 before approval. The curtailment had the effect of leaving the chapter on Purpose, particularly its foundational (but rather meager) first article, without supporting theological and historical rationale.

### 3. The General Purpose of the Salesian Society as a Religious Congregation

Describing the purpose of the Salesian Society in Remarks (*Cose da notarsi*) submitted with the Constitutions in 1864, Don Bosco writes:

The purpose of this Society, insofar as it concerns its members [personally], is to offer them an opportunity to unite in spirit in order to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. We find inspiration in the words of St. Augustine: *Divinorum divinissimum est in lucrum animarum operari* [Of all divine works the most divine is to work for the salvation of souls].

Considered in its historical existence (*in se stessa*), [this Society] has for its purpose to continue what has been in effect in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for the past 20 years or so.<sup>65</sup>

There could be no clearer statement of the *special* purpose of the Salesian Society as a religious congregation. It is the active life totally devoted to the work of charity, undertaken according to the spirit and normative experience of the oratory.

But what of the *general* or *common* purpose of religious life, personal perfection or holiness? How did Don Bosco conceive it in relation to the special purpose?

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<sup>64</sup> Rua MS. (*Ar*, 1858) in Motto, *Cost. DB*, 58 and 60. Italics mine.

<sup>65</sup> *Cose da notarsi intorno alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*: MS. in Don Bosco's hand in ASC 023,1, *FDBM* 1,889 C2-5, Motto, *Cost. DB*, 229, *IBM VII*, 622-623 (omitted in *EBM*). "For the past 20 years or so" refers back to 1844. [Cf. note 63 and related text above.]

## (1) General and Special Purpose of a Religious Institute

The debate on the purpose or purposes of religious life has had a long and disputed history, since it has involved a consideration of all the varied forms of religious life that have appeared since early Christian times.<sup>66</sup>

In summary, the general purpose of religious life is seen to consist in striving for personal perfection or holiness, that is, for perfect charity. It bears the following characteristics: (1) it is common to all forms of religious life; (2) it is essential to, requisite for, religious life as such; (3) it is achieved through a more perfect following of Christ and through a more intimate union with God; (4) it is expressed in the evangelical way of life (including virginity, poverty, obedience, whether in individual or in communitarian form).

The special purpose of religious life, on the other hand, consists in some specific activity relating to worship, the apostolate, or work of charity undertaken *in addition* to the general common purpose but *possessing formally the nature of a true purpose*. It should be noted that such a purpose is not common to all religious life, since historically there have existed recognized forms of religious life that lacked such a purpose. Nor has it, *in itself*, been regarded as essential for the same reason. However, since religious orders, and more so clerks regular and religious congregations, historically were founded and approved by the Church precisely for such a purpose, the special purpose is regarded as essential in their case. This has been confirmed by Vatican II, in its decree on religious life.

In such communities [devoted to various aspects of the apostolate] the very nature of religious life requires apostolic action and services, since a sacred ministry and a special work of charity have been consigned to them by the Church and must be discharged in her name.<sup>67</sup>

As religious life developed, the special purpose took various forms: priestly ministry, evangelization, pastoral activity, work of charity, etc. It should be emphasized that such activity is undertaken not simply as "an occupation," but as a special way of contributing directly to the church's ministry. (Hence it is that such religious institutes have always sought the Church's approval.)

## (2) Formulaic Expressions of the Purposes of Religious Life

The Jesuit constitutions were the first to adopt a formulation which gave expression to both purposes of religious life.<sup>68</sup> Later congregations have

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<sup>66</sup> For historical survey and discussion cf. A. Carminati, "Fini della Religione," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, Vol. IV, 1977) IV, 40-51.

<sup>67</sup> Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> "It is the purpose of this society not only to strive with God's grace after the salvation and perfection of one's soul, but also at the same time ardently to



followed suit, using expressions such as “twin purposes” or “twin principal purposes,” and other formulations designed to specify various aspects of the two purposes.

In any case, the purposes are always expressed in *coordination*. Don Bosco, on the contrary, in his earliest drafts of the constitutions expressed the purposes in *subordination*, to indicate that for the Salesian the general purpose (Christian perfection or holiness) is achieved *through* the special purpose (the work of charity).

## II. Personal Sanctification *Through* the Work of Charity—in Imitation of Christ’s Pastoral Charity

One of the most important spiritual insights embodied in the early Constitutions is the relatedness of the exercise of pastoral charity to the religious and spiritual life of the Salesian. This finds expression in the foundational Articles 1 and 2 of the chapter on Purpose.

### 1. Articles 1 and 2 of the Chapter On Purpose in Their Earliest Drafts of 1858 and 1860

#### (1) Article 1

Article 1 in the earliest draft (the Rua MS. of 1858) simply reads:

1. It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] its [as] 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.<sup>69</sup>

Surprisingly, it may be noted, this first foundational article on the Purpose of the Society makes no explicit mention of pastoral charity towards poor young people, though this would be included in the imitation of Christ’s “virtues.” However, it should be borne in mind that the chapter on Purpose was preceded, as mentioned above, by two other chapters, the Preamble and the Historical Sketch. They were intended to provide the key for a correct understanding of this article as well as of the chapter on Purpose and of the whole project set forth in the constitutions. Those two chapters, eventually removed in Rome, as mentioned above, were all about the option for the young in imitation of Christ’s pastoral charity. It bears repeating, the Preamble said expressly:

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devote oneself to the salvation and perfection of one’s neighbor.” [St. Ignatius, *Summarium Const.*, No. 2, in Carminati, *loc. cit.*, 45]

<sup>69</sup> “Lo scopo di questa congregazione si è di riunire insieme i suoi membri ecclesiastici, chierici ed anche laici a fine di perfezionare se medesimi imitando per quanto è possibile le virtù del nostro divin salvatore.” [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 72]

Our divine Savior himself by his deeds gave us clear proof of this truth [the importance of educating the young]. 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]. [...] Our efforts therefore 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.<sup>70</sup>

This would have been enough. But, as though to make it doubly certain, in the next draft of 1860 Don Bosco revised the last phrase of Article 1 on Purpose to read:

—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 [his?] charity toward poor young people.<sup>71</sup>

## (2) Article 2

Article 2 expands the concept of the imitation of Christ already set forth in Article 1, though it does so along traditional lines not free of difficulty. This article, which remained fundamentally unchanged throughout, reads:

2. Jesus Christ began by doing and teaching. In like manner shall the members begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of both the internal and external virtues and through the acquisition of knowledge; then shall they apply themselves for the good of their neighbor.<sup>72</sup>

The sentence, “Jesus Christ began by doing and teaching,” is a quote from the Acts of the Apostles [Acts 1,1]. In that preface, Luke says that in the first book (the Gospel) he spoke about “all that Jesus began to do and to teach,” that is, “all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning,” with reference to Jesus’ ministry; now (in Acts) he is going to continue the story. The phrase “doing and teaching” describes the double activity of Jesus’ ministry.

The traditional ascetical interpretation of the phrase, however, is entirely different. Here “doing and teaching” represent two successive stages in the life of a religious. The “doing stage” is the period of formation in prayer, study and ascetical striving (paralleling the 30 year-long hidden life of Jesus). The

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<sup>70</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 58.

<sup>71</sup> “*a fine di perfezionare se medesimi imitando per quanto è possibile le virtù del nostro divin salvatore specialmente nella carità verso i giovani poveri,*” [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 72].

<sup>72</sup> “*Gesù Cristo cominciò fare ed insegnare, così i congregati cominceranno a perfezionare se stessi colla pratica delle interne ed esterne virtù e coll’acquisto della scienza, di poi si adopereranno a beneficio del prossimo.*” [Motto, *Cost. DB.*, 72.] “External” and “internal” were secondary distinctions based on whether or not a virtue has an external effect or projection.

“teaching stage” is the period of ministry or apostolate that follows (paralleling Jesus’ three-year long ministry). There is no doubt that Don Bosco’s wording here was influenced by the ascetical tradition, but he himself throughout the process of approval of the constitutions fought against the very idea. He wanted the formation of his Salesians to take place in the context of the apostolate. For example, he consistently rejected the idea of a closed, ascetical novitiate.

In any case, the emphasis is on the imitation of Christ (“In like manner”) rather than on any prescription of a period of exclusively ascetical preparation followed by a second one devoted to apostolic activity.

### (3) Comment

Articles 1 and 2 of the chapter on Purpose (in the drafts of 1858 and 1860), based as they are on the strong foundations of the Preamble and of the Historical Sketch, set forth two basic principles for the spiritual life of the Salesian.

First, for the Salesian personal perfection, that is, holiness, is to be attained *through* the exercise of charity. It should be noted that this formulation goes beyond even the idea of “double essential purpose” developed historically in religious congregations. Vatican II, in the passage from *Perfectae Caritatis* cited above, sanctioned the idea that the special apostolic or charitable purpose of religious congregations is an essential part of religious life, because such activity is entrusted to them by the church and is exercised in the Church’s name. Such a pronouncement has forced a rethinking of the ascetical and canonical tradition, which tended to view the special purpose of an institute as additional and secondary. Don Bosco’s formulation, and the insight which it supposed, not only anticipated Vatican II but was in fact even more novel. It must have appeared altogether revolutionary in the 1860s.

Secondly, Don Bosco sets forth for the Salesian, albeit in nineteenth-century ascetical language, a Christocentric spirituality. The Salesian, gathered in community for the work of charity, is given a comprehensive means for attaining to “perfection” (that is to say, to holiness): the imitation of Christ in his ministry to the young and the poor. This is a Christocentric spirituality. The French spiritual masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth century saw Jesus, in his mystery, in his life and ministry, as the pattern of Christian existence.<sup>73</sup> Don Bosco simply proposes the imitation of Christ in his virtues, which reveals the moralizing and practical mentality of the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>73</sup> Jean Jacques Olier (1608-1657) writes: “Christianity consists in these three points: [...] to look upon Jesus, to unite oneself to Jesus, to act on Jesus. The first leads us to respect and to religion; the second, to union and to identification with Him; the third, to an activity no longer solitary, but joined to the virtue of Jesus Christ.” [E. A. Walsh, “Spirituality, French School of,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 13, 605]

However, in calling for the imitation of the virtues of Christ as doer and teacher, particularly in his love of predilection for the young, he proposes a thoroughly Christocentric spirituality.

**2. The Rewriting of Article 1 of the Chapter on Purpose in 1864**

In the earliest drafts, Article 1 on Purpose stressed the relatedness of the imitation of Christ’s pastoral charity and religious perfection or holiness. Religious perfection (holiness) is achieved *through* the exercise of pastoral charity. By contrast, in the draft of 1864 Article 1 on Purpose appears drastically rewritten, so that the original emphases are done away with.

(1) Nature of the Shift

A comparison will reveal the extent of the rewriting.

<i>Do</i> (1860) <b>Purpose, Art. 1</b>	<i>Gb</i> (1864), <b>Purpose, Art. 1</b>
1. It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] its [as] members priests, seminarians and laymen too, in order that they may strive for perfection <i>through</i> the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Savior, especially in [his?] charity toward poor young people.	1. The purpose of this society is the Christian perfection of its members; every kind of work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, on behalf of young people, especially if they are poor; and also the education of young seminarians. It is composed of priests, seminarians and laymen. <sup>74</sup>

Here truly significant changes have taken place. Community (“the gathering”) is no longer in evidence. The tight subordination of purposes has been replaced by mere coordination of various juxtaposed elements. The concept of perfection to be achieved *through* the work of charity toward the young in imitation of Christ’s pastoral charity has been replaced by that of an unspecified Christian perfection. Christocentric spirituality for the Salesian is no longer to be deduced from the wording of the 1864 article.

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<sup>74</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 72.

## (2) Don Bosco's Abiding Conviction

Before attempting to offer an explanation for this shift, we may take this as certain: Don Bosco never swerved from his conviction that, for the Salesian, holiness is achieved through the work of charity undertaken in imitation of Christ's pastoral charity. For instance, this is the doctrine propounded through the various editions of the Savio biography (from 1859):

The first piece of advice that [Dominic] was given for achieving holiness was that he should endeavor to win souls to God; because there is no holier work in this world than that of contributing to the salvation of souls, for whose redemption Jesus Christ shed the very last drop of his precious blood.<sup>75</sup>

This is also the spiritual doctrine taught in the 1876 document on Salesian Cooperators:

This Association might be regarded as a traditional Third Order; but with this difference, that whereas there perfection was made to consist in exercises of piety [devotions], here the main purpose is the active life and the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk.<sup>76</sup>

We may therefore confidently assert that Don Bosco never intended to propose a way to holiness to Salesians that differed from the one he proposed to his boys and to his Cooperators.

Thus in the Historical Sketch of 1874, written ten years after the reworking of the article under discussion, he explains his idea of the Society in question-and-answer form and writes:

Q: In this Society is your aim the good of neighbor or that of its members?

A: The purpose of this Society is the spiritual advancement of its members *through* the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward poor young people.<sup>77</sup>

## (3) Why the Change?

Then how explain the rewriting of Article 1 on Purpose in 1864? The following may be adduced as possible reasons.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* [...] per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (Torino: Paravia e Comp., 1859), 53, in *Opere Edite* XI, 203.

<sup>76</sup> Bosco Giovanni, *Cooperatori salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al costume ed alla civile società* (San Pier d'Arena: Tip. Salesiana, 1876), in *Opere Edite* XXVIII, 260.

<sup>77</sup> *Cenno storico*, in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the whole subject cf. Francesco Motto, "Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii: Fonti letterarie dei capitoli Scopo, Forma, Voto di

The strong objections made by Archbishop Gastaldi in 1872-1874 and the criticism submitted years earlier by Father Durando and others, that the Salesians were engaged in mindless external activity and neglected their spiritual formation, may have played a part. Perhaps Don Bosco himself feared that the general purpose of all religious life (personal holiness) might be defeated by the very ardor with which his followers pursued the special purpose of Salesian life (pastoral charity towards young people). Hence his decision to state it separately.

The separate statement of purposes, hence the transition from subordination to coordination, may have been suggested to Don Bosco by the models he had before him, even if the change blurred his original insight and his abiding conviction. As indicated above, following the basic Jesuit model, the constitutions that served as Don Bosco's sources (those of the Vincentians, of the Schools of Charity of Venice, of Lanteri's Oblates of Mary, of the Redemptorists, and of the Marists) all listed the purposes separately in coordination.

But Don Bosco had been taking those constitutions as models all along. Did some new factor come into play? New official directives from Rome, issued to clarify this very matter, may have been decisive. The promulgation of the *Methodus* in 1863, the very year of Don Bosco's revision of this article, set in motion a series of actions by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars designed to regulate the approval of the many religious congregations founded in the nineteenth century. These directives were later codified in the *Normae* of 1901.<sup>79</sup> Observations given to some religious congregations on the basis of the *Methodus*, read: "The purpose of the institute should perhaps be expressed more humbly, and separate mention shall have to be made of the member's [...] personal sanctification."<sup>80</sup> After defining the general and special purpose of religious congregations, the *Normae* directed that a clear and separate statement be made of the two: "These two purposes are to be accurately distinguished, and they are to be stated with clarity, in unpretentious terms, and without exaggeration."<sup>81</sup>

The norms given by the Roman congregation also reflect the on-going debate on the purposes of religious life. Some theologians held that ministerial, apostolic, or charitable activities were not of themselves means of

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Obbedienza, Povertà e Castità," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 2 (1983) 341-384, esp. 356-360 [**Motto, Fonti**]; also Francis Desramaut, "Lo scopo della società nelle costituzioni salesiane," in *La Missione dei Salesiani nella Chiesa* (Colloqui 2. Torino: LDC, 1970), 65-85.

<sup>79</sup> *Normae secundum quas Sacra Congregatio Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis novis Institutis votorum simplicium*. [Norms by which the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is guided in the process of approval of new institutes with simple vows], June 28, 1901. For the *Methodus* cf. note 4 and related text above.

<sup>80</sup> *Motto, Fonti*, 359.

<sup>81</sup> *Normae*, No. 44, in Carminati, *loc. cit.*, 49.

perfection; or that at best the two were, each in their own right, separate purposes of religious life, but that one could not be subordinated to the other.

In this context, the 1864 re-writing of Article I on Purpose is understandable. It appears that Don Bosco both by following the models and by complying with official directives hoped to make his constitutions more acceptable.

#### (4) Slight Recovery

Nonetheless after the *Decretum laudis* of 1864, perhaps under Rosminian influence, he attempted to re-establish some kind of syntactical subordination between the general purpose and the specific purpose by a (Latin) participial temporal clause.

It is the purpose of this Congregation that its members, *while* striving *together* for Christian perfection, undertake every kind of work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, toward young people [...].<sup>82</sup>

This formulation, however, appears only in the Latin texts, and not in the final Italian text printed for the confreres in 1875!

I mentioned possible Rosminian influence. Don Bosco had known Antonio Rosmini personally, though he was probably not familiar with the great man's philosophical-theological system. He also knew and used the constitutions of the Institute of Charity. Now, Rosmini more subtly proposed distinct, yet somehow subordinated, purposes of religious life: the members' personal sanctification; and *through* personal sanctification (*sanctificatione mediante*) total dedication to every possible work of charity. The connection, according to Rosmini, lay in the fact that "in one's perfection (perfect charity) is included also the exercise of charity toward neighbor."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 72f.

<sup>83</sup> Motto, *Fonti*, 358 (with note 53).

Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855), was born of a noble family at Rovereto (Trent). Highly and broadly educated, he studied theology at the University of Padua, and was ordained a priest in 1821. In 1828 he founded the Institute of Charity. Popes Pius VIII and Gregory XVI prevailed on him to write, and through the years he authored numerous ascetical, spiritual, philosophical and theological works. At the time of the liberal revolution in 1848 he was given a diplomatic mission to the Holy See by the Piedmontese government, interrupted by the episode of the Mazzinian Roman Republic. At the same time he authored two prophetic works (*The Five Wounds of the Church* and *A Civil Constitution Based on Social Justice*) which drew a condemnation from the Holy Office. His original, non-Thomistic philosophical system, and the works which expounded it, likewise drew a condemnation. But Rosmini was finally vindicated as one of the most important Catholic philosophers and spiritual masters in the nineteenth century. Don Bosco first became acquainted with the Rosminians in 1840 and with Rosmini himself in 1850. Rosmini helped Don Bosco financially; and although Don Bosco was in no



Don Bosco's insights pertaining to the purpose and mission of the Salesian Society as a religious congregation, which we have just discussed, are matched by his concept of the Salesian community as expressed in the chapter on the Form of the Society.

### III. Religious Consecration for the Exercise of Charity in Articles 1 and 2 of the Chapter on the Form of the Society

As indicated in Part I, the chapter on the Form of the Society underwent significant revision at the hand of the Roman authorities throughout its development, especially through the striking of Article 2 (on "civil rights") and the transfer of other articles to different chapters. Our comments have the three earlier drafts in view.

Article 1 is foundational and defines the religious consecration of the Salesian in community. The article underwent some expansion in its last section between 1858 and 1864, after which it remained practically unchanged. Article 2 was likewise foundational in Don Bosco's intention, as it defined the Salesian's full membership in the civil life of his society, conceived as fully compatible with his religious consecration. Don Bosco clung to this provision in the face of repeated objections, until it was removed before approval in 1874.

These two articles represented the twin foundations of which Don Bosco often spoke and which he attributed to Pope Pius IX as the source.<sup>84</sup>

#### 1. Article 1 of the Chapter on Form.

A comparison between the three drafts of Article 1 which are of interest to us is instructive.

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position to evaluate Rosmini's philosophical system, his friendship and esteem for the great and holy man never wavered. [Dicastero per la Formazione, *Sussidi 2* (Roma: SDB, 1988), 312-316]

<sup>84</sup> In his petition addressed to Pius IX in 1864, referring back to 1858 when he presented the idea of a religious society to the pope, Don Bosco wrote: "Your Holiness, you yourself saw fit to lay down its foundations (*La medesima S.V. degnavasi di tracciarne le basi*)." [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 228 (Document 2)] In a memorandum addressed to Archbishop Riccardi di Netro in 1867, Don Bosco wrote unambiguously: "The Holy Father traced [for us] the ground plan of a religious society in which the members were to be true religious before the Church and at the same time remain free citizens before the civil authority." [*Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (1867): MS. in Don Bosco's hand in ASC 022, *FDBM* 1,925 A12-B3, *IBM* VIII, 809-811 (omitted in *EBM*)]

<i>Ar</i> (1858) Form, Art. 1	<i>Do</i> (1860) Form, Art. 1	<i>Gb</i> (1864) Form, Art. 1
<p>1. [i] All the gathered-members lead the common life [ii] bound only by fraternal charity and by the simple vows, which bind them together to form one heart and one soul, [iii] in order to love and serve God.</p>	<p>1. [i] All the gathered-members lead the common life [ii] bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and the simple vows, which unites them to form one heart and one soul, [iii] in order to love and serve God [iv] by the virtue of obedience, of poverty, and of holiness of life.</p>	<p>1. [i] All the gathered-members lead the common life [ii] bound only by the bond of fraternal charity and the simple vows, which unites them to form one heart and one soul, [iii] in order to love and serve God [iv] by the virtue of obedience, of poverty, of chastity, and by the perfect fulfillment of the duties of a good Christian.<sup>85</sup></p>

As may be seen, in his successive rewriting Don Bosco tightened up section [ii] to emphasize unity: “bound only by the *bond* of fraternal charity and the simple vows, which *unites* them to form one heart and one soul.” In 1860 and 1864, the article was expanded by the addition of section [iv] specifying “the virtues of consecration” which enable the members to love and serve God. This section underwent minor modifications and one expansion in 1864 (“by the exact performance of the duties of a good Christian,” rephrased in the subsequent Latin texts as “by a genuinely Christian way of living.” A brief comment on each section will suffice.

(1) Section [i] develops the idea of community already broached in Article 1 of the chapter on Purpose. One should note the unusual term “gathered-members” (*congregati*). The word harks back to the equally unusual phrase in the former article, “It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [as] its members [...]” In various memorandums Don Bosco states that in 1858 the group of oratory workers was divided into two branches. Thus, in the historical sketch of 1874 we read:

Some who had a vocation remained [in residence at the Oratory] to swell the ranks of the nascent congregation. In the year 1858 several priests, seminarians, and laymen as well, formed the number of those who lived in

<sup>85</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 82.

community and who observed what basically were the rules of the Salesian Society.<sup>86</sup>

The 1877 document entitled “Salesian Cooperators:” is even more explicit:

[In 1858] the Congregation was divided into two branches, or rather families. Those who believed they had a vocation and were unimpeded, joined together to live in community [...]. The rest, that is, the laymen [MS. “externs” in *IBM*] continued to live in the world with their own families but continued to work on behalf of the Oratories.<sup>87</sup>

As may be seen, the gathered-members had their counterpart in the extern-members, for whose affiliation Don Bosco included a special set of rules in the constitutions of 1860.

(2) Section [ii] describes the nature of this community. It is a *communio* brought about by fraternal charity and the vows. Both forces act together to form a bond which unites the gathered-members as one heart and one soul. The reference here is to the Jerusalem apostolic community as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and one soul and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. — All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possession and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.<sup>88</sup>

These Scriptural texts depict a community living as one heart and one soul, bound by mutual love and common sharing of goods. The Christian community of Acts has traditionally been regarded as a model of religious life, and the citation from Acts is attested in a number of constitutions. In Don Bosco’s case it reflects a deeply rooted conviction as well as a theology of

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<sup>86</sup> Braido, *Cenno storico*, in *Don Bosco per i giovani*, 117-118. Father Alasonatti, in a letter written *before* Don Bosco went to Rome in 1858 to present the idea of a religious society to Pius IX, confirms the existence of such a group “united as confreres in spirit under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales.” This, however, was not to be made public, “until we see more clearly whether it is the Lord’s good pleasure to prosper the group or to dissolve it—This may shortly be decided when Don Bosco journeys to Rome at the beginning of Lent.” [Vittorio Alasonatti to Angelo Savio, February 6, 1858, in *ASC* 270: Alasonatti] In the introductory Historical Sketch to the constitutions of 1858, drafted shortly after returning from Rome, Don Bosco writes: “Fifteen people at present profess these rules: 5 priests, 8 clerics, and 2 laymen.” [Motto, *Cost. DB*, 70]

<sup>87</sup> MS. in *ASC* 133: Cooperatori 3(1), 2f.; *FDBM* 1,886 E8-1,887 A2, edited in *IBM* XI, 84-86, *EBM* XI, 73-75.

<sup>88</sup> Acts 4:32 and 2:44-45 (*New Revised Standard Version*).

religious community. The first attested reference is to be found in his *Church History* (1845) where he speaks about the lifestyle of those early Christians.<sup>89</sup> Then in treating of the hermits of the desert, he writes that “they were obedient to their superiors like little children, and lived united as one heart and one soul.”<sup>90</sup> He has recourse to this text from Acts some twenty times before 1858, always with reference to religious community.

The image is reinforced by the blunt way in which Don Bosco phrased the foundational Article 1 of the chapter on Poverty in the earliest drafts, barely tempered in subsequent editing.

Ar (1858) = Do (1860), Poverty, Art. 1	Gb (1864), Poverty, Art. 1
1. The essence of the vow of poverty [as practiced] in our congregation lies in leading the common life regarding food and clothing, and in not keeping anything under lock and key without the superior's special permission.	1. The observance of the vow of poverty [as practiced] in our congregation lies essentially in being detached from all earthly goods. This we will try to achieve by [leading] the common life regarding food and clothing, and by not keeping anything for our own use without the superior's special permission. <sup>91</sup>

The Salesian community envisaged by Don Bosco is to be a replica of the apostolic community.

(3) The stock phrase in Section [iii], “in order to love and serve God,” comes from the basic catechism. There in answer to the question, “Who created you?” it defined the purpose of human existence. Here it expresses the double purpose of religious life as well: love and service. Don Bosco assures the Salesian that by being part of a community living in communion and in consecration for the mission the purpose of his human existence is also fulfilled.

(4) With Section [iii] the description of the Salesian religious community might be regarded as complete. Don Bosco has already mentioned the vows as a factor in the bond, and that seemed enough in 1858. But in the drafts of 1860 and 1864, he wished to emphasize the role of the *virtues* of obedience, poverty, and chastity. Just as the vows by their binding force, together with fraternal charity, are the means of communion, so the virtues of obedience, poverty and

<sup>89</sup> *Storia Ecclesiastica per uso delle scuole*, compilata dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (Torino: Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, 1945), 34, in *Opere Edite* I, 75.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 129 and 287.

<sup>91</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 100.

chastity are means of consecration for the achievement of the goals of religious life, the love and service of God. In addition, in the draft of 1864 he wished to suggest another means of consecration, “the perfect fulfillment of the duties of a good Christian.” In subsequent Latin texts, he interpreted this concept to mean “a genuinely Christian way of living (*accurata christiana vivendi ratione*).” This indeed is what the phrase “duties of a good Christian” meant: the program of the Christian life including worship, prayer, moral conduct, etc., traditionally inculcated by the Church.

(5) The preeminence given to obedience is significant. The three vows—virtues of religious consecration are always given in the same order: obedience, poverty, chastity. True, Don Bosco on many occasions by the spoken and the written word exalted chastity as of supreme importance for the spiritual life of the individual, and (in an educational setting in particular) of the utmost necessity both for the educator and the pupils. However, with reference to the structure of religious life, and of the Salesian community in particular, he saw obedience as the primary agent in religious consecration.

Pietro Stella, in discussing the Dream of the Diamonds which Don Bosco had at San Benigno on the night of September 10-11, 1881, points out that although Don Bosco had often exalted chastity as the most *beautiful* virtue, “he wrote that obedience was the first and the foundation of all the other virtues, even in religious life.”<sup>92</sup> In this dream there appears a Gentleman wearing a diamond-studded cope (representing the Salesian society), each diamond bearing the name of an important virtue. Obedience precedes poverty and chastity and is located in the place of honor.

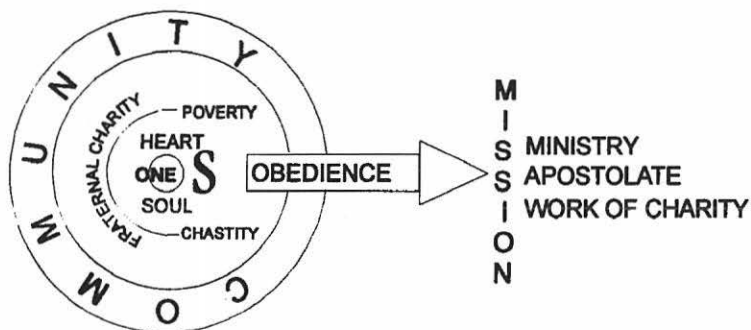
This is because obedience (especially under the aspect of “virtue” extending beyond the canonical field of the vow) figures not only as a means of consecration together with poverty and chastity, but also as the chief religious structure whereby the consecrated person becomes “available” for the mission or work of charity. Charity, although *ultimum in executione* is *primum in intentione*. And since in Don Bosco’s thinking charity and its zealous exercise is both the special purpose of religious life and the means through which its general purpose (Christian perfection) is to be realized, obedience (which governs the availability of the consecrated person) holds a key position.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. II: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, 2nd ed. (Roma: LAS, 1981), 528 (Appendix on Don Bosco’s dreams); published in English as: *Don Bosco’s Dreams* [...], tr. by John Drury (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 29-30 with notes 40 and 41. For this statement Stella refers to Don Bosco’s *The Companion of Youth (Il giovane provveduto*, 1847, 13), and to the *Biographical Memoirs* [EBM IV, 554; VI, 556; VII, 417; IX, 419, etc.], where indeed Don Bosco makes this point.

<sup>93</sup> In a perceptive study of the chapter on Obedience, Motto discusses in detail the centrality of obedience and the position of the superior in a Salesian community: “La figura del superiore salesiano nelle costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales del 1860. Testi, Fonti, Interpretazione,” *Ricerche Storiche*

Obedience is the religious-life structure whereby the superior (community) directs the consecrated person to the work of charity. And this finally becomes the means of personal holiness.



— Community and Mission —

Salesians live in Community, and through fraternal charity and the vows form a Communion: *one heart and one soul*. Obedience, Poverty and chastity serve as the virtues for religious consecration, to love and serve God. The Superior provides animation and leadership, while through Obedience the Salesian becomes available for the Mission (Ministry, Apostolate, Work of Charity).

(6) Let me add a comment on the “spiritual value” of community so conceived. Religious community as communion is a truly significant aspect of Don Bosco’s understanding of religious life, one which is as traditional as it is novel. He had laid down that the general purpose of religious life for the Salesian, Christian perfection or holiness, was to be achieved *through* the exercise of charity. If this were taken superficially, then community would appear to serve merely as a “base of operation,” or “staging area,” having no “sanctifying” value in itself. By defining community as communion, and bringing into play fraternal charity and the vows, Don Bosco endows it with a value *in itself*, the value which the cenobitic tradition (familiar to Don Bosco) clearly expressed. In Don Bosco’s conception, community as communion becomes a true source of spiritual energy for the attainment of both the general and the special purpose of religious life. Fraternal charity with its spiritual inspiration and the vows by their binding power produce a unity in heart and soul which fosters the spiritual life and lends supports to individual commitment.

In the Introduction which Don Bosco wrote for the “official” Italian edition of 1875 such ideas and themes receive extended development.<sup>94</sup>

## 2. Article 2 of the Chapter on Form: Civil Right[s]

As may be seen in the table below, the article was expanded in successive drafts to specify some of the consequences of retaining civil rights, with the added provision that the member cannot dispose of his goods except in the manner laid down by the Rector Major. However, the essence of the article pertaining to retention of civil right[s] remained unchanged until 1874, when the article was removed, rewritten in terms of “radical dominion” and “use,” and transferred to the chapter on the Vow of Poverty.

Article 2, until removed in 1874 before approval, read:

<i>Ar</i> (1858), <i>Do</i> (1860), Form, Art. 2	<i>Gb</i> (1864), <i>Ls</i> (1867) Form, Art. 2	<i>Ns</i> (1873) Form, Art. 2
No one on entering the congregation, shall, even after making his vows, forfeit his <i>civil right</i> . Therefore he retains ownership of his goods, and the power of succession and of receiving bequests, legacies, and gifts.  [ <i>Do</i> :] But for as long as he remains in the congregation [...]	No one on entering the congregation, shall, even after making his vows, forfeit his <i>civil rights</i> . Therefore he retains ownership of his goods, and he can also succeed into [ownership of] someone else's goods.  But for as long as he remains in the Society [...]	No one on entering the congregation, shall, even after making his vows, forfeit his <i>civil rights</i> . He shall therefore pay his taxes as the laws prescribe, he can validly and licitly buy, sell, make a will, succeed into [ownership of] someone else's goods.  But for as long as he remains in the Society [...] <sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> P. Braido (a cura di), *Don Bosco Fondatore: "Ai Soci Salesiani" (1875-1885)*. Introduzione e testi critici (Roma LAS, 1995). [Braido, *DB Fondatore*] Pages 36-46 of Braido's introduction are devoted to a study of Don Bosco's ideas on the Salesian religious community.

<sup>95</sup> *Do* (1860): “Ognuno nell'entrare in congregazione non perderà il diritto civile anche dopo fatti i voti, perciò conserva la proprietà delle cose sue, la facoltà di succedere e di ricevere eredità, legati e donazioni. Ma per tutto il tempo che vivrà in congregazione [...]” [Motto. *Cost. DB*, 82]



## (1) Nature of the Provision

The idea of an association of free citizens who pooled their resources and talents for the work of charity in civil society was an “illumination” which Don Bosco is said to have received from prime minister Urbano Rattazzi in 1857.<sup>96</sup> According to a memorandum of 1864, the idea (now joined to religious vows) received confirmation and endorsement from Pius IX in 1858, when Don Bosco presented to him a plan for the Salesian Society. Don Bosco writes:

The pope said among other things: “On the one hand, this society or congregation should be such as to comply with religious requirements [of the Church]; on the other, its members should be free of those restrictions that might embarrass them before the civil laws [...]. The overarching purpose should be to preserve the spirit of the oratories; hence vows are required as a bond apt to ensure unity in spirit and works. But these vows should be simple and easily relaxed [...].”<sup>97</sup>

These two foundation articles, taken together, are a powerful expression of the form of the Society, as Don Bosco conceived it. We have here a compact group of people gathered and living in communion, united as one heart and one soul by the bond of fraternal charity and the simple vows, living in consecration through poverty and chastity, and available and ready for the mission through obedience. They come together not as a juridical organization, a corporation

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<sup>96</sup> [Giovanni Bonetti,] “Storia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,” in *Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1883, p. 97. The *Storia dell’Oratorio* was published in book form after Bonetti’s death in 1891 as *Cinque lustri di Storia [...]* (1891), [522-524] which was translated into English as *Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate* (1908, reprinted 1934) [344-345]. The “illumination” Don Bosco received from Rattazzi was in the form of an understanding of a point of liberal jurisprudence, namely that the civil right of a private citizen was inviolable under the law because it derived from nature, whereas corporate rights were granted only by the state. Hence if Don Bosco set up his society as an association of private citizens who came together for a humanitarian undertaking, and not as a corporation, the government would have nothing to say in the matter.

<sup>97</sup> This memorandum, dated by Braido in 1864 [*DB Fondatore*, 40], is a MS. in Don Bosco’s hand entitled *Il regnante Pio IX a favore di questa società: ASC 132, FDBM 1,924 D-9-10*. In the Biographical Memoirs [*EBM V*, 561], Lemoyne reports the pope’s words in context, on the basis of Bonetti’s description of the audience [*Don Bosco’s Early Apostolate*, 356]: “It is necessary that you should establish a Society with which the Government cannot interfere, but at the same time you must not be satisfied with binding its members by mere promises, otherwise you would never be sure of your subjects, nor could you count on them for any length of time.” But obviously Don Bosco is the ultimate and only source for the pope’s words, for he was alone with the pope, and seminarian Michele Rua (who acted as Don Bosco’s secretary) was not introduced until the end of the audience.

either secular or religious, but as an association of free citizens who choose to devote themselves and their resources to the work of charity. The vows which are both bond of unity and means of consecration, are also, under the aspect of the virtues of obedience, poverty and chastity, the means whereby God is loved and served.

## (2) Comment on a possible Rosminian Connection

It is worth noting that this novel concept of religious life is in line with the doctrine set forth by Antonio Rosmini in the 1820s. And it is not unlikely (though it is not attested) that contacts with Rosmini influenced Don Bosco's own formulation, albeit with a terminology dictated by the age of the liberal revolution in the 1850s.

Don Bosco used the term "civil right[s]" to describe a situation in which individual religious exercised their rights (such as private ownership) and duties (such as paying taxes) as free citizens. The Salesian Society was not a religious corporation and owned nothing. Rosmini used the term "legal ownership" (*dominium legale*) to describe a similar situation in which individual members retained ownership (not use) of their goods, and his congregation owned nothing. Before the civil law the member of the Institute of Charity would appear to own as any private citizen would; and the vow (of poverty) by which the member bound himself to surrender to his superior the right to dispose of his goods could be simple and *private*, that is, a matter between him and his superior. Thus the vow, like any private agreement, could conceivably remain secret; and if it becomes public knowledge, it will have been by accident and not by its very nature.<sup>98</sup>

Rosmini's idea that the vow could be simple and in the nature of a private agreement may have affected Don Bosco's interpretation of the pope's expression quoted above—that "the vows should be simple and easily relaxed." This in turn may account for Don Bosco's position with regard to both temporary and perpetual vows. (See Excursus II below.)

One should also bear in mind that Rosmini's concept of religious poverty found its place within a complex philosophical, theological and juridical system elaborated out of an intense personal spiritual experience. The Institute of Charity was to be poor with the most perfect kind of poverty; it was to own nothing, and was not to be a corporation either secular or religious, set up according to the juridical system of either State or Church. This type of poverty in Rosmini's thinking was the corresponding pole to charity. It reflected a perfect love, understood as total openness to God, full trust and

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<sup>98</sup> Pietro Stella, "Le costituzioni salesiane fino al 1888," in *Fedeltà e Rinnovamento. Studi sulle costituzioni salesiane*, ed. by Joseph Aubry and Mario Midali (Roma: LAS, 1974) [15-54] 25. [Stella, *Costituzioni*] Stella quotes a letter in which Rosmini outlines his view [*Epistolario completo* II (Casale Monf. 1887) 219].

surrender to him and his loving Providence in complete “indifference,” total availability. Collective religious poverty, as the sign of charity and of surrender to God, in Rosmini’s system figured as the Christian response to current philosophical-juridical theories that founded human society on utility and materialism, that is, on the sum of individual and collective egoism and greed, which inevitably led (as in the case of Cain and Babel) to hatred, strife and confusion.<sup>99</sup>

Nowhere does Don Bosco make reference to Rosmini’s doctrine of religious life; nor does he theorize about poverty, except to indicate in simplest terms its role as a builder of community and fraternal charity.<sup>100</sup> The Rosminian flavor, however, is unmistakable. Thus the “civil right” clause figures not as mere strategy for survival but as a component of a profound spiritual insight regarding religious life.

#### **IV. The Primacy of the Active Life: The Exercise of Pastoral Charity and the Prayer Life of the Salesian**

The chapter on the Practices of Piety is proof, if additional proof were needed, of Don Bosco’s conviction that personal holiness in religious life is attained not through religious exercises or ascetical practices but through the active life of pastoral charity. Later, as already noted, to explain the spirituality of the Salesian Cooperators he would write:

This Association might be regarded as a traditional Third Order; but with this difference, that whereas there perfection was made to consist in exercises of piety [devotions], here the main purpose is the active life and the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk.<sup>101</sup>

This very principle underlies the chapter on the Practices of Piety.<sup>102</sup>

The constitutions of 1858 made no provision for Practices of Piety (the prayer life of the Salesian community). This simply means that Don Bosco saw no need of specifying what was in use at the Oratory since the beginning. A chapter of that title, however, was added in 1860. It underwent some development in 1864 and thereafter.

The structure of the chapter is worth noting. In the draft of 1860, it consists of two foundational articles; three in the draft of 1864. They were followed by specific provisions: for daily vocal and mental prayer; for daily

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<sup>99</sup> Stella, *Costituzioni*, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. note 91 and related text above.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. note 76 and related text above.

<sup>102</sup> For all texts quoted from the constitutions on Piety, cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 182-183.

rosary and “some” spiritual reading; for a Friday fast; for a monthly retreat (of a Happy Death); for the Rector’s power to grant dispensations from practices as he saw fit; for suffrages for deceased Salesians and parents of Salesians. An article on the yearly spiritual retreat was added in 1864.<sup>103</sup>

### 1. Foundational Articles

<i>Do</i> (1860) Piety, Art. 1 and 2	<i>Gb</i> (1864) Piety, Art. 1, 2 and 3
<p>1. [i] The active life to which our society is committed deprives its members (<i>membri</i>) of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common. They shall [accordingly] endeavor to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfillment of the general duties of a Christian.</p> <p>2. [ii] Each associate [<i>socio</i>] shall receive every week the sacrament of penance [administered] by a confessor designated by the rector.</p> <p>[iii] Personal composure [<i>compostezza della persona</i>], a clear, devout, distinct pronunciation of the words of the divine office, modesty in speech, looks and gait both inside and outside the house, ought to be the distinctive characteristics of our gathered-members [<i>congregati</i>].</p>	<p>1. [i] The active life to which our society is <i>mostly</i> committed deprives its members (<i>membri</i>) of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common. They shall [accordingly] endeavor to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfillment of the general duties of a Christian.</p> <p>2. [ii] Each associate [<i>socio</i>] shall receive every week the sacrament of penance [administered] by a confessor designated by the rector.</p> <p>The priests shall celebrate holy Mass every day; and when unable to do so they shall endeavor to assist at Mass. Seminarians [<i>chierici</i>] and coadjutor brothers [<i>fratelli coadiutori</i>] shall assist at holy Mass daily and shall endeavor to receive holy Communion at least once a week.</p> <p>3. [iii] Personal composure [<i>compostezza della persona</i>], a clear, devout, distinct pronunciation of the words of the divine office, modesty in speech, looks and gait both inside and outside the house, ought to be the distinctive characteristics of our gathered-members [<i>congregati</i>].</p>

At first glance, these articles appear altogether unusual as an introduction to a chapter on Practices of Piety. However they are totally consonant with Don Bosco’s understanding of religious life. I called these articles foundational.

<sup>103</sup> The Salesians generally made their retreat together with the boys until 1866, when separate regular retreats were conducted at the newly acquired house of Trofarello. [*EBM* VIII, 198-201]

They in fact function as an infrastructure supporting the prayer life of the Salesian community. A brief comment on each section will bear this out.

(1) Section [I]

In the first place, absolute priority is given to the active life, meaning not the “busy” life, but a life dedicated to the apostolate, to the exercise of Christ-like pastoral charity. Stella remarks:

Herein is contained a certain innovation in the traditional doctrine of religious life. If religious life is a state of perfection, it would have to show forth the sign [of it] in terms of a greater individual and collective commitment. Now the sign to which Don Bosco attaches fundamental value is “the active life” which takes its inspiration from charity and its demands. To liturgical celebration and other forms of prayer [exercises] he seems to attach only a subordinate value, and one that might be overridden to allow for *the eager and fruitful exercise of charity towards neighbor*.<sup>104</sup>

If common prayer forms are secondary, even though important, then their program may be reduced to allow full scope to the primary and essential. At the same time more important structures apt to lend support to the primary and essential should be emphasized.

Article 1 of the chapter on Form had underscored the importance of community and of the means whereby God is loved and served. Here Don Bosco commends two joint contributing factors: *mutual* good example and performance of the duties of a good Christian (an expression used already in Article 1 on Form, 1864). The two are closely related, and function almost like a hendiadys. Mutual good example arises out of a lifestyle and a manner of acting and speaking that provide moral and spiritual support in brotherly solidarity. It builds up and strengthens community as Don Bosco conceived it, unites confreres in common purpose, fuels fervor and creates a prayerful atmosphere. The performance of the duties of a good Christian, that is, living by a program of Christian life based on the teaching and faith experience of the Catholic Church, works to the same effect, for it expresses a personal commitment to the love and service of God.

(2) Section [ii]

Priority is next given to the sacrament of reconciliation, which is here set down as a foundation, not merely as “a practice of piety.” It is the means of on-going conversion and the sign of a life of grace.

It is worth noting that in the draft of 1860, Don Bosco made no mention of the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. Clearly its daily celebration was taken for granted. He introduced it in 1864: daily celebration of, or attendance

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<sup>104</sup> Stella, *Costituzioni*, 34.

at, the Eucharist, with communion at least once a week for seminarians and brothers. Placed advisedly in Article 2, the Eucharist parallels the sacrament of reconciliation as a foundation, not merely as a “practice.” Together they form a binomial expressing reconciliation and grace for the individual and for the Salesian community.

### (3) Section [iii]

Finally priority is given to a series of qualities or characteristics which identify one as a Salesian. Don Bosco seems to want to say that before any practices of piety or prayers are undertaken, the Salesian must be a Christian gentleman, as well as a prayerful and devout person, and act like one. He should give evidence of this fact by habitual exemplary deportment: by the way he prays, speaks and behaves.

## 2. Single Practices of Piety

The foundation articles are followed by four articles which specify a few and simple practices of piety.

(1) Daily mental and vocal prayer are the first to be mentioned. The constitutions of 1860 provided for only half-an-hour of mental and vocal prayer jointly. Either following advice, or on second thought, Don Bosco extended the period to one hour jointly. Thus in the draft of 1864 Don Bosco wrote:

4. Every day there shall be no less than *one hour* of mental and vocal prayer [jointly], except when one is prevented [from doing so] by the calls [*esercizio*] of the sacred ministry. In that case he shall make up [for such failure] by more frequent ejaculatory prayers and by directing to God with greater fervor and love [*intensità di affetto*] those labors which keep him from the ordinary exercises of piety.

The call of the “sacred ministry” takes precedence.<sup>105</sup> And moreover the Salesian is not required personally to make up the practice later. The “making up” is in the form of prayerful union with God and greater fervor while he is engaged in the ministry or apostolate.

Savini-Svegliati Observation 8 of 1864 suggested that more than one hour be provided for common prayer, but nothing came of it. The approved text of 1874 has half-an-hour of one, and half-an-hour of the other, everything else remaining the same.

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<sup>105</sup> “Sacred ministry,” taken literally, has only the priests in view. And indeed the lay component of the Society does not receive much attention in the constitutions. But clearly Don Bosco’s intention is to speak of the demands of the Salesian mission in all its forms (ministry, apostolate, work of charity).

(2) Other practices of piety are: the third part of the Rosary and *some* spiritual reading daily; Friday fast in honor of the Passion; monthly spiritual retreat in which an Exercise of a Happy Death is made.

As noted above, the provision for an annual spiritual retreat appears for the first time in the draft of 1864. The Bianchi-Vitelleschi Observation 21, and later the cardinals of the special commission, demanded longer spiritual retreats, as may be seen by comparing the writing of 1864 with the approved text of 1874.

<i>Gb</i> (1864) Piety, Art. 8	<i>Q</i> (1874) Piety, Art. 7
8. Every year each one shall make a spiritual retreat which he shall conclude with an annual confession. Every one before being received into the Society shall devote a few days [ <i>qualche giorno</i> ] to a spiritual retreat and shall make a general confession.	7. Every year, each one shall [make a] retreat for about ten, or at least six, days so that he may attend solely to prayer [ <i>pietati</i> ]; and when these days are over, he shall duly cleanse himself [ <i>se rite abluet</i> ] by an annual confession of sins. Before being received into the Society [as a novice], and before taking vows, all shall devote ten days to a spiritual retreat and shall shrive themselves [ <i>sese purgabunt</i> ] by a general confession.

(3) A last important article granted the Rector [Director] the power to dispense from the practices of piety *as he saw fit*. It read simply:

7. The Rector may dispense from these practices particular individuals for a certain period of time, as he may judge best in the Lord.

The article provides for “dispensation” pure and simple. Nothing is said about making up the practice of piety in question. Again, and this is obviously the intention of the article, priority is given to the exercise of charity, the mission.

This unusual provision was rejected by the Bianchi-Vitelleschi Observation 27, though the authorities thought it referred only to the annual spiritual retreat. Don Bosco hastened to assure them that it referred to *all* the practices of piety. The provision was thrown out before approval in 1874.

These constitutions on community prayer, in all their leanness, emphasize that the Salesian religious must establish a spiritual foundation if personal and community exercises of piety are to mean anything. In addition, the active life of the ministry or apostolate has priority over all exercises. Finally, the added power of the superior to dispense *outright* completes the picture. The picture is that of a religious truly stripped down for the



engagement. This religious, the Salesian, is indeed bound in community by charity and vows, but he is totally available for the apostolate, at any time, unencumbered even by exercises of piety. *The eager and fruitful exercise of charity toward neighbor* has absolute priority.

### **Conclusion**

In the foregoing pages we have discussed certain foundational articles of Don Bosco's early constitutions that evince his concept of Salesian community and mission.

Don Bosco's constitutions acquire their specific spiritual lineaments from certain features that go beyond mere juridical tradition and mere norm, and that reveal Don Bosco's deep spiritual insights into the nature of religious life. These features were novel in his time, and are no less novel, even after Vatican II, in our contemporary setting.

The dominant note within the overarching theme of the spirituality of Don Bosco's constitutions is pastoral charity exercised in imitation of the love of Christ the Good Shepherd. This fervent and active charity, understood as the extension of the saving work of Christ, most characterizes the apostolate of the Salesian on behalf of the young, especially the poorest and most neglected.

The "oratorian" congregation has not lost its relevance. All over the world, in every society and culture, young people still need to be instructed "in the holy Catholic religion, especially on Sundays and holy days." Hence, the work of the oratory was bound to blossom, and blossom it did in response to diverse pastoral needs. It has ramified into a vigorously spreading tree, and has borne fruit of every description, all virtually contained in a prolific seed bursting with the pastoral charity of Christ.

For this mission is the Salesian community established:

All the gathered-members lead the common life bound only by the bond fraternal charity and the simple vows, which unites them to form one heart and one soul, in order to love and serve God by the virtue of obedience, of poverty, and of holiness of life.<sup>106</sup>

See graphic above on page 38.

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. note 85 and related text above.

## Excursus I

**Note on Article 7 of the Chapter on Purpose in the  
Constitutions of 1864  
Don Bosco's Social Commitment and His Apolitical Stance**

**1. Don Bosco's Continuing Apolitical Stance**

In the 1864 edition of the constitutions, Don Bosco included an article prohibiting political activity to the members. After committing the Society to the apostolate of the spoken and written word among the people (that is of preaching and of the press) in article 6 of the chapter on Purpose, he added a seventh article which read:

7. But it is an established principle, and one that shall be adhered to without exception, that all members of this Society shall rigorously refrain from anything that has to do with politics. Hence neither by the spoken nor by the written word, whether through books or through the press, shall they ever take part in questions that could, even if only indirectly, compromise them in matters of politics.<sup>107</sup>

When Don Bosco petitioned for approval and obtained the *Decretum laudis* in 1864, Article 7 was ordered removed under the second Savini-Svegliati observation. He complied, and although the article might still be read in intermediate archival manuscripts, it no longer appeared in the revised draft of 1867 (*Ls*) presented in Rome. However, in an address to the First General Chapter (1877) Don Bosco stated that the article was retained and was finally removed in 1874 before the final approval of the constitutions. Don Bosco's words are worth noting for other reasons as well:

The Association of Salesian Cooperators has the good will of all because it does not get involved in politics. [As for ourselves] in my view, the reason why we are allowed the freedom to go about our work undisturbed is that our Congregation is in no way involved in politics. I wanted our constitutions to have a special article forbidding all members to get in any way mixed up in politics. Such a provision was included in the manuscript drafts, but when our rules were submitted to the Holy See, and our Congregation received its first approval [*Decretum laudis*, 1864], the article was removed by the specially appointed examining commission. In 1870 [read 1869] the Congregation was up for definitive approval, and the rules were to be submitted again for examination. As if nothing had been said on the subject, I again inserted the article that forbade the members to get involved in political questions. Again they rejected it. Convinced of its importance, I once more inserted it in 1874, when the constitutions had to be examined article by article by the Sacred

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<sup>107</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 80.

Congregation of Bishops and Regulars before definitive approval. Once more it was removed, but this time they attached a written explanation: "This is the third time this article has been struck out. Of itself, it appears to be generally acceptable, but in this day and age circumstances may well force one in conscience to enter the political arena, since politics are often inseparable from religion. In such cases good Catholics cannot be forbidden political activity." So it was that the article was definitively removed. We may therefore get involved in politics when it is advantageous and genuinely advisable. Apart from such cases, however, let us abide by our established rule of not engaging in any political activity.<sup>108</sup>

With regard to the question of how long the article endured in the textual tradition, Motto points out that the archival documentary evidence in our possession does not bear out Don Bosco's statements. One may therefore question the accuracy of Don Bosco's recollection.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, Don Bosco (as reported) quotes the written explanation he was given for the removal of the article directly.

In any case, Don Bosco never deviated from this principle. It is well known that he himself shunned not only all party politics but also all political activity. In his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, written between 1873 and 1875, he speaks of the patriotic celebrations organized for the granting of the liberal constitution in the Kingdom of Sardinia (1848). When Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio pressed him to take part in the festivities with his boys, Don Bosco stated his position very clearly:

It is my firm system to keep out of anything political. Never *pro*, never *con*. [...] Invite me anywhere that a priest can exercise charity, and you'll find me ready to sacrifice life and means. But I want now and always to remain outside politics.<sup>110</sup>

Don Bosco also subscribed to the policy of "withdrawal" from political life called for by conservative Catholic newspapers and endorsed by Pope Pius IX's decree *Non Expedit* of 1868. The decree "forbade" Italian Catholics to vote and otherwise participate in the political process. This policy remained in force throughout the pontificate of Leo XIII, until 1904.

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<sup>108</sup> ASC 04: *Capitoli Generali*, GC I, Session 4, September 7, 1877, Barberis' Original Minutes, 53-55, *FDBM* 1,843 C12-D2 (also in Transcribed Minutes, *FDBM* 1,849 C5); edited in *IBM* XIII, 265, *EBM* XIII, 195 (in need of correction).

<sup>109</sup> Motto, *Cost. DB*, 18, n. 16. Did Don Bosco in 1877 accurately recall the series of events (1864-1874) leading to the approval? For example, the Salesian Society was definitively approved in 1869, not in 1870. Could Don Bosco have been thinking of some other article, e.g., the article on civil rights (Art. 2 of the chapter on Form) which was put through a similar ordeal?

<sup>110</sup> *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*. The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco (New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publication, 1989), 356.

Don Bosco continued to demand that the Salesians' engagement remain exclusively on the plane of apostolic and charitable activity. The apolitical stance that Don Bosco enjoined on his Salesians he also laid down as a rule for his Salesian Cooperators. He wanted his Cooperators, as far as their social circumstances allowed, to be involved in all kinds of charitable work on behalf of young people, but at the same time not to have any political entanglements. This is borne out by the above-quoted passage from the minutes of General Chapter I. The very title of their "charter" which Don Bosco finalized in 1876, "Salesian Cooperators, an Association Dedicated to Furthering Christian Morals and the Good of Civil Society in Practical Ways," testifies to Don Bosco's intention.<sup>111</sup> In another comprehensive statement made at General Chapter I, as reported in the minutes, Don Bosco said:

While keeping aloof from politics, we [Salesians and Salesian Cooperators] shall always avoid anything that might compromise us with the constituted authorities, whether civil or ecclesiastical. All we ask is to be allowed to care for poor and neglected young people and to help them in any way we can. This, we believe, is the only way in which we can advance Christian morals and the good of society.<sup>112</sup>

Now, the reason for the removal of the article on politics by Rome is clearly and tersely cited by Don Bosco in the quote given above, and it could easily have been deduced from the political situation and the position of the Holy See vis-à-vis the liberal state.

It is the inclusion of such a provision by Don Bosco, and his fierce adherence to it, that demand an explanation. After all, the Salesian mission by its very nature addresses the need of society as well as of individual people.

## 2. Don Bosco's Work of Charity and the Renewal of Society

The question has been asked as to the kind of Christian society Don Bosco envisaged and would want his Salesians to be working for. We do not pretend

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<sup>111</sup> *Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società* (1876). Previous titles of this "charter document" are: "Association for Charitable Work" (*Associazione di buone opere*, 1875); "Christian Union" (*Unione cristiana*, 1874). For a study of the four "charter documents" and Don Bosco's idea of the Salesian Cooperators, cf. Francis Desramaut, "Da Associati alla Congregazione salesiana del 1873 a Cooperatori Salesiani del 1876," in *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea* (Colloqui sulla vita salesiana 6. Leumann -Torino: LDC, 1975) 23-55, 356-373. For the 1875 and 1876 documents, cf. *IBM XI*, 535-545, Appendix 4 and 5 (omitted in *EBM*).

<sup>112</sup> *ASC 04: Capitoli Generali, GC I, Session 4, September 7, 1877*, Transcribed minutes, 116-118; *FDBM* 1,849 C12-D2; Edited in *IBM XIII*, 261-262, *EBM XIII*, 192.

that Don Bosco's social model was a "modern" one. It was in fact a model that, in spite of its intense moral and religious inspiration, had already been irremediably left behind. Faced with a social and political order that seemed to deny every day more traditional moral and religious values, he envisioned (at least sentimentally) not the coming of a new Christian order but the restoration of the old—the confessional state, a stratified and orderly society in which respect for authority and private property and hard work prevailed, and in which social order and peace were fostered by the Church's moral doctrine and the fear of God.<sup>113</sup>

We can cite examples of Don Bosco's enduring yearning for the old order. In the summer of 1887, not many months before his death, Don Bosco seems to have expected important political developments to take place in the near future and voiced his apprehension. Carlo Viglietti writes in his chronicle:

This morning, after I had read the newspapers to him, Don Bosco remarked: "Just wait and see; if not by the time of the pope's jubilee, certainly some time in the near future, a crusade will be formed against the revolutionaries. There may not be any blood shed, but they will have their backs to the wall and will be forced to give back to the pope what is his by right."<sup>114</sup>

Was Don Bosco correct in this assessment? No. The process of liberalization and secularization, de-Christianization even, as mass phenomena, was not to be stopped. The separation of Church and State was a fact. Now, these realities called for a reevaluation of the Church's responsibility, and in particular of the mission of a religious congregation. In spite of his sentimental attachment to the old, guided by his keen sense of history and by his intuitions, Don Bosco became increasingly more concerned about working for a new Christian society in new political and social circumstances.

This reevaluation may well have been painful and reluctant. The significant thing, however, is that it was taking place, and that Don Bosco was able to respond constructively to the new situation. In spite of his unswerving Catholic commitment of the most conservative kind, at the apostolic level Don Bosco was able to respond in open and forward-looking terms. A personal factor was also at work here. This has to do with his own experience and with his increasingly deeper understanding of the problems of the poor, especially poor young people. Living as he did in touch and in solidarity with people in concrete situations of suffering, poverty and need, he felt urgently called to meet the need through long-term, as well as immediate, programs.

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. P. Braido, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana* (Quaderni di Salesianum 6. Roma: LAS, 1982), 10.

<sup>114</sup> Viglietti, *Original Chronicle*, Vol. VII, 37 and 54-55, September 2 and November 27, 1887," *FDBM* 1,226 E 12 and 1, 227 A9. "The pope's jubilee" would be Leo XIII's golden jubilee of priestly ordination (1888), or perhaps the tenth anniversary of his accession to the papal throne (1878-1888). Don Bosco seems to be thinking of a restoration of the pope's temporal power.

Don Bosco, therefore, committed his Salesians, after his own example, to the fullest possible engagement in the work of charity and in apostolic activity. He even presented such commitment as the means whereby the general purpose of religious life itself, their personal sanctification, was to be achieved. It was a complex work of charity that, growing out of the oratorian experience, ramified to address ever new situations.

Admittedly, it was “charity.” And even though in the nineteenth century the term “charity” was not yet emptied of its rich theological and traditionally Christian content, it was “charity” nonetheless. It did not really address directly systemic problems of injustice, oppression, and the like. This in any case is the accusation leveled by social historians (especially those of a Marxist tradition) against all nineteenth-century “charity”.

Even so, in practical social terms and in a real sense, such “charity” aimed at renewing society. But could this aim be achieved if Salesians, the Cooperators in particular, were to remain aloof from all political activity?

Hence the question may again be asked—In view of such commitments and in the face of such historic developments, how could the cause of the mission be advanced and its aims achieved, without a political engagement of some kind, at least on selected issues?

Then why did Don Bosco enjoin this apolitical stance on his Salesians?

### 3. Why the Prohibition of Political Involvement

Don Bosco’s own “pragmatism” may be part of the reason. In the context of the liberal revolution and of the political, social and religious turmoil attending it, Don Bosco may have thought that restraints were called for in order to forestall reprisals, or simply to ensure the survival of the work. This is the reason most often given by Don Bosco himself. Abstention from political activity, together with the Salesians’ commitment to charitable work for the poor, is often cited by Don Bosco as the reason why the Society could escape harassment and win the good will of all.

The Church’s official posture and directives referred to above may also be cited as part of the reason (no longer “pragmatic”). Don Bosco would unquestioningly have taken such leadership as a guideline not only for his action but also for his thinking.

Beyond pragmatic considerations and ecclesial solidarity, the prohibition might have been motivated by a deeper theological understanding or instinct. Don Bosco may have believed that a Christian society was not to be rebuilt through political or social activism. On theological grounds, he believed that the Church’s, and therefore the Salesian Congregation’s, mission was essentially to witness to eschatological (though not merely “other-worldly”) realities. Consequently, at the level of strategy, Don Bosco may have seen his Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and also (I would say, particularly) the Cooperators, as a combined force for charity and reconciliation in a society divided by deep rifts. He saw his Salesians as peacemakers helping

people transcend political confrontation and class struggle. He saw the work of the Salesian Family as a peaceful invasion, in the same way that Tertullian viewed the penetration of the early Christianity into the pagan society of his day—perhaps.

Whatever the reason, questions remain. Was Don Bosco's position tenable, realistic, and above all effective? Did it not rather curtail the Salesians' ability meaningfully to devote themselves to the apostolate and truly to help the poor? More especially—Would Don Bosco still write the article today, or write it in that manner?

Perhaps Don Bosco's reported comment, already quoted, may offer a clue. There, after recording the reason given to him for the removal of the article, that "circumstances may well force one in conscience to enter the political arena, since politics are often inseparable from religion," he himself had to admit: "We may therefore get involved in politics when it is advantageous and genuinely advisable."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. note 108 and related text above.



## Excursus II

**Don Bosco's Views on the Vows**  
**His Opposition to Temporary Vows**

**1. The Question**

As indicated above, Rosmini's idea that the vow (of poverty) could be simple and in the nature of a private agreement may have affected Don Bosco's interpretation of the pope's expression quoted above—that "the vows should be simple and easily relaxed." Did the pope mean "simple vows" in the canonical sense of "not solemn," and therefore fairly easily dissolved even under strict Church law; or did he use the terms "simple and easily relaxed" as common qualifiers? This second alternative seems to have been what Don Bosco had in mind. If this be the case, he may originally have thought of the vows as being in the nature of a private agreement, so that if the need arose for a dispensation it would also be in the nature of a private agreement between the member and the superior. This would explain why in the chapter on Form he included the provision (contrary the Church law) whereby the rector major could dispense a member from his vows. This provision was ordered removed under Savini-Svegliati Observation 3 (1864). Don Bosco replied that he meant it only to apply to temporary vows (which was also contrary to Church law), and in this sense he rewrote it in 1867. But in 1873 he returned to his earlier position. This was rejected, and the article was rewritten to place all canonical vows without distinction under the control of the Holy See.<sup>116</sup>

In spite of this official action, certain statements of Don Bosco seem to suggest that he persisted in his belief that as superior he had the power to dispense even from perpetual vows, in the understanding that they were "simple and easily relaxed" (or in the nature of a private agreement?). This may be the real reason why he regarded triennial vows as irrelevant or counterproductive as far as religious commitment was concerned, a view that he voiced on a number of occasions but which both challenged traditional practice and ran athwart of the constitutions which he himself had written. An article of the chapter on Admission in all drafts prescribed temporary vows for two successive three-year periods.<sup>117</sup>

No claim is made here to any certainty in the matter. The interested reader, however, will want to ponder the following texts, which reflect various facets of Don Bosco's thinking on the subject.

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<sup>116</sup> Form, Article 9 (or 10, or 7, or 5): Cf. Motto, *Cost. DB*, 86-87.

<sup>117</sup> Admission, Article 4 (or 5, or 7): Motto, *Cost. DB*, 172-173.

## 2. Texts

In the general conference held in 1875 during the second spiritual retreat at Lanzo, the session of September 23 was devoted to admission to vows. The biographer (Eugenio Ceria) notes Don Bosco's leniency and his well known position in the matter.

"As far as I am concerned," he used to say, "I can hardly see any difference between perpetual and triennial vows since I may dispense also from perpetual vows if one is no longer suitable for the Congregation."<sup>118</sup>

To those who thought that this power of the superior should not be given publicity in the congregation, lest such knowledge lead to abuses, Don Bosco replied:

I do not think that for the moment any trouble would arise on this account. On the contrary, I think it might be a good thing if our people were made aware of this. It would reassure candidates who might otherwise be apprehensive at the prospect of vows taken for life, who might balk at possible serious difficulties which might later arise and lose their peace of mind. Obviously a dispensation from vows is granted only for a serious reason and not just to gratify a whim of the individual. But if serious difficulties should arise, I do not believe there will be any harm in knowing that a dispensation can be obtained.<sup>119</sup>

In the general conference of February 1879, Don Bosco made an even more elaborate statement on the subject. Barberis reports:

When the admission of some who were applying for triennial vows came up for discussion, Don Bosco took the opportunity of reiterating his viewpoint: "Triennial vows hold too tempting a prospect for young men, and many eventually give in. If, on the other hand, they take their perpetual vows, their minds are at rest with no further thoughts [of leaving]. When I introduced triennial vows, I had a different idea of the Congregation. The fact is that I meant to establish something a lot different from what was finally approved. We were forced into this mold, and that's the end of it (*ci costrinsero a far così, e così sia*). But, life being what it is today, triennial vows leave one too open to temptation. If a candidate has the required qualities and disposition, let him take perpetual, not triennial, vows. Unsuitable candidates should be excluded outright."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *EBM* XI, 322-323. Minutes or reports of the fall conferences of 1875 are not included in *FDBM* of *ASC* 04: *Conferenze Generali*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Alassio General Conference, Session 2, February 7, 1879, Barberis Report with Minutes of the Superior Chapter, Note Book II, 76-77, *FDBM* 1878 B5-6. Edited in *EBM* XIV, 29.

After recording the above, Ceria quotes an earlier statement made privately by Don Bosco to Father Giulio Barberis and Father Pietro Guidazio on October 18, 1878, to explain why he thought triennial vows irrelevant and counterproductive:

I went along with triennial vows because my original plan was to found a Congregation which would assist the bishops. Since this was not possible and I was forced to do otherwise, a three-year commitment is now more of a hindrance than a help.

Ceria then adds an extended comment to explain this seemingly cryptic statement. He takes it to refer to the time of the oratory, before Don Bosco's audience with Pius IX (1858), the audience which imparted a new direction to the Society. Up to that time, Don Bosco apparently planned to establish oratories in other dioceses at the service of the bishops. For this purpose he envisioned helpers binding themselves for short periods of time for the work of the oratories.<sup>121</sup>

Ceria also quotes what appears to be Don Bosco's final disposition of the matter in a Good Night of September 5, 1879, repeated at each of the Salesians' spiritual retreats:

I must inform you that this is the last time that vows will be taken for three years. From now on, anyone making vows must make them in perpetuity. Experience has shown that triennial vows are too serious a temptation for some to cope with. After living one year in the congregation [as a novice] one should know whether God is calling him to it and whether he has enough strength to persevere.

The biographer hastens to add that Don Bosco did not enforce his own ordinance strictly, and triennial vows continued to be made.<sup>122</sup>

At the Second General Chapter, Don Bosco commented on a situation created by triennial vows. A former Salesian seminarian named Galvagno had just passed away. Don Bosco urged the directors to notify the confreres of the circumstances of this death, so that they might draw a lesson. (One should overlook the somewhat dubious theology.) As reported, Don Bosco said:

He was a good person, but was extraordinarily attached to his mother, who was very poor. She expected her son to help her financially and therefore she was opposed to his continuing in the Congregation. The son, weak as he was and wanting to help the mother, did not have the courage to take perpetual vows, and at the expiration of his triennial vows did not apply for renewal. But the Lord [...] by this death wished to give us all a lesson: He who provides food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field does not abandon those

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<sup>121</sup> *EBM XIV*, 29-30, with Ceria's extended comment.

<sup>122</sup> *EBM XIV*, 275-276.

who leave everything behind, family included, in order to follow him; on the contrary, he frustrates the hopes of those who rely on people and things rather than on him. In this case, the son was punished by dying without vows; and the mother was punished by being deprived of the son on whom she had pinned her hopes.<sup>123</sup>

### **3. Concluding Comment**

The impression one gets from these texts appears to confirm the comment with which I opened this excursus. Don Bosco had envisioned a Society which, having been born with the work of the oratory, was to retain the flexible features that made it suitable for that work. Even when the Society took on a different form by being forced into the traditional canonical mold, Don Bosco thought he could still cling to (or salvage?) certain features which had made it a supple instrument in the service of the young.

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<sup>123</sup> General Chapter II, Session 7, September 7, 1880, Barberis Minutes, Note Book I, 60-61, *FDBM* 1858 B8-9.