

Don Bosco's Political and Religious Concerns in the Times of the Liberal Revolution in Italy

Some Significant Letters (1858-1871)

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Introduction

The critical edition in progress of Don Bosco's collected letters by Father Francesco Motto offers a great number of unpublished texts.¹ Motto retrieved these letters from a number of archives (Vatican, diocesan and State) as well as from private collections. Some of these documents are particularly significant in as much as they show special, even unsuspected, facets of Don Bosco's activity. Indeed a number of them, addressed to Church and State authorities in critical historical circumstances constitute important documentation of Don Bosco's religious thought and political attitudes. This last group in particular forms the object of the present article.

Letters of a similar character had already seen publication in Father Eugenio Ceria's collection and in the Biographical Memoirs.² Motto has recently drawn our attention to some of these letters, without limiting himself to unpublished texts, in several articles.³ Here, however, our attention is focused on

¹ *Giovanni Bosco, Epistolario. Introduzione testi critici e note* a cura di Francesco Motto, Vol. I, II and III (Roma: LAS, 1991, 1996 and 1999). [Motto, *Ep*]. See my review of Motto's *Epistolario* in *Journal of Salesian Studies* 11:1 (2000)181-184.

² An earlier edition of Don Bosco's collected letters is *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco* a cura di Eugenio Ceria, Vol. I-IV (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1959). [Ceria, *Ep*] *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco* (San Benigno Canavese and Turin) I-IX (1898-1917 by Giovanni Battista Lemoine); X (1939 by Angelo Amadei); XI-XIX (1930-1939 by Eugenio Ceria) [IBM] English Edition: *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, tr. from the original Italian, Diego Borghatello, Editor-in-Chief, vol. I-XVI. (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1995). [EBM]. By editorial policy a number of letters edited in IBM were omitted in EBM.

³ Francesco Motto, "Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour and Antonelli nel 1858," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 5 (1986:1) 3-20; "La mediazione di Don Bosco fra Santa

some letters first published in Motto's collection and dating from 1858 to 1871, hence from the critical period of the unification of Italy and the taking of Rome. For it is our aim to present to our readership letters that have significance for an understanding of Don Bosco's political and religious attitudes and that were only recently published.

How are these texts presented in the present survey? First of all and obviously, our purpose is served only if they are given in English translation, a translation that strives to be accurate though not literal. The Italian text (from Motto's critical edition) is given in footnotes for the purpose of comparison only for special passages. Secondly, the historical context of each letter requires some attention, but only enough is given to it that seems necessary to understand the references made to persons and events.⁴ Thirdly, some comment is added on aspects of Don Bosco's activity, religious thought and political attitudes, the very things that (in the view adopted for the present article) make these letters significant.⁵

Sede e Governo per la concessione degli 'Exequatur' ai vescovi d'Italia (1872-1874)," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 6:1 (1987) 3-79; "L'azione mediatrice di Don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti dal 1858 alla morte di Pio IX (1878)," in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze*, ed. by Pietro Braido (Roma: LAS, 1987), 251-328; "Orientamenti politici di don Bosco nella corrispondenza con Pio IX del triennio 1858-1861," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 12:1 (1993) 9-37; [Motto, *Orientamenti I*] "Orientamenti politici di Don Bosco nella corrispondenza con Pio IX del decennio dopo l'unità d'Italia," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 19:2 (2000) 201-221. [Motto, *Orientamenti II*] See also A. Lenti, "Politics of the 'Our Father' and Politics of the Holy Father: Don Bosco's Mediation in Church-State Affairs," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10:2 (1999) 181-245. [Lenti, *DB's Mediation*]

⁴ For this purpose a large body of literature is available, both scholarly and popular. For Pius IX, the pope of the period (1846-1878), the basic critical biography is Giacomo Martina, *Poi IX*, 3 vol. (Roma: PUG, 1967, 1986, 1990). Both Ceria and Motto provide handy notes on events and persons.

⁵ Each letter is translated in its entirety as given in Motto's critical edition. This includes the awkward and overly voluble expression of respect and submission in the closures. It is to be noted that in writing to the Holy Father Don Bosco always signed himself, "Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni." In writing to other dignitaries, on the other hand he signed himself, "Sac. Gio. Bosco."

An asterisk prefixed to a date means that the date has been transferred from the bottom to the top. The date of an undated letter might be argued from external evidence, in which case it is placed in square brackets.

All square-bracketed items are supplied by the translator, including the numbering of the paragraphs. This is intended to facilitate checking the references in the Comment.

1. Letter to Pope Pius IX, June 14, 1858⁶

Through the late 1840s and the 1850s Don Bosco was developing the work of the oratories and thinking of a society that would eventually make the work permanent. In 1858, with Seminarian Michele Rua as secretary, he took a trip to Rome to seek Pope Pius IX's advice. On this first of twenty Roman trips, he spent some 55 days (from February 20 to April 16) attending to various items of business and taking in the sights that the eternal city and "center of Christianity" had to offer. In audiences with the pope, the idea of the Salesian Society took shape, and quickly found expression in the first constitutions that followed in 1858 and in the founding in 1859. Some two months after his return to Turin, he wrote to Pope Pius IX.

Turin, June 14, 1858

Holy Father,

[1] Back among my boys, I cannot say enough of the things heard and seen in the eternal city, those things especially that have to do with Your Holiness, for my heart overflows with gratitude toward Your Holiness' sacred person.

[2] The spiritual favors that you have so kindly granted me are already bearing their intended good fruit. In thirty or more different towns, people immediately set about planning the celebration of the month of May in honor of the Mary, Mother of God. This effort found encouragement in the indulgences you granted for the singing of sacred hymns.

[3] Also I find satisfaction in being able now to provide accurate information about things [religious] in Rome, and thus offset insinuations coming from people who whether through malice or through ignorance distort the meaning of even the holiest things.

[4] *One thing, however, has been a source of heartfelt regret to me after leaving Rome—not to have had more time at my disposal so that I could come to see Your Holiness again, since in your kindness you had offered to receive me.*⁷ I believe it had to do with our archbishop. Be that as it may, I would again recommend our diocese in its pitiable state to Your Holiness' good and fatherly heart. I entreat Your Holiness with the words that the faithful of Lyons of old spoke to St. Eleutherius, your worthy predecessor: "Holy Father, act to bring peace to our Church and help us in our need." True, we are not suffering out-

⁶ Motto, *Ep* I, 351-353, # 363, from the Secret Vatican Archive [ASV], Don Bosco's holograph.

⁷ *Una cosa però lasciava in me vivo rincrescimento dopo la mia partenza da Roma, e si è di non aver più avuto tempo di presentarmi da V. S. mentre appunto degnavasi di ammettermi all'udienza.* (How could Don Bosco "cancel" a papal audience "for lack of time"?)

right persecution and there is no bloodshed, but evil is rampant and the damage immense. We still have a lot of good people, but they are oppressed and helpless. Evil people get bolder by the day. The weak are daily led astray in great numbers. *If by height of misfortune the heretics were to go to power legally, I have reason to fear that defections would reach frightening proportions even from the ranks of those who occupy posts of responsibility in this diocese. I say this in the Lord. May Your Holiness forgive me.*⁸

[5] I don't know if the idea expressed by Mr. de Cavour has anything in it to commend it to your Holiness. If it were meant to establish a precedent and a general principle, I would not trust the proposal. But since it is meant to deal with one particular case, I think it holds out some hope of success, especially since the original good intentions endure. In any case, your Holiness needs to act in some way for the good of the Turin diocese, because the evils that would result from inaction would be irreparable. I speak in the Lord.

[6] Rumor has it, and it has also been reported in the press, that Father [Giovanni Antonio] Genta, pastor of the church of St. Francis of Paola in this capital city, is about to be named bishop of Asti. I would like to bring to Your Holiness' attention that he is very much the liege of the government. He has recently been decorated with the cross of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus "for his enlightened zeal," the very words of the citation. He is a follower of Gioberti, and has given indications of supporting the Bill on civil marriage.

[7] I beg Your Holiness's kind indulgence for the words that a son kneeling at Your Holiness' feet addresses to you, for he loves you more than himself. I humbly ask your apostolic blessing on myself and on my poor children. I assure you of our constant prayers, that the Lord God may grant Your Holiness many more years for the good of the Church. As for me, it is my hope and firm resolve, with God's help, to work with all my strength for the good of the Church to my dying breath.

Your Holiness' and holy Church's,
Most devoted and humble son,
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

At the time of writing, Don Bosco was also involved in the problem of exiled Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, a matter to which he refers in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the letter. Luigi Fransoni (1789-1862), was archbishop of Turin from 1832,

⁸ *Che se per colmo di sciagura l'eresia montasse legalmente al potere, io temerei spaventose cadute anche da parte di chi in questa Diocesi copre sublimi cariche ecclesiastiche. Io parlo nel Signore: V. S. mi perdoni.*

through the period of the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy. Completely opposed to the liberal revolution of 1848 and connected reforms, he was exiled to Lyons (France) in 1850. And there he died in 1862. In 1858 tentative negotiations began between the Holy See and Prime Minister Camillo Cavour of Piedmont-Sardinia aimed at providing Turin with a bishop acceptable to both parties. Don Bosco acted as a go-between. The negotiations broke down. Turin remained without a resident bishop until Fransoni's death in 1862. There followed an additional period of vacancy until the appointment of Archbishop Riccardi di Netro in 1867. In spite of best efforts, the religious situation in the diocese deteriorated considerably. But this was not all. Liberal reforms following the granting of the constitution in 1848 established freedom of worship and of the press, abolished the Church's traditional privileges (1850), disbanded religious corporations and confiscated Church property (1855), and reorganized all education on a secular basis (1848 and 1859). The chaotic situation that ensued, coupled with a ground swell of anticlericalism explains, if not justifies, Don Bosco's gloomy assessment. There is also a prophetic hint of greater trials in store. He speaks "in the Lord."

In Paragraph # 6 Don Bosco alerts the pope to the danger of appointing a liberal bishop, in the person of Father Giovanni Antonio Genta (1810-1888). There were quite a few liberals among the clergy, people who saw value in the new political and social order, especially in the moderate form it had taken in the kingdom of Sardinia. These people were also "patriotic," that is, they supported the idea of a united Italy. Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), a political philosopher and writer, was one of these priests. At first he advocated a federated Italy under the presidency of the Pope (Neo-Guelphism); later he joined the general liberal and patriotic movement. Don Bosco at first praised him; later he regarded him as a renegade priest.

Among the liberal reforms was that of "civil marriage," proposed in a Bill that recognized the legal validity of marriage only if contracted before the civil authority. In 1852 the Bill was passed in the House but was defeated in the Senate. It was finally passed in 1866.

2. Letter to Pope Pius IX. February 1859⁹

Due to misunderstandings and entrenched positions, by mid-1858 the Fransoni case seemed to be "dead in the water." On July 11 Cavour left for France for talks with Emperor Napoleon III that led to an alliance, to the war against Aus-

⁹ Motto, *Ep I*, 368, # 383, from *ASV Ep. Lat. Pos. et Min.* 93 [1878], Don Bosco's holograph.

tria (1859) and to the unification of Italy (1861).¹⁰ In spite of bitter disappointment, Don Bosco tried to see Prime Minister Cavour again and to get the conversations restarted. On August 4, 1858 he wrote to Prime Minister Cavour pleading with him "in the midst of the many and grave affairs of State not to forget this poor diocese of ours," and declaring himself "ready to do whatever lies in my power for my country and my religion."¹¹ There was apparently no reply, but as late as February 1859 Don Bosco, as he states in the present letter [# 3], was still in touch with Cavour.

In writing to the pope and other Church dignitaries about sensitive matters, Don Bosco never used the postal service, but always made use of trusted persons, Msgr. Sossi in this instance.¹² The letter itself is undated, but the February date may be argued from Msgr. Sossi's movements attested in the diocesan archive.¹³

[Turin, February 1859]

Holy Father,

[1] A trusted person leaving for Rome, the Rev. Msgr. Sossi of the Asti cathedral, affords me the opportunity of kneeling before Your Holiness and of conveying to you a piece of information that I believe to be urgent.

[2] From some written messages that happened to pass through my hands, I learnt that some evil-intentioned persons are planning to set up revolutionary cells at Civitavecchia, Ancona and Rome. Obviously their aim is to foster revolutionary sentiment, so as to be ready to move into action by the end of the month of March. I could not learn the names of the persons in question. The letters were signed with a simple F. Δ∇.

[3] The situation in our diocese is becoming more murky. Evil is on the rise. Cavour appears to have good will (if it's genuine), but he is surrounded by vicious rogues who are dragging him God only knows to what extremes. However, just this morning he told me that he means to present candidates for other vacant episcopal sees.

¹⁰ These important talks between Napoleon II and Cavour were held at Plombières (France) on July 20-21, 1858.

¹¹ Don Bosco to Camillo Cavour, August 4, 1858, in Motto, *Ep* I, 357 (from Turin's State Archive).

¹² Msgr. Antonio Vitaliano Sossi, doctor in theology, canon and provost of the cathedral of Asti, died in 1891. [Motto, *Ibid.*, referring to *Bollettino Salesiano*, May 1891, p. 94]

¹³ Cf. Motto, *Ep* I, 368, # 383.

[4] I beg you to overlook the liberty I'm taking with this letter. My boys, seminarians and priests join me in offering prayers every day for Your Holiness. May God give you good health and grace and keep you many more years for the good of the Church. All of us kneel before Your Holiness and with the greatest reverence implore your holy, apostolic blessing, while on behalf of all I profess to be,

Your Holiness'
Devoted son in C[hrist]
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

The year 1859 marked a turning point in the story of the *Risorgimento*. This was because of the Second War against Austria and the revolutionary spirit that it set ablaze all over Italy. But even before the war revolutionary movements were stirring in many regions of Italy, especially in the Papal States, wherein Civitavecchia, Ancona and, of course, Rome [# 2 of the letter] were located. The war had barely begun (March 27) when Florence (Tuscany) revolted against the Austrian grand duke (March 27-28). Parma and Modena (Emilia) revolted in May, and in June 11-22 Bologna and all of Romagna (the Legations) revolted against the papal rule. The Cardinal Legate of Bologna was forced to leave the city. Although the annexation of the Legations to Piedmont could not be finalized before March 12, 1860, by mid-June 1859 Romagna was lost to the Holy See. On June 20 Pius IX excommunicated all involved in the revolt.

Freemasonry took an active part in promoting the goals of the *Risorgimento*. The delta, the triangle and the inverted 3-dot triangle [# 2] were Masonic symbols.¹⁴

3. Letter to Pius IX, November 9, 1859¹⁵

Meanwhile Austria was roundly defeated in several decisive battles, and on July 11, 1859, an armistice was concluded that transferred Lombardy from Austria to France and thence to Piedmont. Although only the region of Lombardy was annexed to Piedmont by the terms of the armistice, the war set off revolutionary uprisings all over Italy. In July revolts broke out in the Marches and in Umbria

¹⁴ Motto, *Ep I*, 368, # 383. He refers to R. F. Esposito, *La massoneria e l'Italia dal 1800 ai nostri giorni*, 5th ed. (Roma: EP, 1980), Appendix V.

¹⁵ Motto. *Ep I*, 386-388, # 410, from *ASV Ep. Lat. Pos. et Min.* 62, Don Bosco's holograph.

(central Papal States), and in autumn 1859 Tuscany, Romagna and Parma asked for annexation, which was finally achieved in March 1860.

Amid the stirrings of revolution in the Papal States, Don Bosco was again looking for a way to get a letter to the pope by some trusted messenger. This time it was "Marquis Scarampi," a friend and collaborator.¹⁶

The letter opens with Don Bosco's typical expression of "papal ecclesiology," before going on to comments on the political and religious situation, to a description of Don Bosco's activities in Turin and to pessimistic speculations concerning the future.

*Turin November 9, 1859

Holy Father,

[1] It was with anxious anticipation that I waited for a safe means to reach Your Holiness by letter. My purpose was respectfully to ask for your blessing to strengthen us in the midst of our present trials. *I also wanted to assure Your Holiness of our filial Catholic devotion to your sacred person. You are the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ and supreme shepherd of the Church, with whom whoever is not united cannot hope for salvation.*¹⁷ I am now able to fulfill this desire of mine through the kindness of Marquis Scarampi. This zealous confrere of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and our steadfast collaborator in the work of the oratories is leaving for Rome where he will spend the winter.

[2] In the first place, Holy Father, let me say that we deeply regret and disapprove of what our government has been doing or instigated in Romagna. We unfortunately were powerless to prevent such evil; but through the spoken and written word we have consistently voiced our disapproval of what has been happening there. Most of the diocesan clergy, practically all the parish priests, and the majority of Catholic lay people here share these same sentiments, even though they are afraid to take a public stance. But a vicious, hostile press, threats and promises by the government have sadly won over very many who were faltering or afraid. As a consequence the number of fearlessly active Catholics is greatly diminished.

[3] Faced with such a disastrous religious situation, good Catholics have closed ranks around their bishops, offering their services. But we, the people of Turin, have been and are facing much greater dangers by far. Our Archbishop is

¹⁶ Motto [*Ep* I, 388] believes this gentleman to be the Marquis Ludovico Galeazzo Scarampi di Pruney, "a conservative Catholic and a papal liege man."

¹⁷ *Anche per assicurare V.S. del cattolico e filiale attaccamento all Sacra di Lei persona come successore di S. Pietro, Vicario di Gesù Cristo, supremo pastore della Chiesa a cui, chi non è unito, non può sperare salute.*

in exile. Our Vicar General is reduced to silence by threats and harassment. The Protestants enjoy official protection and are hard at work spreading their errors, with plenty of money. The press is given free rein and the teaching in the schools is unchecked. All these evils acting together have poisoned the moral and religious life of the people with their deadly contagion.

[4] In spite of this we have been and are doing all we can to neutralize this evil and its effects. *We have formed a kind of society consisting chiefly of priests and seminarians. Together we try our best to spread good books and journals. We preach, conduct spiritual retreats, triduums and novenas, and are engaged in catechetical instruction. All this we do with the sole aim of inculcating the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith and respect for the supreme head of Christendom.*¹⁸ By these means we have succeeded in instilling sound religious principles in the minds of many young people. My estimate is that over 3,000 youngsters attend our oratories and our evening or day school on Sunday and holy days. All of them show good disposition, receive the sacraments of confession and communion, and are eager to hear the word of God.

[5] About 500 youngsters are enrolled in our school, and we have some 300 boarders, of whom eighteen donned the clerical habit this year and two joined the Order of Preachers. In addition two were recently ordained priests, and three more with God's help are looking forward to being ordained this year. By a wholly mysterious disposition of Divine Providence, our school has been allowed to operate without disturbance, and our teachers conduct their classes unhindered.

[6] But, Holy Father, if I may speak plainly, this raging storm is far from spent. A government that thrives on revolution frightens me, as do the defections from the ranks of good practicing Catholics, each day more numerous. *The enemies of social order are seeking political asylum here or joining the rebels in Romagna in ever-increasing numbers, and this frightens me. But my worst fear is that Your Holiness may have to suffer even more violent harassment and persecutions of all kinds. May God spare you such trials!*¹⁹

[7] These words come from the heart of a devoted son who lives in constant fear lest some evil befall his beloved father. I pray the holy Immaculate Virgin to intercede with God on our behalf, so that we may see better times for the people and peace assured to the Church. Your Holiness may take some com-

¹⁸ *Ci siamo uniti in una specie di società soprattutto di ecclesiastici: facciamo quanto si può per diffondere buoni libri, e buoni giornali; Si predica; si danno esercizi, tridui e novene e catechismi sempre nello scopo di insinuare i fondamenti della cattolica nostra religione ed il rispetto al supremo Gerarca della cristianità.*

¹⁹ *Temo il grande numero di nemici dell'ordine che si rifugiano tra di noi o vanno ad ingrossare le file dei ribelli nelle Romagne; temo poi, Dio tenga lontano tal flagello, temo che Vostra Santità sia ancor maggiormente molestata e forse perseguita chi sa in quante maniere.*

fort in the fact that as soon as uprisings broke out in the States of the Holy See my youngsters decided to offer special prayers for you every day. Ten or more take turns in receiving Holy Communion for Your Holiness' continued good health, grace and preservation.

[8] In presenting these few remarks, I may have failed to show due respect. If so, in your great kindness please forgive me. As for me, I now kneel at Your Holiness' feet to implore your apostolic blessing. In this I represent the many priests working with me in the sacred ministry, some fifty seminarians, candidates for the priesthood, some 200 youngsters who are considering the ecclesiastical state as a vocation, all my young boarders and all the youngsters who attend the oratories. All of us together kneel before you and ask for your blessing, as though it came from Jesus Christ himself. May it strengthen us in the practice of our holy Catholic faith and in our resolve to lay down our very lives rather than to say or do anything contrary to that profession. Amen.

Your Holiness'
Most indebted and devoted son,
Father Gioanni Bosco

[Comment]

As indicated above, in the aftermath of the war against Austria some Italian regional states revolted against their rulers, elected constitutional assemblies, and requested annexation. The papal Legations of Romagna (the cities Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì and Ravenna, northernmost part of the Papal States) were among these. King Victor Emmanuel II cautiously promised to support their cause within his government and with foreign powers. The pope responded by expelling the Piedmontese ambassador from Rome, and by a strongly worded letter of protest. Such were the political machinations to which Don Bosco refers in #2 of the letter.

In paragraph # 3 Don Bosco describes the religious situation in Turin, rendered desperate by the Archbishop's exile, the government's repressive measures, and the freedom (amounting to license) allowed to the Protestants and the anticlerical press.

He goes on [# 4] to report on what was being done at the Oratory to counteract the evil and speaks of the formation of "a kind of society" and of its publishing and pastoral activities, especially as they affected young people. He is speaking, of course, of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. True, the official "founding" (December 18, 1859) had not yet taken place at the time of writing

(November 9), but the group had already coalesced before Don Bosco's first meeting with Pius IX (early 1858).²⁰

The figure given for attendance at the oratories [#4] is a "ballpark figure," and so must be also those given in # 5 for enrollment in the Oratory school and for the boarders. But it should be added that by late 1859 a five-year course of secondary studies (begun in 1855) was in full and apparently satisfactory operation. Likewise by the time of writing the new and larger Home attached to the Oratory capable of accommodating a large number of boarders, had been built in two stages (1853 and 1856), to replace the old Pindari house.

Don Bosco's gloomy assessment and forecast [# 6], based on his observation of the course that the revolution was taking, were not off the mark by much. Nor were his fears for the pope's safety ill founded as things looked in 1859. Later statements, uttered in a prophetic vein, would be much more drastic.

4. Letter to Pope Pius IX, April 13, 1860²¹

As Don Bosco remarks [# 2, below] revolutionary violence continued unabated even as Don Bosco was penning his letter. As a matter of fact, as related below, military operation by Piedmont and Garibaldi would shortly unite most of Italy.

Although Don Bosco's primary purpose in writing was to present to the Pope his youngsters' offering for Peter's Pence and to explain their touching gesture, he could not refrain from making a reference to the critical political situation and from expressing again his dark forebodings.

²⁰ Father Vittorio Alasonatti writing to clerical student Angelo Savio on February 6, 1858 (before Don Bosco's first trip to Rome), though making no reference to vows, confirms the existence of such a group "united as confreres in spirit under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales." He cautions him not to speak about it in public, "until we see more clearly whether it is the Lord's good pleasure to prosper the group or to dissolve it—and this might shortly be decided when Don Bosco journeys to Rome at the beginning of Lent." [Letter of February 6, 1858 in *ASC* 270: Alasonatti.] Likewise, speaking of the origin of the Society in Chapter II of the first draft of the constitutions (composed after his return from Rome in 1858) Don Bosco writes: "A number of priests banded together to form a kind of congregation while helping one another by mutual good example and instruction. [...] They regarded Fr. John Bosco as their superior. And although no vows were made, nevertheless the rules that are here presented were [already] observed in practice. Fifteen people at present profess these rules: 5 priests, 8 seminarians, and 2 laymen. [Motto, *Testi critici*, 70]"

²¹ Motto, *Ep* I, 400-401, # 429, from the Vatican Apostolic Library, section *Indirizzi Pio IX serie* III n. 2061, Don Bosco's holograph.

*Turin, April 13, 1860

Holy Father,

[1] For some time now, Holy Father, my youngsters have wanted to give some sign of gratitude and veneration towards Your Holiness, whom we acknowledge as a good and generous father and Jesus' own Vicar. But times have been so bad that, to avoid putting ourselves in danger to no purpose, we had to be satisfied with offering prayers to God in the privacy of our houses and of our churches.

[2] But now, in spite of the fact that revolutionary violence continues unabated, my youngsters of their own accord have wanted to take up a collection and contribute their mite, a pittance really, for Peter's Pence. Those boys that could not contribute anything at all because of their utter poverty pledged instead to receive Holy Communion for Your Holiness' intention and for the peace of the Church.

[3] Seconding their outburst of religious fervor I take the liberty of placing humbly at Your Holiness' feet a message from them signed by all contributors. I do so with the same heartfelt sentiment with which they themselves express their hearts' affection toward you, the best of fathers. The small sum of money collected has been entrusted to the editors of the newspaper *L'Armonia* for safe delivery.

[4] Holy Father, we are at the moment living through most dangerous and trying times. Up until now the Piedmontese clergy has stood firm. Now, however, threats, promises, gifts of money and the bad example of clergy from regions that have been annexed, give us cause to fear for the future. In some dioceses a number of the clergy have publicly signified their support of current government policy. Some religious corporations have even put on light displays to celebrate the *much-touted annexation*. The revolutionary plan now calls for the invasion not only of Romagna but also of all the other provinces of the [States of the] Holy See, as well as Naples, Sicily, etc. Our holy religion is legally opposed and reviled. We have no means of defending it except by our little popular pamphlets, and by our classroom teaching and catechism classes.

[5] Holy Father, *in view of the present situation, were we to rely on human help, we would have to be prepared for the worst: destruction of the faith, and bloodshed for those who would rise in its defense.*²²

[6] However, Holy Father, take heart in the Lord. The holy Immaculate Virgin from heaven is preparing a great triumph for her Church, a triumph to

²² *Se consideriamo lo stato delle cose appoggiato sul soccorso umano, dobbiamo dire che ci avviciniamo ad un'epoca di distruzione per la fede, epoca di sangue per chi vuole difenderla.*

take place in the near future. True, it will be preceded by horrible catastrophes, but God will shorten the evil times. Meanwhile we pray that the reign of sin may come to an end and that God's holy will be done.

[7] As soon as peace comes again to the Church, I hope to be able to visit the Eternal City and gaze once more, before the end of my days, on Your Holiness' venerable countenance. Meanwhile my priests, seminarians, students and working boys kneel with me at Your Holiness' feet and humbly beg you to accept our small offering and the expressions that accompany it. We ask for your holy apostolic blessing to confirm us in the holy religion of Jesus Christ until death. Amen.²³

Your Holiness' and holy Church's
Most humble and devoted son,
Father Gioanni Bosco

[Comment]

Don Bosco letter was sent in the diplomatic pouch of the representative of the Holy See in Turin and handed to the Pope by Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli. Included in the pouch was a letter from the youngsters to the Pope in which they "presented" their offering. [# 1, 2 & 3, above]. It was actually written by Don Bosco in their name and was signed by the Oratory personnel, by the boys of the oratories and by the boys and girls of two nearby institutions—over 700 signatures in all. From this letter we learn that the sum collected amounted to 163 lire and 44 centimes. The boys' [Don Bosco's] letter to Pius IX reads:

[Turin, April 13, 1860]

Holy Father,

We are the young people of Turin who hold Your Holiness' person in the most tender affection. We love you with filial love because you love us. *But we love you even more because you are the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Jesus Christ and God's representative here on earth. We know that no one can be saved who is not a Catholic, and that no one is Catholic who is not united with*

²³ For the text and a study of some letters (including the two of April 13, given here) see Dante Balboni, "Don Bosco e Pio Nono in alcuni inediti vaticani," *Salesianum* 41:3 (1979) 513-520. Balboni takes the letter from Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Sezione Indirizzi Pio IX*, Serie III, n. 2068. The Pope's gracious reply (in Latin) is dated May 21, 1860 and is preserved in *ASC* 126.2 Pio IX, *FDB* 1561 A7.

*the Pope and does not profess the Pope's teaching, which is the teaching of Jesus Christ.*²⁴

We are greatly saddened by the fact that so many Christians who should love you, or at least respect you, are the cause of such painful disappointment to your good and loving heart. We do not want to be of that number; we love you and we want to love you our whole life long. We want to live and die in our holy Catholic religion, of which you are the Head.

We cannot offer the large sums that many rich Catholics have at their disposal, but God gave us a life and this, Holy Father, we offer you. If there ever comes a time in which we were asked to shed our blood for you and for our holy religion, believe us, Holy Father, all of us would be ready and willing to do so, and that would be the best day of our life.

Our situation is humble indeed, but we wish nonetheless to give some external sign of our filial devotion to your person. We have collected the paltry sum of 163 lire and 44 centimes. It is the mite of the poor, and it is all the treasure we can command. It's nothing worthy of you, to be sure, but we hope that you will accept it as the good and loving father that you are. We also wish to make another offering, one that, we hope, will please you even more. It is the offering of the prayers that we will make every day for Your Holiness' preservation and for the pressing needs of the Church. And in order to move God the more readily to accept our intention we have agreed to receive Holy Communion by turn and to offer to our heavenly Father the body and blood of his Divine Son. There will be fifty-four turns, each with thirty successive Communion offerings, by the Lord's help, for your intention. We will continue this devotion *until the Lord and the holy Immaculate Virgin, moved with pity for our trials, will establish peace in your States and peace among Christian rulers. Then both people and kings shall hasten to kneel at your feet to acknowledge and revere you as the supreme Shepherd of the Church, the representative of the King of Kings and of God who is infinitely good.*²⁵ For the good God wishes to gather all the peoples of the world into one fold under one shepherd, so that one day we may all be happy in heaven.

You have blessed us often in the past. Now we ask you to give us again, as a signal favor, your holy Apostolic Blessing. It will fill our hearts with faith and

²⁴ *Vi amiamo ancor più, perché siete il successore di S. Pietro, il Vicario di Gesù Cristo, e il rappresentante di Dio sopra la terra. Sappiamo che chi non è cattolico, non può salvarsi, e che niuno è cattolico, se non è unito al Papa e professa la dottrina che il Papa insegna, che è appunto la dottrina di Gesù Gesù Cristo.*

²⁵ *Ciò noi faremo finché il Signore, e la Santa Vergine Immacolata mossi a compassione dei nostri mali abbiano reso la tranquillità ai Vostri Stati; la pace fra' Principi Cristiani, e così popoli e Re corrano a prostrarsi ai Vostri piedi per riconoscere e venerare in voi il Supremo Pastore della Chiesa, il Rappresentante del Re dei Re; di quel Dio, che è infinitamente buono.*

the courage necessary to persevere steadfastly in our holy Catholic religion till death. Amen.²⁶ [...]

In the next two paragraphs [# 4 and 5] of his own letter, Don Bosco makes reference to the political situation. At the time of writing the unification-by-annexation movement had just begun, but it was clear that there was no stopping it. Don Bosco could easily foresee, as he writes in # 4, that "the invasion not only of Romagna but also of all the other provinces of the Holy See, as well as Naples, Sicily, etc." would only be a matter of time. This is exactly what happened.

Haunted by such dark premonitions, Don Bosco speaks of an imminent period of religious repression and bloody persecution [# 5]. But he believed that God would act to shorten the time of trial, after which Mary Immaculate would prepare a great triumph for the Church. Such prophecies, couched in veiled allusions to the Book of Revelation and reflecting an apocalyptic frame of mind appear more than once in Don Bosco's writings and culminate in the great, enigmatic "Prophecy of 1873" to be mentioned again below.

5. Letter to Pius IX, March 10, 1861²⁷

When Don Bosco wrote the present letter, again to be delivered through a trusted intermediary into the hands of "the Head of Christendom," the political and military developments he so feared had taken place. Following an uprising at Palermo (Sicily) in early April 1860, Garibaldi accepted the leadership of a volunteer expeditionary force (the "Thousand") to liberate Sicily and Naples. Sailing from Genoa on two steamers on May 6, the "Thousand" landed in Sicily, and between May and October Sicily and southern Italy were overrun, and the Bourbon monarchy was overthrown. Garibaldi's volunteer army now numbered some 500,000! Meanwhile the Piedmontese government delivered an ultimatum to Pius IX to surrender the Marches and Umbria, which were taken by the Piedmontese moving from the north on September 11. Of the Papal States only Rome and the surrounding territory (the Patrimony of St. Peter) remained in the Pope's power. On October 21 and on November 4, 1860, Southern Italy and Central Italy (Papal States) respectively were annexed to Piedmont. On January 27, 1861 nationwide elections were held and the first Italian parliament was

²⁶ The thoughts expressed in the two italicized paragraphs at the beginning and toward the end of the youngsters' letter are obviously Don Bosco's vintage ultramontane ecclesiology. It is also (roughly speaking) the ecclesiology that the youngsters assimilated from the diocesan catechism. Cf. also Note 17 and related text above.

²⁷ Motto, *Ep I*, 440-442, # 495, from *ASV SdS* 1861 rub. 9 fasc. prot. 17.036, Don Bosco's holograph.

seated. Thus the first stage of the unification of Italy under King Victor Emmanuel II was accomplished.

Don Bosco must have written the letter of March 10 with a heavy heart indeed.

*Turin, March 10, 1861

Holy Father,

[1] A devoted reporter of the newspaper *L'Armonia* is traveling to Rome, and this affords me the opportunity of addressing a few words to Your Holiness. How many things would this humble priest like to say to the Head of Christendom! But my report shall be brief.

[2] After being made the object of repeated harassment, peace has returned to the Oratory. I am allowed to work for my youngsters and to publish the Catholic Readings undisturbed. During the past year our school has grown fourfold, and our boarders now number about 500. They are youngsters of good promise and are studying with the priesthood in mind.

[3] For the moment our clergy is showing courage and is standing firm. But very severe trials are in store, and if the Lord does not sustain us with his grace I fear the worst. We've been subjected to attacks with promises, threats and repression. Now the time of persecution is at hand.

[4] Many of the laity are still practicing Catholics, but a great number daily fall from apathy into complete indifference, the bane of Catholicism in our area. However, many that have been in hiding have thrown off fear and are showing the courage of their Christian convictions.

[5] Holy Father, you may take some comfort in the fact that here in Piedmont you have a great number of devoted children. United in the Spirit, we are, God willing, ready to lay down our life and forfeit our possessions for that most holy religion of which you are the visible Head on earth. May God help us from heaven.

[6] What causes most pain is the catastrophes that hang over the universal Church. But take courage, Holy Father, we have been praying, and are now intensifying our prayer for the preservation of your sacred person. One of our youngsters who has for some years given evidence of being favored with special lights from God has this to say: "The present trials will greatly sadden Pius IX's fatherly heart. The Immaculate Virgin is offering to the Holy Father a glorious bouquet of roses, but he must grasp them by their thorny stems."

[7] Another person believes that unless God's designs are changed Your Holiness will again have to leave Rome under duress. A great good, however, will come from this evil, for whole nations will flock to you to pay you homage. Millions of people will then embrace Catholicism moved only by the fortitude

evinced by the Vicar of Jesus Christ in his trials. By this means many souls redeemed by our Savior will receive the light of grace.

[8] Briefly put, the most terrible calamities are to befall us shortly, more terrible than any in history. But Your Holiness will win the most glorious triumph when after bloody engagement you will again enjoy peaceful possession of your States, received with love by your people and blessed by kings and nations.

[9] And what about those rulers and their followers who are the cause of all these evils? Those who caused these evils, or who could but did not prevent them, are the cudgel that God wields to punish people's misdeeds. The cudgel is then broken and thrown into the fire. In any case, we have been and are praying without ceasing that the merciful God may preserve and protect God's Vicar and give peace to the Church. Hope in human beings is of no avail; now God alone can help.

[9] Holy Father, you have been generous with me in the past; be generous to me once more and out of the great goodness of your heart overlook the too familiar tone of this letter. Put everything down to the great love I cherish for your revered person.

In your kindness be pleased to bestow on my youngsters and myself your holy Apostolic blessing, while I kneel at your feet as,

Your Holiness'
Most devoted son,
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

In paragraph # 2 Don Bosco speaks of being subjected to harassment. The reference here is to the house searches carried out by unsympathetic government inspectors in 1860.²⁸ He then speaks of the progress of the Oratory's secondary school begun in 1855 and completed with a five-year program in 1859. By the time of writing in early 1861 the number of students had greatly increased. New buildings erected through the 1850s and 1860s made this possible. But the number given for the school enrollment (500) is again an exaggerated "ballpark fig-

²⁸ Cf. *EBM* VI, 306-334. Don Bosco later wrote a memorandum on these investigations (*Le perquisizioni*), for which see P. Braido and F. Motto, "Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su 'le perquisizioni'. Testo critico e Introduzione," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 8 (1989) 11-200. In their introductory study, the two Salesian historians show how an event of modest proportions was magnified and distorted in Don Bosco's partisan imagination.

ure.”²⁹ Even more surprising, the lads are said to be studying for the priesthood. Unrealistic as it may sound, that was Don Bosco’s idea, at least for many that were “charity cases.”³⁰

Don Bosco gives a positive assessment of the religious situation in Turin [# 3, 4 and 5] for the time of writing, but he expresses fears and doubts about the future. He anticipates a persecution, meant perhaps not in a traditional but in a more civilized sense. The extension to the whole of Italy of the Rattazzi Laws (suppressing religious corporations and confiscating Church property) and the exile and harassment of bishops might be cited as cases in point.

The apocalyptic scenario from which Don Bosco views the political situation [# 6, 7, 8 and 9] is even more heavy-handed than in the preceding letter. He speaks of disasters, more terrible than any in history, overtaking the universal Church. He speaks of prophetic experiences by a youngster and by “another person” foretelling calamities, bloody persecution, the flight of the Pope from Rome, before God and the Immaculate Virgin intervene to punish the aggressors and to restore the Pope to his rightful domains. All this may strike us as “far-fetched.” But one must bear in mind that to a conservative Catholic the liberal revolution and its excesses, the taking of the Papal States and the consequent isolation of the Pope, the apparent subjugation of the Church to the State must have appeared as “the end of the world.” It was in fact the end of a world.

The identity of the young man is not known. However, as Don Bosco states in the biographies of Dominic Savio (1859), Michael Magone (1861) and Francis Besucco (1864), there were other youngsters at the Oratory who enjoyed the favor of divine illumination, so much so that Don Bosco occasionally took their experiences as guide. “The other person,” on the other hand, speaks too much like Don Bosco himself. In a number of places, particularly in the “Prophecy of 1873” (for which he claimed divine illumination), Don Bosco expresses the same ideas.

6. Letter to Archbishop Gioacchino Limberti of Florence, June 18, 1861.³¹

Three months had not yet passed since the meeting of the first Italian parliament and the proclamation of Victor Emmanuel II as king of Italy that Count Camillo

²⁹ See numbers and discussion in P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale* (1815-1870) (Roma: LAS, 1980), 175 and 178-181.

³⁰ For details see A. Lenti, “Key Concepts, Concerns and Fears of a Founder [...]” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 7:1 (1996) 1-82, specifically 51-59.

³¹ Motto, *Ep* I, 448-450, # 505, from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Florence, Limberti Papers b 3, Don Bosco’s holograph.

Gioacchino Limberti (1821-1874) was ordained bishop by Pius IX and appointed archbishop of Florence in 1857 [Motto, *Ibid.*, 400].

Benso of Cavour, the unification's chief architect, died suddenly on June 6, 1861. The weak governments that followed were unable to deal effectively with the social unrest to which the new nation was subject, especially in the South. The army was deployed to deal with brigandage, which was being used for counter-revolutionary purposes. Years of guerrilla activity and brutal repression followed. The conservative clergy was being accused of collusion, which fueled anticlerical sentiment. In the letter, written 12 days after Cavour's death, Don Bosco in passing decries the evil times. His main purpose, however, is to alert the Archbishop to the danger of Protestant activity in Tuscany.

*Turin, June 18, 1861

Your Grace,

[1] This letter comes to you through the kindness of Marchioness Villarios.³²

[2] In the first place, I must thank you for the trouble taken on behalf of young Moglia, the lad recommended to your charity. Should Your Grace, or the lawyer to whom the young man was referred in the matter, have gone to any expense, I beg you, also on his family's part, to let me know, and a money order will be posted to you without delay.

[3] I was greatly pained to learn from reports in the press of the insults you sustained and of the public scandal given on the occasion of the *Corpus Christi* procession. These are evil times that God has seen fit to bring us to. I pray, and I have my poor youngsters also pray, that God grant you strength, health, grace and courage to work for the good of the Church that lies exposed to such implacable attacks.

[4] There's a new evil scheme being hatched for Tuscany, and it stems from the Protestants. *The well-known pastor Edward Moore, a member of the Queen of England's Council, has been commissioned to evangelize, that is, to make Italy protestant. Tuscany and its capital, Florence, have been chosen as his base of operations. He has at his disposal money, scholarship, personnel and wide powers. He has come to talk to me several times and brought with him another gentleman, a pastor from Wurtemberg [Wittenberg?]. Both of them are well grounded in the Protestant Reformation but have very little knowledge of Catholicism. The pastor from Wurtemberg, whose name is Henry Wolf, is in the process of leaving Protestantism. In recent interviews he has expressed his decision to retreat to some cloister so as to prepare for a solemn abjuration. The*

³² Marchioness Fanny Amat Villarios (1614-1882), living in Florence, Turin and Rome, helped Don Bosco in various ways, especially through handling the circulation of the *Catholic Readings* [Motto, *Ibid.*, 449]. A letter from her to Don Bosco cited by Motto is in ASC 126.1 Lettere a Don Bosco con autografi, FDB 1436 C8].

*Englishman raises no objection and shows no hostility toward Catholicism, but (he says) he is an Anglican missionary and will go forward with his mission. This is the man that will cause you more trouble.*³³

[5] To make converts the Protestants use of a number of means. First, they spread anti-Catholic books in every way they can. Secondly, they make lavish use of money, especially when the prospective convert is a priest, and they've won over quite a few. Among their converts there has been a certain Antonio Agostini, a former curate of a parish church in Tuscany, I don't know which. I have been able to get in touch with him a few days ago, and found him torn by remorse. Actually he has already inquired whether, should he return to the bosom of the Catholic Church, he might be reinstated. Thirdly, the Protestants are active in the instruction of the young, using primary schools and kindergartens to good effect and offering rich awards and gifts of money as a lure. These are the means whereby in the past few years they've succeeded in winning over several thousands of our Catholics.

[6] Your Grace, I would like to write at greater length, but you know better than I what must be done. In any case, be on the watch and make an all-out effort to prevent ruinous defections among the clergy. Promote the dissemination of good books among the people, of those books in particular that unmask the absurdities of Protestantism. But the principal object of your pastoral concern must be the catechetical instruction of the young, preferably in small classes.

[7] This is what's being done among us, and I believe it's the only thing we can do to erect some kind of barrier against the surging evil.

[8] Your Grace, I have written as a son would to his father and as the heart prompted. I beg your kind indulgence in my regard for writing at greater length than I had intended. I commend to the charity of your prayers my youngsters and myself, while together we ask for your blessing. With deep respect I am,

Your Grace's
Most devoted servant
Father Gio Bosco

³³ *Il celebre pastore Edward Moore membro del Consiglio della regina d'Inghilterra è destinato ad evangelizzare o meglio a protestantizzare l'Italia. Centro delle sue fatiche è la Toscana e Firenze che ne è la capitale. Egli ha danaro, scienza, uomini e poteri. E già è venuto più volte da me con un altro pastore di Wurtemberg. Sono fondati nella loro Riforma ma conoscono assai poco il cattolicesimo. Il secondo, cioè Enrico Wolf di Wurtemberg, probabilmente cessa di essere protestante e da qualche conferenza si professa deciso di ritirarsi in qualche chiostro per prepararsi ad una solenne abiura. L'inglese tace; non arrabbiato contro al cattolicesimo, ma egli dice di essere missionario anglicano e voler compier la sua missione. Questi è l'uomo che le agguignerà fastidio.*

N.B. Father Agostini, mentioned above, has just now come in. He was a pastor in the city of Lucca. He leaves this afternoon for an interview with his bishop.

[Comment]

The affront against the Archbishop and the Blessed Sacrament being carried in procession [# 3] took place on June 6, the very day of Cavour's death. The press apparently gave the episode more importance than it deserved. In his reply to Don Bosco, the Archbishop makes light of the "insults." His real regret is that the procession was disrupted.³⁴

Paragraphs # 4, 5 and 6 are devoted to Protestant missionary activity. Here Don Bosco focuses specifically on an Anglican missionary named Henry Moore,³⁵ but perhaps he means his description to apply the Protestant proselytizing activity globally, and especially to that of the "Protestants" he knew best, the Waldenses.³⁶ No doubt their proselytizing methods were often reprehensible, and a strong case could be made against their theological and ecclesiological positions. But in his crude apologetic in the *Catholic Readings* of the 1850s Don Bosco lumps together all non-Catholics: Waldenses, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, with Jews, Moslems and infidels thrown in for good measure. Apart from not a few misrepresentations, the underlying thesis of this apologetic was that no one could be saved who was not united to the Vicar of Christ.³⁷ There's a certain (holy) fanaticism in his apologetic, particularly against Waldenses and Protestants, obviously motivated by his burning concern for the salvation of souls.

It is interesting to note that these important Protestant pastors were in touch with Don Bosco and apparently they had more than one conversation with

³⁴ Archbishop Limberti to Don Bosco, June 28, 1861 [ASC 126.2 Lettere a Don Bosco, *FDB* 1540 C12, edited in *EBM* VI, 585-586].

³⁵ Moore was a philosopher and theologian who died in 1873 [Motto, *Ibid.*, 450].

³⁶ In the decade 1860-1870 the Waldenses were very active in Tuscany and they made Florence their cultural capital. But not many priests defected to Protestantism. Rebel priests there were but usually for patriotic reasons. The priest Agostini is not otherwise identified [Motto, *Ibid.*, 450].

³⁷ [Giovanni Bosco] *La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. Avvisi ai cattolici. I nostri Pastori ci uniscono al Papa, il Papa ci unisce con Dio* (Torino: Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, 1850), 23 p., in *Opere Edite* IV, 121-143. *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia coi suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*, epilogati dal sac. Bosco Giovanni, (Torino: Tipografia dir. da P. De-Agostini, 1853), 111 p. + 340 p., in *Opere Edite* IV, 195-305 + 307-646. It was a collection of tracts published in the *Catholic Readings* in six installments, all within 1853. See especially Conversations XX-XLIII, of which the last ten are devoted to showing the inner contradictions of Protestantism.

him. It seems that Pastor Wolf (not otherwise identified) reached his decision to abjure after talking with Don Bosco.³⁸

7. Letter to Pius IX, December 27, 1861³⁹

The political and social situation continued unchanged after the unification of Italy, Cavour's death and ensuing turmoil. Don Bosco, taking advantage of a reliable intermediary, Father Michelangelo Chiatellino,⁴⁰ addressed a letter to Pius IX to apprise him of the religious situation in the North and of the progress of the oratories.

*Turin December 27, 1861

Most Holy Father,

[1] A saintly priest of this Oratory, Father Chiatellino, chaplain to the Duchess of Montmorency, is leaving for Rome for the purpose of visiting the capital of Christendom and of kissing Your Holiness' holy feet, if he will be so favored. I am happy to have this opportunity to express to you, Most Holy Father, the deep affection and devotion that our many priests, seminarians, youngsters and myself cherish toward your august person, whom we acknowledge as the Vicar of Jesus Christ. I shall begin by giving you a true-to-fact report on our religious situation.

[2] The *Protestants*. They've been working tirelessly for some 12 years. They make use of a variety of means: books, missionaries, free schools, kindergartens, hospices, promises and placements in jobs, alms and gifts of money of all kinds. They receive regular financial help from England and Germany. This is the reason why unfortunately they've now succeeded in increasing their membership to the extent they did in all the regions of Italy, especially where there's been political change. At the moment they are concentrating their efforts and resources on southern Italy. In Turin for example they numbered 900 [in 1848]; today, if we are to believe their newspapers their number has risen to 6,500. In Milan from 200 in 1859 their number has risen to 2,000.

True, new members are recruited mostly from among disreputable people, but also young people, servants and tradesmen that deal with them run the risk

³⁸ Don Bosco says that Pastor Wolf came to a decision "*da qualche conferenza,*" an unclear expression that I can only take to mean "since [the last] few conversations". It appears then that Don Bosco had something to do with Wolf's decision to abjure. Moore heard the same pitch and raised no objections, but could not go along with it.

³⁹ Motto, *Ep I*, 471-473, # 537, from *ASV Ep. ad princ.* 45, in Father Michele Rua's hand.

⁴⁰ Michelangelo Chiatellino (1811-1901) was ordained in 1845 and taught in various schools, including the Oratory [Motto, *Ibid.*, 133].

of losing their faith. Nor can we discount the great harm done by those who would be Catholic without the Pope. They enjoy official protection, and through their newspapers, books and speeches they do more harm than the Protestants.

[3] *Catholics*. The damage is great, but we may take comfort in witnessing the marvelous unity of the bishops among themselves and with their clergy—vicars, pastors and canons—and with great numbers of simple committed lay people. Our merciful God has seen to it that these faithful people are able to spread religious books and papers, preach triduums, novenas and spiritual retreats, teach catechism and maintain homes [for poor children]. They work with all their might in defending and spreading the principles of our holy Catholic religion. Most Holy Father, we have a great number of these faithful people, and they give of their time and money and are ready even to lay down their lives for the faith, which only those who live and die united with Your Holiness can claim to possess. True, there are outside Piedmont priests who have had the misfortune of falling into error and are now preaching against the very religion to which they had dedicated themselves. However, their blameworthy conduct negates any effect their false preaching might have, because they are not believed.

[4] *The Oratories*. Oratories have increased in numbers not only in Turin but also in provincial towns. There are 8 of them in this capital city alone, 5 for boys and 3 for girls, with a regular attendance of over 3,000 young people. The boarders in the house of Valdocco number nearly 600, with some 400 studying for the priesthood, under a staff of 60 priests and seminarians. These gatherings of young people [oratories] are a great boon, and their good effect on those who attend is very gratifying. Those who cannot attend because of their age and social condition are cared for elsewhere. The harvest is great, but the number of workers is small compared with the need.

[5] *We find ourselves caught up in a terrible struggle. The angel of darkness has broken out; the world is now in his power. He does his utmost to ruin the faith of true believers. We fight, happy to give our all, to endure all things for the Lord's holy cause. We would be happy indeed if God in his great mercy should grant us to die while working for him.*⁴¹

[6] Give us direction, Holy Father. You may be sure that we will take your advice as norm and try our best to put it into practice.

[7] I am writing as the mouthpiece of many priests and faithful lay people, as well as of my youngsters. We are all united in placing at Your Holiness' disposal our labors, our lives and our possessions. We pray insistently every day

⁴¹ *Noi ci troviamo in un terribile conflitto. L'angelo delle tenebre uscì fuori; il mondo è in suo potere; tutto fa per rovinare i veri credenti. Noi combattiamo, cantenti di dare tutto, patire tutto per la santa causa del Signore. Felici assai in quel giorno in cui Dio nella grande sua misericordia ci desse di morire faticando per lui.*

that the Lord may quickly cause the rainbow of peace to shine over our land for the good of the people and of religion.

[8] Kneeling at your feet we ask for your holy Apostolic blessing, while on behalf of all though of all the least worthy,
I am Your Holiness' and Holy Church's

Most devoted son
Father Gioanni Bosco
Director of the Turin oratories

[Comment]

In paragraph # 2 Don Bosco gives a description of the "Protestants'" activity and successes over the past 12 years. The time frame indicates that he's speaking of the Waldenses who (with the Jews) had been granted religious freedom under the constitution of 1848. As noted above, Don Bosco had engaged them in a "no-holds-barred" apologetic in the early 1850s. Because of it, attempts were made on his life.⁴² With reference to the same situation and in somber apocalyptic tones, in Paragraph # 5 he speaks of the struggle in which the good were engaged and of the "angel of darkness" that held the world in thrall and was at work trying to bring the faithful down to ruin.

Don Bosco [# 4] speaks with some pride of the success of the oratories, and of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in particular. He mentions 8 oratories in the city, and in the signature he describes himself as "Director of the Turin oratories." Obviously he was director of only three oratories (1846, 1847 and 1849), but historians must regard him as the "model" oratory worker in Turin and by far the most successful. Later oratories in the city may be said to have been modeled after his.⁴³

Pope Pius IX replied by a letter in Latin in which he comments at some length on the political and religious situation. He also expresses his satisfaction

⁴² *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. The Autobiography of St. John Bosco*, [...] (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989) 408-426.

⁴³ The first oratory in Turin (the Oratory of the Guardian Angel) was founded by Father Giovanni Cocchi in 1840 and prospered until the liberal revolution of 1848. It was taken over and re-started by Don Bosco in 1849. Don Bosco started his own small oratory in 1841, increased it in 1844 and settled it in permanent premises in 1846 (Oratory of St. Francis de Sales). He founded a second oratory in 1847 (Oratory of St. Aloysius). Since from the start oratory work was carried on in collaboration with priests and laity, in 1852 exiled Archbishop Luigi Fransoni of Turin by decree recognized Don Bosco as Director-in-chief of these three oratories [cf *EBM* IV, 527].

at the united efforts made by so many to counteract evil and gives encouragement, but no practical advice.⁴⁴

8. Letter to Archbishop Gioacchino Limberti of Florence, March 25, 1862⁴⁵

Ever watchful of the proselytizing activities of the Waldenses, Don Bosco alerts the Archbishop of their latest endeavor, the setting up of a print shop in Florence.

Turin, March 25, 1862

Your Grace,

[1] Thank you for the two postal money orders you were so kind as to send me in payment for the pamphlets of the *Catholic Readings* and for three copies of the *History of Italy*. The copy addressed to you was intended as a humble gift for you, a token of the great esteem I cherish for your sacred person. But you wished to pay for it, and I accept the money as alms for these poor youngsters of mine. *Deo gratias*.

[2] The Protestants have transferred to Florence a print shop they owned and operated here in Turin. The move is designed to give them a more central location so as the more easily to spread their evil publications throughout Italy. This is for your information.

[3] Should you know of any poor lad who might be under attack from these enemies of ours and at risk of becoming a victim of their godlessness, please let me know. I would be happy to take him into our house, provided he is between 12 and 18 years of age.

[4] May the Lord grant you good health, grace and courage. Be so good as to give me your holy blessing, as I have the honor of being,

Your Grace's
Most devoted servant
Father Gio. Bosco

⁴⁴ The Pope's letter is in *ASC* 126.2 Pio IX, *FDB* 1,561 A8-9. It is transcribed in Latin and edited in Italian in *IMB* VII 43-45. An English translation is given in *EBM* VII, 33-34.

⁴⁵ Motto, *Ep* I, 489-490, # 556, from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Florence, *Carte Limberti* b 3, Don Bosco's holograph.

[Comment]

The Waldenses had already moved their theological faculty to Florence in 1860. The transfer of the presses would give them publishing power. As a matter of fact, they began publication of the weekly *L'eco della Verità* in 1863 and several more papers after that, to speak only of weeklies.⁴⁶

9. Letter to Pius IX, March 10, 1863⁴⁷

By this short letter, again sent through an intermediary, Don Bosco wishes to bring to the Pope's attention the establishment of the print shop at the Oratory [#2]. This, the last of the workshops established at the Oratory since 1853, began operations with a couple of hand presses in late 1861 or early 1862. It was quickly to become a "publishing house."

*Turin, March 10, 1863

Most Holy Father,

[1] A number of gentlemen and their ladies will be traveling to Rome shortly, for devotional purposes. Count Bosco di Ruffino and his wife, both fervent Catholics and great benefactors of our poor youngsters, are among them.⁴⁸

[2] I therefore take this opportunity to report to Your Holiness that we've opened here in our house a print shop devoted entirely to the publication and circulation of Catholic books. It has been in operation for about a year, and the presses have been busy with good results. Be so good as to give it your holy blessing, that God may help us keep it in operation.

[3] At the same time I feel I should tell you that we are at the eve of painful events. Holy Church is again about to be harrowed and tortured by her ungrateful children. All of us here are praying all the more insistently, and place all our hope in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in the Immaculate Virgin Mary. I hope and pray that God's providence will keep Your Holiness for many more years, so that after passing through fierce storms you may see cloudless days of peace for the Church.

[4] Please be so good as to overlook the liberty with which I lay my heart bare to you, the most loving of fathers. It is now my good fortune to kneel at

⁴⁶ Motto, *Ibid.*, 490.

⁴⁷ Motto, *Ep.* I, 560-561, #640, from ASV *Epist. Lat.* 70 [1863], Don Bosco's holograph.

⁴⁸ Count Aleramo Augusto Bosco di Ruffino (1809-1895) and his wife Teresa (1827-1889) were Don Bosco's close friends and benefactors [Motto, *Ibid.*, 185].

your feet and to beg your holy blessing on my priests, on my youngsters and on myself.

Your Holiness'
Most devoted son.
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

In paragraph # 3, Don Bosco again voices his dark forebodings, this time occasioned by recent political developments. After the unification of Italy the Roman question took center stage with increasing urgency. At this point in time the Italian government still adhered to the moderate positions of Cavour and Ricasoli, also in view of the French who were committed to defending Rome. The cry came from the radical republicans headed by Mazzini and Garibaldi. In early March 1862 the Association for the Liberation of Italy was formed, and Garibaldi began to gather volunteers for an attack on Rome. On a visit to Sicily in June and July, Garibaldi expressed his determination to take Rome or die ("*O Roma o morte*"). In late August, as he was leading a contingent of volunteers against Rome, the Italian army intercepted him at Aspromonte. In the skirmish that followed Garibaldi was wounded. The report stirred up violent anti-government demonstrations that required armed intervention throughout Italy. At the time of writing (March 1863), political passions were still seething. Don Bosco sees the storm clouds ahead, but in spite of realities he takes a "providentialist" view. God is in charge, a belief that he voices more explicitly in succeeding letters.

10. Letter to Pius IX August 25, 1864⁴⁹

After the founding of the Salesian Society in 1859 and the elaboration of early drafts of the constitutions, Don Bosco petitioned for approval in Rome [# 2]. He received the Decree of Commendation (initial approval of the Society) on July 1 (23), 1864. The constitutions were found defective at many points, and the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars handed down 13 critical observations. Some of them touched sensitive provisions that Don Bosco wanted included. Don Bosco never fully complied.

The Society was growing, no doubt about it, but the statistics given in the same paragraph are over generous. For example, Don Bosco had opened a small school at Mirabello in 1863, and was about to open a larger one at Lanzo in au-

⁴⁹ Motto, *Ep* II, 128-130, # 818, from *ASV Ep. ad Princ., Pos. et Mm.* 56, Don Bosco's holograph.

turn 1864. These were the first Salesian schools established outside the Oratory in Turin.

*Turin, August 25, 1864

Most Holy Father,

[1] Father Emiliano Manacorda, doctor of theology and law, and zealous supporter of our oratories, is returning to Rome to pursue the exercise of his sacred ministry. By God's providence he is a person of means, but he has no other aim than to devote life and possessions to those things that Your Holiness may judge to be for the greater glory of God.⁵⁰

[2] Through this benefactor of our young people I have the opportunity to express my gratitude to you, Most Holy Father. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for so kindly taking into consideration the proposal submitted for the Society of St. Francis de Sales. I have already obtained a decree of general approval of the Society with a number of critical observations on its the constitutions. I will carefully try to implement them and then submit the constitutions again to Your Holiness, so that you might graciously expedite to its completion the work begun under your holy auspices. It appears that God has wanted to be lavish with his blessings in our regard. The Society already has over 100 members. It has four houses and five oratories attended by young people of every age and social condition. Their number often surpasses 3000.

[3] The religious situation in our area seems to have come to a head. But the visible signs of God's powerful presence among us are in evidence every day. *Est Deus in Israel*. In the provinces of the former Sardinian kingdom perfect union continues to be maintained among bishops and clergy of every category. True, the religious press is often threatened, fined and penalized. Nevertheless, no one is deterred by fear, and no one has any other point of reference than Rome and the Vicar of Christ.

[4] Take heart then, Most Holy Father, because the time is at hand, and relief from distress is in store for you. God is with you. Meanwhile morning and evening we offer special prayers to God and the Holy Virgin for the preservation of Your Holiness' sacred person. May you have many more years and live to see with your own eyes the triumph of our holy religion and the glory of holy Church.

⁵⁰ Emiliano Manacorda (1833-1909) a life-long friend and supporter of Don Bosco and of the Oratory, studied law at Padua and canon law in Rome, and worked thereafter in the Roman curia. In 1871 he was appointed bishop of Fossano with Don Bosco's support [Motto, *Ibid.*, 70].

[5] Most Holy Father, please overlook the liberty I'm taking, I the poorest and the last of your children. But you are our father and will kindly bear with me. Priests, seminarians and thousands of young people join me in placing their possessions, their heart and their very lives at your service. On your part, please give us your holy Apostolic blessing, and that will be reward enough for us.

[6] With highest esteem, deepest gratitude and most tender devotion I kneel at Your Holiness' feet, unworthy as I am to be,

Your Holiness'
Most humble and devoted son,
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

Commenting on the political and religious situation [# 3 and 4] Don Bosco again offers encouragement to the Pope: "The time is at hand, and relief from distress is in store for you. God is with you," a far too optimistic forecast. Don Bosco was not the only voice that agonized over the religious situation and over the plight of Pope Pius IX in particular. The conservative Catholic newspaper *L'Unità Cattolica* (recently founded in November 1863), like the older conservative Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica* (founded in 1850), both avidly read at the Oratory, carried similar "providentialist" interpretations of political and religious events. Actually the worst was still to come, for the Roman Question would not go away. Around the time of writing, Italy and France were reaching an agreement known as the September Convention (signed on September 15, 1864). It provided for the removal by France of the military force that protected Rome in exchange for a promise by Italy not to attack Rome. It also provided for the transfer of the capital from Turin to a more central city (Florence being finally chosen). These provisions appeared to be (and so they turned out in reality for Italian patriots) mere stepping stones toward Rome. This is how the Pope saw the maneuver. On December 8 Pius IX published the encyclical *Quanta cura* with the appended "Syllabus of Errors of Our Times." The encyclical reaffirmed the Church's traditional teaching and authority in all areas of society. The 80 propositions of the Syllabus condemned all "pernicious errors" of modern thought.

11. Letter to Pius IX, April 30, 1865⁵¹

The miraculous occurrences near Spoleto in 1862, where the Virgin Mary spoke to a young child from her image on the wall of an old ruined Church, ushered in what might be called the decade of Mary Help of Christians. It seemed that the Help of Christians was now about to act in defense of the Church, leading perhaps to the overthrow of the liberal establishment. Don Bosco was caught in the euphoria of those events and decided to build a monumental church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in front of the Oratory in Turin. The Church was begun in 1863 and was dedicated in 1868.⁵² At the time of writing [# 1 and 2], the building had made good progress, but funds had run out. The raffle (of which the letter speaks) and substantial offerings from some benefactors allowed the building to go forward.

Just as the Church was rising, Bills were being discussed in Parliament that would have deep repercussions in the life of the Church, the Bill on civil marriage [# 3] and the Bill to suppress religious corporations and confiscate Church property [# 4]. Then Don Bosco pleads with the Pope to take action to fill vacant dioceses and to put in a good word for the approval of the Society and its constitutions.

*Turin, April 30, 1865

Most Holy Father,

[1] It is ever a source of joy and comfort for me, Most Holy Father, to have the opportunity of addressing, also on behalf of my friends and associates, the dearest and most beloved of fathers. The bearer of this letter is the Marquis Fassati who is traveling to Rome for devotional purposes. He is a great benefactor of our house, so much so that if the church of Mary Help of Christians is now rising above ground I owe it in great measure to the generosity of this worthy family.⁵³

[2] The church is rising steadily, Most Holy Father, but I find myself in very straitened circumstances financially. I have therefore decided to use the very means that you yourself were so kind to suggest through one of our bene-

⁵¹ *Moto Ep.* II, 128-130, from *ASV Ep. ad Princ., Pos. et Mm.* 56, Don Bosco's holograph.

⁵² For details see A. Lenti, "Madonnas for Times of Trouble [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 11:1 (2000) 1-62.

⁵³ Marquis Domenico Fassati Roero di San Severino (1804-1878) distinguished as a military commander, was an admirer and supporter of Don Bosco's work from the beginning. He also helped with catechetical instruction at the Oratory [*Motto, Ep I, 279*].

factors: I am planning a raffle. I therefore take the liberty of asking Your Holiness for your blessing on those who are involved in the building and to send us some gift to head the list of objects in the catalogue.⁵⁴

[3] These past days we've been following with consternation the discussion of the Bill on civil marriage, and our apprehension was all the keener for the fact that its introduction is attributed to Bishop Di Giacomo.⁵⁵ We hope that the bishops' negotiations in progress will bring about modifications in the Bill—who knows?

[4] On Thursday (April 27) the bishop of Susa blessed the cornerstone of the church of Mary Help of Christians. As this was taking place by a happy coincidence something wonderful happened. The sacred service was held from 2 to 3 P.M. with several thousand people from the first families in this city in attendance. Now, as everyone was kneeling and praying that the great Mother of God would bring to naught our enemies' attacks on the religious corporations and on Church properties, at that very moment the Bill in the House of Representatives ran into trouble. The debate was suspended and the Bill, which in the morning had appeared to be headed for passage without opposition, was withdrawn.

[5] Also, Most Holy Father, we offer prayers in common morning and evening that God would help you find a way to repair the ruinous damage that threatens to become each day more serious, if that were possible. I am referring to the problem of returning bishops to their sees and of filling vacant dioceses with new nominations. The whole world is anxiously awaiting with bated breath the Holy Father's decision in the matter, although all are convinced that whatever the Pope does is well done and acceptable to the faithful.

[6] Last March I submitted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars the constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales revised in accordance with the observations received. I leave everything in Your Holiness' hands, whose fatherly goodness I have so often experienced. Our membership has risen above 100. We have 7 houses in operation. The observance of the rules and of religious discipline is as good as can be humanly expected.

[7] Take courage, Holy Father; we are intensifying our prayer for the day when Your Holiness will personally intone the great *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for peace restored to Church and for the glory of Pius IX's pontificate. I think that the day is about to dawn, though not before we fight new dreadful battles.

⁵⁴ The Pope sent two cameos and a gold reliquary in the form of a cross [Motto, *Ibid.*, 129].

⁵⁵ Gennaro Di Giacomo (1796-1878) was appointed bishop of Piedimonte (near Naples) in 1848 and senator in 1863. Of liberal and patriotic persuasion, he clashed with the Cardinal of Naples and with the Roman *curia*.

[8] May God bless Your Holiness, and may the Holy Virgin keep you *ad multos annos* for the good of the Church. In your kindness please bless my poor youngsters and myself, as I humbly kneel with them at your feet, happy and honored to be,

Your Holiness'
Most humble and devoted son,
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

What was being discussed in Parliament was a comprehensive package of legislation designed to unify all civil and judiciary law for the whole country. This unity was largely achieved by extending to the whole of Italy the laws that had been in force in the Kingdom of Sardinia. The Bill on civil marriage had already been brought to the floor of the Piedmontese House Representatives in 1850, but had been defeated in the Senate. It was now revived and passed on April 2, to go into effect on January 1, 1866.⁵⁶ Bishops in the Senate would obviously try to have the Bill retired or modified. For example, a few weeks before Bishop Luigi Nazari di Calabiana of Casale had defended the religious character of marriage on the Senate floor.

The Bill suppressing religious corporations, which extended and applied the Rattazzi law of suppression in effect in the Kingdom of Sardinia since 1855, was passed.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the debate on the extension of the Rattazzi law of confiscation of the Church estate was suspended on April 27 on a motion by one of the ministers, and the Bill was tabled the following day on an order from the king. It was later re-introduced and passed.⁵⁸ The conservative Catholic press quickly gave the episode a providentialist interpretation. For Don Bosco the coincidence appeared even more meaningful, as it involved Mary Help of Christians.

⁵⁶ "Civil marriage" meant that as to its legal effects a marriage could be witnessed only by the State.

⁵⁷ The suppression of religious corporations (by the so-called Law of the Convents) was based on one of the fundamental legal principles of liberalism, namely that, whereas individual right is from Nature and the State cannot interfere with it, all corporate right is from the State and from it alone. A religious congregation, which was a corporation under the Church, could then be suppressed unless granted corporate right by the State through the so-called *Exequatur*. Don Bosco always denied that the Salesian Society was a religious corporation and maintained that it was simply an association of people exercising their individual right. Therefore he never petitioned for the *Exequatur*.

⁵⁸ By law passed on July 7, 1866 the property of suppressed religious orders and congregations passed into State ownership.

In Paragraph # 5, Don Bosco with amazing boldness urges the Pope to take the initiative in filling vacant diocesan sees, a situation that was getting progressively worse. In the conflict between the Church and the liberal government, bishops had been removed from their diocese, and dioceses had remained vacant with the death of their bishop. At the time of writing, negotiations were in progress between the government representative, Saverio Vegezzi, and Cardinal Antonelli for the Holy See to deal with this thorny problem. The Vegezzi negotiations took place in March-June 1865, but failed in the end. Don Bosco was surely concerned and informed, but perhaps not involved at this stage. He would shortly be involved in the next round of talks and would be instrumental in getting bishops appointed.⁵⁹

After obtaining the Decree of Commendation for the Society in 1864 together with the 13 observations on the constitutions, Don Bosco worked on a new draft and sent it to Rome for approval [# 6].⁶⁰ He had not, however, complied with the observations to the satisfaction of the Roman authorities. Hence when he formally petitioned for approval in 1867, his petition was rejected outright.

Again Don Bosco forecasts a glorious triumph for the Church and the papacy in the near future, though not before "new dreadful battles" are fought [#7]. The reference is vague, the situation would only be getting worse on all fronts.

12. Letter to Pius IX, January 25, 1866⁶¹

With the new year (1866), the application of the laws enacted in 1865 made an already deteriorating situation worse. The law on "civil marriage" that took effect on January 1 was largely responsible for this [# 6, below]. Later, on July 7, a law that transferred to the State's ownership the property of suppressed religious orders and congregations reinforced the downward trend.⁶²

⁵⁹ For details see A. Lenti, "Politics of the 'Our Father' [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10:2 (1999) 181-245.

⁶⁰ See Letter to Pius IX, March 30, 1865, in Motto, *Ep II*, 119.

⁶¹ Motto, *Ep II*, 201-202, # 886, from *ASV Ep. Lat.* 73, Don Bosco's holograph.

⁶² Cf. Notes 56 and 58 and related text above. "In 1866-1867 2,000 religious congregations were deprived of legal status and 25,000 ecclesiastical bodies were suppressed. In the course of the next fifteen years over a million hectares of church land were sold off." Buildings were assigned for public use, schools, hospitals and works of charity. This huge windfall into the State treasury was ostensibly earmarked to offset the increasing deficit in public spending. Only 5% of the revenue was to be set aside for the upkeep of public religious worship and related personnel [Dudgeon, *Italy*, 135. Cf. G. Bouffant, *La politica ecclesiastica* [...], quoted in *Sussidi I*, 89-90].

On another front, a further step toward completing the unification of Italy was taken with the Third War of Independence against Austria (June 20-October 3). Italy went to war as the ally of Prussia, as that nation was fighting a war against Austria (June 17-August 23). The opening of a southern front contributed to Austria's defeat by Prussia in the Battle of Sadowa (July 3). The war, otherwise disastrous for the Italian forces, had the political result of winning for Italy the Italian regions still subject to Austria in the northeast, Venice and the Veneto, another stage in the process of unification.

On yet another front, a cholera epidemic broke out again in Italy making numerous victims, especially in Ancona and Naples. (August to December.)

On December 11 the French troops began to pull out of Rome as provided by the September Convention mentioned above.

At the time of writing, Don Bosco could not anticipate these and other developments, but he voices again his fears and concerns.

*Turin, January 25, 1866

Most Holy Father,

[1] The Marchioness Amat de Villarios,⁶³ a fervent Catholic and our generous benefactor is traveling to Rome, and I take this opportunity to voice some thoughts of mine, also on behalf of my numerous associates in the sacred ministry and of my youngsters.

[2] The work of the oratories is going forward without hindrance. Last year we opened a new oratory and another one, God willing, will be opened next summer.

[3] The young people given shelter in three separate hospices are 1200 in number. About 100 of them take the clerical habit every year. Most of them return to their diocese of origin and enter the seminary there. Those that have the proper spirit remain with us and join the Society of St. Francis de Sales, which at present is 110 members strong.

[4] Morning and evening we continue to offer special prayers for the present needs of the Church, and in particular for the preservation of Your Holiness' precious days.

[5] Our fear is that a great trial is in store for us before this year is over. Will it be pestilence or war or famine? May God's will be done. Only may God not take from us the vineyard of our evangelical labors for having found better workers for it.

⁶³ For Marchioness Villarios cf. Note 32 above.

[6] A great calamity for us has been the passage of the Bill on civil marriage that went into effect on New Year's day.⁶⁴ It is bound to dishearten the faithful and sow seeds of strife between civil and Church authorities, not to speak of its immoral consequences. What gives us hope in this crisis is the close union existing among the faithful, priests and bishops, and of these with the supreme Head of the Church.

[7] In any case, we are actively engaged in writing, preaching and in catechetical instruction with excellent results. We are very busy in the confessional, and the sacrament of Communion is very well attended. Our faith and our devotion are focused, one might say, on Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and on Mary Immaculate. With regard to our devotion to the Mother of God, you may be pleased to learn that the church of Mary Help of Christians has made great progress. The walls and the roof are completed, and hopefully we will be able to see God's work through to the end with the help of Divine Providence. It isn't the richest church in the city, but people are saying that it's the most imposing and the most apt to inspire devotion in the faithful.

[8] The publication of the *Catholic Readings* continues, and the Association is 12,000 members strong. This is their 14th year of publication. We ask your holy blessing for their continuance.

[9] The Society of St. Francis de Sales is making good progress. The religious discipline and zeal of its members leave nothing to be desired. We now look to the Holy See in the hope that our constitutions will be definitively approved, at the time and in the manner that Your Holiness will judge to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

[10] My associates, pastors and simple priests, the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the young people of our hospices and of our oratories join me in kneeling at Your Holiness' feet for your holy, Apostolic blessing.⁶⁵ All of us are ready to sacrifice our health and possessions, and our very lives for that holy religion of which you are the Head. More fortunate than they, but also on their behalf, I have the honor to be with gratitude and reverence,

Your Holiness'
Most devoted and humble son,
Father Giovanni Bosco

⁶⁴ On civil marriage, cf. Note 56 and related text above.

⁶⁵ The Pope's reply (in Latin) dated February 24 [ASC B26200 Pio IX] is transcribed and translated into Italian in *IBM VIII*, 312-313 (omitted in *EBM*).

[Comment]

In reporting on the progress of the oratories [# 2], Don Bosco speaks of two additional oratories, one opened in 1865 and the other to be opened in the summer of 1866—a puzzling statement. In the first instance, he may be referring to the Oratory of St. Joseph. But this oratory was taken over in 1863, at which time he would have had four oratories in Turin.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, in 1863 the Guardian Angel Oratory in the Borgo Vanchiglia had been seriously affected by urban renewal projects. When the parish church of St. Julia was built there through the munificent testamentary disposition of Marchioness Juliet Barolo and dedicated in 1866 with its oratory, Don Bosco closed his own. By closing the Guardian Angel Oratory Don Bosco had more Salesian personnel and resources to strengthen the Oratory of St. Joseph. In 1868 the boys attending this oratory numbered about 400.⁶⁷

In any case one is hard put to come up with two new oratories.

The three hospices mentioned in Paragraph # 3 are: the Oratory of Valdocco, the school of Mirabello and that of Lanzo. As usual, the statistics given in the paragraph are inflated. For example, in 1870 the Salesians numbered 62 (including Father Domenico Pestarino) and the novices 40, for a total of 102.⁶⁸ In 1866 the numbers were even smaller.

Again Don Bosco in paragraph # 5 voices his gloomy premonitions of an impending divine chastisement in the terms of the litany, “pestilence, famine and war,” the three great scourges of antiquity. Looking for “prophetic fulfillment” one could point to the above-mentioned disastrous (though small) war and the cholera epidemic of 1866. But it seems that Don Bosco was thinking of something “big” in line with a widely held theology of retribution.

With regard to the Catholic Readings [# 8], Don Bosco speaks of 12,000 members [*associati*]. Allowing for exaggeration, we should bear in mind that Don Bosco is not speaking of “subscribers.” The Catholic Readings were not circulated through subscription, but were instead distributed in parishes or towns by committed individuals that formed a kind of association—an ingenious idea.

⁶⁶ The Oratory of St. Joseph was started in 1859 by Mr. Carlo Occeletti in the Borgo San Salvario, at the southern outskirts of the city. Local priests acted as chaplains for the few years before Mr. Occeletti in 1863 asked Don Bosco to take it over. In 1864 Don Bosco appointed Father Giovanni Battista Francesia as its director [E. Valentini, *L'Oratorio festivo San Giuseppe 1863-1963* (Turin, 1963)].

⁶⁷ P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 173-174.

⁶⁸ P. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 325. Motto writes, “Don Bosco, we know, has a tendency to inflate the numbers of Salesians, of their houses and of their young people” [Motto, *Ep* II, 202].

13. Letter to Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli, April 5, 1867⁶⁹

In accordance with the terms of the September Convention, the French "peace-keeping force" completed its withdrawal in October 1866, leaving the city poorly defended by the papal troops. In his Allocution of October 29, 1866, the pope denounced in the strongest terms the "unjust and iniquitous acts" perpetrated by the Italian government against the Church. He affirmed the absolute necessity of the pope's temporal power to guarantee his complete freedom in the exercise of his pastoral office, and added that in the event of a take-over of the City by Italy he would not hesitate to go into voluntary exile.

Deprived of French protection, Rome was inviting attack. In March 1867, Garibaldi began to plan a military expedition against Rome. In September he was arrested and imprisoned by the Italian government, but was quickly returned to his island retreat of Caprera following widespread popular protests. In October the French government demanded that Italy stop Garibaldi and deployed a new garrison to be stationed near Rome for the protection of the city and the pope.

In spite of the tense political situation, negotiations to fill the vacant episcopal sees were re-started and they ran between December 1866 and March 1867, with Michelangelo Tonello as negotiator for the government of Prime Minister Bettino Ricasoli and Cardinal Antonelli for the Holy See. Don Bosco was in Rome between January 7 and March 2, 1867, with Father Giovanni Battista Francesia acting as his secretary. He was seeking the approval of the Salesian Society (as it turned out without success). Now he was also involved in the Tonello negotiations—to what extent being matter of dispute. A letter from Father Francesia written 10 days after their arrival in Rome, suggests that Don Bosco was quickly and heavily involved. Both sides presented lists of candidates, and Don Bosco made his own recommendations. Political turmoil and the fall of the Ricasoli government brought negotiations to a halt, but not before scores of bishops were nominated and appointed throughout Italy.⁷⁰ Back in Turin on March 2, Don Bosco through letters and memorandums continued to press for bishops' appointments. But there was no further progress.

In the present letter to Cardinal Antonelli, after reporting the general feeling of satisfaction for the appointments already made to dioceses of the north, Don Bosco makes further suggestions.

⁶⁹ Motto, *Ep* II, 347-350, # 1021, from *ASV SdS* 1867 rub. 165 prot. 45270, Don Bosco's holograph.

⁷⁰ For details see A. Lenti, "Politics of the 'Our Father' [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10:2 (1999) 181-245.

*Turin, April 5, 1867

Your Eminence,

[1] I take the opportunity afforded to me by private persons to write with the liberty that I could not take were I to use the postal service. About the appointment [of a bishop] for Fossano, you will have a direct report from Canons Viara and Rossi, very good priests, who have been sent to plead for the nomination of their candidate.

[2] The nominations of bishops for our area—Gastaldi for Saluzzo, Galletti for Alba, Savio for Asti—have been favorably received, even by people who are hostile to the Church. The same, we hope, will be the case of Coffi for Alessandria, Calabiana for Milan and Ferrè for Casale.

[3] The situation in which Bishop [Giovanni Antonio] Balma finds himself merits careful consideration. This worthy prelate is deservedly regarded as a saint. His private and public life testify to this. For the past 20 years he has worked untiringly for vacant dioceses. He has never hesitated to take upon himself the burden of painful trips or of ministerial work. In spite of this, his name does not appear on anyone's list of candidates.

[4] This has made a bad impression, and a thousand rumors have begun to circulate. Moreover, he finds himself in financial straits and gets by thanks to free-will offerings from kind and charitable persons.

[5] Please do look into this matter and do all you can for a person who is universally regarded as pious, learned, wise and zealous.

[6] We have a number of persons here who are highly regarded for their virtue, and would be well received by all authorities. Among these are [Pietro Giocondo] Salvaj, vicar general of Alba, [Pietro] Garga, vicar general of Novara, [Giovanni Battista] Bottino, canon of the cathedral of Turin, Canon [Francesco] Nasi of the same. Even more deserving of consideration is Father Dr. [Francesco] Marengo, professor of theology in the seminary of Turin. He is very much involved in the ministry as a writer and a speaker. All these persons are completely devoted to the Holy See

[7] Perhaps you will think me too bold in the way I write, but you were good enough to give me a father's welcome, and I feel encouraged to speak to you from the heart as a son. So kindly bear with me.

[8] I would again ask your support on behalf of our poor Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, while we continue to pray that God keep you for many years in good health. May God hear our prayer.

With profound esteem and gratitude I have the high honor to be,
You Eminence's

Most humble and devoted servant
Father Giovanni Bosco

[Comment]

In the last paragraph [# 8], Don Bosco asked the Cardinal for support on behalf of the Salesian Congregation, and well he might, for his recent petition for approval was meeting with strong objections in Rome. Don Bosco was asking too much, and the seven-point report by Consultor Savini, dated September 22, 1868, found the constitutions defective and recommended a longer waiting period.⁷¹ Furthermore, unfavorable reports had been received in Rome regarding religious discipline and formation in the Society. Don Bosco's petition was turned down.

After a short period of doubt, Don Bosco decided to make another attempt and left for Rome in early January 1869. In the meantime letters of commendation had been received in Rome, which did much to offset the bad reports. This time, perhaps even to Don Bosco's surprise, the Society was approved by decree of March 1, 1869. But the decree made the point that the Holy Father had approved the Society, but not its constitutions. These must first be emended in accordance with the critical observations of 1864.

[Additional Comment: Significant Events in 1867-1869]

While Don Bosco was waiting for the Holy See's response to his petition for approval of the Society and its constitutions, which as indicated above, proved unsuccessful, a new move against Rome was being planned by Garibaldi. Less than a month after his arrest and confinement to the island of Caprera, in October 1867 Garibaldi escaped and moved against Rome at the head of 9000 volunteers, while a revolutionary uprising (unsuccessful) was taking place there. After initial success against the papal forces, in the beginning of November he was defeated by the French contingents and forced to retreat into Italian territory, where he was arrested again and returned to Caprera. There followed in Rome a series of reprisals and executions.

As the State deficit mounted in 1868, the Italian government intensified the disposal at auction of confiscated Church properties, and imposed the hated grist⁷² tax, which caused widespread and violent public protest. Bloody repression by the army followed through the next few years. In April and May a Bill depriving clerics of the privilege of exemption from military service was debated and passed in Parliament, interpreted as another hostile move against the Church.

⁷¹ Motto, *Cost. SDB*, 237-238; *EBM IX*, 170. 174.

⁷² The "grist tax" was a percentage exacted by the government in kind or in money for grains brought to the mill to be ground into flour.

On June 28, 1868 Pius IX published the Bull of convocation of the First Vatican Council to open in St. Peter's on December 8, 1869. It was to cap years of religious renewal promoted by Pius IX, restate basic tenets of Catholic faith and tradition, and define the position of the papacy in the Church.

On March 31, 1869, Pius IX offered amnesty to the many political prisoners in Rome on condition that they would disavow their past and refrain from any subversive activity in the future. Many prisoners refused the amnesty.

14. Letter to Monsignor Joseph Fessler, Secretary of Vatican Council I, November 22, 1869⁷³

As the date of Vatican I approached, Don Bosco wrote the following letter.

Turin, November 22, 1869

Your Excellency,

[1] Needing to have information regarding attendance at the up-coming ecumenical council, I take the liberty of addressing my humble request to Your Excellency. Here then is my question.

[2] Letters and private information received from friends assure me that Superiors General of religious orders that have been definitively approved and have jurisdiction may attend the up-coming ecumenical council. However, I have not been able to ascertain whether religious congregations have the same right.

[3] I happen to be the Superior General of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, definitively approved as a congregation with simple, perpetual vows reserved to the Holy See.

[4] If in your great kindness you would have someone indicate to me whether as Superior of such a congregation I am eligible for participation in the council, I should regard it as a signal favor. I should not want to appear remiss in anything that would render homage to the Holy See, just as I would not like to intrude where I don't belong.

[5] Trusting that in your kindness you will forgive the trouble this request might cause you, I pray that God grant you good health and long life. With deep gratitude I am,

⁷³ Motto, *Ep III*, 153-154, # 1375, from *ASV Acta S. S. Concilii Vaticani, Secretariat of the Council from No. 1 to 200*, 117, Don Bosco's holograph.

Joseph Fessler, born in 1813 in Tyrol (Austria) took his doctorate in theology at the university of Vienna and was professor of Church history there. He was ordained bishop in 1862, and served as secretary of Vatican I (1868-1870) [Motto, *Ibid.*, 153]

Your Excellency's
Most devoted servant
Father Gio Bosco

[Comment]

The reply, in the negative, was immediate: Superiors General of congregations with simple vows, even if perpetual and reserved to the Holy See, did not have the right to participate in the Council.⁷⁴

The motivation given in Paragraph # 4 is of interest: Don Bosco would not want "to appear remiss in anything that would do homage to the Holy See." [!]

15. To the Capitular Vicar of Cremona, Luigi Tosi, November 26, 1869⁷⁵

The present letter deals not with matters of general political and religious significance but with an individual case. It does nevertheless reveal a facet, not often noted, of Don Bosco's priestly commitment: a concern for persons in trouble.

Turin, November 26, 1869

Very Reverend Monsignor Tosi,⁷⁶

[1] Divine Providence, which sometimes permits the very luminaries of the Church to fall into grievous and humiliating lapses, has led Father Carlo Morandi to this house sustained by public charity.⁷⁷

[2] Fully realizing the depth of the pit into which he had fallen, he chose a life of retirement completely dedicated to devotion, to the fulfillment of priestly

⁷⁴ Motto, *Ep* III, 153.

⁷⁵ Motto, *Ep* III, 156-157, #1379 from Archive of the Diocesan Chancery, Cremona, *serie: spedizioni* - cass. 208, Don Bosco's holograph.

⁷⁶ Luigi Tosi (1797-1872), knight of the Order of St. Maurice and Lazarus, served as pastor and as a canon of the cathedral of Cremona. In 1867 he was elected Capitular Vicar. Apparently during this period clergy discipline deteriorated, and many priests, including Tosi himself, were believed to be excessively liberal and critical of Rome [Motto, *Ibid.*, 157].

⁷⁷ Carlo Morandi, born in 1830 and ordained in 1856, exercised priestly ministry in Bergamo and Cremona. In 1867 (after his lapse?) he moved to Rivoli near Turin [Motto, *Ibid.*, 157].

duties, and to regular reception of the sacraments of Confession and Communion.

[3] With regard to the internal forum [the realm of conscience], his situation has been righted. Now he might be reinstated, if his bishop is willing to grant him a regular *celebret*. This is what I am asking on his behalf.

[4] He is willing to make a public retraction with the formulas and in the manner that you might require.

[5] My view is that after seven months of good conduct he might be reinstated, if in your wisdom you think such a step will be for the greater glory of God.

In your kindness please forgive the trouble that my request may cause you. Wishing you every blessing from God, I have the honor to be,

Your most devoted servant,
Father Gio Bosco

P. S. Seminarian Barnesi has been taken in as a boarder with us. In due time you will receive reports on his conduct.

[Comment]

As Don Bosco insinuates [# 1], and as the *Biographical Memoirs* confirm, at the time of writing the lapsed priest Carlo Morandi had been living for some time as Don Bosco's guest at the Oratory.⁷⁸

The lapse was apparently very serious [# 2] requiring a period of retirement that is said to have lasted seven months [# 5]. Having absolved his penitent from sins and any penalty incurred, Don Bosco requests that the priest be officially reinstated by his bishop [# 3].

The exact nature of the priest's transgression cannot be determined with certainty, but in his public retraction [# 4] of December 8 he regretted the "scandal of apostasy," so the newspaper *L'Unità Cattolica* reports.

We have received from the very reverend Carlo Morandi, a priest of the diocese of Cremona, a copy of the sincere retraction made by him on December 8 in honor of Mary Immaculate and of the ecumenical council. At the same time, this worthy minister of God also announces the publication in the next issue of the *Catholic Readings* of a pamphlet entitled, *Safely Back in the Holy Ark*. This

⁷⁸ "The Oratory witnessed with great joy the conversion of a priest who had been living with Don Bosco for several months. He had been sent by his bishop for his rehabilitation" [*IBM IX*, 763 (omitted in *EBM*).]

may also serve as reparation for the scandal of apostasy given in the course of 15 months.⁷⁹

This letter is proof that, driven by zeal and by Christ's pastoral charity, Don Bosco searched and cared for the stray sheep to bring them back into the fold. Letter No. 6 above is further proof. The *Biographical Memoirs* give further examples of his zeal and charity in dealing with Waldensian ministers.⁸⁰

[**Note on the Religious and Political Events of 1870 and Don Bosco's "Prophecies"**]

The letters that follow are charged with pain and concern. In them Don Bosco voiced his fears and his hopes as he witnessed what he perceived to be the dissolution of his "Catholic world." For they were written at a time when fateful historic events combined to bring about a new political balance of power in Europe and a new situation for the Catholic Church in Italy, especially as it affected the status of the papacy. At this point, therefore, it seems necessary to survey these events however briefly—the First Vatican Council, the Franco-Prussian War, the taking of Rome by Italy and the isolation of the Pope—and to record Don Bosco's perception of and reaction to these events. The letters voice and re-echo the same sentiments.

[*The First Vatican Council (Dec. 8, 1869-Sep. 1, 1870)*]

As mentioned above, the First Vatican Council opened on December 8, 1869 with the participation of some 600 Council fathers. It held 89 general congregations and 4 public sessions. The agenda included several important doctrinal and pastoral issues, among which the much debated dogmatic definition of papal infallibility. The council promulgated two doctrinal constitutions. *Dei Filius* (on God, Revelation, Faith and Reason) won unanimous approval on April 24, 1870. *Pastor Aeternus*, defining the jurisdictional primacy and the infallibility of the pope, was approved on July 18, 1870 not without lively debate and significant dissent, especially from some French, German and Piedmontese bishops.

The significance of the definition lay not so much in the area of doctrine, as in that it strengthened papal authority over against episcopal and conciliar tendencies in the Church. It centralized the Church's jurisdiction, magisterium and disciplinary powers. In the perception of some it also seemed to strengthen

⁷⁹ *L'Unità Cattolica*, December 12, 1869 in *Opere Edite* XXXVIII, 83-84 and in *IBM IX*, 763-764 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁸⁰ See for example *EBM V*, 89-91, 291-295.

the position of the papacy in relation to the secular state in that it claimed for the pope supreme authority in the moral field, which is obviously related to various areas of society and politics.

As indicated above, Don Bosco had queried Rome by letter regarding his right to participate in the Council as Superior of a religious congregation. The reply was in the negative; nevertheless he spent over a month in Rome (January 20-February 23) during the early phases of the Council. As was to be expected, Don Bosco was a staunch and outspoken supporter of papal infallibility and tirelessly pleaded the case with bishops of the opposition, while his printing presses in Turin were turning out copy in its support. He may have been instrumental in winning Bishop Lorenzo Gastaldi of Saluzzo over to the cause.⁸¹

The First Vatican Council held its last session on September 1, 1870. It was hastily adjourned in October, after the occupation of Rome by the Italian army on September 20, 1870. The taking of Rome was itself occasioned by the Franco-Prussian War, which left Rome practically defenseless, due to the recall of the French garrison.

[The Franco-Prussian War (July 19, 1870 – March 3, 1871) and the Taking of Rome (September 20, 1870)]

On July 19, 1870 (the day after the definition of papal infallibility) France declared war on Prussia ostensibly to prevent a Hohenzollern from occupying the Spanish throne, while Italy declared its neutrality. The war was quickly over. On September 1, in the battle of Sedan, the French suffered a crushing defeat, and Napoleon III himself surrendered to King William I of Prussia and acknowledged himself as a prisoner. On September 4, 1870 the Third Republic was proclaimed in Paris. Paris itself surrendered to the Germans after a fairly prolonged siege (September 19, 1870-January 28, 1871), after which a treaty of peace was drafted at Versailles and finalized at Frankfurt an main on May 10.

During the siege, and especially after the Versailles peace settlement, Paris passed through a terrible period of internal disorder. An uprising of "communists," that is, fanatical democratic republicans who demanded a federation of the townships (communes), attempted to overthrow the elected government of the Third Republic. They seized and fortified the northern part of the city, and a new reign of terror began. The archbishop of Paris and many others were murdered. While the Germans kept neutral in the forts, the republican army besieged Paris again. In the fierce struggle for the possession of the city, the "communists" set the principal buildings on fire. The Tuileries, the Hotel de Ville, part of the Palais Royal, the "Pantheon" and other public buildings were

⁸¹ Cf. *EBM IX*, 372-373, 381-385.

either destroyed or heavily damaged.⁸² The insurrection was at length suppressed, and its leaders were executed or deported.

At the onset of the hostilities between France and Prussia, the Italian Parliament in extraordinary session voted for a quick settlement of the Roman question "in accordance with national aspirations." A memorandum was dispatched to the European powers emphasizing the urgent need of settling the Roman question, so as to forestall a republican revolutionary takeover. On September 5, following Napoleon III's defeat, the Italian government reached the unanimous decision to occupy Rome, though not before making a further attempt to get Pius IX to surrender the city voluntarily and peaceably. As expected, Pius IX rejected the proposal. On September 20, 1870, while the Vatican Council was still in session, the Italian artillery opened a breach in the wall at Porta Pia, and the ensuing skirmishes left 49 Italian and 19 papal soldiers dead. The surrender was signed, and the whole city, with the exception of the Vatican palaces where Pius IX had taken refuge, was occupied. In early October by popular referendum Rome and the surrounding territory of Latium were annexed to Italy. With the encyclical *Rescriptores* of November 1, 1870, Pius IX declared the take-over an unjust and illegal usurpation and excommunicated the king of Italy and anyone who might have had anything to do with it.

[*Don Bosco's Prophecy of 1870: "God Alone Is Almighty"*]

At the beginning of that same year, amid rumors of impending war and fears for the safety of Rome, Don Bosco had a visionary experience with premonitions of divine punishments for France and Italy, Paris and Rome. He set it in writing, copies were made and circulated—the "Prophecy of 1870." Don Bosco describes the circumstances of his "prophetic experience" and its character at the outset of his narration.⁸³

⁸² In the Prophecy of 1870, in the apostrophe to Paris, discussed below, Don Bosco mentions the Pantheon specifically: "Your idol, the Pantheon, shall be razed to the ground."

The Pantheon, so called from its round shape resembling the Pantheon in Rome, was first intended as a church dedicated to St. Geneviève, patroness of Paris. During the Napoleonic period it was dedicated instead as a burial monument of the "great men" of France. Used as a church during the Restoration, it was re-converted in the Third Republic.

⁸³ In ASC 132: *Autografi-Sogni* (FDBM 1346 A1-1347 D3) are ten "authenticated" dreams and prophecies of Don Bosco, edited by Cecilia Romero, FMA, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, Edizione critica (Torino: LDC, 1978). Among them are (1) the Prophecy of 1870; (2) The Prophetic Message to Pius IX of 1873; (3) the Prophetic Message to Emperor Francis Joseph I of Austria of 1873. The three of them are relevant to Don Bosco's "prophetic" interpretation of the events surrounding the taking of Rome found in some of the

On the vigil of the Epiphany [January 5] of this year, 1870, all material things in my room disappeared, and I found myself contemplating supernatural matters. It was only a flash of an instant's duration, but I saw a great deal. Although what I witnessed was sensibly present, I find it extremely difficult to communicate it to others intelligibly, as one may realize by what follows. This is the Word of God in human speech.

Of the many copies of the prophecy in *ASC*, Fr. Berto's copy of Don Bosco's original manuscript is the most important extant source because Don Bosco himself destroyed the original. The *only extant autograph* portion of the prophecy is the "Address to Pius IX" ("Now the voice of heaven...") that Don Bosco had written separately and Berto managed to preserve.⁸⁴

Later (March 1, 1874) Don Bosco made marginal interpretative notations to the Berto manuscript. He also dictated (or wrote) interpretative comments on sixteen points of the prophecy, which in the Berto manuscript, appear as an appendix to the main text.⁸⁵ By so doing he authenticated the whole text of the prophecy.

After Don Bosco's death, Berto as archivist of the Society filed Don Bosco's autograph Address to Pius IX, with the date February 12 and an explanatory note:

Don Bosco's holograph. Prophetic fragment written [by Don Bosco] as a complement to the prophecy sent to the Holy Father Pius IX on February 12, 1870. [...] Of this prophecy copies were made from the original to satisfy requests

present letters. For a critical study of these texts, see F. Desramaut, "Le récit de l'audience pontificale du 12 février 1870 dans les Memorie Biografiche de don Bosco," *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 6:1 (1987) 82-104, and P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol. II, *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, 2. ed. (Roma: LAS, 1981, 475-500 and 507-569), translated as *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996). The Appendix on dreams is published separately as *Don Bosco's Dreams* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 35-53. The Prophecy of 1870 is transcribed in *IBM*, and translated in *EBM IX*, 373-376 and again X, 51-55.

⁸⁴ This autograph portion is marked with asterisks, as edited by Amadei in the *Biographical Memoirs* [cf. *EBM X*, pp. 52-53]. It appears to be an insertion into what would otherwise be a well structured composition.

⁸⁵ Cf. *EBM X*, pp. 54-55 (Appendix of clarifications). The marginal notes appear in *EBM* as parenthetical insertions made at the proper place in the main text. One should bear in mind that both sets of annotations were made by Don Bosco on the complete Berto manuscript four years later (March 1874).

from some pious persons. The original is no longer in our possession, for it was returned to Don Bosco and destroyed by him.⁸⁶

In the Biographical Memoirs Lemoyne took this to have been the date of a presumed second audience at which the prophecy would have been presented, and the address read, to the Pope. We now have Don Bosco's contrary attestation in the letter of October 29, 1870 to Cardinal Berardi (to be presented below). He states that he did have a copy of the prophecy with him in Rome in January-February, but that he did not present it to the Pope.⁸⁷ The Address to Pius IX may have been composed by Don Bosco while in Rome and read or spoken to the Pope at an audience, though Berto speaks of it as "sent."

Be that as it may, the Prophecy of 1870 with Don Bosco's annotations and clarifications has importance at this point because of its content. It voices the same concerns and themes to be found in the letters, especially those that follow below.

Overlooking the inserted Address to Pius IX, the prophecy is structured in three parts with an introduction and an epilogue. The introduction gives a description of the prophetic experience and sounds the theme: "War comes from the south, peace from the north."

Part I announces God's punishment on France and Paris with a threefold visitation (in the disastrous Franco-Prussian War). The second visitation culminates in the devastation of Paris, which is apostrophized as "the great whore of Babylon" and "Europe's brothel."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ ASC 111, Sogni, FDB 1312 E5.

⁸⁷ By a critical examination of all available sources, Desramaut (cited in Note 83 above) has corrected Lemoyne's account in the *Biographical Memoirs*, reconstructed Don Bosco's activities during the Roman sojourn (January 20—February 23), and re-dated the papal audiences. The audience of February 8 is firm. But Lemoyne inferred that it was at a presumed audience of February 12 that Don Bosco presented the message to the Pope. There may have been a second audience (perhaps of February 15, according to Desramaut). February 12, however, was apparently the date on which a copy of the prophecy was received by "an important person" in Rome (not the Pope!), and came into the possession of an editor of the *Civiltà Cattolica*. Some two years later the Jesuit journal published an article on prophetic messages and referred (anonymously) to Don Bosco's prophecy. It noted that the prophecy had been made before the events of the Franco-Prussian War and the taking of Rome, and (with some reservations) that it had been fulfilled in those events ["I Vaticini e i nostri tempi, parte seconda," *Civiltà Cattolica*, Serie VIII, 6: 525 (April 23, 1872) 303-304].

⁸⁸ Don Bosco mentions the razing of the Pantheon to the ground, for which see Note 82 and related text above. Actually the Pantheon was heavily damaged but not completely destroyed.

Part II briefly presents the vision of the Warrior from the North meeting the Venerable Old Man of Latium.⁸⁹

[The inserted *Address to Pius IX* (“Now the voice of Heaven is addressed to the Shepherd of Shepherds”) exhorts the Pope to proceed despite the opposition with the “solemn conference” (the First Vatican Council just begun), “until the hydra of error has been beheaded.”⁹⁰]

Part III (a counterpart to Part I above) is an apostrophe or oracle against Italy, also severely punished by God, and against Rome, which will be visited with chastisements four times. The third visitation culminates in the fall of the city, and the fourth in a blood bath.

The epilogue is a message of hope. “The great Queen of Heaven is on hand” to restore the Pope to his former status, to end the reign of sin, and bring on the rainbow of peace “before two full moons shall have shone in the month of flowers.”

The following brief letter in Don Bosco’s hand, but without “address” and signature, was actually addressed to Cardinal Berardi (as may be gathered from the letter of April 11, 1871 to the same). It refers to the prophecy and re-echoes some of its themes.

15. Letter to Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi, October 29, 1870⁹¹

Turin, October 29, 1870

[Your Eminence.]

⁸⁹ For Don Bosco’s conjectures as to the identity of the Warrior from the North, see the comment below. The Venerable Old Man of Latium is obviously Pope Pius IX.

⁹⁰ As Don Bosco states in marginal notes, the on-going debate over papal infallibility that overshadowed the Council even before its inception is alluded to here.

⁹¹ Motto, *Ep* III, 267-268, # 1480, from *ASV SdS* [from the papers of Pius IX], Don Bosco’s holograph; photocopy in *ASC* B31210, Bilio (A 1790218), *FDB* 2,645 B8; edited in Ceria, *Ep* II, 127, in *IBM* IX, 828-829 and in *EBM* IX, 401-402 (my translation). As may be seen, the letter had been published before Motto’s critical edition. It is nonetheless submitted here because of its references and allusions.

Giuseppe Berardi (1810-1878) was a life-long and close friend of Don Bosco. Married and father of a daughter, after his wife’s death he was ordained a priest and then bishop in 1863. He was appointed cardinal in 1868. A doctor of law and a close collaborator of Cardinal Antonelli, he filled high positions with the Holy See [Motto, *Ibid.*, 268].

[1] The piece of writing herewith enclosed comes from someone who has on other occasions given evidence of possessing supernatural gifts. I had it with me in Rome this winter.

[2] I had occasion to mention some of these things to the Holy Father but did not dare to leave him the manuscript. Now that he has been so kind as to send me word that I should speak clearly and explicitly, leaving nothing out, I have decided to pass it on to you. There are other things that cannot be put in writing but that might be said in person by word of mouth with the secrecy that the subject demands. Should anything seem unclear, I might obtain the necessary clarification. You may freely make use of this piece; all I ask is that you do not mention my name on any account, for reasons that you will readily appreciate.

[3] If I knew of a reliable, discreet person who could carry a message to the king of Prussia, I would certainly have a number of things to convey to him that might please him. Grant us your holy blessing.⁹²

[Father Gio. Bosco]

[Comment]

The "someone" in # 1 is obviously Don Bosco himself, and likewise the "piece of writing" he is passing on to Cardinal Berardi is the prophetic vision of January 5, 1870 that he had with him in Rome in January and February.

In paragraph # 2 we learn that while in Rome he did not convey much to the Pope, nor did he leave the manuscript with him. But since Pius IX had expressed his desire to know more, Don Bosco was sending a copy to the Cardinal to use as he saw fit, obviously also to present it to the Pope.

The King of Prussia [# 3] was William I, who defeated Austria in 1866, as indicated above, and France in 1870-1871. This victory paved the way for the federation of Germany over which he reigned as emperor until 1888. Don Bosco may have thought that he might be the Warrior from the North of the prophecy. (Apparently Don Bosco did not reckon with the redoubtable Otto von Bismarck and his *Kulturkampf*.) In 1873, on the other hand, in his Address to Francis Joseph I of Austria, Don Bosco invites the emperor to lead a counter-revolution. Both rulers are from the geographical north. In his 1874 annotations, however, he mentions "Don Carlos" as the Warrior from the North. The Don Carlos in question is Carlos María de los Dolores de Borbón y Austria-Este, Duque de

⁹² The *Biographical Memoirs* add: "As an added item to these predictions, so Father Gioachino Berto attests, Don Bosco declared, 'A revolution will break out. There shall be apostasies among both the learned and the ignorant. Prussia will be converted. Then shall follow a great victory for the Church and a great triumph for the Pope.'" [EBM IX, 402, my translation]

Madrid (1848-1909). He was the fourth Carlist pretender to the Spanish throne (as Charles VII), the eldest son of the third Carlist pretender, Don Juan de Borbón. This fourth Don Carlos provoked a bloody civil war (1872-1876) and achieved successes in the north of Spain. He was ultimately defeated and went into exile after Alfonso XII came to the throne in 1874. Apart from political considerations, the Carlists represented the most conservative Catholic position against liberal developments in Spain.⁹³

16. To Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi, April 11, 1871⁹⁴

This letter was written while the so-called Law of Guarantees was being debated in the Italian Parliament and was nearing passage. The person of the pope presented a special problem for the Italian government. He had been deprived of temporal power, but he could not be eliminated, removed or exiled. Italy had to make allowances for a pope in Rome, just as it had to make allowance for bishops, for clergy, and for a strong Catholic, indeed popish, presence among its population. A widespread feeling of dismay and indignation, in Italy and abroad, at the way in which the pope had been dispossessed by unilateral action was a factor, and besides saving face, the government needed to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Church. Therefore, to allay the fears of the international community, but also in accord with a policy that had guided the liberal governments since Cavour, Prime Minister Lanza introduced a Bill to establish guarantees for the free exercise of papal power. On January 22, 1871, debate on a Bill entitled "Prerogatives of the Pope and the Holy See, and Relations between

⁹³ With regard to Don Bosco's view of the Carlist cause, Father Giulio Barberis writes in his Chronicle: "[In the dining room after supper] the subject of Don Carlos came up in the conversation. Someone mentioned that Archbishop [Giovanni] Simeoni had been accredited as papal Nuncio in Madrid at the court of Don Alfonso (Don Carlos' rival), and that this appointment was bound to be very damaging to the Carlist cause. Don Bosco did not think so. He said: "Don Carlos does not view this action by the Holy See as being against him [...]. He knows that the Holy See remains sympathetic to his cause. But since matters of importance to the Church, such as securing benefices to bishops, were about to be negotiated, a Nuncio had to be appointed. [...] When I was in Rome this past winter, I discussed this very matter with Archbishop Simeoni. [...] As for me, I have always spoken openly in support of Don Carlos' cause from the start. But when I realized that different views were held in Rome, I became a lot more cautious. [Barberis Chronicle, Notebook I, p. 43-44 (entry of June 2, 1875), *FDB* 833 E5-6].

⁹⁴ Motto, *Ep* III, 320-322, # 1529, from *ASC* B31010 *Let. orig., Berardi* (A 1690709) *FDB* 2,641 B 10-12.

Church and State in Italy" opened in Parliament. The "Law of Guarantees," as it came to be known, took effect on May 15, 1871.⁹⁵

By the encyclical *Ubi nos arcano Dei* (May 15, 1871) Pius IX rejected the law as a scheme "to deceive Catholics and soothe their anxiety." He affirmed once again that temporal power was the only true guarantee of the pope's independence.⁹⁶

In spite of the rhetoric of freedom for the pope, the Italian government claimed the right to approve the nomination of bishops and pastors, and to issue permits before they could take possession. At the same time oppressive restrictions were imposed. Religious services were being interfered with, and Catholics were denied the right of canvassing, of assembly, and of holding processions and other public manifestations. On the other hand, the government freely permitted anticlerical assemblies and demonstrations.

What's more, in line with the program of legal unification, the punitive Rattazzi Laws against religious congregations, in the form already applied to the united kingdom of Italy in 1866 and 1867, were extended to Rome itself. These laws, all along debated in the press and on the street, took effect on June 19, 1873. Since many religious congregations had established general houses in Rome, the application of this policy seemed even more monstrous.

The unyielding attitude on the part of the Holy See, justified as it may have been in principle, made matters worse in practice. This was true, for example in the matter of the nomination and appointment of bishops. Don Bosco worked hard and long for the nomination and appointment of bishops to the many dioceses that still remained vacant. And while engaged in a veritable struggle to have the Salesian constitutions definitively approved, he was deeply involved in

⁹⁵ The chief provisions of the Law of Guarantees dealt with the pope's prerogatives: (1) immunity of papal territorial residences (the Vatican, the Lateran and the villa of Castelgandolfo); (2) an endowment of 3,225,000 lire, comparable to the former papal revenues; (3) personal inviolability; (4) right to honors as a sovereign ruler and to a corps of armed guards; (5) free, unimpeded exercise of the spiritual power; (6) right to free, uncensored communication in and outside Italy, and the power to receive and appoint ambassadors.

At the same time, Lanza presented a Bill to transfer the capital from Florence to Rome. The official transfer took place on July 1, 1871, and on July 2 King Victor Emmanuel II and his government made their solemn entrance into the eternal city. Officially Florence served as the capital of Italy from February 3, 1865 to July 1, 1871.

⁹⁶ From the point of view of the government, the Law of Guarantees in itself was as needed as it was liberal. But it was imposed unilaterally. From the point of view of the Holy See, it was nothing but a scheme to divert attention from the real issue, that of "restoration," the only basis for dialogue.

negotiating a formula that would guarantee to the bishops, once appointed, the royal permit and their revenues, but without success.⁹⁷

Such then were the new political arrangements and the ensuing political and religious climate that marked the years 1871-1874.

Turin, April 11, 1871

Your Eminence,

[1] Bishop Manacorda was the bearer of good news, and we were overjoyed to hear that Your Eminence is well, for we were really worried. Now we may thank the Lord that in the midst of public turmoil you are in good health and able to work for the good of the Church.

[2] How I would wish to have comforting news to convey by this letter, but unfortunately I only have distressing news. Nevertheless a person who at times in the past was favored with extraordinary lights is giving us assurance that the present situation in Rome will not outlast the current year.

[3] In May the morning star will appear to show us wherefrom we may hope to have salvation. By Mary's Assumption [August 15] all good people will rejoice on account of the wonderful boon received from heaven. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception [December 8], solemn celebrations will be held in peace. In the interval, however, dreadful events will take place in Rome, as I have already indicated to you in a previous letter, assuming that you received it.

[4] These dreadful events in Rome will be in the nature of plunder of property both sacred and secular and oppression of persons resulting in bloodshed and victims.

[5] Guided by divine inspiration, the Holy Father will know what to do in that situation. But for his own safety and that of his people he may have to leave the Vatican, though only to return a short time thereafter to be the comforting angel of the sorrowing and despairing.

[6] With regard to the cause of these evils or, more accurately, to the reason why God permits such dreadful calamities, I have already expressed my belief to the Holy Father and to Your Eminence last year. The reason is especially to be sought in the serious failure on the part of priests to break the bread of the divine word to children as well as adults. In four fifths of the towns and villages in Italy no catechetical instruction is offered to children, or to adults for that matter. What's the *Catechismus ad parochos* for then? Yet in some of these towns there are crowds of priests who have nothing to do but kill the time of day.

⁹⁷ Cf. Lenti, *DB's Mediation*.

[7] Add to this another bane, the pursuit of the good life [by priests]—eating, drinking, making money—and its consequence, unchastity (*de sexto*).

[8] There are many hard-working priests, surely, as there are many faithful and fervent lay people. But their good influence is practically negated by the wickedness of the others. Furthermore, do we preach on the great Gospel verities, for example, on the text, *Quod superest date pauperibus?*⁹⁸ How many priests do this in earnest?

[9] At this point I feel bound to draw a curtain of silence over a certain matter, for I don't dare commit it to paper: *the progress of Freemasonry in Rome*.

[10] For your saintly self, I have no message except that you should take care of your health and continue to be, as you've always been, an ever-available help to the Holy Father. *The person who foresaw your elevation to the cardinalate believes to have had a vision of a cardinal, perhaps the very same, as in a tableau. The Holy Father sat on a hillock while the cardinal sat on another. A thick fog that became progressively thicker separated the two. Meanwhile a breeze arose that lifted and blew away the sand on which [the cardinal?] was seated.*⁹⁹

[11] Now am I in a bind for having been such a clown! I beg two favors of you: that you will overlook the liberty I've taken, and that you'll tear this sheet to pieces once you've read it. Please do not save it under any circumstance.

[12] As for the rest, I want to assure you again that we will pray every day for you, for your brother's family, especially for young Master Gaetano to whom we offer our best wishes.

[13] Things are well with us, both as to numbers and as to religious discipline. But we're being taxed out of existence, among other troubles. Kindly remember us in your prayers and continue to keep us under your sure protection.

With deepest reverence and heartfelt gratitude I have the honor to be,

Your Eminence's
Most devoted servant
Father Gio. Bosco

⁹⁸ "What's over and above, give to the poor" [Lk 11:41 Vulgata]. Taken out of context (external and internal cleanliness), the text was cited as a norm for almsgiving. The original is of difficult interpretation. NRSV translates: "Give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you."

⁹⁹ *La persona che presagì la sua elevazione crede di aver ravvisato un porporato, che sia quello stesso, in questo atteggiamento: il Santo Padre era sopra un poggio, il porporato sopra di un altro. Esso era diviso da quello da una folta nebbia che si andava ognor più addensando. Intanto un vento soffiando agitava e sperdeva l'arena sopra cui sedeva.*

[Comment]

The person endowed with supernatural illumination mentioned in # 2, is the same person of the previous letter and of the Prophecy of 1870, discussed above, namely Don Bosco himself. He proceeds in # 3 to tell the Cardinal what his eminence knew only too well, that is, the bad situation in Rome after the take-over and the Law of Guarantees. Don Bosco anticipates dreadful events, plunder and bloodshed, as he had told the Cardinal in the previous letter. He also has premonitions that the Pope will have to flee from Rome [# 5].

In this respect, Don Bosco's Prophecy of 1873, addressed to Pius IX, voices these premonitions most emphatically.¹⁰⁰ The message is entitled, "May 24-June 24, 1873," and begins with the words, "It was a dark night." A note appended to the text by Don Bosco (referring to the Prophecy of 1870) reads: "The person reporting these things is the same who unerringly predicted what happened to France a year before it took place. These predictions were widely known and were fulfilled day by day [...]."

The prophetic message of 1873 describes Pius IX's and his followers' flight from, and return to, Rome, in three parts.

Pius IX leaves the Vatican and Rome at the head of a throng of men, women, children, monks, nuns, and priests (many of who die or are wounded). They come to a stop after a 200-day march.

Two angels appear and offer to the pope a banner bearing the inscriptions, "Queen conceived without sin" and "Help of Christians." They bid the pope return with his followers and start a movement for the re-evangelization of the world.

The pope and his followers (now growing in number) return to Rome (another 200-day journey) to find the city and all the land devastated. They offer thanksgiving in St. Peter's. Darkness vanishes, and the sun shines brightly over the world.

In the present letter (written in April) the saving role of Mary is described in # 3. Through the tribulation that will not be prolonged beyond 1871, Mary will take initiative in her month of May, on August 15 (Assumption) and on December 8 (Immaculate Conception).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For references see note 83 above. In *ASC* we have Don Bosco's holograph and a copy by Fr. Berto (1874), to which Don Bosco added some interpretative marginal notations, thus conferring on it definitive authority. The prophecy message of 1873 is edited in *IBM X*, 63-65 and translated in *EBM X*, 55-57. The original holograph is extensively corrected, as though for publication; but in fact the message reached only Pius IX, either in written or oral form, through a cardinal [Cf. *EBM X*, 50].

¹⁰¹ The Prophecy of 1870 ends with the month-of-May theme: "There shall yet come a violent hurricane. Iniquity is at an end, sin shall cease, and before two full moons shall have shone in the month of flowers, the rainbow of peace shall appear on the earth."

Don Bosco interprets the dreadful events in the light of faith [# 6-9] ascribing them to the failure on the part of priests to preach and catechize, and to live according to standards of Christian holiness. Don Bosco then relates "a vision" [# 10] in which the Cardinal and the Pope appear in counterpart. The wording is unclear and so is the meaning. Perhaps Don Bosco is envisioning the Cardinal's elevation to the papacy.

17. To Pius IX, April 14, 1871¹⁰²

In the same political and religious context described above, as debate on the Law of Guarantees was coming to an end, Don Bosco penned a letter to the Holy Father to offer support and comfort.

*Turin, April 14, 1871

Most Holy Father,

[1] The fact that Bishop Manacorda is returning to Rome gives me the welcome opportunity to kneel at your feet and express my filial devotion to Your Holiness' person, also in the name of the whole Salesian Congregation and all the young people in our care.

[2] We want to assure you that often in the day, in fact continually, our thoughts turn to you in the Vatican. We grieve over the painful condition imposed on our good father, though we cannot bring you any comfort except that of our prayers, both private and common. All of us, priests, seminarians, students and working boys with the participation of other priests and lay people, offer special prayers morning and evening for the peace of the Church and for the freedom and independence of its Head.

[3] While we pray that the days of trial may be shortened and that the Lord may quickly show his mercy, we make every effort to fight godlessness. We do this by preaching, with the press and with the dissemination of good books, which not only are tolerated but are having a favorable reception. The *Catholic Readings* now have a circulation of 15,000 pamphlets each month, and the *Library of Italian Classics*, 5,000.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Motto, *Ep* III, 322-323, #1530, from *ASV Ep. Lat. Pos. et Mm.* 117, Don Bosco's holograph.

¹⁰³ The *Biblioteca della Gioventù Italiana* (Italian Young People's Library) was launched on November 18, 1868. As part of its editorial policy Don Bosco stipulates that "those classics that deal with subject matter offensive to religion or morality shall be presented in expurgated form or entirely omitted, no matter how high their credentials" [*IBM* IX, 429 (omitted in *EBM*)]. After getting the series under way, Don Bosco appointed the learned Father Celestino Durando its editor-in-chief. Publication continued