



Don Bosco in Rome

**A Guide to don Bosco's places
in the Capital**

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Rome, 9 October 2022

The canonisation of Salesian Brother Artemides Zatti is a special grace of God's Providence at this time in history. The recognition of the holiness of a confrere who lived the gospel project of the Constitutions to the full is a stimulus and help on the path to holiness of all of us Salesians. The witness of this holiness, achieved within the Salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes, and is the most precious gift that we can offer to the young (C 25). After the canonisation of Don Bosco, which took place on 1 April 1934, and the canonisation of Saints Aloysius Versiglia and Callistus Caravario, which took place on 1 October 2000, the proclamation of the holiness of Artemides Zatti by Pope Francis on 9 October 2022 indicates to the entire Church that he is the first Salesian Brother saint of the Salesian Congregation. This event, as Constitution 45 tells us, reminds us Salesians of Don Bosco of the complementary beauty of our vocation:

Each of us is responsible for the common mission, and participates in it with the richness of his own personal gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the Salesian vocation.

The Salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life.

The Salesian priest or deacon brings to the common work of promoting human development and of educating in the faith the specific quality of his ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments.

The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay Salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make up and of its apostolic completeness.

It is with great joy that I offer you this text, "Don Bosco in Rome" on this occasion, as a gift to Salesians taking part in the canonisation, but also as a valuable legacy for everyone who reads this book. The book speaks of Don Bosco's love for the Eternal City, helps us grasp his profound understanding of Rome and his desire to open a house in the Pope's own city. Just as the value of the education received from Mamma Margaret, the dream at nine years of

age that marked his life, and the simplicity of country life emerge from the home and fields at the Becchi; just as we grasp the value of sacrifice, friendship, work and study, the desire to discover the priestly vocation from his time in Chieri; just as the outline of the vocation to serve the young that needed constant discernment in his time at the Convitto, and in the initial wanderings of the oratory is revealed in the city of Turin; and finally, just as the Don Bosco who created the Preventive System, built a house where young people experienced the spirit of family, established schools and workshops, and gathered the first group of young people who would become the first Salesians emerges at Valdocco, the cradle of Salesian spirituality, so does Don Bosco the founder emerge clearly in Rome – the one who showed his love for the Church and the Pope with the desire to receive the approval of the Salesian Constitutions. The book illustrates a true historical and spiritual pilgrimage to Don Bosco's places in Rome: 1. Don Bosco's residences in Rome; 2. The places most visited and dearest to the Saint; 3. Potential Salesian houses in Rome.

My hope is that each Salesian of Don Bosco and each member of the Salesian Family, as they retrace these places with faith and devotion, may relive the passion of our founder in themselves and faithfully continue to renew the charism of St John Bosco through the witness of personal holiness. May St Artemides Zatti intercede for us.

*Don Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major*

INTRODUCTION

Often, when speaking about Don Bosco, we recall and recount certain particular episodes from his life that took place not in Turin or at the Becchi, but during his many journeys outside Turin and away from Piedmont. Among these, undoubtedly, the greater majority of them had Rome as their goal.

There are few people today who, when visiting the Eternal City (or even living there), wonder what places in Italy's capital city saw the presence of the saint.

This question prompted us to carefully study these journeys which, as many know, numbered twenty in all. A calculation, albeit an approximate one, of the days that Don Bosco spent in Rome has surprised us – as many as 700. This means that out of his 72 years of life the saint spent almost 2 of them in the city of the Popes. And that is not insignificant if we consider the transport conditions in the 19th century.

Over two years and in a 'restricted' Rome as it was then, it is natural that the saint from Turin visited everything there was to visit. So a first answer to the previous question could be: 'Did Don Bosco see everything that could be visited?'

But often, 'everything' is synonymous with 'nothing'.

Looking more closely at the pages of the *Biographical Memoirs* that recount his travels, a certain "topographical map" of the places that were of most interest to the saint forms in the reader's mind. It is on these, then, that we focus our attention, bearing in mind the regrets of people who would like to see everything but are nevertheless forced to make choices.

Unfortunately, some of these places no longer exist today (such as the '*casa dei confessori*' at the Tor de' Specchi Monastery, the monastery of St Cajo al Quirinale, Bishop Manacorda's house ...) because they were demolished in the successive urban redevelopments of the city. It would therefore be useless to include them in what is meant to be a guide for those who intend to visit the "Don

Bosco's Rome" today.

Twenty trips are a lot. But why did the Saint go to Rome so often?

1. Out of love for the Pope.
2. Out of love for the Eternal City.
3. To gain approval of the Rules of the Salesian Society.
4. For appointment of bishops and the question of their 'temporalities'.
5. In order to spread distribution of the *Catholic Readings*.
6. To seek finances for his works.



In order to give a degree of logical unity to the work, these places have been divided into three parts, each of which includes an explanation and, above all, quoting from pages in the *Biographical Memoirs* that refer to each place. However, these parts are not a tour itinerary in themselves, both because the places in each part are sometimes very far apart, and because we leave it to the freedom of the individual to choose those places they consider more of interest for including in any plans to visit the eternal city, unhampered by some pre-established order.

1. Where Don Bosco stayed in Rome

The various buildings (*palazzi*) that hosted the Saint during his stays in Rome are described here. Naturally, we are more attached to some (Tor de' Specchi, Via Sistina...) and to others a little less so. Moreover, for some we have an abundance of narrative material from the pages of the *Biographical Memoirs*, while for others this is not the case. These are the reasons for the considerable difference in the length of the more or less detailed individual explanations.

Any reference to where Don Bosco stayed on each journey should not be lacking a brief presentation of the journey and the reasons that had driven the Saint to Rome on that occasion.

2. The Saint's most visited and dearest places

There is no question that the place most visited by Don Bosco was the Vatican, in all its parts (Basilica, Cupola, St Peter's Tomb, Apostolic Palaces, Papal Audiences...). But there are other places to which Don Bosco was particularly attached. They make this second part of the work. We have also included in this part the sympathetic account of Don Bosco's meeting with a group of boys which took place in Piazza del Popolo, because it seemed to us the only one of the three parts where this could be placed without forcing it.

3. Potential Salesian houses in Rome

Don Bosco often thought of sending his sons to Rome, for the good of the people and for closeness to the Holy See. His thoughts fell on many institutes already existing in the city and which the Saint only considered after a direct invitation to take care of them (often from the Pope).

However, he had to wait until the construction of the Sacred Heart Basilica, with its adjoining Hospice, was completed before he could have a house of his own in Rome.

For those who wish to visit Rome "Salesian-style", the hope is that they will find some useful material in these pages, inviting them to spend a little longer in places where they find that Don Bosco had also been there.

Because "that place will be dearer to you, it will remain more impressed in your mind and you will seem to find something there that belongs to you: affection and love for St John Bosco".



1

**Where
don Bosco
stayed in Rome**



Casa De Maistre

Palazzo Volpi
Via del Quirinale, 21

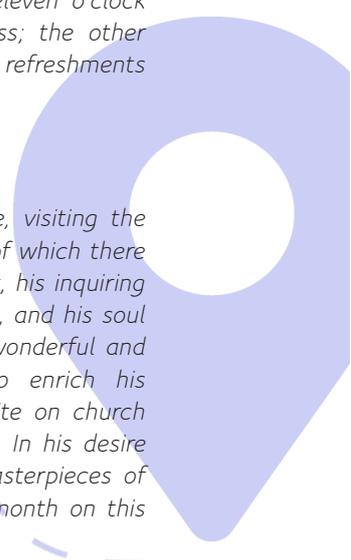
The noble family of Count Carlo De Rodolfo De Maistre, who hosted Don Bosco during his first stay in Rome (21 February – 16 April 1858) were living in the 17th century Palazzo Volpi, opposite the Church of San Carlo al Quirinale (by Borromini), in 1858.

During his stay in Rome, Don Bosco lodged at Le Quattro Fontane on the Quirinale, so named because each of the square's four streets is crowned by a perennially spouting fountain. Count and Countess Rudolf De Maistre, their daughters, and their sons Francis, Charles, and Eugene (the latter a papal army officer), treated him with the utmost consideration and affection—the result of many years of friendship and esteem. They did not have a private chapel, but there was a convent of Belgian nuns in the same building and Don Bosco was welcome to say Mass there. (BM V, 534). [NOTE: All references to the Biographical Memoirs are to the English printed edition, New Rochelle]

The saint arrived here, together with the cleric Michael Rua, exhausted by the journey. Before undertaking it he had made a will. (BM V, 524)

As there was still no continuous railway between Turin and Rome, they had to venture on a very troubled journey: by train to Genoa, where they boarded ship, the *Aventino*, disembarking at Civitavecchia. Don Bosco was seasick and this journey was a real torment for him. (BM V, 528ff.).

From Civitavecchia, having recovered a little from the discomfort of the crossing, they boarded a mail coach and after stopping in Palo for something to eat, they reached the Eternal City at 10.30 p.m. on 21 February 1858.



As the coach moved on to its terminal, the travelers were thrilled by the sight of the Holy City. It was February 21, 1858. Since this was Don Bosco's first visit to the city of the popes and he had no idea of its layout, he gave a guide twelve baiocchi to take them to the house of Count De Maistre, at 49 Via del Quirinale, Le Quattro Fontane. Don Bosco and his two companions arrived there at eleven o'clock and were cordially received by the count and countess; the other members of the family were already in bed. They had refreshments and then retired to their rooms. (BM 5, 533).

The agenda for this, their first stay in Rome, was as follows:

Contacting prominent people and, under their guidance, visiting the most important places, shrines, basilicas and churches, of which there were so many everywhere. His devotion needed an outlet, his inquiring mind sought the great monuments erected by the popes, and his soul longed to recall, amid the empire's majestic ruins, the wonderful and glorious deeds of the martyrs. He was anxious to enrich his knowledge so that he would be better equipped to write on church history and the lives of the popes in Letture Cattoliche. In his desire to be very thorough and see all he could, including masterpieces of ancient or modern art, he decided to spend an entire month on this project. (MB 5, 535).

Unfortunately, today, it is no longer possible to visit the building internally, since it hosts private dwellings.



Map







Palazzo Vimercati

Piazza San Pietro in Vincoli

The Basilica of St Peter in Chains was very dear to Don Bosco; in fact, he often withdrew there to pray or celebrate Mass. This attachment can also be explained by the fact that during his second stay in Rome (7 January - 2 March 1867) Don Bosco lived at the home of Count Vimercati, in the building adjacent to the church.

The journey to Rome led to an unexpected event:

A short distance from Rome we met Bishop Manacorda and Cav. Marietti. Greeting us effusively they got into the carriage with us and took us to Rome... Here, however, something happened that disturbed our contentment. We could no longer find our tickets so we had to pay the entire fare. Through the intervention of Manacorda and Marietti, however, we were free, 'pro tempore' and hoping to find them at the passport station...

Don Bosco's arrival in Rome was eagerly awaited:

At Don Bosco's arrival, the whole city became astir as if a great prince had arrived, and the most illustrious families paid him courtesy calls. His fame as a wonder worker had preceded him, and many unfortunate people were waiting for him as for a healing angel. What faith! I never saw or ever expected to see such boundless confidence in our Don Bosco.



Map



In every corner of the city this morning, all you could see were posters: The History of Italy by Fr John Bosco

The day began immediately by healing the Count himself:

Upon arriving at the count's residence, Don Bosco immediately paid him a visit and greatly cheered him. The count had been bedridden, racked with pain and dizziness, for a long time. Don Bosco found him in a very poor, hopeless condition, with but a slim chance of even just getting up for a short while. He blessed him and told him that he would soon get up for a brief respite. "I'll take you up on that," the count replied. "Only then will I let you return to Turin." He said this because any relief seemed impossible. But, two or three days later, his pain abated and he was able to get up unaided and dine with his family. "So you want me to go back to Turin," Don Bosco said to him as the count entered the dining room. Remembering his words, the count was quick to declare them null and void. The count's improvement, however, was only temporary. Seemingly the Lord did not want to free him

of his cross, but only to lighten it. The fact remains, however, that the count did then and there gain, much strength. Our Lady's kind intervention cannot be doubted.

While waiting for the Papal audience, Don Bosco's activity was intense:

Faithful to his practice of weekly confession, Don Bosco availed himself of the services of Father Vasco, S.J., the count's spiritual director who visited the patient once a week. We must also note that from the very first day of his arrival in Rome and throughout his stay, Don Bosco carried on a priestly apostolate, preaching, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, institutions, boarding schools, monasteries and convents, counseling till far into the night, and instilling into many sick persons the hope of recovery through the blessing and the medal of Mary, Help of Christians. Very many people recommended themselves to him as to a saint, much to the Pope's delight for the great good being done.

Today, Count Vimercati's palace is entrusted, together with the Basilica, to the custody of the Lateran canons, who carefully preserve its ancient image.

In fact, it is possible to admire the corridors and rooms where for hours on end, Don Bosco gave audience to the thousands of people who asked for help, healing, advice, comfort.

A sign placed above a door jamb recalls that Don Bosco was hosted in that room "before 1870". This was the saint's room.

It was in this house, on 26 February 1867 that the only two Roman photographs of the saint were taken by photographer Achille De Sanglaur: the one with Don Bosco with breviary in hand, and the one in the act of blessing "Fr Francesia, Mr Pardini, the butler and his son" (BM VIII, 309). Although reluctant to pose for photographers, he agreed to the Count's request (who wanted a memento of the Turinese priest), to thank him for his thoughtful hospitality.

Word of these photographs, especially the latter, soon spread.

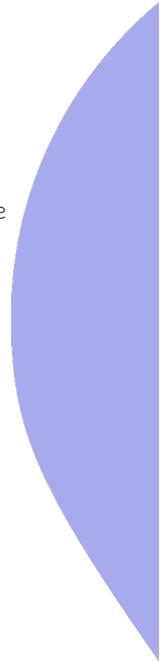
On February 26, after his visit to the Altieri and Vitelleschi families, Don Bosco returned to the hospitable residence of Count Vimercati to spend his last hours in Rome with him. Obliging, he posed for a photograph showing him blessing Father Francesia, the butler, and his son. A limited number of prints were later given out to close friends and benefactors. Most cordial and moving

were the count's last conversations with Don Bosco, who even in those last hours received insistent callers.

Don Bosco left on 26 February 1867 to return to Turin, leaving an indelible memory on many Romans, as Bishop Manacorda wrote to Cav. Oreglia:

My eyes are still swollen with tears at his departure. Last night at 8 o'clock he left us here in Rome as orphans, desolate and moved to see him go. Your Lordship will know what was the abode of this good father of ours in Rome. The victor at Magenta... would be a pygmy before D. Bosco. The Roman nobility, who mingled with the plebs and forgot their court etiquette to bend their knee to D. Bosco and receive his blessing, would not leave the antechamber of the Father of urchins, to sit at the side of their great Sire. Oh how powerful is D. Bosco's virtue. I would like to describe the scene of his departure, but I cannot, my heart cannot bear it. Fr. Francesca will tell you everything.

Having heard of the caring welcome from the Romans, the boys at the Valdocco Oratory did not want to be outdone, welcoming the saint with the famous inscription: 'Rome admires you, Turin loves you' (BM VIII, 312), which was the cause of much justified protest by the Romans and which Pope John XXIII corrected to read as: "The whole world admires you, the whole world loves you."





Casa Colonna

Piazza Santa Chiara 49

The apostolic forwarding agent, Stefano Colonna, lived in this palace, in what was then Via S. Chiara 49. He hosted the saint during his stays in 1871 (June and September) and 1873 (24 February – 4 March).

The reasons that drove the saint to Rome on these trips were mainly the negotiations between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See for the appointment of more than 60 bishops of vacant Italian dioceses and for the approval of the Salesian Constitutions.

Don Bosco succeeded in the negotiations and more than 40 dioceses were provided with their own pastor. Among these was the diocese of Turin. The saint insisted with Pius IX that Bishop Gastaldi, until now a great friend of his, be promoted there.

Even though he was of a different view, the Pope accepted, but telling the saint: "You really want him, and so I give him to you!" (BM X, 200).. How many problems this appointment brought Don Bosco! [*Initially a friend, once he became Archbishop of Turin, Gastaldi became intransigent in dealing with Don Bosco, even suspending him from hearing confessions in his diocese*].



Map

Today, however this building, a few steps from the Pantheon, has been refitted as private dwellings, so cannot be visited inside.





Casa Sigismondi

Via Sistina 104

The Sigismondi family lived here. Don Bosco was their guest on six occasions in 1873-1874, 1875, 1876 (March and November), 1877 (January-February and July).

In those years the saint's main concern was the consolidation of his work and, first and foremost, his commitment to the approval of the Salesian Constitutions by the Holy See.

Don Bosco lived on the top floor of the building, where he often had to withdraw to draft texts, correct drafts, formulate questions, write letters (in many of which one can still read the address: via Sistina 104).

Among these letters of particular importance is the one written on 16 March 1874 to the Rectors of Salesian Houses, in which the saint, announcing the forthcoming meeting of the Cardinal's Commission in charge of deciding on the approval of the Salesian Constitutions, asked for special prayers and pious practices:

Dearly beloved children in JC,

The 24th of this month will be very memorable for our Pious Society. You will certainly remember how it was definitively approved by the Decree of 1 March 1869: now it is a question of the definitive approval of the Constitutions.

For this purpose the Holy Father has chosen a Congregation of Cardinals, who will have to give their opinion on this matter, which

is one of the most important for our present and future good. The prayers so far often recommended were directed to this end. We must therefore redouble our our supplications before the Divine Throne, so that the Merciful God will dispose that everything is according to His greater glory and our particular spiritual advantage.



Map

Let us therefore unite in the spirit of living faith, and all Salesians together with the pupils entrusted to them by Divine Providence, let them be of one heart and soul to implore the light of the Holy Spirit upon the Most Eminent Cardinals with a Triduum of prayers and exercises of Christian piety.

So that there may be conformity in our supplications to the Divine Mercy, let us establish that:

1. Beginning on the 21st of this month, all Salesian members will fast for three days. Let whoever who for a reasonable reason cannot fast say the Miserere with three Salve Reginas to the B. V. Help of Christians with the verse: Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis. Let each one add those prayers and mortifications that he judges compatible with his strength and duties of his state.

2. Let us invite our beloved pupils to approach the Sacraments of Confession and Communion as often as possible. In the morning, begin by singing the Veni Creator Spiritus, etc. Prayers, the Rosary, Mass and Meditation should be directed to this need.

3. Throughout the day let all Salesian members spend as much time as they can before the Blessed Sacrament. The recitation of the Breviary, spiritual reading, all ordinary prayers, are to be done in church.

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4. In the evening, at a more convenient hour, let each of us gather in church, and with the greatest devotion, having recited the Veni Creator as in the morning, make the usual practices in reparation for the outrages that Jesus receives in the Blessed Sacrament;

These humble requests of our to the goodness of the Lord will commence on the 21st and continue until the morning of the 24th inclusive, this month.





May the grace of OLJC always be with us. Amen.

Yours affectionately in JC,

Fr J. Bosco,

Rome, 16 March

At ten o'clock on the morning of March 24, the vigil of the Annunciation, the special committee met with the cardinal vicar, and despite many variations and additions which had been made in the constitutions, the result was highly favourable. But the debate was prolonged and the cardinals decided to meet again on the last day of the month (BM X, 362).

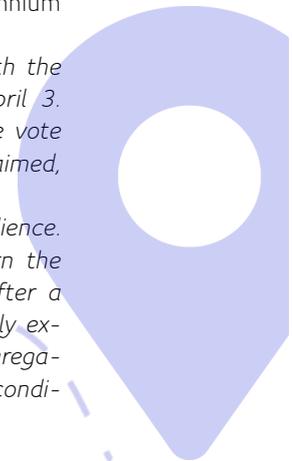
On March 31 Father Berto returned to the Church of San Andrea Belle Fratte to have two candles lit before the altar of Our Lady of the Miracle. At nine o'clock that morning, the special committee of cardinals met to discuss the approval of our constitutions and remained in session until one-thirty in the afternoon. In regard to the question of "if and how the recent constitutions of the Salesian Society should be approved," the reply was Affirmative et ad mentem.

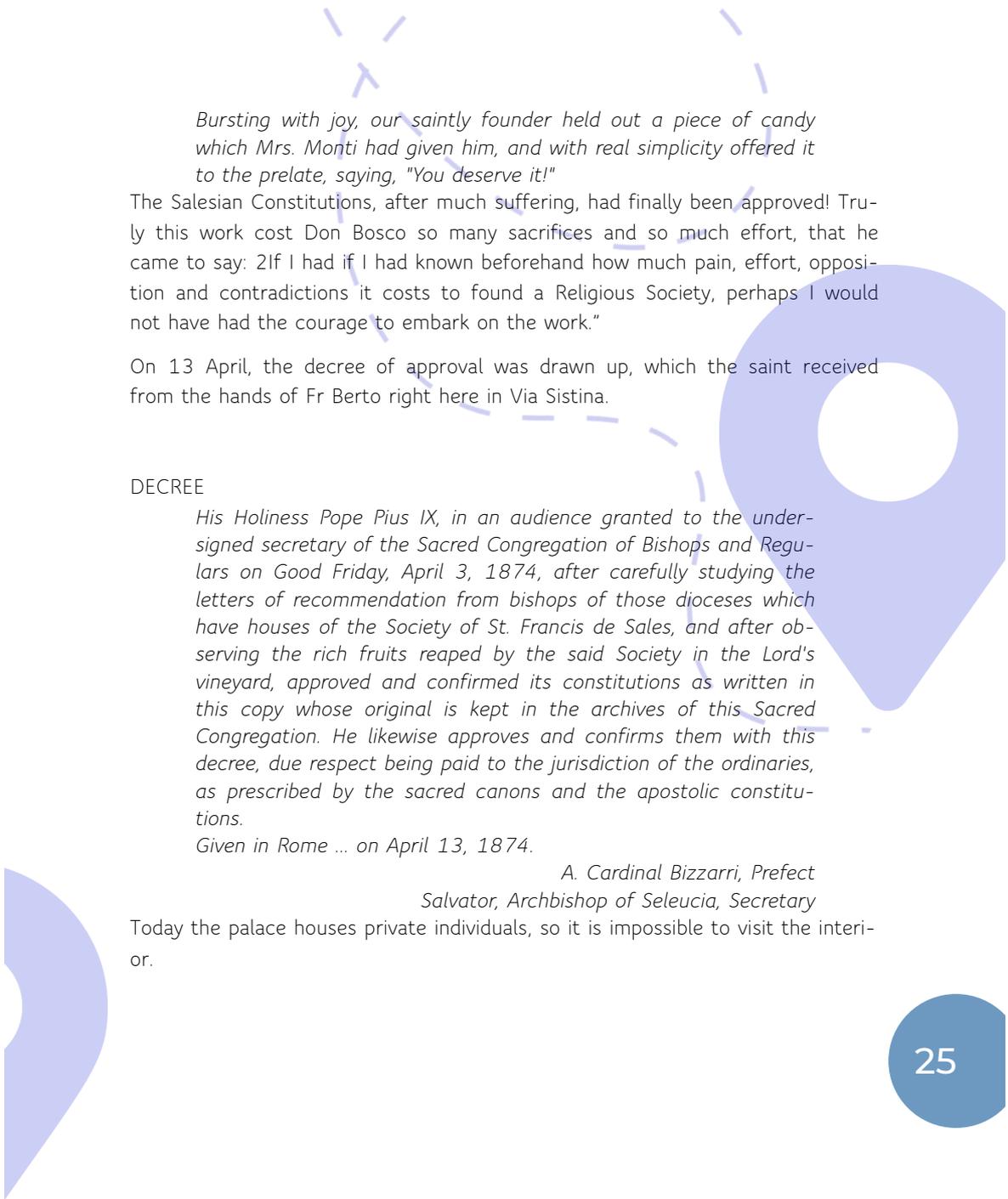
Obviously the cardinals' committee had worked hard, and by the favor of God and Mary, Help of Christians their opinion had been utterly favorable.

It would have been impossible to ask for more. The cardinals had first thought that the approval should be limited to an experiment of ten years prior to granting the definitive approval, but then, in view of Don Bosco's reiterated, fervent supplications, the good offices of Cardinal Berardi, and the clearly favorable comments of the Holy Father, they voted for a definitive approval, three cardinals voting in favor and only one opting for the ad decennium solution.

Archbishop Vitelleschi then asked for a special audience with the Pope, who granted it for the afternoon of Good Friday, April 3. After listening carefully to the report and realizing that one vote was needed for a unanimous approval, he smilingly exclaimed, "Very well, I shall cast the missing vote."

At six that evening Archbishop Vitelleschi was still in audience. Later that same evening, Don Bosco called on him to learn the outcome, just as the archbishop was starting his dinner. After a few moments, he had Don Bosco ushered in and immediately exclaimed: "Don Bosco, rejoice! The constitutions of your Congregation have been definitely approved, and you can issue unconditional dimissorial letters for ten years."





Bursting with joy, our saintly founder held out a piece of candy which Mrs. Monti had given him, and with real simplicity offered it to the prelate, saying, "You deserve it!"

The Salesian Constitutions, after much suffering, had finally been approved! Truly this work cost Don Bosco so many sacrifices and so much effort, that he came to say: "If I had known beforehand how much pain, effort, opposition and contradictions it costs to found a Religious Society, perhaps I would not have had the courage to embark on the work."

On 13 April, the decree of approval was drawn up, which the saint received from the hands of Fr Berto right here in Via Sistina.

DECREE

His Holiness Pope Pius IX, in an audience granted to the undersigned secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on Good Friday, April 3, 1874, after carefully studying the letters of recommendation from bishops of those dioceses which have houses of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, and after observing the rich fruits reaped by the said Society in the Lord's vineyard, approved and confirmed its constitutions as written in this copy whose original is kept in the archives of this Sacred Congregation. He likewise approves and confirms them with this decree, due respect being paid to the jurisdiction of the ordinaries, as prescribed by the sacred canons and the apostolic constitutions.

Given in Rome ... on April 13, 1874.

*A. Cardinal Bizzarri, Prefect
Salvator, Archbishop of Seleucia, Secretary*

Today the palace houses private individuals, so it is impossible to visit the interior.



Monastery at **Tor de' Specchi**

Via del Teatro Marcello 40

A few steps away from the Ara Coeli, the Capitol and the Imperial Forums we find one of the places dearest to the Salesian Family: the Tor de' Specchi Monastery. This has an ancient history; it was founded by St Francesca Romana at the beginning of the 15th century and, since then, has been a point of reference for the Christian life of the capital. Many were the saints who, in many ways, had contact with this work: St Philip Neri, St Bernardine of Siena, St Robert Bellarmine, St Gaspar del Bufalo, S Francis de Sales and St John Bosco.

Don Bosco was very attached to this Monastery and, after 1870, took an interest in ensuring that it was not confiscated by the State, like so much other ecclesiastical property. The Superior of the Oblates, Mother Maddalena Galleffi, and Fr Domenico Berti, Liberian Beneficiary, had begged him to take an interest in this, the latter writing to him:

Please see what you can do for the safety of the historic house of St. Frances of Rome belonging to her religious daughters, the Oblates of Tor de' Specchi. Try to save it from the greedy confiscation commission without having to go through the courts.

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He did not wait for him to ask a second time, and immediately spoke about it to Minister Lanza, with whom he was negotiating on the question of the bishops' temporalities:

"Look, Don Bosco," he finally exclaimed, "Catholics think I'm against them, but that's not true at all!"

Don Bosco struck while the iron was hot. "Then do me a favor!"

"What is it?"

"Please spare the convents of the Oblates of Tor de' Specchi, of the Sisters of Charity at Bocca della Verita, and [of the Religious of the Sacred Heart] at Trinita dei Monti."

His reasons were that the Oblates could assert their rights through the courts, the Sisters of Charity worked in hospitals, and the Religious of the Sacred Heart were French nationals. Lanza thought a moment, made notes, and assured him that these convents would not be confiscated. He kept his promise.

On another occasion:

... Mother Galeffi, who sent for the lawyer handling their case with the government. Don Bosco listened very carefully as the latter briefed him thoroughly on the matter. Then, to the lawyer's surprise, Don Bosco gave him some expert pointers on how to handle the case to see it through to a successful conclusion. Foreseeing the chance of an unfavorable turn of the case or an undue delay, he advised him to write to a government official in Florence, a man named Cutica, who had the last say in these matters. "We are good friends," Don Bosco told him. "Even if we suffer a setback, he will help us by either suggesting a compromise or telling us how to gain an ultimate victory. Then we shall have to insure the houses and property of Tor de' Specchi in such a way that the government may have no further pretext [to take them over]." "Rest assured," said the lawyer, "that your advice will be carried out faithfully."

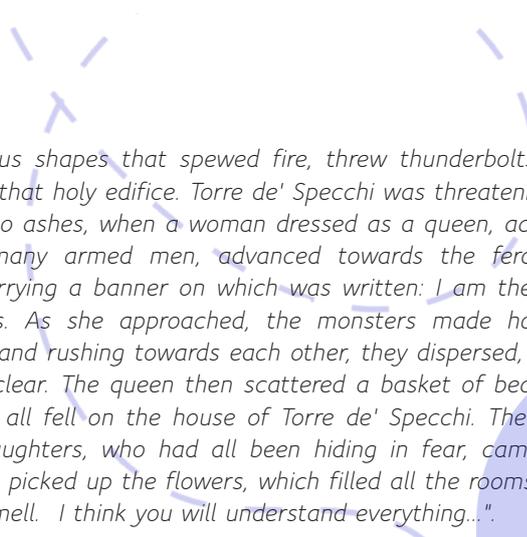


Map

Don Bosco was certain of the success of the Operation and, in 1870, wrote a letter to the Mother General in his classic imaginative language, which is still preserved today in the Monastery archives, where we read:

"It was midday when the sky darkened and a dark storm formed over the retreat and the monastery of Tor de' Specchi. In the midst of the thick clouds appeared giant monsters, drag-





ons of various shapes that spewed fire, threw thunderbolts and swords over that holy edifice. Torre de' Specchi was threatening to be reduced to ashes, when a woman dressed as a queen, accompanied by many armed men, advanced towards the ferocious monsters carrying a banner on which was written: I am the help of Christians. As she approached, the monsters made horrible contortions, and rushing towards each other, they dispersed, leaving the sky clear. The queen then scattered a basket of beautiful flowers that all fell on the house of Torre de' Specchi. The nuns and their daughters, who had all been hiding in fear, came out and, jubilant, picked up the flowers, which filled all the rooms with a fragrant smell. I think you will understand everything...".

Fearful that their goods would be forfeited, the religious made a vow to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: if they won the Cause against the *Giunta Liquidatrice dell'Asse Ecclesiastico* [the government body established to liquidate Church assets], the Oblates would observe the strict fast on the eve of the feast of the Sacred Heart every year, in perpetuity. The vow was officially made on 10 May 1876 and in June Tor de' Specchi was declared exempt from confiscation. This commitment is still scrupulously maintained today.

Don Bosco had Tor de' Specchi as his resting place from 1878 to 1882 (his 14th - 18th stay), more precisely the '*casa dei confessori*' (now demolished), which stood right in front of the Monastery, at no. 36 Via Tor de' Specchi (today Via del Teatro Marcello).

How did the Saint ever come to have use of these premises? We need to go back in time a little.

The well-deserving Mother Magdalena Galeffi, moved by zeal for the religious instruction not only of the women of the house she presided over, but also of many other people, and also urged on by the desire to do charitable work for the benefit of the Oratory, had many and varied publications sent to her by Bosco, which she industriously tried to sell: these were books on ascetics, manuals of piety, moral and amusing stories, and also images, medals, crowns, crucifixes. From 1870 onwards, large crates of these objects were sent to her, and the oratory's booksellers sent a catalogue specifying the relative prices, it always being understood that the amount had to be remitted to the sender. In a short time, sales became very large, so that orders multiplied. The good Mother either sent money to Turin from time to time or delivered

it into Don Bosco's hands or entrusted it to others appointed by him.

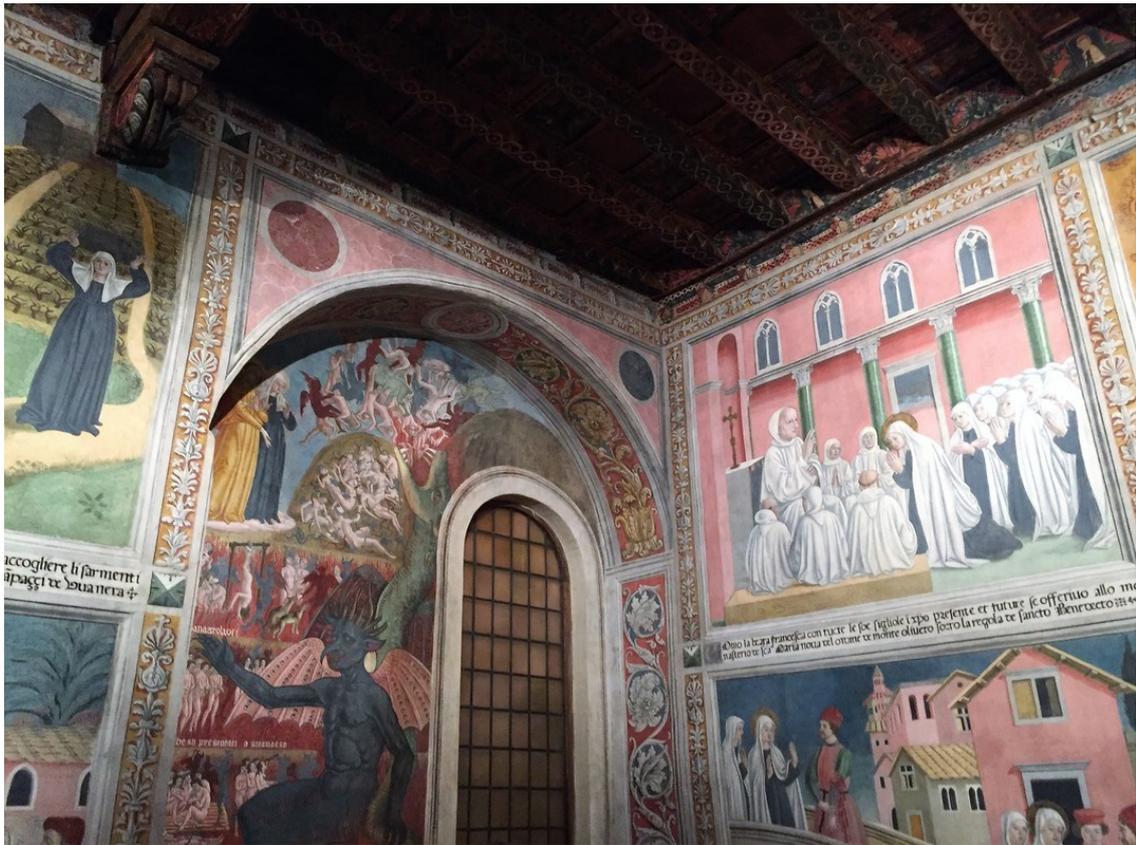
Finally in 1874 she thought to ask the Blessed for a more precise account of the total amount and the sums paid, and then she had the unpleasant surprise of finding that she still owed him a very large sum, for which she was unable to give any explanation. It had always been her belief that the sums sent out represented all the proceeds from subsequent sales based on tariff prices, whereas the situation was quite different. The reason was that the Mother used the work of others in this shop, having entrusted a secular person of her trust with all the bookkeeping and financial transactions; but it seems that management of the money was not too exact. Mother Galeffi, who had no suspicions, continued this good work until her death, endeavouring to make up for the deficit little by little.

After her death in January '76, the new Superior, Marquise Canonici, having discussed the matter with Don Bosco, was able to verify a debt of 20,133.32 lire, which did not appear to have been paid, although the goods had been sent and received. Although the noblewoman had the right to object that the House at Tor de' Specchi should not be considered under obligation for the personal contracts of the deceased, however, both in deference to the good memory of the departed Superior and out of delicate respect for Don Bosco, she showed a desire to settle the dispute fairly. Then the Blessed, who was interested in having a procurator general of the Congregation in Rome and an address for himself and his Salesians, asked as compensation that the House of Tor de' Specchi grant him the free use of some rooms to use as needed.

30

Mother Canonici, with the consent of the Oblates, willingly agreed, putting the entire second floor of a house belonging to the Monastery and located opposite at number 36 at his disposal. The concession could in no way exceed thirty years, excluding also the faculty to sublet all or part of the rooms. In return Don Bosco considered himself paid and satisfied with his credit whether he made use of the concession for the whole thirty years or whether he wished to use it for a shorter time or not at all. The relevant agreement was signed the following March. Readers should not imagine that it was a large apartment. A small door led from the





street to a narrow, threadbare staircase, which led to five narrow, low rooms, where one suffocated from the heat in summer and suffered from the cold in winter.

The Monastery Chapel has a special importance for the whole Salesian Family, because as well as often going there to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice, Don Bosco gave the first talk to Salesian Cooperators here.

Another effective means of recruiting members for the association were the two annual conferences prescribed by the regulations on the feasts of St. Francis de Sales and Mary, Help of Christians. These conferences spread the cooperators' name far and wide because admission was free, newspapers published reports, and the conferences occasionally generated publications which were widely distributed. These conferences were not held prior to 1878; it was then that Don Bosco held the first model conference in both Rome and Turin.

Don Bosco expressly organized the Rome conference, held on January 29, 1878, to serve as a model for all others wherever they might be held. He set it up carefully, choosing a place that would attract Roman aristocracy: the chapel of the noble Oblates di Tor de' Specchi. He also sought the support of several noble men and women and prelates and priests and succeeded in persuading the cardinal vicar of Rome, Monaco La Valletta, to act as co-chairman with Cardinal [Aeneas] Sbarretti. He sent out personal invitations with a printed program which read:

CONFERENCE OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN ROME JANUARY 27, 1878

With the authorization and participation of His Eminence the Most Reverend Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, vicar of His Holiness, the first conference of the Salesian cooperators will be held, as prescribed by Chapter VI, Article 4 of the regulations, at the church of the distinguished convent of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, known as Tor de' Specchi.

Entrance will be through the convent gate. Participants are asked to go directly to the chapel.

All Salesian cooperators are cordially invited to attend. His Holiness most graciously grants a plenary indulgence to all who take part in this meeting.

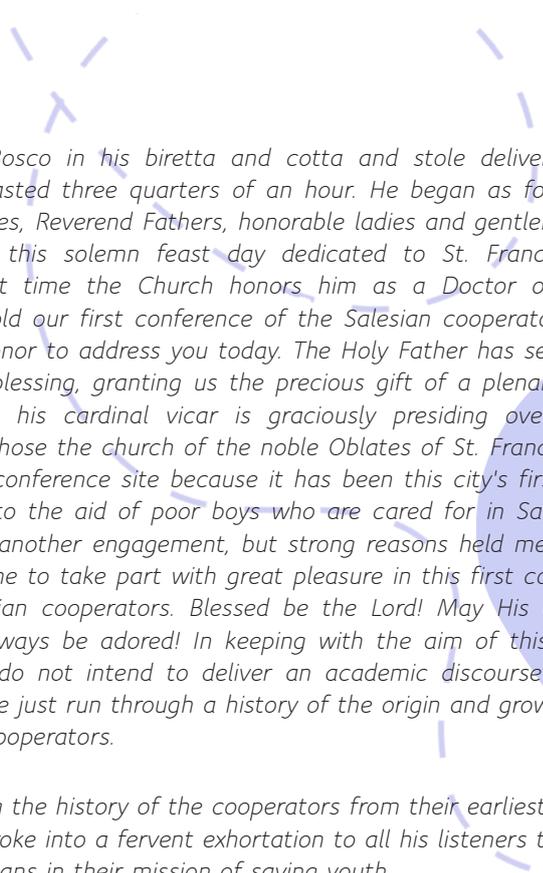
As the regulations prescribe, a collection will be made for the Salesian missionaries of [South] America, for those who are about to leave for there, and for new Salesian houses about to be opened in areas where their need is most felt.

Fr. John Bosco

32

The event could not have wished for a better number or quality of participants. At 3 p.m., a Salesian priest mounted the stage specially erected according to Roman custom, and read from the life of de Sales written by Galicia, the chapter on the Saint's love for the poor: a reading that was listened to with keen attention by those present. Then a celebrated cantor gave a beautiful motet on the words Tu es Petrus, performed with organ accompaniment.





Finally, Don Bosco in his biretta and cotta and stole delivered a speech that lasted three quarters of an hour. He began as follows: "Your Eminences, Reverend Fathers, honorable ladies and gentlemen—he began—on this solemn feast day dedicated to St. Francis de Sales—the first time the Church honors him as a Doctor of the Church—we hold our first conference of the Salesian cooperators. It is my great honor to address you today. The Holy Father has sent us his apostolic blessing, granting us the precious gift of a plenary indulgence, and his cardinal vicar is graciously presiding over our meeting. We chose the church of the noble Oblates of St. Frances of Rome as our conference site because it has been this city's first institute to go to the aid of poor boys who are cared for in Salesian houses. I had another engagement, but strong reasons held me here and enabled me to take part with great pleasure in this first conference of Salesian cooperators. Blessed be the Lord! May His divine dispositions always be adored! In keeping with the aim of this first conference, I do not intend to deliver an academic discourse or a sermon. Let me just run through a history of the origin and growth of the Salesian cooperators.

After narrating the history of the cooperators from their earliest beginnings, he broke into a fervent exhortation to all his listeners to help the Salesians in their mission of saving youth.

My illustrious audience—he pleaded—Protestants, unbelievers, and sectarians of every hue leave no stone unturned in their attempts to harm our guileless youth; like ravenous wolves they stalk the streets, seeking to devour the lambs of Christ. They resort to every possible means to corrupt innocent souls, wrest them from the Church's maternal bosom, and enslave and ensnare them in the clutches of Satan. They do this through publications, pictures, kindergartens, schools, subsidies, promises, threats, and slander. What grieves us most is that instructors, teachers, and even parents cooperate in this campaign of destruction.

How can we remain cold and aloof when faced with such heart-rending sights? Never let it be said, generous souls, that the children of darkness are more eager to do evil than the children of light to do good. Let each of us become a guide, teacher and savior of children. Let us react against the deceits of evil with loving efforts of charity, countering our publications to theirs, our classrooms to theirs, our

boarding schools to theirs. Let us vigilantly watch our children within the family circle, in our parishes and schools.

Don Bosco wrote that very evening to Father Rua: "Today we held our conference, at which the cardinal vicar presided. He delivered a magnificent short address. You will get the details. It will make history." Doubtless, he meant the history of the Congregation, but why not the history of the Church as well? After the formal approval of the Association of Salesian Cooperators on May 9, 1876, this conference, presided over by Rome's cardinal vicar, was practically a public reaffirmation of the association's canonical existence.

There are many episodes that could be recounted about the saint's stay at Tor de' Specchi, but there is one that deserves our attention, for because it shows the righteousness and firmness of the Piedmontese saint.

The key players of the event are Don Bosco and Mons. Macchi, the Holy Father's personal Chamberlain, at one time a friend of Don Bosco (who placed him in Pius IX's good favour) and now his opponent.

A rather revealing incident occurred during Don Bosco's stay in Rome. Monsignor Macchi was doing his utmost to avoid him. One morning Don Bosco went to celebrate Mass in the convent of Tor de' Specchi: While he was at the altar, the papal chamberlain arrived at the convent. Without saying a word about the monsignor's presence, the mother superior invited Don Bosco to have a cup of coffee and he obliged. The monsignor, in turn, had no idea that Don Bosco was there. When they came face to face, Don Bosco was astonished, but the other managed to assume a nonchalant air. He had two elegant, somewhat impudent young Swiss ladies with him. As soon as he saw Don Bosco, the monsignor, nodding toward them, remarked, "What pretty girls God made!" Don Bosco remained silent. Unabashed, the other went on, "What do you think of these young ladies?"

"I am not a connoisseur and don't know what to say," Don Bosco replied, "but I do not think that such manner of talk befits a priest."

"Well, if all priests were like you, things would be much better!" the other exclaimed ironically.



"Do not say if they were like me, but rather if they were as Our Lord would have them be," Don Bosco corrected him.

Interrupting this unpleasant exchange, the mother superior asked the monsignor, "When can you get Don Bosco an audience with the Holy Father?"

"Well," he replied, "the Holy Father has so many things to do that he can't very well see Don Bosco now, but we shall see. . . ."

"Oh! We have already had four audiences with the Holy Father this month!" the two young women boasted.

Upon hearing this, Don Bosco could not refrain from saying, "You have been received by the Holy Father four times in one month, and I have been waiting several months with so many things to attend to, and I still cannot get an audience with the Pope and return to Turin."



Monsignor Macchi then repeated that he would try and kept up his compliments to the young ladies. In disgust Don Bosco rose to his feet and walked out, remarking to the mother superior who followed him, "I never thought you would spring this kind of a surprise on me."

"Forgive me, Don Bosco. I did it only so that you could meet the monsignor and ask him personally for an audience."

"Well, do me the favor of seeing to it that I never meet him again."



2

The Saint's
**most visited
and dearest**
places



The Vatican

Piazza San Pietro
Città del Vaticano

The Vatican is undoubtedly the hill in Rome that most saw Don Bosco; more than any other.

On each of his trips to the Eternal City, the Saint made at least one visit to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles and his Successor.

Don Bosco's biography is full of events that took place in the Vatican, so it was necessary to make a choice, giving more attention to the saint's first stay in the city (1858), about which Don Rua has left us a detailed chronicle not only of the visits made, but also of Don Bosco's state of mind when visiting these holy places for the first time.

Who knows how many times he had longed for this moment!

He did not neglect to visit anything, also making use of the words of Pius IX: "Try to see all that can be seen" (BM V, 562); the visit lasted several days, as Lemoine wrote.

38

1) The basilica

On February 26 Don Bosco, accompanied by Charles De Maistre and the cleric Rua, went to the Vatican where one can admire what is most memorable and most magnificent from both a religious and an artistic point of view. On crossing the Sant'Angelo Bridge, they recited the Creed to gain a fifty days' indulgence; then they bowed to St. Michael's statue which dominates the massive structure of Hadrian's Tomb—now a fortress—and finally reached the immense piazza in front of St. Peter's Basilica. It was



in this piazza that Christians were burned alive by Nero's order. Two enormous four-tiered semi-circles totaling 284 columns and 88 pillars encircle the piazza. Two carriages abreast can fit in the space between each of the four tiers. Above the colonnade are 96 statues of saints. At the far end of the square, a magnificent flight of steps leads to the vestibule of the vast basilica. The vestibule itself is heavily adorned with marble, paintings, and statues. Above is the large balcony where the Pope gives his solemn blessing. This imposing and majestic facade supports thirteen colossal statues representing Our Divine Savior, with St. John the Baptist on His right, and all the Apostles, except St. Peter, ranged on both sides. In the middle of the piazza stands an Egyptian obelisk surmounted by a cross containing a relic of the true Cross. The obelisk is flanked by two spectacular fountains unceasingly spouting jets of water into the air. Don Bosco and his companions uncovered their heads and bowed to the relic of the true Cross to gain another fifty days' indulgence.

Five doors give entrance to the basilica. A plenary indulgence may be gained on any day of the year by visiting it, provided one has gone to confession and Communion.

As soon as Don Bosco went in, he was so awed by its magnificence and vastness that he stood rapt in silent contemplation for a considerable time. The marble statues of the founders of religious orders around the pillars of the central nave were the first to catch his attention. He seemed to see before him the heavenly Jerusalem. (MB 5, 38-539).

He certainly did not imagine that one day he too, as he had dreamed, would be there, in the great Church at the heart of the world. In fact, on the occasion of his canonisation (1934), a large white Carrara marble statue was placed above the bronze statue of St Peter and the effigy of Pius IX. A white Carrara marble statue, weighing several tons, depicting the Saint with Dominic Savio and Ceferino Namuncurá.

But back to the story..

From the bronze doors at the entrance to the Altar of the Cathedra the basilica measures 600 feet; the height between the floor and the ceiling of the nave is over 150 feet. This is the largest church in



Map



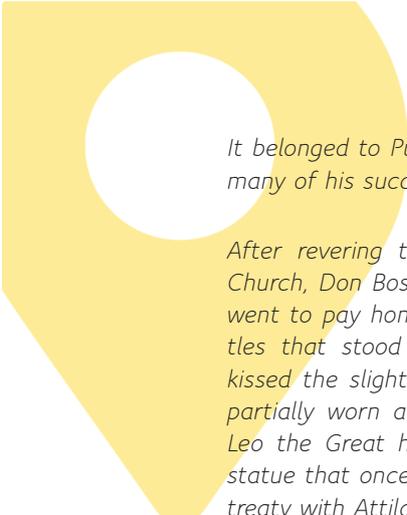
Christendom; St. Paul's Cathedral in London is the next largest. "If we were to add the length of our church at the Oratory to that of St. Paul's," Don Bosco said laughing, "it would match the length of St. Peter's." Each chapel in the basilica is as large as an ordinary church.

Don Bosco started his tour of the basilica on the right aisle, minutely inspecting each chapel, altar, and picture. He studied each statue, bas-relief, and mosaic and stood in contemplation before the splendid tombs of various popes. He also took particular notice of the tombs of the famous Countess Matilda of Canossa who defended papal authority against Henry IV, emperor of Germany, and of Christina Alexandra, queen of Sweden, a Lutheran who, once she became aware of the falsity of her creed, relinquished the throne in order to become a Catholic. She died in Rome in 1689.

Don Bosco took down notes concerning the history of everything he saw, but above all he satisfied his piety. He entered the Chapel of the Holy Column, so called because of a column taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. It is believed that Our Lord leaned on it while addressing the crowds. Surprisingly, the portion of the column touched by Our Savior's shoulders is always free of dust.

He then knelt in adoration in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. There the altar is dedicated to the martyrs St. Maurice and Saints Adventor, Solutor, and Octavius, his companions, the principal patron saints of Piedmont. Near this altar is a wide staircase leading up to the papal apartments. In the Gregorian Chapel he noticed above the altar an ancient image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, dating to the pontificate of Pascal II, who became Pope in the year 1099.

He made his last stop at the Altar of the Cathedra at the very end of the basilica. Four gigantic bronze statues stand above this altar, supporting a stately pontifical throne made of the same metal. The two front figures represent St. Ambrose [left] and St. Augustine [right], and the two at the rear depict St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom. The bronze throne encases a precious relic—a wooden, ivory-paneled chair ornamented with bas-reliefs.



It belonged to Pudens, the senator, and was used by St. Peter and many of his successors.

After revering this symbol of the infallible magisterium of the Church, Don Bosco knelt at the Confession of St. Peter; 3 then he went to pay homage to the bronze statue of the Prince of Apostles that stood beside a pilaster on the right. He respectfully kissed the slightly projecting foot of the statue that was already partially worn away by the kisses of millions of the faithful. St. Leo the Great had this statue cast with the bronze of Jupiter's statue that once stood on the Capitol as a memorial of his peace treaty with Attila.

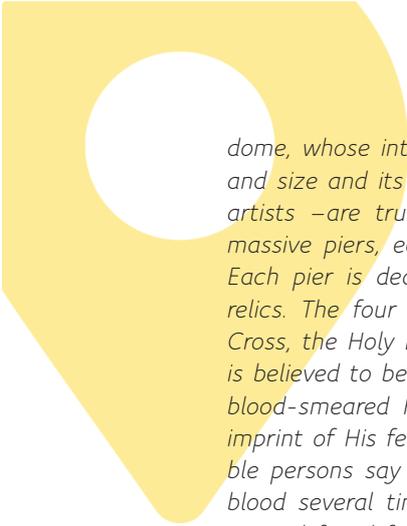
Don Bosco had begun his tour of the basilica at eleven in the morning, and now, at five in the afternoon, he felt exhausted. Accordingly, he returned to the Quattro Fontane. (MB V, 539-540).

As previously planned, at 6:30 on the following morning, March 3, he went to St. Peter's with Rua and Count Charles De Maistre for a more thorough visit of the Confession of St. Peter. They first admired the papal altar which was set majestically on seven white marble steps [not counting the predella] under the center of the dome. In front of the altar there is a large rectangular crypt, enclosed on the top by a rich balustrade around which 112 lamps set on gilded metal cornucopias burn unceasingly. A double marble staircase leads to the Altar of the Confession located beneath the papal altar. The crypt is adorned with precious marble, gilded stuccoes, and twenty-four bronze bas-reliefs representing the main events of St. Peter's life. Here Don Bosco was privileged to offer Holy Mass. The crypt is also adorned with two very ancient images of Saints Peter and Paul on sheets of silver. St. Peter's tomb rests below the crypt.

IMAGE: Fr Michael Rua was among the first to remain with Don Bosco. He was the first priest from the Oratory, becoming Don Bosco's right hand. He became his successor and governed the Congregation from 1888 to 1910. His cause for canonization is under way.]

After a long prayer, Don Bosco went back upstairs for a look at the 450-foot-wide transept. Above the papal altar is the majestic





dome, whose internal diameter measures 137 1/2 feet. Its height and size and its elaborate mosaics—the work of the most famous artists—are truly breathtaking. The dome is supported by four massive piers, each measuring about 235 feet in circumference. Each pier is dedicated to a saint and has a loggia housing his relics. The four relics are: Veronica's Veil, a portion of the Holy Cross, the Holy Lance, and the skull of St. Andrew. Veronica's Veil is believed to be the cloth with which Our Divine Savior wiped His blood-smeared Face on his way to Calvary, leaving upon it the imprint of His features before giving it back to St. Veronica. Reliable persons say that in 1849 this Holy Face was seen to exude blood several times and even to change color, thus altering the original facial features. Canons of the basilica testified to the accuracy of these reports.

Absorbed in such thoughts that were so soul-stirring for the faithful, Don Bosco approached the Altar of the Cathedra and, after again paying homage to it, turned to the southern part of the basilica to look at the tombs of other popes and the sumptuous chapels and altars, especially that of the Virgin of the Column, so called because of the image of the Blessed Virgin painted on a [marble] column [transferred here in 1607] from the ancient Constantine basilica. He also paid his respects to the tombs of several saints: the Apostles Simon and Jude, St. Leo the Great, SS. Leo II, III, and IV, St. Boniface IV, St. Leo IX, St. Gregory the Great, and St. John Chrysostom. His last stop was at the Baptistery, the last chapel of the side aisle, whose font is made of a shell of [red] porphyry. It was already 12:30, and Count Charles De Maistre suggested that they postpone their visit to the dome to another day. (MB V, 547-548).

2) The Cupola

On March 8, a beautiful day, Don Bosco went up to St. Peter's great dome. Canon Lantiesi had procured the necessary passes for him and his friends. That morning Don Bosco said Mass at St. Francis Xavier's altar in the Church of the Gesù as he had promised Count Xavier Provano of Collegno, and by 9 o'clock he was at St. Peter's with Count Charles De Maistre and the cleric Rua. They showed their passes and were ushered up a beautiful staircase. At the roof level of the basilica they read the names of all the fa-

mous people, including kings and princes, who had made the ascent to the very ball atop the dome.

They were delighted to see the names of several kings of Piedmont and of many members of the House of Savoy. Before proceeding further up, they strolled over the roof of the huge basilica. It seemed to be a vast, paved piazza with a perennially spouting fountain. They also visited the larger bell which is about ten feet in diameter.

Afterward they went up a narrow spiral staircase that opened into the first and second interior balustrades of the dome; they walked around both of them. Here Don Bosco studied each mosaic individually, and he noticed that although they had appeared to be small from below, they were really enormous. When he looked down to the floor of the basilica, the people moving about seemed to be no bigger than pigmies, and the papal altar itself, crowned by its hundred-foot-high bronze canopy, looked no larger than an oversized chair.

They continued their climb and reached the top of the lantern above the dome. They were now over 360 feet above the ground. All about them, the immense horizon faded off into the distance.

There still remained the ball atop the lantern, and to reach it one had to climb some twenty feet up a vertical ladder as though through a tunnel.

Undaunted, Don Bosco and his two companions made the ascent. The ball has circular openings all around and is large enough to accommodate sixteen people comfortably. Here, at a height of some 400 feet, Don Bosco began to talk about the Oratory, lovingly reminiscing about his boys. Again he reaffirmed his determination to work for their eternal salvation. After a while, he began the descent with his friends and did not stop until they reached the floor of the basilica. Then, feeling a bit tired, he sat down and listened to a sermon that was being preached just then.

He liked the preacher's refinement of speech and graceful gestures as he spoke on the observance of civil laws. When the sermon was over, seeing that he still had some time before lunch,

Don Bosco walked into the sacristy, which is truly magnificent and worthy of the basilica.

It was now 11:30 and he was still fasting, so he had some lunch with his companions. (MB V, 554-556).

3) The Pio Cristiano Museum

Together with Mr Carlo De Maistre, Don Bosco went to visit Monsignor Borromeo, His Holiness' majordomo. They were very well received, and after talking a lot about the things of Piedmont and Milan, his homeland, the Monsignor took Don Bosco', Carlo De Maistre's and Rua's names to put them on the list of those who wished to receive the blessed palm from the hands of the Holy Father.

The Vatican museums are located around the courtyards of the papal palace where the monsignor had his office. Don Bosco visited them and saw some truly magnificent exhibits, but he lingered particularly in the vast, oblong Christian museum to see a display of the various instruments of torture used on the martyrs by the enemies of the Church. He also admired many paintings of Our Savior, Our Lady and the saints—among others, the picture of the Good Shepherd bearing a little lamb on His shoulder. All the paintings had been found in the catacombs.

From the Vatican they returned to the heart of Rome and crossed Piazza Scossacavalli, where the editorial office of the renowned Civiltà Cattolica was located. He called on them, as he had promised Father [Anthony] Bresciani he would, and was delighted to see that the more important staff writers were Piedmontese.

By now Don Bosco felt the need to call it a day and go home, and so, without further ado, he headed that way. He had barely reached the Quirinal when Mr. Foccardi saw him pass in front of his store with Count De Maistre. He immediately invited them in, and after showing them around he offered to drive them home. Although Don Bosco disliked traveling in a coach, he accepted the offer with good grace. By a patient daily tolerance of both the rudeness of opponents and the importunate attention of friends, Don Bosco practiced virtue throughout his life.



Wishing to enjoy his company longer, Foccardi had the coach take a long, rambling course that ended at nightfall.

"As soon as I arrived home," Don Bosco wrote, "a letter was handed to me. It said: 'The Reverend Don Bosco is informed that His Holiness graciously grants him an audience tomorrow, March 9, at 11:45 A.M.' Although I had eagerly been waiting for this summons, it filled me with excitement. For the rest of the evening I could speak of nothing but the Pope and the audience."

Cardinal Antonelli had kept his word. (MB 5, 556-557).

4) First papal audience

46

As we have already said, the main reason Don Bosco went down to Rome was to be received in audience by the Holy Father.

The first audience, so eagerly awaited, would go down in history, recounted in every detail by Don Bosco himself and Don Rua, who accompanied him as secretary.

Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State, had promised Don Bosco that he would take an interest that he would soon be received in audience by the Supreme Pontiff.

And finally the long-awaited moment arrived..

On March 9 1858—the day scheduled for his papal audience—Don Bosco said Mass in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, one of the most beautiful and magnificent churches in Rome.

Beneath its main altar [in a glass coffin] lies the body of St. Catherine of Siena. After Mass, Don Bosco called on [Francis] Cardinal Gaude whom he had to consult before seeing the Pope. He was given immediate attention and received the desired advice and information; then he rushed home and hastened to draft the petitions he intended to present to the Holy Father.

It was not quite eleven o'clock when Don Bosco and the cleric Rua—dressed in mantellettas—arrived at the Vatican with a thousand things on their minds. Thus preoccupied, they walked up the stairs to the papal apartment which was guarded by Swiss and Noble Guards. The guards bowed to them, took the letter that Don Bosco presented, and led them through several halls to the Pope's antechamber. Since there were others ahead of them, they had to wait some ninety minutes.

"We spent the time looking about us," Don Bosco wrote. "The halls were huge, imposing, and carpeted, but not extravagant. The antechamber floor was covered with a plain green carpet, the brocade on the walls was plain red silk, and the chairs were unupholstered. A single oversized chair on a somewhat elaborate dais marked this as a papal hall. We were pleased to note all this, remembering the unjust caustic accusations that some people level at the pomp and splendor of the papal court."

Suddenly a bell rang and the papal majordomo beckoned to Don Bosco and Rua. The summons came as a shock to Don Bosco, and he had to get a grip on himself so as not to falter. "This is it!" he said. "Let's go." Rua followed him, carrying a deluxe edition of all the issues of Letture Cattoliche. At last they stood in Pius IX's presence and approached him with the ritual triple genuflection—at the entrance, halfway, and at his feet. Their apprehension almost completely vanished when they saw that Pius IX was the most friendly, venerable, and gentle person they could imagine. Unable to kiss his foot since he was seated at his desk, they kissed his hand. Rua, remembering a promise that he had made to his companions, kissed it twice: once for himself and once for them. The Holy Father then motioned to them to rise and come in

front of him. They did so, but Don Bosco, wishing to abide by protocol when speaking to the Pope, again knelt down.

"Don't bother," the Pope said. "Remain standing."

We must note here that the majordomo had introduced Don Bosco to the Pope as "Bosseser."

"Are you Piedmontese?" the Pope asked Don Bosco.

"Yes, Your Holiness. Being in the presence of the Vicar of Christ is the most wonderful thing that could ever have happened to me."

"What work do you do?"

"Your Holiness, I am occupied in educating the young and publishing *Lecture Cattoliche*."

"The education of youth has always been an important mission, but today it is more essential than ever. There is another priest in Turin who works with boys."

At this point Don Bosco realized that his name had been mispronounced, while at the same time the Pope became aware that this priest was Don Bosco, director of the St. Francis de Sales Oratory. He now became much more cordial. "What exactly do you do in your hospice?" he continued.

"A little of everything, Holy Father. I say Mass, preach, hear confessions, and teach. Occasionally I go to the kitchen to give the cook suggestions. Sometimes I also sweep the church."

The Holy Father smiled and asked about the boys and the clerics, as well as about the oratories with which he was already acquainted. He also inquired how many priests were helping him, what their names were, and who collaborated with him in the publication of *Lecture Cattoliche*. Then, turning to the cleric Rua, he asked him if he were already a priest.

"Not yet, Holy Father," Rua replied. "I'm now in my third year of theology."



"What treatises are you studying now?"

"We're taking *Baptism, Confirmation, and . . .*" The Pope interrupted him, remarking: "Those are the easiest." He then again smilingly turned to Don Bosco and said: "I still remember the boys' contribution that you sent to me at Gaeta and the fine sentiments accompanying it."

Don Bosco took advantage of this remark to tell him of the warm attachment his boys had for the Pope and begged him to accept, as a token of this, a copy of *Letture Cattoliche*.

"Holy Father," he said, "on behalf of the management of *Letture Cattoliche* I wish to offer you a bound copy of all the issues that have been published up to now. The binding was done by our boys.

"How many boys do you care for?"

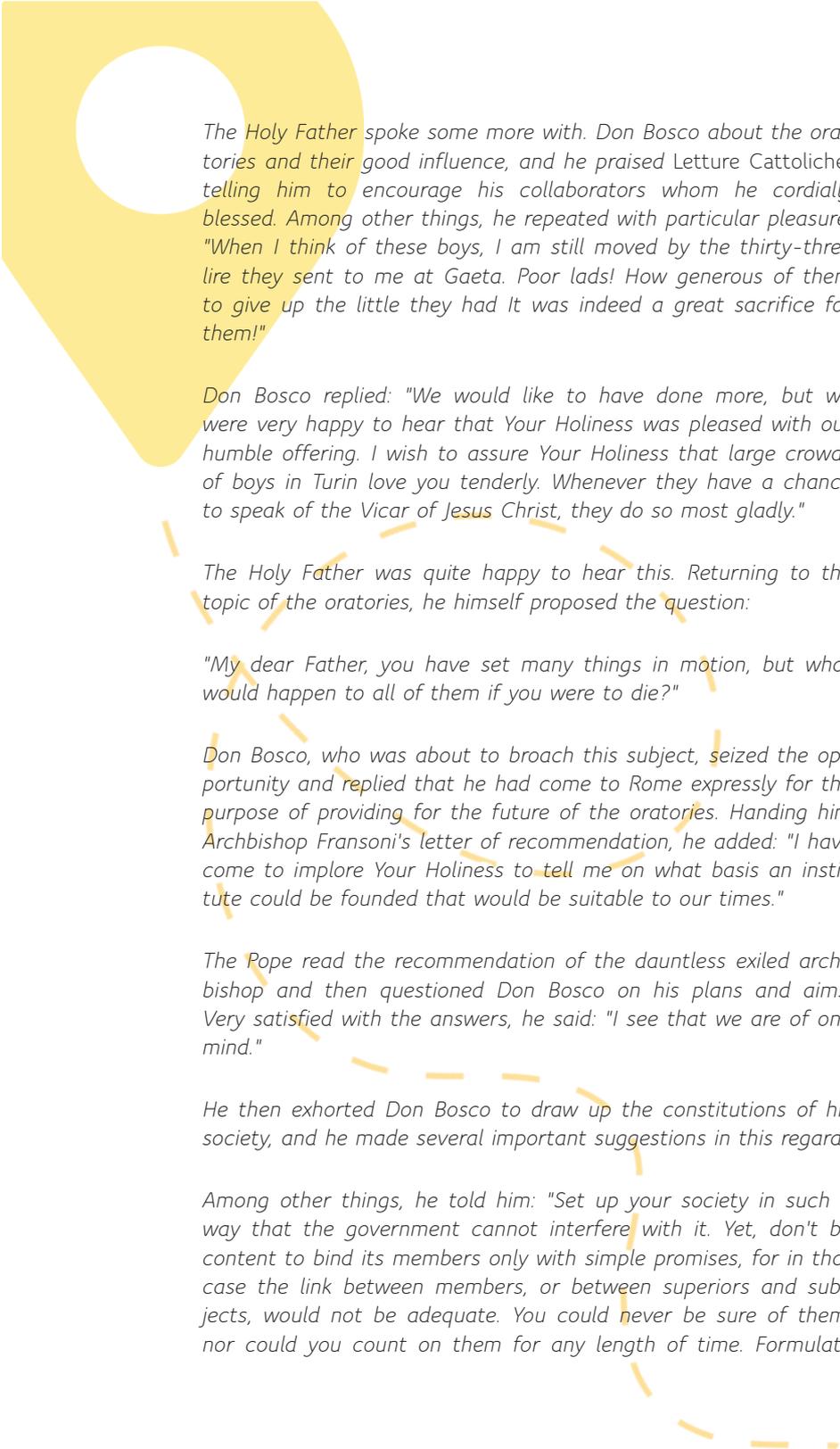
"About two hundred, Holy Father; fifteen are bookbinders."

"Good," he answered. "I want to send each one of them a medal." He went into an adjoining room and soon returned with fifteen small medals of the Immaculate Conception. "These are for your bookbinders," he said to Don Bosco. Then he added: "This medal is for your companion." He turned to the cleric Rua and gave him a larger medal. Then he handed Don Bosco a small box which contained a still larger medal and said: "This is for you." Since they had knelt to receive these valued gifts, the Holy Father again told them to rise.

Thinking that they were ready to leave, Pius IX was about to dismiss them when Don Bosco said: "Your Holiness, I have something special to tell you."

"Very well," the Pope replied.

Rua made the ritual genuflection in the middle of the room and withdrew.



The Holy Father spoke some more with Don Bosco about the oratories and their good influence, and he praised Letture Cattoliche, telling him to encourage his collaborators whom he cordially blessed. Among other things, he repeated with particular pleasure: "When I think of these boys, I am still moved by the thirty-three lire they sent to me at Gaeta. Poor lads! How generous of them to give up the little they had! It was indeed a great sacrifice for them!"

Don Bosco replied: "We would like to have done more, but we were very happy to hear that Your Holiness was pleased with our humble offering. I wish to assure Your Holiness that large crowds of boys in Turin love you tenderly. Whenever they have a chance to speak of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, they do so most gladly."

The Holy Father was quite happy to hear this. Returning to the topic of the oratories, he himself proposed the question:

"My dear Father, you have set many things in motion, but what would happen to all of them if you were to die?"

Don Bosco, who was about to broach this subject, seized the opportunity and replied that he had come to Rome expressly for the purpose of providing for the future of the oratories. Handing him Archbishop Frasoni's letter of recommendation, he added: "I have come to implore Your Holiness to tell me on what basis an institute could be founded that would be suitable to our times."

The Pope read the recommendation of the dauntless exiled archbishop and then questioned Don Bosco on his plans and aims. Very satisfied with the answers, he said: "I see that we are of one mind."

He then exhorted Don Bosco to draw up the constitutions of his society, and he made several important suggestions in this regard.

Among other things, he told him: "Set up your society in such a way that the government cannot interfere with it. Yet, don't be content to bind its members only with simple promises, for in that case the link between members, or between superiors and subjects, would not be adequate. You could never be sure of them, nor could you count on them for any length of time. Formulate

your constitutions according to these principles, and then we shall examine them. It is no easy matter to be in the world and go unnoticed. Nevertheless, if this is God's will, He will enlighten you. Pray. Then come back in a few days, and I shall tell you what I think."

Pius IX had the ability to grasp things quickly, and he was swift in his replies. In five minutes one could discuss matters with him that would have required an hour with others. Thanks to this, they not only discussed a new kind of religious congregation but several other things as well. Don Bosco also asked and obtained various favors—among them the privilege of a private chapel for the Oratory and for the hospice of Father Francis Monteburuno in Genoa.¹ Don Bosco also presented Father Cafasso's petition concerning an extraordinary indulgence at the point of death. ² He begged the Holy Father to grant it and to extend the same favor to him personally, to all those residing at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, and to an unspecified number of benefactors. Pius IX generously consented and promised a rescript for Father Cafasso.

Lastly, Don Bosco asked his blessing for all who were in any way connected with him and his work. The cleric Rua was then called back in and both knelt. "I'll bless you with all my heart," the Holy Father said in a quivering voice, while they, too, were deeply moved: "Benedictio Dei Omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super te, super socium tuum, super tuos in sortem Domini vocatos, super adiutores et benefactores tuos et super omnes pueros tuos, et super omnia opera tua, et maneat nunc et semper et semper et semper"

Toward the end of the audience, Pius IX asked Don Bosco if he had already visited St. Peter's, and he gave him full permission to see every monument and outstanding thing in the Holy City, instructing the papal majordomo to open every door to him. "Try to see all that can be seen," he told him.

52

DON BOSCO'S COMMENT

"The goodness of the Holy Father," Don Bosco wrote, "and my own delight in talking to him had protracted the audience beyond the half hour—in itself a notable time considering the person granting the audience—and had even delayed his lunch. We left the Vatican full of esteem and veneration for the Holy Father, and on the way

home we felt overwhelmed by the numerous proofs of his benevolence. The memory of this audience will certainly be indelibly impressed on our hearts. Through personal experience we can say that one need only approach the Pope to find in him a father concerned, above all, with the welfare of his sons, the faithful all over the world.

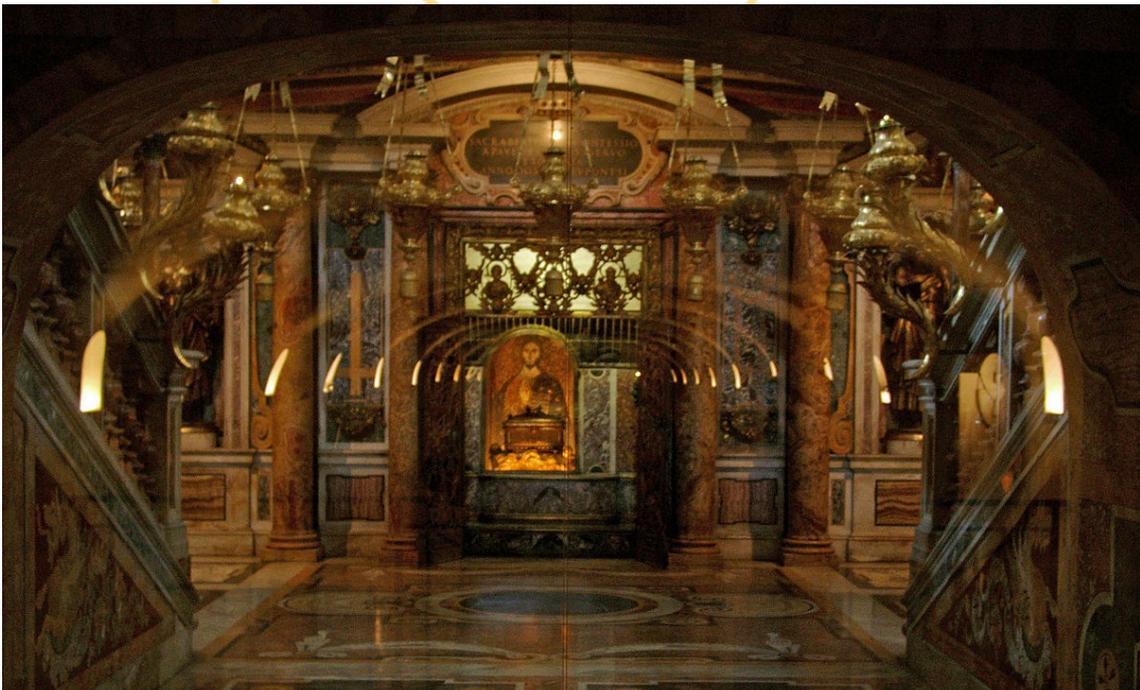
Anyone who hears him speak cannot help saying to himself: 'There is something in this man that one does not find in others!' "

5) St Peter's Tomb

Don Bosco took advantage of the Pope's permission to visit the underground part of the Vatican Basilica.

This space between the old and new floor constitutes precisely those dungeons also known as the the Vatican Grottoes. Here were placed almost all the monuments that existed in the ancient church, among including valuable works of sculpture and painting: and mosaic paintings, sepulchres of Popes sarcophagi of famous people, statues, tombstones and altars.

Don Bosco then told the boys:





"It would take a book to tell all the wonderful things I saw. I'll just mention one, a picture of Mary, known as "La Bocciaata"—a very ancient image on an altar of the crypt. It got its name from the following episode. Deliberately or accidentally, a young man hit the eye of Mary in this picture with a boccia. Tradition has it that blood streamed from the forehead and eye, staining the cheek which is still visibly blood-red. Two drops of blood spurted sideways over a stone, and this stone is now carefully preserved behind an iron gate."

Don Bosco found most fascinating the memory of the Prince of Apostles. He spent the greater part of the day exploring the "Confession of St. Peter" in the company of Monsignor Borromeo. The area where St. Peter's tomb is located was opened for him. He minutely inspected every corner, the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. He asked if there was anything else to see.

"Nothing," he was told. "But precisely where is St. Peter's tomb?"

"Underneath here, deep down in the very spot it occupied when the old basilica was still standing. It has not been opened for centuries, for fear that someone might try to break off pieces for relics."

"I'd like to get to it."

"Impossible!"

"I've been told that there is a way of seeing it, though."

"I've shown you everything to be seen; anything more is strictly forbidden."

"But the Pope has ordered that nothing be kept from me. Should he ask me about it when I see him again, regretfully I'll have to tell him the truth."

Monsignor sent for some keys and opened what looked like the door of a closet. It disclosed an opening on the floor. Don Bosco looked into it, but it was pitch-black.



"Are you satisfied now?" Monsignor asked.

"Not yet; I'd like to see what's below."

"How?"

"Send for a candlelighter."

It was brought and lowered into the hole, but the flame of the wick instantly died out. Besides, the candlelighter was far too short.

Another one with a much longer handle and an iron hook at the end made it possible to touch the lid covering St. Peter's sarcophagus, some twenty-five feet below. Tapping upon it lightly with the iron hook, one could tell from the sound that it had struck first iron and then marble. This confirmed what ancient historians had written.

Don Bosco diligently checked everything so as to be able to correct accordingly his biography of St. Peter based [so far] on the writings of Saxton, Cuccagni, and the Bollandists.

In the meantime, the Holy Father had expressed his wish that Don Bosco attend the divine and magnificent spectacle of all the functions of Holy Week. So he had asked Borromeo to invite him on his behalf, and to procure a place for him from which he could be a spectator of the sacred rites at ease.

6) Holy Week in Rome

On the following day, Sunday, March 28, Don Bosco and Rua got to St. Peter's hours before services began. Count Charles De Maistre escorted them to the diplomats' section where Don Bosco and Rua had reserved seats. Don Bosco paid strict attention, for he knew how important these rituals were. At his side was a Protestant English nobleman who seemed impressed by the solemn rites. At a certain moment a soprano of the Sistine Chapel Choir sang a solo so exquisitely that Don Bosco was moved to tears, while the Englishman became ecstatic. When it was over, the latter turned to Don Bosco, exclaiming: "Post hoc, Paradisus [After this, Paradise]." Not knowing what language Don Bosco spoke, he had used Latin.



Not long afterward, this nobleman became a Catholic, was ordained a priest, and eventually was consecrated a bishop.

After the Pope had blessed the palms, the diplomatic corps filed in turn toward his throne to receive them from his hands. Don Bosco and Rua also knelt at his feet and received their palm. This privilege had been Pius IX's idea.

After all, was not Don Bosco an ambassador of the Most High? Later, when he was back at the home of the Rosminians, Rua offered his palm to Father Pagani, who was appreciative of the gesture and the gift.

To enable Don Bosco to have a close look at all the Holy Week services, even those in the Sistine Chapel, Cardinal Marini, one of the two cardinal assistant deacons at the throne, appointed him his trainbearer. Thus, vested in purple, Don Bosco stood quite close to the Pope throughout all the services and thoroughly enjoyed the Gregorian chant and the polyphony of Allegri and Palestrina. On Maundy Thursday the Mass was offered by Mario Cardinal Mattel, the oldest of the suburban bishops, rather than by the cardinal deacon of the Sacred College, because the latter was unable to officiate. Don Bosco followed the Pope as he carried the Blessed Sacrament processionally to the repository in the Cappello. Paolina and again to the balcony from which all Rome awaited his solemn blessing. In addition, he was present at the Washing of Feet of thirteen priests, also done by the Pope, and at the commemorative supper that followed at which they were waited on by the Vicar of Jesus Christ himself. These two services were held in two spacious galleries of the Vatican.

As regards Good Friday, we found some information in a booklet published in Paris in 1883 under the title *Dom Bosco a Paris par un ancien Magistrat*. On page 66 we read:

On Good Friday [April 2, 1858], a French magistrate was kneeling beside a priest in the Cappella Paolina in Rome in adoration of the Eucharistic Jesus in the repository. An Italian friend who was accompanying the magistrate said to him as they were leaving: "You had a saint beside you—Don Bosco. He is the St. Vincent de Paul of Turin."

But not of Turin only. Of Italy, too, and, God willing, of the whole world!

7) Second audience

Returning to the Quirinal, at the crack of dawn he received an invitation to go to the Vatican. The Pope wished to spend a long time with him, and received him in the most benevolent and paternal manner.

... without further ado he spoke to him [substantially] as follows: "I have been thinking about your project, and. I am convinced that it will do a great deal of good for the young. Go ahead with it. How else can your oratories survive and their spiritual needs be attended to? I think that in these sad times we need a new type of religious congregation, one based on these two premises: it must have vows, for without them unity of spirit and purpose could not be maintained, but these vows must be 'simple' so that they may be easily dispensed from, lest the ill will of some members cause unrest and discord. Its rules must be gentle and easy to observe. The garb and practices of piety must be such as not to draw attention. Perhaps to this end, it would be better to call it a 'society' rather than a 'congregation' Briefly, find a way to make each member a religious in the eyes of the Church but a free citizen in the eyes of the world."

Pius IX then mentioned some congregations whose rules could offer guidelines in drafting those of this new congregation. At this point, Don Bosco humbly presented the manuscript of his constitutions to Pius IX, more or less in these terms: "Holy Father, here you will find the spirit and the norms that for twenty years have guided those who devoted themselves to the work of the oratories. Even before coming to Rome, I did my best to give the various articles a systematized form, and during these last few days I have made corrections and additions to meet the suggestions Your Holiness graciously gave me the first time I had the honor to come into your presence. In drafting the various chapters and in attempting to implement your suggestions, I most probably blundered. Therefore, I now entrust this whole matter to Your Holiness and to anyone you will delegate to read, correct, add, or delete for the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls."

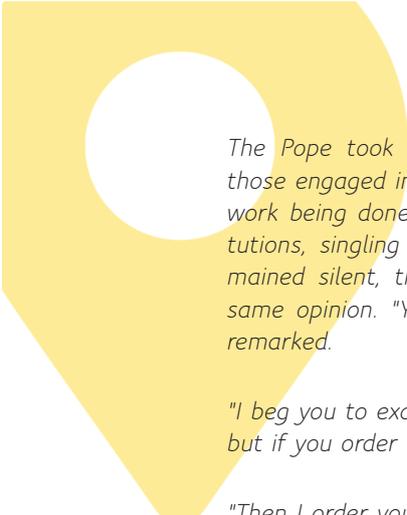
Taking the manuscript, the Pope leafed through some pages. Then he again approved the purpose that had inspired them and placed the manuscript aside on a small table. Thus the Vicar of Jesus



Christ himself decided that Don Bosco should found a new religious society. The Pope then had Don Bosco narrate in detail the beginnings of the Turin oratories and the reasons that had prompted him to start them. He wanted to know what was being done, the manner in which it was done, and what obstacles he had had to overcome. When he heard of the many difficulties, threats, persecutions, and enticements with which Don Bosco had had to contend, seeing some similarity with his own tribulations during the revolution, he exclaimed: "Yes, how true indeed! Ambulavimus per vias difficiles [We have gone through a hard journey]." With a smile, Don Bosco replied: "But with God's grace, non lassati sumus in via iniquitatis [we did not bog down in the way of iniquity]." Then he went on to tell of the great good that had been accomplished through God's infinite mercy and of the many very virtuous boys who had lived and were still living at the Oratory. As the talk then passed on to Dominic Savio, Don Bosco told the Pope about the boy's vision concerning England. Pius IX listened to his report with great interest and delight, and he then said: "I am very much interested in England. This confirms my resolve to keep striving for its conversion. I shall regard this account at the very least as the advice of a good soul."

This disclosure regarding Savio brought another thought to the Pope's mind. Looking fixedly at Don Bosco, he asked if he, too, had ever had any supernatural revelation about his undertakings. Then, seeing that Don Bosco was apparently ill at ease, Pius IX insisted that he be told of any event, no matter how slight, which might have even the appearance of the supernatural. In filial trust, Don Bosco told him everything he had seen in his extraordinary dreams—which had already been verified in part—beginning with his dream at the age of nine.'

The Pope listened with great attention and emotion, and he did not try to conceal the fact that he attached great importance to what Don Bosco had told him. He then said to him, more or less in these words: "When you get back to Turin, write down these dreams and everything else you have told me, minutely and in their natural sense. Save all this as a legacy for your congregation, so that it may serve as an encouragement and norm for your sons."



The Pope took this occasion to praise very highly and warmly those engaged in the education of youth and to mention the good work being done in Rome by oratories and numerous other institutions, singling out St. Michael's Hospice. When Don Bosco remained silent, the Pope sensed that he was not entirely of the same opinion. "You must know something that I don't know," he remarked.

"I beg you to excuse me if I do not feel I should make a comment, but if you order me to do so, I shall speak," Don Bosco replied.

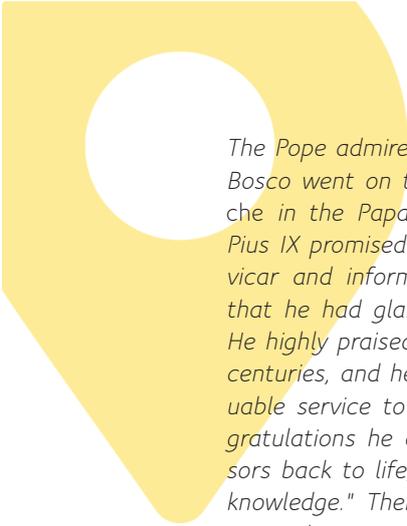
"Then I order you to do so!"

Therefore, sparingly and in a prudent manner, Don Bosco informed the Holy Father of what prominent people thought—and wished that the Pope would learn—of St. Michael's Hospice. Pius IX was surprised, and he immediately promised to remedy the situation. This led him to inquire about the trades, crafts, and academic courses offered to the Oratory boys.

Then he asked Don Bosco: "Of all the subjects you have studied, which did you like best?"

"Holy Father, my knowledge is not vast, but the one thing I love and wish is scire Jesum Christum et hunc crucifixum—to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. [1 Cor 2:2] The Pope remained thoughtful for a while. Then, as though wishing to put him to the test, he said that he had been very pleased with the retreat Don Bosco had given to the women prisoners, and that, as a token of his esteem and affection, he had decided to make him a monsignor with the rank of domestic prelate. Don Bosco, who had never been interested in honors, humbly thanked him, but he declined the offer in his usual witty and friendly manner, saying: "Your Holiness, that would never do! My boys wouldn't recognize me any longer and I'd lose their trust. If they had to call me 'Monsignor,' they wouldn't dare come near me and pull me this way and that as they do now. Besides, everybody would think that the title had brought me wealth. How could I ever again muster enough courage to go begging for the Oratory and other projects? Holy Father, it is far better for me to always remain plain Don Bosco!"





*The Pope admired his charming humility. Without further ado, Don Bosco went on to ask his permission to circulate *Letture Cattoliche* in the Papal States, and, if possible, with postal exemption. Pius IX promised to do so, but he advised him to see the cardinal vicar and inform him of the Pope's promise. He then remarked that he had glanced at his *Storia d'Italia* and *Letture Cattoliche*. He highly praised Don Bosco's lives of the popes of the first three centuries, and he encouraged him to continue the series as a valuable service to the Church, especially at that time. To his congratulations he added: "With your works you bring my predecessors back to life, especially those of whom the faithful have little knowledge." Then, after questioning him on his sources for that series, he granted him the personal faculties he had requested – the lifetime faculty of hearing confessions in *omni loco Ecclesiae* [everywhere] and a dispensation from reciting the Divine Office. Finally, as if he had not been generous enough, Pius IX granted him every faculty he could think of, with these words: "I grant you all I have the power to grant." He then gave him his blessing.*

IMPRESSIONS

Don Bosco left, deeply moved by the Pope's graciousness, and he told Rua what had taken place during the memorable audience. His dispensation from saying the breviary greatly eased his delicate conscience, because he was often busy from morning to night with confessions, audiences, and various other tasks. However, he continued to say his breviary in full as long as he was able, or at least in part, even after his sight dimmed and his health declined.

The Holy Father's affection for Don Bosco was truly striking! From then on, Pius IX was always his father and friend. He constantly held him in high regard, looked forward to conversing with him, sought his advice, and repeatedly offered him ecclesiastical honors in an attempt to keep him nearby. But Don Bosco, though always obedient to the Pope's wishes, did not feel that he could accept these offers. He sought honors for others but accepted none for himself.

8) Easter Sunday

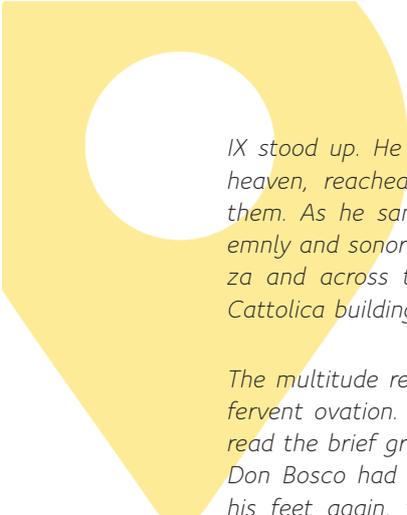
*On April 4, artillery salvos announced the dawn of Easter from Castel Sant'Angelo. Around ten o'clock in the morning, Pius IX entered the basilica on the *sedia gestatoria* to sing the Mass and give the customary blessing *urbi et orbi* from St. Peter's balcony.*

After Mass the cortege of bishops and cardinals wound its way up to the central balcony.

Together with Cardinal Marini and a bishop, Don Bosco stood for a moment near the richly draped balcony railing on which three golden papal tiaras were displayed. The cardinal whispered to Don Bosco: "Just look!" Don Bosco was dumbfounded. A crowd of 200,000 people, eyes riveted on the balcony, thronged the piazza. The roofs, windows, and terraces of all nearby buildings were equally crowded. A French army contingent occupied part of the area between the obelisk and the basilica steps, while papal infantry battalions were lined up to the right and left. Behind them stood cavalry and artillery detachments. Thousands of carriages were packed in the two side wings of the piazza near Bernini's colonnades and in front of the buildings in the background. Groups of people stood up in the carriages—especially in those hired for the occasion—and they seemed to tower above the crowd. It was a spectacle beyond description.

When Don Bosco had started moving with the cortege, the Pope was still venerating the precious relics on display, and he thought that it would be some time before the Holy Father would reach the balcony. He was so completely absorbed in contemplating that immense crowd from all nations that he did not notice that both Cardinal Marini and the bishop had disappeared. When he turned, he found himself wedged between the shafts of the sedia gestatoria and the railing of the balcony—a fine predicament! Cardinals, bishops, masters of ceremonies, and chairbearers stood solidly about, making it impossible to slip through their ranks. It would have been improper to face the Pope or turn his back to him, but it was an absurdity to stand where he was! Having no other choice, he edged along sideways, only to realize that now the tip of the Pope's foot rested on his shoulder. At that moment a silence so solemn fell on the square that one could have heard the buzzing of a fly. Even the horses stood still. Perfectly poised and attentive to everything, Don Bosco observed that only a single neigh and the striking of the clock were heard while the Pope, who was seated, read several ritual prayers.

Seeing that the floor of the balcony was strewn with branches and flowers, Don Bosco stooped to pick a few blossoms and put them between the pages of the book he was holding. At last Pius



Pope IX stood up. He stretched out his arms and, raising his hands to heaven, reached out toward the bowing multitude and blessed them. As he sang the blessing, his booming voice rang out solemnly and sonorously and reached up to the very end of the piazza and across the adjacent Piazza Rusticucci up to the Civiltà Cattolica building.

The multitude responded to the Pope's blessing with an immense, fervent ovation. Then Joseph Cardinal Ugolini and Cardinal Marini read the brief granting a plenary indulgence in Latin and in Italian. Don Bosco had knelt down for the blessing, and when he got to his feet again, the Pope was gone. Bells were pealing joyously, cannons fired salvos from Castel San'Angelo, and military bands filled the air with the blast of trumpets.

Accompanied by his trainbearer, Cardinal Marini boarded his carriage, but as soon as they were on the way, Don Bosco got car-sick. He put up with his discomfort for a while, but finally he had to tell the cardinal that he felt ill. On his advice, he sat outside beside the coachman, but as this too proved useless, he got down to walk. He was still wearing a violet cassock, and this might have invited attention and snickers if he had walked all by himself. Graciously, the cardinal's secretary, a very kind and understanding priest, got out of the carriage and walked with him to the cardinal's palace.

His momentary indisposition, brought on also by the emotions of that morning, soon ceased, but not so the hilarity of his many Piedmontese friends—Father John Tamietti of Cambiano among them—all of whom had seen him on that balcony. As soon as they met him, they said: "You surely made a hit up there where everybody could see you!" Unperturbed, Don Bosco showed them the flowers he had picked up as keepsakes. He dried them and kept them ever afterward as a precious souvenir of the day.

9) Third audience

Don Bosco returned on 6 April for a special audience with Pius IX together with cleric Rua and Fr Murialdo, admitted to the Vatican through the kind intervention of Don Bosco himself.

They entered the antechamber at nine o'clock in the evening, and immediately

D. Bosco was introduced.

Looking somewhat severe, the Pope asked: "Don Bosco, where on earth did you thrust yourself during the papal blessing on Easter Sunday? Of all places, right in front of the Pope, your shoulder propping his feet as though he needed Don Bosco's support!"

"Holy Father," Don Bosco explained quietly and humbly, "I was caught unawares. I beg your pardon if I offended you in any way." "Dare you add insult to injury by asking if you offended me?" Don Bosco scanned his face; the Pope's severe expression was not genuine, and a smile was beginning to break through. "What on earth got into your head to pick up flowers at that moment?" the Pope went on. "It took all the seriousness a pope can muster not to burst into laughter." Pius IX smiled broadly. Without further ado he benevolently went on to say that he had carefully examined the constitutions from beginning to end. Picking up the manuscript from the table, he handed it to him, saying: "Give it to Cardinal Gaude. He will examine it and in due time will contact you." Don Bosco quickly leafed through it and noticed that Pius IX himself had graciously jotted down some remarks and corrections.

The Holy Father considered passing it on immediately to a commission for study, but Don Bosco asked permission to experiment with the constitutions and resubmit them to the Holy See. Pius IX agreed and took this occasion to brief Don Bosco on the procedure he should follow to have his society and constitutions approved.

Don Bosco then reminded him of his several requests for personal indulgences on behalf of some benefactors and promoters of sacred music. The Pope kindly assured him that he would see to them. Thereupon Don Bosco requested a plenary indulgence for all the festive oratory boys to be gained on a day of their choice, and a papal blessing for those working in the oratories, for the distributors of Letture Cattoliche, and for the boarders at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Lastly, he requested special faculties for Father Morizio and Father [Felix] Reviglio. Pius IX graciously obliged. "And now, Holy Father," continued Don Bosco, "please be so good as to give me a special message for my boys, a thought for me to relay to them from the Vicar of Christ."



"The presence of God!" the Pope exclaimed. "Tell your boys, in my name, ever to be mindful of it. Now, are you sure you have nothing else to ask? Is there something you especially desire?"

"Holy Father," Don Bosco replied, "you have graciously granted all my requests. I have no further desire other than to thank you wholeheartedly."

"And yet, I know you still want something."

Don Bosco was at a loss.

"Well, now," the Pope added, "don't you want to make your boys happy when you go back to them?"

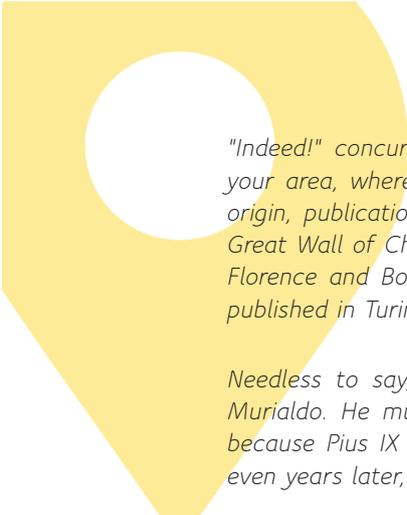
"Of course, Your Holiness."

"Then, wait a moment."

We must say that, just before this, Father Murialdo, the cleric Rua, and Father Cerutti of Varazze, chancellor of the Genoa archdiocese, had been ushered in. They were surprised at the Pope's familiarity with Don Bosco and by the Pope's action, as he scooped up with both hands a goodly number of gold coins from a little safe. Handing them to Don Bosco, he said: "Give your boys a nice treat."

The effect on Don Bosco of such unexpected and exquisite fatherly thoughtfulness can hardly be described. Then the Pope very graciously turned to Don Bosco's companions, and after blessing their rosaries, crucifixes, and religious articles, he gave all of them a souvenir medal. They were deeply moved. After catching his breath, Father Murialdo requested a special blessing for the St. Aloysius Oratory entrusted to him by Don Bosco. Pius IX replied: "Looking after boys is a praiseworthy task. There were Apostles who would have kept children from Jesus, but Our Lord thought otherwise. 'Let the little children come to Me,' He said, and this we must do. God abundantly blesses those who take care of children. Saving oneself while saving others is most consoling; confining one's efforts to saving only oneself is a mark of laziness."

"There is indeed a crying need for such zeal in our neighborhood," remarked Father Murialdo.

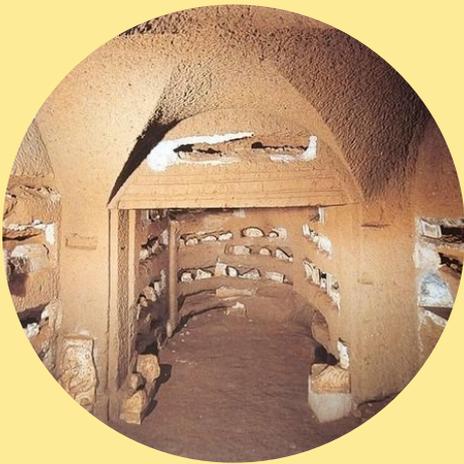


"Indeed!" concurred the Pope. "Everywhere, and certainly also in your area, where an unbridled press wreaks havoc. Regardless of origin, publications are spread far and wide because we have no Great Wall of China to block them. Last year, when I journeyed to Florence and Bologna, I had to confiscate thousands of booklets published in Turin and Milan."

Needless to say, these words were a powerful boost to Father Murialdo. He must have made quite an impression on the Pope because Pius IX did not forget this zealous young Turinese priest; even years later, in 1867, he asked Don Bosco about him.

The audience was now over. All knelt for a final blessing and began to leave. The Pope lingered with Don Bosco, encouraging him to persevere in his undertaking and to try out his constitutions. Again he exhorted him to record in minute detail everything he had told him of a supernatural character, and even things of minor importance if they had a bearing on his initial inspiration of the oratories. He repeated that this would immeasurably boost the morale of future members of his new congregation.

The next day the Pope personally signed the rescripts and had them delivered to Don Bosco. During his last few days in Rome, Don Bosco, enlightened and encouraged by the words of the Vicar of Christ, analyzed the constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, deleting and adding to bring them substantially in line with Pius IX's suggestions.



The Catacombs of St. Callistus

Via Appia Antica 110

Don Bosco always had a great devotion to the Holy Martyrs.

This devotion, combined with a desire to know the places of their martyrdom and burial, in order to be able to write with greater precision and clarity their lives, led him to scrupulously visit the Roman catacombs. The careful observation was however united a spirit of deep faith and devotion.

His attention was particularly directed towards the catacombs of St Sebastian and S. Callistus on the Via Appia Antica, during his stay in 1858.

His last visits were to the Confession of St. Peter and to the catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus. After praying in St. Sebastian's Basilica and looking at two of the arrows which had pierced the saintly tribune and the pillar to which he had been tied, he went down into the catacombs guarding the bones of thousands upon thousands of martyrs. Here St. Philip Neri used to spend nights in vigilant prayer. Don Bosco next visited the catacombs of St. Callistus, where he was probably met by Giovanni Battista De Rossi, their discoverer, to whom he had already been introduced by Archbishop San Marzano.

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Visiting the catacombs is an unforgettable, moving experience. Don Bosco was absorbed in holy thoughts as he walked through the narrow underground corridors where the early Christians attended Mass, prayed and sang, received Holy Communion, listened to bishops and popes, and drew strength to face martyrdom. It is



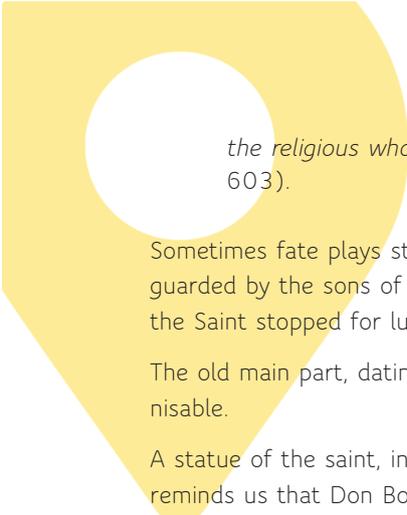
impossible to view impassively the niches where the bleeding or burnt bodies of so many heroes of our Faith were laid to rest or to look unemotionally at the tombs of St. Cecilia and of fourteen popes who gave their lives in witness to what they taught. Don Bosco noticed the many ancient frescoes with their symbols of Christ and the Eucharist, the charming portrayals of Mary's betrothal to Joseph, Her assumption into heaven, or other representations of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child Jesus in Her arms or on Her knee. He was enthralled by the modesty shining through these effigies—resplendent examples of early Christian art, which had been able to capture the incomparable beauty of the soul and the supreme ideal of moral perfection that must be attributed to the Blessed Virgin. He also took notice of many engravings of saints and martyrs.



Map

Don Bosco had entered the catacombs at eight in the morning. When he came out it was six in the evening. The only break had been a light lunch with





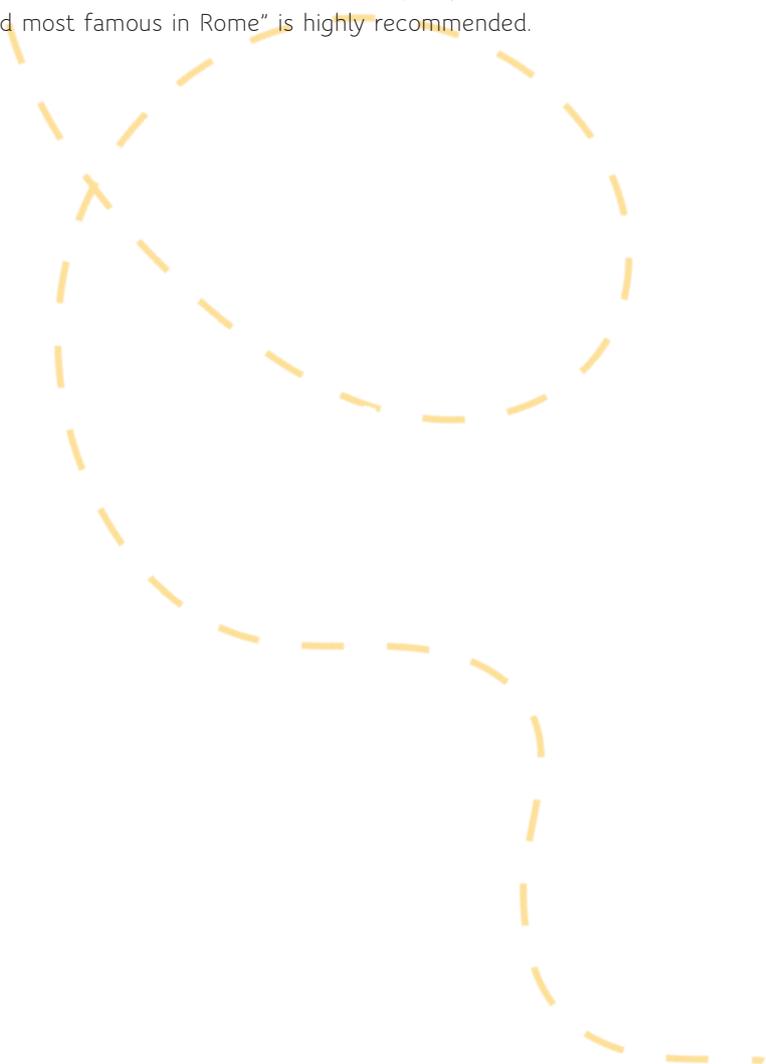
the religious who were custodians of the catacombs (BM V, 602-603).

Sometimes fate plays strange tricks, and today this Sacred Cemetery is carefully guarded by the sons of Don Bosco, and the former Trappist monastery (where the Saint stopped for lunch) is a training house for young Salesians.

The old main part, dating back to the time of Don Bosco's visit, is still recognisable.

A statue of the saint, in front of the entrance to the 'San Tarcisio' Institute, reminds us that Don Bosco, who was once only a visitor, is now at home here.

A visit to these catacombs, described by Pope John XXIII as "the most august and most famous in Rome" is highly recommended.





Santa Maria sopra Minerva

Piazza della Minerva 42

This church, founded in the 7th century over the remains of a temple of Minerva Chalkidiki and rebuilt in Gothic forms around 1280, was around 1280, was much loved by Don Bosco. In fact, he often went there to celebrate the Divine Sacrifice and to preach. Another reason for the frequent the assiduity of the saint's visits to this church is that in the palace adjacent to it lived Cardinal Gaude, a Piedmontese and his friend.

It was this temple that was one of the first places Don Bosco visited in Rome, on 23 February 1858.

Around nine o'clock he and Rua went to the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, so called because it is built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to that goddess. They were cordially welcomed at the adjacent monastery by [Francis] Cardinal Gaude who was expecting them. The cardinal was on excellent terms with Don Bosco, and he conversed with him privately for some ninety minutes. Delighted with a chance to speak his native Piedmontese dialect, he questioned Don Bosco on the oratories and sounded him out on more important matters, such as the state of the Church in Piedmont. He also listened favorably to everything Don Bosco told him of the proposed constitutions he had brought along. The cardinal's words and demeanor showed that his high position had in no way altered his humility or lessened his love for his native Piedmont and old friends. Both during this visit

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Map



and in all his dealings with the cardinal, Don Bosco was greatly helped by Father Marchi, a Dominican, who had the deepest regard for him and offered to help him in every way during his stay in Rome.

More than once Don Bosco recollected himself in prayer in the Church of S. Maria sopra Minerva, at particularly important moments, as he did on 9 March 1858, before travelling to the Vaticano to be received for the first time by Pius IX.

On March 9 1858—the day scheduled for his papal audience—Don Bosco said Mass in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, one of the most beautiful and magnificent churches in Rome. Beneath its main altar [in a glass coffin] lies the body of St. Catherine of Siena. After Mass, Don Bosco called on [Francis] Cardinal Gaude whom he had to consult before seeing the Pope. He was given immediate attention and received the desired advice and information; then he rushed home and hastened to draft the petitions he intended to present to the Holy Father.





Santa Maria in Cosmedin

Piazza Bocca della Verità 18

Don Bosco also came often to the ancient church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin.

The church was erected in the 6th century on top of a large porticoed hall from the Flavian period, of which several columns remain incorporated into the building, which stood near a grandiose altar and two temples consecrated to Hercules Invictus and to Ceres.

The Church, enlarged by Hadrian I in the 8th century, was given to the Greeks who, having fled the persecutions of the Iconoclasts of the East, had settled in the neighbourhoods near the Tiber; from them it took the name of Schola Graeca and S. Maria in Cosmedin (the Greek word for 'ornament').

Attached to the Church is the Monastery of the Sisters of Charity, saved by Don Bosco's intervention from forfeiture. The same morning of 6 March, after visiting the Hospice of St Michael in Ripa, and receiving some work done by the youngsters as a gift, Don Bosco crossed the Tiber at the *ponte rotto* and had to take refuge in the vestibule of the Church of S. Maria in Cosmedin (its facade looking over the Bocca della Verità), to shelter from a violent downpour that had surprised them. The vestibule was already occupied by some cattlemen, with whom, inevitably, Don Bosco chatted.

While waiting out the violent storm, they noticed in the square in front of them, called Bocca della Verità [mouth of truth], several yokes of oxen resting in the mud, heedless of the wind and rain. The men in charge of them had also taken refuge in the same place, and with enviable zest they were eating their lunch of rye

or cornbread and a chunk of raw cod which they tore off piece by piece, washing it all down with water.

Attracted by their simple, good-natured ways, Don Bosco went up to them and said: "You're hungry, I see."

"Very!" one of them answered.

"Is bread and fish enough to keep you going?"

"Yes, and we're thankful to God for it. We're poor and can't expect more."

"Why don't you put your oxen into the stable?"

"We have no stables."

"Do you always leave them out in the weather day and night, just like that?"

"Always."

"Even when you're home in your own villages?"

"Yes, because we have very few stables. Rain or shine, day or night, we leave them out."

"Do you also keep cows and young calves outside?"

"Right. We think that if an animal has started off in a stable, it should stay in a stable, but if it has been brought up outdoors, outdoors it should remain."

"Do you live far from here?"

"Forty miles."

"Can you go to church on Sundays and holy days?"



Map

"Sure! We have our own little church. A priest comes, says Mass, gives a sermon, and teaches catechism. All the people try their best to come, even those who live far away."

"Do you sometimes go to confession?"

"Certainly! Do you mean that there are Christians who neglect this sacred duty? Now it's the jubilee year, and we'll do our best to gain the indulgences."

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Such talk revealed the innate goodness of these peasants who, though poor, were satisfied with their scanty lot and happy with their station in life as long as they could perform their religious duties as good Christians and attend to their humble calling. While they were talking, Don Bosco thought of the great good that regular missions could do in the plains around Rome. This thought lingered in his mind the rest of his life.



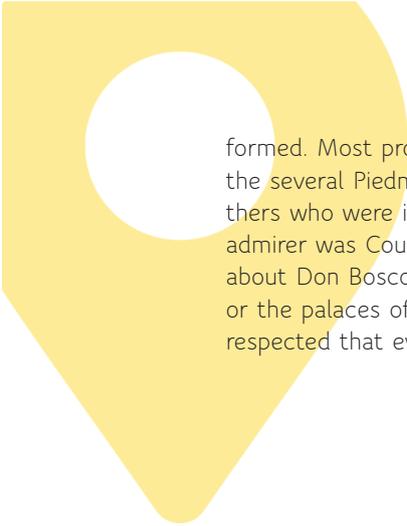


In this story, the memory of the little Becchi's cowherd and his interest in the condition of animals resurfaces, but even more so the priest who recommends good behaviour and Christian religious practices.

The famous 'mouth of truth' is preserved in the vestibule of the church - a Roman mask so called because of the legend, which says that, in order to prove the truth of a person, all one has to do is stick one's hand into the 'mouth' of truth! For liars, it would be cut off.

Stories about Don Bosco's goodness were being rapidly reported and spread by those who had met him during those few days. Father Rua declares that many Romans already knew that in Turin in 1849 Don Bosco had brought a boy back to life so that he could make his confession. In fact, they described the episode to him. From what they said, it was obvious that they were very well in-





formed. Most probably they themselves had heard it from one of the several Piedmontese prelates, diocesan priests, and Jesuit Fathers who were in Rome and knew Don Bosco well. His greatest admirer was Count De Maistre who never ceased telling people about Don Bosco, whether he found himself in aristocratic homes or the palaces of cardinals. He was so devout and so highly-respected that everybody fully believed him.



Santa Maria del Popolo

Piazza del Popolo 12

This church, like Trinità dei Monti, is one of the most famous in the city. It arose from a small chapel built by Paschal II (1099) at the expense of the Roman people (hence the name), over the tombs of the Domitians, perhaps in thanksgiving for the conquest of Jerusalem (which took place in July of the same year, at the end of the First Crusade).

It was restored, enlarged and retouched several times by artists such as Bramante and Bernini.

Roman nobles often came here (many of whom had relatives buried in the same Church). It is therefore normal that Don Bosco often went there to celebrate Mass, to meet Roman nobles, and to collect substantial offerings for his many works.

He had set aside the next day, Sunday, March 7, for a visit to the magnificent Church of Santa Maria del Popolo where he was to say Mass and give Communion to several distinguished persons. Above the main altar is a miraculous painting of Our Lady, attributed to St. Luke. Next to the church there is an Augustinian monastery. At 9 o'clock, Philip Foccardi, a very devout man who was a manufacturer of rosary beads and the owner of a religious articles store, came to pick up Don Bosco in his own carriage.

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After Mass and thanksgiving, Don Bosco toured Villa Borghese and the magnificent Piazza del Popolo, as well as the two churches flanking both sides of the start of Via del Corso --Santa Maria dei Miracoli and Santa Maria di Monte Santo. Then he was driven to the mansion of Princess Potocka, a descendant of the



Map

Sobieskis, former kings of Poland. He stayed for lunch and thoroughly enjoyed the edifying and lively conversation of the lady guests of princess. (MB V, 553).

A humorous and significant episode during his first stay in Rome, in 1858, in Piazza del Popolo deserves our attention. It is something (which occurred perhaps the day before his return to Turin: 14 April 1858): which shows us

Don Bosco's great pedagogical ability and his ease in approaching boys and making friends of them.

Among the cardinals he visited on his farewell tour was Cardinal Tosti who, on a previous occasion, had asked him to speak to the boys of St. Michael's Hospice. The cardinal was gratified by Don Bosco's parting visit, and since it was time for his daily ride, he asked Don Bosco to join him. On the way, they began to talk of the best educational system for boys. Don Bosco was more than ever convinced that the pupils in that hospice kept aloof from their superiors and actually feared them—a very regrettable situation since the superiors were priests. Their discussion went more or less as follows:

"Your Eminence, it is impossible to form boys well if they have no trust in their superiors."

"How is one to win this trust?" the cardinal asked.

"By trying to attract them and by eliminating whatever alienates them."

"How can we attract them to us?"

"By going to them first, by trying to adapt to their tastes, by becoming like them. Would you like a demonstration? Tell me: where are we likely to find a large crowd of boys?"

"In Piazza Termini, or Piazza del Popolo," the cardinal answered.

"Good; then let's go to Piazza del Popolo."

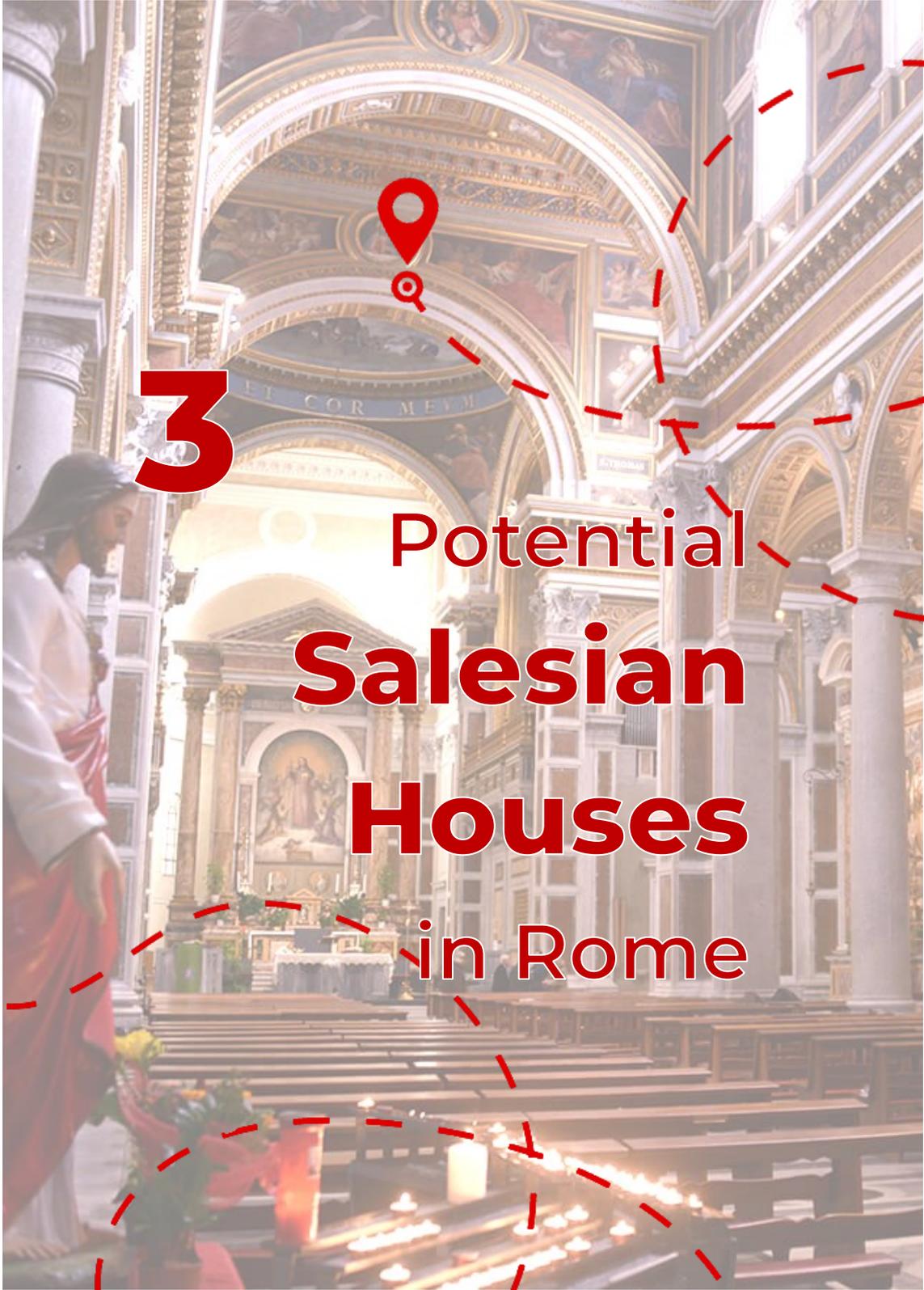
Once there, Don Bosco alighted from the carriage while the cardinal stayed to watch. Spotting a group of boys playing, Don Bosco went up to them, only to see them take to their heels. He called them back in a kindly voice. After a little hesitation, they came up to him. Don Bosco gave them some small things and asked them about their families and their game. He told them to go on with it while he watched or even joined in. Other boys who had been observing this at a distance came running over in great numbers from all sides. Don Bosco greeted them affectionately, and for them too he had a good word and some little gift. He asked them if they were good, if they said their prayers, and if they went to confession. When he turned to leave, they followed him and would only let him go when he got into the carriage again. The cardinal was amazed.

"Did you see?" Don Bosco asked him. "You were right!" he exclaimed.

However, this demonstration did not seem to alter his belief that the system then in force at St. Michael's Hospice was necessary. The cardinal was the authoritarian type; he must have been firmly convinced that confidence and respect could not coexist. As a matter of fact, Pius IX, acting on Don Bosco's impressions of St. Michael's Hospice, had summoned several of its officers. Their reports further convinced him that some reform was called for in order to remedy at least the more serious troubles, but Cardinal Tosti, despite his loving and zealous management of that hospice, had been like a stone wall and nothing could be done. (MB V, 600-601).







3



Potential
**Salesian
Houses**
in Rome



St Michael's Hospice at Ripa

**Piazza di Porta Portese
Lungotevere Ripa**

The Roman Institute of St Michael's (formerly the Hospice), a pious institution founded in the 16th century with the aim of bring together and instructing poor young people in trades and to house older orphaned girls. It was housed in a building with a 334-metre front. The construction of the palace saw Carlo Fontana, then Fuga and Forti, engaged for over a century.

The building first housed the hospice, to which a house of correction for juveniles was annexed, then the women's prison and the customs barracks.

It includes the small church of the Madonna del buon viaggio (Our Lady of the Good Journey) and the large Greek cross church of St Michael (the work of Fontana).

The Institute now has new premises in Tor Marangia, and the former building houses numerous offices of the Ministry of Culture and is home to numerous exhibitions.

At first Don Bosco went there only to visit this famous institution, but later returned several times, at the Pope's request. Pius IX in fact wanted to get to know from Don Bosco about the pedagogical system practised in the Hospice. Later the Pius IX himself insisted that Don Bosco should take over, but the opposition of those who were in charge advised Don Bosco to desist from this enterprise.

Here is the account of Don Bosco's first visit to this Work, on 29 February 1858.

In the afternoon Don Bosco decided to go with Count Rudolf De Maistre to St. Michael's Hospice across the Tiber in order to pay his respects to Antonio Cardinal Tosti, its president. The cardinal had been in Turin as chargé d'affairs to the Piedmontese government from 1822 to 1829, winning the affectionate regard of the intelligentsia and the cream of the nobility.

After crossing the river, Don Bosco and the count visited the Church of San Bartolomeo on the tiny island in the Tiber. The bones of this apostle are preserved under the main altar. They also visited the Church of Santa Cecilia which had been erected on the spot where her house stood, and they venerated her still uncorrupted body. Finally, they arrived at St. Michael's Hospice.

The main building is over 1,100 feet long, 260 feet wide, and 75 feet high; its perimeter is slightly over half a mile. It houses more than 800 persons, mostly boys. The cardinal warmly welcomed Don Bosco and Count Rudolf and entertained them by describing his experiences during the period of the Roman Republic when he had to find lodging elsewhere for fear of assassination. As they were about to leave, he invited them to return for a tour of the hospice at their convenience, asking them to let him know the day and the hour.

Don Bosco gladly accepted the cardinal's invitation, and the following week when things were quieter, he visited the hospice.

On the morning of March 6 he went with Rua and the whole De Maistre family to see the imposing St. Michael's Hospice. Cardinal Tosti had a generous lunch ready for them, but neither Don Bosco nor his friends ate, since they had already had a light meal before leaving and wanted to observe the Lenten fast.



Map

The cardinal and one of the directors graciously took them through each boor and hall where boys were being taught trades and crafts. The hospice had shops for shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, dyers, hatters, saddlers, and cabinet-makers. There were also a printshop and a book-binding shop that manufactured all the textbooks for the schools of the Papal States. This was a

monopoly that Pius IX had granted to the hospice as a source of income. These two shops employed many boys.

The greater number of boys were taught by skilled teachers how to make carpets and tapestries in the Gobelin tradition, as well as woodcarving, painting, sculpture, and etching.

Don Bosco visited each shop. Count De Maistre and other Roman noblemen and priests had already briefed him on the hospice and its organization. They mostly lamented a considerable deviation from its original purpose. Instead of taking in only poor boys, it now also admitted boys of wealthy families and relatives of government employees and important people; thus they were enjoying what should have gone to the poor. Unavoidably this led to favoritism and envy.

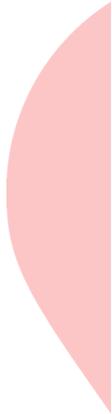
The daily fare was rich in meat and wine, and level-headed people remarked that most pupils could not afford such lavish fare once they left the hospice. The trades—which were supposed to support most of the boys—were neglected as commonplace, and preference was given to crafts, especially carpet and tapestry weaving. Some of these art works adorned many a princely home and brought renown to the hospice. Another complaint concerned the repressive system in force there with its antiquated corporal punishments which were humiliating even though not very severe.

That very morning Don Bosco's friends had asked him at least to try to end such abuses by alerting Cardinal Tosti, its president, of what was being said in Rome against some hospice officials, but Don Bosco preferred not to become involved in matters of this sort.

Nevertheless, he took in everything: boys, craftsmasters, teachers, and assistants. He examined the boys' workmanship and tried to ascertain the prevalent spirit by questioning several boys at random with that kindly discretion that was his alone. He also made mental notes of more important things; he took note of shiny walls and floors, the healthy flush of the boys' faces, the constant supervision, the diligent teaching of catechism, and the regular schedule for the reception of the sacraments. He also found out that all the boys received a suitable and adequate academic edu-







cation. All in all, he decided that despite the more or less serious flaws that were unavoidable in any human undertaking, a great amount of good was being done for the boys of the working class, though not as much as could have been done. For example, he noticed many boys became ill at ease and visibly apprehensive when their superiors showed up or when they had to report to them. Don Bosco was disturbed at this attitude because these boys were naturally open-hearted and affectionate. He wondered how could he give an object lesson to the superiors of the house about the value of his own system of education.

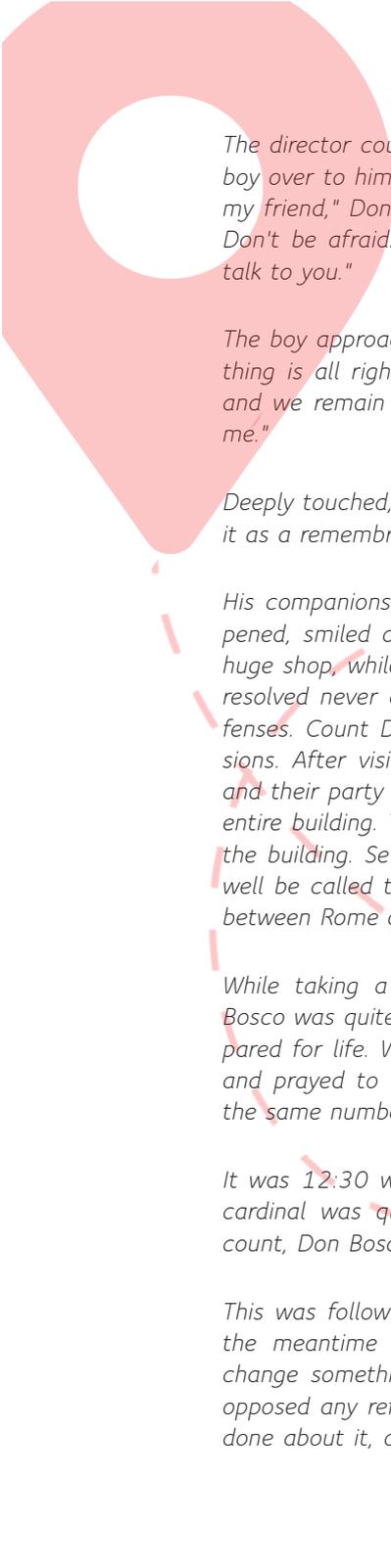
An opportunity soon presented itself. As he was going through the vast establishment with the cardinal and some superiors, they heard a boy whistling and singing. He came bouncing down the stairs, and suddenly at a bend in the staircase he found himself face to face with the cardinal, his shop director, and Don Bosco. The song died abruptly on his lips, and he stopped, head down, his cap gripped tightly in his hand.

"Is this the way to act after so many warnings and instructions?" the director asked. "How ill-mannered can you be? Go to your shop at once and wait for your punishment." Then, turning to Don Bosco, he added: "Please, don't mind."

"Mind what?" asked Don Bosco after the boy had gone away. "Did the boy do anything wrong?"



"Don't you think that such loutish whistling was uncivil?" "But it was not a deliberate infraction. You know very well what St. Philip Neri used to tell the boys of his oratories: 'Keep still if you can, but if you can't, shout and jump all you want, as long as you do not commit sin!' I expect silence at certain hours of the day too, but I ignore minor, thoughtless slips. Besides, I let my boys shout and sing in the playground and on the stairways. All I ask is that they do not tear the place down. A little noise is a lot better than an angry, sullen silence. But now what bothers me is that the poor lad is worrying about what's going to happen to him. He may even be resentful. Don't you think we ought to go and cheer him up?"



The director courteously agreed. In the shop Don Bosco called the boy over to him; bitter and dejected he shuffled over. "Come here, my friend," Don Bosco said to him. "I want to tell you something. Don't be afraid. Your superior has kindly given me permission to talk to you."

The boy approached, and Don Bosco continued: "Cheer up! Everything is all right, provided that you be a good boy from now on and we remain friends. Take this medal and say a Hail Mary for me."

Deeply touched, the boy kissed his hand and said: "I'll always wear it as a remembrance from you."

His companions, who had already gotten word of what had happened, smiled and greeted Don Bosco as he walked through the huge shop, while the director, admiring Don Bosco's winning ways, resolved never again to make so much fuss over such trivial offenses. Count De Maistre narrated this episode on several occasions. After visiting the entire institute, the cardinal, Don Bosco, and their party stepped out onto the terrace that surmounted the entire building. The Tiber flows quite close to the southern wall of the building. Several boats were moored at this spot which could well be called the port of call of small freighters plying the river between Rome and Ostia.

While taking a bird's-eye view of the whole vast edifice, Don Bosco was quite happy that so many boys were being so well prepared for life. We surmise that he then conceived the holy desire and prayed to God that his boys in Turin might eventually total the same number. A few years later, that wish was fulfilled.

It was 12:30 when they came down from the terrace. Since the cardinal was quite tired and the boys had gone to lunch, the count, Don Bosco, and Rua took their leave.

This was followed by a specific invitation from the Pope (who in the meantime had spoken to Don Bosco) to the Cardinal to change something in the running of the Hospice. Tosti, however, opposed any reform, was like a bronze wall and nothing could be done about it, although he directed this admirable institution with

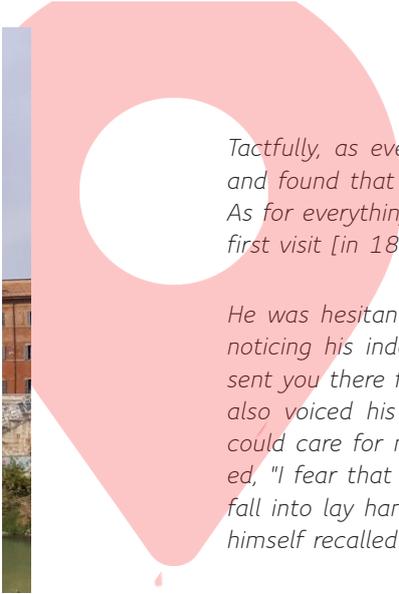


love and zeal. The cardinal was authoritarian, for him it must have been an axiom that confidence makes one lose reverence!

Given the situation, having visited the hospice again in 1867, Don Bosco foresaw its closure.

Pius IX entrusted other confidential roles to Don Bosco. In 1858, for instance, he asked Don Bosco to visit St Michael's Hospice, an imposing institution across the Tiber, which housed nearly twelve hundred residents and enjoyed a reputation in Rome as an institute for poor young people.

Supposedly it was a poor boys' home, and Pius IX had it very much at heart because he himself had been chosen its president in 1825 by Pope Leo XII and had held that office for twenty months, eliminating abuses, dismissing dishonest employees, balancing the budget, clearing up his predecessor's debts, raising school standards, and bringing the whole institution to a flourishing state. Knowing its old troubles first-hand and anxious to forestall their comeback, he feared that the board of directors might not tell him the true state of affairs because of maladministration, connivance or timidity. Hence his request to Don Bosco, who had already been briefed by the Duchess of Sora and other noble ladies on how things stood at St. Michael's. Don Bosco reluctantly accepted this task, the more so because he could foresee how difficult it would be to remedy certain disorders.



Tactfully, as ever, he questioned various residents of the hospice and found that hardly any of the boys could qualify as destitute. As for everything else, nothing or very little had changed since his first visit [in 1858].

He was hesitant to tell the Pope the whole truth, but the latter, noticing his indecision, clearly stated, "I want you to tell me all. sent you there for no other reason." Don Bosco then complied. He also voiced his belief that with its ample revenues the hospice could care for many, many more boys. "Holy Father," he concluded, "I fear that St. Michael's will be lost." He meant that it would fall into lay hands. This forecast impressed the Pope. In 1871 he himself recalled it to Don Bosco as we shall see.

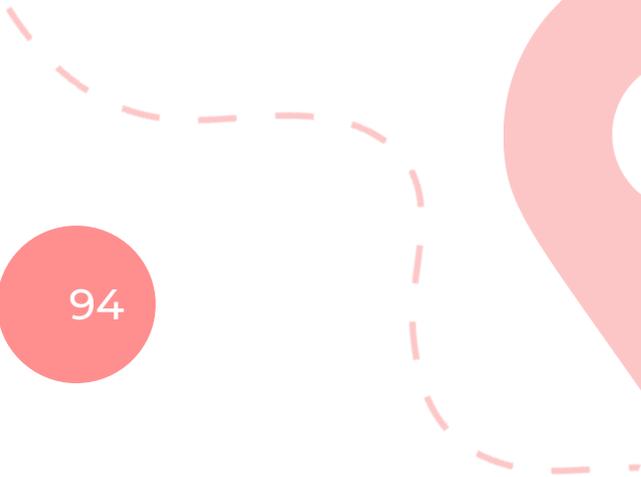
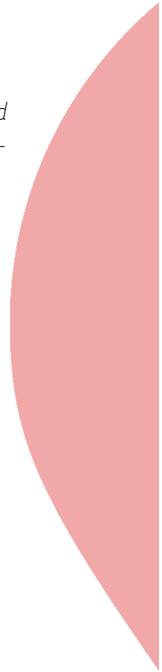
Don Bosco's report drew a storm upon him. The hospice's administrators, summoned by the Pope and taken to task, were quick to connect his reprimands to Don Bosco's visit. Determined to get even with him, yet unable to impugn his personal integrity, they decided to find some pretext in some of the hundred popular booklets he had published.

On June 28, eve of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, Don Bosco went to the Vatican, where he was scheduled for a private audience with the Holy Father. This was an open sign of the latter's benevolence and special interest, considering the enormous demands on his time by frequent public and private audiences for hosts of pilgrims.

As Don Bosco was ushered into the papal chamber, Pius IX amiably looked at him and exclaimed, "Don Bosco, we have lost St. Michael's Hospice."

This vast charitable institute on the banks of the Tiber was particularly dear to the Pope because, as its director and administrator in former years, he had infused new life into the place, paid off its debts and raised the standards of the vocational department. Among other things, to encourage the boys in their work, he had generously allowed them a share of the profits—an innovation which Don Bosco later introduced at the Oratory. Thus, at graduation every pupil received a tidy sum of money.

In referring to St. Michael's Hospice the Pope wanted to remind Don Bosco not only of his efforts to revitalize it, but also of the results of his inspection.





Hospicio Tata Giovanni Hospice

Via Arenula

This Institute had similar aims to St Michael's, and it too was slowly decaying. Don Bosco visited it and was quite happy with it, but not to the point of taking over, as Pius IX (who as a simple priest had been its Director) wanted.

The glorious Institute, from its ancient headquarters in Via S. Anna de' Falegnami (*Via Arenula was opened in 1880 to connect Largo di Torre Argentina with the Garibaldi Bridge, thus destroying part of Via delle Zoccolette and the ancient churches of S.Maria de' Calderari, S.Bartolomeo dei Vaccinari, S.Anna dei Falegnami and Ss.Vincenzo ed Anastasio dei Cuochi, so called because it was the headquarters of Ss. Annunziata dei Cuochi e dei Pasticceri [cooks and confectioners.]*) moved to the new one in Via di Porta Arenula at the beginning of the century. Today it has been demolished, while the new house is a School.

Don Bosco's first visit to this Work dates back to 27 February 1858. He had resolved to visit some charitable institutions for the young, where he hoped to obtain enlightenment and and comfort to zealously strive for the spiritual and material benefit of the Oratory.

He went first to the hospice of "Tata Giovanni" in Via Sant'Anna dei Falegnami. He was truly pleased by its history, purpose, and management.

The hospice dates back to the end of the 18th century when a poor bricklayer named Giovanni Burgi, moved to pity by the great number of or-



Map

phaned boys roaming the streets, started to take in a few in a small rented house. God blessed his efforts, for as the number of boys increased, more room was provided. Gratefully and lovingly, the boys began to call their benefactor "Tata," which in the Roman dialect means "Father"—hence the name "Tata Giovanni" by which the hospice is still known. Burgi had little money but a big heart, and he was not ashamed to beg for his adopted sons. Pope Pius VI, during whose pontificate [1775-1799] this home was founded, gave him a house and continued to help him, and his successors followed his example.

The superior has the title of director, and he is assisted by a vicar of his own choosing with the right of succession. The age-limit for admission is from nine to fourteen. The boys remain there until the age of twenty. The older and more dependable boys monitor the dormitories, while the more educated teach elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic to the younger ones. A few clerics and laymen give lessons in the evening. Most boys learn a craft of their own choosing. Since there are no workshops on the premises, they learn their trade in town, just as the custom was in our Oratory during its early years. A few are given a liberal arts education, but only after unquestionable and long-standing proof of excellent moral character and keen intelligence. The hospice subsists on a monthly grant of one hundred and fifty lire from Pius IX, donations, and part of the boy's earnings: fifteen baiocchi went for their support while the balance was deposited to their accounts.

The hospice, a papal institution, is under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin of the Assumption and of St. Francis de Sales. The hours for rising and retiring, the system observed in the dormitories and in the supervision of the boys, the custom of naming each dormitory after a patron saint—in a word, the whole setup—reminds us of our own Oratory in Turin. Don Bosco was delighted to learn that in Turin, unknowingly, he had duplicated Tata Giovanni's work. All charitable undertakings more or less resemble one another because ultimately God is their unchangeable prime mover and the Church is their unalterable inspirer.

As a priest, Pius IX himself had directed the hospice for seven years and had always regarded it in a personal way. At the time of Don Bosco's visit, his room could still be seen. That year

[1858] the boys numbered about one hundred and fifty. (MB V, 541-542)

Giovanni Borgia

The Tata Giovanni Hospice was born when Giovanni Borgi started to host (1784) in his own home in via de' Cartari the boys he saw sleeping abandoned on the benches and on the steps of the Pantheon on their way back from the evening procession (in which he used to participate) organised by the Oratorio del Caravita; as well as providing them with board and lodging (with the help of his sister Domenica), he began to send them to work with his craftsmen friends so that they could learn a trade that could then sustain them in life. With the help of lay volunteers and priests, he also tried to provide them with a school and religious education.

Since he treated these boys like children, they affectionately called him Tata, which in Roman dialect meant 'father'; hence his nickname and the name taken by the hospice. At the same time, because he had a rough manner and tried to help as many children as possible, some of them even said: "run away, run away, here comes Tata Giovanni!"

With time, the work grew and attracted the interest of various personalities who supported it with donations and income; later, Pope Pius VI bought the Ruggia palace in Via Giulia for the hospice (and meanwhile the institute was rented out, eventually accommodating up to 40 orphans).

With the advent of the Roman Republic (and the death of Tata Giovanni in 1798) the activity of the hospice was in danger of ceasing; despite various tribulations it continued to operate (combined with other minor institutes, including the one run by Venerable Fra' Bonifacio da Sezze) thanks to the work of lawyer Belisario Cristaldi, who moved the hospice to the Church of S. Nico da Tolentino; later, during the Napoleonic period, the institute



was based at S. Silvestro al Quirinale, Borgo S. Agata ai Monti and the Palazzo Ravenna on the Esquiline.

In 1816, when Pius VII returned to Rome, the Tata Giovanni Hospice finally found a permanent home at the Church of S. Anna dei Falegnami under the leadership of Canon Storace. During this period, the activity of the hospice grew (hosting up to 120 boys) and became institutionalised, with the adoption of rules and regulations.

Many lay people and young clerics of the time collaborated in the work of the hospice, which had maintained the founder's original spirit. Among these were the future Pope and Blessed Pius IX, as well as Monsignor Morichini, Monsignor Vespignani and several others.

In 1869, the Tata Giovanni hospice was one of the most significant sites of the events for the fiftieth anniversary of the priestly ordination of Pius IX; on 12 April 1869 the Pope returned to the Hospice (in memory of the first Mass celebrated here on 11 April 1819), after having personally distributed Communion to the orphans from Tata Giovanni the previous day in St Peter's.

Among the former students of Tata Giovanni are the Servant of God Federico Cionchi and Columbanus Longoria, a monk; St John Bosco visited the Hospice Tata Giovanni Hospice on one of his trips to Rome, and saw many similarities there with what he had founded in Turin.

In 1887 the hospice - together with the church of S. Anna dei Falegnami - was demolished for the opening of Via Arenula and moved to Piazza del Bisceione in the Palazzo Righetti (formerly Orsini and Pio di Savoia), where it remained until 1926; from there it moved to its current headquarters in Viale di Porta Ardeatina.







Vigna Pia agricultural estate

Via Filippo Tajani

A third educational institute dear to Pius IX was the agricultural estate known as Vigna Pia. That is why, in 1867, he suggested that Don Bosco turn it into a Salesian Home.

The Institute was situated (at that time) in the open countryside, not far from the Tiber. The unfortunate location of the work was one of the reasons that left Don Bosco hesitant about the decision to take it over (technically the structure was very poor but above all, the proximity of the river increased the possibility of infection and disease).

However, what most prevented him from settling in Vigna Pia was the opposition of the Commission for Pious Works in Rome, reluctant to entrust a Roman work to a foreigner from Piedmont. Don Bosco even went so far as to draft a proposal for the administration of Vigna Pia, but had to give up the undertaking.

Don Bosco also acquainted the Holy Father with an offer of buildings and money for a Salesian house in Rome. Pius IX, who would have liked such a foundation, mentioned Vigna Pia, a sort of farmstead and reform school for about one hundred abandoned youngsters that he himself had founded. He had spoken about it to Don Bosco in 1858. It was managed by French religious who would willingly have withdrawn. Pius IX wished the Salesians to take it over. Duke Salviati, who heartily agreed, took Don Bosco to visit it. The plan fell through, however, after several months of discussions because the Holy See's agencies charged with welfare

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institutions would not give up even an iota of their control over them.

We have a manuscript that was the basis of those negotiations. [Note: the English translation of the BM does not contain this, so the reference is to the Italian edition MB VIII, 606]

PROPOSAL REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT KNOWN AS VIGNA PIA.

That Fr John Bosco take on the administration of the Vigna Pia establishment proposing the following:

- 1. He will provide a sufficient number of people for the religious, moral, artistic and scientific education, in proportion to the age, need and condition of the young inmates.*
- 2. The youngsters will be employed in agriculture, in the most vital trades of society such as shoemaking, carpentry, tailoring, ironmongery and also in study, should it be seen fit. All of them, moreover, will have an evening school in which, among other things, there will be musical instruction.*

The local director is the arbiter of discipline, but he may neither receive nor send away any pupil from the establishment without the consent of the Administration.

4. The Director will provide food, clothing, medicine, art, hair-dressing, laundry, mending and anything else that may be needed for the young people.

5. The cultivation of the land will be dealt with separately as to whether it is to be done on behalf of the Administration or on behalf of the Director.

6. The Administration gives the Director the faculty to accept young people on his own account and assign them to work or study as he sees fit, provided that the capacity of the premises allows this.



Map



7. The Administration will pay the Director for each individual at the rate of one franc per day if they do not exceed one hundred in number; for those exceeding this number, they will be paid for each 90 cents.

The Director, teachers, assistants, service persons, are considered as pupils as regards payment by the Administration, i.e. they will all get one franc each.

8. With this sum, the Administration aims to be exempt from all expenses other than what will be deemed necessary for the conservation or extension of buildings in the establishment.

9. The Administration will make a loan of three thousand scudi to the Director for initial expenses and for the anticipation of the most necessary provisions.

10. This sum will begin to be paid off after one year, by the deduction of three francs per month from what is paid for each pupil.

11. This loan will be guaranteed by means to be agreed upon.

12. The contract will last for a five-year period and in the event that either party for reasonable reasons wishes to withdraw from it, the other party must forewarn the other two years in advance.

Vigna Pia

The Vigna Pia institute is originally an agricultural estate and an orphanage, today a school and religious community centre. The estate was formed in 1850 at the behest of Pius IX, as an 'agricultural charity institute' for orphans of working age entrusted to the Congregation of the Holy Family of Bergamo. The main boarding school building has a quadrangular shape with a hollow interior and extends into the Leo XIII Pavilion, built in 1889. In 1932 the estate became a rural parish. After the post-war period, the agricultural part disappeared, and in 1978 the parish title was transferred to the new church of the Holy Family and the Institute became a public school connected with the nearby Sacred Heart, continuing to house the Holy Family General Administration.

The agricultural estate

In 1850 and 1851 the generous benefactors Prince Torlonia, Princess Wolkonski and the religious order of the Minims established a single estate covering 22 hectares, called the Vigna Pia Agricultural Charity Institute. The name 'Pia' originates from the reigning pope, Pius IX, promoter and protector of the initiative.

The settlement was structured according to the 'colonia' scheme, i.e. an agricultural estate on vast cultivated land arranged around a main blacksmith's shop, which functions as an administrative centre.

The population was made up of 'orphans and other more unfortunate young workers', i.e. between 7 and 21. After literacy, they received theoretical training in agronomy and surveying, followed by apprenticeships in horticulture, cereal cultivation and viticulture, and finally placement in service in a rural family. The

care of souls was entrusted to the nearby parish of Casaletto, while material care was entrusted to the Holy Family of Bergamo, a religious congregation whose mission was the rural apostolate.

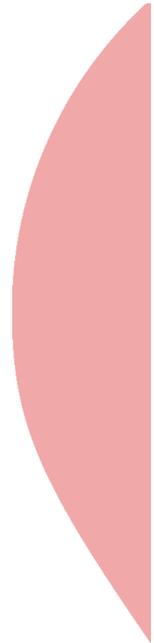
The residence

The main building, called the boarding school, is quadrangular in shape, with a hollow interior area onto which the dormitory balconies face. A similar architectural form is found, in addition to boarding schools, in many works architectural works intended for the 'community life of equals', such as prisons!

The boarding residence main façade faces not the estate, but the Magliana and Tiber valley, and is surmounted by the papal coat of arms between two cornucopias filled with wheat.

Other buildings

The Boarding residence extends into a pavilion of lesser height, a gift from Pope Leo XIII in 1889. Shortly after its inauguration on 23 April 1891, both the Pavilion and the Residence were seriously damaged by the accidental explosion of the nearby Forte Portuense powder magazine. The estate was originally completed with rural farmhouses and a monumental gate on the Via Portuense, with a small country chapel alongside: both have now disappeared.





Church of the Holy Shroud

Via del Sudario

With hopes of opening a Salesian house in Vigna Pia having vanished, in 1869, Don Bosco fixed his attention on the Church of the Holy Shroud, which he had already visited in 1867.

This is located a few steps away from Piazza Navona.

Built in 1604 by Carlo Castellamonte and restored in 1867 by C. Rainaldi, it stands with its plaster facade incorporated into the adjoining houses. It was the church of the Piedmontese, Niçois and Savoyards. Perhaps for this very reason it attracted Don Bosco's attention as early as 1867.

The Church belonged to the Italian State (after the termination of the 'Holy Shroud Sodality'), and Don Bosco immediately undertook negotiations in Florence to have custody of it, also using the adjoining premises.

The negotiations with Cav. Canton lasted a long time, and he "introduced Don Bosco to some employees, his friends and good Catholics, who in time and place could have helped him with the Government".

Don Bosco presented the idea to the Holy Father, already foreseeing that "the negotiations would not be short-lived, and so they lent themselves to keeping him in direct communication with the Minister. Pius IX approved.

The saint had seen things well; these negotiations lasted a very long time (about 8 years) and Don Bosco showed great 'political cunning' in their regard, as we can see from reading Lemoyne's pages [NOTE: the details below are not includ-

ed in the English translation of the BM, so have been translated and abbreviated somewhat here].

The Venerable was concerned about poor Roman youth. The hope of having a place at Vigna Pia having vanished, he began to think about a daring plan to achieve his goal in another way. He proceeded without haste and after mature advice.

In 1867 he had visited the Church of the Holy Shroud, in which a confraternity had been founded since 1597 by some pious subjects of the Sardinian States, with the approval the Holy See, a confraternity whose main purpose was the moral education of the youth of that district.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the confraternity had ceded possession and administration of the church and the fulfilment of its duties. These rights and duties, after a number of years (1831) had been entrusted to the Sardinian Legation residing in Rome, since the Savoy kings had always had this confraternity under their special protection. The church was closed in 1868, because urgent renovations had to be carried out.

Don Bosco planned to have a house annexed to the church, which could easily have been adapted as a hospice of charity for the youngsters. His plan was this: to propose to the Government that they hand over the use and administration of the Church and the house to him, offering his cooperation in money to quickly complete the planned restoration of the church so that it could reopen for worship as soon as possible.

Perhaps Don Bosco had another reason for pressing for a Salesian house in Rome. He foresaw the inevitable entry of the Italian troops into the city, and wanted to take up residence with his followers at the church of the Most Holy Shroud before this event because, while no one would have found his position before the Holy See worthy of criticism, the new government would naturally have been inclined to respect those whom it recognised as its subjects. It would not have failed to protect and defend them from extreme parties: and a law of confiscation would not affect them.

This is an assumption on our part, but given Don Bosco's ingenuity and perspicacity, it is something he would have studied from every aspect and would have foreseen all the difficulties and consequences of. So, what was the goal that the Venerable wanted to achieve?

His aim—which he wanted his co-workers to make known to all—was to do good to as many people as possible, to do harm to no one, and to be allowed to help underprivileged and forsaken boys lest they end up in jail. "As a citizen," he declared, "I respect all civil authorities, but as a Catholic priest I am a servant of the Pope."

This policy, which was nothing but the prudence of the serpent combined with the simplicity of the dove, is that which made him so glorious before God and before men.

Therefore, he wrote about this plan to a great friend of his, Cavalier Carlo Canton, Director and Head of Section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Florence; and the latter replied to him, approving, encouraging, and assuring him that he would inform him of the opportune moment to start proceedings.

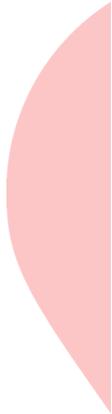
In the meantime, Don Bosco had a lengthy document copied from the State archives, which served to shed light on the negotiations that lasted several years and which he presented to the Ministry of the Interior with the other papers relating to the affair. It was a dispatch from the Royal Legation of the Sardinian States to the Holy See dated 10 April 1851, containing containing long historical notes on the Church of the Holy Shroud. This originated from a confraternity of the same name, made up of former subjects of the Piedmontese, Niçois and Savoyards Duchies, towards the close of the 16th century.



Map

For now it was only necessary to study the project: and Don Bosco set out some preliminary agreement details he had given consideration to and written down in various articles.

THE CHURCH AND SODALITY OF THE HOLY SHROUD IN ROME



1. Father Bosco, following the spirit of the Turin Institute with the title of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, would replace the now ceased society or sodality of the Most Holy Shroud which, according to its founding principles, in addition to religious practices, also had the purpose of giving hospitality to pilgrims, visiting prisoners and the sick, directing children on the path to salvation and other similar works of charity.

2. He undertakes to pay taxes of any kind, to carry out ordinary repairs at his own expense for both the church and the outbuildings; to provide for the cleanliness of the the church, provide and repair vestments, pews, chairs, candlesticks, wax and wine and all that is necessary for divine worship.

3. He will provide for the administration of the institute, the church and the buildings, and for what concerns the tenants and the maintenance of the buildings he will provide no fewer than six persons; no fewer than two priests, one rector, the other vice-rector, a sacristan, two clerics for the service of the sacred services on weekdays and feast days.

4. Every day there shall be not less than two Masses, with the obligation to hear confessions, visit the sick, and, if they have permission, also visit the prisoners.

5. On feast days they will explain the gospel to adults and offer catechism for abandoned children, with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

6. He shall fulfil the attached pious legacies, whether in low or sung Masses, as well as in triduums, novenas, forty hours and for all other solemnities that run throughout the year...

At that time, it seems, there was no mention of the rights of the Royal House. Don Bosco stayed in Florence for a week, going from one to another of the various Ministries, holding special talks with some Ministers and with other personages of high rank. Wherever he presented himself, he was well received, well known for his courtesy and warmth.

Unfortunately, these plans fell through, because after 1870 the Church was

declared a "Church of the Royal Family", i.e. the particular Church of the House of Savoy. Even today, in fact, it is the property of the Presidency of the Republic (waiting to pass to the Military Ordinariate).

The Church of the Most Holy Shroud of the Piedmontese

The history of the church, which already belonged to the imperial Abbey of Farfa before the year one thousand and was known as S. Maria de Cellis or 'Cella Farfoe', tells us that it was ceded to the French in 1478; they rebuilt it and dedicated it to St Louis IX, King of France, hence it was called S. Maria in Cella in S. Loasio.

The French then rebuilt the magnificent church of St. Louis in Campo Marzio in 1589, leaving it to Argentina, and the church became the building of worship for the Piedmontese nation in Rome. The Savoyard, Nice and Piedmontese colony, united in a Confraternity officially recognised by Pope Clement VIII on 2 June 1597, later to become the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Shroud, found temporary lodging here in the church formerly dedicated to St. Louis in Campo Marzio. accommodation in the church formerly dedicated to St Louis. The same Pope donated the paint-



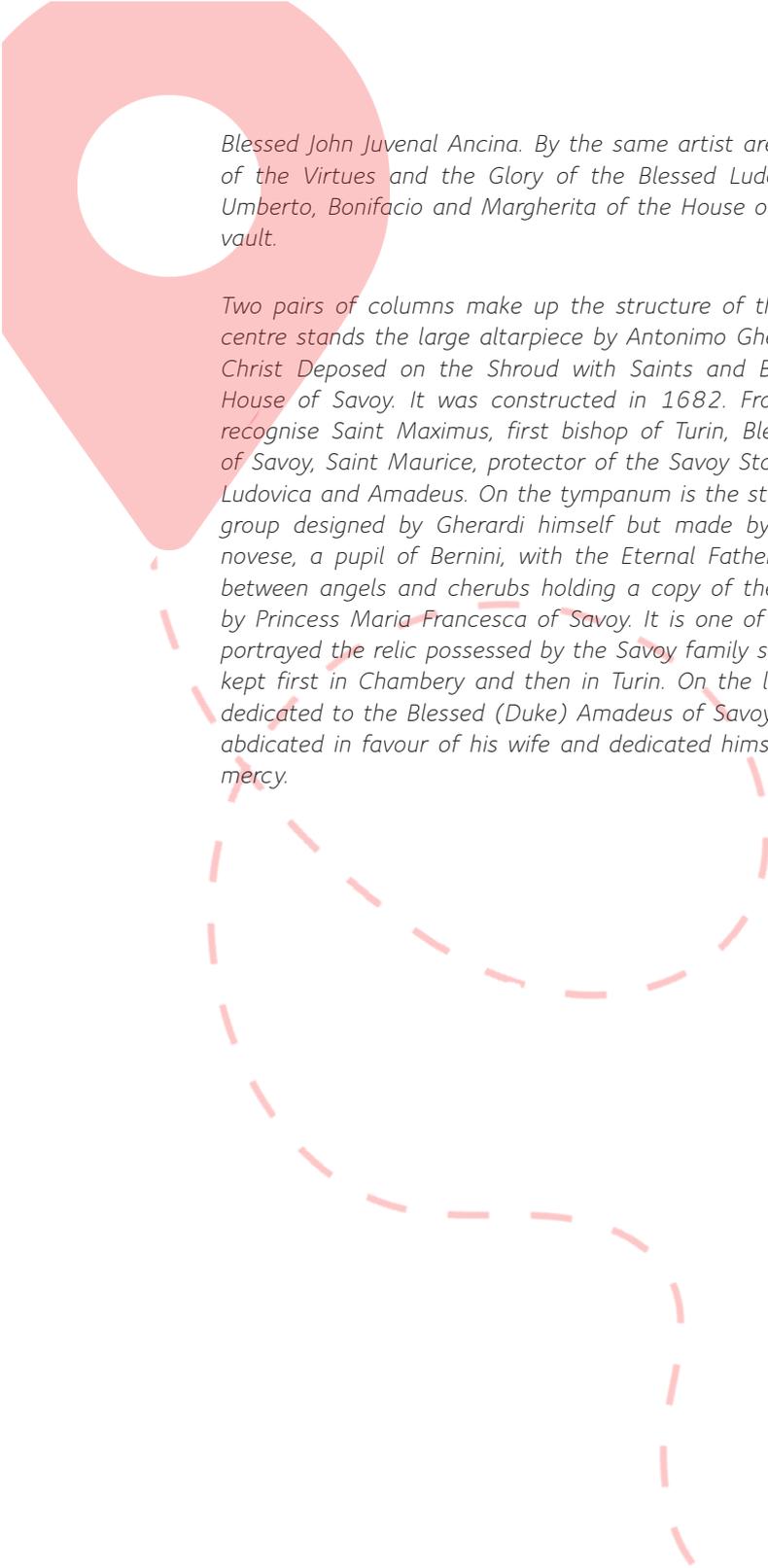
ing of the Holy Shroud, which still stands on the high altar, to the Piedmontese.

In 1604, commissioned by Charles Emmanuel I of Savoy, architect Carlo di Castellamonte designed the building (which had already been enlarged in 1660 by Carlo Rainaldi) with works and elevations in different stages: 1667, 1682 and then ending up with the building that we still see today.

By the bull of 19 September 1605, the archconfraternity was granted the power by Pope Paul V to annually pardon a condemned prisoner. From 1685 to 1687, the façade and high altar were constructed under Pier Francesco Garola. At the end of the 18th century, subjected to Napoleonic depredations, the church was deconsecrated and only reopened in 1801 through the intervention of Charles Emmanuel III: once again abandoned, it was turned into a stable until 1814. It was reopened for worship after the Restoration, refurbished by architect Giacomo Monaldi, and was declared a Sardinian National Church.

Having come under the patronage of the royal house, it was the home of the Chaplain Major of the Royal Palaces and the Palatine Chaplains until 1946. Later it came under the Palatine Ordinary of the Presidency of the Italian Republic. With the signing of the Concordat, the institution was abolished and the church came under the jurisdiction of the Military Ordinariate which has promoted its restoration in recent years.

The interior consists of a single nave covered by a barrel vault, on the walls of which, between pilasters and leaning columns, are two altars within a niche entered via a rounded arch. On the opposite façade is the 18th-century organ, placed on a wooden choir loft, over which the royal shield dominates. To the right is the 17th-century altar dedicated to St Francis de Sales, built with rich marble and with an altarpiece traditionally attributed to Carlo Cesi, perhaps made for the canonisation of the saint, which took place on 19 April 1665 in this very church. Beyond the elegant marble balustrade is the sanctuary decorated with frescoes by Cesare Maccari painted between 1871 and 1873 and depicting the Speech of St Anselm of Aosta to the Ecumenical Council and the other, the meeting between St Francis de Sales and



Blessed John Juvenal Ancina. By the same artist are the allegories of the Virtues and the Glory of the Blessed Ludovica, Amedeo, Umberto, Bonifacio and Margherita of the House of Savoy, on the vault.

Two pairs of columns make up the structure of the altar. In the centre stands the large altarpiece by Antonimo Gherardi depicting Christ Deposed on the Shroud with Saints and Blesseds of the House of Savoy. It was constructed in 1682. From the left we recognise Saint Maximus, first bishop of Turin, Blessed Margaret of Savoy, Saint Maurice, protector of the Savoy State and Blessed Ludovica and Amadeus. On the tympanum is the stucco sculptural group designed by Gherardi himself but made by Pietro Mentinove, a pupil of Bernini, with the Eternal Father in the centre between angels and cherubs holding a copy of the Shroud made by Princess Maria Francesca of Savoy. It is one of the many that portrayed the relic possessed by the Savoy family since 1452 and kept first in Chambery and then in Turin. On the left is the altar dedicated to the Blessed (Duke) Amadeus of Savoy, who in 1465 abdicated in favour of his wife and dedicated himself to works of mercy.



Church of San Giovanni della Pigna

Piazza della Pigna

Having also failed in his attempt to have the Church of the Holy Shroud, Don Bosco turned his attention to the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna, with its attached premises.

This is of very ancient origin and, in 1577, was given by Gregory XIII to the *Archconfraternity of Mercy for Prisoners*, who had it rebuilt by A. Torrioni.

It still belonged to the *Archconfraternity of Mercy for Prisoners* when, at the Audience of 8 February 1870, the Pope proposed to Don Bosco that he take it as his own Roman headquarters.

"The plans we made last year for a house in Rome fell through, but I am still of the same mind and I shall find a place for you. Have you seen the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna?"

"No, Your Holiness."

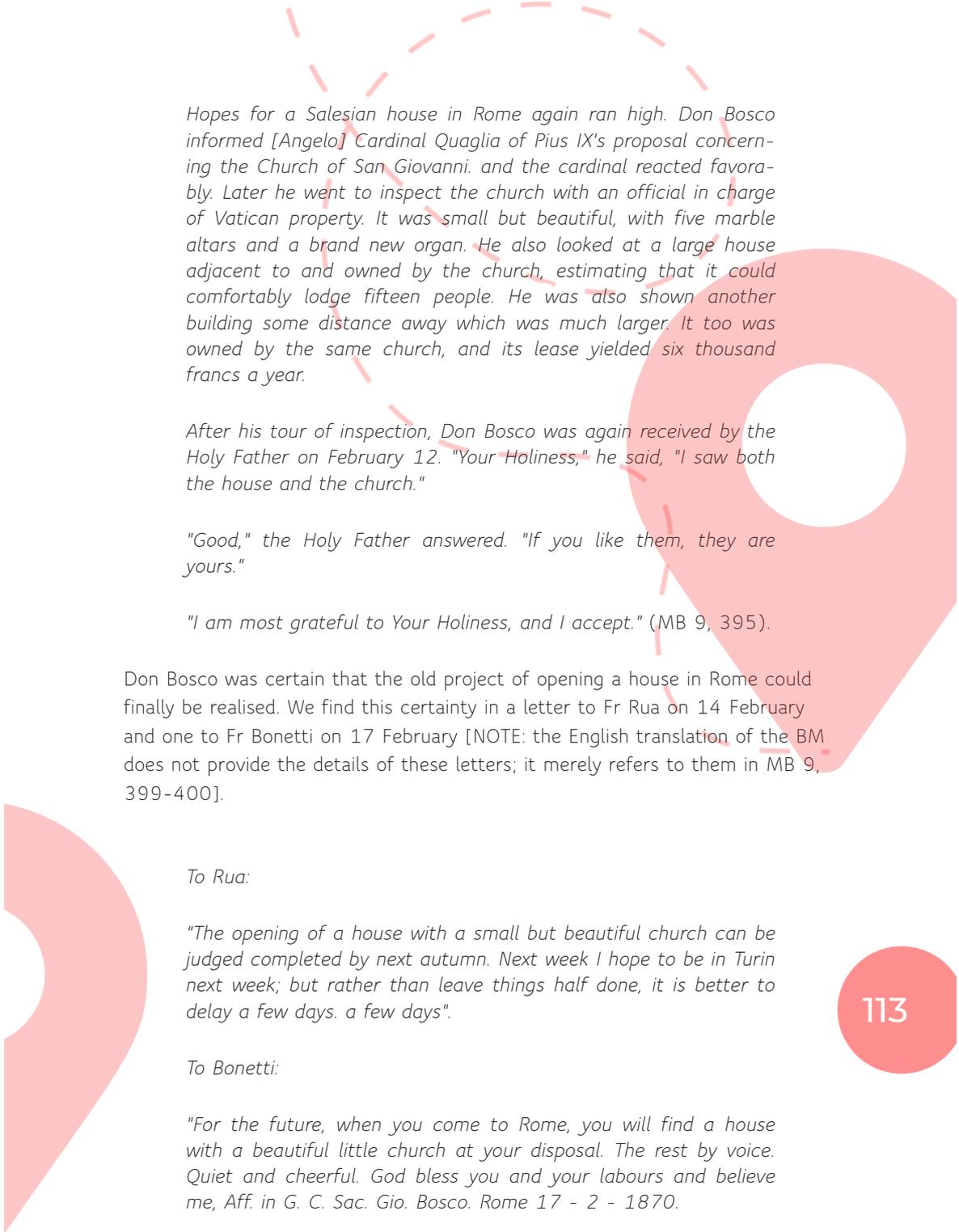
"Go look at it and let me know how you like it."

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On the same day, the saint gave the good news to Don Rua ("Of the money I have here, I will I make a consolidated sum of 100 francs a month for the future house in Rome. The remainder I will bring home with me") and after a few days he went to visit the Church, to then give his definitive answer to the Pope.



Map



Hopes for a Salesian house in Rome again ran high. Don Bosco informed [Angelo] Cardinal Quaglia of Pius IX's proposal concerning the Church of San Giovanni, and the cardinal reacted favorably. Later he went to inspect the church with an official in charge of Vatican property. It was small but beautiful, with five marble altars and a brand new organ. He also looked at a large house adjacent to and owned by the church, estimating that it could comfortably lodge fifteen people. He was also shown another building some distance away which was much larger. It too was owned by the same church, and its lease yielded six thousand francs a year.

After his tour of inspection, Don Bosco was again received by the Holy Father on February 12. "Your Holiness," he said, "I saw both the house and the church."

"Good," the Holy Father answered. "If you like them, they are yours."

"I am most grateful to Your Holiness, and I accept." (MB 9, 395).

Don Bosco was certain that the old project of opening a house in Rome could finally be realised. We find this certainty in a letter to Fr Rua on 14 February and one to Fr Bonetti on 17 February [NOTE: the English translation of the BM does not provide the details of these letters; it merely refers to them in MB 9, 399-400].

To Rua:

"The opening of a house with a small but beautiful church can be judged completed by next autumn. Next week I hope to be in Turin next week; but rather than leave things half done, it is better to delay a few days. a few days".

To Bonetti:

"For the future, when you come to Rome, you will find a house with a beautiful little church at your disposal. The rest by voice. Quiet and cheerful. God bless you and your labours and believe me, Aff. in G. C. Sac. Gio. Bosco. Rome 17 - 2 - 1870.



Thoughts, these, that he confirmed on 7 March in Turin, in the Conference to the Salesians, held to recount the results of his stay in Rome.

Therefore, barring adverse circumstances, we shall send a few of you to Rome in August or October of this year. Likewise, some will be assigned to the school we are opening at Alassio, between Oreglia and Albenga. Such is the understanding I had with the Holy Father.. Last year I built up a small fund for the house we expected to open in Rome. Drawing from this fund and other sums, I have taken out a monthly annuity of 100 francs on the public debt to provide for those who will be leaving for Rome this year.

Unfortunately, these certainties were destined to vanish in the face of other difficulties that arose later.

The church and house of San Giovanni della Pigna did still host the Salesians, because in 1905 these premises were made available to the Salesian Congregation by Pius X. Until 1974, in fact, they were used as the residence of the Procurator General of the Salesian Salesian Society.

San Giovanni della Pigna

History

The church of San Giovanni della Pigna, originally dedicated to the martyred saints Eleutherius and Genesius, is documented in a papal bull of Pope Agapitus II of 955 and in one of John XII in 962.

Having fallen into ruin, in 1584 Pope Gregory XIII granted it to the Archconfraternity of Mercy for Prisoners, who rebuilt it from the foundations. Architect Torroni was commissioned to build the new church; completed in 1624, it took the title Sancti Ionanis de Pinea. It was restored again in the following century and in 1837 under the direction of Virginio Vespignani.

In 1870, Pius IX entrusted it to the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco and, since 1985, at the behest of John Paul II, it has been the seat of the diakonia of San Giovanni della Pigna. In 2007 the church underwent a restoration that restored the original colour of the exterior.

The outside

The church is dedicated to St John the Baptist; the nickname 'Pigna' refers to the large bronze pine cone discovered in the area, which is now preserved in the Cortile della Pigna inside Vatican City.

The façade is gabled, in a simple Baroque style. The cornice, bearing a Latin inscription recalling the past presence inside the church of the Archconfraternity of Mercy to prisoners, is ideally supported by four pilasters with Ionic capitals that divide the façade into three vertical sectors: each of the two side ones hosts, at the top, a rectangular window with no cornice or sill; in the central sector, the portal, which has an architrave with a bas-relief of an angel and a circular gable. The façade is crowned by a simple tympanum surmounted by an iron cross.

Inside

*The interior of the church has a single nave and is the result of 18th century renovations. Along the nave, which is covered with a barrel vault with lunettes, there are, within large niches interspersed by polychrome marble pilasters, four side altars, two on each side. The first altar on the right is dedicated to Saint Eleutherius, Pope, the second on the right to Saint Genesius of Arles; the first on the left is dedicated to the Madonna and houses the painting *Madonna and Child with Angels*, from the 18th century, a copy of a 14th-century image of the *Madonna of St Luke*, the second on the right to *St Teresa of Avila*.*

*At the end of the nave is the sanctuary, bordered by a balustrade and made up of a square bay with a painted dome vault and a semicircular apse with a coffered decoration on the vault. In the apse is the high altar in polychrome marble that has the altarpiece of *St John the Baptist*, from the early 17th century, by *Baldassarre Croce*, between two pairs of *Corinthian columns*, and higher up, the *Pietà* by *Luigi Garzi*, added later.*





Sacred Heart Basilica and Hospice

Via Marsala, 38-42

FROM THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS (BM XIV, Chap 24)

All founders of religious orders, both of men and of women, always sought to set up their residence in Rome. A divine urge was driving them by varied paths to the very heart of unity, authority and teaching, so as to enable them, as it were, to draw from the spring of those limpid life-giving waters which they themselves would spread around the world through many diverse channels. Years before the Church approved his rule, Don Bosco also cherished the prospect of opening a house in the papal city, but up to 1880 all his attempts were in vain until, most astonishingly, his nurtured dream seemed suddenly to break forth into reality. Undeniably it cost him seven years of almost constant spiritual and physical suffering, but in the long run it won him blessings from God and admiration from men. This chapter will recount the circumstances which led to and accompanied the beginnings of the church and hospice of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Castro Pretorio neighborhood.

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PASTORAL INTENTIONS REGARDING THE CASTRO PRETORIO

The urban plan designed by Bishop Francis de Merode, minister of Pius IX, aimed at developing the city's outlying hills, particularly the Castro Pretorio district. That his plan was well thought out with foresight is borne out by the fact that, after September 20, 1870, Rome's expansion not only did not stop

but it accelerated, so that a whole new city seemed to grow up in the area.

However at that time the expansion provided for everything but the spiritual needs of the ever growing population that poured into the district. The hard-pressed Pope Pius IX, whose source of revenues was drained with the loss of the Papal States, was the only one who kept coping with the spiritual needs of his city.

On December 8, 1870 he had proclaimed St. Joseph patron of the universal Church and shortly afterward had purchased at his own expense a piece of land on the Esquiline Hill, intending to erect there a church dedicated to the beloved patriarch. But he soon changed his mind when in 1871 the Italian bishops vied with one another in solemnly consecrating their respective dioceses to the adorable Heart of Jesus. In Rome this generated the idea that in the city of Christ's Vicar a grand shrine be dedicated to His Divine Heart, from which, as from an eternal hearth, a new fire of piety might spread from Rome to the world. Father [Anthony] Maresca, a Barnabite, editor of the *Messaggero del Sacro Cuore* [Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus], publicized the project. And so the saintly Pius IX decided that the land should be used not for a church to St. Joseph but for a temple to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, rejoicing in the thought that from that highest point of the Eternal City the adorable heart of the Redeemer would bless the whole world as from a lofty throne.

Unfortunately, the project kept dragging on endlessly, so that while the new district spread out in every direction, the neighboring parishes of St. Mary of the Angels, St. Bernard, St. Mary Major and St. Lawrence Outside the Walls proved inadequate for the pastoral care of so many people. That saintly Franciscan, Father Ludovico da Casoria [Naples], helped by young members of Catholic Action—outstanding among them Attorney Pericoli—did his best to provide spiritual assistance in a small chapel not far from the site of the planned church. Meantime death claimed the great Pius IX, and nothing had yet been done to realize his project.



Map

LEO XIII'S COMMITMENT TO THE SACRED HEART

Leo XIII's ascent to the papal throne signaled the actual beginning of the enterprise. As bishop of Perugia he had been one of the first to consecrate his diocese to the Sacred Heart, and so he immediately endorsed Pius IX's

plans and energetically moved to implement them. As early as August 1, 1878, through his vicar, Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, he sent a letter to all the bishops of the Catholic world (except those of France, who were already committed to building the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on Montmartre), asking them to contribute to this grandiose undertaking through fund-raising drives in their dioceses. The Plana Federation of Catholic Associations in Rome was charged with the task of collecting the funds, and a committee of Roman patricians under the chairmanship of Marquis Julius Merighi was to supervise the construction of the shrine.

The project moved rapidly once it got started. Work was begun to level a hilly area which rose several yards above the street and blocked construction. Then excavating for foundations was started. But here the workmen ran into a big obstacle not uncommon in Rome's subsoil. They struck tall bricked passageways and corridors, once part of ancient structures that had been built for mining a sort of clay, then commonly used in Rome to replace sand in mixing mortar. They were forced to go down some fifty feet to find solid ground on which to rest the foundations. The cardinal blessed the first stone which was lowered in place on August 17, 1879, feast of St. Joachim and name day of the reigning Pontiff.

THE CHURCH'S DESIGN

The plans of the church, in Bramante's style, had been drawn up by Count Francis Vespignani, Vatican architect, but word from Belgium³ intervened to cause a curious incident. The cardinal vicar's circular of 1878 to the bishops had caught the attention of Baroness De Monier, who offered a hundred thousand francs for the church, but on condition that the design of a Belgian architect, Baron De Bethune, be followed. Furthermore, the good lady clearly stated that she would not contribute a single cent to build any church in Renaissance style: she wanted either a Gothic or a Romanesque church in Rome. Cardinal [Victor] Dechamps, archbishop of Malines, agreed to contact the cardinal vicar.

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This condition, of course, created serious problems, especially since the foundations, already under construction, followed Count Vespignani's design. Nevertheless, the cardinal vicar asked Cardinal Dechamps to send him the design he favored, informing him, however, that neither Gothic nor Romanesque was acceptable in Rome. To this the archbishop of Malines replied, on sending the drawing, "Rome, the heart of Catholicism, should possess monuments of every





important epoch in her history, and it is certainly regrettable that alongside her Constantinian and classical Renaissance basilicas there be nothing to remind us of the style of the cathedrals of Cologne, Amiens, York, Rheims, and Westminster, and so many other marvelous churches of the Catholic world, not to speak of the cathedral of Milan. I realize that this exclusiveness is a result of historical events, but this is an opportunity to dispel it."

At any rate, the plans submitted by De Bethune were given careful consideration.

Certainly—the cardinal vicar replied—if we had to put up a church in pure Gothic style, the design you submitted would be excellent, but Roman taste in churches runs to the classic structure. Furthermore, assuming that the design's dimensions and style were to be carried out, the sum of one hundred thousand lire, though handsome in itself, would not be adequate, according to our calculations.

In turn, Count Vespignani, distinguished exponent of Roman classical architecture, added his own comment to the report sent to the cardinal vicar: "In Rome, seat of the fine arts, the pure Gothic construction which traces its origin to

barbaric styles never won approval and is in fact being adopted now only in erecting Protestant churches."

Father Maresca begged to differ, and so he advised the baroness to get Cardinal Dechamps to bring the matter up to the Pope, but the cardinal declined, feeling that he had nothing to add to what he had already written to Rome. Hence, because of these specious reasons, the generous offer was withdrawn.

FUNDS EXHAUSTED – WORK INTERRUPTED

We are convinced that Don Bosco, to use a popular maxim, with his ingeniousness would have found a way to have his cake and eat it, but at this time he had as yet nothing to do with this project.

Certainly very few people were as gifted as Don Bosco in raising funds to finance so many and such grand beneficial projects. Take this Roman venture, for example. It foundered and ground to a standstill after the initial thrust, even though it had been launched by the highest authority and was under the sponsorship of powerful, aristocratic families. Lack of funds forced the suspension of all work no sooner than construction had reached ground level. The Pope, already overburdened with the monumental task of building the apse of the Church of St. John Lateran and the grand hospital of St. Martha in the Vatican, felt keenly disappointed and could not endure that kind of failure. Soon, however, Divine Providence came to his rescue. The information we pass on here was supplied a few years later by Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda.

THE IDEA OF ENTRUSTING THE ENTERPRISE TO DON BOSCO

One day, speaking in consultation with the cardinals, Leo XIII voiced his deep grief over the enforced suspension of this work. It hindered God's glory, he said, it hurt the Holy See's honor, and it imperiled the spiritual welfare of a huge multitude.

"Holy Father, I have a suggestion that will guarantee the success of this project," Cardinal Alimonda said.

"What is it?" asked the Pope with some surprise.

"Entrust it to Don Bosco."

"Would Don Bosco accept?"

"Your Holiness, I know Don Bosco and his total, boundless devotion to the Pope. Let Your Holiness suggest it, and I am convinced he will accept."

Since this conversation took place in March 1880, at the very time that Don Bosco was in Rome, Leo XIII asked his cardinal vicar to take the matter up with him. The cardinal approached Don Bosco about it on the evening of March 24, without, however, mentioning that it was the Pope's wish. On March 28 he brought it up again with greater insistence, still speaking as though it were his own idea. Don Bosco, visualizing the many grave problems he would have to face, did not commit himself either way, as we know from the testimony given in the canonization process.

First, as regards finances, he had little hope for from the Romans. He knew this from past experience, and the cardinal vicar had written to say as much; the Romans were not generous. [The facts confirmed this. At the lunch given on the day of the consecration (14 May 1887), the parish priest and procurator Fr Dalmazzo, rising to toast and express his gratitude to the benefactors, put the Romans first. Don Bosco, taking a knife in his hand and tapping his glass a few times, stopped him mid-speech and amid the general silence calmly addressed the following words to him: "This is not true. Go ahead." At that moment Don Bosco had to think about the unprecedented hardships of his travels to have the necessary sums necessary for the undertaking. One of the diners who was astonished by the Blessed's frankness and who often repeated the account of the episode, was Bishop Jara, former bishop of Ancud in Chile] Nor could he expect much from the French people, who were concentrating all their efforts on their own great national shrine of the Sacred Heart and their private schools. He also had reason to believe that, generous as they had always been in helping to support his boys, they would take no interest in a new church for Rome. Not even Italy, he feared, could be relied upon because of the country's ruinous economy, its overburdening taxation, and the crying need of maintaining the promised essential welfare services. He realized too the high cost of building in Rome, far higher than in any other Italian city. And did he not already have a good number of building projects weighing him down, such as the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin and that of Mary, Help of Christians in Vallecrosia, and other projects at Marseille, Nice, and La Spezia? Was it wise to put more irons into the fire?

Another reason too for not getting into this venture was the cool response he detected to the planned church at Castro Pretorio. The whole world had been

told that the shrine was being planned as a monument in honor of Pius IX, and every bishop in the Catholic world had been asked to collect donations for it, but hardly had one hundred thousand lire been raised when the whole campaign died out, and all resources seemed to dry up.

There was also another problem. In accepting the commitment, Don Bosco would have bound himself to ratify the contracts drawn up by the previous administration, which still had a voice in the enterprise; furthermore, those contracts ran into substantial sums, as was customary for any work being contracted with the Holy See.

DON BOSCO ACCEPTS THE TASK

However, beyond these worldly considerations, Don Bosco never lost sight of two loftier concerns: the honor of the Church and of the Holy See. What a disgrace that Catholic Rome should cut so sorry a figure before Protestants, who with impressive funds had already erected several churches while the Catholics had not succeeded in building even one! It was a shame that it could actually be said that the Pope's call had elicited such a feeble echo throughout the world. Hence, while weighing the pros and cons for quite some time, Don Bosco found it hard to excuse himself from this heavy burden.

In the end it was the Pope's own word which dispelled all Don Bosco's doubts. In his long-awaited audience with Leo XIII on April 5, the Pope manifested his wish to him, assuring him that by accepting he would be doing something holy and most pleasing to the Vicar of Christ who was exceedingly disappointed at finding himself unable to continue the project. "For me the wish of the Pope is a command," Don Bosco replied. "I accept the trust that Your Holiness has graciously given me."

"But I shall not be able to give you any money," the Pope said.

"I do not ask Your Holiness for money. All I ask is your blessing and all those spiritual favors you may see fit to grant to me and to those who will contribute to build this temple to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the capital of the Catholic world. Indeed, if Your Holiness will allow me, I shall also build next to the church a festive oratory, and a large hospice where very many poor boys, abounding in that district, can be sheltered and be taught some skill or trade."

"Willingly I bless you and all those who shall work with you in so holy an under-



taking," the Pope answered, "and I call down God's blessing upon it now. Work out the details with the cardinal vicar."

Once word got about in Rome that the Holy Father had commissioned Don Bosco to build a boarding school at Castro Pretorio in addition to a shrine to the Sacred Heart, several new and unseasoned members of the city council called on the minister of justice, [Thomas] Villa, to ask how they were to look upon the new institute which probably would vastly expand.

Ten years had not yet elapsed since Italian troops had stormed through Porta Pia, and so the anticlericals sounded the alarm at every breeze that wafted from the Vatican. The minister, though true to his kind, knew Don Bosco fairly well and, as deputy, represented the constituency of Castelnuovo. Having silently heard them out, he stated forthrightly, "Don Bosco is doing a lot of good to many boys by rescuing them from evil ways and giving them an education. He does not meddle in politics. Leave him alone."

When Don Bosco told Marquis Scati about this at the end of 1880, the latter could not help but voice his apprehension that the Freemasons in both the city and state governments might wage war against him. "That's why we must move cautiously—guileless as doves, but cunning as serpents. I have always scrupulously abided by the law, giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, nothing more and nothing less. God help me if I acted imprudently. That would throw too many boys back into the streets!"

THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE VICARIATE AND DON BOSCO

After the papal audience, Don Bosco drafted a memorandum and personally handed it to the cardinal vicar on the evening of April 18, two days before leaving Rome. [Chronicle of Fr. Berto: "Sunday, April 18. This evening Don Bosco went to the cardinal vicar and gave him a memorandum to be handed to the Holy Father concerning the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome."] The brief document summarized the chief points which were later drafted into the definitive contract.

Rome, April 10, 1880

To His Eminence Cardinal Raphael Monaco La Valletta, Vicar of His Holiness in Rome.

I. Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Monument to His Holiness Pius IX of Beloved Memory With the sole aim of promoting God's greater glory and the honor of our holy religion, joined by all my religious, I gladly cooperate with Your Eminence in the construction already in progress of the church to be dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a tribute to the glorious and ever beloved memory of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX.

As for the conditions of a contract, it is my wish that Your Eminence represent both parties: the ecclesiastical authorities and the Salesian Congregation, upon which Your Eminence has always looked with fatherly concern. However, since you have asked me to express my own thoughts on this matter, I do so willingly, leaving it entirely to your own experience and prudence to modify any and all articles, as Your Eminence deems best.

II. The Congregation of St. Francis de Sales

1. In the person of its rector, the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales commits itself to cooperate with every means available to further the work in progress, raise funds and procure construction materials needed to complete this holy enterprise hopefully within two and a half or, at the latest, three years.

2. Once the construction is completed, the Salesian Congregation will take the responsibility of providing all church furnishings, sacred vessels and vestments, and assume payment of fees, maintenance, repairs and so, on.

3. We shall provide personnel for pastoral care—i.e., priests to offer Mass for the people, hear confessions, preach, and teach the children catechism.

4. Either while the church is being constructed or after, the hospice will have a festive oratory for neighborhood youngsters to teach them their catechism, conduct evening classes and, if necessary, also run a day school, as is the tradition of the Congregation's houses founded for this purpose.

5. After the church's construction, the Salesian staff will be subject to the authority of the ordinary in the same way as all churches belonging to religious congregations. If the ordinary decides to establish the Church of the Sacred Heart as a parish, the rector shall choose the pastor from the Salesians, and the rector major of the Congregation will present the candidates to His Eminence, the cardinal vicar of Rome, who will select the priest he judges best qualified for that position to further God's glory and the good of souls.

III. The Church Authority

1. His Eminence the cardinal vicar shall continue his material and moral sup-

port to this undertaking which he himself began and promoted with such dedication; he shall hand over the grounds and building in their present state to the disposal of the Reverend John Bosco. All moneys collected for this purpose by His Eminence or others shall be wholly and exclusively used for the construction of this memorial church.

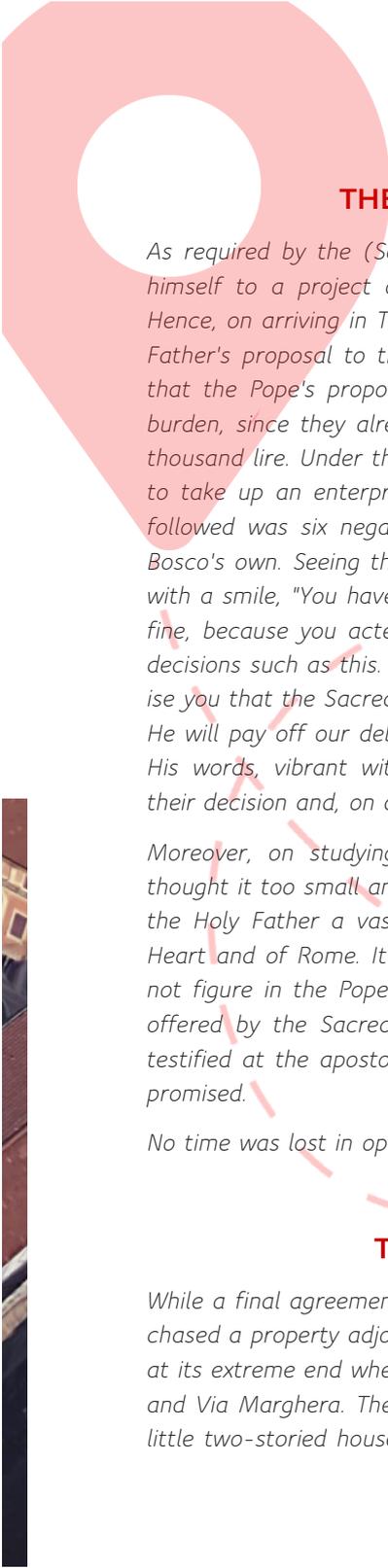
2. He shall allow fund-raising to continue in those places and with appeals to those people whom it shall be deemed wise to approach.

3. The cardinal vicar shall have no responsibility for either the material construction or for purchasing further property needed for the aforesaid construction.

4. I respectfully request the cardinal vicar to submit these articles to the Holy Father, asking him to modify them as he wishes. They shall not be binding until they bear the approval and blessing of His Holiness.

Fr John Bosco





THE APPROVAL OF THE SUPERIOR COUNCIL

As required by the (Salesian) constitutions Don Bosco could not fully commit himself to a project of such magnitude without first consulting his chapter. Hence, on arriving in Turin, he summoned his councilors and presented the Holy Father's proposal to them. The ensuing discussion was a long one. All agreed that the Pope's proposal was a distinguished honor, but also a most weighty burden, since they already were laden with debts amounting to three hundred thousand lire. Under the circumstances it seemed neither wise nor conscionable to take up an enterprise that would swallow up millions more. The vote that followed was six negative and only one positive—the last most certainly Don Bosco's own. Seeing that the Holy Father's proposal had been rejected, he said with a smile, "You have all given me a resounding no for an answer, and that is fine, because you acted with all the prudence needed to make serious, major decisions such as this. However, were you to give me a yes answer, I can promise you that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will supply the funds to build the Church, He will pay off our debts, and He will even give us a handsome bonus as well." His words, vibrant with such trust in Divine Providence, instantly overturned their decision and, on a second ballot, they all voted affirmatively.

Moreover, on studying the blueprints of the church, the chapter members thought it too small and immediately, at that same session, agreed to submit to the Holy Father a vaster project which would be more worthy of the Sacred Heart and of Rome. It was done. The "bonus" was the hospice itself, which did not figure in the Pope's intentions, but was an extra, almost a kind of reward offered by the Sacred Heart. The Congregation's debts, as Cardinal Cagliero testified at the apostolic process, were paid with no strain, as Don Bosco had promised.

No time was lost in opening negotiations.

THE FIRST SALESIAN RESIDENCE IN ROME

While a final agreement was still being drafted in Turin, Don Bosco quickly purchased a property adjoining the original piece of land; it had a small house on it at its extreme end where the hospice today lies along the corner of Via Marsala and Via Marghera. The sale was for forty-nine thousand, five hundred lire. This little two-storied house served as the first Salesian residence during the period

of construction. Don Bosco's intent in enlarging the building site was to allow room for extending the length of the church and putting up the hospice. He had no idea that he had just blasted the Protestant plans to erect a church of their own there. However, the cardinal vicar knew it and stated that he was delighted with the purchase." But when it came to the question of enlarging the church, His Eminence was not so delighted. Maybe he still felt responsible for the enterprise and feared a second failure. It certainly took a great deal to convince him, but at long last the determined intervention of the architect overcame his opposition: With the church's width remaining as stated in the plans, its length was increased from thirty-five to forty-six meters for two new naves, and another eighteen meters for the apse. In fact, Don Bosco recommended to Fr Dalmazzo: I would only beg him (the cardinal) to side with us in ensuring that the church is large enough. As the present plans stand, its public space is barely four hundred meters long whereas it should be twice that length. I foresee that before the church is even completed the new parish will have no less than six thousand souls. To accommodate one-third of this population, the church should be nine hundred meters long.

COLLECTING THE FUNDS THAT WERE NEEDED

To inspire wealthy, generous and pious people to contribute, Don Bosco drew them closer to the Church and to the papacy by obtaining for them from the Holy See suitable honorific titles and spiritual favors. As they felt they were being held especially closer and dearer to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, they strove to become worthy of this honor by doing their best to cooperate in those projects which they thought would please the Holy Father.

The letter sent to Fr Dalmazzo is an example: it also talks about the compromise for the purchase of the new land and touches on the legal transfer of ownership over the old land and the construction already begun.

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

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I am enclosing two petitions for you to submit to Cardinal Giannelli, or perhaps you might do better to give them to Cardinal [Theodolph] Mertel. They are for two distinguished benefactors of ours, both fervent Catholics.

Madame Prat has already contributed sixty-five thousand lire for Peter's Pence, and she will be sending further sums soon.

I realize that there may be fees to be paid, but I will pay them myself, so that I

can say this is a gift. It will bear much fruit.

Mr. Caranti has been notified by Commendatore Fontana that we were also purchasing the little house at a reasonable price, and he said yes. It would be good to talk to him. The agreement gives us time to raise the money, and that is fine. I'll take care of everything, especially the loan. I have high hopes.

Notify me immediately as soon as the notary's deed of transfer [of the land for the Sacred Heart Church] has been made out to us.

The final draft we read in our chapter meeting has been totally approved.

Be at ease. If we go bankrupt we can always sneak off to Patagonia. So go on tranquilly.

Should Mr. Sigismondi have need of the sum he advanced, draw it from the money we have already deposited, or write and I shall provide. God bless us all.

Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately, Fr. John
Bosco

OWNERSHIP AND USUFRUCT

The "clause" about which Don Bosco says in his next letter to Fr Dalmazzo, that he has reflected on at length refers to Article 3 of the agreement, which was then modified to meet his suggestion.

Turin, 14-7-1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

I have reflected at great length on the clause concerning the possibility that our Congregation may cease to exist. In the eyes of the law we are neither a moral nor a legal body. At any rate, in the event of default, a parish church belonging to the ecclesiastical authority will always be respected more than property which we can possess only as individuals.

I believe that we can still make an arrangement if it is not too late: church and rectory belong to the ordinary of Rome in perpetuity, while their use shall likewise belong to the Society of St. Francis de Sales in perpetuity. Let's leave the rest in the hands of Divine Providence. Unless the matter has already been settled and sealed, you might mention the above idea to the cardinal vicar. Other-

wise, let everything stand as written.

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

While discussing this with Father Dalmazzo, the good cardinal vicar let slip a remark: "Everyone says that Don Bosco is the Salesian Congregation. As long as he lives, fine, but once he dies, everything will vanish like a mist before the sun." However, he willingly listened to all Father Dalmazzo had to say in defense of the stability of the Congregation.

Father Dalmazzo closed his argument by remarking that Don Bosco would not have set such stress on the question of ownership if he and the Congregation would always be fortunate enough to have as cardinal vicar someone like His Eminence, who was truly a father to the Salesians. He would then leave everything in his hands. However, since times change, prudence counseled him not to yield on this point. The cardinal was pleased, and he said that he would speak of the matter as Don Bosco understood it to the Holy Father.

On July 14 Father Dahnazzo wrote to Don Bosco: "The cardinal vicar spoke at length about this question to the Holy Father, who replied, 'Get in touch with Father Dalmazzo and have him write to Don Bosco to ask him in my name not to raise any obstacles to this project because the salvation of souls is at stake.' " Don Bosco reiterated his instructions to his procurator by return mail, as follows: "Ownership of the church must remain forever in the hands of the ecclesiastical authority; its use forever belongs to our Congregation..."

THE FIRST SALESIAN PARISH PRIEST

For a long time questions and answers kept being tossed back and forth between the vicariate of Rome and the superior chapter as they tried to settle on the language of the contract. It was still being discussed when Don Bosco officially presented his candidate for the pastor of the parish, which had already been given official state recognition at the end of March; it had been canonically established on February 2 of the previous year.

Turin, July 31, 1880

Your Eminence,

From various sources I understand that it is your intention to entrust the ad-

ministration of the new parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the Salesians. In this case I would suggest that your choice fall on our general procurator, Father Francis Dalmazzo, doctor of letters. As soon as the appointment becomes effective, I shall assign an adequate number of priests to assist him, with the assurance that they have the qualifications proper to those who dedicate their lives to the sacred care of souls.

Our humble Congregation has already many reasons to be deeply thankful to Your Eminence, and on behalf of all of us I assure you that we shall endeavor to repay the benefits you lavishly bestow on us daily. I am greatly honored to pay you my respects.

Your most devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The decree of appointment was not issued until July 12, 1881, and Father Dalmazzo, the appointee, was not informed until the following August 3.

Despite the good will of both contracting parties, disagreements on certain points kept emerging until the fall, while Don Bosco kept striving to eliminate any and all future causes of friction. In the first half of October, discussions were still being held concerning parish salaries. The superiors in Turin were undecided about asking for a stipend and, if so, to whom they should apply: to the municipal authorities, the state government, or the Holy See. At last on October 18 Don Bosco wrote to the procurator, "As for a parish stipend, we will abide by whatever the Holy Father decides or whatever His Eminence the cardinal vicar advises."

In the end the tenth article of the agreement settled the matter.

WORK RESTARTS

In the meantime, the construction crews were very slowly resuming, and Father [Anthony]

Sala [the economer general] began shopping for the granite columns specified by the architect. In the above letter Don Bosco wrote, "Father Sala is getting estimates on the columns for the Sacred Heart Church. I shall keep in touch with you, and if you have any question, let me know immediately. . . . Faith, prayer, and let's go forward.

In November payment fell due to the Tiberina Bank for a considerable portion

of the loan obtained to purchase the land, house and construction materials, and no one knew where the money was to come from. A public appeal could not yet be made through the press because final formalities were still incomplete. Don Bosco's concern is quite apparent in this letter.

Turin, November 24, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

I have received a letter stating that we have an outstanding debt of thirty-nine thousand five hundred lire with Caranti. I had not adverted to this proviso. In this financial crisis everyone is yelling and drawing their purse strings tighter! Is there anyone we can rely on in Rome? Look about far and near and get back to me.

It is absolutely essential that we start a campaign for raising funds for the Sacred Heart Church, but until negotiations are closed, we cannot go public. Still, we haven't a penny to our name. So get things over with!..

SIGNING THE AGREEMENT

However the situation kept dragging because Don Bosco had his doubts about two articles. Article 8 imposed a deadline for terminating construction, and Article 13 concerned the eventuality that, if ever no qualified Salesian would be available, the ecclesiastical authority might appoint a pastor and administrator even for life. "The article obliging us [to complete the construction of the church] within six years from now [and the construction of the rectory within nine years] and the article on a lifelong appointment of an administrator must be amended," Don Bosco wrote on December 9. To emphasize this, he enclosed a note written by Father Rua on behalf of the superior chapter and signed by himself. Its enlightened prudence and holy simplicity reflect the spirit of our beloved founder very clearly.

Your Eminence,

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The superior chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, through its rector major, asks that you approve two minor amendments in the articles of agreement concerning the Church of the Sacred Heart. If we were assured that we would always be dealing with Your Eminence, we would accept these and all other conditions. But we are trying to forestall disagreements which may all too easily arise when you and I have passed on and the administration falls into the



hands of others.

Article 8. We have made the following addition: "Provided circumstances do not arise beyond our control, all needed work on the parish house must be completed in the ninth year."

Article 13. We have eliminated the phrase "even for life" after the words "vicar or administrator" to give the ecclesiastical authority complete freedom of action and to make it possible for the Salesian Congregation to resume normal administration of the parish and forestall eventual problems certain to arise if the boys of the hospice and those of the festive oratory or day school ever had to use the parish church facilities and the church were being administered by a non-Salesian priest.

For myself, however, I believe I would wrong Divine Providence were I to so much as harbor any doubt that either of the possibilities cited in Articles 8 and 13 might come to pass, or that the unlimited confidence which has led us into this vast, costly undertaking might not win for us the continued benevolence of Your Eminence.

I am not sure if I have made myself clear, but your enlightened wisdom will

supply for my lack of clarity or our procurator general will explain to you. I have given him full powers in this and in all affairs of the Congregation.

In deepest gratitude, I am honored to remain,

Yours devotedly,

Fr. John

Bosco

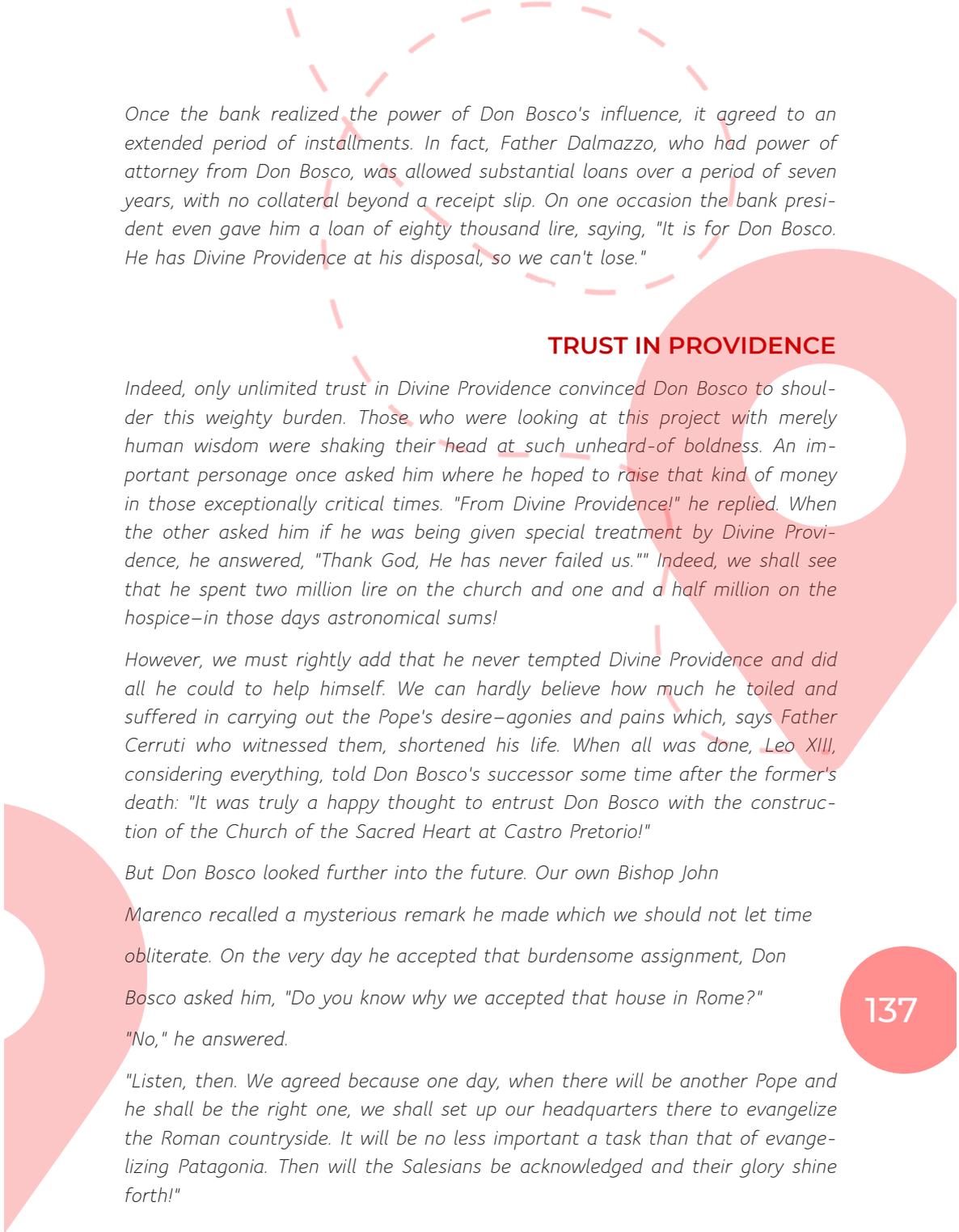
The cardinal vicar was agreeable to the two amendments Don Bosco requested, i.e., the added reservation in the event of circumstances beyond control and the substitution of "temporary" in place of "even for life." This ended the dispute on the terms of the agreement, which was signed by Don Bosco on December 11 and by the cardinal vicar, with the Pope's approval, on December 18, 1880. In the intervening week, when Father Dalmazzo called on the Pope to offer him the best wishes and respects of Don Bosco and the Salesians, the Holy Father asked him if the signing had taken place.

When he was told that the cardinal vicar would be signing very shortly, he said, "Act quickly. Do all the good you can!"

DEBTS AND PAYMENTS

Meanwhile the overdue note amounting to forty-two thousand lire had to be paid to the Tiberina Bank before the end of December. "We have no hope of finding any money here," wrote Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco on December 1. "We'd have a good chance if you were here!" And he kept insisting on the need for some money."

Don Bosco's thinking on this point is clear in the following advice he gave his despairing procurator in a letter dated December 9: "To settle our debt with the Tiberina Bank, let them understand that since we have not been able to sell the property we have put on the market, we do not have the cash available. So, if they can wait, we will now pay the interest as we are doing for the other loan. Otherwise ask them to grant us an extension and allow us to pay it off in installments. We will endeavor to pay off the whole sum in a short period of time. On your part, do your utmost to get more donations. If you can't succeed, rob some bank or, better still, help yourself to some banker's coffers! You'll get more mail on other matters from the others."



Once the bank realized the power of Don Bosco's influence, it agreed to an extended period of installments. In fact, Father Dalmazzo, who had power of attorney from Don Bosco, was allowed substantial loans over a period of seven years, with no collateral beyond a receipt slip. On one occasion the bank president even gave him a loan of eighty thousand lire, saying, "It is for Don Bosco. He has Divine Providence at his disposal, so we can't lose."

TRUST IN PROVIDENCE

Indeed, only unlimited trust in Divine Providence convinced Don Bosco to shoulder this weighty burden. Those who were looking at this project with merely human wisdom were shaking their head at such unheard-of boldness. An important personage once asked him where he hoped to raise that kind of money in those exceptionally critical times. "From Divine Providence!" he replied. When the other asked him if he was being given special treatment by Divine Providence, he answered, "Thank God, He has never failed us." Indeed, we shall see that he spent two million lire on the church and one and a half million on the hospice—in those days astronomical sums!

However, we must rightly add that he never tempted Divine Providence and did all he could to help himself. We can hardly believe how much he toiled and suffered in carrying out the Pope's desire—agonies and pains which, says Father Cerruti who witnessed them, shortened his life. When all was done, Leo XIII, considering everything, told Don Bosco's successor some time after the former's death: "It was truly a happy thought to entrust Don Bosco with the construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart at Castro Pretorio!"

But Don Bosco looked further into the future. Our own Bishop John Marengo recalled a mysterious remark he made which we should not let time obliterate. On the very day he accepted that burdensome assignment, Don Bosco asked him, "Do you know why we accepted that house in Rome?" "No," he answered.

"Listen, then. We agreed because one day, when there will be another Pope and he shall be the right one, we shall set up our headquarters there to evangelize the Roman countryside. It will be no less important a task than that of evangelizing Patagonia. Then will the Salesians be acknowledged and their glory shine forth!"

A prophecy? True, the Pope of today is not the Pope of those days, but he is just as he should be. As for the rest, time alone will give the answer. However, prophecy or not, we see at least the flash of the zeal which constantly burned in the heart of our saintly father who, while working on some project, was also contemplating future ones.

HIS TIME IN ROME IN 1884

From March 24, 1880, when Cardinal Valletta asked Don Bosco to take on the task of building the church, Don Bosco committed much of his time and energy to ensure that the work proceeded his time and energy so that the work would proceed quickly, against the many unforeseen events and the large expenses to be to be faced. For this reason, Don Bosco returned to Rome in 1884, where he sought donors and where he launched a lottery, the proceeds of which would be used to reduce the debts already accumulated.

He arrived in the city on 14 April, and this time he could finally live in a house of his own! The young people of the oratory received him festively and, seeing them, his thoughts returned to their companions from Valdocco, to whom he had Fr Lemoyne write a letter.

He had hoped to be able to rest a little in Rome (he had just returned from a tiring trip to France), but the preparations for the lottery and the difficulties in obtaining the Salesian Congregation's long sought-after privileges, together with the hundreds of audiences he was forced to grant to people who wanted to be received by him, meant that instead of resting, Don Bosco became even more tired, even though he had limited his visits to illustrious personalities to a maximum, as he had done on previous trips.

On 8 May Don Bosco gave the Conference to the Cooperators (at Tor de' Specchi). The weather was very bad, but a good number of people braved the weather to listen to Don Bosco.

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RECEIVED BY POPE LEO XIII

9 May was the day set for the audience granted to him by the Pope. Leo XIII, after inquiring about his health, asked about the progress of the work at the Castro Pretorio and Don Bosco took the opportunity to propose an idea of his own to the Holy Father.

Afterwards the Pope spoke about the Church of the Sacred Heart and asked:

"What are they working on now?"

Don Bosco explained how far the building had progressed and the work that was then being done. He spoke about the obstacles encountered, the good that was already being accomplished in the completed sanctuary, which served as a parish church for the time being, and how the congregation of one thousand persons was gathering in the church every evening during the month of May. The conversation went on to include the festive Oratory, the school frequented by two hundred boys, the Sunday catechism classes that were attended by about three hundred girls, the hospice that was being built, and the premises that had either been built or bought to lodge nearly fifty boys.

The Pope listened with keen interest to his report, and then Don Bosco asked, "I wish to ask the Holy Father permission to express an idea of mine."

"I would like to ask Your Holiness to allow me to express an idea of mine."

"Speak up," the Holy Father said.

"This church is Catholic and the whole world is contributing to its construction," Don Bosco said. "The hospice is for the boys of every nation on earth. I would like Your Holiness to participate in this undertaking, too."

"No, I must not refuse," said the Pope. "And what would you propose?"

"I must not refuse," the Pope said. "What would you propose?"

"That Your Holiness assume responsibility for the cost of the facade of the Sacred Heart Church. How wonderful it would be if one could read this epigraph carved along its pediment:: Catholicorum pietas construxit, frontem autem huius ecclesiae Leo XIII Pont. Max. proprio aedificavit!"

"So you have already thought of the inscription!"

"This or some other more suitable one, provided it expresses the same sentiment."

The Pope began to laugh. "And why not? I agree to the façade. I will provide for it."

"Nevertheless, Holy Father, I do not want you to be alone in building the façade," Don Bosco explained. "I want to help you in every way I can. Did not Countess Fontenay bring you ten thousand lire the other day?"

"Yes, she did."

"Well, it was Don Bosco who advised her to make that offering. Soon Your Holiness will receive another sum of ten thousand lire, and I also know that someone else in Marseille is prepared to give a generous offering to Your Holiness, so that work on the church may continue."

"Good, good," the Pope agreed. "So that is settled then."

"I thank you for all your goodness, Holy Father. Allow me to say one more thing - I want the world to know of your generosity, so if you will allow me, I will advertise it in the Salesian Bulletin."

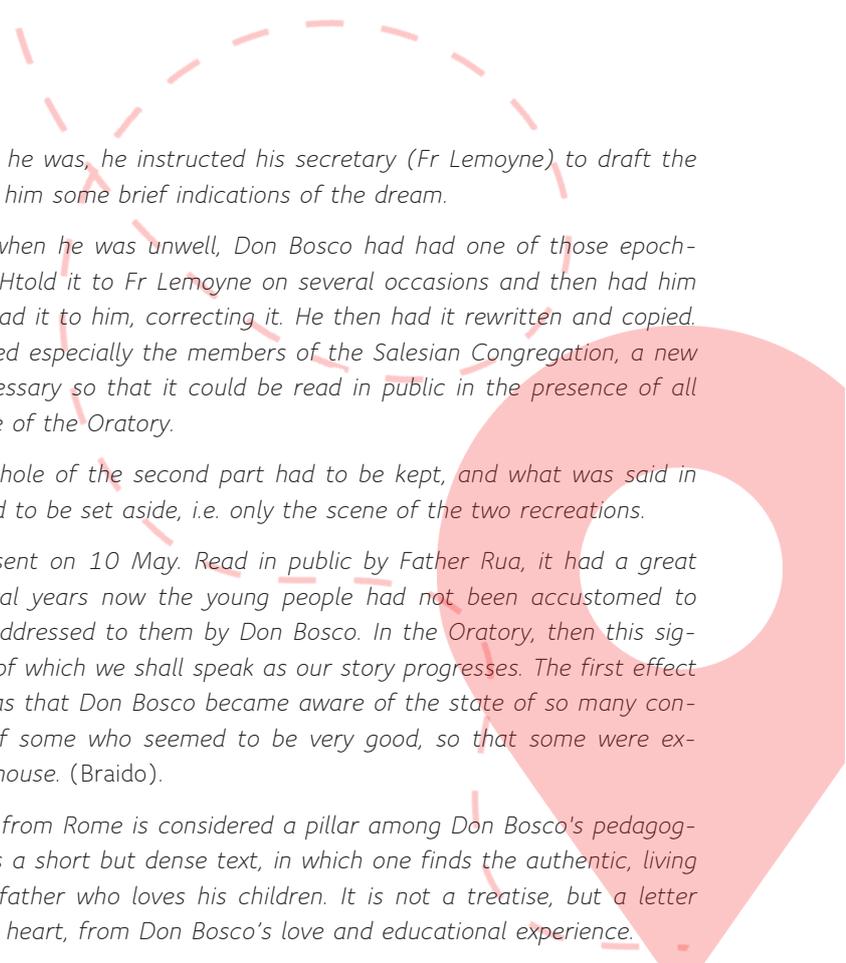
"You may give this matter whatever publicity you wish, according to your own discretion."

In his suggestion, Don Bosco had perceived another way to promote donations to Peter's Pence.

THE LETTER FROM ROME, 1884

Don Bosco's 19th stay in the Eternal City became important because of a letter, the famous "letter from Rome". This letter, written on 10 May and bearing Don Bosco's signature, is the account of a dream he had about the progress of the Valdocco Oratory.





Old and tired as he was, he instructed his secretary (Fr Lemoyne) to draft the text, after giving him some brief indications of the dream.

"On the nights when he was unwell, Don Bosco had had one of those epoch-making dreams. He told it to Fr Lemoyne on several occasions and then had him set it out and read it to him, correcting it. He then had it rewritten and copied. Since it concerned especially the members of the Salesian Congregation, a new version was necessary so that it could be read in public in the presence of all the young people of the Oratory.

Therefore, the whole of the second part had to be kept, and what was said in the first part had to be set aside, i.e. only the scene of the two recreations.

This letter was sent on 10 May. Read in public by Father Rua, it had a great effect; for several years now the young people had not been accustomed to hearing letters addressed to them by Don Bosco. In the Oratory, then this signalled a reform of which we shall speak as our story progresses. The first effect of this dream was that Don Bosco became aware of the state of so many consciences, even of some who seemed to be very good, so that some were expelled from the house. (Braido).

Today the letter from Rome is considered a pillar among Don Bosco's pedagogical writings. It is a short but dense text, in which one finds the authentic, living Don Bosco, the father who loves his children. It is not a treatise, but a letter flowing from the heart, from Don Bosco's love and educational experience.

It is a letter from a father who is far away but is nostalgic for his children.

Just as he was about to leave the eternal city, Don Bosco had a letter written to the Oratory to relate a dream of the greatest importance. He had this dream on one of the nights that he had been feeling sicker than usual. He told Father John Baptist Lemoyne about it in several installments, ordering him to write it down.

On May 6th, he had had someone write to Father Michael Rua, "Don Bosco is working on a letter he wishes to be sent to the boys, and in it he means to tell his dearly beloved children many wonderful things." This letter was mailed on May 10th, but Father Michael Rua did not think that it should be read out in its entirety in public, and so he requested that a copy be sent to him that was suitable for the pupils. Father John Baptist Lemoyne redrafted the letter with only the passages that did not deal with their superiors. When Father Michael

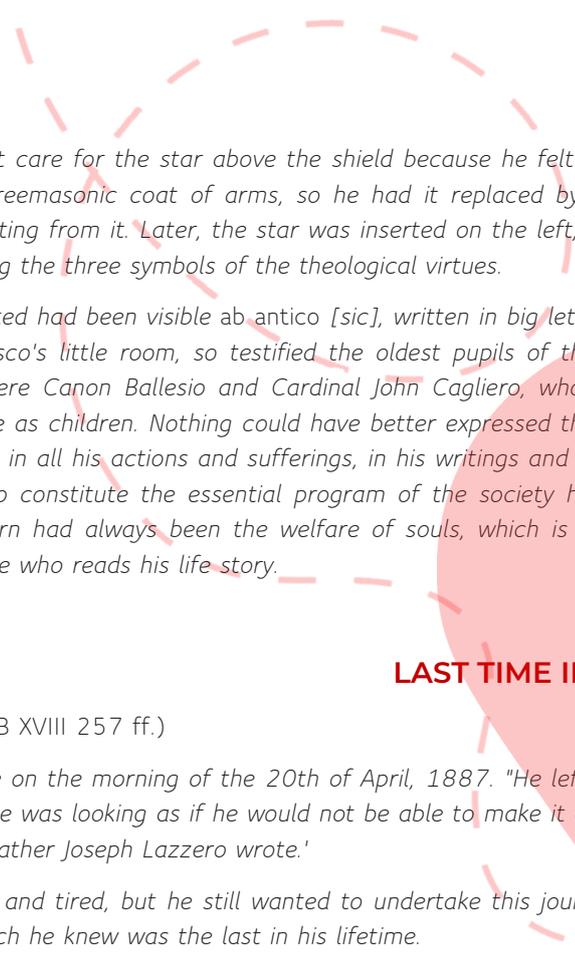
Rua read it to them one evening after prayers, the boys were enraptured, especially when the saint wrote that he had read into their consciences. After he returned home, there was a steady coming and going of boys in his room, all of them wanting to know if he had read their conscience, and if so, what he had seen. This had two principal effects: the beginning of a reform in the life of the Oratory and the dismissal of some boys who only seemed to be excellent in their conduct. (MB XVII, 80-81)

THE SALESIAN COAT OF ARMS

The Salesian 'coat of arms' to be placed on the Sacred Heart Church came into being that same year.

Up until this time (1884), the Congregation did not have its own official coat of arms as all other religious families. As a seal, the pious Salesian Society had used the figure of St. Francis of Sales surrounded by a Latin text. It was only on September 12, 1884 that Father Anthony Sala submitted a sketch of a Salesian coat of arms to the Superior Chapter, when given the opportunity of having it placed on the facade of the Church of the Sacred Heart between the coat of arms of Pius IX and Leo XIII. The design had been drawn by Professor Boidi and was comprised of the following: a shield with a big anchor in the middle; to the right, the bust of St. Francis of Sales and to the left, a flaming heart with a six-pointed star on top; below, a forest with high mountains in the back ground; on the bottom two branches (one of palm, the other of laurel) with the stems entwined and encircling the shield half way; on the lower portion, a waving streamer with the words "Sinite parvulos venire ad me" [Let the children come to me].

Some objected to this motto because others had already used it. Father Julius Barberis suggested that it be changed to "Work and Temperance" this idea being prompted by Don Bosco's dream in which the two words had been proposed precisely as the distinguishing coat of arms of the Congregation. Father Celestine Durando would have preferred "Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis." It was Don Bosco who solved the dilemma by saying, "A motto was already adopted in the early days of the Oratory at the time of the Convitto when I was visiting the prisons: 'Da mihi animas, caetera tolle'" [Give me souls, take away the rest]. The Chapter acclaimed Don Bosco and agreed to this historic motto.



The saint did not care for the star above the shield because he felt it was too similar to the Freemasonic coat of arms, so he had it replaced by the cross with rays emanating from it. Later, the star was inserted on the left, above the heart, thus linking the three symbols of the theological virtues.

The motto selected had been visible ab antico [sic], written in big letters on the door of Don Bosco's little room, so testified the oldest pupils of the Oratory, among whom were Canon Ballesio and Cardinal John Cagliero, who said they had seen it there as children. Nothing could have better expressed the supreme goal of the saint in all his actions and sufferings, in his writings and his talks; a goal that was to constitute the essential program of the society he founded. His major concern had always been the welfare of souls, which is sufficiently evident to anyone who reads his life story.

LAST TIME IN ROME

(passim, from MB XVIII 257 ff.)

He left for Rome on the morning of the 20th of April, 1887. "He left home for his journey but he was looking as if he would not be able to make it even as far as Moncalieri," Father Joseph Lazzero wrote.'

He was now old and tired, but he still wanted to undertake this journey to the Eternal City, which he knew was the last in his lifetime.

Don Bosco himself explained the reason why he had set out on the journey to some priests in Arezzo:

"What do you want?" he answered. "It is an order from the Pope and one cannot say 'no' to the Pope. In a few days the church of the Sacred Heart will be consecrated at Castro Pretorio. When the Pope came to know about it, he asked our superior in Rome, 'Is Don Bosco coming to Rome for the consecration?' When the superior answered that my health would never have allowed it, the Pope said, 'No, I want him to be here. Write and tell him that if he does not come, I will not sign his passport to Heaven.' So you realize that it is also in my own interest that I go to retrieve such a precious document which I shall certainly be needing before long." The archpriest of Capannole who described this incident for us affirms that these were Don Bosco's exact words. So this is something that we would never have found out from any other source, namely, that the arduous journey undertaken by Don Bosco had been an act of obedience to the Pope.

He left for Rome on the morning of the 30th, and arrived at the Termini rail-road station a little after three o'clock in the afternoon. As he was moving toward the exit, supported by others, but still finding it difficult, he shared gracious and at times amusing words with all the people who had gone to meet him. Two sisters already known to him showed up and said that if he would allow them, they would pay him a visit. Smiling, Don Bosco replied, "It costs somewhere between ten and twelve thousand lire to visit Don Bosco in Rome." But then he added, "Nevertheless, I will be pleased to grant you both an audience gratis."

He entered the Salesian house from via Magenta. The door was decorated with festoons, the pillars in the hall decorated with flowers, and there was a poster hanging on the outer wall of the apse: Rome is overjoyed and exultant to welcome within its walls the new Philip, Don John Bosco.

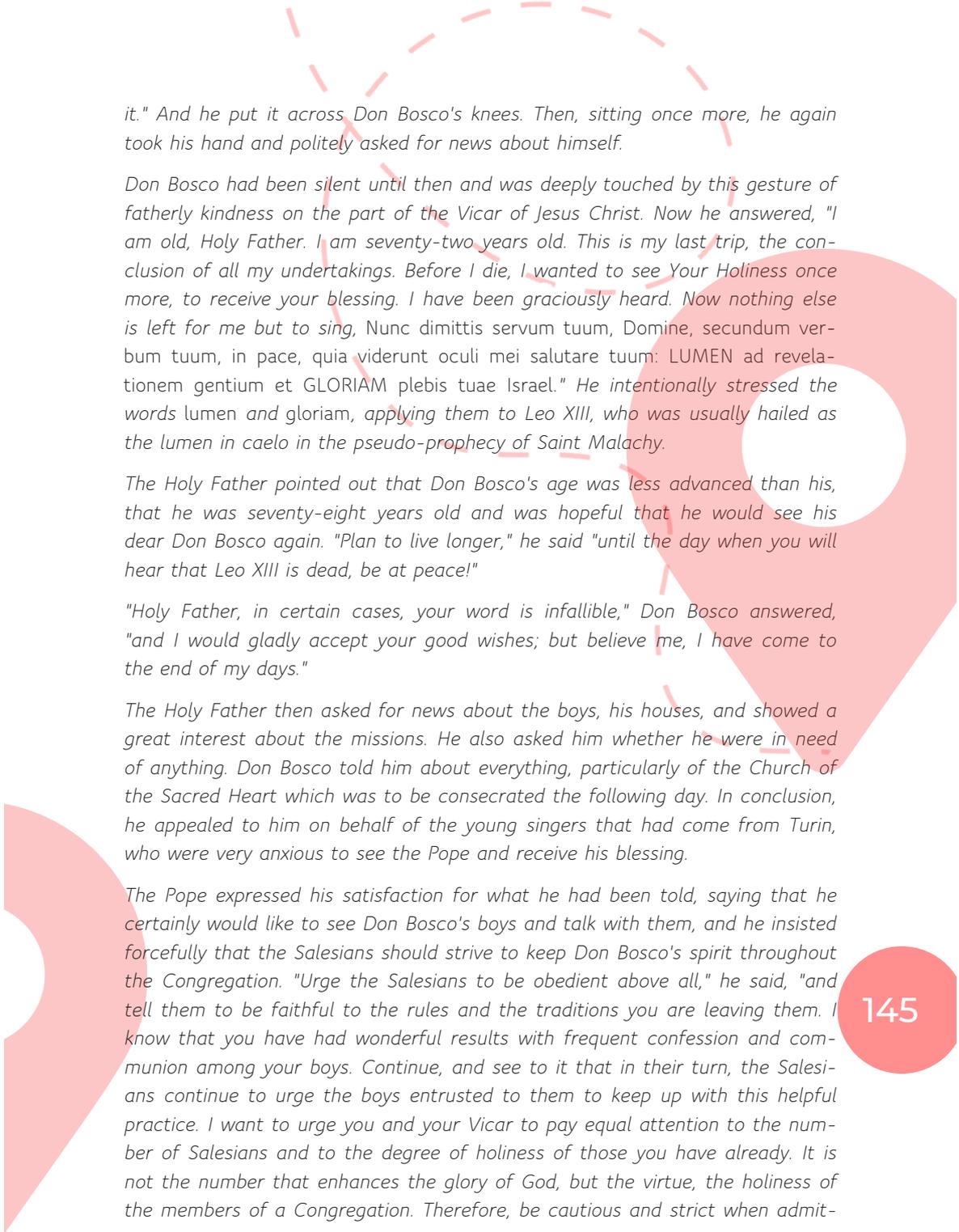
The boys and the superiors were waiting for him under the portico. He sat down on a plain stool and allowed them all to kiss his hand. Then he listened affectionately to their singing and declamations. At the end of the little entertainment, he wittily remarked to those who surrounded him as he was climbing the first steps leading up to the floor above, "You have read some compositions and talked about so many things but you did not say a word about dinner." Everyone burst out laughing and replied that dinner was ready for him. Several gentlemen, among who was the tall figure of Prince Augustus Czartoryski, sat down at table with him.

PAPAL AUDIENCE

On 13 May, the eve of the solemn consecration of the Basilica, the saint was received in audience by the Holy Father.

The Pope gave him a festive welcome, and did not permit him to kneel down to kiss his foot, but asked Bishop Della Volpe to bring a small armchair nearer.

Since the prelate had put it at some distance from the Pope, the Holy Father himself pulled it nearer to him and bade Don Bosco sit, pressing his hand affectionately between his own, and repeating, "Oh! Dear Don Bosco, how are you...How are you?" Then he rose and said, "Perhaps you feel cold, Don Bosco, do you not?" So saying, he went to fetch a large fur, and returned with it saying in a tone of friendly intimacy, "Do you see this lovely ermine fur that was given to me today for my priestly jubilee? I want you to be the first one to use



it." And he put it across Don Bosco's knees. Then, sitting once more, he again took his hand and politely asked for news about himself.

Don Bosco had been silent until then and was deeply touched by this gesture of fatherly kindness on the part of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Now he answered, "I am old, Holy Father. I am seventy-two years old. This is my last trip, the conclusion of all my undertakings. Before I die, I wanted to see Your Holiness once more, to receive your blessing. I have been graciously heard. Now nothing else is left for me but to sing, Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum, in pace, quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum: LUMEN ad revelationem gentium et GLORIAM plebis tuae Israel." He intentionally stressed the words lumen and gloriam, applying them to Leo XIII, who was usually hailed as the lumen in caelo in the pseudo-prophecy of Saint Malachy.

The Holy Father pointed out that Don Bosco's age was less advanced than his, that he was seventy-eight years old and was hopeful that he would see his dear Don Bosco again. "Plan to live longer," he said "until the day when you will hear that Leo XIII is dead, be at peace!"

"Holy Father, in certain cases, your word is infallible," Don Bosco answered, "and I would gladly accept your good wishes; but believe me, I have come to the end of my days."

The Holy Father then asked for news about the boys, his houses, and showed a great interest about the missions. He also asked him whether he were in need of anything. Don Bosco told him about everything, particularly of the Church of the Sacred Heart which was to be consecrated the following day. In conclusion, he appealed to him on behalf of the young singers that had come from Turin, who were very anxious to see the Pope and receive his blessing.

The Pope expressed his satisfaction for what he had been told, saying that he certainly would like to see Don Bosco's boys and talk with them, and he insisted forcefully that the Salesians should strive to keep Don Bosco's spirit throughout the Congregation. "Urge the Salesians to be obedient above all," he said, "and tell them to be faithful to the rules and the traditions you are leaving them. I know that you have had wonderful results with frequent confession and communion among your boys. Continue, and see to it that in their turn, the Salesians continue to urge the boys entrusted to them to keep up with this helpful practice. I want to urge you and your Vicar to pay equal attention to the number of Salesians and to the degree of holiness of those you have already. It is not the number that enhances the glory of God, but the virtue, the holiness of the members of a Congregation. Therefore, be cautious and strict when admit-

ting new members to your Society. Make sure first of all that they are of proven morality."

Then, taking Don Bosco once again by the hand, he asked him confidentially what he thought about the future events within the Church. Don Bosco hesitated, saying that the Holy Father knew how public things were going on better than he did. But the Pope insisted, "I am not asking you about the present situation, for I know that myself. I am asking about the future."

"But I am not a prophet," Don Bosco replied, smiling. Nevertheless, he was obliged to comply, as he told Father John Baptist Lemoyne later when he reported his conversation to him. He told the Pope what he thought and what he knew. He never revealed to anybody what he meant by the words "what he knew."

Perhaps the Holy Father would have liked to keep him longer still had he not realized his painful condition. Seeing that the Pope was about to let him go, Don Bosco said that he had his Vicar and his secretary with him and that they too would have liked to receive the Pope's blessing, if His Holiness would graciously respond to their hopes. The Pope consented, rang the bell and had the two ushered in.

Don Bosco introduced Father Michael Rua, "Ah! You are Father Rua," the Pope said. "You are the Vicar of the Congregation! Excellent! I hear that Don Bosco brought you up ever since you were a boy. Go on, continue the work that has been undertaken and keep within yourself the spirit of your founder."

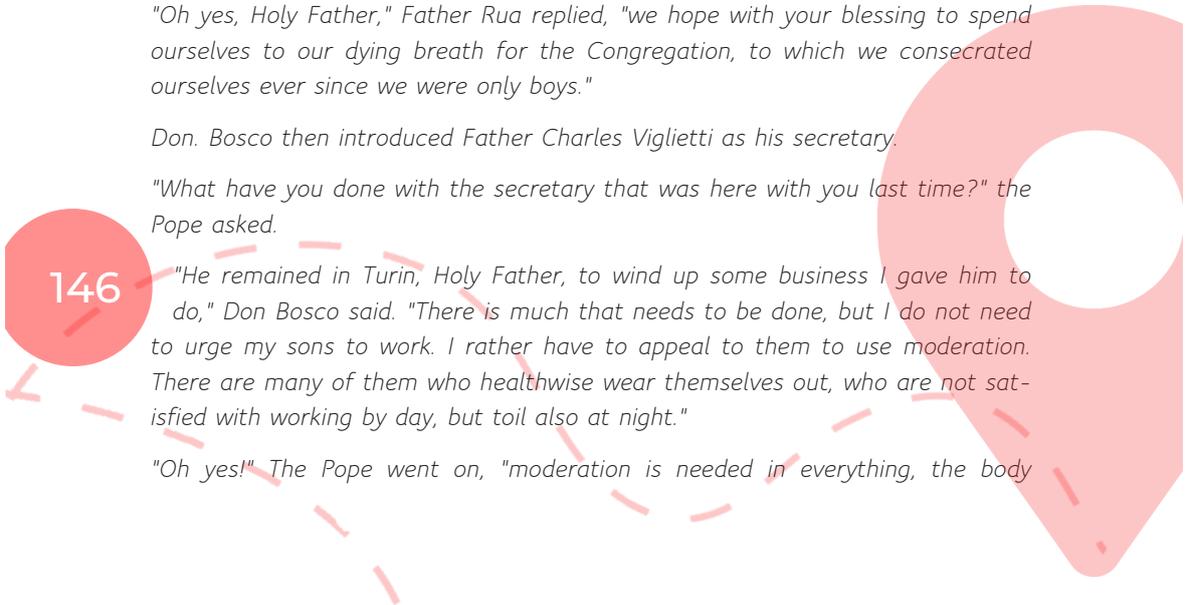
"Oh yes, Holy Father," Father Rua replied, "we hope with your blessing to spend ourselves to our dying breath for the Congregation, to which we consecrated ourselves ever since we were only boys."

Don Bosco then introduced Father Charles Viglietti as his secretary.

"What have you done with the secretary that was here with you last time?" the Pope asked.

"He remained in Turin, Holy Father, to wind up some business I gave him to do," Don Bosco said. "There is much that needs to be done, but I do not need to urge my sons to work. I rather have to appeal to them to use moderation. There are many of them who healthwise wear themselves out, who are not satisfied with working by day, but toil also at night."

"Oh yes!" The Pope went on, "moderation is needed in everything, the body



needs due rest so that it can be used to carry on the works that are to be carried out for the greater glory of God."

"Holy Father, we are willing to obey you," Father Rua said, "but it was Don Bosco himself who gave this kind of bad example in such things."

They all smiled. Then Father Rua asked, and was allowed to beg for a grace. He explained to the Holy Father how the decree of the Holy Congregation of Rites which prescribed examination of postulants for the Salesian Society by two or three committees, was a serious obstacle to the development of the Pious Congregation. He said that it would be much easier if, in compliance with concessions granted by Pius IX, said examinations were entrusted to the particular councils of each house, which in Turin would transmit their verdict for final judgment to the Superior Council. The Pope answered that he duly appreciated the reasons he had brought up. He added that an application should be submitted in writing and the safest course would be to give it to Bishop Della Volpe, who would see to it that it reached the Pope, who would be pleased to do all the rest. The dispensation from the observance of the decrees ruling on the acceptance and admission to vows was then granted for a period of five years.'

With a generous blessing, he then bade Don Bosco go, with great gentleness, and had someone accompany him as far as the stairs. As Don Bosco passed them by, the Swiss Guards stiffened to attention. Don Bosco remarked, laughing, "I am not a king, you know! I am just a poor hunchbacked priest, good for nothing at all. You can stand at ease." The soldiers then came over to him, reverently kissing his hands.

THE RELICS FOR THE SACRED HEART ALTAR

While Don Bosco was at the Vatican, the relics, which were to be placed into the altar stone of the main altar, had been sent from the vicariate to the Church of the Sacred Heart. Hermetically closed and sealed, the case contained a fragment of the cradle of the Infant Jesus, the relics of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Saint James, the martyr Saint Lawrence and of the Salesian patron saint, Francis de Sales. They were put into a gilded urn and exposed in the old chapel where, at nine o'clock in the evening, the hymn of martyrs was sung, followed by the official rite in the stillness of the night.

Don Bosco had made an application to the Sacred Congregation of Rites for certain spiritual favors, such as the privilege of celebrating the Mass of the Sacred Heart during the first three days following the consecration, and the



plenary indulgence to be granted in the usual way from the 14th to the 19th, as well as a seven-year indulgence and an indulgence of 28 days (seven quarantines) every time anyone visited the church with at least a contrite heart.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH

A Sacred Announcement, issued by the Cardinal Vicar on May 2nd, informed the faithful of the imminent consecration, and also of the timetable for the sacred services during the ensuing days. In it was stated that the church was a "universal Shrine" since "the entire Catholic world" had contributed to it "with its offerings." Hence it inferred: "That it should therefore be a reason of a holy jubilation for all Catholics and especially for the Romans, to see that after ten years of labor, obstacles, and immense difficulties, this grandiose construction was finally completed as the vow of many pious souls devoted to the Sacred Heart.

It is true, that there are still several altars and several decorations which require completion, but the constantly growing population of the new districts in that area demanded that forthwith all that work be suspended which would have enhanced the beauty and magnificence of the temple, but which was not absolutely essential, mainly because it was essential to provide facilities to the faithful in a more spacious church for the fulfillment of religious duties. If several works will need completion, the good Roman population and all those who seek the glory of God would find a new incentive to provide their donations so that the sacred building might soon have all that is needed for worship and so that it might not be all too unworthy of God who would establish His loving presence in it."

In referring to the difficulties, this document issued by the Vicariate made known a great truth. It had indeed been a period of seven years of untold struggles, of heroic struggles indeed, if anyone means, as he should, Don Bosco's struggles. As a matter of fact, any of the struggles which others may have had sustained before he took over the task were mere straws in comparison. Our readers are well aware of this. Nor did the long-awaited day of May 14th put an end to all the struggles. Instead, it renewed the test of his patience up to the day he died and only to bequeath them to his successor.

Everything was well prepared both for the consecration rites as well as for the solemn functions to be held the following days. Toward seven o'clock, the consecrating prelate, Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, vicar of His Holiness and

protector of the Salesian Congregation, emerged from the antechamber as on all great occasions and was met by the superiors and many members of the clergy, as well as by Salesians who had come from other houses, and by the boys from Valdocco and their companions from the Roman hospice. In conformity with the ceremonial, the rite was performed behind closed doors. When the doors were at last flung open to the faithful, some five hours had elapsed. Don Bosco assisted, all recollected; several eminent people assisted with him. At the end, Bishop Dominic Jacobini, archbishop of Tyre and secretary to the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, approached the Servant of God and offered him his arm to accompany him very slowly to his room, glad to have been so fortunate as to render him such a service.

Father Francis Dalmazzo was the first priest to celebrate Mass at noon as the new organ filled the temple with its harmony... Hundreds of people, the faithful and the merely curious, entered the church..

After resting a while after the tiring ceremony, the Cardinal Vicar went upstairs to see Don Bosco, whom he embraced affectionately and then remained to dine with him and several other eminent guests. At the end of the repast the Saint expressed his public thanks to the cardinal for all that he had done as Protector of the Salesians, with words of veneration and gratitude. Then he went on, "Your Eminence, we have made a good start," and then he related with the utmost simplicity the story of the instant cure which had taken place the day before. He then said that he had always used the same method, whenever people, eager of obtaining graces, went up to him; namely, he suggested that they give alms in honor of Jesus, Our Lady, or some Saint or other, as a means by which they might obtain favors from God. He said that there was not a single stone in the churches of Mary Help of Christians and Saint John the Evangelist which was not signed by some grace received.

The cardinal also got up to address the assembly. He congratulated Don Bosco for having opened the church even though work in it was not yet completed, for this showed he wanted it to be given to the Sacred Heart of Jesus before it was entrusted to embellishments and ornamentations by artists. He spoke very kindly of the Salesian Congregation, saying that so far it had only procured him happiness, and not one single trouble, pain or hardship. He said he would be glad to take over the task of protector at the rate of one a day for any such Congregations. Smiling, Don Bosco said, "Just wait, Eminence, just wait, the day will come when we too will be a source of trouble for you."

"Well, here in the Church of the Sacred Heart you have a chapel that you wish

to dedicate to Saint Francis de Sales, have you not? Is he not your patron?"

"Yes, Your Eminence."

"Good, I want to pay the costs of that altar, for I hope to obtain from the protector of the Congregation that you have in Heaven whatever assistance I may need in the trials and tribulations reserved for the earthly protector of the Pious Society." This brilliant and generous statement was greeted with a rousing applause.

The Oratory boys gave the first sample of their talent that evening when they sang the Vespers, which Maestro Galli had composed especially for the occasion. Bishop Julius Lenti, archbishop of Side, and vice regent in Rome officiated. In the meantime, Don Bosco received many eminent callers among whom there were bishops and cardinals.

The celebrations properly so-called lasted five days, and the congregation of the pious faithful increased constantly. Each morning a cardinal celebrated a Low Mass, and there was also a Solemn Pontifical Mass. Every afternoon there was a Salesian conference in various languages, then Vespers with music and sermon.

Sunday, the first day, was extremely solemn. The German cardinal, Bishop Melchers, celebrated Mass at seven o'clock. At ten o'clock Bishop Jacobini pontificated, assisted by a bishop from the United States of America. The boys from Turin sang Cherubini's Mass incomparably well. This Mass is known as the Coronation Mass.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco granted continuous audiences, receiving also three bishops and the cardinal of Canossa.

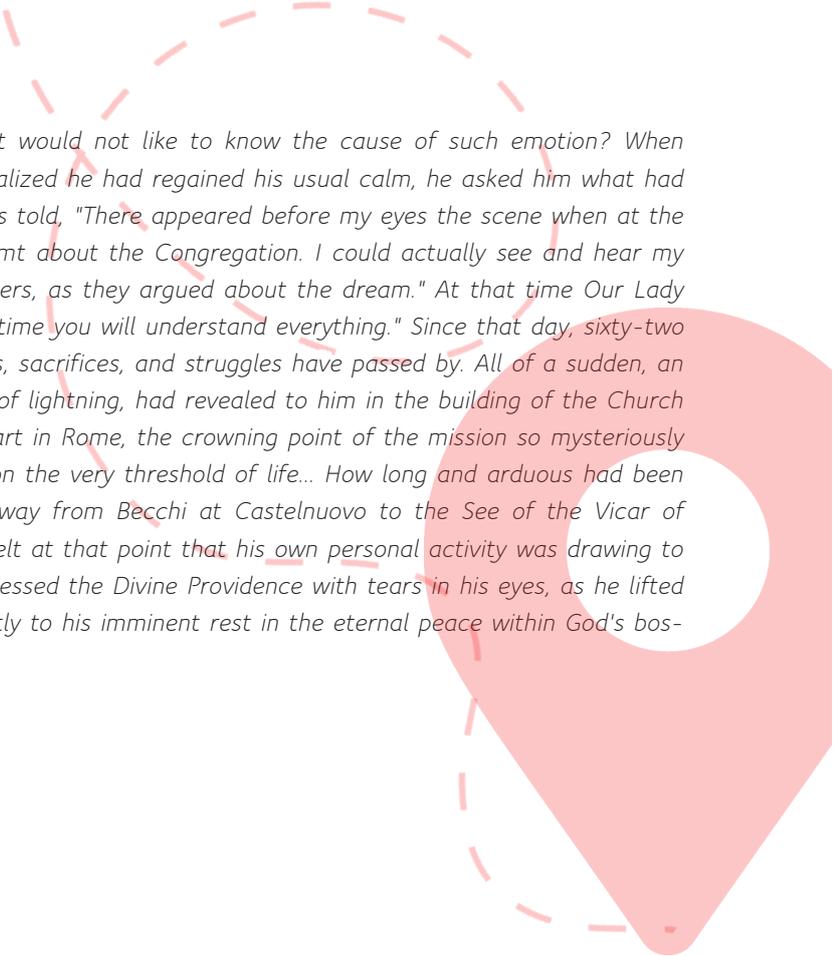
At dinner Bishop Kirby sat at his right hand, Prince Czartoryski on his left. The Prince was spending most of the day within the house. There were also many other guests who shared at the family dinner. At the proper time Father Rua asked Don Bosco to kindly say a few words. Don Bosco rose to his feet painfully and leaning heavily on the table with both hands, he said with halting voice, "I drink to the dear memory of our great friend, the Rev. Margotti, who died recently. To him, the champion of the sacred rights of the Church, to him who always loved us, who came to see us so affectionately before we left for Rome, putting his renowned newspaper at our service for reports on the festivities, which we now celebrate. I drink this with a firm conviction that my zealous Cooperators will be so gracious as to help us complete the hospice of the Sacred Heart so that we can offer shelter, education and training to five hundred

children of the working classes, bringing them up in the holy fear of God so that they in their turn may bear fruit for their own benefit and that of society. I drink to Bishop Kirby, to whom I am bound by an undying friendship." Bishop Kirby answered on behalf of all the Cooperators saying that he and his friends treasured what Don Bosco had said as a toast. He assured him that he and his friends would do everything in their power to abide faithfully by his inspired will so that the hospice might be completed as he desired. At three-thirty, Bishop Charles Murray of Lyons, auditor of the Sacred Rota for France, had a lecture in French in which he stressed the timeliness of Don Bosco's institute on behalf of poor and abandoned youth and the consoling results already obtained.' At five o'clock, the eloquent Bishop Omedei Zorini, an apostolic missionary, delivered a sermon on the Sacred Heart. After this, the Valdocco choir sang Aldega's Vespers. In the evening, the facade of the Church, the bell tower, and the hospice were brilliantly illuminated after a very elegant design elaborated by a Salesian cleric. This brought people in vast crowds from the furthest districts of the town to Castro Pretorio for some hours.

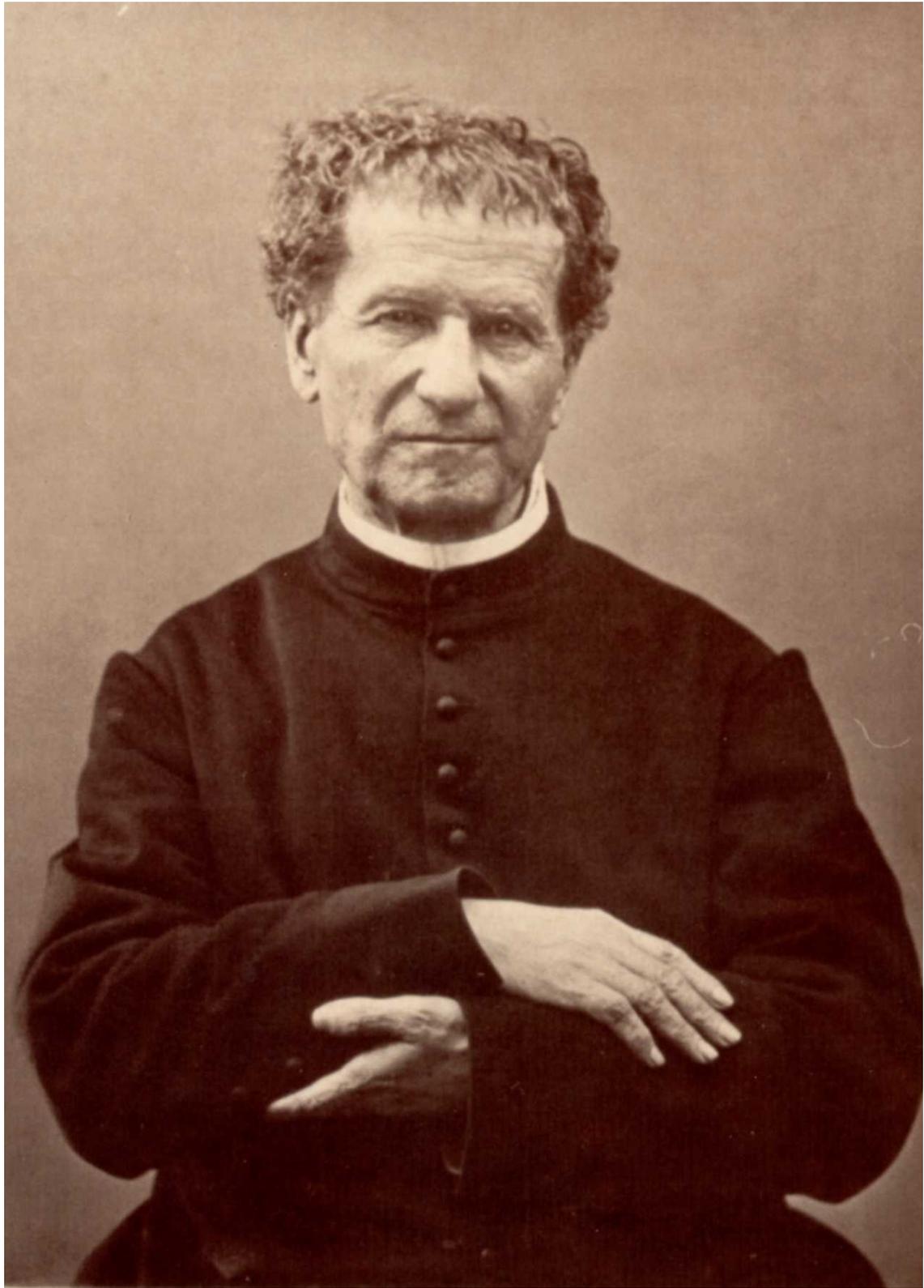
The Mass with general Communion on the second day of the celebration was said by Cardinal Placido Schiaffino of the Priests of Mount Olive.

THE LAST MASS AT THE ALTAR OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

That morning Don Bosco chose to go down to the church to say Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. No less than fifteen times after he had started the Holy Sacrifice Don Bosco had to stop, overcome by powerful emotion, which caused him to shed tears. From time to time, Father Charles Viglietti, who was assisting him, had to divert his attention so that he could continue. As he was leaving the altar, the congregation was overcome by great tenderness and gathered around him, kissing his vestments and his hands now freed of the chalice, and even followed him into the sacristy where they all voiced their desire to be blessed. "Yes, yes," he answered. He climbed the three steps which led from the first sacristy into the second, he turned around, he raised his right hand, but suddenly he burst into tears, covering his face with both hands. "I bless...I bless..." he repeated again and again, his voice stifled, unable to finish his sentence. It was necessary to take him gently by the arm and lead him away. The people were deeply impressed and moved on to follow him, but the door closed behind him.



Who is there that would not like to know the cause of such emotion? When Father Viglietti realized he had regained his usual calm, he asked him what had happened and was told, "There appeared before my eyes the scene when at the age of ten I dreamt about the Congregation. I could actually see and hear my mother and brothers, as they argued about the dream." At that time Our Lady had said, "In due time you will understand everything." Since that day, sixty-two years of hardships, sacrifices, and struggles have passed by. All of a sudden, an unexpected flash of lightning, had revealed to him in the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, the crowning point of the mission so mysteriously outlined for him on the very threshold of life... How long and arduous had been the path all the way from Becchi at Castelnuovo to the See of the Vicar of Jesus Christ! He felt at that point that his own personal activity was drawing to a close, and he blessed the Divine Providence with tears in his eyes, as he lifted his gaze confidently to his imminent rest in the eternal peace within God's bosom.



Letter from Rome

10th may 1884

My most beloved children in Jesus Christ:

I am always thinking of you, whether I am near you or far away. I have only one wish and that is to see you happy in this world and eternity. It was this thought, this desire, that induced me to write you this letter. My dear boys, I feel the weight of being away from you and not seeing you, not hearing you, causes such a pain for me that you can hardly imagine. That was why I would have liked to write you this letter a week ago, but all the things I had to do prevented me. Nevertheless, although there are now only a few days left before my return home, I want to anticipate my return among you at least by means of a letter, not being able to do it in person. It is one who loves you tenderly in Jesus Christ who writes to you, and it is his duty to speak to you with the liberty of a father. You will allow me to do this, will you not? And you will be attentive and will put into practice what I am now about to tell you.

I have told you that you are the one and constant thought of my mind. On one of these past evenings, I had gone to my room, and while I was getting ready for bed, I had begun to say the prayers that my dear mother had taught me. Just then, I do not know whether sleep overcame me or whether something distracted me, but it suddenly seemed that two former boys from the Oratory appeared before me... One of them came up to me, greeted me affectionately and said,

"Oh, Don Bosco! Do you recognize me?"

"Yes, I recognize you," I answered...

"Do you still remember me?" the other asked.

"I remember you and all the others. You are Valfre and you attended the Oratory prior to 1870."

"Listen," he said then, "would you like to see the boys who were at the Oratory in my day?"

"Of course! Show them to me," I said. "I would be delighted." So Valfre showed me the boys and they all looked the same. They were the same height and age as I had known them then. I thought I was in the old Oratory at recreation time. It was a picture full of life, full of movement and merriment. Boys were running, skipping and jumping. Some were playing leapfrog and others were playing ball. In one corner, there was a cluster of boys avidly listening to a priest, who was telling a story. In another corner, a cleric was playing flying donkey and trades with another cluster of boys. People were singing and laughing everywhere and there were clerics and priests with cheerful boys gathered around them. It was obvious that the utmost cordiality and familiarity existed between the boys and their superiors.

I was mesmerized by that spectacle, and Valfre said to me, "You see, familiarity breeds affection, and affection breeds confidence. This is what opens up their hearts and the boys reveal everything to their teachers, assistants and superiors. They are frank in their confession and outside of it, and docile and obedient to anything they are told to do by someone they know is honestly fond of them.

Just then, the other former pupil, who now had a white beard, came up to me and said, "Don Bosco, would you now like to see and know the boys who live at the Oratory today?" This was Joseph Buzzezzetti.

"Yes," I answered. "It is already a month since I saw them last."

He pointed them out to me. I saw the Oratory and all of you at recreation, but I no longer heard the shouts of joy, singing or the lively animation that I had just seen before.

Sadly, boredom, weariness, sullenness, and diffidence were evident on the boys' faces and in their actions. It is true that I saw a good many of them running and playing, but I also saw a good many more who were standing alone and leaning against the pillars, prey to disquieting thoughts.

Other boys had withdrawn from the general recreation to sit on the stairs, the corridors or on the balconies overlooking the garden. Others strolled slowly in groups, talking softly among themselves, casting suspicious or malicious glances around them... Here and there, someone smiled, but such smiles were accompanied by glances that not only aroused suspicion, but also the conviction that had St. Aloysius been in the company of those boys, he would have blushed. Even among the boys who were playing, I saw a few so listless that it was obvious that they found no pleasure in their games.

"Have you seen your boys?" the past pupil asked.

"Yes, I have seen them," I answered with a sigh.

"How different they are today from what we were!" the former pupil exclaimed.

"Unfortunately! How listless they are at recreation!"

"This causes the indifference that many show when they receive the Holy Sacraments. They are careless in their practices of piety in church and elsewhere, and that is why they are reluctant to live in an environment where Divine Providence showers all its bounty on their bodies, souls and intellects. That is why many of them do not follow their vocation and are ungrateful to their superiors, and that is why they grow secretive and complain while other deplorable things occur as a consequence."

"I see, I see." I said. "But how can I restore the former vivacity, cheerfulness and expansiveness of these dear children of mine?" "With charity!"

"With charity?" I asked. "But are not my boys loved enough? You know that I love them. You know how much I have suffered and endured for them during the course of some forty years, and all that I am still suffering and enduring now! All the privations, humiliations, oppositions and persecution I have endured in order to provide them with food, shelter, teachers and especially in order to ensure the salvation of their souls! I have done all I could and all I know for them, who represent the love of my whole life."

"I am not referring to you."

"Then to whom do you refer? To those who took my place? To the directors, prefects, teachers and assistants? Don't you see how they spend the youthful years of their lives caring for those entrusted to them by Divine Providence? Don't you see that they are martyrs of their work and study?"

"I see it and I am aware of it, but that is not enough. The best is still missing."

"What is it that is missing?"

"The boys must not only be loved, but they must know that they are loved."

"Don't they realize that everything that is done for them is done out of love?"

"No, and I repeat, it is not enough."

"So what then is needed?" I implored.

"That they be helped to understand and love the things that are not so agreeable to them, by participation in their childish pleasures. The things that are disagreeable to

them are discipline, study, and self-mortification. They must learn these things with love and enthusiasm."

"Please explain yourself more clearly!"

"Watch the boys at recreation."

I watched them and then said, "What special thing is there to see?"

"You do not see it, even though you have been educating boys for all these years? Look again! Where are our Salesians?"

I looked and saw that there were only a few priests and clerics mingled with the boys, while even fewer participated in their games. The superiors were no longer the animating spirit at recreation. For the most part, they strolled up and down, talking among themselves, without paying any attention to what the boys were doing. Occasionally, someone did observe some wrongdoings, but they did nothing to correct the behavior. There were some Salesians who would have liked to mingle with the boys in their groups, but I saw that some of these youngsters were studiously trying to get away from their teachers and superiors.

"Were you not always in the midst of the boys at the Oratory in the old days, especially at recreation time?" my friend asked. "Do you remember those wonderful years? It was a thing for rejoicing, like Heaven, a period upon which we shall always look back lovingly, for we were guided by affection and held no secrets from you."

"Certainly! Everything was delightful then for me as well, and the boys were all eager to come and talk to me. They were always eager for my advice, so that they could put it into practice. But now I see that continuous audiences with others, increased business matters and my health prevent me from doing all this."

"That is all very true, but if you are unable, why are the Salesians not imitating you? Why do you not insist and demand that the Salesians behave toward the boys the same way as you did?"

"I talk myself hoarse, but unfortunately, they do not feel like shouldering the burdens as we once did."

"So by neglecting to do what costs them least, they lose what is most important, and waste all their efforts thereby. They must learn to love what the boys love, so that the boys may love that which is dear to their superiors. In this way, their efforts will be light. The cause of the present change in the ways of the Oratory lies in

the number of boys who do not confide in their superiors. Once their hearts were like an open book before their superiors, and they loved them and obeyed them promptly. But now they look on the superiors precisely as superiors, no longer as fathers, brothers and friends. Therefore, they fear them and love them little. If there is to be but one heart and soul, then for the love of Jesus, this fatal barrier of diffidence must be broken so heartfelt trust can take its place."

"What must be done to break down this barrier?" I asked.

"It is imperative to achieve familiarity with the boys, especially at recreation time. Without familiarity, affection cannot be shown and without affection, there cannot be confidence. He who wants to be loved has to show that he loves. Jesus Christ became little with the little ones and shouldered our own infirmities.

There we have the master of familiarity. A teacher who is seen only at the teacher's desk is only a teacher and no more, but if he joins the boys at recreation, he becomes a brother.

"If one is seen only when he preaches from the pulpit, we shall only say of him that he is doing his duty, but should he utter a word or two during recreation time, his will be regarded as the word of someone who loves. How many conversions were brought about by such words whispered unexpectedly into the ear of a boy at play! Those who know they are loved give love in return, and those who are beloved, especially by children, will obtain everything. Such a feeling of confidential trust is like an electric current between the boys and their superiors! They lay bare their hearts and make their needs known and reveal their faults. A love like this will enable the superiors to endure fatigue, displeasures, ingratitude, annoyance, shortcomings and neglect on the part of the boys...

"Jesus Christ did not snap the reed already bent, nor did He extinguish the smoldering wick. That's your model! Then you'll have no chance to see people who work for vanity, who will punish only to take revenge on their offended pride or who leave their assistance assignment out of jealousy for the overpowering ability of others. There will be no one who knocks down others in order to be loved and esteemed by the boys. Then you will not see anyone who favors one child and neglects all the other boys, someone who neglects his very serious duty to assist out of love of his personal comfort.

"If there is really true love, nothing but the love of God will be sought after and the salvation of souls. When this kind of love wanes, then things will begin to go wrong.

"Why should charity be substituted by the coldness of a rule? Why is it that the superiors abandon the observance of those educational rules dictated to them by Don

Bosco himself? Why is it that the system of preventing transgressions with vigilance and love is slowly being replaced with one of less worth? If neglected, these laws will breed contempt for the superiors and will be the cause of very serious shortcomings.

"And this does happen if familiarity is missing. If the Oratory is to return to its former happiness, the former system must come back. The superior should be always ready to listen to any doubts or complaints with all eyes to supervise their behavior and all heart to look for the temporal and spiritual good of those entrusted to him by Divine Providence. Then the boys will no longer barricade their hearts. Only in cases of immoral demeanor are the superiors to be inexorable. It is better to run the risk of expelling an innocent boy than to risk retaining one that will cause a problem. The assistants must look at it as their duty to report to their superiors anything that may in any way be offensive in the eyes of God that is brought to their attention."

Then I asked, "What is the best thing to do to make sure that a family spirit, love and trust emerge triumphant?"

"Strict observance of the house rules."

"Nothing more?"

"The most appetizing course in any meal is a good cheer."

As my former pupil finished speaking on this note, I continued watching the recreation with real displeasure, and little by little I was overcome by increasing fatigue. Such weariness overcame me that I could no longer endure it, so I shook myself and returned to my senses.

I found myself standing at the foot of the bed. My legs were so swollen and painful that I could no longer stand upright. It was very late, so I went to bed, determined that I would write all this to my beloved children.

I do not want to have such dreams because they tire me excessively.

The next day, I felt myself aching all over and could not wait to get to bed that next evening. But as soon as I was in bed, the dream started all over again. I saw the playground, the boys who are now in the Oratory, and the same former pupil.

"I will tell the Salesians what you told me, but what am I to tell the boys at the Oratory?" I asked him.

He answered, "That they must appreciate all that their superiors, teachers and assistants are tirelessly doing out of love for them, for if it were not for their welfare,

they would not shoulder such sacrifices. Tell them they must learn how to endure the faults of others, for perfection is not of this world and is found only in Paradise. They must desist from complaining because this makes the heart grow cold. Above all, that they must strive to live in the holy grace of God. He who is not at peace with God will not find peace within himself or with others."

"Do you mean to say that among the boys there are some who are not at peace with God?"

"This is the primary cause of the malaise of which you are now aware, and which must be remedied. There is no need for me to specify such causes now. A person who has secrets to safeguard and who fears that his secrets will be discovered is the one who is distrustful. At the same time, the heart that is not at peace with God is full of anguish and is restless, intolerant of obedience, irritated over nothing and feels that everything is going wrong. And since he has no love, he feels that the superiors do not love him."

"Yet, my friend, do you not see how often boys go to confession and communion here at the Oratory?"

"It is true that they go frequently to confession, but the thing that is radically wrong in the case of many of the boys is that they lack steadfast resolution when they go to confession. They do confess, but confess always the same faults, temptations, bad habits, acts of disobedience and neglect of their duties. They go on this way for months and months, even years, sometimes right through their fifth year of high school. Such confessions count for little or nothing at all. They, therefore, bring no peace of mind, and if a boy is summoned before the judgment of God in such a state of mind, it would fare badly for him.

"Are there many such boys at the Oratory?" I asked.

"There are only a few in comparison with the great many boys living in the house," he answered as he pointed them out to me.

I looked around and saw these boys, but in those few, I saw things that grieved my heart sorely. I do not want to commit them to paper, but when I return, I shall confer with those concerned.

At this time, I will only say that it is now time to pray and make steadfast resolutions not only with words, but in deeds, and to show that the Comollos, the Dominic Savios, the Besuccos and the Saccandis still live amongst us in spirit.

Finally, I asked my friend, "Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Tell all of them, old and young alike, to remember always that they are the children of Mary Help of Christians. They should remember that she brought them here to rescue them from the dangers of the world, so that they might love one another like brothers. They should give glory to God and to her with their good conduct. They must remember that it is our Lady who provides them with food and with the possibility of studying, together with countless graces and miracles. They must remember that it is now the vigil of the feast of this most holy mother of theirs, and with her assistance, the barrier of diffidence that the devil has been able to erect between the boys and their superiors to bring about the ruin of souls must come down."

"Are we going to succeed in removing this barrier?"

"Most certainly, provided that old and young alike are willing to endure a few minor mortification for the love of Mary and put into practice all that I have been saying."

Meanwhile, I continued watching the boys and saw how some of them were heading for eternal damnation, and I felt so sharp a pain in my heart that I woke up. I saw many important things that I would like to tell you, but this is neither the place nor do I now have the time for it.

After all this, do you know what this poor old man, who has consumed his whole life for his beloved boys, wants from you all? Nothing more than the return of the happy days of the old Oratory when love and Christian trust between the boys and their superiors and the spirit of harmony and mutual endurance for the love of Jesus Christ prevailed. I need you to comfort me with the hope and the promise that you will do everything I wish for the benefit of your own souls. You do not realize how lucky you have been to live at the Oratory. I declare to you before God that a boy who enters a Salesian house will be immediately taken under the special protection of the Most Holy Virgin. So let us all work in harmony. The charity of those who command and must obey should ensure that the spirit of St. Francis of Sales reigns among us. Oh, my beloved children, the time is drawing near when I shall have to leave you for eternity. [Note by his secretary: here Don Bosco stopped his dictation, his eyes filled with tears, not out of regret, but out of the infinite tenderness that was evidenced by his glance and the tone of his voice.] therefore, am most anxious to leave you, my priests, clerics and most beloved children, on the road of God on which our Lord Himself wishes you to walk.

To this same end, the Holy Father (whom I saw on Friday, May 9th) sends you his sincerest blessing. I shall be with you in front of the picture of our loving

Mother Mary Help of Christians on her feast day. I want this magnificent feast to be celebrated with the greatest solemnity, and I want Father Lazzeri and Father Marchisio to make sure that you are cheerful, even in the dining room. This feast of Mary Help of Christians should be the prelude to the eternal feast we shall enjoy one day together in Paradise.

Most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Rev. John Bosco

SOURCES

On the subject of Don Bosco's stays in Rome it is possible to make use of these searches:

1. "DON BOSCO A ROMA" di don Fabio Bianchini - pro manuscripto - 1988

The text was composed on the occasion of the centenary of Don Bosco's death. The structure of the current text and the major topographical indications are drawn from it.

2. "I SOGGIORNI DEL BEATO DON BOSCO IN ROMA". by Sac. Salvatore Romolo - Ed. SEI - Turin - 1929 - Salesian Printing School.

The volume, in 407 pages, chronologically retraces each of the 20 trips that Don Bosco made in the capital, with the addition of an appendix.

It is a tribute to Don Bosco in the year of his beatification. It remains to this day the most comprehensive and fully documented study.

3. SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE BOLLETTINO SALESIANO

Supplement of October '99, entitled "DON BOSCO RACCONTA" - The journey to Rome in 1858.

164

Fr Giancarlo Manieri and Fr Francesco Motto focus on the first stay, certainly the richest in information about Don Bosco's 'curiosity' in discovering every corner of the city.

A 47-page dossier, enriched with many photos of "vanished Rome", the article aimed at accompanying the pilgrims who came to Rome for the Jubilee of the year 2000, to the places visited by Don Bosco himself.

4. DON BOSCO A ROMA by Antonio Sperduti – Venti viaggi nell'attà eterna - Internal edition by the 'Casa per ferie' of the Hospice of the Sacred Heart,

This 67-page booklet, illustrated with period photos, briefly lists each of Don Bosco's 20 trips to Rome, highlighting the dominant feature in each. It concludes with an overview of his life.

5. UN PIEMONTESE A ROMA edited by Michele Novelli based on research by Fabio Bianchini's 'Don Bosco a Roma' and on the documents of the Biographical Memoirs.

The work, commissioned by the Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, is part of the initiatives for the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth.



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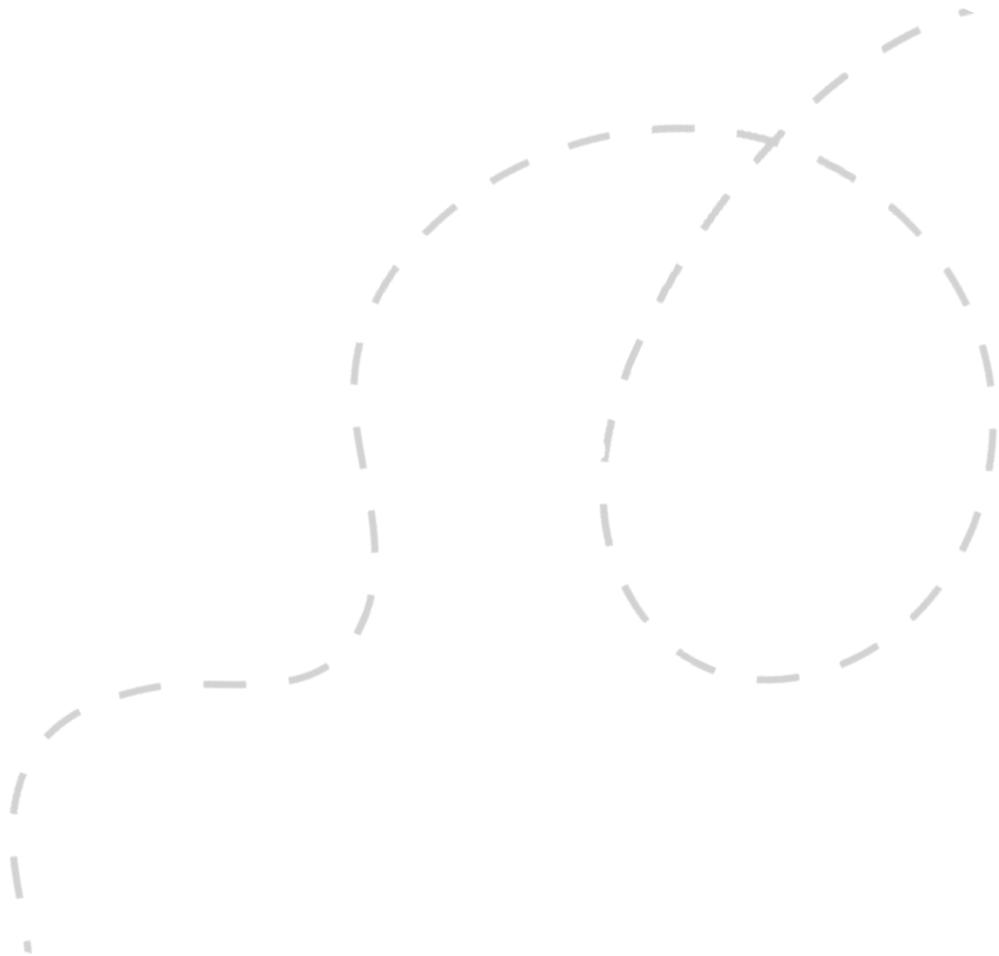
2. THE SAINT'S MOST VISITED AND DEAREST PLACES

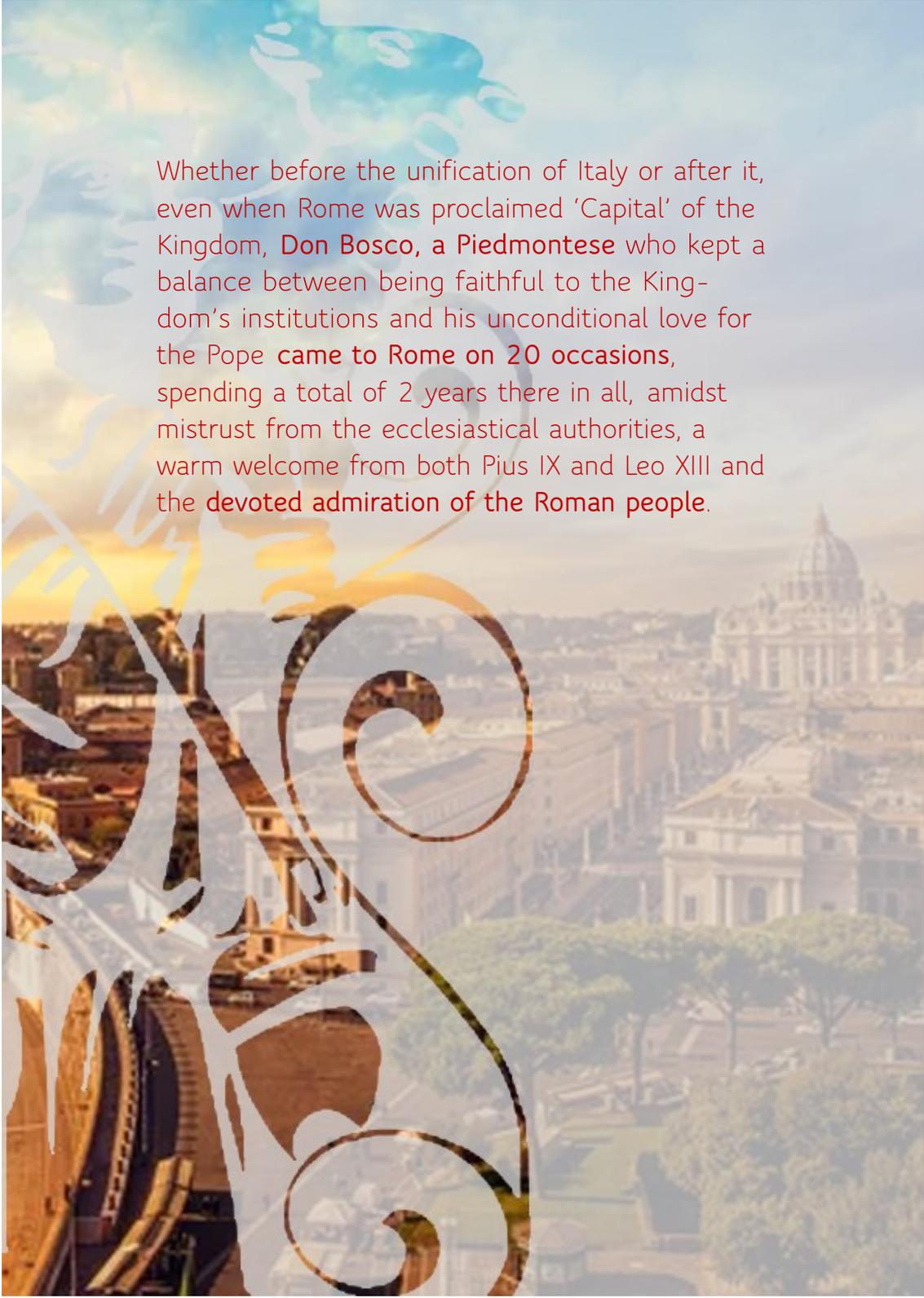
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Whether before the unification of Italy or after it, even when Rome was proclaimed 'Capital' of the Kingdom, **Don Bosco, a Piedmontese** who kept a balance between being faithful to the Kingdom's institutions and his unconditional love for the Pope **came to Rome on 20 occasions**, spending a total of 2 years there in all, amidst mistrust from the ecclesiastical authorities, a warm welcome from both Pius IX and Leo XIII and the **devoted admiration of the Roman people.**