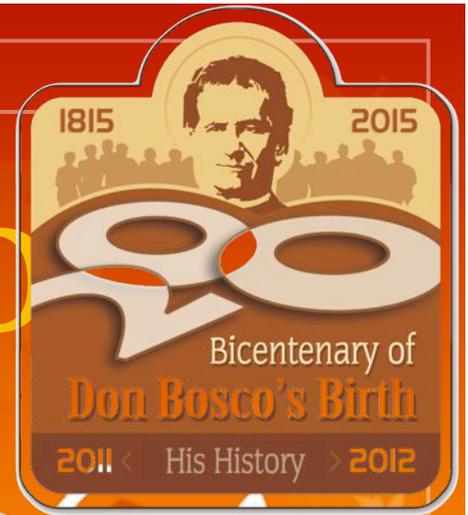


OCTOBER 2011

Getting to know

Don Bosco

His Place in History



Making a Study Plan

We all need to create a plan if we are going to study Don Bosco in a deeper, methodical way and if we are going to foster a better grasp of the man whose call and mission continues to drive much of what we do and who we are as Salesians today!

This addition to the INTOUCH newsletter will appear monthly with suggestions for reading, study, and reflecting on Don Bosco as a man of history. There are many resources and we will call attention to some of these in this and other future issues of this guide.

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

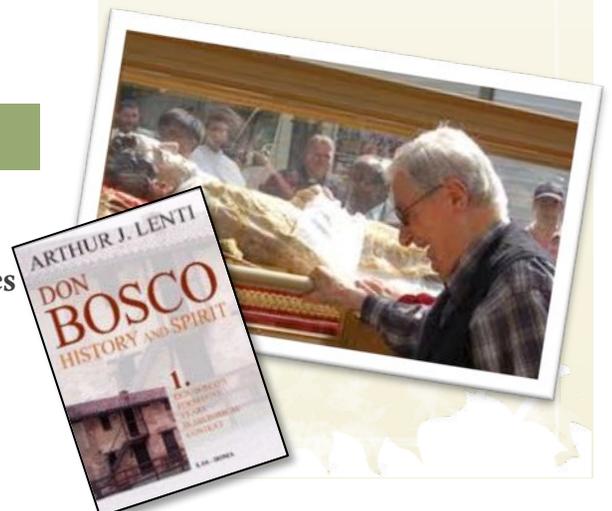
2 Weekends
Jan 6-8 DB Hall
Jan 20-22 De Sales
If De Sales is ready for use
 Friday 7PM through
 Sunday Lunch.
 Accommodations by
 reservation. \$30 reg.

What to Read

The sources we have are amazing! The saint is so close to our own history that we have the richness of his own words, a plethora of eye-witnesses, chroniclers of many important moments in the life and mission of the Founder, and so much more!

We have his own words enshrined beautifully and succinctly in *The Memoirs of the Oratory*. We have more than 20 volumes of material gathered by various chroniclers who lived and witnessed Don Bosco's way of living and praying and acting on behalf of the young.

We have the tremendous work of Fr. Arthur Lenti recently published in full in seven volumes. This historical, critical study of Don Bosco as Founder and Builder has become one of the most important resources for our study to date!



Don Bosco's Experience

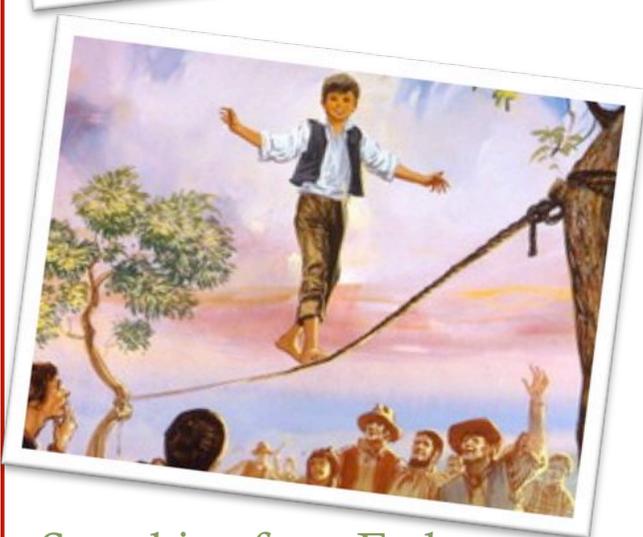
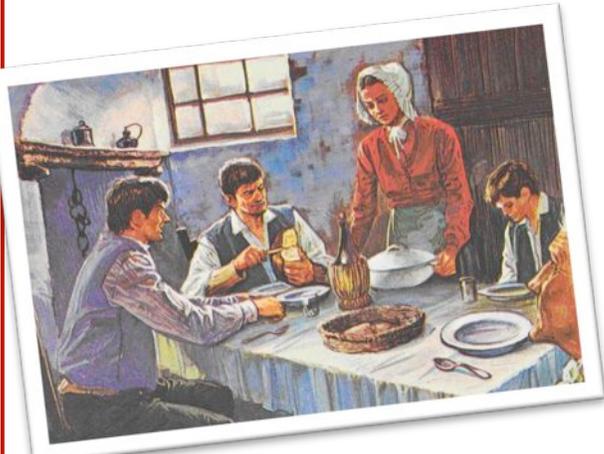
How rich it is to be able to make a direct connection with Don Bosco's own experience of his calling and his relationship with God.

The Memoirs of the Oratory

There are various critical editions of this autobiographical work of St. John Bosco. Most recently, the volume has been produced in English without a lengthy commentary or endnotes. Fr. Giraud, professor at the Salesian Pontifical University has completed an important critical introduction to this work of Don Bosco. It is currently in Italian & Spanish.

The Bosco Household

The childhood and development of John Bosco has undergone some careful reconsideration in recent years with the work of Fr. Pietro Stella, Fr. Pietro Braido, Fr. Arthur Lenti, and Fr. Francesco Motto, to name a few.



Searching for a Father

A strong central theme in all of this study is Don Bosco's yearning for a father after the death of his own father at age two. This loss drove him into his own quest for meaning and eventually led him to the mission of becoming a father and teacher of the young.

Searching for a Future

The young man, John Bosco, never had a divine blueprint dropped in his lap. Many of the turns of events in his life would be considered psychologically damaging in other situations. He left home as a young teen seeking to find a future in education. His life was guided and enriched by many loving and caring figures from Mamma Margaret to Fr. Calosso. He had companions who inspired and challenges his dreams.





Steps and Influences Toward Realizing a Dream

A prophetic dream, significant relationships, spiritual guides, and a plan of life...this is the stuff of the Salesian Story.

In this first installment, we will look at the young boy Giovanni Bosco and examine those influences in his early life which enabled him to overcome many obstacles in fulfilling the prophetic dream at age nine.

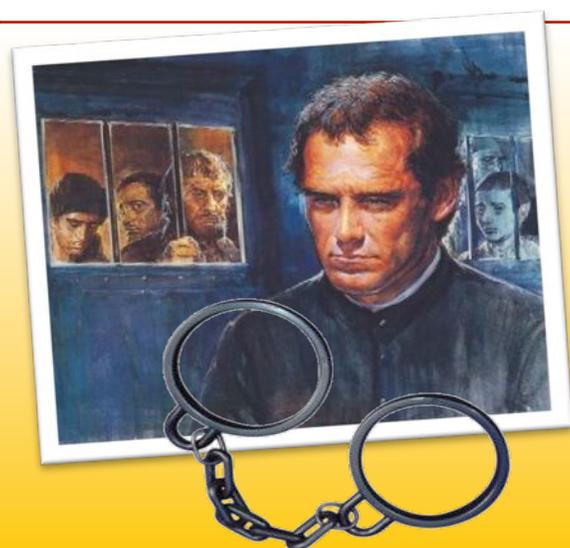
The stories are so iconic and familiar to the Salesian Family and are so close to us that we might easily miss some of the most important details which carve out a path of holiness and human formation necessary for our imitation as members of this family.

With the help of such researchers as Fr. Pietro

Stella, Fr. Pietro Braido, and our own Fr. Arthur Lenti, we might plumb more deeply the significance of these events and persons in the shaping of this great saint. Undertaking this investigation may renew our vision of the Spirituality of Accompaniment, the Preventive System, and the Mission of Don Bosco to adapt them to the living realities and the needs of the young for our time and place.

Each of us has a story with similar moments, persons, and influences. Each young person longs to be part of such a story, to make their lives journeys with meaning and purpose.

Let us all be conduits of holiness and meaning by connecting our stories and theirs to the story of Don Bosco.



Preventing Self-destruction

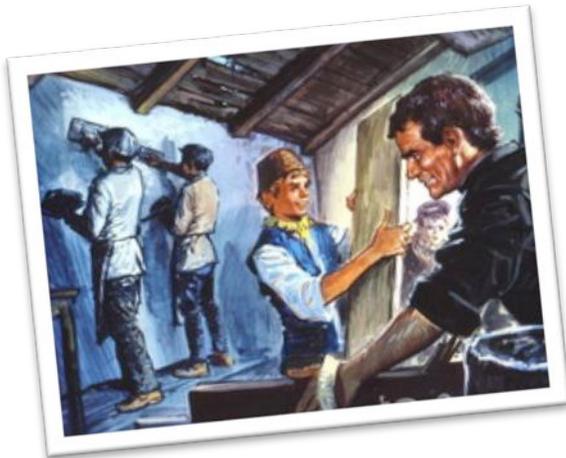
Finding a Way to Reach the Young Before Harm Can Come to Them

The prison visits with Fr. Cafasso had a profound impact on the young priest, John Bosco. He became convinced that God wanted him to work with the young to prevent them from falling into trouble, into prison, or into the exploitation by a world that considered youth expendable. His method was simple: Love the young into safety. Relate to them as valuable and restore their self-worth. Give them tools to become good citizens, educated members of their society, and mold their hearts with virtue and holiness. This Preventive System became the centerpiece of Don Bosco's work and spirituality.

Poor & Abandoned

Don Bosco Moves into the Streets...

Fr. Arthur is adamant in his critical study that Don Bosco did NOT move into the streets of Turin because of some romantic ideal to live out his priesthood in a particular way. Don Bosco moved out simply because the young were in dire need. From a band of traveling youngsters to a world-wide movement is the action of the Spirit of God at work to save souls. Don Bosco was the right instrument at the right time

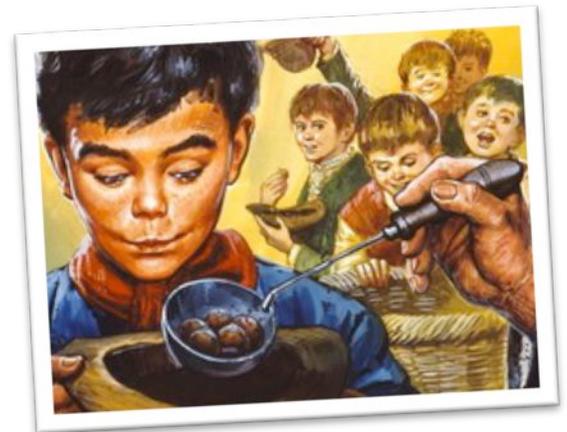


Training for Work and for Life...

Unique among other movements, Don Bosco began simply by offering practical skills to boys who needed work. It was one way to prevent them from becoming slaves of factories or living in the streets. Literate or illiterate, all the young found a welcome friend in this man who drew upon their natural abilities.

Bread, Work, and Paradise

Skills for working was only one practical result of Don Bosco's outreach, and there were many young people who lacked the most basic necessities such as a place to eat, to live, to study, and to play. The Oratory became Don Bosco's invitation into his family giving the poorest a place at his own table. He demonstrated a practical style of love that offered the embrace of a loving family.



For you I would give my last breath...

Pouring himself out for these poor and abandoned, Don Bosco became deathly ill. The boys he rescued kept vigil at the nearby Church, took turns keeping watch at his room, and prayed fervently for their advocate. God heard their prayer. Don Bosco knew that he had been spared to give every bit of his life for such as these. "For you I would give even my last breath!" he promised.

Don Bosco's Experience of Accompaniment

The Roots of a Salesian Spirituality of Accompaniment in the Lived Experience of Saint John Bosco

Premise

Much has been written on the life and the legacy of Saint John Bosco in the intervening years since his death in 1888. His particular style of education has been and remains the subject of great analyses and speculation. The stories and images of his life, from his childhood through his remarkable response to God's call as an apostle to the young, are rich and familiar to peoples and cultures throughout the world. The twentieth century introduced Salesian scholars dedicated to the spiritual life of this founder, educator, and saint seeking to uncover a distinctive spirituality for study and imitation. To harness the greatness of this figure has posed a tremendous challenge in all of this time. Students and scholars alike return again and again to the experiences of this man and to Saint John Bosco's personal record of his own encounters. This is the stuff of spirituality—the lived experience of God. Much more than simple stories, spirituality is *participation* and *mediation*. Christian faith, to be grounded in reality, “is not ritual, dogma, religion, or spiritual weirdness. It's authentic experience made personal through our full participation in what God is doing.”ⁱ

Participation reverberates throughout the Gospel revelations of Jesus—the fullness of encounter with God. From the outset of his ministry, Jesus invites his newly called disciples to “come and see.”ⁱⁱ The following of Christ becomes an experience of *relationship* and *accompaniment*. Instead, the disciples are not called to become spectators, but to “drink of the cup from which I must drink.”ⁱⁱⁱ The saints are those whose lives are more than mere models.

They are “part of the revelatory address from God calling us to decision.”^{iv} Hans Urs Von Balthasar insisted upon this important understanding of the saints and spirituality and is summarized succinctly by Larry S. Chapp of De Sales University in Pennsylvania:

Were it not for the visible holiness of the saints, it would be all too easy to dismiss Scripture and Church as ideological deformations of an originating historical event. The holiness of the saints displays something of the compelling beauty of the form of God's revelation in Christ, drawing us closer and provoking from us a dramatic decision. The ‘beauty’ of the saints is the evident sanity and reasonableness of their trust in God's revelation. They have a universal appeal to anyone whose ‘rationality’ has been transformed by sharing in this same attitude of trust. To that end they provide us with a living hermeneutic for an authentic universal grounded in an engraced rationality rather than the ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’.^v

Pope Pius XI eulogized Don Bosco on the occasion of his beatification describing this deep connection with God:

Union with God was habitual with him, even in the midst of the most absorbing occupations. Whether at home or abroad, in carriage or train, his discourse breathed the love of God, and was full of desire to increase His glory. His life was a continual prayer, an uninterrupted union with God. Faith—was thus one of the virtues most clearly observed in him, a Faith that led him ever to seek the glory of God in all the marvelous works which he undertook.

This high degree of Faith fostered his burning devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament and to the Mother of God, who was so closely associated with his apostolate; it accounts for his devotion to the Guardian Angels and the Saints, for his veneration for the Church and its Supreme Head, towards whom he ever manifested supreme loyalty and devotion.

While at prayer his outward demeanor was neither exaggerated nor affected, it was perfectly reverent and showed that he was absorbed in the presence of God.^{vi}

A study of Salesian spirituality, then, is a study of Don Bosco's personal encounter with God, a "visible holiness." Something of this encounter was so inviting and so tangible that it would win many hearts and become a style of spirituality nuanced by the special charism of accompaniment. An examination of such spirituality becomes a point of connection with God, a special revelation that is timeless. With the changing of seasons and cultures within the evolving realities of life, such spirituality waits to be discovered anew and applied to a given moment, prepared for the challenges such a moment presents. There is a familiarity in this process because an authentic spirituality will speak to the hungers of any heart in any age.

Don Bosco's Spirituality of Accompaniment: Winning and Guiding Young Hearts

Any reading of the life of Saint John Bosco will lead immediately to the conclusion that there were many key figures in his own life and throughout his life which became for him both friendly companions and spiritual guides. Various moments along his own journey of life are marked by a capturing of his heart and imagination spurring him into an uncertain and often frightening future with courage and faith. These touchstones along the path often became models from which he would draw *inspiration* and *guidance* and by which he would, in turn, offer both gifts to the young people considered his missionary focus. In the details of his own encounters, we find substance and precise characteristics of his particular spirituality: spirituality marked by the ability to attract the young, win their hearts, and shape their lives and souls to good purpose and holiness. To his story and these key figures we now turn.

Human and Spiritual Accompaniment in the life of Giovanni Bosco

Before Don Bosco won hearts to himself and transformed lives, his own heart had been won-over by many caring and well-placed individuals along his path. Sometimes these were the obvious persons within closest proximity. At other times, these were less intimate figures of his history--mentors at a distance, and even a cultural milieu fertile for his personal growth and development both as a man and as a believer. The Salesian world is deeply indebted to Pietro Stella, Pietro Braido, and Arthur Lenti to name just a few, for placing under the microscope such a milieu in an effort to bring Don Bosco's universal significance into greater relief. Sometimes, as such scholars maintain, historical and ecclesial events would fall in step with Don Bosco's journey assisting or provoking in him a personal integration and intuition. At the base of the saint, the educator, the founder, and the man John Bosco are found many persons and events whose accompaniment shaped his holiness and greatness.

Mamma Margherita and Giovanni Bosco's Experience of God

The role of Don Bosco's mother, Margherita Occhiena, has been recognized in our times as having the utmost importance in shaping the life of her son and has taken on the universal appeal to the vocation of all parents as the first educators and evangelizers of their children. This has been strongly and unanimously affirmed in the continuing process of her canonization. At the moment of this writing, the world looks to the mother of Don Bosco as Venerable Margherita, soon to be raised to the honors of the altar of sanctity. This affirmation sets in high relief the importance of accompaniment in one's journey of life. The child, Giovanni Bosco, first encountered God through his holy mother, and this encounter would provide the shape and character of his



life-long relationship with God, a relationship sustaining many attacks from within and without.

In Don Bosco's own biographical memoirs, *The Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, he begins a reminiscence of his mother with the occasion of his first communion made at the age of eleven years. It was Giovanni's mother who was his primary catechist and he would go on to pass his exam in catecheses and obtain admission to the sacrament. His recollection is telling as he describes the teaching he received from his mother nuanced by the capturing of his heart:

Amongst the many things that my mother repeated to me many times was this: 'My dear son, this is a great day for you. *I am convinced that God has really taken possession of your heart.* Now promise him to be good as long as you live. Go to communion frequently in the future, but beware of sacrilege. Always be frank in confession, be obedient always, go willingly to catechism and sermons. But for the love of God, avoid like the plague those who indulge in bad talk.'

I treasured my mother's advice and tried to carry it out. I think that from that day on there was some improvement in my life, especially in matters of obedience and submission to others. It was not easy for me to be submissive because I liked to do things my way and follow my own childish whims rather than listen to those who gave me advice or told me what to do.^{vii}

Though Mamma Margherita could neither read nor write, she had a profound knowledge of Bible stories and a grasp of a faith that was rooted in the realities of life. For her, God was a part of everyday life, as real as the sun rising and setting, as close as each breath. She had recognized something unique and special in her youngest son; she believed his heart to be possessed by God and sought to nurture that holiness in every way possible. That conviction would lead her to tough and difficult decisions for Giovanni's future as well as lead to confrontation with her step-son Antonio. Determined nonetheless, she was

guided by what she believed was Giovanni's calling. Her first act of spiritual accompaniment was to confirm the stirring Giovanni felt within him and enable him to respond to that stirring despite the obstacles. To this end, she not only goaded him into hard work in the fields of the farm, but also to take up reading and writing. She urged him to do all that was appropriate for his age and encouraged his recreations and his fascinations with acrobatics. These were the first seeds of a thirst for literature and culture and a love for activities beyond the classroom with their power to attract and entertain others.

Perhaps most important to the spiritual formation of Giovanni Bosco was his mother's advice for and practice of frequent communion and reconciliation. Her daily devotions to the Mother of God and her immersion in prayer deeply influenced the man who would make the pillars of his own spirituality devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Mother of God. He would carry with him and bestow upon his own students the desire for frequent communion and sincere confession. These were the basic tools for fine-tuning one's soul and for living in the presence of a loving God.

It must be mentioned that Mamma Margherita worked, lived, and taught within a particular social, political, and religious milieu. This, too, has bearing on the formation of the child, Giovanni Bosco. Much research has been completed with this in mind and is found particularly in the works of Pietro Stella and Pietro Braidò. Stella explains that Piedmont had been spared much of the war and turmoil that marked the century of reason, the 18th century. The contemporaries of Mamma Margherita stood solid in the belief that this era had not, in fact, swept away the God of the ages nor the fierce religiosity and faith of the common man. As revolutions swept the regions bordering Piedmont and raged in much of Western Europe, Piedmont would feel their effect in a growing indifference to faith and a mockery of religious rites.^{viii} Despite these effects, the period of restoration gave the people of Piedmont an assurance that God was indeed a victorious and patient God.

Margherita shared this confidence unswervingly. “Dominating everything was the idea of a personal God: the most-high Lord but also a Father of infinite goodness. The natural and supernatural orders were tacitly impressed on Giovanni’s mind as he learned of the ties that united the frail human person to God as creature or adopted child.^{ix}”

For Margherita, even Giovanni Bosco’s vocational dream at the age of nine became the catalyst for her choices as the boy grew. Sometimes those choices were daunting, such as her decision to send Giovanni away in order to pursue studies. Still, no decision was taken independent of the abiding sense of God’s plan for herself, for her family, and for her youngest son.

A detailed treatment of Don Bosco’s understandings of God from childhood through all the pivotal moments of his life has been handled with care and precision in Stella’s work. It will serve the purpose of this study to highlight those details which contributed to the formation of a spirituality of accompaniment. Among such details is the respect for creation Giovanni Bosco learned from life with his mother and family. Stella quotes some examples from the writings of Saint John Bosco in *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo* published by him in 1858:

Seeing the order and wondrous harmony that reigns throughout the universe, we cannot hesitate for a moment to believe in a God who has created all things, given them movement, and preserves them... In his omnipotence he has given existence to everything and he provides for them out of his goodness. It is he who sustains and sets in motion the enormous weight of the vast whole. It is he who gives form and life to all living things...

But here we encounter a truth that will certainly increase our amazement. All the things we see in the universe have been created for us. The sun that shines during the day, the moon that brightens the darkness of night, the stars that decorate the firmament, the air that

enables us to breathe, the water that serves human needs, the fire that warms us, the earth that offers us its fruits: all were made by God for us...

What feelings of gratitude, respect, and love we should have for such a great and good God! What should we give in return for the great kindness of our God?^x

What had been impressed upon the mind and heart of the young Giovanni Bosco was the centrality of the human relationship to God. God places humanity at the center of creation by “putting all things under [humanity’s] feet.” This relationship permeated all that structured Giovanni Bosco’s vision of reality and creation itself. This was a choice of predilection, an intentional invitation for collaboration and accompaniment. This was the model of ministry Saint John Bosco would enshrine in the work of his life. The framework of this relationship is the generous act of creation by a loving God for the sole purpose of rising up a being to share his likeness, to reciprocate his loving outreach, and to share in the very act of creating with him. Far removed is a God of distance and judgment unconcerned and uninvolved with his creation. Instead, this is an image of a God walking in the garden of his creation with the pupil of his eye. However, it is in this garden that the awful and real choice of rejection remains perennially present. This relationship, initiated by God, demands a free response. Accompaniment is an invitation to journey intentionally with the God of creation and invitation. Accompaniment is an act of trust. And this relationship hangs delicately in the will of man.

Saint John Bosco’s own journey would reveal to him the many instances of persons choosing to turn away from this relationship. It would forge in his heart a burning desire to lead others to the awareness of this loving invitation and the dreaded fear of its rejection. Such desire within him would etch in bold letters his life vocation to seek souls above all else.

Perhaps his step-brother Antonio, six years his senior, would become for Giovanni the first and lasting impression of one whose heart

may grow cold to such invitation. His response to the protests of Antonio regarding Giovanni's pursuit of education and the answering of Giovanni's felt calling, would only deepen the urgency for Giovanni to remove whatever obstacles would stand in the way of responding to his own invitation. This concentrated focus upon the will of his God would forge in young Giovanni the desire for partnering with others in responding to his calling, and with time, in responding to the calls of others.

Reaching the peak of family turmoil, Giovanni's mother arranged for Giovanni to move away at the young age of twelve, first to her parents' home in a hamlet near Asti and then to the large farm of the Moglia family, friends of the Occhiena's. Stella points out that Giovanni would have most certainly dreamed of attending school in Castelnuovo or Chieri immediately, but his family was obviously not capable of such expense.^{xi} In this period of waiting, working the fields, becoming involved in the parish near the Moglia Farm, and reflecting on his future, a contemplative spirit of patience and trust was born. His prayers would be answered in two years: an experienced elderly man was assigned as chaplain at Murialdo, Don Giovanni Calosso.^{xii} Befriending and admiring the young man, he would intervene in the family situation and offer compromises so that Giovanni could return home.

During these special years, Giovanni had experienced the accompaniment of the Moglia family and that of the kindly chaplain toward achieving his life goals. They recognized and respected the boy's sense of faith and trust in God. So much did the chaplain recognize his young friend's faith and intelligence that he partnered with him personally in his education.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Leonard SWEET, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, Colorado Springs, Waterbrook Press, 2007, 111.

ⁱⁱ *John 1, 39.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Matthew 20, 23.*

^{iv} Larry CHAPP, *Revelation* in Edward T. OAKES and David MOSES (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, 23.

^v CHAPP, *Revelation*, 23. This quotation contains references to a work of VON BALTHASAR, *Explorations in Theology*, volume 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, tr. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989, 159.

^{vi} W.G. Austen, *Saint John Bosco*, London, Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 1954, section entitled, "The Science of the Saints." This homily is also given in its full text in the original Italian in Eugenio CERIA, *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco, Volume XIX La Glorificazione (1888-1938)*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1939, 131-166.

^{vii} Giovanni BOSCO, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, trans. Daniel LYONS, New Rochelle, Don Bosco Publications, 1989, 33.

^{viii} Cf. Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, translated by John DRURY, New Rochelle, Salesiana Publisher, 2005, 4.

^{ix} STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 4 -5.

^x Pietro STELLA, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, New Rochelle, Salesiana Publishers, 1996, 6 - 7.

^{xi} Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 22.

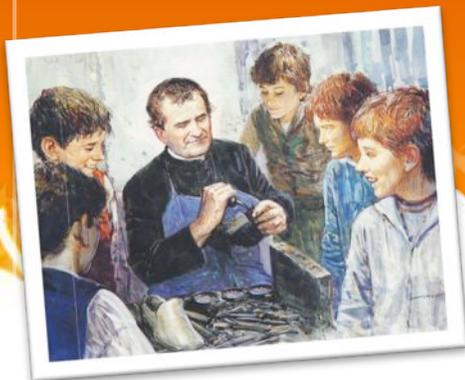
^{xii} STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 17.

Next Issue: *Don Calosso Friend & Spiritual Director*

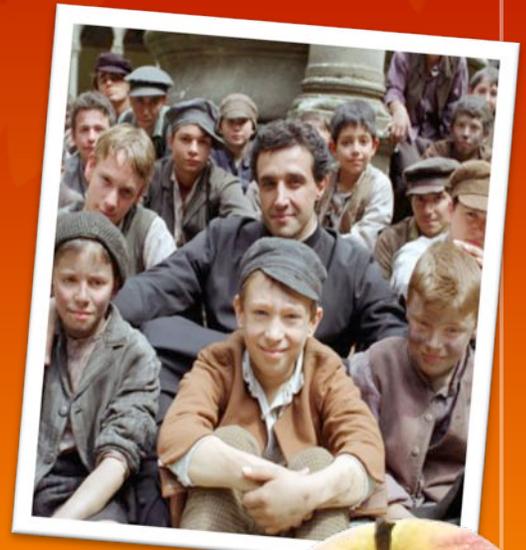


Gather! Study! Pray!

Now that you have begun this journey of study, take this information and share it with your staff, your families, your colleagues, and the youth in your area. Go forward with meetings of your own design. Create powerpoints, set up movie nights to watch a video of Don Bosco's life, gather for prayer and study. The rest is up to you!



It's Your Turn!



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

Institute of Salesian Spirituality

1831 Arch Street]
Berkeley, CA 94709

Guidelines for Deeper Study...

From the Critical Work of Fr. Arthur Lenti
See *Don Bosco History and Spirit* volume 1:
Don Bosco's Formative Years in Historical Context

- Don Bosco's Ambivalent Attitude toward His Own Biography, p. 83ff
- Appendix 1: Biographical Sketches of J. B. Lemoyne, E. Ceria, and A. Amadei, pp 93-125
- Chapter 7: Don Bosco's "Memoirs of the Oratory: and Bonetti;s "Storia dell'Oratorio" pp 128-163
- Chapter 8: A Childhood of Promise in Times of Political Upheaval (1815-1824), pp. 165-182.
- Appendix I: Margaret Occhiena Bosco (1788-1856): Genealogical Table and Biographical Repertory, pp. 183-194.
- Appendix II: Biographical Sketches

of Father Joseph Lacqua and Giovanna Maria (Marianna) Occhiena, pp. 194-196.

These chapters and indices examine the political, social, and religious setting for the formative years of the young Giovanni Bosco as well as an excellent charting of the various sources from Don Bosco to the first key Salesian Chroniclers

Worthy of special study is the graphing of Don Bosco's earliest years in a table comparing the details from *The Memoirs of the Oratory* and *The Biographical Memoirs*. This table is located in Chapter 8, Appendix 1, pp. 183-193.

The following chapters investigate Don Bosco's adolescent years from (1824-1830) which we will follow in the coming issues.