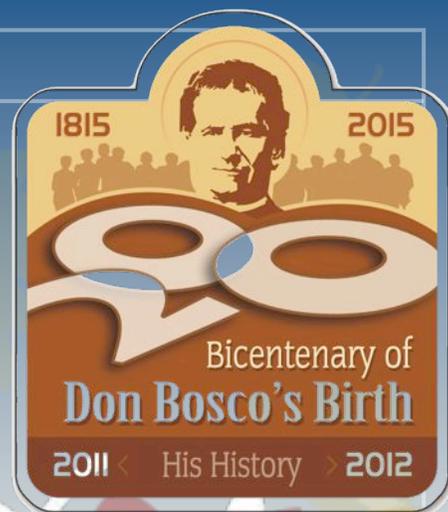


N O V E M B E R 2 0 1 1

Getting to know

Don Bosco

His Place in History



Home & Friends

So maybe the clipart of pumpkin pie pushes the envelope a bit, but at this time of year we often associate pumpkin pie with being home and being among friends. As we continue to look at the young life of Don Bosco, we will look more closely at some important persons whose presence gave the young Giovanni Bosco more than information or opportunity, but friendship, guidance, and a sense of place. We might say, these persons gave Bosco the home he craved his entire life. So, cut yourself a piece of pie, light a fire in the fireplace, and make yourself at home in these snapshots.

Memoirs of the Oratory

As I mentioned in the October Don Bosco Study Guide, the best resource for our study of Don Bosco is his own words enshrined in *The Memoirs of the Oratory*. There are a number of more recent editions available. Perhaps the easiest to obtain is the small version available at Salesiana Publishers in Paramus. Currently, that edition is priced at \$12.00. This is where you can find them:

Salesiana Publishers
c/o SRM Distribution Services
75 West Century Road, Suite
200
Paramus, NJ 07652
phone 201-986-0503
fax 201-986-0504
e-mail: srmdist@verizon.net

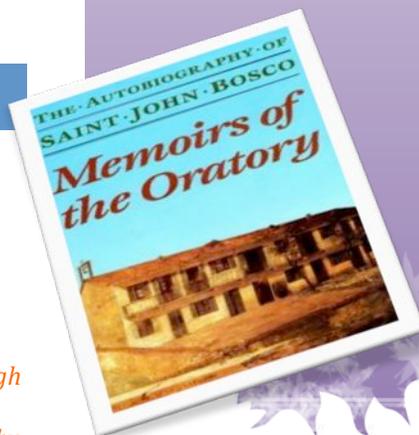
Don Bosco in History Seminars

3 Evenings LA
Jan. 17,18,19
7PM-9PM
each night at
St. Joseph's in
Rosemead.

3 Evenings SF
Jan. 9,10,11
7PM-9PM each
night at DB Hall

2 Weekends
Jan 6-8 DB Hall
Jan 20-22 Young
Adults and SMS
Location TBA

Friday 7PM through
Sunday Lunch.
Accommodations by
reservation. \$30 rea.



Don Bosco's Search

Persons such as Fr. Calosso & Fr. Cafasso became much more to Don Bosco than mentors. They were, in fact, father figures for which he longed...

From Don Bosco's own account, we see how much he loved Fr. Calosso and turned to him for support. This man stepped in as mentor, spiritual director, and as a true father to the young Bosco, promising his inheritance to help secure his future plans. We all know how lost Giovanni Bosco was after the loss of this man. He was, in fact, so broken that he stayed for a time with his own grandparents to avoid returning the stress of living with his own stepbrother, Antonio. This loss, however, moved something deeply within the boy that would translate into the foundation of his own mission to youth.



Teachers and Friends

We know that eventually Mamma Margaret found a way to send her son to school in Chieri. She and her brother's family, with the help of many other family supporters pitched in their means to pave a path for the education of her son.

While in these adolescent years, the young Bosco made



significant friends and followed the lead of important teachers. Fr. Banaudi would become his confessor and he found in this man someone who not only loved, but also showed his love to his students and charges. In fact, Don Bosco describes his love as that of an





Chieri, Teachers, Friends, & Confessors

Chieri truly was a new start for the young Giovanni Bosco. Not only did his studies begin in earnest, he made deep and lasting friendships that would shape his character, challenge his goals, and clarify his purpose.

Among the biographies of Bosco, we know that he detailed a friendship he shared with a young boy named Luigi Comollo. This companion was very different in temperament and size from the gregarious Bosco. This boy was much smaller, introspective, and pious. But this attracted Bosco because his friend's interiority provoked personal examination of his own piety and commitment. These two grew very close and Bosco recounts that the inevitable death of his weaker friend devastated him.

Another curious friendship in these years involved a Jewish boy from the Jewish ghettos in Chieri—his name was Jonas. These two boys found great delight in sharing music and song. Eventually, this led the young Bosco to invite his friend into Christianity. This led to an emotional disruption of their friendship with the adamant insistence of Jonas' mother that he and Bosco remain apart. This was another loss for the young man and one that would inform his attitude toward human and divine friendships. At the center of his pedagogy were friendships and relationships, but those involvements were always directed toward a higher friendship with Jesus Christ. Without this, he felt he would betray his young charges



Befriending the Spiritual

The Lesson of Comollo was Befriending the Spiritual

At first reading, the friendship between Giovanni Bosco and Luigi Comollo would seem unlikely. Both had such different characters. However, this adolescent friendship would so shape Don Bosco that the biography of his schoolmate would remain one of his key references and a tool for teaching the young the importance of befriending their spiritual lives and caring for their souls with intention and diligence.

and leave them without the means for their personal meaning and true happiness. He would insist that his students be true and lasting friends but that at the center of those friendships needed to be Jesus Christ, their best friend. From the grace and fire of the adolescent friendships, Giovanni understood the hunger that no human relationship could satisfy, without denigrating the importance of deep friendship and love.



From his first adolescent confessor, Fr. Maloria, and one of his favorite teachers, Fr. Banaudi—already mentioned, Don Bosco discovered the balance between the human and the spiritual, the importance of friendship grounded in faith.

The following article explores these relationships with some detail. Let us consider these steps toward the formation of

our unique Spirituality of Spiritual Accompaniment.



Mentors and Spiritual Guides

Don Calosso as Friend and Spiritual Director

Don Bosco recalled in his *Memoirs* that Don Giovanni Calosso took a sincere and fatherly interest in him and this interest introduced him to the idea of a spiritual director for the first time:

I put myself completely into Don Calosso's hands. He had become chaplain at Murialdo only a few months before. I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal welfare...

It was then that I came to realize what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one up till then.¹

Saint John Bosco elaborated that before this meeting, he lived his life in a mechanical way “not knowing the reasons,” but after the meeting he “began to savor the spiritual life.”² It is an important detail in this recounting that the young Giovanni did not make his savoring a private affair. Instead, he was anxious to share whatever morsels of spiritual wisdom he could with others. Fr. Calosso built on the hungers and enthusiasm for faith implanted by Mamma Margherita. Even before his contact with Don Calosso, Giovanni had displayed enthusiasm for games, acrobatics, and other attractions to gather his friends and to teach them about God.

Don Bosco's recreational activities naturally played a significant part in his formation. His mother encouraged his involvement in games and outdoor pursuits. His interest in games, in looking for bird's nests and his attempts to be an acrobat all prepared him for his involvement in *La società dell'allegria*³

Still, now his activities had a focus and a dream attached as never before and these became some of his greatest motivations for gathering people and for perfecting his skills to attract

them.

Linked to the spiritual enrichment he received, the young Giovanni was schooled in classic education diving deeply into Latin works. As he excelled in all areas, trials began to appear. The situation at home with his stepbrother had not, in fact, improved. Soon, the situation grew intolerable once more. The journey of the good priest went beyond expectation, as his intervention now became an invitation for Giovanni to move out once more and this time to stay in the chaplain's own home. Mamma Margherita was elated and urged Giovanni to take up the offer. In this new environment, freed at last from the strains of his living situation, Giovanni boasted that he could learn more in one day than in a week of visits.

At the age of fifteen, Giovanni lost his mentor to a stroke. In his own words, Don Bosco would write, “his death shattered my dreams.”¹ Painfully he recounted Don Calosso's attempt to preserve his material goods for the boy, only for that to be lost soon after his death as the living relatives of the chaplain came asking for the key to his safe. Not yet an adult, he could only relent. The impact of this shared part of his journey is underlined by Don Bosco's own admission that each day that dawned brought his “outstanding benefactor” to mind and heart. Don Bosco spoke freely about the affection lavished upon him and the loyalty that engendered in him. He wrote honestly about the depth of the loss he felt at the end of this relationship.⁴

Searching for Models, Clinging to Dreams

The loss of Don Calosso was incalculable. Now Giovanni had to return to the Becchi house and fields. Mamma Margherita watched her youngest immerse himself in profound and inconsolable sorrow and she feared for his health. She made a decision, temporary as it was, that certainly saved his dreams, if not his

very life. She sent him to stay awhile with his maternal grandfather.⁵ There he regained his strength and his vision. He continued to hunger for models to follow but found the priests in his life sorely lacking in their approachability. Yet, instead of discouraging the youth further, it ignited in him a burning desire to be for others the kind of priest Don Calosso had been for him. He did return to the family home shortly before Antonio married. During this time, he kept himself out of mental reach by clinging to the model of Don Calosso. He began again to follow his dream even enduring grievously long walks into Castelnuovo for school. As his attentions were turned back to study, Antonio's attentions were drawn to his future marriage and the division of the inheritance. Margherita joined with her brother Michele to find the means for schooling and board in Castelnuovo. Giovanni lived with a tailor, Giovanni Roberto,¹ while attending class. During this part of his journey, Bosco would experience ridicule from younger classmates and even from an older priest who considered Giovanni's studies a waste of time.

Stella explains that in this difficult period, Giovanni Bosco retreated to his dreams, seeking out God, "immersing himself in the divine, where his aspirations to the priesthood could be assured and guaranteed."⁶

The next years at school in Chieri granted young Bosco scholastic and personal success. He advanced rapidly through first level studies bounding ahead to his own level and beyond. He demonstrated to students and instructors an uncanny intelligence and a remarkable ability for recall. Braido refers specifically to these years of formation for their important influence upon the future pedagogy of Don Bosco and indicates that this molding was helped by "the reality of finding himself deeply immersed into a holistic, formative structure, which is at the same time cultural, ethical and religious."¹ In his studies of this period, Braido highlights two of Giovanni Bosco's teachers: Banaudi, whose students loved him with the affection of a father so that the good priest never resorted to using punishment; and a young priest, Maloria, whom Giovanni chose as

his regular confessor throughout his years of study in theology. The latter welcomed Giovanni warmly. Both men became the models he sought to assist him in attaining his personal goals. Both would influence his own manner of being educator and priest.⁷ This period would also enkindle in the youth a deep and lasting love for literature.

Into this setting came his dearest peer, Luigi Comollo. Once again, the adolescent Bosco is drawn to the other for companionship, surely, but also for spiritual guidance and modeling. The details of this passage would be etched indelibly upon Giovanni Bosco's experience and in the future influence his insistence on the need for good companions with a priority of spiritual purpose. The friendship Don Bosco described flourished in the larger context of Giovanni's efforts to create a special club of good companions. This was his response to peers who seemed lost and unfocused.

Giovanni was filled with a desire to become a positive and joyful influence for others creating a "Society of Joy" as his creative response to the new surroundings at Chieri. The intensity of the friendship the two shared and the firmness of their purpose was recognized by Albert Caviglia and recorded within the four biographical volumes of work on Saint John Bosco he left unfinished at the time of his death in 1943. After an in-depth study of Don Bosco's biography of Comollo Caviglia wrote:

"The spirit by which Don Bosco led to holiness the youngsters whom he educated and then memorialized in his writings is the same spirit that lives in the two young men Comollo and Bosco. The figure, the actions, and the spirit of Comollo are an indispensable ingredient for understanding Don Bosco's youth and the development of his character. This is even more true for understanding his life before his priestly ordination."⁸

We turn our attention to the special and formative relationship with Luigi Comollo, Don Bosco's closest school-time friend.

Friendship and Befriending the Interior Life



It is no small detail that Saint John Bosco would enshrine the friendship he shared with Luigi Comollo in one of his first biographical works. It is a work he would refine and adapt for various audiences especially honing the details to appeal to young readers for emulation. Scholars such as Stella, Caviglia, Braido, and Giraud, routinely include the Comollo work as the model for future studies of his three students, Dominic Savio, Michele Magone, and Francesco Besucco.

It has been tempting for biographers to paint a picture of a young Giovanni Bosco dramatically turning away from his worldly pursuits in imitation of his inspiring and rigidly pious friend Comollo, but this is an inaccurate portrayal. It is important to contextualize this relationship with another. Giovanni Bosco became the great hero of another peer, a Jewish boy named Jonah.⁹ The significance of this relationship is evident in the complete delight Giovanni demonstrated in the presence of this young man's company. In his *Memoirs*, Giovanni Bosco recalls spending countless hours singing and playing the piano with his handsome young friend, whose voice was especially gifted. The closeness of this friendship would lead eventually to Jonah's conversion to Catholicism, despite terrible rejection from his own family. Giovanni was on the verge of a new insight. His joyful friendship did not deter him from

inviting Jonah to a deeper level of faith, to a place where they could share belief and worship, as well as entertainments. This motivation, Saint John Bosco would admit in retrospect, did not become conscious for him until he met Luigi Comollo.

Stella captures this revelation beautifully:

“The origin and cast of John's friendship with Comollo were very different [from those with Jonah]. In this case it was Giovanni who discovered great spiritual richness in the boy who looked so physically frail. Giovanni instinctively became his protector against the insults and attacks of bullies and other superficial boys. *Now athirst for the interior life, Giovanni was really defending the source and wellspring that he was seeking for his own soul's sake. He was defending the incarnation of the very ideal that seemed to be his own (italics, mine).* Giovanni had already been moving toward it on his own, but his encounter with the virtuous Comollo tripped the tension wire in his heart. Seeing in him a *hero*, Giovanni wanted to be his friend.”¹⁰

At the same time that this friendship flourished and Giovanni Bosco's hunger deepened, it is ironic that the reputation of his seminary professors was anything but consoling. Though he respected their position, he longed to talk to them, to share with them, to seek out their guidance and support. And he was not the only one who noticed their distance. In fact, he described his fellow students as fleeing from the sight of any professor as though fleeing from a black cat.¹¹ Perhaps this is the void Comollo filled. Not finding a safe harbor to rest and to deepen his human and spiritual heart, Giovanni found both a friend and an inspiration in Luigi.

Their exchange was often about heavenly things and Giovanni often felt less worthy or more worldly in Comollo's presence. In those places of sharing and exploring the deeper meanings of things, they made a pact—which they repeatedly confirmed—that the first among them to die would return to signal personal eternal salvation. Though this detail leads to the familiar recounting of Giovanni Bosco's supernatural experience after

Comollo's death, what should be underlined here is the shift in focus that marks this part of Giovanni Bosco's formation. His quest for saving souls has a strong link to this friendship that became a symbol of the pulsing reality of eternity in the midst of the everyday and ordinary events of one's life.

Accompaniment and Vocational Discernment:

Don Cafasso as Mentor and Friend

Wavering on the horizon of his young life, Giovanni Bosco finally began to see his lifelong dream take form and substance. Donning the cassock at the start of his philosophical studies at the seminary, Don Bosco would characterize these years of study as a shift from the profane to spiritual.¹² He notes a decided turn to the interior life upon the reading of *The Imitation of Christ* sometime in 1837. Though he remained an avid student and an obedient seminarian, crises would surface in these years. There existed an obvious tension between his fond relationships with the priest instructors and their methods of education. Yet

Giovanni Bosco's goal to become a priest was indeed coming within his reach, but there is evidence that what remained unclear in those years were his sense of a deeper calling and the application of that priesthood. He was unclear about the path of his future priesthood and considered various forms of religious life, weighing various ministries to consider as a priest. It is to this point in his trip of the faith that Giovanni turned to three people for guide and accompaniment: to Don Joseph Cafasso—his new confessor, a man molded much by his own relationship with the thirty year old Canon that had been the first confessor of Don Bosco, Don Giuseppe Maloria, and two companions whom would remain with him after their ordinations, Giovanni Giacomelli and Guglielmo Garigliano.

He brought to Don Cafasso a dream that perplexed him. He saw himself as a priest darning socks.¹³ The stirrings of deeper questioning caused Giovanni to lean heavily upon his confessor and his friends to focus his attentions and sharpen his resolve. Sometimes this led him to extremes, shunning former pleasures such as playing the violin or returning to acrobatics. He wrapped himself in the ascetic environment of the seminary resolved to eliminate anything that would distract him from the goals he treasured from his vocational dream at the age of nine—a dream he would later explain recurred at difficult moments throughout his life. His friends recall that Giovanni would lose his temper and resolve to imitate the gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales and the humor of Saint Philip Neri as his remedy. He looked to his chosen circle of companions, to the priests, and to his favorite saints as role models for continued vigilance and growth.

As mentioned before, into this part of his story Luigi Comollo had left his imprint in the heart of Don Bosco and the evidence was most dramatically revealed in his insistence on good companions, which would appear time and time again in Don Bosco's later work.

Accompaniment with his peers was



his later reflections leave the impression that the over-riding experience was one of deep affection and that relationships outweighed any other tension, so much so as to provoke in his later years a fond nostalgia for this period.

complemented most beautifully in the relationship and trust he would build with his confessor, Giuseppe Cafasso, and the balance between peers and guide would establish a pattern in Don Bosco's own guidance for others.

As his confessor, Don Cafasso left another lasting and formative impression on Giovanni regarding ministry to prisoners and a fine-tuning of his personal spirituality. Braido captures this dynamic:

Fr. Joseph Cafasso, besides being a guide in the study of moral theology, also taught Don Bosco spirituality and life. It was Fr. Joseph Cafasso who encouraged Don Bosco to follow an educational activity such as priestly ministry among prisoners and Lenten catechism classes with particular concern for the young who had migrated from the countryside into Turin. Don Bosco, in later years, would often go to Fr. Cafasso, his benefactor and confessor, both for advice and help.

At the school of Fr. Cafasso, Don Bosco strengthened and refined his spirituality: Christian hope; preference given to trusting God rather than to the fear of God; the sense of duty as a coherent Christian lifestyle; the fundamental importance to be given to the practice of the sacraments, an effective pastoral ministry; loyalty towards the Church and the Pope; the apostolic orientation towards abandoned youth; the meditation on the 'last things' and the exercise for a happy death.¹⁴

By the accompaniment of the gentle and holy Cafasso, the shape of Giovanni's ministry became clearer as his discernment was intensified through personal experience. In fact, Don Bosco recalled that in the prisons he saw many young people between the ages of 12 and 18 and became disheartened to discover the high incidence of repeated crime and incarceration. It was his observation at that time that their abandoned state pushed them into crime and the budding plant of a mission grew stronger in his heart. Don Bosco described this moment:

"Who knows?" I thought to myself, "if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on

feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?"

I talked this idea over with Fr. Caffasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain.¹⁵

After six years of direction from Don Cafasso, and ordained in 1841, Giovanni Bosco took the advice of his mentor to enter the Convitto to hone his pastoral skills as a confessor and priest. This Giovanni did gladly, happy to be with Don Cafasso and enriched by every experience his confessor offered him. The shape of his great mission and its spiritual underpinning is linked directly to this period of Giovanni Bosco's formation and the accompaniment of Don Giuseppe Cafasso.

Refining the Call: Hearing the Cry for Accompaniment from the Abandoned Youth of Turin

From Giovanni Bosco's earliest memories of his own father's death and the impression this loss left upon his young heart through the search for companions, guidance, and a deepening of the interior life, we see that many circumstances and persons rushed to fill the void left by his father. It became an unspoken theme in his life to fill this void and this translated easily into his quest for a deepening of his relationship with God. His dream at the age of nine—his vocational dream—added complexity and mystery to his search. It ignited within him a life goal, but in the tumbler of his life, the turning, and jostling of many experiences worked slowly and purposefully to smooth and polish that dream. It is tempting to create a list of those persons and details that would bring him to his point of decision to reach out to poor youth and to quantify those contributions as an attempt to systematize Don Bosco's own personal journey of faith. Some of those details and persons have already been mentioned. Yet, considering that Don Bosco

himself would look back only in his last years of life to marvel at a coherent whole, to be moved by the clarity of God's action throughout his life, it seems advisable to continue on the path of examining his spirituality step by step, to walk with him in the evolution and accomplishment of his dream. This will serve to unfold those moments that give form to a spirituality of accompaniment as God's special gift, not only to and for Don Bosco, but also for the world. Historically, Don Bosco's progression as a newly ordained priest preparing for ministry at the Convitto in Turin to Don Bosco the Founder of the Salesians and a vast movement of outreach to abandoned youth cannot be seen in a straight line. It was a winding and precarious path. To examine the many details of this important juncture would encompass a study far beyond the scope of this work. However, to examine some of these details under the microscope of accompaniment and spirituality will assist in offering a glance at this particular characteristic of Don Bosco's charisma at this crucial moment of his life. Obviously, it will be necessary to contextualize this glance with some historical information, but only as it aids this focus.

The Influences of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonus Liguori

Let it be underlined that Don Bosco's experience was positive at the Convitto. It was fortunate that Don Cafasso continued to guide the young priest. Don Bosco praised the Convitto for its wholesale attack against the heresy of Jansenism. This heresy promoted a sense of relationship with God that was distant at best and preached vehemently against the worthiness of man to approach God. So contrary to Don Cafasso's counsel—and all the spiritual guides before him—Jansenism suggested "if the world waited four thousand years to receive its Lord, Christians ought to prepare their whole lives by abstaining from Communion."¹⁶ However extreme this may appear, Stella makes the point that in reality

many priests who were labelled as Jansenists in the Piedmont of those times were, in fact, advocates of frequent approach to the sacraments and their ardent desire to see the Eucharist highly respected and valued was often mislabelled. The situation was not black and white. Nevertheless, the influence was strong and the canonization of Don Cafasso, many years later, highlighted this holy man's desire to free the faithful from such an oppressive God and this influence certainly touched the core of Don Bosco.

What also touched Don Bosco, however, was the austerity prevalent inside of the struggle to find a pure form of Christian living. There existed a great struggle between two schools of thought in that time and region: a benignant disposition led largely by the Jesuits, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, the Friendship Association, and the Convitto, and a rigorist disposition held firmly by those who feared a new rise of religious apathy such as that leading to the French Revolution, a position espoused by the University of Turin and the Seminary there.¹⁶ The newly ordained priest embraced a God readily available to all in the sacrament of Confession and approachable in the Eucharist, but he also maintained the necessity for one to consciously work toward salvation by a life of interiority, prayer, joyful and willing obedience to the will of God, and the brave suffering that comes with living for others and for God. Such a life adhered fiercely to the Church with affection and obedience to the Holy Father. During his three years of study at the Convitto, this attitude pervaded his role as Confessor. He clearly distanced himself from the rigorist tendency and chose, instead, a view of intimacy with God more in line with the teachings of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonsus Liguori. This, too, characterized his practice of teaching catechism, as per his duty in training. Along with this duty came the outreach to poor youth in the city, something not distinctly associated with Don Bosco. This would be the occasion for Don Bosco to hone all the more his vision for answering God's call.

The Choice for "the Abandoned"

The Salesian family of Don Bosco is wont to pinpoint the saint's critical moment of choice for youth to his encounter with a sixteen-year-old orphan at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin on 8 December 1841. This can be considered the historical moment for the start of Don Bosco's personal connection to his future ministry, but he had been teaching and visiting the youth of Turin prior to this. Such outreach preceded Don Bosco's arrival in Turin, as well. *What are important in the exchange with Bartholomew Garelli are the connection Don Bosco makes with this orphaned youth and the resonance this has in his own heart.* Here the fatherless Don Bosco meets an orphan. Here a teen too embarrassed to attend school connects deeply with Giovanni, who experienced ridicule as he entered schooling later than most. Here, Don Bosco met a hunger for individual care, and offered the promise of friendly accompaniment he so desperately longed for at every turn in his own life.

Certainly, he launched a program of catechesis and outreach that would grow rapidly. Ironically, his mentor Don Cafasso would interrupt this growing ministry at the end of Don Bosco's years at the Convitto and force a choice upon the young priest. He would be offered the chance to continue catechism as a tutor at the Convitto at the expense of a growing Oratory, or to become chaplain for a hospital of 400 young girls. The choice pushed Don Bosco to choose going away from the comfortable Convitto to attend to youth in Turin with the Marchioness di Barolo under the guidance of Don Giovanni Borel. At first glance, this appears incongruous with the vision that would be associated with Don Bosco, but in fact, it would serve to confirm his calling more specifically. This was intuited by Don Cafasso who told Don Bosco that God would show him what he should do for youth if he went to Don Borel and continued his work.

The growing mob of youth followed Don Bosco to the little hospital of the Marchioness di Barolo where Don Bosco assisted the head chaplain Don Borel. Here he felt the independence to explore new possibilities for

these young people, even as he attended to his duties at the Refugio while the Hospital of St. Philomena was under construction. Tensions would arise on two fronts: the collaboration efforts of other oratories in the city with Don Bosco's work and the demands felt by the Marchioness for her work for the girls. On the first front, some other efforts to reach out to poor youth became entangled in patriotic politics and



protest. This Don Bosco shunned completely. He was ready and willing to collaborate with others' efforts on behalf of the young but only according to his own judgment in order to avoid such entanglements.

Don Bosco's growing Oratory moved from the Church of St., Francis of Assisi to the unfinished hospital being built for girls. This served as the place of meeting for Don Bosco's charges until its completion. By this time, Archbishop Fransoni had become an admirer of Don Bosco's efforts and even blessed a chapel there for the boys' use. In November of 1845, Don Bosco moved the meetings to the house of the priest, Don Giovanni Moretta. He rented three rooms there and over 200 students would meet in the daytime while night classes were offered as well. It was during this period that Don Bosco acknowledged that rumors abounded regarding his intentions promulgating the idea that he was raising a horde for revolution.¹ Eventually, the noise of the boys created enough disturbances to arouse the ire of

the other tenants in Don Moretta's building and the Oratory was forced to move elsewhere yet again.

Accompanied by a Shepherdess and Sheep

By March 1846, Don Borel joined Don Bosco at a field rented from the Filippi brothers only to be evicted in a few weeks. By now, the vision that may have been clear to Don Bosco was becoming extremely unclear even to Don Bosco's greatest supporters prompting the notion that the young priest was losing his mind. Nonetheless, Don Bosco clung to a dream he had had at the start of his work among the young people of Turin. In this dream, he again retreated to the spiritual and became convinced of the direction his life was taking. He saw wild animals again and he followed a shepherdess who helped him to lead this strange flock. He saw a new building with porticoes and a huge Church. Along the journey, many of the animals had become sheep. Moreover, when Giovanni became tired, he noticed that many of these sheep transformed into shepherds to help him. Despite the surmounting difficulties and oppositions, he remained steadfast and hopeful, as is evident in his own words:

This dream lasted most of the night. I saw it all in great detail. But at the time I understood little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. But I understood little by little as the dream began to come true. Later, together with another dream, it served as a blueprint for my decisions.¹⁷

It may appear that his accompaniment waned in this period, but this was far from the reality. Instead, his accompaniment was found in two very distinctive and telling places when the rest of the world seemed to walk away from him. He found his closest companions in the Virgin Mary, the Help of Christians, and in the young people themselves. Needless to say, both of these refuges he considered as gifts from God. Both appeared in his recurring vocational dream and both appeared in various other manifestations throughout his life.

Identifying the Flock

"Poor and abandoned" had been a term already put to use by a French priest working among youth in Marseilles in the 18th century, Servant of God, Abbé Jean-Joseph Allemand [1772-1836],¹⁸ and in institutions set up by Don Ludovico Pavoni in Brescia. The same term was employed by Don Bosco and by Don Giovanni Cocchi and Don Pietro Ponte¹⁹, Piedmontese priests also dedicated to forming oratories. This description of their outreach helped to identify the target of their mission. Still, it deserves more clarification here. Don Bosco was a poor peasant, and he felt the sting of his father's early death and the struggle of living in turmoil because of family strife and the lack of resources for his education. This, however, would not be the description attached to his use of "poor and abandoned" especially living in the new crises presenting themselves in the industrial city of Turin. The poor and abandoned youth there had very specific historical, social, and religious situations crying out for response. Don Bosco recognized the difference between the poverty that was a part of his experience and the "new experience"²⁰ he found in the streets of Turin. Don Bosco made this description:

Stonecutters, bricklayers, plasterers mostly attended the oratory, cobblestone setters, squarers and others arrived from distant places...

...from the Savoy, Switzerland, the Aosta Valley, Biella, Novara, and Lombardy.²¹

Arthur Lenti describes the area as full of children "eking out" a living by odd jobs that provided them a "meager livelihood." Most of these youth also lived without protection and resorted to gangs for defense. These were immigrants and locals alike, permanent residents and seasonal workers all sharing a similar plight. Though factories enslaved children as young as 8 years of age, most of those targeted by Don Bosco and the other oratorian efforts were between the ages of 12 and 20. We recall that Don Bosco had been

introduced to many young people at the prisons as he assisted Don Cafasso. These boys of Turin fell into this category. They were rarely in prison for serious crime, but as a result of hunger or by association with the gangs.

Lenti describes as many as thousand of these young people flooding the market each day in Turin, looking for some kind of work. There were also many of these youth and many, much younger than this group, who were regularly employed in the factories, but their plight was no better as they were usually badly exploited, frequently sick or injured, and generally neglected. The image of Don Bosco at the marketplace, the train station, or at the local factories is a common part of the Salesian story and this explains why.

The wages received in day jobs and by regular workers made it nearly impossible to live in an apartment. Such conditions negated the possibility of an education, and reduced food staples to an inadequate diet for proper nutrition even among the traditionally poor. Obviously, these sad situations precipitated crime and delinquency. Crimes ranged from petty theft to serious burglary or prostitution. Gangs gravitated to the Vanchiglia District of Turin near the River Po. Some of these gangs were known for murder and others for breaking and entry and theft. These gangs were well known at the time of Don Bosco's first oratory efforts. Unfortunately, the civil outreach was minimal and inadequate. Outside of the reforms instituted by King Charles Albert, such as the separation of children from adults in prison, little was done. Even the good intentions of the King were lost in bureaucratic malaise. Don Bosco was among a new generation of priests who tried to respond in realistic and helpful ways seeing that the older generation of priests and the parish structures themselves were at a loss.

His response would be pedagogical and spiritual. Sabino Palumbieri writes of Don Bosco's "preoccupation" at this moment:

Don Bosco era preoccupatissimo delle incidenze

sulla fragilità psicologica dei ragazzi. Egli è stato un educatore che ha realizzato il concetto etimologico di *pedagogia*. Il *pedagogo* è colui che conduce per mano il bambino. Don Bosco usava una gradualità di *trattamento educativo*. *Agendo su adolescenti e preadolescenti, vedeva un'incidenza negativa di certe figure sul ragazzo, il quale avrebbe potuto portarlo a generalizzare quella categoria: don Abbondio pavido, ecco ogni prete pavido; la monaca di Monza costretta in quella forma, ecco ogni religiosa forzata a una vita non gradita.*²³

Don Bosco heard the collective cry. Here are his own words for this dire situation as he presses to reveal the truer identity of the young as anything but depraved, and weighing the need to act on their behalf:

The young constitute the most fragile yet most valuable component of human society, for we base our hopes for the future on them. They are not themselves depraved. Were it not for parental neglect, idleness, mixing in bad company, something they experience especially on Sundays and holy days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts moral and religious principles—of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice. For if they are found to have been ruined at that young age, it will have been due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice. These young people have real need of some kind of person who will care for them, work with them, guide them in virtue, and keep them away from evil.²⁴

It should not be surprising that the first boys to come to Don Bosco at the start of his oratory were those he met in prison. Lenti points out the discrepancy between the "harmonious" incidents with Bartholomew Garelli and Don Bosco's own sentence "This was the beginning of the Oratory." This pronouncement of Don Bosco is vague in its application and Lenti suggests that perhaps Garelli became the symbol of all orphaned, poor, and abandoned youth.²⁵ In fact, it may well be that the sentence refers to his awakening in the prisons while assisting Don Cafasso at the Convitto. In either case, whether he sensed this immediately in prison or later in the collective cry of a darker reality over-shadowing Turin, Don Bosco heard their cry and for him, it was the voice

of God.

Endnotes:

¹ BOSCO, *MO*, 36.

² STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 18.

Stella quotes directly from Don Bosco's *MO*.

³ Pietro BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimare*, Rome, LAS, 42000, 140.

⁴ BOSCO, *MO*, 42.

⁵ Cf. BOSCO, *MO*, 43.

⁶ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 19. Pietro Stella underlines the trauma of this loss on the young man referring to Don Bosco's account in the *MO*: "Things went so far that my mother, fearing for my health, sent me away for a while to my grandfather in Capriglio."

⁷ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 22.

⁸ STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 23.

⁹ Pietro BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimare*, Rome, LAS, 42000, 140.

¹⁰ Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimare*, 141.

¹¹ BOSCO, *MO*, 82. This reference to the work of Don Caviglia is offered in the notes added to the English translation of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, with the research of Michael MENDEL, and John DRURY.

¹² Cf. BOSCO, *MO*, 90-97, and STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 30-32.

¹³ STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 32.

¹⁴ Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimare*, 143. Braido adds this note to his reference: *MO* (1991), 91. Many impressions at the moment of his departure, *MO* (1991), 110. In a book by priest F. Falcone, *Per la riforma dei seminari in Italia* (Rome: F. Pustet, 1906), Don Bosco's preventive system is also proposed for "seminaries, especially for Middle and High schools", although combined substantially for the particular aims of ecclesiastical formation, with the "substance of the S. Charles educational system". (Ibid., 56-66).

¹⁵ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 65.

¹⁶ Cf. BOSCO, *MO of the Oratory*, in

"Comment on John's Dream 1830, 57-58.

¹⁷ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimare*, 145.

¹⁸ BOSCO, *MO*, 182.

¹⁹ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 80. This quote comes from a text Stella maintains influenced many Piedmontese pastors, *Conversations with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament*, a text written by Gabriel Gerberon. Stella explains that acting vicar general for Cardinal Delle Lanze, Gaspare Nizzia, had made a gift of this book to the Piedmontese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Ossorio, in 1762.

²⁰ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 36-37.

²¹ Cf. BOSCO, *MO*, 233.

²² BOSCO, *MO*, 211.

²³ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 106, note 18 and 112, note 33 explains that St. Martin's Oratory was entrusted to the secretary of the Barolo, Don Ponte.

²⁴ Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 106, 110.

²⁵ Cf. Arthur LENTI, *Don Bosco and "Poor and Abandoned" Youth*, in "Journal of Salesian Studies," 6, 1, Berkeley, Institute of Salesian Studies, 1996, 8.

²⁶ LENTI, *Don Bosco and "Poor and Abandoned Youth,"* 8.

²⁷ Sabino PALUMBIERI, *Passione per l'uomo*, in D. Del Rio-A. Paoluzzi, *Salesiani e Gesuiti. Viaggio inchiesta all'interno di due grandi congregazioni religiose*, Torino, SEI, 1996, 35-36.

²⁸ Cf. S. G. BOSCO quoted in LENTI, *Don Bosco and "Poor and Abandoned" Youth*, 19.

²⁹ Cf. LENTI, *Don Bosco and "Poor and Abandoned" Youth*, in the comment, 22.





Suggestions for Use of this Guide...

Community Days

How did your October Community Meetings go? Ours were wonderful. Here are just a few more questions for this month.

- Recall a childhood or adolescent friendship. Are you still in touch? How has the relationship shaped who you are today?
- How has your interior life grown and become more intentional over the years?

Cooperators

Discuss these issues at your next meeting:

- How might your private relationships add to or distract from your life of faith?
- Do you have spiritual friends who help you reach your goals of holiness?

Invite a lifelong friend to see your life as a Cooperator. Introduce this person to Don Bosco and the Salesian Mission.

With the Young

Create activities, study nights, and moments of sharing around these issues:

- Ask the young people to make a list of qualities that make a true friend
- Ask the young people to keep a journal of their friendships and to analyze after one month which friendships cause them to grow closer to God.
- Invite the young to lead an evening of adoration or devotion. Let them lead with their prayers and their sharing of faith.

Colleagues

Make a resolution for the month of November to be a colleague who never participates in gossip or hearsay. Be the example of a friend to all by being positive, honest, and always respectful of others. Do the difficult task of narrowing these efforts toward a person with whom you work and minister who is particularly grating for you. Melt their hearts with sincere outreaches of friendship. Forgive wrongs and ask forgiveness when necessary.

DON BOSCO IN HISTORY

Gather! Study! Pray!

Finish off that pie, call your staff, your families, your colleagues, and the youth in your area. Go forward with meetings of your own design. Discuss your interior lives and

make resolutions for action!



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Share your questions for Fr. Arthur...

Please send your questions regarding the History of Don Bosco and his place in History to Fr. Arthur. Send these to DonBoscoHallCA@gmail.com

Guidelines for Deeper Study...

From the Critical Work of Fr. Arthur Lenti
See *Don Bosco History and Spirit* volume 2:
Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory

- Read Fr. Arthur's classic treatment of the definition of the "poor and abandoned" as found in Volume 2, Chapter 1. This important chapter begins on page 1 and concludes on page 32.

After becoming familiar with the terminology and reality Don Bosco understood as the background for his mission to the young, return to his earlier experiences as an adolescent and young man in Chieri. The school at Castelnuovo is the setting for Don Bosco's first meeting with a young cleric named Joseph Cafasso. Even before Don Bosco would choose this

man as his confessor and spiritual guide, there are details offered in Don Bosco's encounters with this young man years before. Fr. Arthur details these encounters and assesses Don Bosco's interpretations of these relationships in *don Bosco History and Spirit, volume 1: Don Bosco's Formative Years in Historical Context*. Chapters 10 and 11 (pages 227-289) offer these insights and much more as Don Bosco moves from primary to secondary school. Fr. Arthur carefully discusses "the context of choosing friends" in these chapters, dealing with the formation of the Societa dell'Allegria, and other initiatives of the student Bosco.

Attached to this study guide are seven whole chapters from *The Memoirs of the Oratory* including the appended notes from the 1989 English edition.

Excerpts from

Memoirs of the

Oratory

Chapters 7-13



7

School at Chieri

School in Chieri Kindness of teachers The first four grades

After the loss of so much time, it was finally decided to send me to Chieri,¹ where I could continue seriously with my schooling. That was in 11830.² One raised in the backwoods³ finds plenty of novelties to wonder at in even a small country village. I lodged with a woman from my own town, Lucy Matta,⁴ a widow with one son. She used to stay in the city to help him and keep all eye on him.⁴

The first person I met was Fr Eustace Valimberti, of revered memory. He gave me a lot of good advice on how to keep out of trouble.⁶ He invited me to serve his Mass and thus he could always advise me well. He brought me to see the headmaster in Chicri⁷ and introduced me to my other teachers. Up to now, my studies had been a little of everything and amounted almost to nothing. Accordingly, I was advised to enroll in the sixth class, which today would correspond to the first year of *ginnasio*.⁸

My teacher was Dr Pugnetti,⁹ also of dear memory. He was very kind to me. He helped me in school, invited me to his home, and was very sympathetic to me because of my age and my goodwill. He went out of his way to help - me as much as he could.

My age and my size made me look like a pillar amongst my little companions. I was anxious to get out of that situation, After two months of the sixth class, I was at its head. I took an examination and moved up to the fifth class." I went gladly to my new class because my classmates were more my size, and my teacher was the beloved Fr Valimberti. After two more months, I led the class again and, by exception, was allowed to take another examination and so was promoted to the fourth class, which is equivalent to the second year of *ginnasio*.¹²

Here my teacher was Joseph Cima. a strict disciplinarian.¹³ When he saw this student as big and stocky as himself coming into his class in midyear, he joked in front of the whole class, "He's either a simpleton or a genius. What do you make of him?"

Taken aback by that harsh introduction, I answered, "Something in-between. I'm just a poor young fellow who has the goodwill to do his work and get along in his studies."

He was mollified by my reply and went on with unusual kindness, "If you have goodwill, you're in good hands. I'll see that you won't be idle here. Don't worry; if you have any problems, tell me promptly and I'll sort them out for you."

I thanked him with all my heart.

After a couple of months in this class, something happened that gave rise to some comment about me. One day the teacher was explaining the life of Agesilaus in Cornelius Nepos." I did not have my book with me that day, and to cover my forgetfulness, I kept my Donato open in front of me. My companions noticed, and first one and then another began to laugh. Suddenly the whole classroom was in an uproar.

"That's going on here?" shouted the teacher. "What's going on?" he shot at me, this time. Everyone was looking at me. He told me to construe the text and repeat his explanation. I got to my feet, still holding my Donato. From memory I repeated the text, construed it, and explained it. Instinctively my companions expressed their admiration and burst into applause.

The teacher was angry beyond description. It was the first time, according to him, that he had failed to maintain discipline. He swung at me, but I saw it coming and ducked. Next he placed his hand on my Donato and demanded of my neighbours the reason for all the commotion.

'Bosco had his Donato in front of him all the time," my companions explained, "but he read and explained the lesson as if he had the Cornelius text." The teacher took the Donato and insisted I go on for two sentences more. Then he said to me, "In tribute to your wonderful memory,¹⁵ I'll overlook your forgetfulness. You're blessed. Only see that your gift is put to good use,"

At the end of that school year (1830-1831)¹⁶ as a result of my high marks, I was promoted to the third class, equivalent to the third year of *ginnasio*.¹⁷



A view of Chieri. In the 1830s, the city was known for its schools, monasteries, and convents. It was also a center of light industry. The Bosco family lived near Chieri in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Don Bosco's grandfather Philip Anthony Bosco moved to Castelnuovo in 1751.

Notes

- 1 . Chieri was an ancient cathedral city about nine miles southeast of Turin, separated from the great capital city by the Turinese hills, and about nine miles west-southwest of Castelnuovo. With about nine thousand inhabitants, it was easily the largest city in the area of Castelnuovo, and it was the only industrial center. The principal industry was the manufacture of cotton and silk textiles; there were some thirty factories, some of them perhaps just domestic enterprises.

By John Bosco's time there was no longer an episcopal see at Chieri, but there were numerous convents and monasteries-of the Dominicans, Oratorians, Jesuits, Franciscans, and Poor Clares-and, since 1829, one of the archdiocesan seminaries.

The city was also a student center, attracting to its schools several hundred boys and young men each year from the towns and villages of the area. Student life was

difficult. Schooling required tuition and books. Housing was hard to find and of poor quality. To meet their rent, food, and school expenses, students had to work after school in jobs like clerking, housecleaning, tutoring younger boys, or tending horses. Chieri students dressed poorly, ate poorly, and suffered from the cold of winter. John Bosco's situation was not at all unusual except for his age. His strong peasant constitution helped him to cope with the wretched food and miserable living conditions and even to maintain his athletic prowess-as we shall see.

2. John went to Chieri on November 3, 1831.
3. "backwoods" = boschi in Don Bosco's text, he is punning on his name, which means "wood" in Italian.
4. Lucy Matta's (1783-1851) husband, Joseph had died in 1824. The Mattas were from Morialdo. While her son John Baptist was studying at the Royal College from 1831 to 1833, Mrs. Matta rented a house in piazza San Guglielmo, off 9 via Mercanti, from James Marchisio.

Mama Margaret sent John to staff with the good lady.

This meant she had to pay a steep board tog fee of twenty, one lire a month, which the family could not afford. John covered part of this sum by doing jobs for Mrs. Maui, and his mother supplied the rear in either cash or produce. The landladv soon came to realize what a treasure she had in her house with this young man, and she began to make ready use of him for her son's good. And she stopped asking rent from her tenant.

5. Mrs. Matta's vigilance (assistere vegliare) foreshadows the Preventive System.
6. Here we have yet another intimation of Don Bosco's system. Frequently at the Oratory he would ask good boys to look after new or troublesome boys in the same way. It was part - of the strategy of having good companions.
7. The headmaster or principal was appointed by the government since the school was a public one. At this time he was a Dominican, Father Pius Ensebius Sibilla.
8. In the educational system of the time, once elementary education was completed, the first stage of secondary education involved five classes (or years). The first three were sometimes known as grammar 1, 2, and 3, after which came humanities and rhetoric. This period was followed by about two years of philosophy which, for clerical students, would be the first years of seminary studies.

The corresponding system in modern Italy consists of five years of ginnasio followed by three years of liceo. This prepares for entry to tertian-, or university, studies. There is also a "middle track" (scuola media) without access to liceo

In Britain the corresponding system is forms 1 to 5 of compulsory education until one is sixteen or older. These are followed by optional sixth-form studies of two or three years in lower and upper sixth that can lead to entrance to university education.

The five years of the Italian ginnasio are approximately equivalent to the four years of college-preparatory high school in the United States or, again approximately, to the five years of Canadian high school.

By the time Don Bosco was writing his Memoirs, the old system had been reformed. So he gives a little explanation. In the 1830s classes were numbered in reverse order. The sixth class was the preparatory form, while the fifth, fourth, and third classes

(grammar 1, 2, and 3) corresponded to forms 1, 2, and 3 of the ginnasio. The humanities and rhetoric years corresponded to forms 4 and 5 of secondary school. The preparatory year was equivalent to the last year of primary school (eighth grade in the American system). So its pupils were boys of twelve or thirteen, in the midst of whom was thrown this newly-arrived sixteen-year-old country lad.

The secondary and undergraduate school systems look like this:

Piedmont	Modem Italy	United States	United Kingdom
Preparatory		Grade 8	
Grammar 1	Ginnasio 1	Grade 9	Form 1
Grammar 2	Ginnasio 2	Grade 10	Form 2
Grammar 3	Ginnasio 3	Grade 11	Form 3
Humanities	Ginnasio 4	Grade 12	Form 4
Rhetoric	Ginnasio 5	Junior College	Form 5
Philosophy	Liceo	Junior College	Form 6
School			

9. John's teacher in the sixth class was Father Valerian Pugnetti. "Doctor" here and elsewhere in the Memoirs means Doctor of Theology.
10. January 1832,
11. Father Placido Valimberti.
12. It was now about March 1832, and John had reached tenth grade (form 2).
13. Cima's first name was Vincent. He was a seminarian.
14. Cornelius Nepos (100-25 s.c.) was a human historian.
15. John Bosco certainly did have a phenomenal memory, which he demonstrated repeatedly. He used to say that for him to read something was to remember it. When he was already well on in years, he could still entertain his secretaries by reciting long passages from Dante. A few months before his death, he was traveling in the coach with Father Rua. The conversation came around to some point of sacred history which had inspired Metastasio (1698-1782). Don Bosco recited whole stanzas from the Italian poet; it was very unlikely that he had read any of the poetry since leaving secondary school. Various examples of his extraordinary memory are cited throughout the *BM*, e.g. I, 294, 315, 321-323.
16. Correct to 1831-1832.
17. In one school year John had done three years' work. No doubt his diligence and his maturity, relative to his classmates, helped him a great deal, as did his memory. Stella writes, "His marks were brilliant, at least by comparison with those of his fellow students; but his surviving notebooks reveal clearly how incomplete his training in the humanities was at that point" (*LW*, p. 23).

8

*The Society for
A Good Time*

*My companions The Society for a Good Time
Christian duties*

All this time I had to use my own initiative to learn how to deal with my companions. I put them in three groups: the good, the indifferent, and the bad. As soon as I spotted the bad ones, I avoided them absolutely and always. The indifferent I associated with only when necessary, but I was always courteous with them. I made friends with the good ones, and then only when I was sure of them.¹

As I knew few people in the town, I made it a rule to keep to myself. I sometimes had to discourage people I did not know too well. Some wanted to get me to a show, others into some gambling, and still others to go swimming. And there were suggestions that I should steal fruit from the town gardens or country orchards.

One companion was so bold as to suggest that I should steal a valuable object from my landlady so that we could buy some sweets. Gradually I got to know the undesirables and firmly avoided their company. Usually I had a counter to these suggestions. I used to tell them that my mother had asked my landlady to look after me, and out of love for my mother I did not want to go anywhere nor do anything without good Lucy's consent.

This firm obedience to the good woman led to a very happy and practical conclusion. With much pleasure, Lucy asked me to take charge of her only son,* a lively youth more interested in games than in schoolwork. She depended on me to check his homework even though he was in the class above me. I took him in hand as if he were my brother.¹ I used little prizes as bribes to get to him. I played indoor games with him and helped him to be faithful to his religious duties. Little by little he became more tractable, obedient, and studious.¹ After six months he had become so good and diligent that his teacher was satisfied and he won honors in class. His mother was so delighted that she refused to accept my monthly rent.

Since the companions who tried to coax me into their escapades were the most careless about everything, they began to come to me for help because I did them the kindness of lending them my homework or dictating it to them. The teachers frowned on this. *They* said that it was a false kindness that only encouraged laziness, and they strictly forbade me to do it. I then resorted to less obvious ways of helping them, such as explaining problems to them and lending a helping hand to those who needed it. Thus I made everyone happy and won the goodwill and affection of my companions. At first they came to play, then to listen to stories or to do their homework, and finally for no reason at all, just as the boys at Murialdo and Castelnuovo used to do.

That these gatherings might have a name, we called ourselves the Society for a Good Time." There was a reason for the name, because everyone was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain, or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once.

So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted: (1) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian. (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties.

All this helped my reputation, and in 1837 my companions respected me like the captain of a small army. I was much in demand for entertainments, for helping pupils privately, or for giving lessons or reviews at home.

Thus Divine Providence enabled me to supply my own clothes, school necessities, and other things without having to disturb my family in any way.

Notes

1. Don Bosco returns to a favorite educational theme: the importance of choosing one's companions carefully.
2. Swimming was viewed in Piedmont as a moral problem for several reasons:
Drowning in the sometimes treacherous waters of the cold, swift streams was a serious risk (see chapter it).
"Skinny-dipping" clashed with the natural modesty of the people even though girls were never present.
Lack of adult supervision sometimes allowed improper behavior to occur. Note young Dominic Savio's reasons for not going swimming-as Don Bosco puts those reasons into the pre-adolescent's mouth-in chapter 4 of Savio's biography (pp. 4-5 of the O'Brien edition or pp. 38-39 of the Aronica edition).
3. This note and similarly placed ones were added by Don Bosco during revision of Father Berto's copy of the manuscript.
4. John Baptist Matta, who died in 1878, was six years senior to John. Yet it seems that he was but one class ahead of John. From Don Bosco one would get the impression that John had been looking after John Baptist as though the Matta boy were his younger brother.
5. John did magic tricks, told stories, and even composed bits of poetry, as he will mention later. It is not difficult to see how much of Don Bosco's Preventive System is already at work here. And, again, we see the impact that a good companion can have on another youth.
6. The Italian, "Societa' dell'Allegria" is virtually untranslatable. It has been variously rendered as the "Glee Club," "Jovial Society," "Cheerful Company," "Good Times Club," "Happy Fellows Society." Stella (*LW*, p. 31) describes the club as a "secret" society, like the many patriotic societies then flourishing in Italy." Thus Stella reminds us that this was a revolutionary era. In 1830 there had been major, successful uprisings in Belgium and France. In 1831 lesser, unsuccessful ones occurred in the Papal States, Modena, and Parma, and there was unrest in Piedmont in spite of a rigidly controlled press. There was talk of a constitution, but King Charles Albert, who had just come to the throne, mercilessly crushed a revolutionary conspiracy. After the failures of these Italian ventures, Giuseppe Mazzini founded a new secret society, *Goivana Italia* (Young Italy) in 1831.

Don Bosco has not yet given any indication in his *Memoirs* of the great national events which were already occurring and which would eventually touch him very personally. As a country schoolboy, in a State that practiced censorship, he was

probably not even aware at the time of distant events. But John must have known that there were secret societies like the Carbonari and the Freemasons and that soldiers and the police visited Chieri in 1831 and 1834 to hunt out seditious elements.

Three of John Bosco's characteristics come through in the form taken by the Society for a Good Time, a club in which he was effectively president, even if not so in name. The three qualities are a lively, enterprising apostolic zeal; a real organizing ability; and most of all, the joyful spirit that became the hallmark of all his educational work. The rest of his autobiographical narrative will show how the germ of this apostolic spirit developed.

7. We cannot be certain of the year when John and his friends organized the Society for a Good Time, but it was probably soon after John arrived in Chieri.

9

*Life at School**Good companions Practices of Piety*

Amongst the members of our Society for a Good Time I discovered some who were truly exemplary. Worthy of mention are William Garigliano from Poirino and Paul Braje¹ from Chieri. They were always ready for some good recreation, but only after they had done their homework. Both were reserved and pious, and they gave me plenty of good advice. On feast days, after the practices of piety in common at the college,² we used to go along to St Anthony's Church, where the Jesuits gave marvelous catechetical instructions with plenty of stories that I still recall.

During the week, the Society for a Good Time used to meet at the home of one of the members to talk about religious matters. Anyone was welcome to come to these gatherings. Garigliano and Braje were amongst the most conscientious. We entertained ourselves with some pleasant recreation, with discussions on religious topics, spiritual reading, and prayer. We exchanged good advice, and if there were any personal corrections we felt we should hand out to each other, whether these were our own personal observations or criticisms we had heard others make, we did that. Without realizing it, we were putting into practice the excellent adage, "Blessed is he who has an advisor"; and that saying of Pythagoras,³ "If you have no friend to tell you your faults, pay an enemy to do it." Besides these friendly activities, we went to hear sermons and often went to confession and holy communion.

Here it is good to recall that in those days religion was a basic part of the educational system.⁴ A teacher faced instant dismissal should he make any statement unbecoming or irreligious. If this was the way teachers were treated; you can imagine how severely pupils were dealt with for any unruly conduct or scandal.

We went to Holy Mass every morning; classes began with the devout praying of the *Actiones* and the *Ave Maria*; they ended with the *Agimus* and an *Ave Maria*.⁵

On feast days all the pupils attended the college church. Before Mass we had spiritual reading, followed by the chanting of the Little Office of Our Lady.⁶ Then came Mass and the explanation of the gospel.⁷

In the evening we had a further catechetical instruction, vespers, and another sermon⁸ Everyone was expected to approach the holy sacraments; to prevent the neglect of this important obligation, once a month the students had to present a card to prove that they had gone to confession. If one fell down on this, he was barred from end-of-year examinations, no matter how good he was at studies.⁹ This strict training produced marvelous results. Many years went by without any swearing or unbecoming words being heard. The pupils were as docile and respectful at school as they would have been at home. And it often happened that in very large classes everyone won promotion at the end of the year. This was the case with my own classmates in the third class, humanities, and rhetoric.

I had the great good fortune of choosing as my regular confessor Doctor Maloria, canon of the chapter in Chieri.¹⁰ He always had a warm welcome for me. Indeed, he encouraged me to go to confession and communion more often, advice not too commonly given in those days, I do not remember that any of my teachers ever advised me along these lines.

Those who went to confession and communion more than once a month were considered very virtuous; and many confessors would not permit it. Consequently, I have to thank my confessor if I was not led by companions into certain unfortunate pitfalls that inexperienced boys in large schools have to regret.¹¹

During these two years,¹² I never forgot my friends at Murialdo. I kept in touch with them and sometimes went to visit them on Thursdays.¹³ On autumn weekdays, as soon as they got wind of my arrival they ran to meet me and always made a big fuss over me. A branch of the Society for a Good Time was started amongst them, too. Those whose good conduct throughout the year recommended them were enrolled. Bad conduct-especially swearing or evil talk -warranted expulsion from the club.

Notes

1. Ceria says that the correct spelling is "Braia" (MO, p. 53); Stella spells it "Braja" (*LW*, p.31) Presumably Ceria has Italianized the name, whereas Stella has kept the Piedmontese form.

Garigliano, two years younger than John, was to be his companion at the seminary and at the Convitto Ecclesiastico; he died in 1902. Paul Victor Braja, three years younger than John, died on July 10, 1832. Hence the club must have been organized during the school year 1831-1832.

2. The term "college" (collegium) designated a state-run secondary school such as the Royal College that John attended in Chieri. Later in the nineteenth century it came to mean a private, secondary-level boarding school. It is not to be confused with an American college, i.e. the first level of higher education, leading to a bachelor's degree. See Stella, *LW*, pp. 124-126.

The chapel was located on the ground floor off one of the two little courtyards where the college was situated, at what is now via Vittorio Emanuele 45

3. Greek philosopher and mathematician (ca. 588-ca. 500 B.c.).
4. The scholastic legislation of that period is to be found in an official publication, *Raccolta per ordine di material, dei Sovrani provvelimenti che reggono gli studi fuori dell'Universita e gli stabilimenti dipendenti dal Matistrato dell Riforma* [:A Presentation in Topical Order of the Royal Laws for the Regulation of Studies Outside the L'niversity] (Turin: Stamperia Reale. 1834). It also contains the royal decrees promulgated in 1822 by king Charles Felix concerning religion, in a socio-political context of vigorous restoration. The program is wide-ranging and detailed. For instance, in the "Regulations for University Studies" there was article 123: "On days preceding the other great solemnities of Holy Church, the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, and the feasts of the patron saints of studies, after classes the students shall be prepared to celebrate these mysteries."

Don Bosco gave similar advice for his schools and followed many of the particular practices that he evidently learned in the public schools of the 1830s.

5. All the prayers were in Latin. The Actiones may be translated, "Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration, continue with your help, and reach perfection under your guidance, through Christ our Lord" (one of the collects for Ember Saturday in Lent in the old liturgy; now the collect for the day after Ash Wednesday).

The Agimus is the familiar "We give you thanks, Almighty God, for all your benefits: you who live and reign forever and ever." The Ave Maria is the Hail Marv.

Don Bosco's earliest Regulations for the Hospice Attached to the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales" (1852) contains this directive: "Work shall begin with the Actiones and Ave Maria, and shall end with the Agimus and Ave Maria" (*BM IV*, 550; cf. *IV*, 553). In Salesian schools periods of work and study began and ended with these prayers for many generations.

6. The Little Office of Our Lady was a simple, popular version of the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) in Gregorian chant. Since this version was virtually unchanging, it was easily learned, even by nearly illiterate people (cf. chapter 40). Before Mass the schoolboys sang only lauds (morning prayer),
7. According to the general custom in nineteenth-century Piedmont, the sermon usually followed Mass.
8. Vespers (evening prayer) was sung from the Little Office. Such evening devotions were the common practice at that time.
9. Modern pedagogical practice, of course, does not tolerate such infringement on the freedom of conscience of pupils. Although Don Bosco notes the apparent good results of the practice at Chieri, he never instituted it in his own schools. Not only was he afraid that boys might be pressured into committing sacrilege, but he wanted an atmosphere of freedom. For this reason, for example, he refused to have the students go to communion row by row—a very orderly way to proceed—because it would be too obvious who did or did not approach the Lord's table; rather, at communion time the boys were to leave their places whenever they chose, if—they chose. Likewise, confessors were always available when the boys were in church, and Don Bosco himself would frequently seek out boys who he knew had not been reconciled to the Lord (see chapter 40); but no one was ever compelled to confess or to feign a confession.
10. Canon Joseph Maloria (1802-1857), who had earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Turin in 1825, was much respected for his learning. He had already been Joseph Cafasso's confessor during the latter's secondary school days, and he may have helped deepen the friendship between John and Joseph that began when they met at the Morialdo chapel (chapter 6). Father Maloria remained John's confessor from this time through his seminary years. John seems to have visited him often at his home.

As mentioned in chapter 7, note 2, Chieri had once been a cathedral city. It still had a chapter of canons attached to its duomo. One of them at this time was Saint Joseph Cottolengo, founder of the Little House of Divine Providence in Turin, a couple of blocks away from the place where the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales would one day be established. In this reflection, Don Bosco not only notes in passing the danger of bad companions but also cites a valuable experience that contributed to his teaching that confession and communion are the pillars of a good education. In John's youth, Jansenistic rigorism, which discouraged frequent communion, was still a powerful influence in Piedmont. We will return to this problem in chapter 19, note 7 and comment, and chapter 27.

Don Bosco always linked an adolescent's perseverance in virtue and his growth in the Christian life to the good advice, the encouragement and the fatherly vigilance of the confessor. It should also be noted that he speaks of a "regular confessor," one who

comes to know the heart of his penitent and therefore can offer sound spiritual guidance.

12. In Don Bosco's recollection, these years would probably be 1830-1832. He was in secondary school at Chieri from 1831 to 1835.
13. There was no school on Thursday afternoons, but there was on Saturday mornings.

10

Louis Comollo*Humanities and rhetoric**Louis Comollo*

When we had finished the first courses of *ginnasio*,¹ we had an inspection. The man who came to examine us on behalf of the School Reform Board² was a lawyer of outstanding merit, Prof. Fr Joseph Gazzani.³ He was very kind to me, and I have always retained grateful memories of him; we have maintained a close, friendly relationship ever since. This good priest is still living in Upper Moltedo near Oneglia,⁴ where he was born. Amongst his many charitable works, he endowed a scholarship at our college in Alassio⁵ for a boy desirous of studying for the priesthood.

Though the examinations were conducted strictly, all forty-five in our class were promoted to the next class, which corresponds to our fourth year of *ginnasio*. I myself nearly failed for giving a copy of my work to others. If I was let through, I am indebted to the protection of my revered teacher Fr Giusiana, a Dominican. He set an extra paper for me, at which I did very well, and I was passed unanimously.⁷

In those days there was a praiseworthy practice by which the town awarded a prize to at least one student in each grade, remitting the twelve-franc tuition. To win this prize one had to be approved unanimously in both studies and conduct. I was lucky enough to be excused from this fee every year,

That year I lost one of my dearest companions. Young Paul Braje, my dear, intimate friend, died on _____ in _____⁸ after a long illness. He was a model of piety, resignation, and living faith. He thus went to join St Aloysius,⁹ whose faithful disciple he had been all his life. He was mourned by the whole college, and all the students turned out for his funeral. For a long time afterwards, during their holidays they would receive holy communion and recite the Little Office of Our Lady or the rosary for the soul of their dead friend.

To make up for this loss, however, God sent me another companion every bit as virtuous as Paul, and even more remarkable in his deeds. This was Louis Comollo, of whom I will have more to say in a moment.

At the end of the humanities year, I did very well. On the strength of my results, my teachers, especially Doctor Peter Banaudi, suggested I should ask to take the exam in philosophy,¹⁰ and, in fact, I was promoted. But as I enjoyed my study of literature, I thought it better to continue my programme normally and take the rhetoric course, i.e. the fifth year of *ginnasio*, during 183-34.¹¹ It was during that year that I met Comollo. The life of this precious friend has been told elsewhere,¹² and those who want can read it there. Here I mention only the incident that led to my noticing him amongst the humanities group.¹³

There was a rumour in the top form¹⁴ that a saintly pupil was to join us that year. He was said to be the nephew of the provost of Cinzano,¹⁵ an elderly priest with a reputation for sanctity. I was keen to get to know him, but I did not know his name. This is how we met: At that time it was common practice to initiate new students through a dangerous game called *cavallnia*.¹⁶ The giddy and less studious ones loved it, and generally they were the most skillful at it.

For several days they watched a reserved youngster of fifteen years¹⁷ who had just registered at the college take his seat and settle down to read or study, heedless of the din going on round him. A boorish fellow came up to him, grabbed his arm, and insisted that he join them at *cavallina*.

"I don't know how," was the other's mortified and humble reply. "I don't know how: I've never played these games before."

"You better join us," said the aggressor, "or I'll kick and beat you till you do."

"You can treat me as you please, but I don't know what the game is, nor do I care to learn."¹⁶

His crude and ill-natured fellow student grabbed his arm, shoved him, and gave him two slaps that were heard all over the room. That made my blood boil. But I held back for a moment to see if the boy under attack would give the offender what he had coming. He could easily have done so because he was older and stronger than the bully. You can imagine everyone's astonishment when the good youth, countenance red and almost livid, looked with pity at his malicious companion, and replied only, "Are you satisfied? Now go in peace; I've already forgiven you."¹⁷

That heroic act made me want to know his name. It was, in fact, Louis Comollo, nephew of the provost of Cinzano, whose praises I had heard so often. From that moment on, he became my close friend, and I can say that from him I began to learn how to live as a Christian.¹⁸ I trusted him completely and he trusted me. We needed each other: I needed spiritual help; he needed a bodyguard.

The shy and retiring Comollo never even tried to stand up to the vicious insults of our companions, whereas all of them—including those older and bigger than I—respected my mettle and my strength.¹⁹

That became evident one day when certain boys were bent on making fun of Comollo and another good-natured lad called Anthony Candelo. I wanted to intervene on their behalf, but the bullies gave me no heed. Another day when the harmless pair were being abused again, I shouted, "You'd better watch out. I'll deal with the next one who lays a finger on them."

A considerable number of the taller and bolder spirits ganged together to threaten me while Comollo got two smacks in the face. At that I forgot myself completely. Brute strength moved me, not reason.²⁰ With no chair or stick within reach, I grabbed one of my fellow students by the shoulders and swung him round like a club to beat the others. I knocked down four of them; the rest took to their heels yelling for mercy. Then what? At that moment the teacher came into the room. Seeing arms and legs flying everywhere amidst an out-of-this-world uproar, he began to shout and to strike blows left and right. The storm was about to burst upon me when he learned the cause of the disturbance. He demanded a replay of the action, or at least a show of my strength. The teacher laughed, and so did all the pupils. Everyone was so amazed that I escaped the punishment I deserved.

Comollo had a different lesson to teach me. When we could speak between ourselves, he said to me, "John my friend, I'm amazed how strong you are. But, believe me, God didn't give you strength to massacre your companions. His will is that we should love one another, forgive one another, and return good for evil."

I could only wonder at my companion's charity. I put myself entirely into his hands and let him guide me where and how he wished. By agreement with our friend Garigliano, we went together for confession, communion, meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and serving Holy Mass. Comollo knew how to organise us with such gentle courtesy and sweetness that we could not refuse him.

I remember one day when we were passing a church; I was so engaged in chattering with a companion that I forgot to raise my cap. He corrected me at once, but so graciously: "John my friend," he said, "you're so lost in talking to men that you forget even the Lord's house."

Notes

1. This episode occurred at the end of the 1832-1833 school year. John had been in Chieri for two years and done the work of four years (classes 6, 5, 4, and 3).
2. The School Reform Board (Magistrato della Riforma) was responsible for supervising the educational reforms mandated in the Kingdom of Sardinia by the law of 1822. In 1833 the board sent an extraordinary visitor to preside at the final exams in the college at Chieri.
3. In *BM I*, 207, this name is spelled "Gozzani." According to the professor's grandnephew, the correct spelling is "Gazzano." Father Gazzano established the scholarship on March 1, 1872 (*MB X*, 317)

In his first draft of the Memoirs, Don Bosco wrote, "In subsequent years he was very kind to me. In this year (1873) he is still living in Upper Molto near Oneglia and does many charitable works. The exams.... " When he reviewed the manuscript, he rewrote it, leaving the word "in" after "relationship," apparently intending to continue, "this year (1873)," but getting a little distracted by the new, complimentary subject he introduced, "This good priest...."

4. More precisely, near Portomaurizio, which is a mile west of Oneglia on the Ligurian coast. The communes were united in 1923 as the city of Imperia. It is sixty miles southwest of Genoa.
5. The Allisio became the primary Salesian apostolate from the 1860s till quite recently. Alassio is on the Mediterranean coast about fifty miles southwest of Genoa; the Salesians opened a school there in 1869.
6. The surviving records verify this. Father Hyacinth Giusiana (1774-1844) came from Cuneo, forty-five miles south of Turin. He taught grammar and was one of John's favorite - teachers at Chieri.
7. No doubt there was more than luck involved in John's success. But being excused from even twelve lire's tuition was a blessing for the hard-pressed Boscos.
8. Don Bosco left the date of his friend's death blank. The family records include this note from Paul's father: "On July 10, 1832, Paul Victor Braia, aged twelve, went to his eternal rest. I can say without hesitation that this son of Philip and Catherine, like Cafasso, must have gone straight to heaven."

When Don Bosco begins this paragraph 'In that year,' the year in which he was promoted from the grammar section to the humanities year, he means the school year 1832-1833, not the calendar year 1832.

9. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (1568-1591) was a young Jesuit of noble birth who died while caring for the sick during a plague. Noted for piety, obedience, and especially purity, he is regarded as one of the patron saints and models for young people. He must have been particularly venerated in Chieri because his mother had been born there (her house is still standing). See *NCE I*, 332-333 Butler's *Lives*, R, 603-606; Maurice Meschler, *Life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, Patron of Christian Youth* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1985).

Don Bosco held up Saint Aloysius as a model for his oratory boys and students and celebrated his feast (June 21) with great pomp. In choosing Aloysius as one of his work's patrons, Don Bosco was certainly influenced by the fact,, mentioned above; he may also have been influenced by Aloysius's status as a religious and a seminarian and possibly by such mundane touches as his own father's middle name and the first name of his great earthly patron, Louis Fransoni, archbishop of Turin from 1832 to 1862. Finally, there was the dearest friend of his youth, Louis Comollo, to whom Don Bosco will come in a moment. (Luigi is rendered as - either "Aloysius" or "Louis" in English; this work uses the latter generally except for the Jesuit saint, who is almost universally known as Aloysius.)

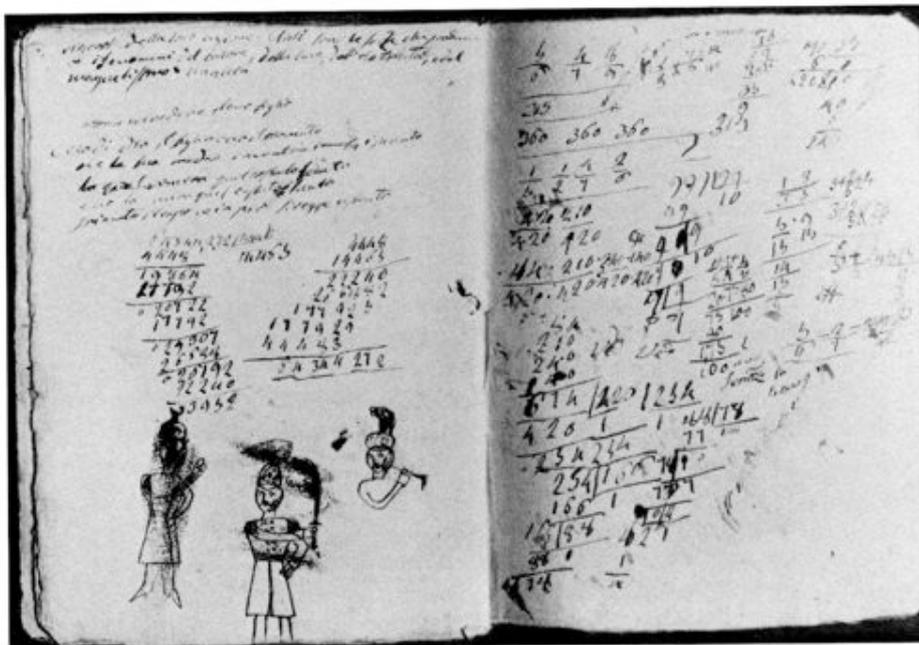
10. Father Peter Banaudi, from Briga Marittima, taught rhetoric and humanities and was one of John's favorite teachers. He - died in Turin on March 29, 1885, at the age of eighty-three. Don Bosco actually calls him Dottor, not Teologo as he does some of his other teachers (see chapter 7, note 9).
11. Actually, it was 1834-1835; when that school year ended, John was almost twenty years old.
12. Don Bosco published anonymously an eighty-two-page biography of Comollo in 1844. It was entitled *Cenni storici sulla vita di Luigi Comollo ...* [A Brief Life of Louis Comollo] (Turin: Speirani and Ferrero). See *BM* II, 152-156. Ten years later he printed a revised version in the *Catholic Readings* (January 10 and 25, 1854); this time he identified himself as the author. In 1884 he issued a third edition with various additions.

Alberto Caviglia did an in-depth study of Comollo's biography in his edition of the works of Don Bosco (left incomplete at four volumes by Caviglia's death in 1943, with two more published posthumously). Caviglia made a happy discovery, becoming convinced that this biography contains a marvelous outline of the basic principles of Don Bosco's educational program. Caviglia wrote, "The spirit by which Don Bosco led to holiness the youngsters whom he educated and then memorialized in his writings is the same spirit that lives in the two young men Comollo and Bosco." He then added, "The figure, the actions, and the spirit of Comollo are an indispensable ingredient for understanding Don Bosco's youth and the development of his character. This is even more true for understanding his life before his priestly ordination."

Caviglia's work, incidentally, is to be distinguished from the *Opere edite e inedite di San Giovanni Bosco Complete Works of Saint John Bosco*, reprinted in thirty-eight volumes by the Center for Studies on Don Bosco at the Salesian Pontifical University (Rome: LAS, 1976-1977, 1987).

13. The humanities and rhetoric groups met in one classroom with one teacher. Comollo was a year behind John in school.
14. In the rhetoric class.
15. Louis's uncle-his great-uncle, actually-was Father Joseph Comollo (1757-1843). As provost, he exercised some authority over the other clergy of the town of Cinzano, about five miles north-northwest of Castelnuovo.
16. Don Bosco uses his Piedmontese dialect here; in Italian the game is called *cavalluccio*. It is a game a little like leapfrog, but the lads see how many can pile onto one victim's back.

17. Peter Louis Comollo was born April 7, 1817, in the hamlet of Prat in the annunc of Cinzano. From his childhood he hoped to become a priest and was noted for his piety. In the fall of 1834, when John first met him, Louis was seventeen.
18. From Comollo, John learned a more perfect practice of virtue. Stella (L W, p. 32), noting Don Bosco's tendency to hyperbole, writes: John discovered great spiritual richness in Comollo)... Now, athirst for the interior life, John was really defending the source and wellspring that he was seeking for his own soul's sake. He was defending the incarnation of the very ideal that seemed to be his own. John had already been moving toward it on his own, but his encounter with the virtuous Comollo tripped the tension wire in his heart. Seeing in him a hero, John wanted to be his friend.
19. It seems strange that John, at nineteen-or even seventeen, according to his memory-should have schoolmates "older and bigger" than himself. On the other hand, when he was fully grown he was only 5'4" tall (*BM IV*, 120). He proved his strength many times throughout his life: cf. *BM IV*, 492; VI, 116; VIII, 410; MB \VI. 636; XVII, 205; XVIII, 479, 490
20. Don Bosco judges his youthful energy rather severely; but in that energy he reveals to us his natural spirit and generosity.



Like schoolboys everywhere, John Bosco doodled in his notebooks. This copybook of his dates from his years in Chieri.

11

Various Events

Waiter and bartender A feast day

A tragedy

We pass on from school affairs to certain events by way of diversion. I changed lodgings during my humanities year to be nearer my teacher, Fr Banaudi, and to help John Pianta, a friend of the family, who came to Chieri that year to open a café.¹

The lodging certainly had its dangers,² but as I was moving in with exemplary Catholics and was continuing my friendship with good companions, I was able to make the change without fear of moral danger.

When I finished my homework, I had a lot of spare time; I used to devote part of it to reading the Latin and Italian classics and the rest to waking liquors and jams. Halfway through that year I was in a position to prepare coffee and chocolate; I knew the recipes for many kinds of sweets, drinks, ices, and various refreshments. My landlord began by giving me free lodging. Then, gauging the boost I could give to his business, he made me an attractive offer; he tried to induce me to give up my other concerns and work full time for him. But I was doing that work only for fun and relaxation; I had no intention of giving up my studies.

Professor Banaudi was a model teacher. Without having recourse to corporal punishment, he succeeded in making all his pupils respect and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons, and they loved him like an affectionate father.³

To show our appreciation, we planned a surprise for his feast day." We decided to write both poetic and prose pieces for the celebration. and we had little presents which we thought he would especially like.. The event was a splendid success. Our teacher was pleased beyond words, and as a token of appreciation, he took us on a picnic in the country. It was a wonderful day; both teacher and pupils were of one spirit, and each of us strove for ways to express the joy in his heart.

As we made our way back to Chieri, our teacher met someone we did not know, and he had to go off with the man; we were left by ourselves on the road for a little while. At that point some of our companions from the upper classes came up to us and invited us to go swimming with them at a place called Fontana Rossa,⁴ about a mile from Chieri.

I was against the idea, and so were some of my companions; but it was no use.: few came home with me while the others wanted to go swimming. It was a regrettable decision. A few hours after we got home, two of our picnic group ran in, breathless and frightened.

"Oh, if you only knew what a terrible thing's happened!" they gasped, "Philip N., who insisted so much that we go swimming, is dead."

"What" we all exclaimed. "Philip was a good swimmer."

"Maybe he was," went on the excited messenger. "To encourage us to dive in with him, he jumped in, full of confidence, but unaware of the dangerous whirlpools in the Fontana Rossa. We waited for him to surface, but he did not appear. We raised the alarm. When help arrived, the rescuers tried everything, even at risk to themselves. It was an hour and a half later before they recovered the body."

The tragedy depressed all of us. There was no more talk of swimming that year nor the following one (1834).⁵

Some time ago I happened to meet a few of my old friends from those days. We recalled the drowning of our companion at the Fontana Rossa whirlpool with real regret.⁶

Notes

1. The two reasons Don Bosco gives for his change of lodging were really secondary. The main reason was that John Baptist Matta had finished his secondary studies, and he and his mother had returned to Castelnuovo.

Joseph - not John - Pianta was not only a friend of the Boscos from Morialdo, but a distant kinsman of Margaret (Molineris, p.185). He was Lucy Matta's brother, which means of course that she too was related to Margaret. In 1833 he went to Chieri to open a coffee shop - what is called a "bar" in Italy nowadays. Margaret asked him to board John and look after him. During the day John was to do his schoolwork, and in the evenings he was to help Pianta manage the billiard room. The billiard room also had a piano. Every week Margaret brought John some bread and other food for his main meal. While Pianta was responsible for John's soup (a substantial meal in itself).

Pianta's place was in the Vergnano house at 3 via Palazzo di Citta. It is now an ice cream shop. The cafe measured about twenty feet by twenty. What was the billiard room, slightly larger at twenty feet by twenty-three, is now a small tailor's shop. The house is just a few yards from the Church of Saint Anthony the Abbot, which made it convenient for John to go to daily Mass. The church is at the corner of Chieri's main square, the piazza d'Armi, and via Vittorio Emanuele and is staffed by the Jesuits. Saint Anthony's was the primary meeting place of the Society for a Good Time and of the regular school assemblies for church services.

When John came to Chieri for the opening of school, however, Pianta had not finished setting up his cafe. So John had to seek temporary lodging with the baker Michael Cavallo-not in his house but in his stable. (Lemoyne calls him Cavalli in *BM I*, at 6.) John earned his keep by caring for the horse and by tending Cavallo's vines a little way out of town. The youth asked only that he be free on Saturday evenings to go to confession. What was the Cavallo stable is still extant across the street from the Vergnano house. This arrangement did not last long, for some good people-just who, we do not know-noticed John's plight and urged Pianta to get on with opening his coffee shop.

2. The dangers that John perceived came from the example given by the customers who frequented Pianta's bar: gambling at billiards and other games, frivolous use of hours at a time, and offensive language.

When the aged Pianta met the Salesians John Bonetti, John Baptist Francesia, and Joachim Berto in Chieri on May 10, 1888, he told them.

It would have been next to impossible to find a better lad than John Bosco. Every morning saw him on this way to serve several masses in St. Anthony's Church. I had with me at home at the time my aged and sickly mother; it was really impressive to see how kindly he treated her. John would quite often spend entire nights with his books; in the morning I would still find him reading and writing by the light of his lamp. (*BM I*, 217)

However, good Pianta did not see fit to bring up the question of the "spacious" room he had given the young man to sleep in. Lemoyne describes it in this way:

John's bed was a narrow strip over a small oven that was used for baking pastry. John reached it with a small ladder. But when lie stretched out in these confined quarters his feet dangled beyond the thin straw-filled pallet and over the edge of the oven (*BM* 1, 216).

This cubbyhole was in a small passageway, 11.6 feet long by 6.6 feet high by 2.6 feet wide, between the coffee room and the billiard room.

When Don Bosco was canonized in 1934, the people of Chieri celebrated the event by placing tablets at many of the sites associated with his ten years as a resident there. One such memorial was put on Pianta's former shop, recalling young John's sacrifices. It also mentions his young friend Joseph Blanchard (1828-1893), who sometimes gave John gifts of fruits and vegetables to satisfy his hunger. The Blanchards, who were grocers, had another apartment in the Vergnano house from November 1833 till August 1834 (Molineris, p.192).

3. Don Bosco, himself an educator with over thirty years of experience behind him at the time of writing, calls Father Banaudi a model teacher. He has singled out the fact that his teacher did not have to use punishments to make himself respected; rather, he used fatherly love for his pupils. We may suppose that Father Banaudi's methodology made a deep impression on his young student. Certainly Don Bosco describes his methodology in words that echo the Preventive System.
4. It is not hard to imagine that John was the chief organizer of the surprise party.
5. This is the local name of a stream that rushes down from the nearby hills on the northwest side of the city. It takes its name, which means "Red Fountain." from its rust-colored waters.
6. The Piedmontese mile is 2466 meters, or roughly a mile and a half in the English measure.
7. This sad event occurred in 1834, during John's humanities year of 1833-1834. Father Peter Banaudi's name day was June 29; so we may place Philip's drowning in early July, though Molineris (p. 225) suggests June 28. Molineris tried, unsuccessfully, to identify further the unfortunate boy who drowned, but he never completed his search.

The next year, the rhetoric year, John's teacher was the priest Doctor John Bosco, whose name was the same as the saint's but who was not a relative. Don Bosco mentions him in the biography of Comollo: "He had become an idol of the whole student body because of his kindness, his patience, the courteous way he dealt with all the students, and the interest he took in helping them succeed in their studies."

Divine Providence was remarkably preparing the future apostle of youth by setting before him outstanding examples of men who educated by means of loving kindness (Desramaut, *SouAut*, p. 72).

8. Don Bosco has passed over several other events of this period. On May 9, 1833, Joseph Bosco married Domenica Febbraro. The couple would have ten children. Joseph had been leasing farmland from the Mattas at Sussambrino since 1831 (see chapter 6, note 9), where his partner was Joseph Febbraro.

On August 4, 1833.. John was confirmed by Archbishop John Anthony Gianotti of Sassari in Saint Blaise's Church at Buttigliera d'Asti. This was the same church to which young John had gone to hear the missionary preachers in the jubilee year of 1829. The sponsors for all seventy-two confirmands were Mayor Joseph Mariano

Buttigliera and Countess Josephine Molina. Those confirmed ranged in age from seven to twenty-nine. (SM 1. 100: Molineris, pp. 798-799)

Joseph Cafasso was ordained a priest on September 21, 1833, and celebrated his first Mass at Castelnuovo soon after.

The place where John Pianta set up his café and billiard hall is now marked by a commemorative plaque that records John Bosco's stay there. When he had leisure time, John often met with his friends here.



12

A Jewish Friend

Jonah

While I was still a humanities student lodging at John Pianta's cafe, I got to know a Jewish youngster called Jonah. He was about eighteen, was remarkably good looking, and had an exceptionally fine singing voice. He was a good billiards player too.

We met at Elijah's bookstore, and he would always ask for me as soon as he came into the shop. I liked him a lot, and he was very attached to me. Every spare minute he had, he spent in my room; we sang together, played the piano, or read. He liked to hear the thousand little stories I used to rely on.

One day he got into a difficult quarrel which could have had sorry consequences for him. He came running to me for advice.

"Jonah, my friend," I said to him, "if you were a Christian, I would advise you to go to confession.³ But in your case, that's not possible."

"But we Jews can go to confession, if we want to."

"Go to confession by all means, but your confessor is not obliged to secrecy. Neither can he forgive your sins or administer any sacraments."

"If you'll take me, I'll go to a priest."

"I could do that for you, but a lot of preparation is necessary."

"What sort of preparation?"

"Confession takes away sins committed after baptism. If you wish to receive any of the other sacraments, you must receive baptism first."

"You must be instructed in the Christian religion. You must believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. After that you can be baptized."

"What good will baptism do me?"

"It wipes out original sin, and actual sins too." It opens the way to the other sacraments. Finally, it makes you a child of God and an heir to heaven."

"We Jews cannot be saved?"

"No, my dear Jonah; since Jesus Christ came, the Jews cannot be saved unless they believe in him."

"If it comes to my mother's ears that I want to become a Christian, heaven help me!"

"Don't be afraid; God is the master of all hearts. If he calls you to become a Christian, he will do it in such a way as to satisfy your mother, or provide in some way for the good of your soul."

"You are such a good friend of mine; if you were in my place, what would you do?"

"I would begin to take instruction in the Christian religion. Anyway, God will show you what to do in the future. Take this little catechism and begin to study it. Pray that God will enlighten you, and he will help you to know the truth."

From that day onward Jonah became attracted to the Christian faith. He used to come to the cafe and, after he played a game of billiards, he would come looking for me to discuss religion and the catechism. In a few months he had learned to make the sign of the cross, could say the *Pater*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Credo*, and knew the other principal truths of the faith. He was very happy and became better every day in his speech and his actions.

Jonah had been left fatherless as a child. His mother Rachel had heard vague reports about Jonah's intentions, but as yet she knew nothing certain. This is how the news broke: One day, while making Jonah's bed she came across his catechism, which he had inadvertently left under his mattress.

She went screaming through the house, took the catechism to the rabbi, and suspecting what was afoot, rushed to the student Bosco's lodgings. She had often heard her son speak of him. Picture to yourselves ugliness itself, and you will have an idea of Jonah's mother. She was blind in one eye and deaf in both ears; she had a big nose, hardly any teeth, and a long, pointed chin; she was thick Tipped, with a twisted mouth; her voice sounded like the squeal of a foal.⁷ The other Jews used to call her the "Lilith the Witch," a name they use for the ugliest thing they can imagine.⁸

I got a fright when I saw her. Before I had time to recover, she opened up on me: "I swear you've done wrong! Yes, you! YOU HAVE ruined my Jonah. You've brought public disgrace on him. I don't know what will become of him. I'm afraid he'll end up a Christian, and you'll have been the cause of it."⁶

I understood then who she was and of whom she was speaking; as calmly as I could, I explained that she ought to be happy about it and to thank me for doing him so much good.

"And what's the good of that? Is it a good thing for a person to deny his own religion?"

"Calm down, my good woman," I said to her. "Listen. I didn't go looking for your son Jonah. We met in Elijah's bookshop. We became friends without any special reason. He's very fond of me, and I like him too. As his true friend, I want him to save his soul and to get to know our religion, because outside it no one can be saved. Good mother of Jonah, please note that I only gave your son a book and told him to study it. If he becomes a Christian, he does not abandon his Jewish religion; he perfects it."

"If Jonah should have the misfortune to become a Christian, he would have to abandon our prophets, because Christians do not believe in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nor in Moses and the prophets."

"We do believe in all the holy patriarchs and prophets of the Bible. Their writings, their sayings, and their prophecies are the foundation of the Christian faith."

"If our rabbi were only here, he would know how to answer you. I know neither the *Mishnah* nor the *Gemara* (the two parts of the *Talmud*).⁹ But what is to become of my poor Jonah?"

So saying, she left. It would be too long to recount the many attacks that the mother, the rabbi, and various of Jonah's relatives made on me. Neither threats nor violence had any effect on that courageous young man; he withstood them all and continued to take instruction.

Since he was no longer safe amongst his family, he had to leave home and live almost as a beggar. Many people came to his aid. And that all might be done with due prudence, I recommended my pupil to a learned priest who took a fatherly interest in him. When Jonah's religious instructions were completed, he was impatient to become a Christian. A solemnity was arranged that set a good example for all the people of Chieri. Other Jews were impressed too, and later several others embraced Christianity.

Jonah's godparents were Charles and Octavia Bertinetti, who provided what the neophyte needed. After becoming a Catholic, he was able to earn an honest livelihood by his own efforts." The newly-baptized's name was Aloysius."

Notes

1. The Jews of Chieri lived in their own ghetto along via della Pace, as prescribed by the laws of King Charles Felix (1821-1831). They were regarded as second-class citizens, officially tolerated. Jonah's home was at the corner of via della Pace and via d'Albussano. The home and bookstore of Elijah Foa were at 12 via della Pace.
2. John and Jonah had several things in common that helped make them fast friends: they were the same age, they were both highly talented, and they were both fatherless. They used to meet in a spot in Pianta's cafe-probably in the billiard hall, since the piano was there-where there was room during the day to study or host a friend during John's rare moments of leisure.

John's friendship for this Jewish youth was not an isolated event. Lemoyne (*BM I*, 231) cite, testimony to his practical kindness. John noticed the trouble that several Jewish boys had with Saturday schoolwork. To prevent their having to violate their sabbath or else suffer the ridicule of their schoolmates for not doing their work, he would do it for them.

3. In the 1830s, to be a Christian in Italy was practically equivalent to being a Catholic. Don Bosco realized that Protestants could not receive the sacrament of penance either. The British statesman Lord Palmerston once visited the Oratory. When he saw five hundred boys working quietly in a single study hall, without a teacher monitoring them, he was astonished. He asked Don Bosco how that was possible.

"Sir," his host answered. "We possess a means unknown to you."

"How is that?"

"It's a secret revealed only to Catholics." "And what is that secret?"

"Frequent confession and communion, and daily Mass heard with devotion."

"You're right," the visitor confessed. "We lack those powerful means of education. But can they be substituted?"

"If we don't use the means supplied by religion, we must use threats and the cane."

"Absolutely right Religion or the cane! I'll inform my government."

This episode, taken from archival material, is recounted in the Salesian Bulletin, October 1922, p. 259,

4. More specifically, baptism cancels the actual, or personal, sins that one may have committed before baptism. As John told Jonah earlier, Catholics hold that sacramental penance (confession) is necessary for the forgiveness of serious sins committed after baptism. Original sin is the sin inherited by the whole human race from their first ancestors (cf. Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12-21).
5. Don Bosco describes his conversation with his young friend without making any distinctions. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church:

There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, and the way to Jesus Christ is through his Church.

Those who know that it is God's will that they should belong to the Catholic Church are obliged in conscience to join his Church, or they will be lost.

One who honestly tries to please God according to the light of his own natural reason implicitly and unconsciously desires to belong to the Church and to be saved through Jesus Christ. Such a person will be saved. (Sec, for example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, III, 8, 3 ad I; and III, 68, 2.)

Pope Pius XII excommunicated the American Jesuit Leonard Feeney for teaching that one had to belong explicitly to the Roman Catholic Church in order to be saved (Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, August 8, 1949 IDS 3866-3872) quoted in J. Neuner, SJ, and J. Dupuis. SJ, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Church* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1975, pp. 235-37)

John came closest to the Church's teaching when he told Jonah, "God will ... provide in some one for the good of your soul."

For a summary of the Church's teaching on Judaism since the Second Vatican Council, see the comment at the end of the notes.

6. The Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Apostles' Creed in Latin.
7. A foal is not yet able to give forth the full neigh of a grown horse. It is nearer to a grunt than a whinny. Don Bosco seems to have wanted to avoid the rougher but more common expression "grunt like a pig." All in all, Don Bosco's unflattering picture of Jonah's mother does no credit to his usual sensitivity to people.
8. There were various Jewish legends about Lilith, whose name comes from Isaiah 34:14 (the RSV renders it "the night hag"). Originally she was a female demon whose name comes from Akkadian. Medieval folklore turned her into the woman who deceived Adam and into a ghost that wandered around at night, devouring children.
9. Talmud means literally "instruction." It is the final codification of Jewish law, based on the scriptures and oral tradition, and it dates from the third and fourth centuries. It has two parts, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The first, from the second century, contains the traditional oral law; the Gemara, literally "completion," expands upon the tishnah through the commentaries of Jewish scholars.
10. The records at Chieri verify the baptism. However, the name is not given as Jonah. Jonah may have been a middle name or a nickname. It is also possible that Don Bosco used a fictitious name to permit the man a certain anonymity. The record for 1834 reads thus:

Bolmida. On August 1, Sebastian Schoppo, theologian and canon curate, by the permission of the Archbishop of Turin, solemnly baptized a certain Jewish young man of Chieri named James Levi, aged 18. I gave him the name Aloysius Hyacinth, Lawrence, Octavian. Maria Bolmida. The Godparents were Hyacinth Bolmida and Octavia Mary Bertinetti (Stella, *LW*, p. 32, n. 68).

Lawrence, Octavian, Maria Rolmida. 'file godparents were Hyacinth Bolmida and Octavia Mary Bertinetti. (Stella, *Lam*', p. 32, n. 68)

Charles Bertinetti was not the godfather, after all. He was probably there with his wife. Don Bosco's memory has slipped slightly again. See also chapter 16, note 14.

The convert lived as a faithful Christian and retained affection and gratitude toward his friend John. Lemoyne met him at the Oratory around 1880 (*BM* I, 243).

11. It is possible that John suggested this name himself. We have already noted his devotion to Saint Aloysius (see chapter 10, note 9). In the first five months of his priesthood (from June to November 2, 1841), Don Bosco was an assistant to the provost of Castelnuovo. Lemoyne asserts that the parochial baptismal register there shows that practically all the boys that Don Bosco baptized had Aloysius for either their first or their middle name (*BM* II, 14). When Molineris checked the records for

that period, he discovered that Don Bosco baptized only three boys, one of whom was named Luigi (pp. 264-265).

It is equally possible that Jr'dhn had nothing to do with the choice. Saint Aloysius was already- very popular in Chieri, and the name was commonly given.

Comment on Catholicism and Judaism

Vatican II refined the teaching of the Catholic Church on the Church's role in the salvation of the human race in *Lumen gentium* and in *Nostra aetate*. The former, the Constitution on the Church, affirms that everyone is called to belong to God's people, i.e. the Church, which is necessary for salvation by the explicit will of Christ (no. 13) and subsists fully in the Roman Catholic Church; mere membership is insufficient, though, for one must "persevere in charity" (no. 14). Those who reverence the sacred scriptures, believe in the Trinity, and are consecrated in baptism are also part of the Church even if "they do not profess the faith in its entirety" and are not in communion with Peter's successor (no. 15).

Those who have not yet received the gospel are related in various ways to the People of God... Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, Without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace. (no. 16, quoted in the Abbott edition, New York, 1966)

Nostra aetate is the Council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. This landmark document's no. 4 speaks of the Jewish people and says, in particular, "The Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the call he issues.... "

When Pope John Paul II made his historic visit to the synagog of Rome on April 13, 1986, he alluded to the riches of *Nostra aetate*. He then emphasized three points, quoting several times from that document's fourth paragraph:

The first is that the Church of Christ discovers her "bond" with Judaism by "searching into her own mystery." The Jewish religion is not "extrinsic" to us, but in a certain way is "intrinsic" to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You (the Jews) are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

The second point noted by the Council is that no ancestral or collective blame can be imputed to the Jews as a people for "what happened in Christ's passion"-not indiscriminately to the Jews of that time, nor to those who came afterwards.... So any alleged theological justification for discriminatory measures ... is unfounded. The Lord will judge each one "according to his own works," Jews and Christians alike (cf. Romans 2:6).

The third point ... is a consequence of the second. Notwithstanding the Church's awareness of her own identity, it is not lawful to say that the Jews are "repudiated or cursed," as if this were taught or could be deduced from the sacred scriptures or the New Testament. Indeed, the Council had already said ... that the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling (cf. *Lumen gentium* v, no. 16, and Romans 11:28-29).

A major Church statement on racism, issued February 20, 1989, resoundingly condemned anti-Semitism as "the most tragic form that racist ideology has assumed in our century" and reminded the world that "entertaining racist attitudes is a sin" (New York Times, February 11, 1989, pp. 1, 4).

13

Black Magic*Games Conjuring tricks
Self-defense*

In the midst of my studies and other interests, such as singing, music, speech training, and dramatics,¹ which I undertook wholeheartedly, I also learned a variety of new games: card tricks, marbles, quoits, walking on stilts, running and jumping, all of which I enjoyed and in which I was by no means mediocre, even if I was no champion. Some of these activities I had learned at Murialdo, others at Chieri. If in the fields of Murialdo I was only a beginner, that year I developed into something of a master. At that time, not much was known about these sports because they had not been much publicised; so in the popular estimate they were a source of wonder.

What shall I say of these skills? I often gave performances both in public and in private. Since I had an exceptional memory, I knew by heart long passages from the classics, the poets particularly. I could quote at will from Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Parini, Montini,² and others as if they were my own. Likewise, I could thus improvise without any trouble. In those entertainments or concerts, sometimes I sang, sometimes I played an instrument, or sometimes I composed verses which were highly praised—though in reality they were nothing more than excerpts from various authors adapted for the occasion. That is why I have never given any of my compositions to anyone. Whatever I did write down, I have burned.³

Conjuring was a source of wonder. People sat wide-eyed at the sight of an endless stream of balls coming out of a little box too small to hold even one, or eggs tumbling out of a little bag. But when they saw me producing balls from bystanders' noses, or heard me tell accurately how much money people had in their pockets, or when they watched me crush coins to dust between my fingers, my audiences got frightened and even lost their heads; they began to whisper that I was a sorcerer, that I had to be in league with the devil.

My landlord Thomas Cumino⁴ added to the credibility of this idea. Thomas was a fervent Christian, and he loved a joke. I knew how to take advantage of his character, and I would say, his simplicity, to embarrass him thoroughly. One day, for his feast day he had very carefully prepared chicken and jelly as a treat for his lodgers.⁵ But when he carried the dish to the table and uncovered it, out popped a live cock, flapping about and cackling in a thousand ways. Another time he had a pot of macaroni cooked and ready to serve, but at the last moment he found the pot full of dry bran. Sometimes when he filled the bottle with wine, he would find as he poured it out that it had turned to water. When he wanted a drink of water, he would find his glass full of wine instead. Sweets changed into pieces of bread, coins in his purse into pieces of rusty tin. A hat became a nightcap; nuts changed into pebbles right in the sack. These were everyday occurrences.

Good Thomas was nonplussed. "These things are not human," he would mutter to himself. "God does not waste time with such frivolities. It must be the work of the devil."

He did not dare mention these matters at home, so he sought advice from a nearby priest, Fr Bertinetti. Suspecting "white magic"⁶ as the explanation of these tricks, he decided to refer the matter to the school superintendent, who was at that time a respected cleric, Canon Burzio, archpriest and parish priest of the cathedral.⁷

The canon was a learned man, pious and prudent, and without speaking to others asked me *ad audiendum verbum*.⁸ When I arrived at his house, I found him saying his Office.⁹ Smiling at me, he made a sign, for me to wait. When he had finished, he asked me to follow him into his study. There he began to question me, very politely, but with a serious look.

"My friend, so far I am quite pleased with your conduct and the progress you have made in your studies. Now, however, you are the subject of much talk. They tell me you are a mind reader, that you can guess how much money people have in their pockets, that you can make black seem white, that you can tell what is happening at a distance, and similar things. That makes people talk about you. In fact, some have gone farther and suspect you of being a sorcerer or even that the devil is at work here. Tell me now, who taught you this knowledge? Or where did you pick it up? Tell me everything in complete confidence. I assure you that I will not use it except for your own good."

Keeping a straight face, I asked him for a few minutes to think over my reply. Then I asked him to tell me what time it was. He put his hand into his pocket, but his watch was not there.

"If you haven't got your watch," I suggested, "could you give me a five-soldi coin?"¹⁰

He checked all his pockets but could not find his purse.

"You rascal," he shouted angrily, "Either you are the devil's servant, or he's yours! You've already stolen my purse and my watch. I can't keep quiet any longer; I must denounce you. Even now I don't know what keeps me from giving you a good thrashing."

However, when he saw that I was smiling serenely, he got hold of himself and went on more calmly. "Now let's take this quietly. Explain these mysteries to me. How was it possible for my watch and my purse to vanish from my pocket unknown to me. Where are they?"

"Well, Father," I began respectfully, "I'll explain in a few words. It's all a matter of sleight of hand, information, and preparation."

"What information could you have about my watch and purse?"

"I'll explain it all quickly. Just after I came in, you gave some alms to a beggar. You left your purse on a priedieu. Then you went into another room, leaving your watch on that side table. I hid them both; you thought you had them on your person, while they were really under this lampshade." So saying, I lifted the lampshade and recovered both objects that the devil was supposed to have taken away.

The good canon had a hearty laugh. He asked me to give him a demonstration of sleight of hand, and how to make things appear and disappear. He enjoyed it all and gave me a little gift. Finally, he told me, "Go and tell your friends that wonderment is the result of ignorance."¹¹

Notes

1. Part of the reason why Don Bosco became a successful educator was that he incorporated all these activities, and sports too, into his system. From the first, he seemed to know instinctively that these means would attract youngsters, to whom he could then introduce Jesus and Mary.
2. All his life Don Bosco treasured the poetry of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and could quote extensive passages from the Divine Comedy from memory. Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), poet and diplomat, helped inspire the Renaissance. Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) wrote epic and dramatic poetry and is best known for *Jerusalem Delivered*. Giuseppe Parini (1729-1799) is best known for his satiric epic *The Day*. Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828) was a poet, professor, and historian.
3. He forgot to burn some. We have been able to find an exercise book of his entitled "A Collection of Sonnets and Various Poems." He began this particular collection on May 27, 1835. Together with items by various authors and friends there are also a few of his own compositions. Among other things is a sonnet which he titled "The Constancy of Pius VII under Napoleon's Oppression." On the front page he wrote, *Quidquid agunt homines, intentione indicat omnes* (Their intention is the measure of whatever men may do). Above that inscription is a note in Lemoyne's writing, indicating that Don Bosco left this copybook to his faithful friend before he died.
4. In 1834-1835, the last year of John's ginnasio, the pastor of Castelnuovo, Father Anthony Cinzano, sent him to lodge with the Cumino family. Earlier, Joseph Cafasso had also boarded with them for four years. Father Cinzano provided eight lire a month to cover John's room and board (*BM I*, 248).

The Cumino house is at 24 via Vittorio Emanuele, near Saint Anthony's Church. Mr. Cumino was a tailor. He offered John one of his storerooms as a bedroom. After a few months, Father Cafasso managed to get better treatment for John.

Ceria notes that John had to tend a vineyard and look after a horse belonging to Mr. Cumino (*MO*, p.71) he appears to have confused this arrangement with John's earlier stay with Michael Cavallo (chapter 11, note 1).
5. Italians celebrate a person's feast day (name day) more than his birthday; it is customary for the one celebrating to give gifts or a treat rather than to receive them.
6. There had been a distinction between white magic and black magic since the Middle Ages. The latter was diabolical. White magic was understood to be natural, based on laws of physics that most people would not grasp. From the context it seems that John was accused of practicing black magic rather than the white that he records here and in the opening line of the next chapter.
7. Canon Maximus Burzio rented rooms in the Bertinettis' apartment house-which the couple would one day leave to Don Bosco (see chapter 16, note 15). From

18to 1863 the canon was pastor of Moncucco, where John had stayed with the Moglias from February 1827 to November 1829.

8. This was a legal term which means here, basically, "to tell him what was going on" (Desramaut, *SouAut*, p. 81).
9. The Divine Office consists of psalms, hvnuts, scripture readings, readings from the Fathers of the Church, and prayers. Priests, religious, and other Christians pray the Office at various times (hours) during the course of the day; hence it is also called the Liturgy of the Hours. The principal hours are readings (also called vigils, formerly called matins), morning prayer (formerly called lauds), and evening prayer (vespers). The lesser hours in Don Bosco's time were prime, terse, next, none, and night prayer (compline); the reform of Vatican II has reduced these to two hours, midday prayer and night prayer, besides simplifying the main hours.
10. A soldo was worth five centesimi, or one-twentieth of a lira.
11. John quotes thee canon's advice in Latin: ignorantia est magistra.