

J A N U A R Y 2 0 1 2

Getting to Know...

# Don Bosco

His Place in History

## According to Don Bosco

As a man of his times, Don Bosco operated from a set of very precise understandings of God. He had a keen awareness of humanity respecting its great capacity while respecting and attending to its fragility. He was consumed by those conditions which could so easily pull a soul from the great mercy and love of God brooking no compromise with corruption and sin. His efforts to transform those conditions and draw attention to the issues that affected the quality of life for the young gave Don Bosco a particular view of work. He saw it as both the result of corruption and as a means of liberating service. In this issue, a comparison will be offered between the Founder and a famous author and social critic contemporary to Don Bosco, Charles Dickens. This author, like Don Bosco, alerted his age to the plight of the young lost in poverty and corruption in fast-changing world.



The late Fr. Pietro Stella devoted much of his life uncovering cultural and literary treasures from Don Bosco's period of history culling insights into the world in which he lived, out of which Don Bosco operated, and into which he made his own unique contribution.

## Examining Don Bosco's Understanding

This issue of the Don Bosco Study Guide continues to look at the person of Don Bosco. We begin with reflections written by the great Salesian historian Fr. Pietro Stella. Fr. Stella gave us a critical historical analysis of Don Bosco from many vantage points. We will summarize Fr. Stella's examination of Don Bosco's understanding of God, man, and sin. Then we will make a comparison between Don Bosco and Charles Dickens.

In This Issue: *Linking Don Bosco & Charles Dickens*

Charles Dickens is loved and revered in the world of literature especially because of his ability to see the world of the young person so lost in an industrialized world of poverty and corruption. His efforts to expose the dangers of the exploitation and neglect of the young strikes a resonant chord in the Salesian heart. Don Bosco and Dickens seemed on the same mission.



## Don Bosco's God

**God is the reality into which all things are immersed and through which Don Bosco perceived all moments of his life.**

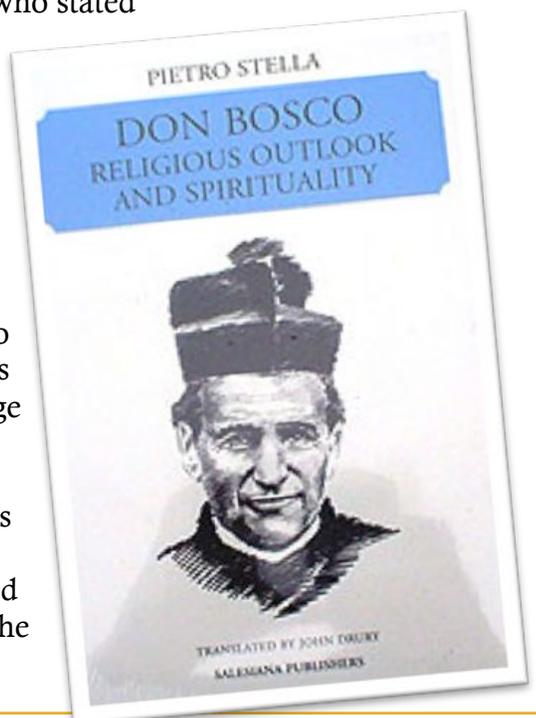
### Knowledge of God

In a fitting reference to Don Bosco's motto, *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*, Fr. Stella begins an examination of Don Bosco's concept and understanding of God. He asserts that such a motto arises from one already in close contact with his God in his own personal vocation and destiny and in those of the people around him. In fact, God is the reality into which all things are immersed and through which Don Bosco perceived all moments of his life. As a child, the immediacy of his God stood in stark contrast to many of the influences of his contemporary world and those of the recent history preceding Don Bosco with the growing cynicism and rejection of religious ideas in the dawn of Enlightenment. This immediacy of God, in the words of Fr. Stella, "dominated the mind of Don Bosco as the noonday sun."

Don Bosco's concept was obviously rooted in the Scriptures and their assertion that all things in heaven and earth shout the presence of God. Turning to human existence, Don Bosco saw revelation in the organization of life and in the unity between souls. His view was of a "primordial goodness and order," and agreed with authors who stated that man had an inner "secret instinct" for God, yet for which God makes the first initiative. In the relationship with God as understood by Don Bosco, Fr. Stella points out that Don Bosco was more concerned about what the promptings of God are to mankind than to dissect their nature and origin. In other words, the relationship and the inner voice are givens in Don Bosco's religiosity.

God has communicated himself to the world of humanity and for Don Bosco there were many paths open to recognize these communications. Knowledge of God comes from association in the created world, from innate knowledge in the heart of man, and through the Scriptures as passed down through the ages. The ambient of Don Bosco's perceiving are specifically Christian and a Christianity that is built on the Hebrew experience of God.

Contrary to the Deism of his day, Don Bosco believed that God's existence went deeper than emotion and will to the





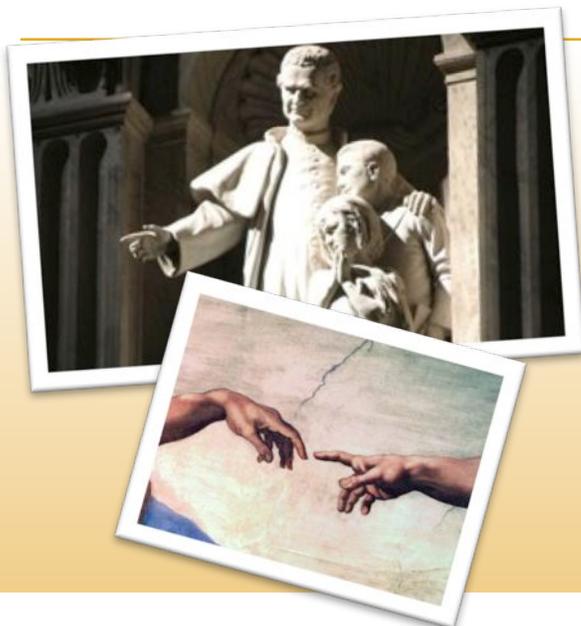
## Don Bosco's Traditionalism

very nature of man: man is uniquely derived from God and therefore is disposed to the knowledge of God by virtue of human nature. This God was not a distant force, but the revelation of an intimate friend. In fact, Don Bosco used the most familiar terms to speak of God and rarely used words of omnipotence and distant power. But this does not diminish his sense of God's immensity and creative power sustaining all things in their existence. Yet, Don Bosco's God was both powerful majestic and "our compassionate Father in heaven."

Into the battles of Jansenism, Deism, and other the criticisms hurled at the God of his age, Don Bosco brought the images of a merciful God borrowing images from St. Alphonsus and other authors. And his aim in presenting such an approachable and majestic God was always the call to conversion.

### *Don Bosco and Traditionalism:*

Don Bosco taught and evangelized within a specific cultural and literary milieu. Most of the Catholic authors contemporary to Don Bosco were responding to a European crisis of faith, turning toward harsh apologetics and fideism. These authors became the antithesis of Enlightenment and Deism, of rationalism and positivism. The writings of Don Bosco reflect some of this traditional element through his insistence upon the divine nature of God's revelations, but he insists that God can be known. But traditionalism, as Fr. Stella insists, had a specific influence on the religious outlook of Don Bosco's century. Such traditionalism, as favored by Don Bosco, saw signs of God breaking into the human scene frequently. The extraordinary was, indeed, available.



## God in Don Bosco's Life

**Don Bosco saw the hand of God throughout his life marveling that God could make use of him!**

Don Bosco could often blend deep emotion and fear with joy. For him, God was humble and merciful empowering Don Bosco to do whatever he could. Don Bosco's response was one of biblical servitude. His tears at Sacra Cuore demonstrated this deep marveling at the revelation that God had used Don Bosco as a powerful and unlikely instrument.

## Understanding Man

As is evident in Don Bosco's understanding of God, man is a unique and uniquely blessed creature of God, the very image and likeness of God second only to the angels in heaven. To be complete, the human being is both body and soul, but the soul took prominence in his spirituality, borrowing from favorite spiritual authors. Don Bosco's language reflects these influences.

### *The human soul:*

The height of man's value resides in the soul as the very breath of God. Even the faculty of thinking in man is a gift connected to the soul and its great capacity for creativity proves the existence of God and makes of the soul his signature on the world.

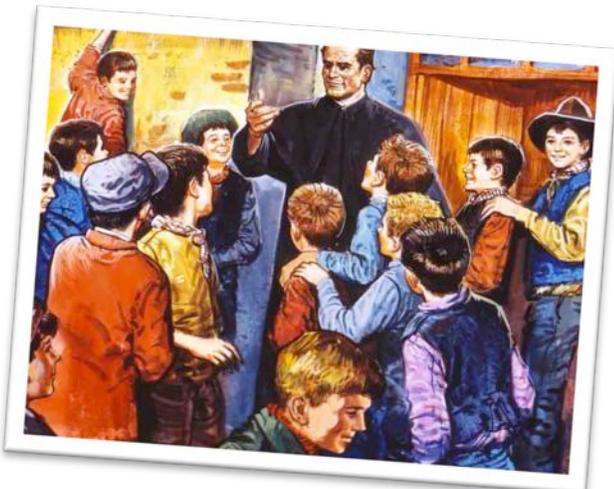
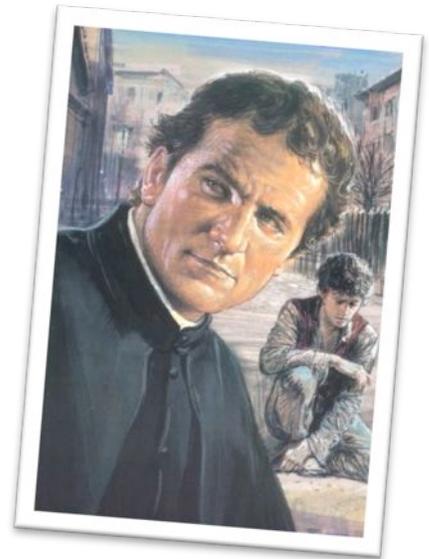
The human soul is immortal and free. Without these two central attributes, man could not claim to be made in the image of the Creator.

### *The human body:*

The body is the outward expression of the existence of man and is man's partner until death. This dependency has its roles and the body is the instrument of the soul and is meant to serve us. But its place in the hierarchy of spirituality is lower than the soul. It is not a passive reality but one that needs direction and cooperation. It is not self-possessed and it experience anguish as the soul strives for perfection. In fact, it is in this understanding that we can see an antithetical strain in Don Bosco's conception of the body. This demands decisive battle against the body, but only at the service of saving one's soul, not merely as some masochistic requirement of Christian discipleship.

### *The human heart*

We find the human will at the heart of man. For Don Bosco, the heart needed to be unattached to the world, emptied of its promises, and preserved for God. This was the task of sanctity. This work on the heart is a joint venture between God and man. It is the



grace of God, which calls the heart to that purification. In the end, this boils down to the central choice left in the hands of man: to choose the eternal or the temporal, the dedication to God or to things.

## Understanding Sin

### *Corruption of the human heart:*

Finally, we look at sin as understood by Don Bosco. For Don Bosco there was absolutely no middle ground. Sin was totally rejected. Arising from his view of God and humanity, sin is always understood as a deliberate act of rebellion against a loving and nurturing God. And God sees sin as ingratitude.

The act of choosing the created over the Creator, the material over the spiritual, was, for Don Bosco, the very “brutalizing of man.” There is evidence of Platonism reaching into Don Bosco’s concept of sin as he drew upon the spirituality of Aloysius Gonzaga—a saint constantly at battle with the body and its tendencies. Don Bosco borrows the imagery of man as a slave or a beast.

The imagery in Don Bosco’s dreams leaves no doubt about this stance against the horrors of sin. Sin can cloud a boy from his true purpose and place his soul in danger of mortal sin and eternal condemnation. Reason is extinguished and the boy follows the path to sin like a wild and uncontrollable beast.

Original sin transmitted the consequences of sin. One of its lasting effects is the corruption of the human heart and ignorance. Unbelief, in this model, is not an accident, but the result of a chain of sinful choices. Catholicism and true faith are, for

Don Bosco, the only remedy and to reject these, even in Protestantism, is deadly heresy.

### *Creatures after sin:*

Creation in all its beauty can become corrupted at the hands of humanity. Good pleasures may become luring and dangerous temptations. The promises of heaven and true happiness can become lost to counterfeits. In his *Companion of Youth* Don Bosco quotes St. Alphonsus in his bold rejection of the world and all of its promises. We find a strong comparison between the two saints in this approach. St. Alphonsus is permeated with anxiety over the power of sin, but never far from the source of the soul’s strength.

Don Bosco had a great fear of an offended God. This lent to his abhorrence of sin. Fr. Stella suggests that this fear was ever connected to a theology and his own personal experience. But pervasive in his theology is the predilection of the time for the propensity of man to choose weakness. Thus, we find the strong insistence upon prevention and active presence to avoid sin. And personally, Don Bosco warned the educator that responsibility for sin committed was also on his soul should he fail to be vigilant in assistance. The priest, more than others, would enter into heaven either with the souls he had saved or lost.

## Reflections

I was fourteen when I first heard the dream of Don Bosco in hell. It was read to us as part of a retreat as I entered into high school. That dream remains with me to this day. It is not an image of a loving God that I found elsewhere in Don Bosco and it has always been incongruous to me. With the study of his time and his worldview, it has helped to place this dream within a wider context, but it still remains a pebble in my shoe. Perhaps I need a bit of Don Bosco’s fear and a taste of his hunger for eternal things.

One day, I will wrestle this dilemma to the floor. But I tend to walk between Don Bosco’s abhorrence for sin and the maxim of Fr. John Tickle, an author and biblical scholar from New Mexico. Fr. Tickle insists that our interpretation of scripture or any other element we might refer to as spiritual—such as a private revelation, the instruction of a priest, or an interpretation of some event—must withstand the litmus test of the Good Shepherd. His words spoken at a conference for the interpretation of the Book of Revelations remain clearly etched on my mind. I will paraphrase this man whose example and influence I still carry today.



## Don Bosco and the World of Work and the Novel of Charles Dickens, “Hard Times.”

### Silvio Tramontin’s Treatment: Don Bosco and the World of Work

#### 1. *A Complex context:*

Silvio Tramontin decries the work of Gian Marion Bravo for his scant treatment of Don Bosco and Joseph Cottolengo in 19th century Piedmont. Bravo suggests that their movements were fringe movements which depended upon the aristocracy and divine providence and therefore incapable of embracing the whole of society. Bravo went further by suggesting that the followers of Don Bosco and Don Cottolengo, by applying mere theories of their ideals, would actually serve as obstacles to social and intellectual development of the masses. But Tramontin insists that Don Bosco was an exception among the socially minded saints of his region by inserting himself and his work into the mainstream culture attempting to address the rising problems of modernism affecting their society.

On the other hand, author Bairati, who penned a work entitled *Salesian Culture and Industrial Society*, recognized in Don Bosco and his work the “stopping off ground and place of inculturation” for the mass movement of youth from the country into the industrialized cities. He suggested that the Salesian culture stayed close to many of the changing conditions in society without

losing its own foundations. Organizationally, the Salesian culture, he maintained, was modern for its ability to mature the young for this changing world and help them play an important role in society. But this was accomplished with and through Christian love.

#### 2. *Don Bosco’s Concept of Work*

For Don Bosco work was the means for earning a living and the consequence of sin. A lengthy dream over the first two nights in May of 1871 framed within this world-view the means of salvation: toil, sweat, and continual prayer, reminiscent of his promises to the Salesian Family of bread, work, and paradise. His own upbringing and the story of his own vocation reflected this experience of work and toil and its use as a means for sanctification. Don Bosco embraced work of every kind from his childhood until his death. He saw every job as an opportunity to pray and to serve God. By this, Don Bosco courted a type of secularity to the extent that there is behind creation a certain order and goodness. The work of man, his destiny, has been “enobled by the work of Jesus.” This is the center of Don Bosco’s theology of work—an act of co-creation, continuing the work of God in the world.

Key also to Don Bosco’s view of work was its capacity to serve others. Merely as a means of production, work loses its soul. But done in service and out of love, it becomes the path to one’s salvation and a positive contribution to society at

large. This embrace of work included both intellectual and manual labor. He saw these styles as complementary.

### **3. *The kinds of work***

Don Bosco appealed for help for all three of his Oratories which he proudly asserted were positively effecting change in the city of Turin. While many of these youth could handle all manner of work both intellectually and manually, there were still others whose lack of basic needs prevented them from making a valuable contribution at the outset. It was for these youth that Don Bosco appealed to his society and various assistance for these most desperate youth. This appeal in 1862 reveals his Oratories at the heart of his project for changing lives and society through many varying types of work and training depending upon the means available.

### **4. *Enterprises for the world of work***

The three Oratories already in operation in Turin by 1847 were Don Bosco's main focus. Only about 7 boys were boarded at the Pinar di house at this stage, but another 700 boys were attending classes and training in the evenings.

The Oratories can be examined over three periods of history. The first phase is the early phase characterized by Don Bosco's concern to find decent jobs for the boys. Contracts still exist which show Don Bosco's outline for a good work experience, asking employers to treat the boys with kindness, fairness, and providing them enough time to pray, play, and rest. His "Mutual Aid" society was a structure put in place to help the boys become members of a sort of labor society with paying dues reserved to helping them if and when they should fall ill or incapacitated for any reason.

The next phase of the Oratory experience was the development of "coadjutors" which were both lay and religious. These prepared the way for trade and technical schools which had as one of its purposes the protection from abusive employers in society.

The professional schools was an idea long in the making. The initial workshops necessarily had to grow into professional institutes and tradeschools. To that end, the fourth General Chapter of 1887 established uniform guidelines for professional

schools. Rather than seeing the trade school as a negative link to the sad future of capitalism, Tramontin suggests that Don Bosco systematically contributed great growth and organization to society and developed important and practical relationships with entrepreneurial efforts.

His special contribution will be remembered in the field of publications. The explosion of publications of educational and devotional materials contributed to the education of the region as well as the business of many printing houses throughout Turin. So successful were these connections with industry that it would make possible the opening of a printing press within the Oratory by 1862. And this printing house "became the dynamic center of the Valdocco workshops. From this center grew other trades such as book-binding and a bookshop. Tramontin quotes Fr. Peter Stella who points out that Don Bosco had developed a "third way" of educating the young between the extremes of craftsmen and apprentice and the new model of tradeschools, Don Bosco opened his own large workshop producing and training simultaneously always on the look out for helping his young people more and more.

### **5. *Work and Rest***

Recreation was not only built into the contracts for the boys, it was often very creative and festive. Don Bosco saw the playground as a place to meet the young and to attract them initially. Games taught balance and working together. He did not like sedentary games because he felt the boys needed physical activity to spend their energies positively. Furthermore, such activity draws youth away from danger.

Walks and hikes were important, to get out of the city, to inspire wonder and appreciation in nature, and to bring a bit of creativity and culture into the working lives of these boys.

### **6. *Work and Piety***

Cheerfulness, work, and piety were woven together in Don Bosco's program. He saw piety and catechism linked to recreation and education. Don Bosco made it clear that piety and catechism were never an afterthought but the actual starting point of his mission. From his catechism lessons, the first band of boys grew into a large horde all in

need of religious instruction. As early as 1847, Don Bosco published his own additions to the catechism to meet such needs. He recognized a dire need to update the language and approach of catechism and piety and in this, suggests Tramontin, Don Bosco made a “qualitative leap.” His masterpiece along these efforts would be published in 1847 as *Giovane provveduto*.

The Eucharist and sacraments were the basis for the spiritual nourishment of both the boarders and the countless day students. But these were found always within a warm and familiar setting that evoked trust. It was intentional for Don Bosco that the experiences of piety, the approach to the sacraments, and the spiritual life in general be made a comfortable and integrated part of life, even as a respite from the toils of each day.

### 7. *As a conclusion*

Don Bosco extolled the dignity of work and the highest value of human life. He put at the center the importance of meaningful and personally dedicated work over mere production. Work has a value apart from profit-making which enriches the sense of shared community over individual advancement. And for Don Bosco, all of the dimensions and values of work had to contribute to the saving of souls.

## Charles Dickens Novel: *Hard Times*

### *The Tale of Self-made Men*

This novel by Charles Dickens revolves around the lives connected to a wealthy merchant in a town called Coketown. This man raises his two children according to the new rationalism with a propensity for self-absorption and adherence only to facts. This man, Thomas Gradgrind, even builds a school to promote these new trends while raising his children and another young person abandoned by her father.

Gradgrind’s natural children lead horrible and shallow lives. The son becomes a disillusioned and self-absorbed man who works with the bank in Coketown run by another so-called self-made-



man. The daughter marries a factory owner who is much older than she.

Another subplot develops by putting attention on the “Hands,” as the lowest laborers are known. At the center of this concurrent story is a young hand desiring to be free from a horrible marriage and marry another “hand.” “The Hands” rally to form a union for the calling of a strike. The young man fears increased tensions and is fired for refusing to participate in the plot to spy and strike. It is this poor man of integrity who grabs the attention of Gradgrind’s daughter, already trapped in a horrible marriage. She wants to help the young Hand. As he looks for work as a farmhand, he becomes the prime suspect of a bank robbery at the bank where Gradgrind’s son works.

The daughter of Grandgrind, Louisa, is blackmailed by an assistant at the bank because the poor girl is falling for a young educated man who has come to apprentice with the bank manager. The assistant tries to frame the daughter, but the daughter runs to her father to confess a life of meaningless misery. Her father, the self-made man and rational intellect is hit hard by this revelation and begins to rethink his own life. This is a turning point in the novel. It seems that the lessons of a heartless industrial world cannot be stopped and things continue to unravel mercilessly, taking the poor and the sophisticated down into the same hopelessness. In fact, the young Hand is symbolic of the effect of such self-serving tendencies upon the weak and the honest. He dies after falling into a shaft never able to marry the poor maiden also stuck as a Hand at the factory. The poor young Hand could not return to the town or fulfill his dream to marry simply because he was held as the most likely suspect in the bank robbery. But, in fact, it turns out that the bank has been robbed by the selfish son of Gradgrind. Tom, this disillusioned fugitive tries to make an escape but is stopped by a past student of Tom's own father who has turned his back on the foolishness of rationalism. Eventually, a circus hand enables Tom to make a successful escape.

One by one, the characters are exposed in their shallow and selfish lives until Mr. Gradgrind decides to turn his life toward helping the poor. His son dies before he can make such a complete conversion and his daughter remains unmarried and childless. Ironically, the person who comes to represent depth and goodness is the adopted child abandoned by the circus hand. This third child adopted by Gradgrind remains innocent and free of the poisonous culture of heartless and pragmatic rationalism dominating in her times. It is the poor and abandoned one whom, in the end, has happiness, a large family, and who even embraces her stepsister in her miserable state.

***Motivated by Personal Experience of Rejection and Poverty***

The story of Charles Dickens reads inexorably in auto-biographical detail. The rejection, hardship,

and forgotten status in a hardened urban setting plays out so many of personal details of the author. His own mother died leaving him to fend for himself in an institution. He finds his way to an aunt who was more fantasy and mystery to him than reality until he finds this angel to be a living and caring person who literally adopts Charles from the street. He works quite literally in many jobs in similar straits to the Hands he describes and even loses a possible marriage because he status does not suit her father's higher class. When Dickens eventually marries, his wife



**HARD TIMES.**

BOOK THE FIRST. SOWING.

becomes ill and discovers that his first love lives still with her father whose riches have been stolen in an act of betrayal as the father had grown more and more senile. The dying wife of the author arranges for this poor first love to meet with her and promise to marry Charles upon the death of this woman, his wife.

There are many other details, but it is enough to see that Dickens does eventually marry

and rescue his first love. He even steps into save her betrayed father and helps settle things in court for a return of his stolen and misappropriated properties.

Dickens saw the cold rationalism of an industrial world as the heart of the evils of his time and his world. Always at the center of the greatest abuse would be found the poor, the weak, and especially the uneducated youth. These were the voiceless ones of his society. He wrote to expunge this awful memory from his own veins, but more than catharsis, he cried loud and clear to a society and government quickly become deaf and blind to the horrible plight of these little ones. Though he would find success in his own time, he would struggle for many years. He knew the struggles of the lower classes. He starved, scraped, and struggled for most of his early life. And he knew that it could be avoided.

As Don Bosco used the printing press to turn a light on the very same conditions so too did Dickens highlight the horrors of his age. Both men gave a voice to the voiceless and engaged the comfortable bureaucrats with a reality they wanted badly to ignore. Neither men allowed this ignorance to endure.

Attached here is an article written by Charles Dickens in 1852, exactly the same time period in which Don Bosco began to develop his three Oratories and to respond to the repressive nature of education and the poverty of children outside of education caught in the tendrils of industrialization.

***Charles Dickens writes on “Ragged Schooling”(1852)***

I offer no apology for entreating the attention of the readers of The Daily News to an effort which has been making for some three years and a half, and which is making now, to introduce among the most miserable and neglected outcasts in London, some knowledge of the commonest principles of morality and religion; to commence their recognition as immortal human creatures, before the Gaol Chaplain becomes their only schoolmaster; to suggest to Society that its duty to this wretched throng, foredoomed to crime and punishment, rightfully begins at some distance from the police office; and that the careless maintenance from year to year, in this, the capital city of the world, of a vast hopeless

nursery of ignorance, misery and vice; a breeding place for the hulks and jails: is horrible to contemplate.

This attempt is being made in certain of the most obscure and squalid parts of the Metropolis, where rooms are opened, at night, for the gratuitous instruction of all comers, children or adults, under the title of RAGGED SCHOOLS. The name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity school, and who would be driven from any church door; are invited to come in here, and find some people not depraved, willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of Law, for their correction.

Before I describe a visit of my own to a Ragged School, and urge the readers of this letter for God's sake to visit one themselves, and think of it (which is my main object), let me say, that I know the prisons of London well; that I have visited the largest of them more times than I could count; and that the children in them are enough to break the heart and hope of any man. I have never taken a foreigner or a stranger of any kind to one of these establishments but I have seen him so moved at sight of the child offenders, and so affected by the contemplation of their utter renouncement and desolation outside the prison walls, that he has been as little able to disguise his emotion, as if some great grief had suddenly burst upon him. Mr. Chesterton and Lieutenant Tracey (than whom more intelligent and humane Governors of Prisons it would be hard, if not impossible, to find) know perfectly well that these children pass and repass through the prisons all their lives; that they are never taught; that the first distinctions between right and wrong are, from their cradles, perfectly confounded and perverted in their minds; that they come of untaught parents, and will give birth to another untaught generation; that in exact proportion to their natural abilities, is the extent and scope of their depravity; and that there is no escape or chance for them in any

ordinary revolution of human affairs. Happily, there are schools in these prisons now. If any readers doubt how ignorant the children are, let them visit those schools and see them at their tasks, and hear how much they knew when they were sent there. If they would know the produce of this seed, let them see a class of men and boys together, at their books (as I have seen them in the House of Correction for this county of Middlesex), and mark how painfully the full grown felons toil at the very shape and form of letters; their ignorance being so confirmed and solid. The contrast of this labour in the men, with the less blunted quickness of the boys; the latent shame and sense of degradation struggling through their dull attempts at infant lessons; and the universal eagerness to learn, impress me, in this passing retrospect, more painfully than I can tell.

For the instruction, and as a first step in the reformation, of such unhappy beings, the Ragged Schools were founded. I was first attracted to the subject, and indeed was first made conscious of their existence, about two years ago, or more, by seeing an advertisement in the papers dated from West Street, Saffron Hill, stating "That a room had been opened and supported in that wretched neighbourhood for upwards of twelve months, where religious instruction had been imparted to the poor", and explaining in a few words what was meant by Ragged Schools as a generic term, including, then, four or five similar places of instruction. I wrote to the masters of this particular school to make some further inquiries, and went myself soon afterwards.

It was a hot summer night; and the air of Field Lane and Saffron Hill was not improved by such weather, nor were the people in those streets very sober or honest company. Being unacquainted with the exact locality of the school, I was fain to make some inquiries about it. These were very jocosely received in general; but everybody knew where it was, and gave the right direction to it. The prevailing idea among the loungers (the greater part of them the very sweepings of the streets and station houses) seemed to be, that the teachers were quixotic, and the school upon the whole "a lark". But there was certainly a kind of rough respect for the intention, and (as I have said) nobody denied the school or its whereabouts, or refused assistance in directing to it.

It consisted at that time of either two or three-- I forget which-miserable rooms, upstairs in a

miserable house. In the best of these, the pupils in the female school were being taught to read and write; and though there were among the number, many wretched creatures steeped in degradation to the lips, they were tolerably quiet, and listened with apparent earnestness and patience to their instructors. The appearance of this room was sad and melancholy, of course--how could it be otherwise!--but, on the whole, encouraging.

The close, low chamber at the back, in which the boys were crowded, was so foul and stifling as to be, at first, almost insupportable. But its moral aspect was so far worse than its physical, that this was soon forgotten. Huddled together on a bench about the room, and shown out by some flaring candles stuck against the walls, were a crowd of boys, varying from mere infants to young men; sellers of fruit, herbs, lucifer-matches, flints; sleepers under the dry arches of bridges; young thieves and beggars--with nothing natural to youth about them: with nothing frank, ingenuous, or pleasant in their faces; low-browed, vicious, cunning, wicked; abandoned of all help but this; speeding downward to destruction; and UNUTTERABLY IGNORANT.

This, Reader, was one room as full as it could hold; but these were only grains in sample of a Multitude that are perpetually sifting through these schools; in sample of a Multitude who had within them once, and perhaps have now, the elements of men as good as you or I, and maybe infinitely better; in sample of a Multitude among whose doomed and sinful ranks (oh, think of this, and think of them!) the child of any man upon this earth, however lofty his degree, must, as by Destiny and Fate, be found, if, at its birth, it were consigned to such an infancy and nurture, as these fallen creatures had!

This was the Class I saw at the Ragged School. They could not be trusted with books; they could only be instructed orally; they were difficult of reduction to anything like attention, obedience, or decent behaviour; their benighted ignorance in reference to the Deity, or to any social duty (how could they guess at any social duty, being so discarded by all social teachers but the gaoler and the hangman!) was terrible to see. Yet, even here, and among these, something had

been done already. The Ragged School was of recent date and very poor; but he had inculcated some association with the name of the Almighty, which was not an oath, and had taught them to look forward in a hymn (they sang it) to another life, which would correct the miseries and woes of this.

The new exposition I found in this Ragged School, of the frightful neglect by the State of those whom it punishes so constantly, and whom it might, as easily and less expensively, instruct and save; together with the sight I had seen there, in the heart of London; haunted me, and finally impelled me to an endeavour to bring these Institutions under the notice of the Government; with some faint hope that the vastness of the question would supersede the Theology of the schools, and that the Bench of Bishops might adjust the latter question, after some small grant had been conceded. I made the attempt; and have heard no more of the subject from that hour.

The perusal of an advertisement in yesterday's paper, announcing a lecture on the Ragged Schools last night, has led me into these remarks. I might easily have given them another form; but I address this letter to you, in the hope that some few readers in whom I have awakened an interest, as a writer of fiction, may be, by that means, attracted to the subject, who might otherwise, unintentionally, pass it over.

I have no desire to praise the system pursued in the Ragged Schools; which is necessarily very imperfect, if indeed there be one. So far as I have any means of judging of what is taught there, I should individually object to it, as not being sufficiently secular, and as presenting too many religious mysteries and difficulties, to minds not sufficiently prepared for their reception. But I should very imperfectly discharge in myself the duty I wish to urge and impress on others, if I allowed any such doubt of mine to interfere with my appreciation of the efforts of these teachers, or my true wish to promote them by any slight means in my power. Irritating topics, of all kinds, are equally far removed from my purpose and intention. But, I adjure those excellent persons who aid, munificently, in the building of New Churches, to think of these Ragged Schools; to reflect whether some portion of their rich endowments

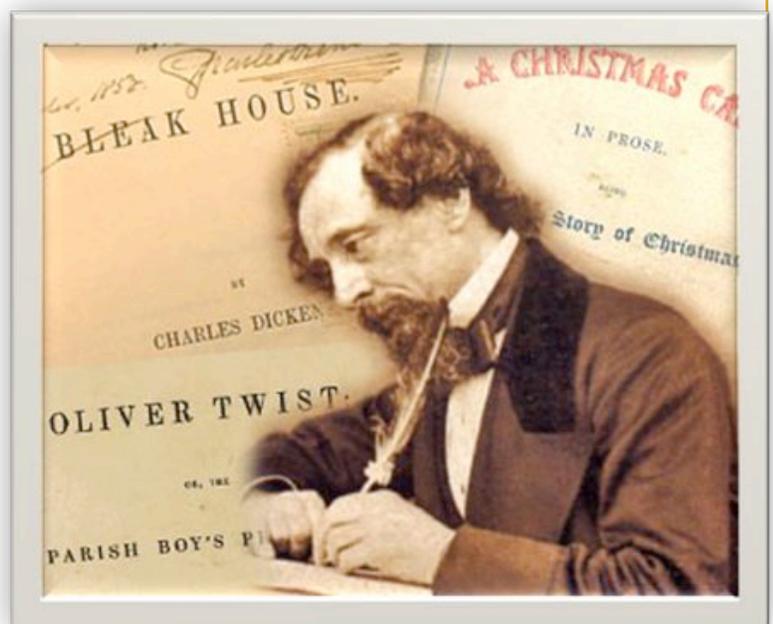
might not be spared for such a purpose; to contemplate, calmly, the necessity of beginning at the beginning; to consider for themselves where the Christian Religion most needs and most suggests immediate help and illustration; and not to decide on any theory or hearsay, but to go themselves into the Prisons and the Ragged Schools, and form their own conclusions. They will be shocked, pained, and repelled, by much that they learn there; but nothing they can learn will be onethousandth part so shocking, painful, and repulsive, as the continuance for one year more of these things as they have been for too many years already.

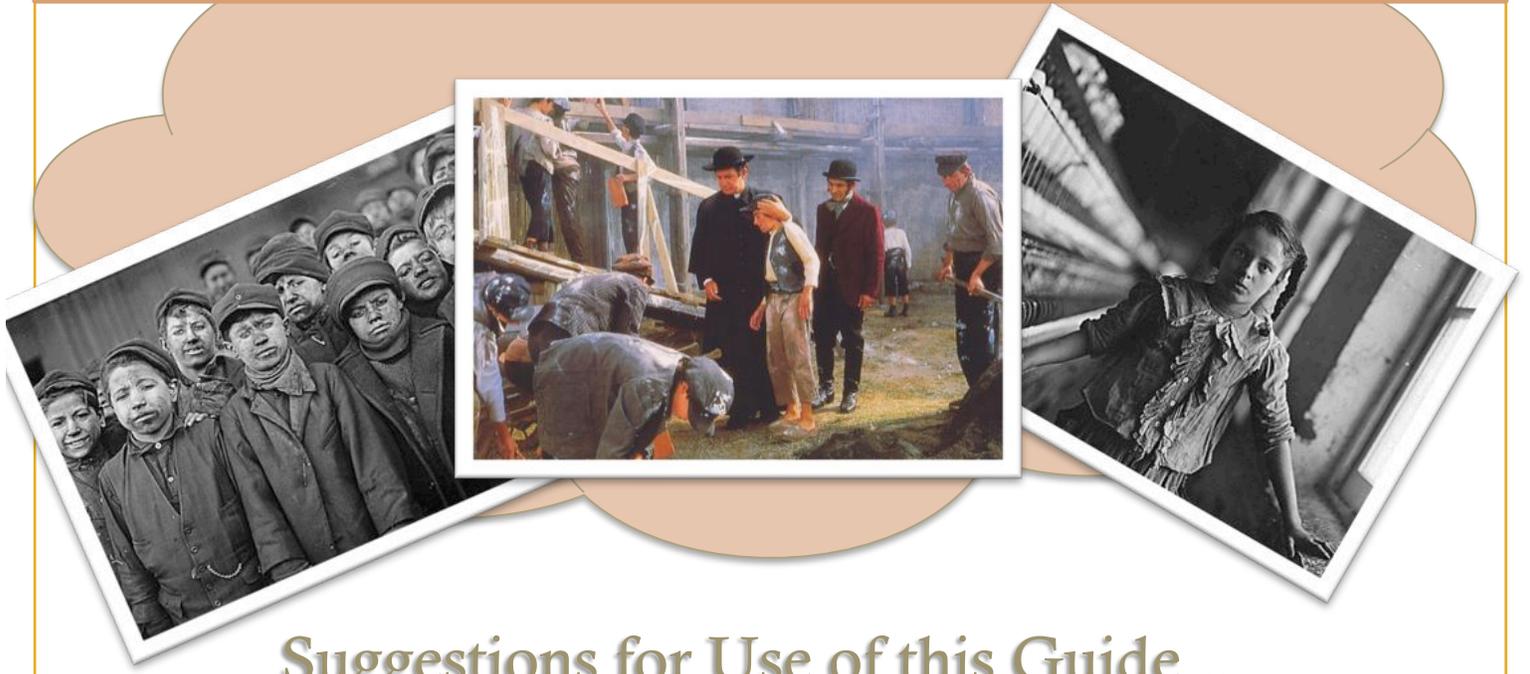
Anticipating that some of the more prominent facts connected with the history of the Ragged Schools, may become known to the readers of *The Daily News* through your account of the lecture in question, I abstain (though in possession of some such information) from pursuing the question further, at this time. But if I should see occasion, I will take leave to return to it.

First published 13 March 1852, *The Daily News*

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First placed in the archives: November 2001





## Suggestions for Use of this Guide...

### Community Days

During the Founder's Month...

- Become familiar with the present day work conditions affecting the lives of young people and their families.
- With careful attention to the plight of the undocumented, explore ways to reach out to families caught between cultures and economic conditions. Discuss practical means for providing services to these families within the mission of your Salesian presence.

### With the Young

Job fairs and Career Days are often a part of the Salesian Mission. Perhaps these opportunities can bring much needed attention to the local poor who seem stuck in this economic downturn.

- Invite young people to learn about job hunting
- Alert them to the advantages and dangers of their profiles available on the internet
- Help them to market themselves as responsible young people in a way that does not compromise their opportunities

In this time for college application, assist the young people through the complicated paperwork.

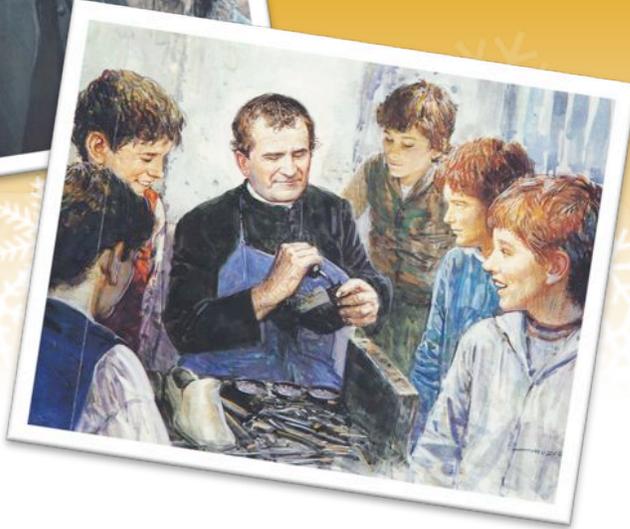
### Cooperators

As Cooperators deeply aware of the present economic conditions, become a resource for young people in finding meaningful work. Perhaps you can offer a session to local teens for creating resumes. Where you can, introduce young people into the world of your own employment. Offer shadow days and apprentice opportunities. Be sure to pray for families struggling to find decent work and meaningful lives.

### Colleagues

Many people are facing uncertainty because of their job security, the lack of benefits for their families, and other financial woes. This is a time when we can give practical assistance to one another. Help the unemployed look for work. Assist colleagues with letters of recommendation, skills for saving and investing, and even where possible offering financial assistance when necessary. In a special way this month, pay close attention to young families struggling to feed and clothe their children. Educate the young to reach out with their means, as well, doing all they can for those struggling to survive.

## Don Bosco for Today



These hard financial times would not be something that Don Bosco would easily dismiss. His example both inspires and haunts us as he gave everything, especially to the poor. He felt the pangs of hunger, suffered the cold, and dove into the hostile world around him to rescue young people from poverty in its many manifestations. May your attentiveness to the poor bring you closer to the heart and mission of Don Bosco!

### Ask an expert!

*Share your questions for Fr. Arthur...*

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

### Guidelines for Deeper Study...

From the Critical Works of Fr. Arthur Lenti peruse the following treatments of the material included in this Study Guide

- In *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, volume 3: "Don Bosco Spiritual Master, Writer and Founder of the Salesian Society, read chapter 3, "The Decade 1850-1861 and Its Importance" found on pages 59-107.
- This survey of the critical times of Don Bosco examine his actions and decisions in the midst of revolution and political upheaval.
- This important decade introduces the vital role of the Salesian Lay Brother and the introduction of the Trade-schools.

From the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, by St. John Bosco, read the following sections:

- Read Chapters 40-63, pp.134-190. These chapters are the last reporting of Don Bosco in this volume and form the third part of the Memoirs: *The Third Decade: 1846-1855*

From *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, by Pietro Stella, SDB, read the following chapters:

- "Chapter 1: God, Creator, and Lord" pp. 3-18
- "Chapter 2: The Human Being" pp. 19-28.
- "Chapter 3: Sin" pp. 29-45.

STELLA Pietro, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, DRURY J, (translation) Salesiana Publishers, New York, 1996.