**PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY**

**Institute of Spirituality**

*Doctoral dissertation*

AUTHOR

**GIUSEPPE BUCCELLATO SDB**

**IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

**ROLE OF MENTAL PRAYER**

**IN THE FOUNDING CHARISM**

**OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO**

MODERATOR

**MANUEL RUIZ JURADO SJ**

ROME - 29 NOVEMBER 1999

# PRESENTATION

In the *Preface* to the first edition of *Don Bosco con Dio* by Salesian Fr Eugenio Ceria, published in 1929, the year of the beatification of the founder of the Salesians, the author wrote, with depth of feeling: “No, let no one be under the illusion that he understands Don Bosco if he does not know how much he was a man of prayer; anyone too focused on the biographical details would gain little insight regarding his remarkable life unless they delve deeply into his inner and habitual experiences.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

In my opinion, the bibliography on Don Bosco over the last forty years shows a considerable imbalance between the numerous pedagogical and historical studies and the few publications and articles that can be placed within the content and methodological framework of spiritual theology.

Already in 1973, Salesian historian Fr Pietro Stella noted: “Research on the spirituality of Don Bosco and the Salesians today is perhaps not as advanced as that on the educational system. This fact imposes itself on the study of the historian and on those who wish to predict the possible future developments of the Salesian phenomenon.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Alongside this more general observation, I feel I must note that some of the most recent biographical studies on the founder of the Salesians have been more concerned with clearing the field of any hagiographic exaggeration than with attempting to penetrate the sanctuary of his intimate life, to reinterpret his inner motivations, the principles that animated his fervent spirit of prayer, and the spiritual and significant traits of the religious life he proposed to the Salesian congregation, a project that is manifested but not exhausted in his apostolic mission.

The aid of *historical criticism* has made it possible to “demythologise” the history of the origins; but the attempt to re-read the lives of the saints “apart from their holiness”, that is, starting only from psychological or sociological categories, has deepened the divide between *biography* and *spiritual life*, between *history* and *hagiography*.

The theological sciences can have a different approach, in content and method, to the history of the saints because their frame of reference and epistemological presuppositions are different. In this context, the lives of these men and women can be read as a *theological existence*, a *mission received*, an *experience communicated* in the Spirit and by the Spirit, and, in the final analysis, as a true *exegesis* of the mystery of Christ.[[3]](#footnote-4) In the saint, in fact, there is an objective “pacification” between *holiness* and *theology*, between *spiritual theology* and *dogmatic theology*, inasmuch as holiness, as a lived, “Marian” acceptance of the divine mystery, is an exegesis of Revelation. Therefore, it can become the *theological place* where the kind of reflective theology which is the science of theologians can be nourished and *reformulated*, in accordance with the mystery of the *Incarnation*.

When I undertook this study, I sensed that research on the question of prayer, particularly *mental* prayer, could open up a privileged perspective on the attempt to “glimpse” the spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians and his “theological mission”.[[4]](#footnote-5)

However, the task soon appeared arduous. Despite the large amount of published and unpublished writings by the Turin saint, it is not possible to find either a *treatise* on prayer (Don Bosco is not a theorist, he is not interested in this) or a *spiritual diary* that “reveals” the sanctuary of his inner life. From his writings, even those that we can classify as *autobiographical* or from the thousands of letters in his correspondence, it is not possible to directly glean elements concerning his personal life of prayer. Don Bosco narrates, teaches, admonishes, asks for help for his works, gives thanks, blesses, but he is the jealous guardian of his innermost life.

It was therefore necessary to broaden the field to include a considerable number of texts which, at least indirectly, would give us an insight into his “feelings” on the subject of prayer. This necessity motivates and “justifies” the ample space devoted to the analytical section.

Having discarded any possibility of taking *shortcuts* to understand the role of mental prayer in the spiritual experience and founding charism of the saintly Piedmontese educator, I had no choice but to “resign myself” to an *indirect* but *comprehensive* approach to the abundant heritage of published and unpublished *sources*. In particular, it was necessary to draw on several different resources: the writings of the founder, the elements that allow us to reconstruct his life and the formation he received and imparted in relation to *mental* prayer, the history of the origins of the congregation and the early Salesian magisterium and, finally, the *feelings* and, as far as possible, the experiences of the *first group of disciples*, the first authoritative interpreters of the charism of the foundation.

The questions I put to the sources, however, did not concern only *formal mental prayer* or *meditation*, but also every other form of prayer that *actibus internis intellectus et voluntatis absolvitur.* The simple habit of *constantly thinking about God,* the insistence on *conscious* vocal prayer, the emphasis given to *adoration* and to devotional forms of intimate and affective prayer, night prayer... the importance given to daily *meditation* itself and its methods, the role assigned to certain privileged times for personal prayer such as *periodic days of recollection* or *spiritual exercises/retreats*,[[5]](#footnote-6) and, finally, the sentiment expressed towards *contemplative prayer* in general and the *extraordinary gifts* of passive contemplation.

We have thus entered the great “castle” of *Salesian sources* (I will say something about this briefly, comforted by the suggestion of a metaphor); without *specialised guides*, without privileged paths.

I had been assured that this immense manor house, perhaps one of the most abundant in terms of rooms among those that still embellish the landscape of the history of spirituality, did not possess many original rooms worthy of a scholar’s interest. Furniture of dubious taste, outdated furnishings and “borrowed” items, few “original” paintings. The wisest choice would have been to move immediately into that truly special place known as the *preventive system*, and live there for the duration of the visit.

But I was motivated more by a desire to learn about the castle’s *supporting structures*, which explain its solidity and rapid and harmonious expansion, and, through them, to recognise the mind, heart and tastes of its *architect*, than by any interest in art. From this point of view, therefore, even the least *original* rooms of the castle and the *borrowed furnishings* acquired their value in their ability to transparently reveal the inner world of their creator.

From this perspective, even the problem of the controversial, or rather, alleged *lack of originality* of a certain part of Don Bosco’s literary production was secondary to the objective of understanding the “feelings” of the founder. Even the occasional *edifying exaggerations*, linked in particular to the only “*libri scritti senza altri libri*” (“books written without other books” – the expression is Fr Caviglia's), exaggerations that *disturb* the historian’s reconstructions, reveal, sometimes in an eminent way, the particular *model of holiness* constantly presented by Don Bosco to his followers and, more specifically, the role that prayer is “assigned” in this model.

Anticipating the conclusions of the study, we could say that the analytical examination of the *sources* in relation to the role of *mental* and *formal prayer* in the founding charism of St John Bosco has revealed a broad convergence at several different levels.

– First of all, we can observe a vital harmony between the *formation* Don Bosco received and the traits of his *spiritual experience* that we can glimpse through his writings, both autobiographical and otherwise, the story of his life and the testimonies of those who shared a significant period of his human journey with him.

– Secondly, the same consistency can be observed in his numerous *spiritual writings* which, although not theological *treatises* but rather popular or edifying writings, reveal throughout his life his constantly positive judgement on the value of mental prayer in Christian and religious life.

– Another important indicator of continuity can be found in Don Bosco’s long pastoral experience and, in particular, from his “project” of *educating young people to prayer,* which can be reconstructed from his educational practice and from the analysis of some widely read *manuals* and biographies.

– A final indicator of continuity, and the most important in relation to focusing on the *founding charism*, is the consistency that guides the gradual manifestation and development of the foundation project, as emerges, in particular, from the first constitutions, from the texts that accompany their publication and facilitate their correct hermeneutics, from the teaching that guides the consolidation of the foundation, from the teachings of the first novitiate and also from some aspects of the spiritual experience of the first Salesians, the most authoritative “interpreters” of the founder’s charism.

These four complementary aspects then converge towards a coherent unity of thought and practice, which allows us to interpret some *fragments* of his spiritual experience, his literary production and the testimonies of his life of prayer within an *overall totality* that brings us closer to *knowledge* of the founder and then returns to shed light on each individual fragment, restoring it to us as *part* of an orderly and coherent *whole*.

The extensive analysis points towards an appreciation of the *contemplative dimension* in the spiritual experience of St John Bosco and in the charism of the foundation of the Salesian congregation.

Far beyond the essential nature of certain *obligations* formalised in the constitutional dictates, the founder’s proposal emerges, moving towards a concept of Christian and religious life lived in the constant *presence of God*. Beyond *formal* mental prayer, which is strongly recommended, the spirituality of the founder of the Salesians encourages *diffused* mental prayer, continuous thought of God, affective and silent prayer “without time limits”, and does not exclude the horizon of contemplative experience. This fact is even more relevant in the context of 19th-century Piedmontese spirituality, which was not particularly inclined towards manifestations of the mystical life.

The charism of the founder of the Salesians and the project he proposed to the *spiritual movement* he began, do not contrast *active life* with *contemplative life*, but rather combine both as different manifestations of the same *love for God* that Don Bosco himself, according to what the Church declared when canonising him, lived in a *heroic* way.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the beatification of Dominic Savio, a pupil of the oratory who died in 1857. It was the time when Don Bosco was preparing to write the first draft of the constitutions for the nascent congregation. Two years later, in 1959, he wrote in *The Life of the Young Dominic Savio*: “his thanksgiving was liable to have no end to it. If he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he in prayer or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy.”[[6]](#footnote-7) “The innocence of his life, his love of God and great desire for the things of God so developed Dominic’s mind that he came to be habitually united with God.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

Are these hagiographic exaggerations? In any case, these writings give us an idea of the spiritual “climate” of those years: this is the model of holiness continually proposed, without distinction, to young people as well as to that first, unique group of religious, many of whom were still just teenagers.

It is this educational environment, made up of emulation and love of prayer, that constitutes the hermeneutical setting for interpreting the first constitutional dictum, but also the rapid expansion of the congregation: a single piety for all, young people and Salesians, towards a “high standard” of Christian life.

I am publishing this study a few years after its completion, leaving it unchanged due to its particular nature and in accordance with the requirements of the series in which it finds its natural place. At the conclusion of this *experience*, my personal and most heartfelt thanks go to the moderator, Fr Manuel Ruiz Jurado, S.J., whose careful guidance and constant support have made the completion of this work possible. I also express my deep gratitude to Fr Giuseppe Troina, my former provincial, to my confreres Fr Salvatore Mangiapane and Fr Biagio Lazzara for their patient re-reading, to my confreres at the Salesian Central Archives and to Fr Cosimo Semeraro, director of the *Centro Studi Don Bosco*, for their availability during the consultation of sources.

I dedicate these pages to my mother and my brother, but also to all those young Salesians who feel the urgency to *set sail* in the new millennium without considering the spiritual history of our origins to be useless ballast.

Finally, I would like to remember all those who have been my companions on the journey in times of difficulty and suffering, but also in the joyful discoveries of these years.

Rome, 31 January 2004

Fr Giuseppe Buccellato

Table of Contents

[PRESENTATION 2](#__RefHeading___Toc20861_1352903096)

[ABBREVIATIONS 12](#__RefHeading___Toc76623_1352903096)

[INTRODUCTION 13](#__RefHeading___Toc76709_1352903096)

[CHAPTER 1 14](#__RefHeading___Toc76711_1352903096)

[Mental prayer in today’s ecclesial context and in the context of research into Salesian spirituality, its assumptions and motivation 14](#__RefHeading___Toc76713_1352903096)

[1. Assumptions and motivations 14](#__RefHeading___Toc76715_1352903096)

[2. A look at current research on Don Bosco in the spiritual theology 16](#__RefHeading___Toc76717_1352903096)

[3. Notes on method 18](#__RefHeading___Toc76719_1352903096)

[4. Mental prayer: semantic clarifications 19](#__RefHeading___Toc76721_1352903096)

[4.1 Some distinctions 20](#__RefHeading___Toc76723_1352903096)

[4.2 The purpose of my study 22](#__RefHeading___Toc76725_1352903096)

[5. General plan of the study 23](#__RefHeading___Toc76727_1352903096)

[CHAPTER 2 26](#__RefHeading___Toc76729_1352903096)

[The founding charism and its hermeneutics 26](#__RefHeading___Toc76731_1352903096)

[1. Consecrated life as a charism for the Church 26](#__RefHeading___Toc76733_1352903096)

[1.1 Charism and religious life in official documentation 27](#__RefHeading___Toc76735_1352903096)

[1.2 The term ‘charism’ in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita Consecrata” 29](#__RefHeading___Toc76737_1352903096)

[2. The use of the term ‘charism’ in theological discussion 30](#__RefHeading___Toc76739_1352903096)

[2.1 Charism of the founder 30](#__RefHeading___Toc76741_1352903096)

[2.2 Collective or permanent charism of the institute 32](#__RefHeading___Toc76743_1352903096)

[2.3 Founding charism, original charism 36](#__RefHeading___Toc468031758)

[3. Combining fidelity and renewal 37](#__RefHeading___Toc76745_1352903096)

[3.1 A gift to get to know 39](#__RefHeading___Toc76747_1352903096)

[3.2 A gift to be discerned 40](#__RefHeading___Toc76749_1352903096)

[3.3 A gift to be safeguarded 40](#__RefHeading___Toc76751_1352903096)

[3.4 A gift to be developed 41](#__RefHeading___Toc76753_1352903096)

[4. The hermeneutics of the founding charism 43](#__RefHeading___Toc76755_1352903096)

[4.1 Contemporary hermeneutics and spiritual discernment 44](#__RefHeading___Toc76757_1352903096)

[4.2 The hermeneutical journey 45](#__RefHeading___Toc76759_1352903096)

[4.2.1 The study of the sources to identify the charism 46](#__RefHeading___Toc76761_1352903096)

[4.2.2 The interpretation of the charism 50](#__RefHeading___Toc76763_1352903096)

[ANALYSIS 51](#__RefHeading___Toc91306_1352903096)

[CHAPTER 3 52](#__RefHeading___Toc91308_1352903096)

[At the sources of the spiritual experience: 52](#__RefHeading___Toc91310_1352903096)

[childhood and early formation period 52](#__RefHeading___Toc91312_1352903096)

[1. In the sanctuary of spiritual experience 52](#__RefHeading___Toc91314_1352903096)

[2.2 Towards a documented and unprejudiced hagiography 56](#__RefHeading___Toc468031772)

[3. At the dawning: the family and farming setting of The Becchi 58](#__RefHeading___Toc91316_1352903096)

[3.1 In the beginning was the mother 60](#__RefHeading___Toc91318_1352903096)

[3.2 The Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales 62](#__RefHeading___Toc91320_1352903096)

[3.3 A general criterion for interpreting Don Bosco’s “spiritual writings” 64](#__RefHeading___Toc91322_1352903096)

[3.4 Education to prayer 65](#__RefHeading___Toc91324_1352903096)

[3.5 Work and prayer: the first seeds of a vital synthesis 66](#__RefHeading___Toc91326_1352903096)

[4. Adolescence and youth: the time to make choices 68](#__RefHeading___Toc91328_1352903096)

[4.1 Spiritual friendships in Chieri 68](#__RefHeading___Toc91330_1352903096)

[4.2 Choosing a state of life and entering the seminary 69](#__RefHeading___Toc91332_1352903096)

[4.3 Clerical clothing 70](#__RefHeading___Toc91334_1352903096)

[5. At the seminary 71](#__RefHeading___Toc91336_1352903096)

[5.1 Practices of piety at the Chieri seminary 71](#__RefHeading___Toc91338_1352903096)

[5.2 The “discovery” of the Imitation of Christ 73](#__RefHeading___Toc91340_1352903096)

[5.3 Seminarian Louis Comollo 73](#__RefHeading___Toc91342_1352903096)

[5.4 Holy Orders 76](#__RefHeading___Toc91344_1352903096)

[6. At the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin 79](#__RefHeading___Toc91346_1352903096)

[6.1 The Convitto Ecclesiastico’s formation project 81](#__RefHeading___Toc91348_1352903096)

[6.2 Practices of piety at the Convitto 83](#__RefHeading___Toc91350_1352903096)

[6.3 Don Bosco’s judgement regarding his Convitto experience 85](#__RefHeading___Toc91352_1352903096)

[7. St Joseph Cafasso 87](#__RefHeading___Toc91354_1352903096)

[7.1 Fr Cafasso and Don Bosco 88](#__RefHeading___Toc91356_1352903096)

[7.2 Some of Cafasso’s teachings on mental prayer 91](#__RefHeading___Toc91358_1352903096)

[8. The Spiritual Exercises in Piedmont in the 19th century 95](#__RefHeading___Toc91360_1352903096)

[8.1 The Spiritual Exercises at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius above Lanzo 97](#__RefHeading___Toc91362_1352903096)

[8.2 Don Bosco at St Ignatius 99](#__RefHeading___Toc91364_1352903096)

[8.3 The Spiritual Exercises in Don Bosco’s personal and apostolic experience 102](#__RefHeading___Toc91366_1352903096)

[9. Conclusion: mental prayer in his childhood and formation experience 105](#__RefHeading___Toc91368_1352903096)

[CHAPTER 4 107](#__RefHeading___Toc145991_2104736509)

[The journey towards the foundation 107](#__RefHeading___Toc145993_2104736509)

[1. The beginnings: a simple catechism lesson 107](#__RefHeading___Toc145995_2104736509)

[2. Educating young people to prayer 109](#__RefHeading___Toc145997_2104736509)

[2.1 What kind of prayer at Don Bosco’s school? 111](#__RefHeading___Toc145999_2104736509)

[2.2 The thought of the presence of God 114](#__RefHeading___Toc146001_2104736509)

[2.3 Eucharistic devotion 115](#__RefHeading___Toc146003_2104736509)

[2.4 The Spiritual Exercises or retreats and the exercise for a Happy Death 118](#__RefHeading___Toc146005_2104736509)

[2.5 Meditation 122](#__RefHeading___Toc146007_2104736509)

[2.5.1 Meditation in *The Companion of Youth* 122](#__RefHeading___Toc146009_2104736509)

[2.5.2 Holiday advice 125](#__RefHeading___Toc146011_2104736509)

[2.6 Silence after the “good night” 128](#__RefHeading___Toc146013_2104736509)

[2.7 Attentive vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer 128](#__RefHeading___Toc146015_2104736509)

[3. Mental prayer and models of youthful holiness: the first biographies of young people 129](#__RefHeading___Toc146017_2104736509)

[3.1 *I cenni storici sulla vita del chierico luigi comollo* (Historical notes on the life of the cleric Louis Comollo) 135](#__RefHeading___Toc146019_2104736509)

[3.1.1 The “time” for prayer. Affective prayer 136](#__RefHeading___Toc146021_2104736509)

[3.1.2 Importance of meditation 137](#__RefHeading___Toc146023_2104736509)

[3.1.3 Asceticism and mental prayer 137](#__RefHeading___Toc146025_2104736509)

[3.1.4 Ecstasy, tears and raptures. Contemplative prayer 138](#__RefHeading___Toc146027_2104736509)

[3.1.5 Method in prayer 138](#__RefHeading___Toc146029_2104736509)

[3.2 The six Sundays in Honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga 139](#__RefHeading___Toc146031_2104736509)

[3.3 Vita del giovanetto Sovio Domenico (Life of Dominic Savio) 140](#__RefHeading___Toc146033_2104736509)

[3.3.1 Contemplative prayer 142](#__RefHeading___Toc146035_2104736509)

[3.3.2 Locutions and visions 143](#__RefHeading___Toc146037_2104736509)

[3.4 The “Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele” (The Biographical Sketch of young Michael Magone) 144](#__RefHeading___Toc146039_2104736509)

[3.5 Il pastorello delle Alpi, o La Vita del giovane Besucco Francesco (*The Little Shepherd Boy of the Alps, or the Life of young Francis Besucco*) 146](#__RefHeading___Toc146041_2104736509)

[3.5.1 Love for prayer 147](#__RefHeading___Toc146043_2104736509)

[3.5.2 Time for prayer, and union with God 147](#__RefHeading___Toc146045_2104736509)

[3.5.3 Prayer during the night 148](#__RefHeading___Toc146047_2104736509)

[3.5.4 Raptures and ecstasy 148](#__RefHeading___Toc146049_2104736509)

[3.6 The Biographie du jeune Fleury Antoine Colle (The Life of young Antoine Colle Fleury) 149](#__RefHeading___Toc146051_2104736509)

[4. Conclusion: youthful holiness and Salesian holiness 150](#__RefHeading___Toc146053_2104736509)

[CHAPTER 5 152](#__RefHeading___Toc165548_2104736509)

[Don Bosco, founder and spiritual author 152](#__RefHeading___Toc165550_2104736509)

[1. Founder 152](#__RefHeading___Toc165552_2104736509)

[2. A look at the main events 157](#__RefHeading___Toc296428_2104736509)

[2. Spiritual author 161](#__RefHeading___Toc296430_2104736509)

[3.1 The Mese di maggio and the Porta teco of 1858 164](#__RefHeading___Toc296432_2104736509)

[3.2 Sermon notes: Forty Hours devotion, Eucharistic piety 165](#__RefHeading___Toc179529_39525145)

[3.3 The Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso (The Life of Father Jospeh Cafasso) 167](#__RefHeading___Toc179531_39525145)

[3.4 La biografia della Beata Maria degli Angeli (The Life of Blessed Mary of the Angels) 170](#__RefHeading___Toc179533_39525145)

[3.5 From the Epistolario 174](#__RefHeading___Toc179535_39525145)

[3.6 Fr Bonetti’s revision of Il cattolico provveduto 178](#__RefHeading___Toc179537_39525145)

[4. Mental prayer and practices of piety in Don Bosco’s constitutions 181](#__RefHeading___Toc179539_39525145)

[4.1 Evolution of the constitutional provisions in relation to practices of piety and daily meditation 185](#__RefHeading___Toc468031842)

[4.2 Assessments of the constitutional text 187](#__RefHeading___Toc468031843)

[4.3 Towards the formation of religious awareness 192](#__RefHeading___Toc179541_39525145)

[5. The spiritual exercises/retreats for the Salesians: the beginnings 195](#__RefHeading___Toc179543_39525145)

[5.1 From Fr Berto's notes of 1867 197](#__RefHeading___Toc179545_39525145)

[5.2 From Don Bosco’s handwritten notebook from 1869 and the corresponding notebook of Don Berto’s notes. 200](#__RefHeading___Toc179547_39525145)

[5.3 Two undated manuscript sheets 200](#__RefHeading___Toc179549_39525145)

[5.4 Some brief conclusions on the documents regarding the Exercises at Trofarello 201](#__RefHeading___Toc179551_39525145)

[6. The spiritual exercises and the exercise for a happy death in Don Bosco’s constitutions 202](#__RefHeading___Toc179553_39525145)

[CHAPTER 6 205](#__RefHeading___Toc179555_39525145)

[Consolidation of the foundation 205](#__RefHeading___Toc179557_39525145)

[1. Consolidation and expansion 205](#__RefHeading___Toc179559_39525145)

[2. The first canonical novitiate and teachings on mental prayer 208](#__RefHeading___Toc179561_39525145)

[2.1 Biographical notes on Fr Giulio Barberis, director of novices 209](#__RefHeading___Toc468031854)

[2.2 Fr Barberis’ personality and the identity of the first novitiate 212](#__RefHeading___Toc468031855)

[2.3 Mental prayer in Fr Giulio Barberis’ first conferences to the novices 215](#__RefHeading___Toc468031856)

[2.4 Mental prayer and practices of piety in some other of Fr Barberis’ notes 224](#__RefHeading___Toc179563_39525145)

[2.5 Novitiate and mental prayer: Conclusions 227](#__RefHeading___Toc179565_39525145)

[3. The Italian editions of the Constitutions and the introduction “To the Salesian confreres” 228](#__RefHeading___Toc179567_39525145)

[3.1 practices of piety and meditation in the introduction to the constitutions, *to the Salesian confreres* 231](#__RefHeading___Toc468031860)

[3.2 St Vincent de Paul’s letter on everyone rising at the same time 233](#__RefHeading___Toc468031861)

[3.2.1 *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo De' Paoli [The Christian guided in virtue and civilisation according to the spirit of St Vincent de Paul]* 234](#__RefHeading___Toc468031862)

[3.2.2 The contents of the letter 235](#__RefHeading___Toc468031863)

[5.2.3 Some concluding remarks 238](#__RefHeading___Toc468031864)

[3.3 the letters of St Alphonsus. Outlines 239](#__RefHeading___Toc468031865)

[4. Prayer and mental prayer in the first Salesian necrologies (obituaries) 239](#__RefHeading___Toc468031866)

[4.1 Some recurring themes in relation to prayer 241](#__RefHeading___Toc468031867)

[4.2 meditation 244](#__RefHeading___Toc468031868)

[5. The first four general chapters of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales 248](#__RefHeading___Toc179569_39525145)

[5.1 The text for meditation and retreats in the First General Chapter 249](#__RefHeading___Toc468031870)

[5.1.1 The Question of the Meditation Text 251](#__RefHeading___Toc468031871)

[5.1.2 A reference to Trofarello’s first spiritual exercises or retreat 255](#__RefHeading___Toc468031872)

[5.1.3 The recommended texts for preaching the Spiritual Exercises 255](#__RefHeading___Toc468031873)

[5.2 The second General Chapter 257](#__RefHeading___Toc468031874)

[5.3 The Third General Chapter and regulations for the spiritual exercises 257](#__RefHeading___Toc468031875)

[5.3.1 Some observations on the regulations for the Spiritual Exercises 258](#__RefHeading___Toc468031876)

[5.3.2 The final text of the Regulations for the spiritual exercises/retreats 260](#__RefHeading___Toc468031877)

[5.4 The Fourth General Chapter 264](#__RefHeading___Toc468031878)

[6. His final years 265](#__RefHeading___Toc468031879)

[CHAPTER 7 268](#__RefHeading___Toc179571_39525145)

[Mental prayer in Don Bosco’s religious experience 268](#__RefHeading___Toc179573_39525145)

[Testimonies of contemporaries 268](#__RefHeading___Toc179575_39525145)

[1. Holiness from up close 268](#__RefHeading___Toc179577_39525145)

[2. The cause of beatification and canonisation 270](#__RefHeading___Toc179579_39525145)

[2.1 Brief history of the process 270](#__RefHeading___Toc179581_39525145)

[2.2 Some testimonies from the cause 272](#__RefHeading___Toc179583_39525145)

[2.2.1 Testimonies of continuous union with God 272](#__RefHeading___Toc179585_39525145)

[2.2.2 Formal mental prayer 274](#__RefHeading___Toc179587_39525145)

[2.2.3 Ejaculatory prayer 277](#__RefHeading___Toc179589_39525145)

[2.2.4 The gift of tears 277](#__RefHeading___Toc179591_39525145)

[2.2.5 Other external signs and attitudes of the body 279](#__RefHeading___Toc179593_39525145)

[2.3 The *Aliae novae animadversiones* and definitive *Responsiones* 280](#__RefHeading___Toc179595_39525145)

[2.3.1 Some premises 282](#__RefHeading___Toc179597_39525145)

[2.3.2 Distinction between acquired and infused contemplation 282](#__RefHeading___Toc179599_39525145)

[2.3.3 *Ad perfectam cum Deo unionem pervenit* 283](#__RefHeading___Toc179601_39525145)

[2.3.4 Conformity to the divine will 283](#__RefHeading___Toc179603_39525145)

[2.3.5 Apostolic concern and continuous presence with God 283](#__RefHeading___Toc179605_39525145)

[2.3.6 Contemplative life and active life 284](#__RefHeading___Toc179607_39525145)

[2.3.7 Extraordinary gifts 284](#__RefHeading___Toc179609_39525145)

[2.4 Conclusions 285](#__RefHeading___Toc179611_39525145)

[3. Other authoritative testimonies 285](#__RefHeading___Toc179613_39525145)

[3.1 Fr Paul Albera 285](#__RefHeading___Toc179615_39525145)

[3.2 Fr Philip Rinaldi 287](#__RefHeading___Toc179617_39525145)

[3.3 Pius XI and Cardinal Salotti 288](#__RefHeading___Toc179619_39525145)

[4. An attempt at an analysis of the spiritual experience: Fr Ceria’s *Don Bosco con Dio* 289](#__RefHeading___Toc179621_39525145)

[4.1 Information about the author and origins of the book 290](#__RefHeading___Toc468031904)

[4.2 The chapter on the *gift of prayer* 291](#__RefHeading___Toc179623_39525145)

[4.2.1 Introduction: an argument *a priori* 292](#__RefHeading___Toc179625_39525145)

[4.2.2. Type or degree of mystical union. Simple union and confirmation of the testimonies from the cause 293](#__RefHeading___Toc179627_39525145)

[4.2.3 The seven effects of simple union in the Life of St John Bosco 294](#__RefHeading___Toc179629_39525145)

[4.2.4 Fr Ceria’s conclusion 296](#__RefHeading___Toc468031909)

[4.3 Fr Ceria’s guidelines for evaluation 297](#__RefHeading___Toc179631_39525145)

[SUMMARY 299](#__RefHeading___Toc179633_39525145)

[CHAPTER 8 300](#__RefHeading___Toc179635_39525145)

[The role of mental prayer in 300](#__RefHeading___Toc179637_39525145)

[St John Bosco’s founding charism 300](#__RefHeading___Toc179639_39525145)

[1. A coherent unity 300](#__RefHeading___Toc179641_39525145)

[1.1 Mental prayer in initial formation and adult spiritual experience 301](#__RefHeading___Toc179643_39525145)

[1.2 Mental prayer and spiritual writings 306](#__RefHeading___Toc179645_39525145)

[3.3 Education of the young to faith and mental prayer 308](#__RefHeading___Toc179647_39525145)

[1.4 Mental prayer in the project of founding the Salesian Congregation 309](#__RefHeading___Toc179649_39525145)

[2. Spiritual experience, founding charism and mental prayer 315](#__RefHeading___Toc179651_39525145)

[3. Brief treatise on meditation in the Salesian tradition at the beginnings 317](#__RefHeading___Toc179653_39525145)

[3.1 The necessity of meditation in religious life 318](#__RefHeading___Toc179655_39525145)

[3.2 Meditation and progress in the theological virtues 319](#__RefHeading___Toc179657_39525145)

[3.3 Importance of its daily practice 320](#__RefHeading___Toc179659_39525145)

[3.4 Usefulness of doing meditation in the morning 320](#__RefHeading___Toc179661_39525145)

[3.5 Meditation in common and in private 321](#__RefHeading___Toc179663_39525145)

[3.6 Duration of meditation 322](#__RefHeading___Toc179665_39525145)

[3.7 Meditation, affective prayer and the imagination 322](#__RefHeading___Toc179667_39525145)

[3.8 Importance and usefulness of a method 324](#__RefHeading___Toc179669_39525145)

[3.9 Rendiconto (manifestation) and meditation 324](#__RefHeading___Toc179671_39525145)

[CONCLUSION - EVALUATION 326](#__RefHeading___Toc179673_39525145)

[CHAPTER 9 327](#__RefHeading___Toc179675_39525145)

[Concluding evaluation and research prospects 327](#__RefHeading___Toc179677_39525145)

[1. An overview of the approach followed 327](#__RefHeading___Toc179679_39525145)

[2. Special contributions and research prospects 329](#__RefHeading___Toc179681_39525145)

[2.1 Influences of Ignatian spirituality on the spiritual and apostolic experience of St John Bosco 329](#__RefHeading___Toc179683_39525145)

[2.2 Appreciation of the formative role of the Diocesan Convitto Ecclesiastico in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience and life 331](#__RefHeading___Toc179685_39525145)

[2.3 The first group of disciples 332](#__RefHeading___Toc179687_39525145)

[2.4 The model of religious life at the origins of the Society 332](#__RefHeading___Toc179689_39525145)

[2.5 Further studies on other aspects of the founding charism 332](#__RefHeading___Toc179691_39525145)

[2.6 Role of mental prayer in the founding charism of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians 333](#__RefHeading___Toc179693_39525145)

[3. Difficulties and limitations of this study 333](#__RefHeading___Toc179695_39525145)

[EPILOGUE 335](#__RefHeading___Toc179697_39525145)

[BIBLIOGRAPHY 336](#__RefHeading___Toc179699_39525145)

# ABBREVIATIONS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **AAS** | Acta Apostolicae Sedis |
| **AA.VV.** | Autori Vari (Various Authors) |
| **ACS** | Archivio Centrale Salesiano/Salesian Central Archives (at the Generalate) |
| **AGFMA** | Archivio Centrale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice/Central Archives of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (at the Generalate) |
| **can./cann.** | canon/canons |
| **cap.** | capitolo (chapter) |
| **cf.** | compare |
| **CJC** | Code of Canon Law (1983) |
| **col./coll.** | column/columns |
| **DSp** | *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* a cura di VILLER M. e ss., 17 volumi, Beauchesne, Paris 1932 (starting from). |
| **DpF** | Dicastero per la formazione (Formation Department) |
| **DpFS** | Dicastero per la Famiglia Salesiana (Salesian Family Department) |
| **EV** | Enchiridion Vaticanum |
| **ff.** | following |
| **FdB** | ARCHIVIO SALESIANO CENTRALE, *Fondo Don Bosco. Microschedatura e descrizione,* a cura di TORRAS A., Roma 1980. |
| **FdR** | ARCHIVIO SALESIANO CENTRALE, *Fondo Don Rua. With annexes concerning Don Bosco (complements) and Mary Domenica Mazzarello. Microschede - Descrizione,* a cura di TORRAS A., Roma 1996. |
| **ISS** | Istituto Storico Salesiano (Salesian Historical Institute) |
| **MB** | LEMOYNE G.B. - AMADEI A. - CERIA E., *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco,* 19 volumi di testo e due di indici. Edizione extracommerciale. San Benigno Canavese (Torino) 1898-1948. |
| **MO** | BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S.Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855,* Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di Da Silva Ferreira A., LAS, Roma 1991. But the English citations will be taken from *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, published 2024 by Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. |
| **no./nos.** | number/numbers |
| **[my emph.]** | My emphasis |
| **p./pp.** | page/pages |
| **RSS** | Ricerche Storiche Salesiane |
| **S.D.B.** | Salesians of Don Bosco |
| **v./vv.** | volume/volumes |
| **[**author name**]** | author who is not on the title page of the work |
| **…** | omissis |

# INTRODUCTION

# CHAPTER 1

## Mental prayer in today’s ecclesial context and in the context of research into Salesian spirituality, its assumptions and motivation

### 1. Assumptions and motivations

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of the Holy Father John Paul II *on Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the world* devotes the fourth part of the first chapter, entitled *Confessio Trinitatis*, to the question of the call of consecrated persons to holiness, the fruit of the *living presence of the Spirit’s action* throughout the history of the Church.[[8]](#footnote-9)

*Sanctitatis Spiritu ducti,[[9]](#footnote-10)* consecrated persons have the task of *courageously re-proposing the holiness of the founders and foundresses* as a response to the signs of the emerging times in today’s world.[[10]](#footnote-11)

In this context, two paragraphs are dedicated to the exhortation to *fidelity to the charism of the founder* which, ultimately, must take the steps of an increasingly full conformation to the Lord*;*[[11]](#footnote-12) the next paragraph, entitled *Precatio et ascesis*, then indicates that it is in the *silence of adoration* before the *infinite transcendence of God* that is the only “place” where this call to holiness can be *accepted* and *cultivated*:

Recipitur ad sanctitatem vocatio atque percoli potest tantummodo *in adorationis silentio* coram infinita Dei transcendentia: “Fatendum est nos omnes hoc silentio indigere, adorata praesentia imbuto… Omnibus nempe, credentibus et non credentibus, discendum est silentium, quo Alter sinatur loqui, quando et quomodo volet, nobis vero verbum illud intellegere liceat”.[[12]](#footnote-13) Re autem ipsa permagnam hoc prae se fert fidelitatem liturgicae precationi atque privatae, spatiis orationi mentali contemplationique destinatis, recessibus menstruis nec non spiritalibus exercitationibus.[[13]](#footnote-14)

This consideration of the Holy Father, John Paul II, is placed “before” any distinction between institutes of active life and contemplative life.

Many other pronouncements of the magisterium on religious life show the same awareness.[[14]](#footnote-15) The very *mission* of the Church, in which both active and contemplative religious participate in a particular way, does not consist in *an activity of external life*, but is the very mission of Christ who, in obedience to the Father, continues to *offer himself* for the life of the world.[[15]](#footnote-16)

Prius enim quam missio ad exteriora opera sese describant – the post-synodal Exhortation again states in this regard – iam explicatur in Christo mundo proponendo per personalem testificationem inter homines. Haec quidem est provocatio, hoc principale vitae consacratae officium! Quo amplius quis sinit se Christo configurari, tanto magis Illum praesentem refert operantemque in mundo ad hominum salutem.[[16]](#footnote-17)

This *spiritual worship* that has the Eucharistic celebration as its *source* and *culmination*  finds the precondition for authentic participation in adoring silence, in *mental prayer*.[[17]](#footnote-18) Already in 1966, Paul VI stated in the norms for implementing the Council decree for religious, *Perfectae Caritatis*:

Quo intimius ac fructuosius religiosi sacrosanctum Eucharistiae mysterium et publicam Ecclesiae orationem participent, ac tota spiritualis eorum vita abundantius nutriatur, prae multitudinem precum amplior locus orationi mentali tribuatur, servatis tamen piis exercitiis communiter in Ecclesia receptis, necnon debita adhibita cura ut sodales in vita spirituali ducenda diligenter instruantur.[[18]](#footnote-19)

A certain contrast between *subjective piety* and *objective piety* has sometimes characterised the post-conciliar theological debate.

Father Euloghio Pacho wrote about this as early as 1975, after presenting the different perspectives and terms of this debate, in the *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*:

Having clarified the positions and doctrines, on both sides there has been a gradual orientation towards a line of convergence…

The encyclical *Mediator Dei...* openly stated that there is no opposition between subjective and objective piety; that the superiority or greater dignity of liturgical prayer, the supreme norm for the others, does not imply any depreciation of the forms of prayer and piety of the Church in the modern era... In this context, the contrast between liturgical worship and intimate prayer, both personal and individual, meditative and devotional, has gradually and imperceptibly disappeared, while a better understanding has been gained of how integration at the personal and community level is possible.[[19]](#footnote-20)

The awareness of the at least theoretical solution of this contrast and the conviction that, as Paul VI said, “personal religion is an indispensable condition for authentic liturgical participatio”" is one of the main prerequisites of my study.[[20]](#footnote-21)

The same pontiff said in 1970:

It will be the liturgical life, well cared for, well absorbed in the consciences and habits of the Christian people that will keep the religious sense of our time, so profane and so desecrated, vigilant and operative, and that will give the Church a new springtime of religious and Christian life.

But we must at the same time complain that personal prayer is diminishing, thus threatening the liturgy itself with inner impoverishment, outward ritualism, and purely formal practice. Religious feeling itself can be lost due to the lack of a dual character indispensable to prayer: interiority and individuality. Everyone must learn to pray within themselves and by themselves. The Christian must have his or her own personal prayer. Every soul is a temple.[[21]](#footnote-22)

The conviction that this analysis is still relevant today and, therefore, the observation that this decline in *personal prayer* persists and with it the risk of *liturgical formalism* that is produced by any *loss of interiority,* has been a stimulus for me to undertake research that attempts to understand more deeply the role of *mental prayer* in the charism of the founder of the Salesians and in the project of life he proposed for the spiritual movement that originated from him.

### 2. A look at current research on Don Bosco in the spiritual theology

The bibliography on Don Bosco over the last forty years,[[22]](#footnote-23) in my opinion, shows a degree of imbalance between publications and articles focusing on spiritual theology and pedagogical and historical studies.[[23]](#footnote-24)

Already in 1973 Salesian historian Fr Pietro Stella noted:

The research on the spirituality of Don Bosco and the Salesians today is perhaps not as advanced as research on the educational system. This factor must be taken into consideration by historians and anyone wishing to predict possible future developments in the Salesian movement...

Despite the circular letters of Don Bosco’s successors and the writings of Salesians such as Bishop Giacomo Costamagna, Fr Andrea Beltrami, Fr Giulio Barberis, Fr Eugenio Ceria, Fr Alberto Caviglia, it cannot be said that spiritual reflection has produced something of great prominence comparable to the works of Alfonso Rodríguez, Lallemant, Bérulle, Álvarez de Paz, Teresa d 'Ávila, Luís de la Puente, Alphonsus Liguori: works of great resonance throughout the modern age. Nor did the Salesians have theologians comparable to the greats of the mendicant orders or to Vásquez, Suárez, Molina, Lessio, de Lugo of the Jesuits in the 16th and 17th centuries. It is certain that theological and spiritual reflection in our times has a different function from that found three or four centuries ago. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the emergence or non-emergence of spiritual reflection, whether internal or contiguous to the Salesian movement, could be taken as a symptom of what the Salesian Family will be among ecclesial groups of the same type that have flourished throughout history.[[24]](#footnote-25)

Some reaction to the abundant hagiographic literature, which is edifying but not always adequately documented, and the growing awareness of the modest *originality* of the spiritual production of the founder of the Salesians and his first disciples have, in my opinion, contributed to a decline in interest in research in the field of spiritual theology. The need to reflect on the educational experience has, on the contrary, encouraged the interest of scholars of pedagogy and pastoral theology.[[25]](#footnote-26) Furthermore, as a positive effect of the awareness of the importance of greater rigour in historical research, there has been no shortage in the publication of several critical editions and a constant effort to reconstruct the history of the founder and the *founding experience*, freeing it from the excesses of a *supernaturalist* or apologetic interpretation.

These important advances in research can encourage a documented hagiography and be an indispensable premise for research in spiritual theology, research that requires, however, to develop with its own method.

In his article *Prospettive di ricerca su Don Bosco* (Research Perspectives on Don Bosco) in 1990, Fr Pietro Braido, an expert in Salesian history and pedagogy, pointed out nine topics as worthy of critical study due to their particular complexity, relevance or topicality: the history of the “beginnings” of Don Bosco and his work, Don Bosco in the fabric of the local and universal church of his time, his relations with civil society and popular culture, the migrant and missions problems, the foundation of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco the “dreamer” and miracle worker, the exploration of ecclesiastical and civil archives.[[26]](#footnote-27)

This list would seem to confirm the loss of interest, in research, in the most characteristic issues of spiritual theology: religious life, vows, prayer, asceticism, the spiritual experience of the founder and his first disciples; these are matters which demand a continuous comparison with changing historical and ecclesial realities.

The experience of the origins must then be addressed in its entirety, without “discounts” and with the rigour of scientific research, when it comes to focusing on the *charism of the founder,* the special gift given by God to the founder for his religious family and for the Church.

“Accomodata renovatio vitae religiosae” the Council Fathers said in the Council’s Decree *Perfectae Caritatis, “*simul complectitur et continuum reditum ad omnis vitae christianae fontes primigeniamque institutorum inspirationem et aptationem ipsorum ad mutatas temporum condiciones.”[[27]](#footnote-28)

There are fundamental *questions* that every congregation must continue to put to its *sources*. Starting from the *experience* that the congregation is currently going through, as we will say, and returning to the sources only when seeking a kind of confirmation of current orientations, can put us at risk of *reducing* the charism, neglecting its consistency and its total and complex reality.[[28]](#footnote-29)

This awareness motivated me to return to questioning the sources in relation to an issue I felt is relevant in the current ecclesial context and on which there are no specific studies.[[29]](#footnote-30)

### 3. Notes on method

My study therefore falls within the realm of *spiritual theology* and, more particularly, the *history of spirituality.*

Some insights from spiritual theology will therefore form my initial frame of reference; in particular, this science will provide me with the necessary contextual and semantic references in relation to the question of *mental prayer* and its different forms.

The goal of clarifying an aspect of a founder’s *charism* then represents, as we shall see, a particular hermeneutical problem.

Having assumed some *general criteria* for interpreting the *founding charism*, again from the field of spiritual theology but with the help of philosophical hermeneutical methods, I will go on to an analytical and critical study of the numerous sources, which can essentially be classified into four different categories: the published and unpublished writings of the founder, the documents that allow us to reconstruct his life and spiritual experience as well as the *milieu* in which both developed, the acts concerning the history of the origins of the institute and the first official “magisterium” of the fledgling congregation, and finally, the writings and historical experience of the first group of disciples.

In the next phase, the *inductive method* and what, in contemporary hermeneutics, is commonly called the *principle of totality*, will allow me to draw some conclusions in relation to the theme of this study.

This *overview* which encompasses the entire life of the founder, will allow me to interpret each *fragment* of my research in the *context*  of his life experience. This was necessary for two main reasons:

– there is no theoretical-systematic discussion of Don Bosco on the question mental prayer in religious life;

– despite the copious amount of published and unpublished writings of the founder of the Salesians, the scholar is faced with an extreme need for autobiographical sources on his inner life; there is no spiritual *diary*, and in his letters Don Bosco does not indulge in personal confidences. The various written *memoirs* offer a chronicle of events rather than the author’s *spiritual emotions*.The study of the *spiritual experience* of the founder of the Salesians, a study that is the basis of a correct interpretation of the *founding* *charism*, must therefore make use of some *indirect tools.*

This latter consideration introduces, in our particular methodological approach, the help of the *human sciences* and, in particular, *psychology*. This science, which is normally an important support to the *method* in the study of spiritual theology, can also help us to formulate reasonable hypotheses about the inner life of the founder of the Salesians.

Finally, I note that in terms of the *scientific methodology* adopted, I have sought to “optimise” clarity rather than the essence, making it as easy as possible for scholars to find references, reducing acronyms and abbreviations to a minimum, repeating the title of the studies at each reference and, at the beginning of each chapter, the full citations of previously cited texts.

### 4. Mental prayer: semantic clarifications

Before introducing the general plan of my study, it is essential to proceed with some terminological clarifications.

In the next chapter I will focus more broadly on the meaning I intend to attribute to expressions such as *charism, charism of the founder, charism of foundation or founding charism, charism of the Institute* and on some general criteria suited to the *hermeneutics* of the *founder’s charism.* Here, instead, I will attempt to clarify the semantic value I am attributing to the term *mental prayer.*

In its most common and general sense, the term prayer isspecifiedas *mental*[[30]](#footnote-31) in contrast to *vocal*. Fr Joseph De Guibert states: ‘Solet dividi oratio in *vocalem* et *mentalem*: modo generali prior habetur quando actibus internis intellectus et voluntatis iungitur externa eorum expressio per locutionem; altera vero his actibus internis absolvitur’.[[31]](#footnote-32)

Carmelite Fr Albino of the Child Jesus writes in his *Compendio di Teologia Spirituale*: “Prayer is called mental when it takes place in the powers of the soul without any external manifestation. Every act of faith, hope, love, every thought and spiritual affection is mental prayer, that is, an encounter with God.”[[32]](#footnote-33) Similarly, the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* specifies: “Plus communément mental et vocal sont opposée. En réaction contre la routine et le formalisme, dès l’antiquité, nombreux sont ceux qui rappelent que le désir du coeur import plus que le bruit de la voix.”[[33]](#footnote-34)

In this more general sense, the expression *mental prayer* can therefore be identified with the *silentius adorata praesentia imbutus* in reference to John Paul II’s *Orientale Lumen*.[[34]](#footnote-35)

Instead, in his text *Metodi di orazione mentale,* Cardinale Giacomo Lercaro attributes this semantic content to the expression *diffused mental prayer,* which he defines as “any pious thought that has God or things related to God as its object”,[[35]](#footnote-36) distinguishing it from *formal mental prayer,* which for him is “that particular exercise of spiritual life whereby we devote a certain amount of time each day or at regular intervals, to the exclusion of all other activities, to conversing with God, without the use of pre-established verbal formulas.”[[36]](#footnote-37)

This distinction of Lercaro’s allows us to focus on a *narrower* and more particular meaning of the expression. Alongside the more general meaning of *non-vocal prayer*, the expression *mental prayer* has been and continues to be used to indicate that particular *practice of piety* which consists in setting aside a specific time of the day *to the exclusion of all other activities* for non-vocal prayer, a practice already found in the Old Testament and in Jesus’ own prayer, then attested to by the Fathers, but probably introduced into religious life by Benedictine monasticism after the eighth century and becoming part of the constitutions of many religious orders, especially in the sixteenth century.[[37]](#footnote-38)

Mental prayer in this narrower sense is also called *meditation.[[38]](#footnote-39)*

In the history of spirituality these two terms, *meditation* and *mental prayer*, have often been used interchangeably[[39]](#footnote-40) and both to indicate, according to Lercaro’s terminology, *formal mental prayer*, that is, a particular practice of piety. This is the meaning we find them used more often than not in the texts of the Salesian tradition; it will be the particular context, then, that will enable us to understand the semantic content of the expression.

An example could be helpful.

In the first printed text of the *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, definitively approved in 1874, we read, in the chapter dedicated to the *pratiche di pietà* (practices of piety): “*Ciascheduno, oltre le orazioni vocali, farà ogni giorno non meno di mezz’ora di orazione mentale*…” (In addition to vocal prayers, each person shall spend at least half an hour each day in mental prayer).[[40]](#footnote-41) The context here leaves no room for doubt that the text refers to *formal mental prayer.*

On the other hand, in a sheet of notes by Don Bosco, dated around the end of the 1870s and used for the preaching of the first retreat of the fledgling congregation, we find written: “Vocal prayer without the intervention of the mind is like a body without a soul – Lament of the Lord: Populus hic labiis me honorat: cor autem eorum longe est a me (Mark 7: 6).”[[41]](#footnote-42)

Here, clearly, the expression *mental prayer* is not used in the narrow sense of a *practice of piety,* but in the more general sense seen above; it indicates the inner act of the intellect and will by which the person praying is called to make the vocal prayer *true*. It is this act, in fact, that can transform the word spoken with the lips into an inner dialogue, into prayer. It is therefore a question here of *diffused mental prayer.*

The context, therefore, will allow us to make the correct semantic attribution on a case-by-case basis.

#### 4.1 Some distinctions

Some further terminological clarification may be helpful before focusing on the subject of this research.

Mental (formal) prayer is commonly referred to as *methodical* when it uses a *method.[[42]](#footnote-43)*  However, we note here that in some authors, such as Lercaro, the term *methodical* refers rather to the *regularity,* *daily routine*, or *habit* of prayer; whereas to refer to the previous semantic content, it is preferable to say *prayer with the aid of a method.* In this case too, however, the particular context will allow us to avoid any misunderstanding.

Another useful distinction is between *active* or *ordinary* mental prayer and *passive* or *extraordinary* mental prayer, also called *mystical, infused, contemplative, etc.* In the first case, it is the soul that actively and positively disposes itself to communicate with God; *passive* mental prayer, on the other hand, is more immediately a gift of the Spirit, in which the soul participates only with a particular act of the intellect. to communicate with God; passive mental prayer, on the other hand, is more immediately a gift of the Spirit, in which the soul participates only with a particular *disposition*, but which does not lose its fundamental aspect of a free and unconditional gift. “The Holy Spirit”, Cardinal Lercaro says, “introduces the soul if and when he wants,without the soul being able to dispose itself except negatively by removing obstacles; in the act of prayer, God produces knowledge and love in the soul; and the soul, while acting freely, feels guided, fulfilled, and moved by a higher principle.”[[43]](#footnote-44)

*Passive* or *extraordinary* mental prayer is then often distinguished into four *degrees*, which correspond to the last four *dwellings* of the *inner Castle of St Teresa of Avila:* prayer of stillness, simple union, ecstasy, spiritual marriage.[[44]](#footnote-45)

A final terminological clarification can be made by distinguishing *discursive* mental prayer, in which reasoning, the *intellect*, dominates, from *affective* mental prayer, in which the *affections* and therefore the *will have a predominant role.*

#### 4.2 The purpose of my study

At the end of these semantic clarifications and the necessary distinctions, it remains to be asked what the real purpose of my study is. What direction is intended for investigation when referring to the role of *mental prayer* in Don Bosco’s founding charism?

Let me immediately say that my intention here is to take up the expression in its most general meaning, substantially the meaning which emerges from the aforementioned definition by De Guibert.[[45]](#footnote-46) I will therefore be dealing not only with *formal mental prayer*, but also with any other form of prayer that *actibus internis intellectus et voluntatis absolvitur.*

The emphasis placed on *conscious vocal prayer*, the habit and education of constantly recalling the *presence of God* and *adoring silence*, the importance given to *days of recollection* and *retreats* as “privileged places” for silent personal prayer, judgement on the *contemplative experience* in general or on certain particular experiences or *extraordinary* gifts, the importance given to certain particular forms of prayer such as the visit *Eucharistic adoration,* *night prayer* and, in a special way, the consideration shown for *daily meditation* in the plan of religious life passed down by the founder to the fledgling Salesian congregation: all this will be the subject of my study, both in reference to Don Bosco’s *spiritual experience,* to his *founding charism[[46]](#footnote-47)* and life of the *Society of St Francis de Sales* until the founder’s death.

Some might argue that an investigation in the field of the *history of spirituality* should rather start from the semantic content attributed in the nineteenth century to the term *mental prayer.*

In reality, as we have already shown through the example given earlier, the use of this term is not unambiguous even in the period we are considering, and varies from the general meaning of *diffused mental prayer* to the more specific meaning of *formal mental prayer.*

In any case, however, once the semantic landscape has been clarified according to today’s understanding, it is entirely legitimate to investigate the content thus defined in relation to a historical period in which the term a different meaning or even no meaning at all. This is what is usually done, for example, when one wants to know the *ecclesiology* of the First Vatican Council, the  *historiography*  of Benedetto Croce or  *epistemology*  according to Galileo Galilei. None of these terms has a semantic equivalent in the period of history covered by the study, but it is still legitimate for scholars, after clarifying the subject of their research and therefore its semantic heritage, to extend their investigation to any historical period.

More precisely, but somewhat more rhetorically, the title of my study could finally be expressed as follows: *Contribution to an evaluation of the role of mental prayer, be it diffused or formal, regular or methodical, active or passive, discursive or affective ... in the founding charism of St John Bosco.*

### 5. General plan of the study

After specifying, in this first chapter of the introductory section, the specific subject of my research, I felt it was essential to clarify, in the following chapter, the general criteria I intend to follow for the hermeneutics of the founding charism.

The recent theological landscape, in fact, presents significant differences in perspective both in reference criteria and in the interpretation of the documents of the Magisterium; it therefore happens that the same terms are used with different meanings. It will therefore be essential to clarify the semantic frame of reference and to justify the choice of some hermeneutic criteria.

The central body of this study will consist of the analysis, which is developed over five different chapters.

The first four follow my chronological division of the human and spiritual experience of the founder and the history of the foundation.

The first period considered goes from the birth of the founder until the end of his formation   
(1815-1844); the second covers the period from the first establishment of Salesian work to the first draft of the Constitutions (1844-1858); the third includes the entire journey up to the final approval of the *Society of St Francis de Sales* (1858-1874); the fourth is the period of consolidation until the death of the founder.

The first period, therefore, is the one which goes from Don Bosco’s birth to the end of his formation which, after his ordination to the priesthood (1841), continued with three years at the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin.

The emergence of religious experience, education in prayer, the role of the family and environment, the content of the first catechesis received, his early spiritual friendships, the formation projects that were part of the regulations of the seminary and the *Convitto* and the subjective resonance they had for Don Bosco’s reflective awareness, the influence of his formators, the first retreat he made at the *Santuario di Sant'Ignazio sopra Lanzo* and also his first homiletic exercises: these are some of the main references that will allow us to approach the first thirty years of Don Bosco’s human and spiritual experience, years that were undoubtedly decisive from the point of view of his growth to maturity, his formation in prayer, and his apostolic orientation.

One figure in particular stands out among his formators – Saint Joseph Cafasso, who often contributed to shedding light on Don Bosco’s personal discernment and who for about twenty years, until his premature death in 1860, was his weekly confessor and spiritual director. Fr Cafasso, in whose hands Don Bosco placed “*every decision [he] made, all [his] study, every activity of [his] life”*, as he himself says his *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, would also introduce him to preaching retreats and the priestly apostolate among young people.

The second of the historical periods considered in the analytical section ends with the probable date of the first draft of the Salesian Constitutions.

It is the time of the establishment of the work of the oratories, a particularly important period for getting to know the educational atmosphere in which Don Bosco’s first young collaborators grew up, and who would sign the document which established the Society.

This latter consideration also leads us to ask about the contents of the formation of young people in prayer. The habit of constantly thinking about the presence of God, Eucharistic devotion, monthly *recollections* and annual retreats, education in meditation and silence, insistence on *attentive* vocal prayer or *ejaculatory prayer*: these are the “indicators” that I will try to observe, trying to reconstruct, in reference to my subject, not only Don Bosco’s thinking and his *formation plan*, but also some of the customs of his educational practice.

Don Bosco’s feelings about mental prayer can be understood from this analysis and, above all, from the content of the numerous biographies of young people he wrote during this period or a few years later. This will enable me to overcome the difficulties arising from the lack of a theoretical and systematic reflection, of a true and proper “treatise” on the subject.

The third chapter of the analytical section goes into the heart of the founding experience, embracing the entire *iter* until the final approval of the constitutions.

This was a period of maturity, a period of great fertility in literary production. From some of these writings, from unpublished notes and from his correspondence, I will try to glean further indications to reconstruct Don Bosco’s thinking on mental prayer.

With the beginning of the process of *institutionalisation*, the various constitutional texts become an obligatory reference point for my research; in particular, the focus is on the chapter concerning the *practices of piety* and *formal* mental prayer or meditation.The preserved manuscripts and the critical edition of the constitutions will enable me to lay the foundations for an interpretation of the constitutional text.

Another important point of reference, in relation to this third period, is the beginning of the retreat experiences for the fledgling congregation; this particular “resource” had been constantly valued by Don Bosco since the beginning of his ministry among young people. Starting in 1866, annual retreats became part of the regular practice of the Society of St Francis de Sales. This development was seen as crucial for the growth of the congregation in the following decade, when the first General Chapter of the Society was held.

The sixth chapter of my study, the fourth in the analysis section, covers the last period of the saint’s life and will allow us to approach Don Bosco’s project, now free of institutional concerns, and aimed solely at the expansion, consolidation of the Society and the formation of his men in their awareness that they were religious.

A key reference point for understanding the role given to mental prayer, and meditation in particular, is provided by the teachings of the first canonical novitiate. Other important resources will be the introduction and appendices which Don Bosco wanted, in addition to the first Italian editions of the definitively approved constitutions.

My investigation into the founding charism and model of religious life proposed by Don Bosco to the Salesian congregation will also be enriched by an analysis of some of the first biographies of deceased Salesians. Some indications emerge from the presentation, which is certainly exhortative, of these “fulfilled” lives, regarding the project of religious life proposed by Don Bosco at the beginnings of the congregation.

The first four General Chapters of the congregation were held during this last period of the founder’s life,. From the documents of the first and third Chapters, in particular, we will highlight some findings on the question of formation in meditation and retreats.

All four of these “historical” chapters of the analytical section will be accompanied by brief summaries of the main events in the history of the origins, in order to facilitate understanding of the individual elements within a broader context that will aid interpretation.

The final chapter of the analytical part, the seventh of this study, will instead be dedicated more directly to Don Bosco’s spiritual experience, as it emerges from the depositions at the cause of beatification and canonisation, and from the testimonies of some others who knew Don Bosco “closely”.

The eighth chapter is an attempt to summarise the entire section devoted to analysis.

By applying the so-called hermeneutic principle of *totality*, I will first try to find some constants throughout the life of the founder and to re-evaluate, in an overall view, every single *fragment* that emerged in the analytical section.

In the second part of the an attempt will be made to reconstruct, along essential lines, a kind of *mini-treatise* on formal mental prayer, starting from the elements brought together in the analysis.

The conclusion, referring to what has been said about the hermeneutics of the founding charism, will attempt to summarise some of the contributions that have emerged, with a view to evaluating the role of mental prayer in Don Bosco’s founding charism. The presentation of some possible avenues for further research and some limitations of the study will conclude the study.

# CHAPTER 2

## The founding charism and its hermeneutics

### 1. Consecrated life as a charism for the Church

Consecrated life, rooted in the examples and teachings of Christ, is a gift of God’s Holy Spirit to his Church.[[47]](#footnote-48)

This awareness, which frames the reflection on the evangelical counsels in a Trinitarian and ecclesial perspective and reaffirms the divine initiative in the project of life outlined by many founders, can be considered a given by now in the ecclesial Magisterium on consecrated life.[[48]](#footnote-49)

During the Second Vatican Council, many interventions by the Council Fathers testified, in particular, to the conviction of the *pneumatic* origin of religious life.[[49]](#footnote-50) “The predominant *ecclesiological point of view,”* Fr Ruiz Jurado emphasises regarding the elaboration of *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*, “leads to recognising in religious life, characterised by the profession of the evangelical counsels, an effect of the initiative of the Holy Spirit through his influence on those men or women who feel called to dedicate themselves fully to evangelical perfection.”[[50]](#footnote-51)

The definitive text of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in the sixth chapter *De religiosis*, is expressed as follows: “The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls. The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church received from its Lord and which it always safeguards with the help of His grace.”[[51]](#footnote-52)

This particular theological perspective, which emerges in some other texts of the Council[[52]](#footnote-53) and of the immediate post-Council,[[53]](#footnote-54) finds its foundation and its most common expressive form in the New Testament doctrine of Paul.

The Pauline term *charism*, in fact, expresses a *special gift of divine grace given to believers by the Holy Spirit for the common good of the Church.[[54]](#footnote-55)* This is a neologism probably coined by Paul himself, who uses it 16 times in his letters.[[55]](#footnote-56)

It should be noted that, although the use of the term can be considered relatively recent, the profound reality that the term expresses can be considered a constant heritage of the ecclesial tradition.

In this regard, Fabio Ciardi notes:

Although the use of the term with this precise meaning is relatively recent, it expresses, in new language, a profound conviction that has always been present throughout religious life: those who are at the origin of an Order or Institute have been guided by the Spirit. Their initiative is not simply human, but the result of a divine project that the Spirit, in some way, has manifested to them.[[56]](#footnote-57)

#### 1.1 Charism and religious life in official documentation

The term *charism* in relation to religious life does not appear in the official texts of the Second Vatican Council.[[57]](#footnote-58)

In fact, it was used for the first time in an official document only in 1971, in number 11 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio* by Paul VI. Reiterating the need expressed by *Perfectae Caritatis* to combine contemplation with apostolic love, the Holy Father affirmed: “Solum hoc modo animos hominum ad veritatem amoremque divinum amplectendum erigere poteritis secundum charisma Fundatorum vestrorum, quos Deus in Ecclesia sua excitavit.”[[58]](#footnote-59)

A few years later the well-known directive *Mutuae Relationes*, on the mutual relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church, took up the Pauline terminology and specified its content in relation to religious life.[[59]](#footnote-60)

Since then, the term *charism* and the expressions *charism of religious life, charism of the founder, founding charism, foundational charism, charism of the Institute, original charism, institutional charism, charism of a religious family have become commonly used in official documents, as well as in the Holy Father’s addresses.*[[60]](#footnote-61) This category now seems to unify the different theological perspectives on consecrated life.[[61]](#footnote-62)

“Difficulter quidem describitur” John Paul II said, for example in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Donum* in 1984 *–* “… immo etiam recensetur, quot variis modis personae Deo consacratae *per apostolatum* impleam *suum erga Ecclesiam amorem.* Hic semper ex peculiari illo Conditorum vestrorum dono est ortus, quod, *a Deo acceptum* et ab Ecclesia approbatum, totius communitatis charisma est factum. Quod donum variis respondet Ecclesiae necessitatibus et singulis mundi historiae temporibus…”[[62]](#footnote-63)

Then in the *Lineamenta* of the Synod on consecrated life, the noun *charism* was used 67 times;[[63]](#footnote-64) the adjective *charismatic* occurs 11 times. Fr Fabio Ciardi wrote in 1993:

Perhaps no other ecclesial document concerning consecrated life has made such a massive use of the term charism. The other words used by the Council to designate consecrated life, both as a whole and in its specific forms, are almost overwhelmed by the terminology of charism. We encounter the term *gift* – preferred by Council documents – only fifteen times... Only 6 times does it speak of *spirit* to designate the specific nature of an Institute, 3 times of *spirituality,* 5 times of *nature.[[64]](#footnote-65)*

And again, the Holy Father, on 22 March 1995 during the Wednesday audience, said:

In the Church, the Holy Spirit has always given some people the charism of being founders. It has always been the case that people who share the orientation of the founder’s consecrated life gather around him or her... The Holy Spirit has always created and fostered harmony among the members of the congregation and helped them to develop a life in common animated by charity, according to the particular orientation of the charism of the founder and his or her faithful followers.[[65]](#footnote-66)

The Synod’s *Instrumentum laboris* also makes extensive use of the term; outlining, in general terms, the history of its use in ecclesial documents, it states at number 42:

The Second Vatican Council did not explicitly designate consecrated life with the term “charism”, but it recognised in it the gift attributed to celibacy and the evangelical counsels; consecrated life is the fruit of the action of the Spirit...

Paul VI spoke explicitly of the “charism of religious life... the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church” and specifically of the “charisms of founders... raised up by God within His Church”, as well as of the charisms of the various institutes (*ET 11, 32).*

Even richer and more articulated is the use of the term *charism* and its derivatives in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of 1996*.* The next paragraph is about this examination; I will also try to underline the use and content of some expressions that, as we will see later, present some semantic problems.

#### 1.2 The term ‘charism’ in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita Consecrata”

The term *charisma* and its plural *charismata* appear 72 times in the text of the Exhortation; we also find the adjectival form[[66]](#footnote-67) *charismaticus 5 times.*[[67]](#footnote-68) The expressions *charisma fundatoris, charisma fundans* and *charisma fundationis* are found 9 times;[[68]](#footnote-69) it speaks of *charisma instituti* or *institutorum*[[69]](#footnote-70) *10 times;* and on 3 occasions it uses the general expression *consacratae vitae charisma.*[[70]](#footnote-71)

The *pneumatica* origin of charisms is explicitly highlighted 12 times; the ecclesiological perspective (charisms are a gift for the Church) is found 7 times;[[71]](#footnote-72) the variety, diversity or multiplicity of charisms is underlined 17 times.[[72]](#footnote-73)[[73]](#footnote-74)

Attention and the call to *fidelity* to one’s own charism emerge in various ways; in addition to the expression *fidelitas fundationis (or fundatoris) charismati,*[[74]](#footnote-75) but it is implicitly referred to at least another 20 times by adding the adjectives *proprium, suum, singulum, ipsum,*  in reference to the noun *charisma.*[[75]](#footnote-76) Twice the expression discretio charismatum[[76]](#footnote-77) appears and *veritas charismatum[[77]](#footnote-78) appears once.* No. 97 specifically says *fideles charismati suisque traditionibus.[[78]](#footnote-79)*

This simple analysis of the terms and expressions used reveals the document’s constant concern for fidelity to the original inspiration of the founder. This attention also demonstrates an awareness of the Church’s task of safeguarding the heritage of each individual institute.

Already the Council had stated: “In ipsum Ecclesiae bonum cedit ut instituta peculiarem suam indolem ac munus habeant. Ideo fideliter agnoscantur et serventur Fundatorum spiritus propriaque proposita, necnon sanae traditiones, quae omnia cuiusque instituti patrimonium constituunt”.[[79]](#footnote-80) “Competentis Ecclesiae auctoritatis est consilia evangelica interpretari, eorundem praxim legibus moderari atque stabiles inde vivendi formas canonica approbatione constituere itemque, pro parte sua, curare ut instituta secundum spiritum fundatorum et sanas traditiones crescant et floreant”.[[80]](#footnote-81)

### 2. The use of the term ‘charism’ in theological discussion

The consensus on the semantic value of the term *charism* and the judgement of its appropriateness for highlighting the pneumatological and ecclesial aspect of consecrated life can be considered general in theological discussion today. On the other hand, the use that theologians make of some of the expressions already encountered in ecclesial documents, is more varied and articulated.[[81]](#footnote-82)

“These same expressions”, Giancarlo Rocca rightly points out,“have been used with different meanings according to the different authors, so the charism *of* founder is the charism *of the* founder, or the charism *of foundation,* (founding charism), while for others the charism *of the founder* is the charism  *of the institute*, and for others the charism *of the institute* is its *mission* or *end…”*[[82]](#footnote-83)

This semantic confusion makes it necessary for anyone wishing to express an opinion on this matter to first provide an *explicatio terminorum*. The real problem, however, is the hermeneutics of ecclesiastical documents, which are sometimes read on the basis of different semantic references, and the different theological perspectives underlying some of these choices.[[83]](#footnote-84) Ultimately, the real question shifts to the relationship between *renewal* and *fidelity to the founder’s charism* and the hermeneutic process for determining the *proprium* of each religious family; a process that is difficult to objectify, partly due to the significant historical and charismatic differences between the various founders.[[84]](#footnote-85)

In constructing my particular *lexicon*, I will also try to bring out some of these different theological opinions.

#### 2.1 Charism of the founder

In my view, it is *the personal and non-transferable gift that a man or woman receives from the Holy Spirit and which places them at the origin of a religious family*; it is the specific gift that was given to the founder or foundress *to found* an Institute. “This inspiration,” Fr Regamey says, “involves the perception, through a particular historical situation, of a need of the Church to which the institute must respond with its evangelical life and its ministries.”[[85]](#footnote-86)

Some authors, such as Fabio Ciardi,[[86]](#footnote-87) prefer to distinguish the expression charism *of the* founder from charism *of* founder [founder’s charism, we might say in English]; in the latter case the preposition[[87]](#footnote-88) of *would be declarative; it would specify the type of charism to which one wants to refer and not the “content” of the same.*

I do not see much point in multiplying distinctions, especially if they add nothing to the theological discourse; to distinguish the charism *of* founder from the charism *of the* founder means believing one can imagine a *form* in this case without the corresponding *content.*

The charism of founder, or founding charism is, in fact, a specific, concrete gift oriented to a particular foundation; here as elsewhere it seems to me that it is the *theological* content of the term *charism* and, therefore, its divine origin that should be emphasised.[[88]](#footnote-89) God does not give a man or a woman the *gift* of being a founder except in view of ‘that’ particular foundation.

The semantic content of these expressions is different in some of what the Salesian priest Fr Joseph Aubry wrote. In fact, he distinguished the charism *of* founder, which concerns his person and is therefore incommunicable, from the charism *of the* founder that affects the content of his spiritual experience passed on to his disciples.[[89]](#footnote-90)

Here, the distinction is not merely formal but also substantive. In my definition, in fact, I have stressed the fact that the *charism of the founder* is a *personal gift* for us, since this is the characteristic of all God’s gifts, and for this reason *not transferable,* even if its effects and the prospect of good that derives from it are permanent for the Institute and for the Church.

The specification *of the* for me is a kind of *absolute possessive*; it implies reference to a particular founder of a particular institute. The singular *charism*, then, does not leave room for potential misunderstandings; we are not talking here about the *charisms* of the founder, which represent the set of personal gifts of nature and grace that characterise that person’s experience as a human being and a believer, but of that particular gift that was given to the individual in view of and in relation to the task received of giving rise to a new religious family.

The positions of the various authors are different[[90]](#footnote-91) and, in some cases, perhaps not entirely consistent.[[91]](#footnote-92) In any case, beyond the different semantic choices, they can indicate a different theological approach to the hermeneutics of the founder’s charism and, therefore, give rise to different perceptions of the mandate that the Church gives to each religious family to live in *fidelity to itself.*

To better clarify my particular perspective, we can look at some other expressions used by the ecclesial Magisterium or in reflection by theologians.

#### 2.2 Collective or permanent charism of the institute

For me the *founder’s charism* is that personal gift which, since it is at the origin of the experience of foundation, outlines the essential spiritual features that characterise the Institute’s identity, its mission in the Church, and its particular spirituality.

Giancarlo Ghirlanda introduced the expression “*collective charism of the institute*” into theological reflection. He states:

At the origin of each institute is the charism of the founder, which includes personal charisms and the collective charism of founder or foundress. Although personal charisms influence the collective charism of the founder in some way, they do not bind the members of the institute because they do not belong to it, being strictly personal, special and often extraordinary charisms. The collective charism of founder, on the other hand, even if it conforms to personal charisms, is by its nature shared with others.[[92]](#footnote-93)

The collective charism of the institute would therefore be a gift given by God to an *institution* or a *group*; this, in my opinion, is difficult to understand on a theological level and sometimes contradicted by the history of some foundations that have had internal difficulties and controversies from the very beginning.[[93]](#footnote-94)

This uncertainty is evident in the words of Fr Ruiz Jurado when he states: “Theologians are inclined to think that charisms, as gifts of the Spirit, are granted to specific individuals and not to institutions, although they can be attributed to institutions in a different sense than to the founder. This way of thinking about them seems more in line with the New Testament doctrine of charisms and with the nature of the ‘experience of the Spirit’ with which the charism of the founders is identified in *Mutuae Relationes*. It would seem that the experience of the Spirit should be attributed to people and not to institutions as such.”[[94]](#footnote-95)

Laurier Labonté, who in 1976 suggested replacing the expression *charisme de l 'institut* with *souci primordial de l 'institut,[[95]](#footnote-96) also seems to be of this opinion.* As early as 1970, Fr De Candido denounced the idea that a person’s charism could be inherited by an institution as theological abuse, attributing the inability to dialogue that sometimes characterises relations between religious, to this fundamental error.[[96]](#footnote-97)

A possible solution to the controversy seems to me to be contained in an attempt by Giancarlo Rocca to *regulate the vocabulary.* He suggested different levels of interpretation of the term charism: in a *narrow sense* the term should refer only to the founder, while in a broad sense it could also refer to the institute. “When applied to the explicit function of founding an institute,” he says, “charism is taken in its primordial meaning of a particular, personal, incommunicable gift granted by God to a person for the good of the Church. When applied to the institute, it becomes synonymous with end-of-mission-apostolic task, that is, it becomes a content, a programme.”[[97]](#footnote-98)

The expression *charism of the Institute,* then, can be read in the broad, *analogical* sense; but in my opinion we must no forget that in a proper sense it refers to the gift that is given to the founder *for* the Institute and *for* the good of the Church, a gift that must be *constantly safeguarded, more deeply understood and developed[[98]](#footnote-99)* in continuity with his founding experience.

In this sense, I believe we should use all the expressions that refer to particular *charisms*, such as the *Franciscan charism,* or the *Salesian charism* or the *Lasallian charism*; in the strict sense they refer to the gift made to Francis, John Bosco, John Baptist de la Salle for, in view of, for the benefit of the foundation of their respective institutes and the Church. In current language, then, they generally refer to the spirit, disposition, nature, and mission of the religious family, but they must recall the *responsibility* that these institutes have to *welcome* the gift made to the founder *for* the institute and to grow *in continuity* with that.

Even the use of the expression *charism of the Institute*, in some cases, may raise some concerns. For some the wording *of the institute* seems to refer indistinctly to the period of its origins; for others it refers to the charism in its *historical* development; for still others it is the charism of the institute *today*, as it is realised in the changing conditions of the times by its followers.

All this risks “blurring” the necessary reference to the *charism of the founder* as the only criterion for verifying the fidelity of an institution to the task it is called to carry out in the Church. Distinguishing the *charism of the Institute* from the *charism of the founder*, emphasising the possibility of its *development*, while failing to stress more strongly the need for *continuity*, can give rise to what Fabio Ciardi condemns as “the danger of replacing the founder”.[[99]](#footnote-100)

For example, Fr Mario Midali, who distinguishes the *founding charism* from the *development of the original charism* and from the *charism of the Institute61, writes: “The charismatic experience of the origins[[100]](#footnote-101)* is destined to endure throughout history, to develop and progress, or else face decline and even disappearance from history’s stage.”[[101]](#footnote-102) And in another, less recent study, he wrote:

The charism of an Institute is necessarily linked to the life and activity of all those who, starting with the founder, have shared its adventure following the call of the Holy Spirit. It cannot therefore be limited to a single period, even if as privileged as that of the origins, and even less restricted to those most directly responsible for the leadership of the respective religious community. It covers the entire span of its history and is present in all its members, certainly in different forms according to the human talents and spiritual gifts of each one, and in proportion to each one’s correspondence to the vocation received.”[[102]](#footnote-103)

Along the same lines, the reflection of another Salesian, Fr Joseph Aubry, who in one of his last theological studies on consecrated life, in a paragraph entitled The “charism of the founder” developed in the “charism of the institute” (ET 32), wrote:

The Church today has strongly asked each institute for two things. The first: reject all genericism, *rediscover and re-evaluate its vocation and identity...* How? By clarifying its ‘heritage’, which includes ‘its own spirit and intentions’, but also the ‘healthy traditions’ of its history.

Secondly, *not to block* its charism, either in the past or in the present, which is not something to be preserved but a living reality inherent in the consciousness and heart of all members and is to be translated into meaningful choices. We must therefore accept the effort to *re-actualise in the Church and the world today* the gift made to the founder....

The Church invites every institute to ‘convert to the Holy Spirit’, to rediscover something of the boldest creativity of the founder, without fear of risk. This undertaking, as difficult as it is essential, is entrusted to all members united in deep communion (all together are the depositories and bearers of the charism), open to communion with other charismatic families... and attentive to what ‘the Spirit is saying to the Churches’ today.[[103]](#footnote-104)

In number 32 of *Evangelica Testificatio*, to which Fr Aubry refers, we recognise, however, a different concern on the part of the Magisterium: “Nimia enim cupiditas cuiusdam flexibilis mobilitatis et liberae facultatis effectricis inducere possunt, ut rigiditas accusetur etiam minima pars constantis ordinis in consuetudinibus servandis, quam vita Communitatis et sodalium perfectio pro more expostulant. Mentes intemperanter incitatae, quae ad caritatem fraternam provocant vel ad ea, quae afflatu Spiritus Sancti insinuari putantur, Instituta ad interitum possunt perducere.”[[104]](#footnote-105)

Here, as elsewhere, the real concern of the Magisterium seems to be “the excessive desire for flexibility and creative spontaneity” that can “lead institutions to collapse”.

Regarding the distinction introduced by Midali, Fr Ruiz Jurado says: “We tried to distinguish between the charism of the founder and the charism of the institute in other ways by establishing the difference between the charism of the origins of the Institute and the current one. I am of the opinion that no valid basis can be found for this differentiation in the guidelines of the Magisterium.”[[105]](#footnote-106)

Fr Ruiz Jurado’s position seems to me to be completely acceptable in the light of the concern, constantly demonstrated by the Church’s Magisterium, for a significant return to the *sources* and to *the primitive spirit of the institutes,[[106]](#footnote-107)* a criterion that guarantees the authenticity of any attempt to *reformulate the charism[[107]](#footnote-108)* and the very possibility of ratification, by the Church, of any proposal to change the constitutional dictate formulated by the founder.[[108]](#footnote-109)

Across the broad spectrum of theological opinions, however, there is no lack of some even more extreme positions. John C. Futrell, for example, said in 1971: “The charism of the founder of any religious community is this charism as it lived *now*”.[[109]](#footnote-110)

And the reply from Giancarlo Rocca:

If we accept that the “charism of the institute” is that of the institute as it lives today, then its current position is entirely correct. In this case, the institute would have its own charism that would develop according to the times and places and today’s would certainly be correct. To say that today’s is the correct charism of the institute is not, however, a methodologically sustainable position (in practice, the correct charism would always be the last, and the ways of the past could all be wrong)...

If we accept evolution and development with a view to re-acculturation, it is proposed that the charism of the institute should contain within itself seeds that are constantly germinating. While this position is useful for initiating the necessary update, it does not yet specify sufficiently what the concrete point of reference is (it is not enough to speak of discernment) on which the present and the future can be judged and legitimised.[[110]](#footnote-111)

As Rudolf Mainka points out, the charism of foundation is certainly subject to a natural development and is enriched with an ever new creative capacity; but this growth is nothing more than the “manifestation, clarification and development of the power of the Spirit that the charism, a ‘gift of God’, had in itself from the beginning and of which even the founder and his companions were not fully aware.”[[111]](#footnote-112)

As I will say later, the development of the *founder’s charism* must be compared to the development of a living organism that continues to grow without losing its identity, remaining substantially unchanged. “Accomodatio enim,” says *Evangelica Testificatio, “*cuiusvis animantis ad ea, in quorum ambitu degit, non est in eo posita, ut veram suam dimittat identitatem, sed in eo, ut se confirmet vitali vigore sibi peculiari”.[[112]](#footnote-113)

### 2.3 Founding charism, original charism

The spiritual experience of the founder, communicated to the first disciples and shared by them, gives rise to a *founding[[113]](#footnote-114)* or original experience.

The expressions *founding charism* or *foundational* and *original charism* refer to the experience of the origins of the Institute, to its particular kind of life, its nature, its character as it was “conceived” by the founder. Here too it seems to us that we cannot speak of *charism* in the narrow sense.

The founding charism, the foundational or original charism would therefore be, as a whole, the set of spiritual gifts common to the founder and the first group of disciples that are at the origin of the foundation experience, an experience that outlines the essential features that characterise the Institute’s identity, its mission in the Church, its particular spirituality compared to those of other religious families.

It is, as Lozano says well, the *proprium* that characterises the life and mission of the first community. “Un proprium” the author specifies “que deberá mantenerse siempre en continuidad dinámica con los orígenes, a pesar de y a través de toda discontinuidad de las formas contingentes, condicionantes psicológicos, ambientales y teológicos por medio de los cuales ha de expresarse en la historia.”[[114]](#footnote-115)

In fact, in my opinion, the semantic content of these expressions must also be traced back to the founder’s *charism,* if the risks deriving from a loss of the necessary reference criterion are to be avoided.

This is the opinion of Santiago González Silva, who attributes the same meaning to the two expressions *founder’s charism* and *founding charism, thus highlighting the responsibility of the disciples to carry on the heritage inherited from the founder*.[[115]](#footnote-116)

### 3. Combining fidelity and renewal

As I have already pointed out in speaking of the use of the term *charism* in the post-synodal exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, the Church’s Magisterium has addressed an insistent appeal in this, as in other official documents, to the different institutes, congregations and orders, for *fidelity to the charism of the founder.*

Number 36 of the Exhortation, in particular, bears the title *Fidelitas erga charisma.* There we read: “Ante omnia postulatum invenitur *fidelitatis ipsi fundationis charismati* ac propterea spiritali cuiusque Instituti patrimonio. Hac enim in ipsa fidelitate erga fundatorum ac fundatricum afflatum, Spiritus nempe Sancti donum, facilius deteguntur fervidiusque vivuntur necessaria vitae consecratae elementa.”[[116]](#footnote-117)

The expressions *fidelity to the founding charism* and *fidelity to the inspiration of the founders* are equivalent then. A little further on, the document states:

Haec enim semper triplex necessitudo[[117]](#footnote-118), licet cum distinctis variarum vitae formarum proprietatibus, in omni fundationis charismate emergit, eam ipsam ob causam quod dominatur ibi «profundum animi studium sese Christo configurandi ad aliquem Eius mysterii aspectum testificandum»; quae quidem ratio necesse est concorporetur atque enucleetur secundum verissimam Instituti traditionem eiusque ad Regulas Constitutiones et Statuta.[[118]](#footnote-119)

The founding charism, considered as a gift of the Spirit to the founders, must therefore conform to the rules, constitutions, and statutes of each religious institute or family.

However this fidelity, as the following number of the same Exhortation says in its title *Efficiens fidelitatis,* musts be *creative.* “Admonentur ideo Instituta ut magna cum rerum suscipiendarum audacia alacritatem revocent invenctionis sanctitatemque fundatorum ac fundatricum ita sane signis temporum respondentes in orbe hodie exorientibus.”[[119]](#footnote-120)

Perseverance in striving towards holiness is therefore the best expression of this *audacia* that characterised the founder; moreover, this dynamic fidelity is called to be docile both to the divine *inspiratio*, given to the founders, and to the judgement of the Church.[[120]](#footnote-121)

The lack of living contact with the founder’s experience, then, can transform the founding charism into a pile of cold ashes.[[121]](#footnote-122) To avert this danger, the Council had stated: “Accomodata renovatio vitae religiosae simul complectitur et continuum reditum ad omnis vitae christianae fontes primigeniamque institutorum inspirationem et aptationem ipsorum ad mutatas temporum condiciones.”[[122]](#footnote-123)

The question remains whether and how this *continuous return to the sources,* urged by the Council Fathers, has been realised in the last thirty years by the various religious families.

Any detailed evaluation would be long and complex and obviously beyond the limits of my study, but some examples are possible.

First of all, it seems to me that in some cases there is still a serious historico-critical investigation to be carried out that allows us to know the writings of the founder, the history of the foundation, the authentic spiritual tradition of the Institute; perhaps not all the congregations have yet invested sufficient resources in this valuable work. In some cases this could even have compromised the complete correspondence of the *renewed constitutions* to the founder’s original charism.

In other this path has been taken with the help of historical criticism or the human sciences, sometimes perhaps more with the aim of “demystifying” the history of the origins and freeing it from the exaggerations of a certain devotionalist hagiography, than of rediscovering the heart and *proprium* of the founding experience and thus giving impetus to the spiritual life of the institute.

Unfortunately, it seems to me that the history of the founder, even if canonised by the Church, has rarely been read as a “theological existence”, a mission received, an experience communicated in the Spirit and by the Spirit as a true *exegesis* of the mystery of Christ. Fr Antonio Sicari wrote:

The existence of a saint is in fact in itself a “theological existence”, the more it tends to identify with the mission received from above.

Theological existence means that there is an objective reconciliation between holiness and theology in the saint, between spiritual and dogmatic theology, since holiness, as a lived, “Marian” acceptance of the divine mystery, is an exegesis of Revelation, therefore of the mystery of Christ. Therefore, it becomes the real place where the kind of “reflected” theology that is the science of theologians can also be nourished and authentically formulated.[[123]](#footnote-124)

While on the one hand, therefore, certain excesses of devotional hagiography have contributed to creating a fracture between *theology* and *holiness*, on the other hand a certain modern hagiography has made this fracture deeper, sometimes re-reading the founding experience by starting only from psychological or sociological categories.

“The most important thing in the great saint,” Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote a few years ago, “is his mission, the new charism given by the Spirit to the Church”.[[124]](#footnote-125) And this *gift* of knowing or, better, recognising, requires a particular approach, a method that takes into account the nature of the subject: this method cannot be deduced from other sciences whose conclusions remain a valuable resource. It must be the method of spiritual theology.

it seems that there is still a long way to go with regard to the *mandate* entrusted by the Council to the various religious families.

“It seems that the renewal begun with the Second Vatican Council,” the Congress of the Union of Major Superiors said more generally in 1994, “continues to be an excessively long dawn; day never arrives. Many things can be sensed, but darkness still prevents us from seeing their outline.”[[125]](#footnote-126)

It may be interesting to note, then, that religious life throughout all these centuries has always undergone *reforms,[[126]](#footnote-127)* and these reforms have almost always been characterised by a *return to the past*, by an attempt to revitalise the charism of the origins, to take as a *norm* the original rule, the *spiritual experience of the founder,* and to relive the main features of the *founding experience* in the same radical way. The importance of this *fidelity to the charism of the founder* was therefore felt in the Church long before the Second Vatican Council indicated it as an authentic criterion of renewal.

The relationship that should bind every institute or congregation to its particular *gift,* that is, to the charism of its founder, seems to me to be observed, in a dynamic way, in four successive stages:

- a gift to *get to know*;

- a gift *to be discerned*;

- a gift *to be safeguarded*;

- a gift *to be developed.*

#### 3.1 A gift to get to know

The first, fundamental relationship which characterises an authentic acceptance of the gift *proper* to each institute, inevitably passes from an adequate, significant knowledge of the founder, his writings, the main *sources* and the history of the founding experience.

The responsibility for guaranteeing this particular aspect of the *initial and ongoing formation* of the members of an institute is entrusted in a special way to the Superiors and General Chapters;[[127]](#footnote-128) everyone, however,shares responsibility for this task of maintaining vital and meaningful knowledge of their spiritual heritage.

“For any community member, then,” Antonio Romano rightly points out, “the ignorance of their founders and of the founding experience of the origins is first of all ignorance and lack of fidelity to themselves, to their vocation and spiritual identity and undermines any possibility of genuine community renewal.”[[128]](#footnote-129) He goes on to say:

Creative stimulus in this process is provided by listening lovingly to the founder, meditating on his writings, which have a charismatic impact within an institutionalising community, caring for the interior life, study, prayer, reflection and communion of life. If this is lacking, it means that the charismatic and institutional fibres of the group have not absorbed the potential of the founder’s charism, and community life is heading towards a sterile survival with an inexorable path towards extinction... Anchoring oneself to one’s origins, as in the Church, is not a nostalgic return to a past that is now history, but uninterrupted contact with the source that makes us young.[[129]](#footnote-130)

#### 3.2 A gift to be discerned

The rereading of the sources is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to be faithful to the Council’s mandate.

The historical approach must in fact be accompanied, as we said, by a *phenomenological*, spiritual-experiential, theological and, ultimately, hermeneutical approach, which above all permits a rethinking of the life and the renewed constitutions of the Institute in the light of the *founder’s charism*; in particular, it is a matter of recognising and distinguishing the characteristics of the founding experience, which represent the *proprium* of the institute and which are destined to remain, even if they take on new forms, in changing times, from the other elements that are transitory and linked to the particular historical and cultural circumstances of the founding experience.

In this regard, Fr Fabio Ciardi writes:

It is necessary to study whether such and such a particular devotion, for example, was linked to the personal piety of the founder, whether it was inherited from the common custom of the temple, or whether he wanted to instil it as a characteristic element of his religious family as the result of a particular experience linked to the founding project. If these components are not part of the heritage that the founder intended to hand over, they are to be removed from the permanent and transferable charismatic core.[[130]](#footnote-131)

This particular *discernment in the Spirit* therefore finds its characteristic place and vital impulse in the *conformation to Christ* which represents the surest way to combine *fidelity* and *renewal.*

“Utcumque tamen persuasio vigere debet” says the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata,*  “in qaerenda pleniore usque cum Domino confirmatione consistere ipsam sponsionem cuiusvis «renovationis» quae consilio pristino fidelis persistere vult.”[[131]](#footnote-132)

Giancarlo Ghirlanda emphasises: “The Spirit is not self-contradictory; therefore, every historical evolution of an institute in its institutional forms, in order to be authentic, must be in continuity and consistent with the original charism of its foundation, otherwise it must be rejected. It is the Spirit who suggests the adaptations necessary for the charism to remain alive.”[[132]](#footnote-133)

This particular *discernment*, therefore, does not differ, as regards its general characteristics, from any other spiritual discernment. Its particular purpose, however, will allow me to identify, in the last part of this chapter, some possible hermeneutical approaches that make its definition more grounded.

#### 3.3 A gift to be safeguarded

The exhortation to remain faithful to the gift received, as I have already pointed out several times and, in particular, with regard to the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, is found constantly in the Church’s Magisterium. “The key to the realisation of every institute,” said John Paul II “was its fidelity to the initial charism that God found in the founder to enrich the Church. For this reason I repeat the words of Paul VI ‘Be faithful to the spirit of your founders, to their evangelical intentions, to the example of their holiness... It is precisely here that dynamism is found in every religious family’.[[133]](#footnote-134) And this fidelity continues to be a certain criterion for judging what ecclesial activities the institute and each member should undertake to contribute to the mission of Christ.”[[134]](#footnote-135)

The document *Mutuae Relationes*, citing no. 11 of *Evangelica Testificatio* and the Second Vatican Council itself, stated in 1978:

Propterea *Ecclesia propriam indolem variorum Institutorum religiosorum tuetur et fovet.* Haec autem *propria indoles* illum secum fert peculiarem quoque stilum sanctificationis et apostolatus, qui suam definitam traditionem ita constituit, ut eius obiectiva elementa convenienter deprehendi possint.

Necesse ergo est hoc tempore evolutionis culturalis et renovationis ecclesialis identitatem cuiscque Instituti adeo in tuto servari, ut vitari periculum possit non satis definitae cuiusdam condicionis, qua Religiosi in vitam Ecclesiae modo vago et ambiguo inserantur, cum in debita consideratione non habeantur definiti operandi modi eorum indolis proprii.[[135]](#footnote-136)

“Fundatorum mens atque proposita – afferma ancora il *Codice di Diritto Canonico* del 1983 – a competenti auctoritate ecclesiastica sancita circa naturam, finem, spiritum et indolem instituti, necnon eius sanae traditiones, quae omnia patrimonium eiusdem instituti constituunt, ab omnibus fideliter servanda sunt.”[[136]](#footnote-137)

The mandate entrusted to religious families by Vatican II, however, does not imply “archaeologism” (a return to the past), a static *restoration*. “The return to the origins of Christian and religious life,” John Paul II said a few years ago, “has nothing to do with a backward-looking and impossible revival of a past that is now over. On the contrary, it is the ability to rediscover in the past those living and bubbling springs, those vigorous and nourishing roots that are the ultimate reason for our fundamental choices, our life, our present and future history.”[[137]](#footnote-138)

#### 3.4 A gift to be developed

Number 11 of the well-known *Mutuae Relationes* directive had defined the *founder’s charism* as follows: “Ipsum *fundatorum charisma* videtur esse quaedam *Spiritus experientia*, propriis discipulis tradita, qui secundum eam viverent, eam custodirent altioremque redderent et constanter augerent simul cun Christi Corpore iugiter crescente.”[[138]](#footnote-139)

From this perspective, the *founder’s charism* presents itself as a living reality that prolongs its effects in history, creatively actualising the founding experience, in fidelity to the gift received. Progress and return to the origins, renewal and fidelity are realities that must be combined. “It is a dynamic fidelity,” *Optiones Evangelicae* stresses in 1980 *–* “open to the impulse of the Spirit, which passes through ecclesial events and the signs of the times, of which the persevering exhortation of the Magisterium is the bearer.”[[139]](#footnote-140)

It is in attempting to combine the two “poles” of fidelity and renewal that the various authors sometimes seem to diverge, at least in certain emphases or points. For example, Mario Midali, emphasising the need for progress and renewal, says:

Consistent with this order of ideas, it must be recognised that the charism of the Founder and the origins is not a *fixed* and *exclusive* experience that, in a certain sense, contains everything in it that is required to feed the growth of an Institute. Instead, it is a *reality in motion*, *open to developments*, even considerable ones, with the sole condition that they are consistent with the founding inspirations, because this implies substantial fidelity to the charismatic project of the Founder.

The reasons for this progress can be given. This happens first of all through the contribution of the gifts of nature and grace of individual members... It happens again through growth and expansion, not purely numerical and geographical, but especially spiritual and missionary... Finally, it is required by the urgent need to adapt the founder’s plan to different cultures and regions...[[140]](#footnote-141)

In reality, it seems to me that speaking of *considerable developments* or referring to the *gifts of nature and grace of individual members* can cause us to forget that the *development* of the founding charism must take place *ad intra* of its life process, the first act of which is its original manifestation. In a similar way to what happens to any vital organism, the *charism of the founder* or *of the Institute* does not grow by juxtaposition of *other personal gifts* of its members or by *leaps in quality*, but develops while preserving its genetic heritage, its “biological identity”.

This seems to me to be the perspective that Fr Antonio Romano’s reflection takes when he says:

...every community, in making the effort of authentic renewal, must always start from its own original identity, must know how to look at its own past, read it deeply and understand it ever more fully. Only in this way will consecrated persons be able to create their future and be able to respond prophetically to the new ‘signs of the times’. There can be no benefits for the local Church where one is called to live and inculturate one’s vocation unless one remains anchored, in dynamic fidelity, to the spirituality and charism of one’s founder, since the renewal of institutes cannot take place on the basis of sociological motivations, but only in a rediscovery of the specific nature of the founding charism.[[141]](#footnote-142)

From this particular perspective we could say, paraphrasing the title of a pastoral letter of a few years ago, that the founding charism must continually *become what it already is.*[[142]](#footnote-143)

This development, therefore, as stated by the founder of the Little Sisters inspired by the spirituality of Charles De Foucauld, is nothing more than “the manifestation, clarification and development of that power of the Spirit which the charism, ‘a gift from God’, had within it from the beginning and of which even the founder and his companions were not fully aware.”[[143]](#footnote-144)

Our gaze, therefore, will be constantly turned towards the past, in the awareness that accepting one’s past is, at the same time, creatively accepting one’s present and future.[[144]](#footnote-145)

### 4. The hermeneutics of the founding charism

The founding charism is presented, then, as something alive, an organism that grows while remaining faithful to itself. Fabio Cairdi notes that “We are dealing with a reality of the spiritual order which has an authentic historical *continuum*; it is not static”.[[145]](#footnote-146)

Being a reality of the *spiritual order*, the founder’s charism, as I said, can only be correctly interpreted within a process that has the same characteristics as any other spiritual discernment. Its hermeneutics, moreover, are a delicate operation and never definitively concluded. “The interpretation of the charism” says Antonio Romano “... has the characteristics of life and the founder’s sons and daughters are subjected to the flow of time and need continuous reflection and interpretation, without losing over time the essential characteristics that are inscribed in the permanent code of the charism itself.”[[146]](#footnote-147)

Faced with such a complex and even “painful”[[147]](#footnote-148) operation, as it may require guidelines and reforms that are not always easy to implement, it is necessary on the one hand to be particularly docile to the Spirit of God himself, the author and dispenser of every *gift*, and on the other to resort to a *science* and a *method* that is as objective as possible.

Some authors agree in identifying three different ways of approaching the founding charism:[[148]](#footnote-149)

\* the *historical approach* that starts from the life and activity of the founder, taking into account the founding experience almost exclusively; this approach includes the risk of a kind of *fundamentalism* that *mummifies* the charism, reducing it to accidental and outdated forms which no longer respond to the changed needs of the times and the needs of the ecclesial community;[[149]](#footnote-150)

\* the *experiential approach* which starts from the life of the Institute *today*, from its demands and expectations and from the awareness of having to respond to changing social and cultural needs. The risk in this approach is the loss of the original identity of the institute, to the point of a real *replacement of the founder.[[150]](#footnote-151)* The founding experience ends by highlighting only the elements that “confirm” the choices made by the Institute. The founder, therefore, risks being reduced, as Rudolf Mainka says, “to the role of being a tool that we use whenever we can justify our opinion and our activity through him, but which we leave aside at other times.”[[151]](#footnote-152)

\* the *hermeneutical approach,*[[152]](#footnote-153) which uses the demands and conclusions of contemporary hermeneutics, enhancing both the contact with the sources and with the founding experience, and the current theological and cultural assumptions and current “experience” of the Institute.

Although not without risks, this latter approach is considered by many authors to be the only one capable of adequately safeguarding both of the issues that emerge from the above reflection: fidelity to the origins and renewal.[[153]](#footnote-154)

Even from this perspective, however, we must not forget the particular *aim* of the interpretative process. Fr Antonio Romano writes:

The charism of the founders is an experience of the Spirit that can only be understood through a profound experiential-historical-theological-spiritual act, that is, a method that adequately takes into account the historical, cultural, religious, social and theological presuppositions of the past, but also a profoundly religious act, an act that is understood through life, reflection and prayer, an act of continuous conversion to one’s vocation.[[154]](#footnote-155)

#### 4.1 Contemporary hermeneutics and spiritual discernment

Some of the fundamental instances of contemporary hermeneutics can certainly help us understand how fruitful the relationship between past and present can be in the interpretation of the founding charism.[[155]](#footnote-156)

Hermeneutics as a science is usually applied to the interpretation of a literary work or an historical event; but its fundamental canons can also effectively be used to interpret a living and dynamic reality such as the founding charism.

Fabio Ciardi examines some of these instances in his *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica del carisma di fondazione* (Listening to the Spirit: Hermeneutics of the Charism of Foundation):[[156]](#footnote-157)

\* the *autonomy of the object (what is being interpreted)* that must be safeguarded in its integrity and otherness. This requires a constant effort to minimise the influence of one’s own subjectivity in the interpretative procedures, and great methodological rigour;

\* the *circularity* between part and whole within the reality to be interpreted and between *object* and *interpreting subject.* “There is a continuous dialogue,” Ciardi says ”... between the reality of the past, my present and the tradition through which the past comes to me.”[[157]](#footnote-158)

\* the *relevance of understanding*, i.e. the awareness that one’s investigation of the past is conditioned by one’s present experience. “This makes the hermeneutic process active: an experience, an encounter.”[[158]](#footnote-159)

\* *hermeneutic consonance*, i.e. the need for a particular *affinity* between the object and the interpreting subject. “One cannot discover or interpret the ‘founder’s charism’ Antonio Romano notes, “unless one deeply grasps the *apex* of his soul, his radical intention, his personal love for God…”[[159]](#footnote-160) “The object of the interpretation,” Fabio Ciardi makes “while retaining its autonomy, is in a certain sense immanent to the interpreting subject.”[[160]](#footnote-161) The work of the founders, from this perspective, is a reality that transcends them, that goes beyond their own reflected consciousness.

Another of the important “achievements” of contemporary hermeneutics is overcoming the historico-critical study of *sources and as an “autonomous” stage.*

It is not enough to publish the critical editions of the sources, Fabio Ciardi says, however indispensable they may be. All archival and documentary research and historical analysis must lead to hermeneutics, that is, it must be able to interpret today’s life and result in proposals for the path that every religious family is called to follow in its desire to offer ever new answers to the ever new demands of the Church and the world. We must look to the past not to do restoration work, but to become more rooted in the present, to better read the signs of the times and respond appropriately...[[161]](#footnote-162)

All this, I would add, must happen not only out of a desire for renewal but in docility to the Spirit who *searches the depths of God[[162]](#footnote-163)* and who *makes all things new.[[163]](#footnote-164)* This is the path sometimes followed by other *religious saints* in the footsteps of their founders, in a perfect synthesis of *fidelity* and *renewal*. In my opinion, these other *saints* are the best “interpreters” of the founder’s charism.

#### 4.2 The hermeneutical journey

The demands of contemporary hermeneutics therefore come to our aid in this difficult operation of *spiritual surgery,[[164]](#footnote-165)* which can enable us to revisit even a single aspect of a *founder’s charism.*

What is now needed is a methodologically coherent path that allows me to approach, as objectively as possible, the *founder’s spiritual experience* in order to determine its *proprium*, its original inspiration, the radical intention that gives the new foundation its character and identity. The spiritual experience of the founder, in fact, represents the *theological place* where it is possible to interpret the charism, to know in depth the gift received from him.

We can distinguish two fundamental stages in this journey:

\* the investigation of the *sources*, those in the narrow sense, first of all, in particular the writings of the founder, which almost always require prior critical study; but we can also consider as sources for interpreting the charism, in a broad sense, the life of the founder, the analysis of his *spiritual experience* and that of his first disciples faithful to his inspiration, the writings of the latter, the history of the institute and any other element that allows us to approach the founding experience;

\* the *interpretation of the charism*, which is the real hermeneutical work and which must lead us to grasp the gift that the Spirit, through the founder, wanted to communicate permanently to the congregation he founded for the good of the Church.

##### 4.2.1 The study of the sources to identify the charism

As I have said, the hermeneutics of charism requires a rational and analytical study, as objective as possible, of certain fundamental “resources”. These are:

*a) The founder’s writings*

The first stage, which precedes the hermeneutics of the founding charism, consists in the arrangement and critical study of the founder’s writings, particularly those writings to which the founder himself entrusted the task of explaining his inspiration or the charism of the institute. In the first place, therefore, there are the *rules* or *constitutions,* which express the nature of the institute, its aims, the means of achieving them, and then also the *spiritual writings* or writings on religious life.

This often difficult and dry work allows us to reach the original texts and observe them objectively and critically.

It seems important to note, however, that the problem of the *originality* of some of the founder’s writings can in some cases be considered secondary in order to know the founding charism. Regardless of whether these texts are sometimes the result of compilation rather than the original expression of the founder, or contain contributions from some of the *first disciples,* they nevertheless preserve his *choices,* often even his theological vision or his particular inclinations, and are equally valuable for the hermeneutics of the charism. Furthermore, these texts contribute to the not always easy task of “reconstructing” the particular “spiritual climate” that helped bring about the founding experience.

In this work of careful re-reading, the contribution of psychology and, in particular, of *content analysis can certainly be useful.* Some writings can *reveal* more than they expressly say, because they offer a glimpse into the author’s inner world; I believe that this study could be particularly interesting in *biographies* written by the founder, biographies that often indirectly reveal his personal *experiences* and his personal *inclinations.*

As we will see shortly, *autobiographical writings deserve a special mention due to their importance.*

*b) The founder’s life and spiritual experience*

The founder’s life is certainly one of the main *sources* for the study of the founding charism. In addition to introducing us to the formative journey that helped shape his personal universe of values and the evolution of his cognitive, affective and emotional processes, knowledge of the personal history and work of the founder is an indispensable tool for a correct hermeneutic interpretation of his writings. Fabio Ciardi says:

The historico-critical investigation is called upon to embrace the entire life and work of the founder as its object of investigation. Simply reading his texts is not enough to get in touch with him. His person and his message emerge only from the overall, organic and unified consideration of his achievements and operational choices, throughout his life. Lived experience is the first *locus theologicus* from where the charism must be drawn. The charism is an experience of the Spirit; an experience, therefore, even before it is a doctrinal elaboration. Even in the far from infrequent case that founders have not left writings, we can still access the founding experience. Their teaching is all there in their lived experience.[[165]](#footnote-166)

Particular attention should be paid to knowledge of the cultural and spiritual environment of the origins, the currents of spirituality that influenced the formative experience and the spiritual life of the founder and the fledgling congregation. The founder’s studies, his reading, the characteristics of his language, his formators and spiritual directors, his friendships and, even before that, his family environment and personal experiences take on considerable importance in this work of analysis.

Similarly, it may be important to ask in which cases his choices or his “spiritual paths” are detached from the environment in which he lived or from the formation he received.

These cultural and environmental elements can help us to approach the founder’s *spiritual experience*.[[166]](#footnote-167)

This *intimate life*, which sometimes eludes rigorous and exhaustive investigation due to its very nature, can be particularly revealed by any *autobiographical writings*, especially where these do not merely recount events but also the developments of inner life, *spiritual emotions,* journey of the soul, or even by *letters*, which more easily reveal the immediacy of feelings.

However, the founder has not always left writings with these characteristics, sometimes due to a certain reticence shown in “talking about himself”, the result of sincere humility. “It is all these obstacles, and others,”says Fr Gonzalez Silva, “that create the problem of vagueness, of gaps in the text which the reader must fill in and will fill in differently at different times and in different societies. In dealing with them, it will be necessary to know how to combine science with intuition.”[[167]](#footnote-168)   
Sometimes it will be a matter of applying a principle similar to what is called *analogy of faith* in the exegesis of Sacred Scripture: every small *fragment* acquires its true meaning when inserted into the *whole* of the founder’s human and spiritual experience and receives its authentication from being in harmony with it.  
It should be emphasised, however, that the *spiritual experience* of the founder is, at any rate, a gift of the Spirit, a *datum* that inevitably shifts our attention from the *subject,* from his personal psychological and spiritual dynamics, from his personal history to the *objective reality* that in some way “imposes itself” on him; this consideration becomes more important when we are faced with *mystical experiences* that involve the gift of *passive contemplation.*

From this point of view, I reiterate, the spiritual experience of the founder remains a *mystery* to be approached, on the scientific level, with the awareness of being able to reach, at most, reasonable and documented *hypotheses* that have the character of *moral certainty* or ample *probability.*

A valuable contribution in this regard can be gleaned from the testimonies of those who lived with the founder and were co-protagonists of the founding experience. It may be that these documents require to be read with critical capacity; but it would be a serious mistake to ignore them altogether to avoid the “risk” of any historical inconsistencies or be faced with writings that are not sufficiently objective because influenced by a significant relationship with the founder*.*[[168]](#footnote-169)

*c) The first disciples*

In my opinion, the importance of approaching the first community of disciples is linked to two different reasons.

First of all, this first group contributes, sometimes in a decisive way, to the birth of the religious family. The founding inspiration is concretely embodied in the founding experience. “It is in this work of incarnation,” Fabio Ciardi says “that the first companions contribute to making explicit the contents and essential lines of the particular charism given to the founder or foundress, experiencing them themselves in their own lives and initiatives, so that the inspiration acquires an increasingly defined face.”[[169]](#footnote-170) When the contribution of the first disciples is decisive, they can take on the role of real *co-founders.*

Secondly, the group of first disciples, during the life of the founder, but especially after his death, sometimes directly takes on the fundamental role of *discernment* in the hermeneutics of the founding charism; discernment that is all the more authoritative the more the spiritual proximity with the founder is demonstrable. As Rudolf Mainka says, “They lived day after day in close communion with the founder; they were able to assimilate his spirit and experience first-hand how the founder overcame and resolved the initial difficulties... And they were able to grasp what was in him the particular charism of the founder of the new religious family.”[[170]](#footnote-171) “Like the apostles” notes Antonio Romano on the same subject “the first disciples are the main depositories and privileged witnesses of the original charism in its *nascent* moment.”[[171]](#footnote-172)

In an eminent way, this first group of disciples was able to “read from within” the charism of the foundation and engage in the hermeneutical process of *connaturality*[[172]](#footnote-173) which makes the common gift of the Spirit more explicit. “The body interprets itself,” says Antonio Romano, “and, through this same act of interpretation, creates *a community of memory and hope*, uniting the past and the future in the present and dynamically developing the historical and communal dimension of its members, creatively planning its own future.”[[173]](#footnote-174)

The importance and *interpretative authority* of each of these disciples can be considered linked not only to the length of time they spent in close proximity to the founder and their loyalty to the Institute, but also to the institutional role that the founder decided to entrust to them.

The first group of disciples, in fact, does not present itself to us as an undifferentiated whole, but often appears ‘structured’ in relation to tasks and roles, in many cases established and assigned by the founder himself.

Therefore, in my opinion, knowledge of the first *novice directors* and the first *formation programmes* they implemented, of the first *spiritual directors*, and also of the first successor, especially if he was appointed by the founder himself and indicated by him as the authentic interpreter of his spirit.

*d) The history of the origins of the institute*

Another important *source* for the hermeneutics of the founding charism is certainly the history of the origins of the Institute and its gradual development.

Of fundamental importance are, in particular, any *General Chapters* held during the life of the founder*,* *annals* or *chronicles*, *circular letters,* which accompany the growth of the foundation.

It is also necessary to consider that the justifiable interest in the initial inspiration of the founder should not prevail over the study of any subsequent developments in his awareness in relation to the religious family *project* he founded. In this gradual development or manifestation of the foundation’s *plan*, our interest shifts to the possible period of *consolidation* where, in some cases, thanks to dialogue with the ecclesiastical authorities, it is possible to recognise the characteristic features of the “finished product”, the end point of a process of reflection, also the result of the first important checks and evaluations.

*e) The understanding of the charism throughout its history*

A final element that cannot be ignored for a correct hermeneutics of the founding charism is the understanding of the charism throughout the history of the Institute, especially in the period immediately following the founder’s death.   
“As a living reality,” says Fabio Ciardi, “it has been preserved, explored, developed... The ‘hermeneutic circle’ leads the interpreter to embrace the entire tradition of understanding, moving in a circular fashion from the parts, or individual interpreters, to the whole, or the historical tradition of its interpretation, seeking a ‘unity of meaning’ of the charism and recognising the concordances between the various traditions of understanding.”[[174]](#footnote-175)

In this perspective, the *interpreter* is never “alone”, as modern hermeneutics suggests; on the contrary, he is vitally inserted in a *tradition of interpretation,*[[175]](#footnote-176) where each different voice must be evaluated according to the authority that the context in which it is pronounced confers on it.

##### 4.2.2 The interpretation of the charism

The actual hermeneutic work will be based on the analysis of what I have described as the *sources of the founding charism* and, in particular, on the spiritual experience of the founder which “supports” the foundation itself.

In fact, the ability to continually compare these sources contributes to avoiding any reductive interpretation and any *neutralisation* of the charism.[[176]](#footnote-177) Antonio Romano says:

The founder’s charism is not a sterile reality of the past definitively archived, but is a living reality that must be continuously discovered through a dynamic and loving ecology of conversion, faith and listening. When the community loses its contact with this living reality, then it is no longer able to release the potential that is latent in the lives of its members. If, on the other hand, the old charismatic experience has been absorbed and is alive in the fibres of the community, then its dynamic effervescence continues to creatively open up the future of the group at every moment of its history.[[177]](#footnote-178)

Rereading the sources means this becomes an existential process of *spiritual* listening and dialogue. The demands of the current historical situation, the progress of the theological sciences, the path of the Church and the conclusions of the Magisterium thus become the “place” where this rereading can become genuinely fruitful only if it is capable of continually returning to itself with humility and courage.

This *hermeneutical circle*, in particular, will help to distinguish between the various elements of the founding experience and the personal charisms of the founder, those gifts that have been permanently “given” to the religious family for the common benefit of the Church.

“Hermeneutics” says Fabio Ciardi,“must tend towards the interiority of the charism, in attentive and available listening to the ever new meanings it contains. To the extent that a charism draws on the gospel, it is susceptible to an ever deeper understanding, as is the Word of God of which it is the bearer.”[[178]](#footnote-179)

In this interpretative *continuum*, the *living word* of the founders will thus be able to continue to “irrigate” and make the history of religious families fruitful.

# ANALYSIS

# CHAPTER 3

## At the sources of the spiritual experience:

## childhood and early formation period

### 1. In the sanctuary of spiritual experience

During his address on the occasion of the beatification of Leonardo Murialdo,[[179]](#footnote-180) a contemporary and friend of Don Bosco, Pope Paul VI said:[[180]](#footnote-181)

We have paid homage and asked for the intercession of a new citizen of heaven...

The question that the solemn event of beatification raises in the minds of all who contemplate him in the glory in which the Church places him today is instinctive, legitimate and obligatory: Who was he?

But before answering, we could ask ourselves another tacit question that reveals the characteristics of modern hagiography: What do we want to know about a saint or a blessed?[[181]](#footnote-182)

Who was Don Bosco?

This question, only seemingly rhetorical, demands some clarification.

The range of sources and studies that enable us to approach the life of Don Bosco is certainly very rich. Archival documents, stories and chronicles, autobiographical writings, testimonies, published and unpublished works by the saint hundreds of biographies, some of which were written by Don Bosco’s contemporaries, a rich collection of letters and a large number of articles and studies published in various parts of the world:[[182]](#footnote-183) all this literature may initially discourage those who wish to approach the human and spiritual experience of this founder in a serious and documented manner, but it remains a heritage of uncommon dimensions in the history of spirituality that can lead us to believe that, perhaps at the end of the journey, we will achieve a certain knowledge of his spiritual life.[[183]](#footnote-184)

This conviction clashes, in the first instance, with a more general consideration. Every spiritual experience, as a synthesis between the “objective” and “subjective” aspect of faith, between the *fides quae* and the *fides qua,*[[184]](#footnote-185)contains something unattainable, mysterious and therefore escapes any attempt at rigorous, exhaustive systematisation.

Another historical difficulty is linked to the fact that Don Bosco’s religiosity, his “feel” for God and his relationship with him are inevitably linked to his time and his environment; knowledge of his religious experience therefore also clashes with the difficulty of reconstructing this spiritual *milieu* in an objective and complete manner.

In addition to these general difficulties, which are common to the spiritual experience of Don Bosco and that of every other believer, there is another of a subjective, personal, “temperamental” nature. From his numerous writings, even those that we can classify as “autobiographical” or from the thousands of letters in our possession, it is not possible to directly derive significant and “first-hand” testimonies about his religious life. Don Bosco tells stories, teaches, admonishes, asks for help, gives thanks, blesses...; but he is the jealous guardian of his profound experiences.

Fr Pietro Stella writes in this regard[[185]](#footnote-186) in the introduction to his three-volume work *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*:

To describe the birth and development of someone’s way of sensing God, one would have to be inside them: live their life, in their time, be in their soul, be one soul with them. And with Don Bosco this is not easy. His autobiographical pages, his personal memories are not like those of Teresa of Avila or even like those of Teresa of Lisieux. They are mostly late and very rarely – fleetingly – does one manage to catch Don Bosco expressing his inner religious feelings, the motivations behind his actions. He almost always recounts facts: what his life was like before and after the priesthood, how the Oratory was born, how the works “that divine providence” entrusted to him developed.

However, already in all this a way of sensing and presenting one’s life is discovered. So all we can do is listen, read and peer through the cracks he left us in the massive edifice of his industriousness, striving to see better with the help of tools he did not have at the time and which are available to us today thanks to the development of many sciences.[[186]](#footnote-187)

Despite the large volume of writings, therefore, we are faced with an “extreme lack of sources”[[187]](#footnote-188) on his inner life. We do not have a *spiritual diary* or an autobiographical account of Don Bosco’s inner journey. We know almost nothing about his life of prayer from him; he left us no written record or revision of the spiritual resolutions he made at significant moments in his formation.

Even the rich correspondence manifests this confidentiality and “a limited range of emotional reactions”.[[188]](#footnote-189)[[189]](#footnote-190) Psychologist Giacomo D’Aquino states:

As far as what Don Bosco wrote or said is concerned, he rarely expressed himself with frank immediacy. In fact, he tended to keep his inner life, his conscious conflicts, to himself, and this makes any investigation difficult. It is rare to catch him in his emotional reactions, which surface fleetingly, especially in the last years of his life.[[190]](#footnote-191)

Don Bosco himself confesses, at the beginning of the *Memoirs of the Oratory:*[[191]](#footnote-192)

Many a time I have been urged to write my memoirs concerning the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. Though I could not readily say no to the authority of the one who advised me to do this, I found it hard actually to set about the task because it meant too often speaking about myself. But now there has been added the command of a person of supreme authority, an authority that brooks no further delay. Therefore I am now putting into writing those confidential details that may somehow serve as a light or be of to the work which Divine Providence has entrusted to Society of Saint Francis de Sales.[[192]](#footnote-193)

Even some of his contemporaries seem to have been impressed by this reservedness. Bishop Velluti Zati, Bishop of Pescia, expressed himself in this way on 3 March 1888, just over a month after Don Bosco’s death:

Great was his mortification and his piety; and here allow me to move on, for who can ever contemplate the beauty of the crystal-clear water of this diamond of perfection? To know the secret of his intimate relationship with God, to penetrate the sanctuary of his heart, the dwelling place of the purest and most chaste, noble and holy affections?[[193]](#footnote-194)

And Msgr. Giacinto Ballesio Vicar Forane of Moncalieri and a former student of the oratory, as he stated a few days later, on 8 March of the same year said:

Don Bosco, his life, his works are within the domain of history which will tell future generations in beautiful and splendid pages that he was the apostle of good for half a century. It will say that with pedagogy learned from the Gospel he directed thousands of the children of the people to the study of knowledge and virtue, to the love of work. It will tell of his ingenuity, saluting him as a renowned writer of asceticism, an easy, popular and feared apologist, a learned and esteemed historian, a proponent of all beautiful and good culture. It will say that in the midst of persecution and the collapse of religious orders, in order to better implement his bold designs, expand and perpetuate them, he established a new flourishing congregation of wisdom, zeal and youth. It will say that after having scattered his works throughout half of Europe with universal acclaim and wonder, his boundless mind, his fearless spirit led him across the seas with missions to America. History will tell these and other things in praise of the humble and great priest and to the glory of the Lord, who wanted not the destroying genius of war in him, but the arts of peace, sacrifice and love, “Del creator suo spirito | Più vasta orma stampar.”

What history will not be able to fully express, what it will not succeed in making us understand well, is his intimate life...[[194]](#footnote-195)

Even more outstanding and explicit is the statement that the first biographer of the saint, the French doctor Charles d’Espiney attributes to Fr Joseph Cafasso, confessor, spiritual director, supporter and “financier” of Don Bosco:[[195]](#footnote-196)

Savez-vous bien qui est Don Bosco? Pour moi, plus je l'étudie et moins je le comprends. Je le vois simple et extraordinaire; humble et grand; pauvre et travaillé de vastes pensées, des projets en apparence irréalisables... et avec tout cela, constantement traversé dans ses desseins et comme incapable de mener à bien ses entreprises... Pour moi, Don Bosco est un mystère. Si je n'avais la certitude qu'il travaille pour la gloire de Dieu, que Dieu seul le conduit, que Dieu seul est le fin de tous ses efforts, je le taxerais d'homme dangereux, plus encore pour ce qu'il laisse deviner que pour ce qu'il dit... Je vous le répète, pour moi, Don Bosco est un mystère: laissez-le faire.[[196]](#footnote-197)

To what do we attribute this objective reluctance to talk about his spiritual life? Is it a character trait, a natural reserve, an “environmental” influence,[[197]](#footnote-198) or rather the result of an ascetic detachment from self,[[198]](#footnote-199) as one might assume from the beginning of his *Memoirs*? It is hard to go beyond assumptions. In any case, the different perspectives appear convergent, rather than opposed.

#### 2.2 Towards a documented and unprejudiced hagiography

Given what I have attempted to say in the previous paragraph, I believe one fact is undeniable: Don Bosco’s holiness, as Fr Arnaldo Pedrini states, would appear to be “both manifest and hidden.” It was made manifest by the prodigious deed which he guaranteed to souls in the name of God and the Most Holy Virgin; and hidden especially because he loved to keep the mystery or secret of the great King to himself as closely as possible.”[[199]](#footnote-200)

This is why many of his biographies, even recent ones, probably contain his “history” in a more documented way, but they cannot claim to contain his “life”.

This consideration is neither original nor recent. Fr Eugenio Ceria[[200]](#footnote-201) had already written in 1929:

Rapt by the sight of the wonders of his multifaceted activity, his contemporaries admired his triumphs almost without thinking that he was *omnis gloria eius ab intus.* Even the generation that came up after his death looked by preference to Don Bosco’s works, studying their forms and developments without giving any thought to thoroughly scrutinising their animating principle, the principle that was the great secret of the saints: the spirit of prayer and union with God.[[201]](#footnote-202)

Historical criticism and the progress of the human sciences have today contributed decisively to enriching our knowledge of Don Bosco and other saints; at times, however, we have gone from a devotional, pious, exclusively supernatural interpretation of the first biographers to a simply “horizontal”, natural and psychological interpretation.

As early as 1955, José Herrera and Veremundo Pardo criticised the attitude of some biographers of Saint Vincent de Paul, systematically presenting the reader with uncertainties, question marks, claiming thus to be objective. However, their approach ultimately led them to adopt a stance that questions the very existence of a “life” within a framework they only attempt to depict externally.[[202]](#footnote-203)

Fr Ceria emphasised:

Yes, it is right to give credit to the followers of the historical method if, in certain circles, the figures of the saints can appear today without arousing the antipathy they once did in some people. But it is also undeniable that this risks undermining their true individuality, because it strips them of the halo that made them who they were and shows us what they really were... How can we ignore holiness in studying the saints? And when I speak of holiness, I am referring to a reality that positive science, whether historical or psychological, tends to overlook, but never those whose eyes are trained in investigating facts belonging to a higher order, where the human encounters the divine and intimately unites with it. This is why writers who believe that it is not worthwhile or that it is irrelevant to consider him as a man united with God are distorting the concept of a Saint. Thus the lives of saints, let’s put it this way, have ended up being secularised or pretty much so.[[203]](#footnote-204)

Faced with all these difficulties, I ask myself: what path should I follow in order to recognise the most significant traits of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience? Faced with the *extreme need for sources* on his inner life*,* how am I to understand the role that mental prayer played in the saint’s life? How can I at least arrive at documented and reasonable *hypotheses,* overcoming all rationalist and positivist prejudices, but without falling into devotional hagiography?

The only viable path, it seems to me, must start from an attempt to reconstruct, as far as possible, the spiritual milieu into which Don Bosco was born, where he lived through the fundamental years of his childhood and formation, with particular reference to his formation in prayer and mental prayer. Later I will need to broaden the focus to the period of his adult life, what he wrote, his understanding of religious life. It is through this long journey that I will attempt to bring out, always in relation to mental prayer, the characteristic features of his personal charism and also the path he proposed for the congregation he founded.

Documentary evidence, at any rate, requires an interpretation; any claim of “neutrality” which refers to the canons of a positivist historiography clashes with the impossibility of achieving the certainty of an “exact” science in the historical field. Jacques Maritain wrote several years ago:

There are no “brute” facts; a historical fact presupposes and implies many critical and discriminating judgements, many analytical reconstructions, as many as any other “fact”; moreover, history does not aspire to an impossible “coincidence” with the past: it requires a sifting and a selection, it interprets the past and transposes it into human language, it re-composes and reconstitutes the sequences of events that follow one another, and, finally, it cannot fulfil its task without having resorted extensively to abstraction. But history uses all this to connect the singular to the singular; its specific object is the individual or the singular. The explanation offered by the historian as such is an explanation of the individual by means of circumstances, motives, individual events. Historical explanation, since it is individual, participates in the potential infinity of matter; it is never finished and never achieves (as an explanation) the certainty of science.[[204]](#footnote-205)

The belief that *every historical fact presupposes and implies many critical and discriminating judgements* makes us understand on the one hand, the need to approach sources critically; on the other hand, we must accept that the criticism of sources is not *neutral* but is influenced, especially in the case of hagiographic studies, by the particular conception of Christian life and *holiness* that the historian or theologian has developed more or less consciously in the particular period or context in which they lived.

The study of *spiritual experience,* then, due to its reference to a reality that *transcends* both the individual who experienced it and the historian or theologian who approaches it, must take into account, even at the methodological level, the particular nature of its *object.* That is why, beyond any presumption of certainty, the end point of our journey belongs to a realm of knowledge that is not the same as the so-called *exact sciences*, but moves within the realm of *hypotheses*; (the more they can be documented, the better), but they are still hypotheses.

### 3. At the dawning: the family and farming setting of The Becchi

The deep roots of John Bosco’s religiosity are to be found in his family upbringing and the peasant farmer setting of the Becchi[[205]](#footnote-206) in Castelnuovo d’Asti at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[[206]](#footnote-207)

Natale Cerrato writes:

This religious sense of life, which permeated all the works and writings of Don Bosco, was clearly a legacy of his people. Don Bosco’s holiness was drawn from the divine source of Grace and modelled on Christ, the master of all perfection, but it was rooted in the enduring spiritual values of his homeland. The good tree produces good fruit.

Religious observance, in the Piedmontese countryside, was well rooted. Life was punctuated by rest on Sundays, daily practices, and religious festivals.

However, these practices and countless devotions coexisted with folklore and superstition,[[207]](#footnote-208) which often caused concern among pastors, who frequently attempted to encourage a more genuine practice of Christian life and observance of the Sunday precept.[[208]](#footnote-209)

Fr Stella says:

From what can be gathered from the documents, it appears that religion was truly dominant in the Turin and Monferrato regions, permeating both individual and collective life. But to what extent did religious observance respond to an inner need or was it merely an unthinking adherence to prevailing customs? To what extent was it the result of external conditioning or even inner need? Is there not a risk of transposing problems that arose later, when one wants to test the sincerity and solidity of the faith that regulated and nourished customs?[[209]](#footnote-210)

Don Bosco was born and spent his childhood in this simple, rural setting, and probably retained some of its distinctive characteristics for the rest of his life.[[210]](#footnote-211)

Left fatherless at less than two years of age,[[211]](#footnote-212) little John would open himself up to this religious sense of life under the careful guidance of his mother Margaret.[[212]](#footnote-213)

#### 3.1 In the beginning was the mother

*In the beginning was the mother...*This is how one of Don Bosco’s first biographers, Danish writer Johann Joergensen, begins his work, emphasising it “with all due respect for the holy book”.[[213]](#footnote-214) And in fact, the figure of the mother in John’s education to the faith undoubtedly played a fundamental role.[[214]](#footnote-215)

This awareness was always clear to Don Bosco. In his *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, he would write about his mother, Margaret Occhiena:

Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age. When I was still very small, she herself taught me to pray. As soon as I was old enough to join my brothers, she made me kneel with them morning and evening. We would all recite our prayers together, including the rosary. I remember well how she herself prepared me for my first confession. She took me to church, made her own confession first, then presented me to the confessor. Afterwards, she helped me to make my thanksgiving.[[215]](#footnote-216)

On various occasions the *Biographical Memoirs* describe her as a woman of great human virtues and a deep spirit of *piety*. “Margaret’s love of neighbor is not surprising” Fr Lemoyne says “when we realize that she was a woman of prayer. On her way to the fields, during her hours of work, and on her return home she would repeatedly recite the rosary.”[[216]](#footnote-217) “She was a truly admirable woman because she always prayed. Prayer is the source of wisdom to the humble and those who lack human knowledge.”[[217]](#footnote-218) “For Margaret, apart from the prescribed prayers she recited devotedly on her knees, would continually murmur words of love for God throughout the day, while occupied with the most varied chores.”[[218]](#footnote-219)

Don Bosco’s religious experience, therefore, has its deep roots in this family and daily catechesis, built on witness and example even before it was built on the “truths” of any doctrine that had been handed down.

But is it also possible to reconstruct some of the fundamental contents of this catechesis?

One possible approach would be to study the text of some of the catechisms in use in the dioceses of Piedmont at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in particular the catechism prepared for the diocese of Mondovì by Bishop Michele Casati in 1765. This catechism was adopted by several Piedmontese bishops and introduced in the diocese of Turin (of which Castelnuovo d’Asti became part in 1817) by Bishop Vittorio Gaetano Maria Costa.[[219]](#footnote-220)

These catechisms were evidently intended to make Christian doctrine more accessible. The dialogue structure, simple language and mnemonic repetition made it easy to assimilate even in rural areas, where illiteracy was widespread.[[220]](#footnote-221)

In this regard, Aldo Fantozzi writes:

The bishop of Mondovì, Bishop Michele Casati, published his catechism in 1765: it was a fortunate text, because several bishops adopted it in their dioceses. It was printed in 1787 in Turin, adopted and completed by Bishop Costa, bishop of Casale.

As a young girl in her parish in Capriglio, Mamma Margaret learned the Catechism from question and answer booklets, repeating them over and over again, in unison, aloud, until they were fixed in her memory.

The catechetical material which Margaret taught her children can be found in the Casati text (cf. BM v. 1, p. 34).

Margaret passed on her solid faith through this family schooling, together with the feeling for the divine that the children breathed in the vastness of creation, in the deep voice of conscience, in the wonder at the starry nights...[[221]](#footnote-222)

Don Bosco himself testifies:

I was eleven years old when I made my first holy communion. I knew my catechism well. The minimum age for first communion was twelve years. Because we lived far from the parish church, the parish priest did not know us, and my mother had to do almost all the religious instruction. She did not want me to get any older before my admission to that great act of our religion, so she took upon herself the task of preparing me as best she could. She sent me to catechism class every day of Lent. I passed my examination, and the date was fixed. It was the day on which all the children were to make their Easter duty.

In the big crowd, it was impossible to avoid distractions. My mother coached me for days and brought me to confession three times during that Lent. “My dear John,” she would say, “God is going to give you a wonderful gift. Make sure you prepare well for it. Go to confession and don't keep anything back. Tell all your sins to the priest, be sorry for them all, and promise God to do better in the future. I promised all that. God alone knows whether I have been faithful to my resolution. At home, she saw to it that I said my prayers and read good books; and she always came up with the advice which a diligent mother knows how to give her children.

On the morning of my first communion, my mother did not permit me to speak to anyone. She accompanied me to the altar and together we made our preparation and thanksgiving. These were led by Father Sismondi, the vicar forane, in a loud voice, alternating responses with everyone. It was my mother’s wish for that day that I should refrain from manual work. Instead, she kept me occupied reading and praying.[[222]](#footnote-223)

On 3 December 1843 Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, Archbishop of Turin, would reproduce this Casati catechism by promulgating the *Compendium of Christian Doctrine for the use of the Diocese of Turin.*[[223]](#footnote-224)

In the pages of these catechisms, therefore, it is possible to find the “sources” of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience, of his concept of God, of his religiosity. This was emphasised by Fr Braido, who stated:

Anyone wishing to explore the “sources” of Don Bosco’s religious mentality and spirituality (and therefore also his pedagogy) would find it difficult to overstate the influence exerted by the “Short Catechism” which he learned by heart from his mother and the priests who were his first religious educators. During childhood and adolescence, the contents of this elementary and fundamental handbook for every good Christian of the time had a profound influence on his way of thinking and living, both as a catechist and when catechising, to the extent that it determined the direction of his entire life.

It is therefore not of secondary importance for understanding his inner self to study the various ways in which he related to this reality, without excluding even the most modest expressions.[[224]](#footnote-225)

Contact with these simple texts of pedagogy to the faith reveals, in the first instance, the centrality of the idea of the *omnipresent*[[225]](#footnote-226) God.

From his mother’s religious upbringing, little John therefore learned a vision of life and divine Providence capable of reading daily events in the light of the mystery of a God who was constantly present in human history. Fr Stella states: "For young John, God must have been the One whom his mother respected above all else, even though he was invisible...; in whom she had unlimited and unquestioning trust, because he was a good and provident father who gave her daily bread and everything she needed.[[226]](#footnote-227)

This view of life, strongly centred on the continuous and loving *presence* of God, represents the prerequisite, the necessary condition for rooting the personality of the contemplative, of those who live constantly in union of affection and will with the Absolute.

#### 3.2 The Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

One of the main points of reference in our possession, in relation to the period of infancy and childhood of the saint, is his own account, more than fifty years after the first events narrated, in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales.*[[227]](#footnote-228)

The account of those years certainly escapes the strict criteria of historical investigation; some dates are approximate, some events must undoubtedly be interpreted within the particular literary genre and the intentions of the narrator.[[228]](#footnote-229)

The narrative develops as an autobiographical story, a “history” of the origins of the oratory, given as a testimony to the fledgling congregation so that the memory of God’s provident intervention in the past could guide the present and the future.[[229]](#footnote-230) The story is of an edifying nature and it would therefore be naive to “literally” accept all the details and, equally, to judge it with the strict criteria of historiography.

The most important aspect of the work, as Fr Braido pointed out, is probably its being an “historical document” to be located at the end of Don Bosco’s human and spiritual experience, as a [[230]](#footnote-231)memoir *and a* plan *for the fledgling congregation.*[[231]](#footnote-232)

In many pages, it clearly appears to be an “entertaining story” featuring a precocious boy, a street performer, a narrator, an intelligent and bright student who becomes an equally “dreamy” priest involved in the dramatic events and happy ending of his Oratory. In other respects, the text seeks to be in some way a narrative evocation of the past, intent on seeing a benevolent and timely Providence in the unfolding of events. More evident, then, is the concern to describe, albeit “poetically”, the origin, development and formation of a typical spiritual and pedagogical experience, which under the “Oratory” formula is presented as the most functional and productive approach to young people of the new era.

The latter seems to us to be the point of view adopted in an absolutely pre-eminent form by the author, who intends to convey this lived experience as a programme of life and action to those who follow him. With this operation, he would anticipate in a more flexible and colourful, vividly “narrative” way the sparse formulations of the pages of the preventive system in the education of youth, from 1877, which were closer to the “collegiate” style.[[232]](#footnote-233)

From the author of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, we learn:

Now, what purpose can this chronicle serve? It will be a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past. It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide. It will give my sons some entertainment to be able to read: about their father's adventures. Doubtless they will be read much more avidly when I have been called by God to render my account, when I am no longer amongst them.

Should they come upon experiences related maybe with complacency or the appearance of vainglory, let them indulge me a little. A father delights in speaking of his exploits to his dear children. It is always to be hoped that the sons will draw from these adventures, small and great, some spiritual and temporal advantage.

So, my dear children, when you read these memoirs after my death, remember that you had a loving father who left these memoirs as a pledge of fatherly affection before he abandoned this world. And remembering that, pray for the happy repose of my soul.[[233]](#footnote-234)

This uplifting story, intended to make us understand *how God himself has always been our guide*, precisely because it was written at a mature age and with the express intention of *overcom[ing] problems that may come in the future by learning from the past*, also passes on to us, directly or indirectly, the “‘experience of the spirit’ transmitted to [his] disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them”;[[234]](#footnote-235) it is a “story” that becomes in some way a paradigm, guide, constant point of reference and that could be translated into a set of “criteria” to verify fidelity to the *founding charism.*

#### 3.3 A general criterion for interpreting Don Bosco’s “spiritual writings”

These latest considerations lead me to focus, at this point in my study, on a general criterion for interpreting not only the pages of the *Memoirs of the Oratory* but also other writings by the founder.

Already in 1965 Fr Braido himself, speaking of the *Memoirs*, had stated:

The events described and the things narrated are real experiences; but, in all likelihood, not with the fullness of meaning and comprehensive vision that the author’s current awareness, having reached maturity in his projects and achievements, gives them. When Don Bosco wrote, he was already 58-60 years old and he was recounting past events in the light of positive achievements and according to guidelines and directives for the future. It is natural that in recounting his early pastoral and educational experiences, three chronological and psychological levels constantly interfere with and overlap each other: the facts and insights of that time and the mature awareness of their meaning in a present that sees them clarified, enlarged and enriched through difficult, clearer and more complete subsequent developments, and in *a future to be guaranteed* and organised. From a purely historical point of view, this can create problems. However, from the point of view of a faithful and comprehensive reconstruction of the “system” of religious, social and educational action, in its definitive elements, it actually constitutes an enormous advantage. Memoirs are more clearly distinguished from a “family chronicle” in that they are reflective, summarising and programmatic documents.[[235]](#footnote-236)

This same criterion of interpretation, as we shall see, can also be applied, for example, to the numerous “biographies” which certainly contain some historical elements, but which above all provide us with the universe of “meanings” of Don Bosco and the elements of the *project* of Christian life that he indicates “to his sons”.

Don Bosco, when he writes, has only one objective: the “advantage of religion”:[[236]](#footnote-237) this is the general criterion that must be taken into account when approaching his writings which, from this point of view, can all be described as “spiritual”.

Any literary or scientific interest is completely alien to his mentality. That is why he makes no effort to be “original”, except where he sees a new possibility to do good. Many of his writings are of a “compilatory” nature, some others are exhortative or constructed according to the hagiographic models of the time, while others are, in some respects, not entirely faithful to history.

Nevertheless, this remarkable patrimony, if interpreted patiently, gives us back his spiritual universe and also allows us to overcome his confidentiality in expressing our own personal religious feelings and to glimpse, albeit indirectly, the traits of his religious experience.

From his writings, it is also possible to highlight elements of that *spirituality* that outlines the characteristic features of the Christian life he envisioned for the Salesian congregation, even in the absence of a direct and systematic treatment of the subject by the founder himself. As I will say later, Don Bosco is not a theorist, he has not written treatises, he has not left us systematic reflections. His pedagogical method was “constructed” on the basis of a few written pages, but above all thanks to a reflection on his rich experience as an educator, which was subsequently analysed by scholars of pedagogical theory.

Similarly, we can say that Don Bosco is not a *theologian*, at least according to the modern understanding of the term. He did not write a treatise on prayer, on mental prayer or on the spirituality of the congregation he founded; yet he is certainly at the origin of a “current” of thought, of a spiritual movement. He is the depository of a particular *charism*; on this *spiritual experience* it is necessary to base a systematic reflection capable of rewriting the spirituality of the founder in a comprehensive way.

#### 3.4 Education to prayer

At this point I ask myself more directly: what elements does Don Bosco’s story provide me with in relation to the theme of my study and the development of his religious experience, limited to accounts of his childhood?

A first element of a very general nature is the clear perception that the writer has, and which he tries to convey to his “sons”, of God’s constant and mysterious[[237]](#footnote-238) intervention in his life; Don Bosco’s narrative reveals to us the reflected consciousness of a life “gathered” since childhood around *religious experience*.

Another more specific element is the memory of early formation in daily meditation, conducted under the guidance of Fr Giovanni Calosso, chaplain at Morialdo, a centre a few kilometres from Castelnuovo.[[238]](#footnote-239) Don Bosco tells us:

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

It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director. a faithful friend of one’s soul. I had not had one up till then. Amongst other things he forbade a penance I used to practise: he deemed it unsuited to my age and circumstances. He encouraged frequent confession and communion. He taught me how to make a short daily meditation, or more accurately, a spiritual reading. I spent all the time I could with him; I stayed with him on feast days. I went to serve his Mass during the week when I could. From then on I began to savour the spiritual life; up to then I had acted in a purely mechanical way, not knowing the reasons.[[239]](#footnote-240)

Don Bosco’s story can be read, as we have previously stated, according to different “levels” or “chronological planes”.[[240]](#footnote-241) In any case, it reveals to us, in addition to the importance given by Don Bosco as an adult to the direction of conscience and personal education in prayer, a clear awareness of the distinction between *spiritual reading* and *meditation.*[[241]](#footnote-242) Furthermore, it highlights the awareness of the importance of a path that leads from a life of piety made up of pious practices or good traditions to a reflective consciousness that becomes capable of “savouring the spiritual life”.

#### 3.5 Work and prayer: the first seeds of a vital synthesis

The years of childhood and adolescence were, for Don Bosco as they probably were also for many of his peers born into a peasant family in the Asti countryside, also years of work and fatigue.

Forced to leave home at the age of twelve due to some disagreements with his half-brother Anthony, John had to work as a stable boy at the Moglia family in Moncucco where he resided for about twenty months, starting in February 1828.[[242]](#footnote-243)

We find no mention in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* of this long period spent with the Moglias.[[243]](#footnote-244) However, some testimonies from the cause for beatification allow us to imagine that even as a teenager, John Bosco had the ability to combine work and prayer in a vital way. Giorgio Moglia testified:

From my Aunt Anna I knew that the young Bosco was dedicated to prayer, even when he was busy grazing the flock in the countryside.[[244]](#footnote-245) I still remember that when the young Bosco was already a cleric, I went to his house and stayed there for about three months, and we slept in the same room. Before falling asleep, he made me pray and gave me good advice.[[245]](#footnote-246)

Fr Lemoyne confirms,

Giovanni Moglia, the owner’s brother-in-law, surprised him one day kneeling under the scorching sun, in the middle of a meadow, motionless, his face turned towards the sky, his eyes closed and raised, so full of grace that he was amazed. He called him by name several times, but seeing that he wasn’t moving, he shook him. “Why are you sleeping in the sun?” John got up all confused and replied: “ No, I was not sleeping.” In fact, he was holding a devotional book.”[[246]](#footnote-247)

Again according to Giorgio Moglia

I also remember hearing my family tell the story of how my great-uncle Giuseppe once came home at midday, tired and exhausted, with his hoe on his shoulder, and saw the boy Bosco kneeling on the first step of a ladder. Seeing this, my great-uncle exclaimed: ‘Oh look, I’m so tired I can’t go on, and you’re standing there praying, saying your midday prayers.” The boy replied immediately: “Perhaps I have earned more by praying for two minutes than you have all morning hoeing.[[247]](#footnote-248)

The particular solitude imposed by life in the fields and the profession of shepherd seemed to be, for the young Bosco, a privileged opportunity for contemplation. “My grandfather Matta Secondo, now deceased,” Fr Secondo Marchisio testified[[248]](#footnote-249) “assured me repeatedly, even on his deathbed, that their mothers spoke of John Bosco as an example, especially for prayer and obedience.”[[249]](#footnote-250) “He used to withdraw to the shade of hedges and willows to read, pray, and study.

This was confirmed to me by my cousin Rosa Cagliero, née Febbraro, a fellow countrywoman of the servant of God, who was asked to look after his cows so that he could spend more time in contemplation and prayer.”[[250]](#footnote-251)

It is certainly possible that these stories of childhood have been enriched, over the years and with the growth in popularity of Don Bosco, by some narrative or “mythical”elements; it is certain, however, that the position of the teenaged Bosco differed from that of any stable boy. His spirit of piety, his taste for reading, the propensity already openly manifested for life as a cleric, justify the permission he obtained by the Moglia to go alone, on Sunday morning, to the early mass in the church at Moncucco, where the provost Fr Francesco Cottino urged his weekly attendance at the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, as well as the privilege granted to him to lead the rosary that the Moglia family said every day before a picture of Our Lady of Sorrows.[[251]](#footnote-252)

These were important years, therefore, in which spiritual experience matured and took deep root. This is how historian Fr Stella describes them, in an effective summary:

These were not wasted years, nor were they a mere interlude, during which his sense of God and contemplation took deeper root in him, which he was able to explore in solitude or in conversation with God while working in the fields. These were years that could be described as one of absorbed and supplicatory waiting: waiting for God and for people; years in which perhaps the most contemplative phase of his first five years of life can be placed, when his spirit must have been most receptive to the gifts of the mystical life flowing from a state of prayer and hope.[[252]](#footnote-253)

Was it these “contemplative” experiences that enabled Don Bosco, many years later, to “recognise” in Savio’s lengthy “raptures”, remaining there “in prayer, or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy”,[[253]](#footnote-254) the gift of *infused or passive mental prayer?* We don’t know that.

The fact remains that Don Bosco throughout his life showed that he knew how to recognise everything that manifests a detachment from creatures, a state of perfection, an absorption in God. Fr Stella emphasises again:

Therefore, although he does not confide in us his personal experiences of “contemplation” and of a state of union and presence, nor does he offer us a theory on unitive prayer and contemplation, he nevertheless shows himself willing to explain certain stages of spiritual life found in people with whom he lived as union and loving co-presence.[[254]](#footnote-255)

### 4. Adolescence and youth: the time to make choices

From the age of sixteen until he turned twenty-six, Don Bosco lived mainly in the town of Chieri, about sixteen kilometres from Turin, first as a student in the public school and, from 1835, as a cleric and seminarian.[[255]](#footnote-256)

The period of adolescence and youth which preceded his entry into the seminary, represents, for Don Bosco as it does for most people, the time for real discernment about his own project of life.

Some significant friendships played a fundamental role in this “phase” of John Bosco’s human and spiritual experience, which certainly influenced his formation and choices.

#### 4.1 Spiritual friendships in Chieri

The period from 1831 to 1835 was a calm one marked by good school successes, the esteem of teachers and the friendship of many good companions.[[256]](#footnote-257) In relation to the first two years spent in Chieri, Don Bosco mentions two in particular: Gugliemo Garigliano and Vittorio Braja.[[257]](#footnote-258)

They were always ready for some good recreation – says Don Bosco - but only after they had done their homework. Both were reserved and pious, and they gave me plenty of good advice On feast days, after the practices of piety in common at the college, we used to go along to St Anthony’s Church, where the Jesuits gave marvelous catechetical instructions[[258]](#footnote-259) with plenty of stories that I still recall.

During the week, the Society for a Good Time[[259]](#footnote-260) used to meet at the home of one of the members to talk about religious matters. Any one was welcome to come to these gatherings. Garigliano and Braje were amongst the most conscientious. We entertained ourselves with some pleasant recreation, with discussions on religious topics, spiritual reading, and prayer. We exchanged good advice, and if there were any personal corrections we felt we should hand out to each other, whether these were our own personal observations or criticisms we had heard others make, we did that.[[260]](#footnote-261)

Two other important friendships, which matured in the years immediately following, were his friendships with Jonah,[[261]](#footnote-262) a Jew, and with Luigi Comollo, who would also be his companion in the Chieri seminary until 1839, the year of his premature death.[[262]](#footnote-263)

Don Bosco’s youth in Chieri, in the college as later in the seminary, was spiritually marked by these deep friendships. Don Bosco surrounded himself with young people who loved prayer and the virtues. “Ces pieux et vertueux camarades,” says Francis Desramaut “ prodiguaient à Giovanni Bosco conseils, encouragements et bons exemples.L'affection qu'il leur portait l'entraînait à les écouter, à les admirer et à les imiter. Les amitiés du clerc Bosco étaient authentiquement spirituelles”[[263]](#footnote-264).

The religious education at the school was regulated by the royal order promulgated by Carlo Felice on 23 July 1822. This is how Caselle describes the spiritual life of Chieri’s students:

On weekday mornings, Holy Mass was heard and each student had to be provided with a prayer book and read it freely. At the beginning of the school day, the *Actiones* was recited with the *Ave Maria,* then the *Agimus* was also recited with the *Ave Maria*. On Saturdays, everyone had to recite the catechism lesson assigned by the spiritual director, and at the end of school, they had to honour the Blessed Virgin with the *Litany*.

On public holidays, the students were all gathered in the church of the Congregation. As the young people entered, there was a spiritual reading, followed by the singing of the Office of Our Lady; then the Mass; then the explanation of the Gospel. In the evening catechism, with the obligation for each student to answer the questions asked by the spiritual director,vespers, instruction. Everyone had to approach the Blessed Sacrament; and to prevent the neglect of these important duties they were obliged to bring their Confession card once a month and the Holy Communion card at Easter. Those who had not fulfilled this obligation were no longer admitted to the exams at the end of the year, even if were among the best in their studies. Those whom the spiritual director dismissed from the Congregation because they were disobedient or because they ignored the catechism, were expelled from classes.

A triduum was prescribed in preparation for the Christmas celebrations during which two sermons were given per day, Holy Mass was attended, the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the novena were recited. In Lent, every school day students had to attend catechism, which preceded the usual lessons. Every year, for five days, from Passion Friday to Holy Tuesday, everyone gathered together for the spiritual exercises, with two meditations and two daily instructions, and this spiritual recollection ended with the Easter Communion. Individual young people had to obtain a declaration stating that they had regularly attended these exercises.[[264]](#footnote-265)

#### 4.2 Choosing a state of life and entering the seminary

In this recollected and uplifting environment, of which Don Bosco had fond memories,[[265]](#footnote-266) his awareness of the importance of choosing a vocation grew and matured, sometimes in a disturbing way. Fr Stella states:

Whatever works he may have read (the *Opuscoli relativi allo stato religioso* by St Alphonsus, which he later used for the Introduction to the Salesian Rule; or La strada al santuario mostrata ai chierici *by the Jesuit Antonio Foresti, which he certainly had in his hands in the seminary, or the* Guida Ange*lica, which he used as a source for Il Giovane Provveduto or Gesù al cuore del giovane* by Giuseppe Zama-Mellini, which he included in the same *Giovane provveduto* among the books to be preferred for spiritual reading, or the *Saggia elezione* by Piedmontese Jesuit Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli), whatever book he read, as offered him by the subalpine environment of the time, he would have found the belief expressed that the state to be chosen is predetermined by God. This belief stemmed from ancient Christian thought, which in the Middle Ages had given rise to an objectivist way of seeing things, according to which every human choice was resolved in the decision of the individual or the community to follow the divine plan. This belief had taken on an almost distressing character in modern times, because it emphasised the importance of choice as a free decision, as proof of fidelity to God, a matter of merit and salvation, or of guilt and eternal damnation.[[266]](#footnote-267)

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* reveal how vividly Don Bosco remembered his difficult childhood, characterised by a certain anxiety but also by special fervour and earnest prayer. It was in this “spiritual atmosphere” and with the awareness of an adult, that Don Bosco matured in his decision to embrace the clerical state and enter the seminary in Chieri. The decision to share his doubts with his friend Luigi Comollo proved decisive.

Don Bosco himself recounts that Comollo advised him to make a novena, during which he would write to his uncle, the provost.[[267]](#footnote-268) On the lat day of my novena I went to confession and communion with this incomparable friend. I attended one Mass and served the other at the altar of Our Lady of Grace in the cathedral. Then we went home and found a letter from Fr Comollo which went something like this: Having given careful consideration to what you wrote me, I advise your friend not to enter a monastery at this time. Let him don the clerical habit. As he goes on with his studies he will better understand what God wants him to do. He must not fear to lose his vocation because aloofness from the world and earnest piety will help him overcome every obstacle.[[268]](#footnote-269)

Fr Comollo’s advice was also supported by that of a young priest, a student at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin[[269]](#footnote-270) and also born in Castelnuovo d’Asti. Don Bosco had met him a few years earlier: Fr Joseph Cafasso.[[270]](#footnote-271) His gifts of discernment would be decisive on several occasions during Don Bosco’s life.

#### 4.3 Clerical clothing

In October 1835, John Bosco prepared for his clerical clothing with prayer and recollection.

Having made up my mind to enter the seminary, I took the prescribed examination. I prepared carefully for that most important day because I was convinced that one’s eternal salvation or eternal perdition ordinarily depends on the choice of a state in life. I asked my friends to pray for me. I made a novena, and on the feast of St Michael (October 1834) I approached the holy sacraments. Before the solemn high Mass Doctor Cinzano, the provost and vicar forane of my region, blessed my cassock and tested me as a cleric.[[271]](#footnote-272)

Among the seven resolutions he made during those days and which he passed down to us in his *Memoirs*, the first five reveal his subjective need for a more stable and virtuous lifestyle, one that was more secluded and temperate. With the sixth Don Bosco promised: “In addition to the ordinary practices of piety, I will never omit to do a little meditation and a little spiritual reading every day.”[[272]](#footnote-273) Finally, the last one projects him “outside” into a daily apostolate: “Every day I will relate some story or some maxim advantageous to the souls of others....”[[273]](#footnote-274)

### 5. At the seminary

On October 30, 1835, cleric Bosco crossed the threshold of the Seminary in Chieri.[[274]](#footnote-275) The next day a triduum of spiritual exercises began which[[275]](#footnote-276) ended with the resolution to faithfully carry out one’s duty, first of all by the faithful observance of the rules of the Seminary.[[276]](#footnote-277)

The most important regulatory reference point for the Turin seminaries of that period was the Constitutions of the Turin seminary promulgated by Archbishop Colombano Chiaverotti in 1819.[[277]](#footnote-278) In addition to this text, there was a *Regolamento del Seminario di Chieri*, attributed to Fr Lorenzo Prialis, which is difficult to date and whose only known copy was written by Canon Sebastiano Mottura, rector of the Seminary in Chieri from 1829 to 1860.[[278]](#footnote-279)

An examination of these regulations reveals a particularly austere view of life in the seminary; the rules laid down do not always appear to be supported by sufficient motivation.[[279]](#footnote-280) Everything contributes to forming the attitudes of the future cleric with a certain gravity and composure.

It is of interest, from my particular perspective, to examine the practices of piety.

#### 5.1 Practices of piety at the Chieri seminary

In *Part Two* of the *Constitutions* of the seminary*,* in Chapter I entitled *Della pietà e del servizio di Chiesa* we read, *passim:*[[280]](#footnote-281)

1. …. We therefore desire that piety and fear of God be the first qualities of those who wish to live in our seminary, so that, by planting deep roots in their tender hearts, they may in time bear sweet fruits of virtue for the common edification of our diocese.

2. At the signal to rise, each pupil shall get out of bed promptly and, having first raised their hearts to God, shall dress in silence and modesty and, after a quarter of an hour, shall recite, at the signal of the prefect of the dormitory together with the others, the *Angelus Domini, and after the half hour allotted for rising has passed, they shall go to the chapel, if the weather is fine, or to their desks, if it is winter, to recite the prayers in common as they are printed for the use of the seminary, with recollection and devotion, kneeling with their faces turned towards the sacred image in the dormitory.*

3. There, the prefect shall recite the vocal prayers in a clear and slow voice, and the other pupils shall accompany him in a low voice, with attention of mind and devotion of heart.

4. Once the prayers have been recited in the chapel, weather permitting, the meditation will be read aloud and with the appropriate pauses by the chapel prefect; then Mass will be attended with the greatest possible inward and outward devotion...

7. In the evening after supper, once recreation is over and before retiring for the night, the aforementioned prefect shall recite the vocal prayers, accompanied in silence and sotto voce by all the others in the chapel; an examination of conscience shall be made and, on weekdays, the litany of the Blessed Virgin shall be recited, which will be sung on Saturday evenings, on holy days of obligation, and during the novena of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. In the novenas of St Francis de Sales and St Louis,[[281]](#footnote-282) instead of the litany the hymn *Iste Confessor[[282]](#footnote-283)* will be sung.

*Meditation*, therefore, is read *clearly and with the necessary pauses*, according to the custom of the time.[[283]](#footnote-284)

Note also the reference to the need to *accompany vocal prayer with attention of mind and the devotion of heart* and the importance given to *silence. “Le séminariste”* Francis Desramaut stresses, *“apprenait ainsi à construire en soi le digne prêtre de l 'avenir dans la prière, l 'étude et le silence, ce silence qui imprégnait la majeur partie de sa journée.”*[[284]](#footnote-285)

Don Bosco recalls that

The practices of piety were well conducted. Each morning we had Mass, meditation, and rosary; edifying books were read during meals... We were expected to go to confession once a fortnight, but those who wished could go every Saturday. We could only receive holy communion, however, on Sundays and on special feasts. We did receive communion sometimes on weekdays, but doing so meant that we had to act contrary to obedience. It was necessary to slip out, usually at breakfast time, to St Philip's Church next door, receive holy communion, and then join our companions as they were going into the study hall or to class. This infraction of the timetable was prohibited. But the superiors gave tacit consent to it since they knew it was going on and sometimes observed it without saying anything to the contrary. In this way, I was able to receive holy communion much more frequently, and I can rightly say it was the most efficacious support of my vocation.[[285]](#footnote-286)

#### 5.2 The “discovery” of the Imitation of Christ

Among the readings that accompanied his spiritual formation, Don Bosco himself recalls one in particular, the *Imitation of Christ*.

I had some mistaken notions about my studies that could have had sad consequences had I not been saved by a truly providential event. Accustomed to reading the classics all during my school days, I had grown so familiar with the outstanding characters of mythology and pagan fables that I found little satisfaction in anything ascetical. I had reached the point where I could convince myself that fine language and eloquence could not be reconciled with religion. The very works of the holy Fathers appeared to me as the products of limited intellects, excepting always the principles of religion which they expounded with force and clarity.

At the beginning of my second year of philosophy, I paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament one day. I had no prayer book with me, so I began to read *The Imitation of Christ.* I went through some chapters dealing with the Blessed Sacrament. I was so struck by the profound thoughts expressed, and the clear and orderly way these great truths were clothed in fine language that I began to say to myself: “*The author of this book was a learned man.* Again and again, I went back to that golden little work. It was gradually borne in on me that even one verse from it contained so much doctrine and morality as I had found in whole volumes of the ancient classics. To this book I owe my decision to lay aside profane literature.[[286]](#footnote-287)

Fr Pietro Stella notes:

It seems that the transition from a “profane” taste to an uncompromisingly religious one took place (according to Don Bosco himself) during his years studying philosophy and culminated in early 1837 with his reading of *De imitatione Christi.*

But it is possible to indicate some dominant ones. The awareness that he was called by God to the priesthood grew ever stronger within him, together with a sense of the holiness required to ascend to the altar and an urgent desire to break away from habits and attitudes that seemed incompatible with the priestly state.[[287]](#footnote-288)

Love and esteem for this text did not diminish with adulthood. The *Imitation of Christ* would remain among the recommended texts for daily spiritual reading in *The Companion of Youth*, the widely read prayer manual for young people first published by Don Bosco in 1847, which went through 120 editions and reprints until 1888.[[288]](#footnote-289) The same indication also appears in the constitutional text of the *Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* of 1885:

In the quarter of an hour assigned for spiritual reading, they will use those books which they will see indicated to them by their superiors. Especially recommended are the Imitation of J.C, The Holy Nun and The Practice of Loving Jesus Christ by St Alphonsus, The Devout Life y St Francis de Sales adapted for young people, Rodriguez and the lives of those saints who dedicated themselves to the education of young people.[[289]](#footnote-290)

#### 5.3 Seminarian Louis Comollo

Some shadows remained over the Seminary environment, even years later, in Don Bosco’s recollections.[[290]](#footnote-291) But the choice to be a young seminarian needed to be accompanied by “some who were well known as models of virtue. These were William Garigliano, John Giacomelli of Avigliana[[291]](#footnote-292) and, later, Louis Comollo. For me, these three friends were a treasure.”[[292]](#footnote-293)

It is precisely from the testimony of one of these companions, Giovanni Francesco Giacomelli, who would also be the saint’s confessor for the last fourteen years of his life, that we know:

When I met him at the seminary in Chieri, I admired him for his great diligence and *love* of study and  *piety*. I never saw him take part in entertainment, even if it was lawful or permitted by his superiors, but during recreation time he either read or studied, or conversed while walking with his companions, always telling edifying things, *or he went to the church to visit the Blessed Sacrament.[[293]](#footnote-294)*

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco reveals to us:

Comollo often interrupted my recreation time, leading me by the sleeve of my cassock and telling me to come along with him to the chapel; there we would make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament for the dying, saying the rosary or the Little Office of Our Lady for the souls in purgatory.

This marvelous companion was my fortune.[[294]](#footnote-295)

The friendship with Comollo was certainly the most important friendship of those years. A few years later, in 1844, Don Bosco wrote up his life for the edification of young seminarians, entitled *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo[[295]](#footnote-296) [Historical sketch of the life of the cleric Louis Comollo],*

The booklet, less than a hundred pages long, appeared anonymously in its first edition, but was republished in 1854 and reprinted several times.[[296]](#footnote-297) As historian Fr Pietro Stella[[297]](#footnote-298) points out, it shows the special bond of ideas and life that had developed between the two men, and completes the knowledge that Don Bosco himself would provide about this spiritual friendship in his *Memoirs of the Oratory.*

Don Bosco’s judgement on the religious experience of his young friend and any similarities and differences[[298]](#footnote-299) become an *indirect* indication of his spiritual life in those years and, at the same time, of the concrete *model* of Christian life proposed first to seminarians and later also to young people in oratories and colleges.[[299]](#footnote-300)

It would be an exaggeration, says Fr Stella, to say that Don Bosco owed the strength of his inner life to Comollo, but certainly the communion of life between the two was a safeguard and a means of enrichment for John.

The “not extraordinary, but accomplished virtues” (p. 27) that Don Bosco admired in his friend already contain the seed of the affirmation that it is precisely in these virtues that the holiness of young people consists. Louis Comollo was one of the examples to which Don Bosco loved to appeal and the *Sketch* on him was one of the spiritual reading texts of the Oratory.[[300]](#footnote-301)

“I could only wonder at my companion's charity,” Don Bosco said in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, when recalling the years they had spent together in the college in Chieri *–* “I put myself entirely into his hands and let him guide me where and how he wished. By agreement with our friend Garigliano, we went together for confession, communion, meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament..’[[301]](#footnote-302)

I will come back to the pages of this brief biography in the following chapter. I will spend some brief moments here on two passages that allow us to understand Don Bosco’s “feelings” and some of the habits of the young seminarians in Chieri.

The first passage gives us some indications regarding the “rhythms” of Comollo’s personal prayer. Don Bosco also spends time describing some of his *raptures:*

He had a timetable for prayer, spiritual reading, visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and he observed it scrupulously. Circumstances had it that for a few months I went to the Cathedral precisely at the time that Louis went there to spend time with Jesus. So I would be happy to describe what he was like there. He would take up a place near the altar if he could, kneel down, join his hands, bow his head slightly, cast his eyes down and would stay absolutely still; he would be insensitive to any voice or sound. It would often happen that when I had finished my duties,[[302]](#footnote-303) I wanted to invite him to come home with me. So I would nod my head or, coming a bit closer, would cough, to get him to move; he would always stay the same until I actually came up and touched him. Then, as if woken up from sleep, he would move and although a little unwillingly, would accept my invitation.”[[303]](#footnote-304)

The second passage expresses more clearly Don Bosco’s conviction that certain “movements”, certain consolations, certain manifestations felt during prayer, were not to be considered useless oddities:

... when it was time for him to approach the altar I saw him taken up with the most lofty and devout thoughts. With full composure, walking slowly and deliberately with his eyes cast down, and at times trembling with emotion, he would approach the Holy of Holies. When he had returned quickly to his place he seemed beside himself, deeply moved and fully taken up in devotion. He prayed, but his prayer was interrupted by sobs, groans and tears; he could not quieten his rapture of affectionate piety until Mass was over and the morning hymn began. He was often warned to curb his external show of emotion since it might offend others: “I feel so full of affection and so happy of heart”, he told me, “that if I can’t express it I feel I will suffocate”... From this anyone can see clearly that Comollo was well advanced on the way of perfection. Those movements of love of God, of gentleness, of contentment in spiritual matters are the result of his keen faith, his burning charity which was deeply rooted in his heart...[[304]](#footnote-305)

Don Bosco wrote this when he was about twenty-nine years of age.

His reserved temperament prompts him to advise his companion to avoid *acts of external devotion* and what they may suggest *in others’ eyes.* The fact remains that his way of describing these particular “phenomena” of the spiritual life reveals his consideration and esteem and the belief that they are the *effect of the keen faith and burning charity* that were rooted in his friend’s heart.

#### 5.4 Holy Orders

During the 1839–1840 school year which followed Comollo’s death, Don Bosco received the tonsure with the four minor orders and, after preparing during the summer, was admitted early to the final year of theological studies. He could therefore officially apply for admission to the subdiaconate.

This step is something he saw as important and therefore Don Bosco felts inadequate: “Though I wanted to complete my studies,” he would say in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, “I quaked at the thought of binding myself for life.”[[305]](#footnote-306)

Once again Fr Cafasso encouraged him to go ahead and trust “in his advice”. After a retreat lasting ten days, according to his account, he made a general confession and received the order of subdiaconate on 19 September 1840.

“Henceforward,” Don Bosco says, recalling the words that Fr Giovanni Borel had told him at the end of a retreat,[[306]](#footnote-307) “I took the greatest care to practice Doctor Borrelli’s advice: a vocation is preserved and perfected by recollection and frequent communion.”[[307]](#footnote-308)

It is not easy to determine the exact semantic value of the term *ritiratezza* in Don Bosco’s understanding of it. About a year before he began writing the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, he wrote to a woman “Give a lot of thought to your choice of state and do good... Prayer, frequent Communion, aloofness from the world/being recollected are the foundations.”[[308]](#footnote-309)

The expression also appears in the resolutions he made on the occasion of his clerical clothing: “I will love and practice a retiring life.”[[309]](#footnote-310)

The term reminds us of the numerous renunciations made by Don Bosco concerning “profane”[[310]](#footnote-311) games and amusements, but it seems to me to refer above all to an inner life, to a fruitful solitude that must be cultivated in the secrecy of one’s own room and that encourages recollection and prayer.

For example, when preaching to priests Cafasso said:

The divine Redeemer, Head and Master of all priests, whenever he could enjoy a few moments to take a break from his continuous labours, as we read in the Gospel, withdrew and prayed. Withdrawal and prayer, these are the two wings that have to lift the priest high enough to make him like a God on earth. Withdrawal and prayer are two inseparable qualities: one deriving from the other; I speak of a pious and virtuous withdrawal and not something natural and whimsical. The man who withdraws naturally is a lover of prayer; the man who prays necessarily withdraws from the noise of the world and seeks peace and solitude. Withdrawal and prayer are two virtues that are enough, because they carry with them and suppose what is required to form a worthy and holy priest. For those who experience withdrawal and pray, it is impossible not to have a heart detached from this world and filled with the spirit of the Lord.[[311]](#footnote-312)

Ordained a deacon in March 1841, John Bosco began the retreat on 26 May of that year in preparation for his priestly ordination, which took place on 5 June of that same year in the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Turin.

The resolutions made on that occasion are not found in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* but in an autograph notebook whose contents are known to the Salesians as the *Spiritual Testament* of Don Bosco, but whose real title, also handwritten, is *Memoirs from 1841 to 1884-5-6 by Fr John Bosco to his Salesian sons.[[312]](#footnote-313)*

It is another important autobiographical writing by Don Bosco, whose editing began in 1884 and ended on 24 December 1887,[[313]](#footnote-314) just over a month before the end of Don Bosco’s earthly life, the day on which the notebook passed into the hands of his secretary at the time, Fr Carlo Viglietti.

At the beginning of this booklet, mainly devoted to a series of provisions, advice and recommendations for the period following his death,[[314]](#footnote-315) Don Bosco returns to the period of his ordination to the priesthood and the resolutions he made on that occasion. His writing begins with these words:

I began the Retreat at the House of the Mission on 26 May, Feast of St Philip Neri, 1841.

Priestly ordination was conferred by Luigi Fransoni our archbishop, in his church on 5 June that year.[[315]](#footnote-316)

The first Mass was celebrated at St Francis of Assisi assisted by my well known benefactor and director Fr Joseph Cafasso[[316]](#footnote-317) from Castelnuovo d’Asti on 6 June Trinity Sunday.

The conclusion I drew at the end of the retreat in preparation for my first Mass was: The priest does not go either to heaven or hell alone. If he does well he goes to heaven with the souls he has saved through his good example; if he does badly, gives scandal he goes to perdition with the souls damned through his scandal.

Resolutions:

1. Never go for walks unless seriously necessary: visit the sick etc.

2. Use time well.

3. Suffer, act and accept humiliations in everything and always if it is a case of saving souls.

3. The charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.

5. I will always be happy with the food that is put in front of me unless it is harmful to my health.

6. I will water down my wine and drink it only as a remedy: meaning only when and as much as is needed for my health.

7. Work is a powerful weapon against the soul’s enemies, therefore I will not give my body more than five hours of sleep every night. During the day, especially after lunch, I will not take a rest. I will make some exception if ill.

8. Every day I will give some time to meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I will make a brief visit or at least a prayer to the Blessed Sacrament. I will give at least a quarter of an hour to preparation and another quarter of an hour of thanksgiving to Holy Mass.

9. I will not engage in conversations with women outside of confession or some other spiritual need.

These memoirs were written in 1841.[[317]](#footnote-318)

Once again, the proposal to do meditation every day returns; to this is added the choice to dedicate an adequate time for preparation, and thanksgiving after Mass. In this regard, some time later he wrote in the same notebook: “Since when I arrive in the sacristy I am usually asked to speak or listen to confessions, before leaving the room I will make sure that a brief preparation for Holy Mass is made.”[[318]](#footnote-319)

This concern accompanied Don Bosco throughout his life, if it is true that the *Spiritual Testament*, in one of its last pages, reports this request for forgiveness from Don Bosco: “I must, however, apologise if anyone observed that I often made too brief a preparation or too brief a thanksgiving at Holy Mass. I was in a way forced to do so by the crowd of people who surrounded me in the sacristy and took away the possibility of praying both before and after Holy Mass.”[[319]](#footnote-320)

Don Bosco writes again in the *Memories of the Oratory*:

My ordination day was the vigil of the feast of the Blessed Trinity. I said my first Mass in the church of St Francis of Assisi, where Fr Caffasso was dean of the conferences. Though a priest had not said his first Mass in my home place for many a day, and my neighbours were anxiously waiting for me to say mine there, I preferred to say it without fuss in Turin. That day was the most wonderful day of my life. At the *Memento* in that unforgettable Mass I remembered devoutly all my teachers, my benefactors spiritual and temporal, and especially the ever-lamented Fr Calosso, whom I have always remembered as my greatest benefactor.[[320]](#footnote-321)

Through his memories of the past Don Bosco, as an adult, reveals to us his awareness of the importance of surrounding God’s precious gifts with silence and recollection.

### 6. At the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin

The summer following the priestly ordination was still a time of discernment for Don Bosco.

He was offered several “jobs” or pastoral activities. He tells us:

Before I made a final choice, I sought out Fr Caffasso in Turin to ask his advice. For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work. Without a moment's hesitation, this is what he said: “You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers and come to the Convitto.” I willingly followed his wise advice; on 3 November 1841, I enrolled at the Convitto.[[321]](#footnote-322)

In November 1841, therefore, Don Bosco entered the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin where he remained for about three years.

The Convitto had come into being in 1817 at the inspiration of Pio Brunone Lanteri[[322]](#footnote-323) and at the initiative of Fr Luigi Guala in the premises of the former convent, annexed to the church of St Francis; the official decree of approval from Archbishop[[323]](#footnote-324)[[324]](#footnote-325) Chiaverotti still bears the date of 23 February 1821.

The stated purpose of the Convitto was to gather young priests, recently ordained, for a preparation closer to the priestly ministry, in particular in view of preaching and the ministry of confessions.

The situation of the young Piedmontese clergy of those years is well described by the *Regolamento del convitto ecclesiastico.*[[325]](#footnote-326)

At the end of their theology studies, many of them find themselves without any means of support other than those provided by public conferences; they are therefore forced to earn their living in occupations unrelated to the ecclesiastical ministry, others to retire to their birthplace where they usually lack appropriate education and emulation, others are forced to enter expensive boarding arrangements where they are often disturbed in their studies and are in danger of losing their ecclesiastical spirit; others, finally, discouraged by the difficulties encountered in the length of time that must be devoted to such studies, abandon them altogether, and the result is necessarily:

1. A scarcity of confessors who are skilled in dealing with all kinds of people, and hence greater difficulty for the faithful in approaching the Holy Sacraments.

2. Loss of ecclesiastical spirit, whereby many of the plants cultivated with great effort and expense, which during the five years of theology gave hope of excellent results, became sterile due to lack of final cultivation.

The damage caused by these things, and how much they are to be lamented in circumstances where there is such a need for good workers, cannot be sufficiently explained.

It was therefore decided to remedy this grave evil in part by establishing a boarding establishment in the premises of St Francis, intended to accommodate clergy, where they could devote themselves to these studies and become skilled in the exercise of the holy ministry.[[326]](#footnote-327)

The opening of the Convitto was an event with far-reaching consequences for the Piedmontese church;[[327]](#footnote-328) with the Convitto, in fact, a new “spiritual school” of priests was born in Turin with a clear identity that distinguished them from those formed at the Royal University of Theology. The mitigated rigour in moral matters and Gallicanism in ecclesiology were counterbalanced by a clear choice for probabilism and an unreserved defence of papal authority.

This plan for his priestly life was in line with that of the *Amicizie Sacerdotali* (Priestly Friendship Society) founded by Nicolaus von Dissbach, of whom Lanteri had been a disciple and friend.[[328]](#footnote-329)

#### 6.1 The Convitto Ecclesiastico’s formation project

Let me now summarise the main characteristics of the Convitto’s “formation project”.

1. In the *moral theology* field, the main effort was to form young priests in the teaching of St Alphonsus,[[329]](#footnote-330) overcoming rigorous and Jansenist pastoral positions, encouraging frequent reception of the sacraments, but without falling into minimalism or laxity.[[330]](#footnote-331) The Convitto’s timetable included two conferences on moral theology a day and a practical confessional exercise.[[331]](#footnote-332)
2. In the *ecclesiological* field, the Convitto’s thinking followed the Ultramontane line that had characterised the birth of the Amicizie.The authority and prestige of the pope were defended against the “enemies of primacy” and misleading doctrines.
3. In the *ascetic* field, an austere and “retired” life was proposed. “Silence shall be observed at all times,” the first of the Convitto’s rules said, “except during recreation time, when voices shall not be raised too high, and care shall be taken not to make noise in the corridors, on the stairs, when entering or leaving rooms, and especially in the study, where silence shall be observed with the utmost rigour.”[[332]](#footnote-333) Detachment from the “world”, avoidance of crowded places, prohibition from attending shows or going to public places: these elements were considered essential in order not to lose the “ecclesiastical spirit”.  
   Great importance was given not only to *moral theology,* but also to *preaching* and *liturgy.* “The time for study,” states regulation no. 13, “shall be divided partly into practical moral theology and partly into the composition of sacred eloquence and liturgy in the manner that will be assigned.”[[333]](#footnote-334)
4. Another fundamental characteristic was *a strong apostolic “projection”;* first Guala and then Cafasso, who became rector of the Convitto in 1849, guided young priests in significant apostolic experiences on behalf of young people, the poor, prisoners and those condemned to death.[[334]](#footnote-335)
5. From this apostolic perspective, the *Ignatian spiritual exercises* occupy a prominent place, of which Diessbach, Lanteri, Guala and Cafasso were convinced promoters.[[335]](#footnote-336)
6. Other characteristics of the Convitto’s spirituality were a solid *Marian piety,[[336]](#footnote-337)* devotion to the *Sacred Heart* and to *Christ in the Eucharist.*
7. Another guiding principle, also linked to the apostolic project of the Diessbach *Amicizie*, was the importance given to the apostolate of the *good press*, to the dissemination of publications that refuted doctrinal errors and spread Catholic doctrine.
8. The Saintly Protectors of the Convitto were St Francis de Sales, whose teachings and spirituality had a major influence on the lives of the *Amicizie,*[[337]](#footnote-338) and St Charles Borromeo, the true “refounder” of seminaries during the Catholic Reformation.

What follows is how the Convitto’s spirituality was outlined by Tullio Goffi:

The Convitto’s spirituality is based on the doctrine of St Francis de Sales and St Alphonsus Liguori. It does not form people for holiness as in a monastic community; it does not educate them to a mystical experience; it does not invite them to abandon everyone and everything in order to perceive themselves as belonging only to God and in God. It simply makes young priests aware that they are living in a spiritually troubled world; it shows them that, from the Christian point of view, there is much to be done; it equips priests for unceasing action on behalf of souls to be saved, offering them the comfort of apostolic charity and acceptance. The Convitto seeks to convince priests that what they must propose and demand of the faithful (orthodox doctrine, a spirit of prayer and mortification, ethical and canonical observance) necessarily requires them to bear witness to it in their own lives. Doctrine on priests or lay people, although it does encourage virtuous asceticism within a faithful practice of piety.[[338]](#footnote-339)

#### 6.2 Practices of piety at the Convitto

At this point, I think it would be helpful to say a few words about the life of prayer and devotional practices at the Convitto.

I have already mentioned the silence that accompanied the residents’ day, which began at 5.30 in the morning (at 5.00 in the summer).

We read *passim* from the regulations:

When the signal is given, everyone shall rise promptly, and once the individual is ready, they shall go to the place designated for prayer and remain there in silence and recollection, preparing themselves in accordance with the Holy Spirit’s instruction: *Ante orationem praepara animam tuam.*

Half an hour after *Angelus Domini*, vocal prayer in common, which shall be said slowly and with a clear, harmonious and devout voice; then half an hour of meditation. After the meditation, study in common...

At half past eight, the clerics will attend Holy Mass at the altar of the Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception erected in the Church of St Francis, which will be served by one of them *per turnum* wearing a surplice; the others will kneel on the side benches at the same altar. In going to and from Mass, they will observe seriousness and silence...

At half past twelve, when the bell rings for lunch, reading will take place *per turnum*...

After lunch, a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament...

At 3 o’clock spiritual reading...[[339]](#footnote-340)

At 5 Angelus Domini and recite the Rosary in common...

At 9:30 am, at the sound of the small bell, silence and prayer in common; examination of conscience and then rest.[[340]](#footnote-341)

The overall structure of the practices of piety, therefore, did not differ much from the seminary in Chieri.

However, the Convitto’s regulations appear, here as elsewhere, more basic and, above all, richer in spiritual motivation.[[341]](#footnote-342)

#### 6.3 Don Bosco’s judgement regarding his Convitto experience

For a better understanding of Don Bosco’s spirituality, it would certainly be helpful to retrace the characteristic features of the “formation project” of Turin’s Convitto one by one and find how they were reflected in his spiritual and pastoral experience.[[342]](#footnote-343)

But what impact, in subjective terms, did Don Bosco’s time at the Convitto have? What was his adult opinion about it? We can read this in the *Memoirs of the Oratory:*

The Convitto Ecclesiastico completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma, and that speculative; and in moral theology only controversial issues.

Here one learnt to be a priest. Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study, reading good authors - these were the areas of learning to which we had to apply ourselves.

At that time, two prominent men were in charge of this most useful institution: Doctor Louis Guala and Fr Joseph Caffasso. Doctor Guala was the work’s founder. An unselfish man, rich in knowledge, prudent, and fearless, he was everyone’s friend in the days of the regime of Napoleon I. He founded that extraordinary seedbed where young priests fresh from their seminary courses could learn the practical aspects of their sacred ministry. This proved very valuable to the Church, especially as a means of eradicating the vestiges of Jansenism that still persisted in our midst.

Amongst other topics the most controversial was the question of Probabilism and Probabiliorism... Dr Guala took a strong stance between the two parties; starting from the principle that the charity of O.L.J.C. should be the inspiration of all systems, he was able to bring the two extremes together. Things came together so well that, thanks to Doctor Guala, St Alphonsus become our theological patron. This was a salutary step, long desired, and now we are reaping its benefit.

Fr Caffasso was Guala's right-hand man. His virtue, which withstood all tests, his amazing calm, his shrewd insight, and his prudence enabled him to overcome the acrimony that was still alive in some probabiliorists against the Liguorians.

Dr Felix Golzio, a hidden gold mine amongst the Turinese clergy, was also at the Convitto.[[343]](#footnote-344) In his modest life-style he was hardly noticeable. But he was a tireless worker, humble and knowledgeable; he was a real support, or better, Guala and Caffasso’s right-hand man. The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes, the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy.

These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues.[[344]](#footnote-345)

This decidedly positive judgement, expressed by Don Bosco in the same years as the final approval of the Constitutions (1874) and the consolidation of the congregation he founded, indirectly gives rise to a sort of programmatic indication on how “one learns to be a priest”: meditation, reading, two conferences a day, preaching practice, a retired life...

Once again, re-reading the *Memoirs of the Oratory* at this particular chronological level, that is, as a historical document that allows us to recognise the priestly life project proposed in his mature years to the congregation he founded, allows us to enrich our knowledge of Don Bosco’s judgement on a “successful” formation programme and, in particular, on the role entrusted to meditation and the life of prayer.

I thought it would be interesting to include here a testimony from Don Bosco, this time from the period we are considering.

This is an excerpt from a memoir he wrote on 16 April 1843, towards the end of his second year at the Convitto, about a fellow student at the seminary in Chieri, young Giuseppe Burzio, who later became an Oblate of the Virgin Mary in the congregation founded by Pio Brunone Lanteri and who died prematurely in 1842.[[345]](#footnote-346)

After having extensively described the virtues of this young man and after having indicated him as a “perfect model of the cleric”, Don Bosco writes:

His piety, which was truly singular, represented an even greater commitment. I can refer only to those external acts of piety that were visible to all, but anyone who knew how sincere he was and how constant in the practice of virtue, can easily surmise how great and how many must have been the unseen acts of his many virtues.

Thus he never took part or assisted at exercises of piety with indifference or out of habit. On the contrary, he was remarkable for the joy and contentment reflected in his face. IAs soon as a church service or customary practice of piety, like prayer or meditation began, or as soon as he set foot into the chapel, he immediately would become recollected. From his devout bearing, those who saw him could sense how much his heart was in it and how great was his spirit of faith. Whether Superiors were present or not, Burzio’s edifying demeanour was always the same. One could very well say of him: *ambulabat coram Deo...*

Besides carrying out with ardor the regular practices of piety, he was very devout ( as I was able to notice through his words and acts) , to the

Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin, to whom he offered acts of love and gratitude whenever he had some free moment. During recreation periods, above all, on school holidays, I often saw him take polite leave of his companions and go to church to spend some time in conversing with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and His loving Mother.[[346]](#footnote-347)

Don Bosco was almost twenty-eight years old, and was at the end of his experience at the Convitto;[[347]](#footnote-348) the consideration and esteem he showed for that “lingering in sweet conversation”, even “during recreation time” reveals to us his way of feeling, his ideal of Christian and priestly life.

The time for prayer, for personal and silent conversation with God, would never be judged by him to be “excessive” or inappropriate; on the contrary, this favourable judgement would be shared, as we shall see, by many of the protagonists of his biographies, young and old alike, whom he would continue to present throughout his life as authentic models of Christian virtue and holiness.

### 7. St Joseph Cafasso

The figure of Cafasso[[348]](#footnote-349) and his spiritual doctrine[[349]](#footnote-350) deserve special attention for the role that this saint played for more than thirty years in Don Bosco’s life.

Giuseppe (Joseph) Cafasso was born in Castelnuovo d’Asti, the same town that gave birth to Don Bosco, on 11 January 1811.

Physically unremarkable, “slightly-built, bright-eyed... kindly and pure in appearance”,[[350]](#footnote-351) Cafasso was one of the first students at the new seminary in Chieri in 1827.

In 1833, immediately after his ordination as a priest, he entered the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, where he remained first as a student, then as a tutor and professor of moral theology, and finally as rector after the death of Fr Guala in 1848. He held this position until his death on 22 June 1860.[[351]](#footnote-352)

In addition to teaching moral theology he devoted himself particularly to pastoral care for prisoners and those condemned to death,[[352]](#footnote-353) and to preaching retreats to clergy and lay people. This latter fundamental aspect of his priestly apostolate would have an impact on Don Bosco’s spiritual and pastoral experience.

Cafasso meticulously collected his notes in numerous notebooks, but never published anything. One of his nephews, Canon Giuseppe Allamano,[[353]](#footnote-354) who reopened the Convitto in 1882 after it had been closed a few years earlier by Archbishop Gastaldi, published several volumes of meditations and instructions for the people and the clergy at the beginning of the 20th century.[[354]](#footnote-355)

Fr Eugenio Valentini, who edited the entry on “Joseph Cafasso” in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, writes:

Joseph Cafasso fut à la fois un maitre en théologie morale et en théologie spirituelle. Sa spiritualité, tout à fait traditionnelle, est profondément pastorale. C'est pourquoi son influence auprès du clergé et de ses dirigés fut‑elle grande; rappelons que son meilleur disciple fut saint Jean Bosco.[[355]](#footnote-356)

The influence exerted by the doctrine and pastoral zeal of Cafasso on the Turin clergy was profound. Although his sphere of influence may seem limited to the pupils of the Convitto, he was, as Fr Flavio Accornero states, a teacher of priests and therefore “multiplied” his influence on the Church in Piedmont:

He was a man capable of opposing evil, writes Accornero, and of fighting the Lord’s battle with untold zeal in his work for souls, as a priest and as a teacher of priests. It was precisely his work in such restricted and closed environments as the confessional, the pulpit and the Convitto that gave Cafasso his undisputed insight, for he worked with multipliers: the entire clergy of Piedmont, it can be said, looked to him as their inspiration and guide on new paths, and all spiritual directors looked to him as their director. And his teachings, his words, his ideas passed from priest to priest, from parish to parish, from soul to soul...

We can therefore see a blossoming of students, founders of religious institutions, ascetic and moral guidelines, and the beginnings of holiness. How much is there of Cafasso in their activity and holiness? Of course, many elements that sprang from this source became ingrained in the lives of these men, who represent the most spiritually renowned personalities of the Piedmontese century and who, in their gigantic spiritual stature, are proof of the goodness and strength of the seed from which they originated.[[356]](#footnote-357)

#### 7.1 Fr Cafasso and Don Bosco

The influence exerted by Cafasso’s personality on Don Bosco, who was about four and a half years younger than him, was decisive. Don Bosco himself leaves us in no doubt, in this regard, when in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, after having spoken of the years spent at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* and, in particular, of Fr Luigi Borel, Fr Felice Golzio and Fr Cafasso, he states:

These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues. Fr Caffasso, who for six years had been my guide, was also my spiritual director. If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life.[[357]](#footnote-358)

The Salesian John Cagliero, then Archbishop of Sebaste and Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia, testified to the relationship between the two saints at Cafasso’s beatification process:

Our Ven. D. Bosco had a very special, intimate veneration for Ven. Cafasso, combined with a holy affection that bound him to him and made him a humble disciple before the goodness and holiness of his great teacher. For 20 years, he had him as his spiritual director, his only confidant and advisor.

We, who had such a high opinion of D. Bosco’s goodness and virtues, combined with the greatest affection and deepest veneration for his holiness, formed an even higher opinion of his teacher Don Cafasso with regard to his goodness, virtues and holiness.

And I myself, on several occasions when I had the opportunity to meet the Ven. Cafasso and listen to his warm exhortations, became convinced of the truth of what Don Bosco told us.[[358]](#footnote-359)

We read again in the *Nova positio super virtutibus,* from the same witness:

It was a common belief for me and among my colleagues at the Oratory that the Ven. was a model of every priestly virtue ....

From what I could see on several occasions when I approached him, and from what I heard from the Ven. D. Bosco, who was his disciple, enjoyed his intimate familiarity, knew his heart and spirit, and scrutinised the rare and supernal gifts with which he saw him enriched by the Lord... I can give sure testimony that the theological, cardinal and moral virtues were practised by the Ven. Cafasso in a heroic manner.[[359]](#footnote-360)

Fr Eugenio Valentini wrote in this regard, in the presentation to the re-edition of the *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*[[360]](#footnote-361) written by Don Bosco himself, published in 1960, on the occasion of the centenary year of his death:

Humanly speaking, without St Joseph Cafasso, we would not have had St John Bosco, and probably not even the Salesian Congregation.

It was he who advised him, guided him in his choice of state, formed him in the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and then directed, defended and supported him in the difficult moments of his life.

The Master's spirituality was largely transferred to the Disciple, and today, rereading these pages a century later, we easily notice the intertwining and, so to speak, the fusion of these two spiritualities.

In fact, this is the main feature of this documentation. Don Cafasso was for Don Bosco the Master, the Spiritual Director, the Confessor, the Benefactor par excellence. Now, this influence of intimate relationships, lasting for thirty years, could not fail to leave and – what an imprint! -in the life of the disciple.

This is the first reason, the objective one, why the spirituality of Cafasso was transfused into St Jon Bosco.[[361]](#footnote-362)

Retracing all the individual episodes and moments in which the lives of these two saints crossed paths is certainly beyond the scope of this study, but it would nevertheless be useful to give us a clearer perception of how decisive this “influence of intimate relationships” mentioned by Fr Valentinimay have been in Don Bosco’s life. Let me at least try to recall some of the fundamental stages.[[362]](#footnote-363)

After their first meeting, which most likely took place in 1829,[[363]](#footnote-364) Fr Cafasso’s guidance and support were decisive in Don Bosco’s reflective consciousness in difficult moments,[[364]](#footnote-365) and especially in certain situations of *discernment*, particularly in:

– the decision to not abandon studies in order to embrace the clerical state;[[365]](#footnote-366)

– the decision not to enter the novitiate of the Reformed Franciscan Minors of Our Lady of the Angels,[[366]](#footnote-367)

– the decision to enter the Chieri seminary;[[367]](#footnote-368)

– dispelling the doubts that preceded his clerical clothing and the request for admission to orders;[[368]](#footnote-369)

– his decision to enter the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* immediately after his ordination as a priest[[369]](#footnote-370) and his *first Mass* celebrated by Don Bosco in the church of St Francis of Assisi attached to the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* where Cafasso was ‘head of the conference’[[370]](#footnote-371);

– guiding his first pastoral experiences;[[371]](#footnote-372)

– decisively diverting him from leaving for the missions and from “entering into religion” with the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, at the end of a course of Spiritual Exercises;[[372]](#footnote-373)

– helping to determine the general orientation of his apostolic life also with regard to the apostolate of the *good press*[[373]](#footnote-374);

– guiding some particular projects of the life of the new Oratory of San Francesco de Sales.[[374]](#footnote-375)

After leaving the *Convitto Ecclesiastico,*[[375]](#footnote-376) Don Bosco continued to go to confession weekly to Fr Cafasso until the latter’s death in 1860; For long periods, he went to the Convitto every day to study and retreat to a room reserved for him, in particular to prepare the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), for which he often used the library.[[376]](#footnote-377)

Don Bosco’s affection, esteem and gratitude towards his teacher are evidenced by the acute suffering caused by his death and by his desire to preserve and perpetuate his memory.[[377]](#footnote-378)

The Servant of God Giuseppe Allamano testifies:

Following a suggestion made to me by the Servant of God Fr John Bosco a year before his death, in order to preserve the memory of the Venerable, I sent a circular letter to all those who I believed had had dealings with him to gather information about his life. I then handed these memoirs over to Canon Colombero, parish priest of St. Barbara’s in Turin.[[378]](#footnote-379)

Colombero’s would be the first true, documented biography of Cafasso. Don Bosco, before him, had long cherished the idea of writing one; this was testified by his nephew, who also stated that, according to the saint, he had not succeeded in this endeavour due to the disappearance of the documents he had collected in a cupboard in the oratory.[[379]](#footnote-380)

#### 7.2 Some of Cafasso’s teachings on mental prayer

Detachment from the world, solitude, and a solid life of prayer: these are the three steps indicated by Cafasso to a soul that wants to make progress in a more perfect spiritual life.[[380]](#footnote-381)

I will not dwell on the concept of *detachment from the world* ; I will only emphasise the saint’s insistence on the need for clergy to avoid “games and public spectacles”[[381]](#footnote-382), a theme that we find among the resolutions made by Don Bosco from the moment he took holy orders, and on the excellence of the virtue of humility as detachment from oneself and a condition for the authenticity of apostolic work.[[382]](#footnote-383)

More relevant to our study are Cafasso's considerations on the subject of *solitude.* Flavio Accornero writes:

Solitude – alongside withdrawal – is a term that is repeated almost indefinitely by our author, and love of solitude is a practice that is recommended, with an emphasis on its indispensability, to the clergy as well as to the people, no longer simply as an escape and absence from the world, but as an exercise of presence to God and to one’s own conscience.[[383]](#footnote-384)

Cafasso considers, therefore, the practice of solitude as an indispensable "resource" for the life of the priest. “Union with God” he says, “purity of conscience, exemplarity of life, which are so proper to the priest, are useless to hope for or seek outside of withdrawal and solitude.”[[384]](#footnote-385)

No material occupation and not even apostolic work can be sufficient reason to dispense oneself from this fruitful solitude.

My brothers, let us never forget that our life consists more in the spirit than in works; works are valued according to the spirit. Take away or diminish from a cleric the *inner spirit* proper to his state, and you take away or diminish in *proportion* the value of his works. for if we want that spirit to reign in us, unimpeded, indeed increased and inflamed, it is necessary, indispensable, to exercise continuous and constant vigilance over ourselves, and it is absolutely necessary to have a place and a time for retreat, study and examination in our daily life, otherwise, as happens, what will come of it? We engage in study, preach, hear confessions, and take on countless tasks for various reasons, rarely pausing from morning to evening. While everything may yield good results, how are we doing on the inside? What benefits are we actually gaining, and how do we assess the state of our hearts?[[385]](#footnote-386)

And the first, main “place” that Cafasso indicates for this daily “withdrawal” is our *room.* “Only in the room will we find that peace,” he says, “that tranquillity, that calm so necessary for forming a good priest.”[[386]](#footnote-387) It is this “cell” that the priest must learn to love: “Love for the cell where the air is purer for the soul, the sky more open, the Lord closer and more familiar.”[[387]](#footnote-388)

Alongside the ordinary solitude of the room, the priest must periodically seek adequate time for his *spiritual exercises.*

It cannot be compared to what God offers to those who seek him, to those who surrender themselves to come and deal with him at this time... Retreat, solitude in the company and in the bosom of the Lord is worth more, and a thousand times sweeter than all the delights of this earth: what passes between a soul and God in these places; oh the subtleties, the caresses that God reserves, the sighs, the impulses, the flights of a soul that spends time with, that speaks with its Lord![[388]](#footnote-389)

The third foundation of the priest’s spiritual life is *prayer.*

Among the means that contribute to forming the cleric, that special man in the world, a mirror of divinity on earth, an internal, spiritual man, separate as he is from the deceitfulness of the age and consecrated entirely to the interests of God, more divine than human, prayer must necessarily enter into retreat.[[389]](#footnote-390)

Flavio Accornero emphasises:

This prayer, as we can see, is not reduced to a question of asking God for something, but has a character of trust, abandonment and love; it is not only a search, a striving towards the one object, but an effort that presupposes enrichment at its end and leads the soul to a communication with God pushed to the extreme limit of union and intimacy. “Familiarising oneself” is the term that most evocatively conveys our author's thoughts on the matter: this unifying current with which the soul must surround itself cannot be attained without experiencing the need for deep and complete contact with God...

Cafasso insists precisely on his teaching of preference for this unifying aspect, on which the fruitfulness and continuity of prayer hinges; being men of prayer involves precisely an intimate friendship, a dwelling, a profound communication with the One who is the source of love.[[390]](#footnote-391)

The importance of prayer for the life of the priest is underlined in one of his *instructions*, starting from two considerations. Prayer, first of all, is to be considered the first duty of a cleric:

Among the duties and offices of the priest it can be said frankly that the first is to pray: o*mnis pontifex pro hominibus constituitur in iis quae sunt ad Deum.* The principal means, indeed the only means that he has to keep open this way, this relationship, this communication with God, the way in which he must accomplish this great mission and embassy, is prayer: take away prayer from me, and you will at the same time take away all communication between Heaven and earth, between God and man.[[391]](#footnote-392)

Secondly, by virtue of his “profession” he must be a teacher “of this great art of prayer”:

And how will he succeed, if he does not know it fully and does not exercise it himself? Have you ever observed how any teacher teaches a profession or art to his pupil or disciple? He begins by explaining the principles and theory thoroughly, giving the reason for everything so that the pupil may understand its value and power. But this is not enough, and he is not satisfied. He puts himself first, working like a beginner under the eyes of his pupil, then he gives it back to them and wants them to work in his presence, so that he can advise them, help them, encourage them, and so, piece by piece, part by part, between the two of them, but almost as if they were one, the work is continued and completed to the satisfaction and mutual pleasure of the teacher, who enjoys the progress of his pupil, and the pupil, who advances thanks to the kindness of his teacher. This is what priests must do among the people, in their preaching, in the confessional, in catechism, and in domestic and family discourse: teach this great art of prayer.[[392]](#footnote-393)

Cafasso also insists on the need to find time for prayer, even among occupations and commitments. There can be no “excuse” or mitigating circumstances, therefore, for a priest who is not also a man of prayer:

But what if the situation were different, and the priest did not pray as much or as well as he should, and was a man of occupation, if you will, of study, of science, but not a man of prayer? Oh! ... perhaps my answer will be a little harsh and you will find it ungrateful; yet we are here to give it to each other. I can’t, I don’t have the head for it, I don’t have time to pray: Hey! When it comes to a necessary task that must be done, there is no need to argue about it, it cannot be ignored, for better or for worse, we must move forward; these excuses and pretexts are of no use: they might be useful when one is not yet at that point, but when one is, with or without the head for it, willingly or unwillingly, it is something that must be done; look at temporal affairs which are heavy, difficult and thorny: if it were possible, one would like to shirk them, but one immediately comes to this conclusion: it is useless to think about it, it must be done, and if it cannot be done, then do as much as you can. So I would say to the cleric in this case: this office of prayer, this task, this occupation is indispensable for a priest; it is a waste of time to try to do without it: either pray or cease to be a priest. Oh! I would pray, if that were the case, I would try hard, I would give it a go, but I don’t know; why? What excuse can be given: a teacher who, when asked to teach, replies that he does not know; the answer is easy, it is natural, and there is no other: you should not have set yourself up as a teacher; and why did you become a priest, when you knew you had to teach others to pray if you did not understand it yourself? Oh! That’s how it is. Go to many who are wise and they will teach you themselves what you do not know ; go to many good faithful and they will tell you how, with what heart and what you should pray about; and if you do not know how to pray, St Augustine comes in here, but look, kneel at the foot of the Cross, prostrate yourself before this God, and then do, say what you want, since everything is prayer, whether you adore, whether you admire this God, whether you praise him, love him, thank him, rejoice with him, everything is prayer, it is prayer before him.[[393]](#footnote-394)

In the same instruction, Cafasso pauses to distinguish three “categories” of clergy: those who “recite prayers but do not pray”; those who “do so with difficulty and poorly, and as soon as they have fulfilled their pure and simple material obligation, they no longer think about it”; and the “true priests” who are necessarily men of prayer:

Everyone is naturally inclined to love their skill, and so they derive pleasure and enjoyment from pursuing it. Far from wanting to keep it hidden, they crave recognition and desire that everyone should know about it. They are pleased when others praise their skill, but it seems that they struggle; however, this is not true. They would struggle even more and suffer greatly if they had to stop and give up their work. Here in a few words is the idea of the man of prayer, and prayer; He is the priest who, unlike another who chose a different career, dedicated himself to a life of prayer. He loves prayer, takes pleasure in it – at least in his willingness – and finds it impossible to turn away from or abandon it. Watch him at home, in church, or around the streets; he prays constantly: when he studies, he prays; when he works, he prays; when he enjoys himself, he prays; when he eats, when he sleeps, he prays; and how can this be? Is he always on his knees? It is not necessary. He prays, because whatever he does, he does with that end in mind, for that purpose, for the honour and glory of his God; he prays because from time to time he remembers God, thinks of him, throws himself into his work, talks to him; and do not believe that he finds it hard, for it is a delight, a joy rather than a burden for him to pray; and do not try to turn him away from it and make him desist, because everywhere, in everything, he is praying without you knowing it or realising it. He prays, spends time with and converses with his Lord: this is the man of prayer among the clergy: whether there are many or few, I cannot say; I will only say: Happy would be the world, fortunate would be the earth, if it could could count on, could calculate on finding such a man, such a priest, that is, a man of prayer![[394]](#footnote-395)

And Cafasso concludes the instruction by stating:

Praying, as we have seen, is not enough for a priest. He must be a man of prayer, and to become one, many words are not enough. Neither art nor industry are of any use. Detachment and withdrawal from the world are necessary, as are the practices of piety and mortification. Finally and above all, reflection and meditation are necessary, and when our heart is emptied of the mud of this earth, when it is filled and warmed by the things of the Lord, it will no longer be able to live on earth, but often, easily, without effort or fatigue, it will be carried to Heaven to see God, to greet God, to speak to him, to become familiar with him, to converse with him, and by this alone we will be men of prayer and devotion[[395]](#footnote-396).

There are many other quotes on this subject,[[396]](#footnote-397) but I feel that they would add little to what I have already tried to express. This great love of solitude, retreat, prayer, and an “ordinary” life of simple and profound union with God, these teachings that were continually the subject of his preaching to the Piedmontese clergy and, at the same time, the awareness, which we have tried to highlight, of the spiritual intimacy that existed between these two great saints, become indirect “instruments” that allow us to know more deeply the spiritual experience of Don Bosco, even where our saint shows himself to be sparing with intimate confidences.

“Following the example of many others, our author,” writes Flavio Accornero about Cafasso, “concedes a large part of his spiritual direction, the most important and conclusive part, to prayer... At Cafasso’s school, therefore, we must first of all be convinced that there can be no true spiritual life without prayer.”[[397]](#footnote-398)

### 8. The Spiritual Exercises in Piedmont in the 19th century

The practice of regular spiritual exercises is one of the most interesting characteristics of 19rh century spirituality. Although it was already to be found in Europe in the previous two centuries, it was widespread and almost generalised in this century, not only for religious orders, but also for the “secular” clergy, for devout lay people and for school pupils.[[398]](#footnote-399)

The piety of the laity, more specifically, was supported and encouraged by “*popular missions*”[[399]](#footnote-400) which can be considered a particular adaptation of the exercises; annual retreats, closed or open, were mandatory in religious houses and seminaries since the end of the 17th century, by order of Clement XI and Benedict XIV.[[400]](#footnote-401)

Many bishops often recommend the exercises to both clergy[[401]](#footnote-402) and laity.[[402]](#footnote-403) Practically every diocese in Piedmont had its own house for the exercises.[[403]](#footnote-404)

The work of the exercises was disseminated in Piedmont after the Restoration, thanks to some enthusiastic propagators of Ignatius’ method.

Among these, the first needing to be mentioned was Fr Roothaan S.J., rector of the college of the province of Turin and then, for thirty years, General of the Society.[[404]](#footnote-405) His spiritual work encouraging the exercises left a lasting trace in the history of the exercises in Piedmont and in the Society of Jesus.

Another fundamental reference is the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, approved in 1826 by Pope Leo XII with the brief *Etsi Dei filius,[[405]](#footnote-406)* which in this respect brings together the legacy of the *Amicizie* and, in particular, the *Amicizia sacerdotale*, due to the importance that their programme devoted to the apostolate of preaching the spiritual exercises.[[406]](#footnote-407)

Fr Timothy Gallagher has amply demonstrated the centrality of the *Exercises* of Saint Ignatius in the spirituality and charism of the founder of the Oblates; even more than the Jesuits, whom Lanteri saw engaged in other educational works, they devoted themselves almost *exclusively* to preaching the exercises according to the Ignatian method, for the benefit of priests and lay people of all categories and classes.[[407]](#footnote-408)

Lanteri had been initiated into this work by Diessbach.[[408]](#footnote-409)

In a letter to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Pio Brunone Lanteri, referring to the period prior to the temporary suppression in 1820 by Archbishop Chiaverotti, and therefore to the first four years of the congregation's life, wrote:

The Oblates of M. point out in this regard that from the Constitutions and Rules... it appears that their primary purpose is to give the Exercises of St Ignatius free of charge, as they always practised and attended to so tirelessly that in the early years, that is, from September 1817 to May 1820, they gave 61 courses, and in the following four years, although reduced to a very small number, they gave another 115 courses...[[409]](#footnote-410)

Lanteri's work, which sometimes remained in the shadows[[410]](#footnote-411) but was highly appreciated by Fr Roothaan himself, who described him as “extremely versatile in giving the exercises”,[[411]](#footnote-412) also reached several priests in the diocese of Turin, whom he encouraged to join the apostolate of the exercises.[[412]](#footnote-413) The constitutions of the congregation provided for, in addition to the “congregated” members with vows and communal life, the “aggregates”, diocesan priests who, although not living in community, preached and exeercised the ministry of confession in the exercises, and the “boarders”, this latter group being priests, generally young ones, who lived temporarily in the Oblate communities, not only for their own spiritual exercises, but also to have the comfort and appropriate tools to write their own courses of exercises.[[413]](#footnote-414)

Lanteri also wrote a *Directory* that was published for the first time in 1829 together with the text of Saint Ignatius.[[414]](#footnote-415)

This return to the spiritual exercises and the renewed attention and fidelity to the text of the *Exercises,* promoted above all by Roothaan, did not hinder the spread of the model of popular exercises inspired by Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio and Saint Alphonsus. These are, for the most part, adaptations of obvious Ignatian derivation, as Fr Pietro Stella pointed out:

These types of exercises were developed mainly by pastors who had experience with the people's religiosity, or even priests and educated faithful who were not accustomed to or capable of prolonged meditation. This approach to the exercises, therefore, was well suited to the popular religious education effort of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[[415]](#footnote-416)

Meditation had by then become commonplace; nevertheless, the general atmosphere of silence and contemplation, and the numerous periods devoted to personal meditation, examination of conscience and going over things in one’s room, made these exercises a training ground for interiority and mental prayer.

#### 8.1 The Spiritual Exercises at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius above Lanzo

Lanteri’s work in promoting the exercises received its “official blessing” in the diocese of Turin as early as 1807 when, together with Fr Luigi Guala, he was appointed to preach to the priests of the diocese.

Guala and Lanteri decided to restore and use for this purpose the premises adjacent to an ancient sanctuary. After the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773,it had been annexed to the archiepiscopal curia of Turin and had fallen into a state of almost complete abandonment.

The construction of the sanctuary of St Ignatius,[[416]](#footnote-417) at an altitude of about 920 metres not far from the village of Lanzo, about forty kilometres north-west of Turin, was completed in 1727 by the Jesuits, who had become owners of a small chapel where the saint was venerated and of the surrounding land in 1677.[[417]](#footnote-418)

The early years were not without hardship and material difficulties, but by 1808 the house was officially opened.

In 1814, Fr Luigi Guala, who had been appointed Rector of the Church of St Francis of Assisi a few years earlier, became administrator of the sanctuary, appointed by the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Giacinto della Torre. This appointment was later confirmed in 1836 by Archbishop Fransoni.

This particular circumstance links the fate of the sanctuary to that of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*. Both thus acquire a central role in the theological formation and spiritual life of the nineteenth century Piedmontese clergy. Saint Ignatius, in particular, was somewhat the beating heart of the entire diocese of Turin during the difficult years of the Italian Risorgimento.

The exercises at St Ignatius were paradigmatic and were “famous throughout Piedmont”;[[418]](#footnote-419) they became, in practice, “the norm and model on which the exercises were established or restored in individual dioceses”.[[419]](#footnote-420)

The experience was regulated by a small but detailed compendium of *rules* established by Fr Guala, rules that laid down the exact times of the day, the notices to be given, the small tasks to be distributed by the director of the Exercises.[[420]](#footnote-421)

The timetable for ordinary days, with the exception of arrival and departure days, included:[[421]](#footnote-422)

- 5 ½ Rising.

- 6 Prime – Points for meditation and review in the room.

- 7 ¾ Mass – Terce – Coffee in the room.

- 9 ½ Sext – Instruction, reflection in the room.

- 11 ¼ Nones – Reading in church.

- 12 *Angelus –* Lunch – Recreation.

- 14 Litany of Our Lady – Rest.

- 15 ½ Matins and Lauds – Meditation and review.

- 19 ¾ Rosary – *Angelus –* Supper and recreation.

- 21 ½ Litany of the saints in church – Rest

The sanctuary, thanks to the restorations and extensions promoted by Guala, became capable of accommodating about eighty retreatants.[[422]](#footnote-423)

Upon Guala's death, Cafasso, who had already begun his apostolate several years earlier by giving the exercises at the sanctuary, took over its administration, completing some works and, in particular, facilitating access to the sanctuary by purchasing additional land and building a road suitable for vehicles.[[423]](#footnote-424)

On the “atmosphere” that reigned at these exercises led by Cafasso, Di Robilant informs us:

As president of the pious gathering (Cafasso), sought with saintly demeanour to ensure that everyone was happy and cheerful; but at the same time, he was extremely demanding that things be done properly, especially in the exact recitation of the Breviary and scrupulous observance of silence. “The Exercises,” he said, “are like a divinely ordered machine composed of many small parts: vocal prayer, mental prayer, examens, hymns, readings in church and in one's room, recreation, silence...” The main point he insisted on, however, was silence. “I dare to say,” he said, “that the outcome, the fruit of our Exercises will be according to the silence that will be observed during these days. If it is observed rigorously and true solitude reigns among us, I hope for everything.”[[424]](#footnote-425)

This attention to silence and recollection already emerged from Fr Guala’s regulations, who recommended (*passim*):

I. Outside recreation hours, everyone shall observe strict silence, both in the corridors and on the way to and from their rooms, the church and the refectory, without even greeting each other with signs or staring at each other, so as not to invite each other to speak. This shall also apply at table, where no compliments shall be exchanged, nor shall anyone serve another, especially with wine....

IV. No one will walk through the corridors, as this is too easy an opportunity to break the silence...

XI. Finally, it is to be hoped that everyone will make a religious commitment to maintain recollection and to be of mutual edification: may the famous admonition of St Arsenius always be impressed upon our minds: *Fuge, tace, quiesce, haec sunt principia salutis...’[[425]](#footnote-426)*

At the Shrine of St Ignatius, however, the exercises were not only held for the clergy. In fact, lay people also attended, people of “all ages and conditions, predominantly young people, from ministers of state and members of the court to humble professionals, shopkeepers and craftsmen.”[[426]](#footnote-427) The timetables and regulations, apart from a few rules that specifically concerned priests, such as those relating to the celebration of Holy Mass, were the same.

#### 8.2 Don Bosco at St Ignatius

In 1842, at the end of his first year at the Convitto, Don Bosco, accompanied by Cafasso, went to the sanctuary of St Ignatius for his spiritual exercises.[[427]](#footnote-428) The Convitto’s regulations, in fact, established that:

The Convitto will open on 1 November, and since it would not be appropriate to wait for a spiritual retreat during the year, it will end with the Exercises at the Sanctuary of St Ignatius, which the Convitto’s students will undertake to attend.[[428]](#footnote-429)

The *Biographical* Memoirs tell us

The retreat began on June 7, 1842. Father Menini, S.J., preached the instructions, and Father Guala the meditations. This we know from a manuscript of Don Bosco, still extant, with outlines of the matter treated by the preachers. For Don Bosco the most efficacious sermon was the deportment of Father Cafasso, himself a retreatant. His saintly fellow townsman had never missed these retreats, even when he was not the preacher. He was an example to all by his constant recollection, punctuality at all exercises, [and piety in] serving several Masses every morning as an ordinary altar boy. Don Bosco faithfully imitated everything he did, as many eye-witnesses, Father Giacomelli among them, later attested.[[429]](#footnote-430)

During these first exercises at St Ignatius, Don Bosco took notes on the meditations and instructions[[430]](#footnote-431) and also added some notes, probably during the “review” sessions.[[431]](#footnote-432)

The meditation topics, given by the rector of the Convitto, were: the purpose of man, sin, death, the Last Judgement and hell, God's mercy, *the two standards*,[[432]](#footnote-433) Christ as a model, the means of salvation, paradise and God’s love. Fr Minini[[433]](#footnote-434) S.J.’s instructions, after an exhortation to make the exercises well, focused on the dignity of the priesthood, the virtues required and the means to obtain them, zeal for souls, and the need for priests to be men of prayer.

From that year on, Don Bosco was a frequent visitor to the sanctuary. In fact, he went there almost uninterruptedly[[434]](#footnote-435) every year until 1874.[[435]](#footnote-436)

The *Biographical Memoirs* contain references to almost all these “trips up the mountain”. Let’s go through them quickly:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| YEAR | MB\*  Volume | Page | PREACHER/S |
| 1842 | 2 | 122 | Fr Borel, Fr Minini S.J. |
| 1844 | 2 | 206 | Fr Cafasso |
| 1845 | 2 | 294 |  |
| 1846 | 2 | 478 |  |
| 1847 | 2 | 245 | A canon from Vercelli and a Jesuit (?) |
| 1849 | 3 | 536 |  |
| 1851 | 4 | 270 | Canon Gastaldi, Fr Molina |
| 1852 | 4 | 470 |  |
| 1853 | 4 | 620 |  |
| 1854 | 5 | 66 |  |
| 1855 | 5 | 302 |  |
| 1856 | 5 | 511 |  |
| 1857 | 5 | 713 | Fr Cafasso |
| 1858 | 6 | 40 |  |
| 1859 | 6 | 252 |  |
| 1860 | 6 | 696 |  |
| 1861 | 6 | 990 |  |
| 1862 | 7 | 224 |  |
| 1863 | 7 | 485 |  |
| 1864 | 7 | 699 |  |
| 1865 | 8 | 164 |  |
| 1868 | 9 | 324 |  |
| 1869 | 9 | 674 |  |
| 1870 | 9 | 892 | Fr Felici |
| 1871 | 10 | 175 |  |
| 1872 | 10 | 362 |  |
| 1874 | 10 | 1277 | Archbishop Gastaldi |

\* The references are to the Italian MB as not all can be found in the English BM

Before 1866, the year in which the experience of “self-managed” exercises in Trofarello began for the fledgling congregation, Don Bosco often brought some of the young clerics of the Oratory with him to the sanctuary.[[436]](#footnote-437)

Many times Don Bosco went up to St Ignatius, first with Cafasso and then with Golzio, as a collaborator in the animation of exercises for the laity and as a Confessor.[[437]](#footnote-438)

This happened, for the first time, in 1843. Fr Lemoyne tells us about it:

At that time, the laymen’s spiritual retreat needed some enlivening. Mindful of this, Father Cafasso earnestly wished Don Bosco to attend. To comply with this holy desire and to contribute to the success of a work so pleasing to God, Don Bosco obliged, and henceforward never failed to take part in it, year after year, until 1875. For many years he made the journey on foot leaving Turin at 3: 00 a.m. and arriving at St. Ignatius about 10: 00 a.m. Father Cafasso, Father [Felix] Golzio and Father Begliati always put him in full charge at the shrine and retreat house, but did not burden him with preaching. However, after Don Bosco had received faculties to hear confessions, nearly all wanted to make their confessions to him, and he made himself available. The good he accomplished is beyond calculation.[[438]](#footnote-439)

And later, with reference to the summer of 1849, we read once more:

After these celebrations (St John the Baptist), Don Bosco prepared to go to the sanctuary of St Ignatius, where Fr Cafasso wanted him at all costs... Don Bosco felt completely at home at the shrine in Father Cafasso’s company. During his retreat he reflected, heard many confessions, and with his benefactor and spiritual guide firmly decided to lay the groundwork for his own religious congregation.[[439]](#footnote-440)

We also have manuscripts of some of his early preaching experiences, some of which were probably composed as exercises in rhetoric during his time at the Convitto.

In one of these, entitled *Introduzione ai santi esercizi spirituali. 30 novembre 1843*, we read:

Listen in the meantime, O you my dear Jesus; I undertake these *Holy spiritual Exercises* only for the good of my neighbour’s soul, and for your greater glory. On the other hand, I know that I am nothing but a miserable creature, a poor sinner; therefore, I place the cause in your hands; I will do what I can on my part through you, give me your help; move the hearts of those who come to listen, not to my words but to your divine word, guide my tongue, inflame my heart with holy affections; so that what I am about to say from this holy place may bring honour and glory to you, spiritual fruit for my soul, and for the souls of those who come to listen to me...

To understand what we must do to make these holy exercises fruitful, we must first get a clear idea of what they are. The spiritual exercises are nothing more than a series of meditations, and instructions, which are made to move man to friendship with God. Firstly, a series of meditations are presented, the purpose of which is to lead man to self-knowledge: to understand that he was not created for the miserable things of this world, but rather destined for a happiness infinitely superior...

Can anything more necessary and important than this be found?

I am not referring to this method of meditation, this order of preaching inspired by the Blessed Virgin to St Ignatius of Loyola; nor am I referring to the many indulgences granted by the Supreme Pontiffs to those faithful who devoutly participate in the spiritual exercises; I am simply saying that God has great special graces in store for everyone during these days.[[440]](#footnote-441)

Fr Stella writes, concerning these “youthful” sermons by Don Bosco:

The sermons that we have of his were largely compiled in the early years of priesthood, that is, in the years he spent at the Convitto. The topics dealt with are indeed those commonly found in the sermons of the 18th and 19th centuries, clearly linked to the patterns of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, to the literary production of Segneri and St Alphonsus, which Don Bosco followed directly or through followers, such as the early 18th-century Piedmontese Jesuit Rossignoli and the early 19th-century Ligurian priest Antonio Francesco Biamonti.[[441]](#footnote-442)

#### 8.3 The Spiritual Exercises in Don Bosco’s personal and apostolic experience

The experience of the Spiritual Exercises in the formative context of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, thanks also to the spiritual proximity with Cafasso becomes an important point of reference for Don Bosco both personally and apostolically.[[442]](#footnote-443)

The *Biographical Memoirs* also tell us that at the end of his three-year stay at the Convitto Don Bosco had contacts with the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, founded by Pio Brunone Lanteri, and for a certain period he had the desire to “enter religion” in that congregation[[443]](#footnote-444) and, therefore, to dedicate his whole life to preaching the exercises of St Ignatius.

This is confirmed by a handwritten page in the *Cronichetta anteriore* by Fr Giulio Barberis, first novice director of the Salesian Congregation, who writes:

Here are some details of Don Bosco’s life that he himself recounted to someone in particular...

After completing his third year of moral studies, he decided to join the Oblates of Mary Immaculate; he had already arranged everything and was only going to St Ignatius for his spiritual exercises. When I had finished them, I spoke to Fr Cafasso so that he would give me a definitive answer, and he said no. This response was a terrible blow to me, but I did not even want to ask why; I returned to the Convitto and continued to study, preach and confirm.[[444]](#footnote-445)

Cafasso, whom Don Bosco continued to trust, was, according to Fr Lemoyne’s account, very determined in guiding his disciple’s discernment.

The fact remains that Don Bosco certainly retained great esteem and consideration for the mission of the Oblates and for the apostolate of the exercises.

From the very beginning of his mission among young people, he sought to give this particular experience of the spirit special attention, which he continued to do throughout his apostolic ministry.[[445]](#footnote-446)

In fact, as early as 1847 (1848?),[[446]](#footnote-447) shortly after first settling in Valdocco, he carried out his first experience of spiritual exercises with young people (from Sunday evening to the following Saturday evening)[[447]](#footnote-448) at the Oratory; two years later, he wanted these to be residential and in a suitable place.[[448]](#footnote-449)

The *Memoirs of the Oratory* tell us about his experiences as a preacher immediately after leaving the Convitto: “At that time, I began to preach publicly in some of the churches in Turin, in the Hospital of Charity, in the Hospice of Virtue, in the prisons, and in the College of St Francis of Paola. I preached triduums, novenas, and retreats.”[[449]](#footnote-450)

Another interesting detail, not sufficiently highlighted in the reflection of these years on the charism of foundation of the Salesian congregation, emerges from the analysis of the first draft of constitutions but also of the practice of the foundation period, still in relation to the spiritual exercises.

When Don Bosco wrote the first rules of the fledgling congregation, he studied carefully, in addition to those of the *Rosminians*, the constitutions written by Lanteri for his Oblates of the Virgin Mary, and drew inspiration from them for some specific issues.[[450]](#footnote-451) Desramaut writes:

Toutefois, prêtre diocésain peu au fait des mécanismes du monde religieux, il avait dû chercher des modèles pour composer ce Regolamento. Deux livrets l'avaient très particulièrement intéressé: les Constitutions et les Règles de la congrégation des Oblats de la Vierge Marie et les Constitutions de la congrégation des Prêtres séculiers des Ècoles de Charité. Il connaissait de longue date les Oblats de Marie, congrégation à laquelle il avait eu des velléités de s'agréger…[[451]](#footnote-452)

In the first draft in our possession, known as *Autografo Rua*,[[452]](#footnote-453) there is mention, at a certain point, of the *aims* of the fledgling *society.* Five are listed.[[453]](#footnote-454) Let’s summarise them:

1. bring its members together for a life of perfection;

2. work for the benefit of others;

3. gather poor and abandoned young people to educate them in religion, especially on weekends;

4. take some of them into houses and teach them a trade or craft;

5. support the Catholic religion among adults of the lower classes *by giving spiritual exercises*  and distributing good books[[454]](#footnote-455).

In reality, therefore, there are four *apostolic areas* indicated for the new congregation: oratories, colleges, preaching of exercises and dissemination of *good press.*

This reference remained essentially unchanged throughout Don Bosco’s life, as can easily be verified from the synoptic overview of the critical edition edited by Fr Francesco Motto in relation to these articles on the *Purpose of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.*[[455]](#footnote-456)

In the final version approved in 1874 and in the Italian translation of 1875, one of the aims of the *society* was also to foster ecclesiastical vocations (in point 5); point 5 of the first draft, which concerned exercises and good press, was split into two points, 6 and 7.

Let’s look at these two different versions:[[456]](#footnote-457)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| AUTOGRAFO RUA [1858?] | FIRST TEXT PRINTED IN ITALIAN  AFTER THE APPROVAL [1875] |
| 5. The need to support the Catholic religion is now being felt keenly even among the lower classes of adults, especially in rural areas, therefore the congregation will endeavour to preach spiritual exercises, distribute good books, and use all means that industrious charity may suggest, so that either by word or in writing, a barrier may be erected against impiety and heresy, which in so many ways attempts to insinuate itself among the uneducated and ignorant; this is currently being done by preaching from time to time some spiritual exercises and by publishing Catholic readings. | 6. The need to support the Catholic religion is keenly felt among Christian peoples, particularly in villages; therefore, Salesian members will zealously endeavour to preach spiritual exercises to confirm and direct in piety those who, moved by a desire to change their lives, come to listen to them.  7. Similarly, they will endeavour to spread good books among the people, using all the means that Christian charity inspires. Finally, with words and writings, they will try to stem the tide of impiety and heresy, which in so many ways attempts to insinuate itself among the uneducated and ignorant: To this end there should be sermons, which are given to the people from time to time, triduums, novenas and the dissemination of good books. |

The splitting of number 5 highlights even better the preaching of the exercises among the purposes of the congregation.

Another brief consideration can be made, again on the subject of spiritual exercises and the first constitutions.

In the last three editions compiled by Don Bosco, there is a reference to the obligation for clerical confreres to compose a course of exercises to complete their studies in preparation for priestly ordination. “Each member,“ the 1875 version reads, “in order to complete his studies, in addition to daily moral conferences, shall also endeavour to compose a course of sermons and meditations, primarily for the use of young people, and then adapted to the intelligence of all faithful Christians.”[[457]](#footnote-458)

It is not difficult to verify that the practice of the young congregation was consistent with this indication.[[458]](#footnote-459)

This last reference in the original constitutional text brings us back to Diessbach's *Amicizia sacerdotale*, whose statutes, describing the apostolic means that the *priestly friends* would use to “jugate the whole earth to Jesus Christ,” stated: “...in order to spread it effectively (the holy word of God), each of them shall compose with great care for his own use a course of Missions and a complete set of spiritual exercises.”[[459]](#footnote-460)

At that time, the Oblates’ constitutions also contained a similar reference in the first article of *Chapter Two*, entitled *Regarding their own sanctification*: “(The members) shall also compose a series of meditations and instructions for giving the Exercises according to the method of St Ignatius.”[[460]](#footnote-461)

A similar article remained in the Salesian Constitutions until 1972; in the text *ad experimentum* after the Special General Chapter of 1971 and in the final text of 8 December 1984, both the reference to the preaching of exercises as one of the aims of the Congregation and the indication of the course of exercises that each member was required to complete.

This topic deserves further discussion in relation to a more complete definition of the founding charism; I will try to say something more at the conclusion of the work.

### 9. Conclusion: mental prayer in his childhood and formation experience

In the study of the spiritual experience of a believer, the period of childhood and early upbringing in prayer acquire particular importance.

When believers have completed a formative journey structured in terms of objectives, methods and content, as in the case of Don Bosco or any seminarian of his time, it becomes possible to retrace, in some way, when the documents allow us to do so, the path of maturation and growth. This is what I have tried to do in the first part of this chapter.

The personal resonance and “results” of a formation process certainly have indicators that allow us to verify their impact on adult personality.

First of all, there is the judgement that the subject expresses, after some time, on their own formation journey; but there are certainly other “objective” indicators which, even outside of “reflective” awareness, allow us to verify continuity and discontinuity with respect to the content and attitudes that have been developed.

It was not difficult to recognise, in Don Bosco’s childhood, in his formation for the priesthood and in his positive experience at the Convitto, a journey of education in recollection, “withdrawal”, silence and mental prayer. What impact do these elements have on the “finished product”, i.e. the adult?

I have already given a brief preview of some of these elements in order to demonstrate their substantial continuity. Much more remains to be said, not only about his experience as an educator of “interiority”, which will not be examined here in particular, but above all in relation to the project of holiness that he indicated to the Salesian congregation.

This is what I will try to do in the course of this study.

# CHAPTER 4

## The journey towards the foundation

### 1. The beginnings: a simple catechism lesson

The journey towards the foundation of the Society of St Francis de Sales began, in Don Bosco’s memory, in 1841, the year he entered the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin. He would write in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

Hardly had I registered at the Convitto of St Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the institute...

I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens. This was the beginning of our Oratory. It was to be blessed by the Lord with growth beyond my imagining at that time.[[461]](#footnote-462)

In 1874, the year in which the Constitutions of the Society were ultimately approved, Don Bosco, in a statement sent to the cardinals of the commission delegated to approve them, referred to an “experiment carried out with the Constitutions for thirty-three years, during which it was possible to modify, add or remove anything deemed useful for the practical running of the Institute.”[[462]](#footnote-463)

“This Society,” he had written in 1867, “although limited to some members of the clergy, began in 1841 to gather poor young people on holidays.”[[463]](#footnote-464) Elsewhere he specified that “From 1841 to 1848 some rules were already practised according to the spirit of this Congregation, but there was no common life.”[[464]](#footnote-465)

In reality, however, we know that the first permanent settlement of the oratory in the *Tettoia Pinardi* in the Valdocco district of Turin, which would become the centre of Don Bosco’s educational work, dates back only to March 1846,[[465]](#footnote-466) while a clear intention to guarantee the solidity and stability of the work begun, giving rise to a religious institute, can be traced back, with some approximation, to around 1857.[[466]](#footnote-467)

These repeated, though not unambiguous references[[467]](#footnote-468) by Don Bosco to 1841 as the year in which the Society began lead me to understand that, in his mind, the origin of the Salesian congregation should be understood as a gradual evolutionary process,[[468]](#footnote-469) the beginning of which coincides, in practical terms, with certain decisive events in his life and, in particular, with the experience of a catechism class that began on 8 December of that year, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, with one or two young people[[469]](#footnote-470) in a room adjacent to the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi, annexed to the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin.

Without neglecting this particular perspective of Don Bosco, I will spend time in this chapter considering the period of time spanning from 1841, the year of his ordination to the priesthood, to 1858, the year in which the first draft of the Constitutions was most likely written, as a time of preparation for the legal foundation of the Congregation. It was an important and fruitful time, however, in which some of the founder’s insights matured and, at the same time, the group of very young disciples was formed which would constitute the first nucleus of the congregation. Later on I will focus on the actual foundation period and the consolidation of the new institution.

However, in this important early period, I will try to identify, from the particular perspective of this study, some elements of substantial continuity with Don Bosco’s formative experience and with the ideal of life proposed to the Salesian congregation.

A general historical framework, relating to the period under review, is useful to introduce these considerations.

“This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson.”[[470]](#footnote-471)

During the three years from 1841 to 1844, Don Bosco, who lived at the Convitto and exercised his priestly ministry in prisons, on the streets and in workplaces, continued to gather young people in a room attached to the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi.[[471]](#footnote-472)

The following two years were a period of discernment and movement from one place to another in search of a stable accommodation for his oratory.

Finally, in April 1846, he rented a covered shed from Francesco Pinardi, about twenty metres long, on Via della Giardiniera in Valdocco, and there he ultimately established his work.

In 1847, a *hospice* was annexed to the oratory where young people were taken in “to be removed from danger, educated in religion and sent to work.”[[472]](#footnote-473) Next to the section for *artisans*, a section for *students* was soon established. Initially, these students attended public schools; among them, Don Bosco also took care of those who showed a particular inclination towards the “clerical state”.[[473]](#footnote-474)

The years 1847 and 1849 marked the expansion of the oratory’s work into two other areas on the outskirts of Turin; the oratories of *St Aloysius Gonzaga* in the Porta Nuova area and *The Holy Guardian Angel in the Vanchiglia district were annexed.* In 1852, Don Bosco was officially appointed director of the three oratories by Archbishop Franzoni, Archbishop of Turin.

From 1853, the first internal classes for students and apprentices were organised in the *House attached* to the oratory. In 1854, Don Bosco proposed to four young men that “with the help of the Lord and St Francis de Sales, they make an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbour, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord.”[[474]](#footnote-475) The same year saw the publication of the *Draft Regulations for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin in the Valdocco region,* drawn up by Don Bosco with the aim of providing “a regulatory framework that might serve as a plan for a proper organisation of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such dedication and charitable concern.”[[475]](#footnote-476) Finally, in 1856, “to everyone’s advantage, workshops and classes were permanently established at the Oratory itself.”[[476]](#footnote-477)

This very brief summary of the early period[[477]](#footnote-478) will allow me to frame and give due importance to some of the elements I will now focus on, in relation, I repeat, to the period from when he left the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin (1844) to the probable date of the first constitutional text known to us (1858).[[478]](#footnote-479)

### 2. Educating young people to prayer

From the very beginning, Don Bosco’s educational experience was marked by a deep conviction of the “primacy of religion” in the work of prevention and rehabilitation of “youth at risk”.[[479]](#footnote-480) In 1854 he wrote:

The idea of the Oratories came from frequenting the prisons in this city. In these places of spiritual and temporal misery there were many young people... Carefully considering the reasons for this misfortune one could see that for most of them they were unfortunate more for want of education than out of malice. One could note also that little by little they could be led to appreciate their dignity as human beings, that they could reason, and that they must earn their bread in life through honest effort and not by stealing. In other words as soon as their minds were enlightened by a moral and religious principle they began to feel something good in their hearts which they could not explain but which made them want to be better people. In fact many changed their behaviour while still in the prison, while others when released lived in such a way that they would not end up there again.

So we had confirmation that these young men were unfortunate for want of religious and moral instruction and that these two educational means were ones that together could keep good boys good and lead the unruly ones to make wise judgement when they were released from these places of punishment.[[480]](#footnote-481)

Don Bosco’s educational model was, in some way, exclusive, radical. Christian practice and a life of grace were the central focus of his priestly work with young people.[[481]](#footnote-482) “‘An aim,” Fr Stella writes, that he “assiduously declared in almost every speech and on every page of his writings. His is always a trade in souls.”[[482]](#footnote-483)

The spiritual “quality” of those first weekend gatherings and the centrality of the religious aspect can be glimpsed even from Don Bosco’s simple, essential description of the day’s programme:

The religious services on Sundays and other holy days are as follows: Mass followed by a story from the bible or Church history, or an explanation of the Gospel of the day; then recreation. After midday catechism in classes, vespers, a brief instruction from the pulpit, Benediction and then followed by the usual recreation. Once religious services are over everyone is free to stay and play or to go home. Once night falls we send everyone home and the Oratory is closed.[[483]](#footnote-484)

From the outset, Don Bosco’s proposal had a “clear identity”; this is certainly surprising when one considers that the beneficiaries of his educational work were often young seasonal immigrants or inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods or suburbs,[[484]](#footnote-485) sometimes completely lacking in religious culture and education.

In the years that followed, religious practice in Valdocco, influenced by the Piedmontese environment of the time,[[485]](#footnote-486) became increasingly structured and differentiated, partly due to specific differences between those inside and outside the institution, students and artisans, clerics and young people.[[486]](#footnote-487)

From 1847, the year of its first edition, *The Companion of Youth,* a manual of prayer, became a fundamental reference point for the prayer life and devotional practices of the oratory. By the year of Don Bosco’s death, it had been published in Italian 120 times.[[487]](#footnote-488)

This booklet, which in its first edition had 352 pages but underwent additions and revisions until it reached 520 pages in 1885,[[488]](#footnote-489) bears a certain resemblance in its layout to other manuals that were developed in the same spiritual climate.[[489]](#footnote-490) It exerted its influence until well into the first half of this century[[490]](#footnote-491); already during Don Bosco’s lifetime, a female version was also widely circulated.[[491]](#footnote-492)

#### 2.1 What kind of prayer at Don Bosco’s school?

Let us now try to reconstruct, as far as possible, some characteristics of the life of prayer in the Oratory setting which, since 1847, remember, had also become a *hospice*, a place accepting young artisans and students full-time.

The *centrality of religion*, to which I have previously referred, translates into a life of intense but not suffocating prayer. Fr Giulio Barberis, first novice director of the Salesian congregation, wrote in his *autographed Chronichetta* of 1878, reporting on the opinion of the Bishop of Casale during a visit to the Salesian oratory:

He soaks young people so deeply in pious practices that, I would almost say, he intoxicates them. The very atmosphere they breathe is imbued with the practices of our holy religion. Young people who are so impressed, even if they wanted to, hardly dare to do wrong any more, they do not have the means to do so; it is absolutely necessary to swim against the tide: without the practices of piety, they would find themselves like a fish out of water.[[492]](#footnote-493)

Alongside common practices which structured daily life and the daily schedule, private devotions and individual initiatives developed.[[493]](#footnote-494) The *sodalities*, in particular, represent one of the most characteristic tools of Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy.

These were real associations with spontaneous membership, with a set of rules, common commitments, a promise. The first to be established, back in 1847, was the one dedicated to St Aloysius Gonzaga,[[494]](#footnote-495) which soon attracted most of the young people. Starting in 1855, other groups with different identities and objectives were formed, including *the Immaculate Conception Sodality*, *the Blessed Sacrament Sodality*, *the St Joseph Sodality*.

The Immaculate Conception Society, founded through the initiative of Dominic Savio, and the Blessed Sacrament Sodlity, in particular, would have a clearer spiritual identity. Frequent participation in the sacraments, duties to God and neighbour, powerful witness among peers, Christian and human virtues, solidarity among members: these are the main ingredients that characterised the life of the sodalities.[[495]](#footnote-496)

This atmosphere of freedom, in which everyone was constantly and in various ways encouraged to live a more intense Christian life and, ultimately, to achieve a holiness that is “possible for everyone”, was the most characteristic feature of Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy.

This latter consideration applied, in particular, to how he educated them to prayer. In the *First Draft Regulations for the House attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* of 1853*,* in the short chapter *On piety*, we read in the first three articles:

1. Remember, my sons, that God made us to love and serve Him, our Creator, and that all the knowledge and wealth of the world would avail us nothing without the holy fear of God from which our temporal and eternal welfare depend.

2. Prayer, the sacraments, and the Word of God are the means that will keep us in the fear of God.

3. Pray fervently and frequently; never disturb those near you or pray unwillingly. It would be better not to pray at all than to pray badly. The first thing to do on awakening in the morning is to make the Sign of the Cross and to raise your mind to God by means of some ejaculatory prayer.[[496]](#footnote-497)

Educating young people in prayer was therefore one of Don Bosco’s prior concerns. As he wrote in his Life of Francis Besucco:

It is so difficult to get boys to enjoy prayer. Their fickle age makes anything which requires serious mental attention seem nauseating and heavy. A boy is very fortunate if he has been trained in prayer and likes it. The fountain of divine blessings is always opened by prayer.[[497]](#footnote-498)

What concept of *prayer* is Don Bosco referring to here?

As we have already seen, the teaching of St Alphonsus, also mediated through the teachings of Cafasso, certainly had a great influence on him. The *necessity* of prayer, and in particular of prayer capable of invoking God’s salvation for one’s soul, is certainly a constant feature of Don Bosco’s spiritual and educational experience. “Those who pray will surely saved; those who do not pray will surely be damned”: this maxim of St Alphonsus, which would be added along with others to the final edition of *The Companion of Youth*, represents a profound conviction. Yet, in my opinion, it is surpassed by the atmosphere of simple confidence which, in Don Bosco’s spiritual project, was the true horizon of education to prayer.

The *prayer of petition*, often recommended, takes on a role in this context that transcends the content of each request, opening the young person’s heart to an awareness of God’s constant and providential presence and to the *confidence* that is a significant reflection of the theological virtues in that young person. Fr Stella writes in this regard: “..also in prayer of petition there is something deeper; beneath the grace we desire to obtain there is something that derives from our conversation with God, there is our relationship with the sacred and the transcendent.”[[498]](#footnote-499)

In Don Bosco’s pedagogy of prayer, everything from the outset converges towards a horizon that he points to as possible for everyone, namely, of a life lived constantly in the presence of God. This is a guarantee of a healthy moral life and, ultimately, of full conformity to his will.

Although this project seems very demanding, Don Bosco’s educational ability to initially require only a *minimum*, the gradual nature of his proposal and his ability to make a more intensely lived life of grace attractive in a thousand ways won over many of the boarders and day students at the oratory to this ideal during those years.

From this perspective, the attention to *vocal* prayer should be understood as informing the life of the oratory, even during the Eucharistic celebration: “Boys are made in such a way,” Don Bosco said, according to Lemoyne, “that if they do not pray out loud with others, left to themselves they would no longer say their prayers either vocally or mentally.”

This attentive *vocal prayer*, like the confident *prayer of petition*, is called to evolve, as Don Bosco understood it, into *prayer of affection*. However, as will become clearer in Don Bosco’s reinterpretation of the spiritual experience of some young people during those years, the horizon of *contemplative prayer* and its various manifestations cannot be ruled out.

Given this initial overview, let us now examine more closely some characteristic elements of the environment of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales that refer directly or indirectly to mental prayer.

#### 2.2 The thought of the presence of God

When discussing the “sources” of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience as a young man, I have already emphasised how the constant awareness of God’s authoritative and loving presence was one of the key themes of his early education in the faith.

*God sees you,* his mother Margaret Occhiena repeated continuously to little John, according to Fr Lemoyne’s account;[[499]](#footnote-500) *God sees you,* Don Bosco would write on the walls of his oratory, according to witnesses’ accounts.

The boys were always conscious of the presence of God. All over the Oratory, large inscriptions proclaimed: “God sees you.” With this constant reminder Don Bosco was able to teach them recollection when at prayer, stressing that prayer was a very effective personal colloquy with God. Consequently, the boys recited very devoutly even the short prayers before and after study, work, and meals. His own example was most effective. Everyone could see that he was diligent in his practice of piety and in his daily meditation and prayers; all were edified by his devout demeanor in church or when reading his breviary, even when it was gravely inconvenient for him to do so.[[500]](#footnote-501)

Salesian Fr Gioacchino Berto[[501]](#footnote-502) testified: “His faith was revealed in a very unique way, as he continually instilled in his subordinates the practice of God’s presence, placing the maxim *God sees you* in places of study and work and other sayings of Holy Scripture under the porticoes of the Hous”;[[502]](#footnote-503) and similarly, Fr Francesco Cerruti said:[[503]](#footnote-504) “He instilled the thought of God’s presence in a thousand ways; and he also had it written, along with many other scriptural texts, in his private room and under the portico of the House.[[504]](#footnote-505)

From the very beginning of his Oratory experience, therefore, Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy, in continuity with the education he received, used simple and ordinary tools to educate young people to keep their minds, as far as possible, constantly “occupied” with thoughts of God. This habit is also presented, in *The Companion of Youth*, as an effective tool to overcome temptation.[[505]](#footnote-506) Fr Stella writes:

Don Bosco always warmly pointed out religious practices inspired by groups that had sprung up through his initiative, under his control and with his encouragement. For example he approved the custom at the Oratory, when students and artisans would suspend their work and studies for some recreation in the courtyard, of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. He would assign *fioretti* (little acts of sacrifice) during the novenas that led up to the most important feast days; he encouraged and approved the practice during May of preparing little devotional altars in the common dormitories; and he described the Eucharistic and Marian fervour of various young people, as well as their resolutions to be virtuous based on prayer of petition. These were the guidelines he hoped would inspire individual piety and nourish a “taste” for prayer.[[506]](#footnote-507)

#### 2.3 Eucharistic devotion

As is well known, nineteenth-century attention was focused more on the *real presence* of Christ under the Eucharistic species than on the *celebration of the memorial* of his passion, death and resurrection.[[507]](#footnote-508) Participation in the daily celebration of Holy Mass and *frequent communion[[508]](#footnote-509)* were, from the outset, the most characteristic features of Eucharistic devotion at the Valdocco Oratory.

In the first five years of the boarding section, Fr Stella informs us, in the morning the prayers (*I adore you, Our Father*, etc.) preceded the attendance at Mass. This was to take place as it did in student congregations: in silence, following the most important moments with the help of meditations proposed by *The Companion of Youth*, perhaps interspersed with a few hymns. Fr Francesia recalls that in those years (1850-58?) it happened that various young people appeared in the sacristy before Mass to go to confession to Don Bosco. People waited in prayer in the church (or, in any case, in silence), sometimes even for a quarter or half an hour. Don Bosco would present himself at the altar when he had finished hearing confessions. The[[509]](#footnote-510)

Attention to the *real presence* was also the foundation of a practice of which Don Bosco became a passionate apostle among young people: the *visit to the Blessed Sacrament*[[510]](#footnote-511)*.*  “He was truly an apostle,” Fr Valentini says, “inspiring other little apostles, who in turn invited their companions to go and visit Jesus, the friend of their souls.”[[511]](#footnote-512)

Starting in 1857, he also promoted the establishing of a *Blessed Sacrament Sodality* among young people, which aimed to “promote adoration of the Blessed Eucharist and make reparation to Jesus Christ for the outrages committed against him by infidels, heretics and bad Christians in this most august sacrament.”[[512]](#footnote-513)

All the Lives of young people written by Don Bosco contain, as we shall see, several references to this “pious practice” which had been particularly spread by Saint Alphonsus in the eighteenth century.[[513]](#footnote-514) Some words attributed to Comollo, his companion at the seminary in Chieri, also take us back to the spiritual formation he received during those years and further confirm the influence of the spirituality of St Alphosus:

When he became a cleric and found himself at the Seminary, he writes in the *Historical notes on the Life of the Cleric Louis Comollo* in 1884, he was often heard to say: ‘It was because of the important work of St Alphonsus with the title: *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, that I learned how to make a spiritual communion, which I can say has been my comfort through many dangers...’

Frequent visits to the Church were added to spiritual and sacramental communion. He felt so embraced by the presence of Jesus that often he would spend entire hours there, pouring out his fervent and tender feelings of affection.[[514]](#footnote-515)

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament contributed greatly, in Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy, to nourishing the affective piety which opened the hearts of young people to a simple and profound trust in him who is “rich in graces to be distributed to those who ask for them.”[[515]](#footnote-516)

Let us pause to consider a few more texts dating back to the early years of the oratory. In *The Six Sundays and Novena of St Aloysius Gonzaga with a Note on the Life of the Saint* from 1846, we read of the admiration of the author, then in his early thirties, for the young saint who had such great tenderness for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. “He spent many hours each day before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. He spent three days preparing for holy communion, then three days making his thanksgiving. When receiving the Sacred Host he often burst into such a flood of tears that his strength gave way and he was unable to get up.”[[516]](#footnote-517)

Already in the first edition of *The Companion of Youth* in 1847 some pages, which certainly depend on St Alphonsus,[[517]](#footnote-518) are dedicated to this pious practice. The title is *Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Most Holy.* After a brief introduction, four points follow: *1*. *Actions to perform when visiting the Blessed Sacrament; 2. Spiritual Communion; 3. Prayer to Mary, Queen of Peace; 4. Prayer of St Bernard.* In point 1 we read:

My Lord Jesus Christ, who out of love for mankind you remain night and day in this Sacrament, full of mercy and love, waiting, calling and welcoming all who come to visit you; I believe you are present in the Sacrament of the Altar, I adore you from the depths of my nothingness and I thank you for all the graces you have given me, especially for giving me yourself in this Sacrament, for having given me your Most Holy Mother Mary as my Advocate, and for having called me to visit you in this church. Today I greet your most loving Heart, and I intend to greet it for three reasons: first, in gratitude for this great gift; second, to compensate you for all the insults you have received from all your enemies in this Sacrament; third, with this visit I intend to adore you in all places on earth where, sacramentally present, you are less revered and more abandoned. My Jesus, I love you with all my heart. I am sorry for having so often offended your infinite goodness in the past. I propose with your grace to no longer offend you in the future: and at present, miserable as I am, I consecrate myself completely to you; I give and renounce all my will, my affections, my desires, and all my belongings. From now on, do whatever you like with me and my things. I only ask and want your holy love, final perseverance and the perfect fulfilment of your will...[[518]](#footnote-519)

This is a prayer by Saint Alphonsus, introduced in the original by the title *Actions to be performed at the beginning of every visit to the Blessed Sacrament.[[519]](#footnote-520)*

By carefully observing the second part of the passage quoted here, it is also possible to identify a direct or indirect “source” for St Alphonsus in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius and, in particular, in the prayer *Take Lord* from the *Contemplation to attain love* in the fourth week.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SAINT ALPHONSUS | SAINT IGNATIUS |
| ...at present, miserable as I am, I consecrate everything to you; I give and renounce all my will, affections, desires and all my things. From now on, do whatever you like with me and my things. I only ask and want your holy love, final perseverance and the perfect fulfilment of your will. | ...take, Lord, and accept all my freedom, my memory, my intellect and all my will, all that I have and possess: you have given it to me, to you, Lord, I give it back, everything is yours, do with it as you will, give me your love and your grace, for that is enough for me.[[520]](#footnote-521) |

At the end of this section, I think it is worth sharing a thought from Salesian Fr Alberto Caviglia, who joined the Valdocco oratory in 1881 at the age of thirteen and was Don Bosco’s penitent until he entered the novitiate three years later. His name is linked to a rich literary career and, in particular, to an eight-volume edition of *Scritti editi ed inediti di Don Bosco (Published and unpublished writings of Don Bosco),* which occupied him from 1928 until his death in 1943.[[521]](#footnote-522) He invites us explicitly to to enter into the founder's spiritual experience in order to understand the importance that this devotion had in his pedagogy for faith:

Don Bosco himself was a Eucharistic saint, that is, completely imbued with devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Sacrament, and worked at all times and in every field to create the most intense Eucharistic life in all its aspects... It is precisely the life of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the presence and dwelling of Jesus under the mystical veil of the Species, that forms the subject of special devotion to the Eucharist: that is, the love of Jesus made concrete and almost tangible in his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Those who visit Jesus in the Tabernacle, like those who think of his divine presence in the Blessed Sacrament (a loving way of practising the presence of God), can only do so out of love; and for all those who visit him, he becomes a source of spiritual benefits and a conquering power which elevates the soul above the carnality of being and makes it capable of a moral strength that no human persuasion can exert. We see from this what was in the mind of the holy educator when he directed his young people along this path, both for the common formation of the Christian soul, which was his primary goal, and to cultivate a more exquisite piety leading to holiness. Don Bosco instilled few devotions, but they were fundamental and theologically concrete, and all of them, including devotion to Mary, converge on this point.[[522]](#footnote-523)

#### 2.4 The Spiritual Exercises or retreats and the exercise for a Happy Death

The practice of the spiritual exercises or more simply retreats, was introduced from the early years after Don Bosco settled in Valdocco (1846).

The *Biographical Memoirs* recount the event as follows:

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's mind was crystallizing another project for the sanctification of a small group of his boys – a spiritual retreat. At that time only four or five boys boarded at the Oratory, and it was they whom he had particularly in mind, although he also planned to include some of the older boys who attended the festive oratory. A few of these he had already prepared and invited to make a spiritual retreat of about a week. The retreat had its problems: inadequate facilities to accommodate the retreatants; constant supervision on his part; the expected lack of understanding by the  
boys, due to their youthful restlessness of the importance of silence and recollection; distractions caused by neighborhood noise and the coming and going of people in the Pinardi house; disruption of routine in the boys’ homes and workshops; and also the added expenditure of Don Bosco’s limited resources. Undaunted by the lack of adequate kitchen utensils, Don Bosco determined to serve the boys a noon-time meal to eliminate their having to go home to eat with the distractions that this entailed. He did not wait until everything was available. He was convinced that if one delays doing what is good in order to do it better he may actually end up by doing nothing at all. Therefore, he decided to hold the spiritual retreat that very year, 1847. Divine Providence sent him a priest to preach it in the person of Father Frederick Albert...[[523]](#footnote-524)

Fr Lemoyne continues:

God blessed this retreat and Don Bosco was very happy with the fruits. Several boys, with whom he had labored for a long time in vain, now turned over a new leaf. He therefore determined to hold a retreat every year, regardless of the sacrifices it entailed. Genuine conversions and singular fruits of sanctity resulted in increasing numbers. For several years he continued to provide lunch during that week, also to the day pupils even when they were as many as fifty. This gave him a chance to discover their inclinations, to spur the lukewarm to greater effort, to encourage the more fervent, and to probe their vocations, directing toward the priesthood those whom he considered to have the calling. He did all this so artfully and prudently however, that, while fully respecting the boys' freedom of conscience, he aroused in their hearts a greater love for God and spiritual things and a firm detachment from worldly affairs. He was deeply pleased to see not a few of these young apprentices, after their spiritual retreat, strive perseveringly to lead a better life, and indeed to tread a path of sanctity.[[524]](#footnote-525)

The *Biographical Memoirs* testify that the tradition of the annual retreat became one of the cornerstones of the Salesian work of educating young people in the faith.[[525]](#footnote-526)

In Don Bosco’s account of things, however, the year in which he began holding a retreat at the oratory was 1848 and not 1847, as stated in the autograph *Cenno storico dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*  of 1854[[526]](#footnote-527) and from the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, which were written, as we know, several years later. What is essential, however, is that Don Bosco’s “reinterpretation” emphasises the importance given from the outset to the retreat experience, particularly as a privileged means of vocational discernment and personal sanctification:

I adopted every means to pursue also my own particular objective, which was to observe, get to know, and chose some individuals who had a suitable inclination to the common life, and to take them with me into my house.

With this same purpose, in that year (1848) I put it to a test with a little spiritual retreat. About fifty boys gathered at the Oratory house for it. They all ate with me; but because there were not enough beds for all, some had to sleep with their own families and return to the Oratory in the morning. This coming and going to their homes risked almost all the benefit to be reaped from the sermons and instructions which are customary on such occasions. The retreat began on Sunday evening and finished on the following Saturday evening. It succeeded quite well. Many boys for whom I had laboured in vain for a long time really gave themselves to virtuous living. Several entered religious life; others, while continuing in the secular life, became models in their regular attendance at the Oratory.[[527]](#footnote-528)

The practice of spiritual exercises or retreat was therefore held in high regard by Don Bosco, as confirmed by one of his first biographers, Fr Ceria, who described him as a “great admirer of the Ignatian practice”.[[528]](#footnote-529) “Don Bosco,” continues the author, “loved the Spiritual Exercises: he loved them for others, he loved them for himself.”[[529]](#footnote-530)

Thus in 1844 Don Bosco describes the experience of the exercises through the voice of his young friend Louis Comollo:

During Lent (1839), and with keen devotion, he also made his retreat. After this, he said that he did not have long to wait in this world and that the greatest favour the Lord could grant a Christian was that of making a retreat. “It is the greatest of graces,” he told his friends rapturously, “that God can give a Christian, to give him time to arrange matters of soul in full awareness, at his leisure, and with the support of all kinds of favourable circumstances such as meditation, instructions, readings, good example. Oh! How good you are to us, Lord! How ungrateful would the one be who did not make use of all this goodness from God.”[[530]](#footnote-531)

In relation to the theme of this study, however, it becomes essential to ask what “model” of retreat Don Bosco was actually referring to and what role personal prayer and silence played in this.

As far as the retreat for the Salesians is concerned, I will speak about this at length later on.

As for the retreat for young people and, in particular, the experiences of those early years, first of all a number of considerations can be made.

A first, immediate, emphasis concerns attention to the search for a sufficiently recollected “place” and one suitable for the purpose. According to the *Biographical Memoirs,* it seems that as early as 1849, retreats for the young people at Valdocco took place in two rounds in Santa Margherita, on the hill at Moncalieri, Fr Giovanni Vola’s house.[[531]](#footnote-532)

The following year, the minor seminary in Giaveno was chosen;[[532]](#footnote-533) the *Biographical Memoirs* also preserve the complete list of participants (109 young men) with their respective ages; it may be interesting to note that the average age of the participants was just under twenty. In this long list of names, we also find those of some future Salesians, including Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, who was about sixteen years old at the time.

The biographer writes, regarding the retreat for that year:

[Don Bosco’s] preaching was animated with ardent concern for the salvation of souls. One day he was so moved by his own words that he broke into sobs and had to step down from the pulpit. Humbly and with some embarrassment, he remarked to Ascanio Savio: “I couldn't control myself.” But the effect on his young listeners was beyond words.

In the closing sermon, Don Bosco gave the following souvenir: "Make the Exercise for a Happy Death every month; Make it *well*; make it *unfailingly* well! – It was Fr Rua who remembered this.[[533]](#footnote-534)

I will return later to the *exercise for a happy death* and its importance for *piety* in the Salesian congregation. Here I would stress, in relation to the prayer life of young people, that already the *First Draft Regulations for the house attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales,* drawn up between 1852 and 1854, stated: “Students will make the Exercise for a Happy Death on the second Tuesday of each month. They should prepare for it by performing some

suitable practice of piety a few days before.”[[534]](#footnote-535)

We have no documents regarding the timetable adopted and the “style” of these first experiences of “residential” retreats; some testimonies from Fr Lemoyne refer rather to the early 1860s, but they are equally indicative for us.

His main biographer informs us: “The retreat began on Sunday evening, April 19 [1863]. At the “Good Night” Don Bosco urged strict silence outside of recreation periods. He forbade noisy games, including soccer...”[[535]](#footnote-536)

This was the timetable for the day:

MORNING

5 ½ rising

6, Prayer. – Prime – *Veni Creator –* Meditation. – *Miserere. –* Mass. – Terce. – Breakfast

9 ½, Sext. – Instruction. – Hymn: *Lodate Maria. –* Retirement and reflection

11 ½, Visit to the Blessed Sacrament with the Chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.. – Nones. – Examination of conscience. – *Regina Coeli.*

12, Lunch and recreation.

EVENING

2, Litany of the Saints. – Retirement and private spiritual reading.

3 ¼, Vespers and Compline. – Instruction. – Hymn: *Su figli cantate. –* Snack and recreation.

5 ½, Matins and Lauds. – Meditation. – *Miserere. –* Rosary. – Reflection. – *Regina Coeli.*

God – Soul - Eternity.[[536]](#footnote-537)

The *Biographical Memoirs* preserve the timetable published in the poster prepared to advertise the 1864 retreat, aimed at students and artisans.

The arrangements for the day are the same as the previous year; however, at the end of the poster we read:

**3 things recommended**

1) Keep strict silence, except during recreation.

2) Participate in the services.

3) Realize how great is the grace of a retreat.

GOD – SOUL – ETERNITY

Et haec omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

11 April 1864 Rector D. BOSCO GIOVANNI

The daily timetable and, above all, the call for silence take us back to the model of the retreats that Don Bosco experienced at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* and Guala’s rules, already mentioned. The *Memoirs* also inform us of the fact that some of the young people made a commitment to maintain silence even during recreation.[[537]](#footnote-538)

Some pages by Fr Pietro Stella can once again help to sum things up.

In 1981 he said that the main elements of the retreats, whether they lasted three days or were extended to six days (from the evening of Good Friday to the morning of Easter Wednesday), even for young people, were meditation, instruction, vocal prayers in common that were longer than those said on ordinary days, and silence. The meditations, according to customs that were already well established in the 18th century, focused on the supreme destiny of man, God’s plan for salvation, the salvific work of Jesus Christ, and the crucial moments in man’s life in relation to eternal salvation. The Ignatian influence was very evident. Various collections of retreat sermons, such as those by Cattaneo, Segneri Iuniore, and Biamonti, contain meditations or at least some references to classic themes in the dynamics of St Ignatius’ exercises: the purpose for which we were created, the fall of the angels and our first parents, actual sin, death, judgement and hell, Jesus the Redeemer, the passion and death of the Man-God, the battle between good and evil, with the former fighting under the banner of Christ and the latter under that of Satan.[[538]](#footnote-539) Implicit, but very much present, is the belief that man is free to choose. It is up to him, setting himself the goal assigned by God, to take the side of good or evil, with the prospect of eternal life or death.[[539]](#footnote-540)

#### 2.5 Meditation

“In searching for the language most suited to young people,” Fr Juan Picca wrote a few years ago, “it seems that Don Bosco wanted to avoid the word ‘meditation’.”[[540]](#footnote-541)

In fact, already in the *First Draft Regulations for the House annexed to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* in 1854 we find: “When the second bell rings ... The students, instead, will first go to the study hall and then to Mass. After Mass they shall make a brief meditation.”[[541]](#footnote-542) Fr Giovanni Anfossi, friend and fellow disciple of St Dominico Savio, would testify at his cause for beatification:

According to the regulations, every day in the morning we waited for the meditation, to which the Servant of God gave great importance. Furthermore, I can say that I saw him after this meditation done in common, and also at other times, kneeling, recollected, in deep meditation and contemplation without moving his lips.[[542]](#footnote-543)

The testimonies, however, appear to conflct. Bishop John Cagliero, the first Salesian bishop, who had been accepted at Don Bosco’s oratory since 1851, stated at the same process:

Although meditation was not customary for boys at the oratory, the Servant of God nevertheless felt drawn to spend all the free time he was allowed in church, especially after Communion, raising his mind and heart to God, so that all his prayers were more mental than vocal.[[543]](#footnote-544)

Was the practice of genuine meditation together common among the young boarders at the Valdocco oratory? Did Don Bosco talk to them about meditation or teach them how to do it?

In order to formulate a comprehensive and well-documented response, I will examine some other accounts from that period. First of all we can look at what the manual of prayer has to say in this regard.

##### 2.5.1 Meditation in *The Companion of Youth*

“*The Companion of Youth*” Fr Picca writes in the aforementioned article, “does not explicitly talk about meditation.”[[544]](#footnote-545) The text, in fact, does not contain an explicit reference to a method for meditation and, in general, does not go so far as to recommend or describe this practice of piety.

However, I believe that this consideration should be combined with a number of other observations, based on an analysis of some of the contents of the widely distributed booklet:

- The *Seven considerations for each day of the week*, found in the first part of the manual, have the classic structure of meditations organised into *points*. I will say later that the body of traditional Ignatian meditation, as taught in the first Salesian novitiate, consists of an exercise of the three *powers* (memory, intellect, and will) applied to three different *points* or considerations relating to the mystery being meditated upon; this is a tradition that goes back to St Ignatius’ own booklet on the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In 1875, Fr Barberis, the first novice director, wrote in a conference notebook for the *ascritti* (novices): “Thus, the intellect, memory, will and affections or prayers are applied by pondering the first point; meanwhile, the reader will read the second and the same operations will be repeated, and so on after the third...”[[545]](#footnote-546)

This is why most of the texts used as aids for personal meditation at that time organised the *subject matter* of meditation into three points.[[546]](#footnote-547)

Four of the *Seven considerations for each day of the week* are organised into three points, two others into two points, and one, *On mortal sin,* which is shorter than the others, presents the subject matter undivided. Don Bosco’s preface introducing them states:

Since I would really like you to do a little spiritual reading each day, and not everyone can have the right books, I am giving you seven very brief reflections, one for each day of the week. They should be helpful for those who do not have the right books. When you are kneeling down say: “My God, I am sorry with all my heat for having offended you. Give me the grace to understand well the truths I am about to reflect on and fill me with love for you. Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, pray for me.”

In reality, therefore, despite the initial reference to *spiritual reading*, the subsequent instructions refer to emotional involvement (...*fill me with love for you...)* and to actual prayer (... *kneel down...)* and, therefore, they lead us back to *meditation* rather than simple spiritual reading.

In practice, these meditations were read daily and repeated week after week; the small amount of material available and the weekly repetition certainly reduced the intellectual effort required and helped to *appreciate their content in depth*.

- The thematic structure of these seven meditations follows a pattern customary in *spiritual exercises* at that time. The seven topics are:  *1. The purpose of man; 2. Mortal sin; 3. Death; 4. Judgement; 5. Hell; 6. Eternal punishment: 7. Paradise.*

At the beginning of the first meditation on *The Purpose of Man*, scheduled for Sunday, the first day of the week, topics from the *Principle and Foundation* of St Ignatius’ *Exercises* also resound:[[547]](#footnote-548)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| THE COMPANION OF YOUTH | PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION |
| ... the only purpose for which I created you is to be loved and served by you in this life, and by this means to make you eternally happy in Heaven one day. | Man is created to praise, revere and serve God our Lord, and thus attain salvation. |

- At the beginning of the short chapter entitled *Things necessary for a young person to become virtuous*, since the first edition, young people were invited not only to say morning and evening prayers but also to spend some time each day “reading a book on spiritual matters”.[[548]](#footnote-549) Recommended readings were:

\* The *Imitation of Christ;*

\* St Francis de Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life;*[[549]](#footnote-550)

\* St Alphonsus’ *Preparation for Death*;

\* *Gesù al cuore del giovane* by Giuseppe Zama-Mellini.

I have already said something about the *Imitation of Christ* and the esteem that Don Bosco had for it. The *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Francis de Sales, as is well known, dedicates the entire second part to the *need for* and *method* of meditation. St. Alphonsus’ *Apparecchio alla morte* (Preparation for Death) has the classic structure of a meditation text, with its thirty-six *Considerations on Eternal Truths*, all rigorously divided into three points, each of which concludes with *feelings and prayers.*

Less well known is the text by Fr Giuseppe Zama Mellini,[[550]](#footnote-551) which is also mentioned in the second edition of the *Life of Dominic Savio* together with the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Preparation for Death.* Hence I thought it useful to include some excerpts here*.*[[551]](#footnote-552)

The text contains 31 meditations[[552]](#footnote-553) that the author imagines as being “dictated” by Jesus to the heart of the young man. The first is entitled *Mental Prayer.*

The structure is always three points. In the first point we read:

1. How you console me, my son, here prostrate at my feet, so that I may enlighten you and speak to your heart! Do you know why so few young people live virtuous lives? Do you know why so few people today find the path that leads directly to me and to their happiness early in their lives, and how many, on the contrary, rush headlong towards eternal death? I will tell you, my son, for your instruction and encouragement; it is because almost no one enters into himself, almost no one seeks me with his heart and speaks to me (Jeremiah XII,11). They live carefree, and though they sometimes praise and honour me with their lips, their hearts are far from me (Isaiah XXIX, 13). You were such, and lived such, as if I did not live for you, as if I did not love you, and did not ardently seek to be loved by you; as if I did not show myself ready to pour out every grace for your benefit. Come, my son, gather yourself together and separate your thoughts from the world, come close to me, follow me, and in the solitude of your mind I will speak to you and help you (Hosea II, 14)..... Ah, I wish you understood how much you need mental prayer![[553]](#footnote-554)

In the same meditation in the second point we read:

...you will see everything in its proper light, if you accustom yourself to meditate, if you consider with some prayer and study God, the soul, death, eternity, your inclinations, transience, inconstancy, and the nothingness of the world. Yes, you will see much better with a little serious meditation than with many books, many instructions or any other means...[[554]](#footnote-555)

And finally to the third point, which ends with the so-called *fruit* or spiritual resolution:

3. Ah! Come to me every day (Matthew XVI, 26), and console my heart. You will see that spending time with me will not be a burden, but rather a source of comfort, pleasure, and every good thing (Wisdom VII, 11). So what will you resolve? Will you have the time and inclination to occupy yourself with trifles, amusements, childish thoughts, perhaps even with things that displease me and harm you, and will you not even for a moment give a serious thought to me, to your obligations, to your own good? If you do not know, I will be your teacher, I will let you taste my gifts and fill you with my spirit. I remind you that I spent entire nights (Ambros. I .5 in Lk. VI, 22) in prayer for you, that there in the garden I shed sweat like drops of blood for you (Lk. XXII, 44) Will you not spend a few hours for me in return (Matt. XXVI, 40)?....

FRUIT

Resolve to do at least a quarter of an hour of meditation every day. Obtain some books suitable for your state of life, such as the Maxims of St Liguori, Segneri’s Manna, Kempis, Da Ponte, or similar works, and in the meantime use this booklet for this month and obtain the indulgences granted to those who teach, learn and practise this holy exercise. (Bened. XIV, Const. Quemadmodum). Never abandon your meditation; even if it seems dry, seek the God of consolation, not the consolations of God, and you will reap abundant fruit...[[555]](#footnote-556)

Based on the considerations I have attempted to offer in this section, I do not feel I can conclude that meditation is entirely foreign to this devotional manual and the educational intentions of its author.

##### 2.5.2 Holiday advice

There is another element that I feel I must emphasise in relation to the question of meditation and the period we are examining.

A tradition that can be documented continuously, practically throughout Don Bosco's entire educational experience, is the custom of giving young people who were leaving for their summer holidays at the end of the school year, first verbally and later in writing, some *advice* or *reminders* for *enjoying their holidays.*

This tradition was first recorded by Fr Lemoyne at the end of the 1854-1855 school year.[[556]](#footnote-557)

We have several versions of these *reminders*, some of them handwritten or corrected by Don Bosco himself, others, more recent, in print.

In an undated handwritten sheet we read:

Lifestyle during holidays

1. Daily. Serve Holy Mass if you can, meditation and a little spiritual reading; escape from idleness, good example everywhere.

2. Weekly. Confession and communion.

3. Sundays. Mass, sermon, Benediction.

4. Every moment. Flee sin. God sees you. God will judge us.[[557]](#footnote-558)

In another, also this one handwritten, we find:

1. Morning and evening prayers with devotion; attend Holy Mass and meditate or at least do some spiritual reading.

2. Attend parish services every Sunday.

3. Every week or at least every fortnight, confession and communion.

4. Avoid idleness, bad companions and bad readings...[[558]](#footnote-559)

These texts, although not dated, appear, in comparison, less elaborate and therefore older than those in print, which date back to the 1870s and present a better organisation of the material. In *Ricordi per un giovanetto che desidera passar bene le vacanze* from 1873 we read for example:

**At every moment**

Avoid bad books, bad mates, bad talk.

Idleness is the greatest enemy you have to constantly fight.

Without the fear of God, knowledge becomes foolishness.

**More frequently**

Receive the Sacraments of Confession and Communion St Philip Neri advised receiving them every week.

**Every Sunday**

Listen to the word of God and attend the liturgical functions.

**Daily**

Hear and, if you can, serve Holy Mass and do some spiritual reading.

**Morning and evening**

Devoutly say your prayers.

**Every morning**

Make a brief meditation on some truths of the faith.

These reminders are written on the first of two inner pages of a folded leaflet; alongside them are some maxims taken from the Holy Scriptures or from spiritual authors. The last is a quote from Psalm 38, *In meditatione mea exardescet ignis*, which Don Bosco would often repeat to the Salesians as well.[[559]](#footnote-560)

The tradition of handing over these reminders was maintained for some time even after Don Bosco’s death. From[[560]](#footnote-561)

I note here that all the texts examined and the numerous other *holiday reminders* preserved in the archives reveal a clear distinction between *meditation* and *spiritual reading*; a distinction that was evidently also known to the young listeners.

Spiritual reading, as reflection on a written text, essentially involves *intelligence*, while *meditation* is true prayer, therefore *dialogue* that can start from a written text but involves all the powers of the soul (intelligence, emotions, memory, will, imagination, etc.). I do not entirely agree, in this respect, with Fr Stella when he says:

Clearly, Don Bosco does not require young people to meditate in the way conceived by the more classical schools of asceticism. However, since spiritual reading is not separate from a certain amount of reflection (and therefore open to meditation proper), Don Bosco interprets spiritual reading as meditation and is content to require this minimum from the boys.”[[561]](#footnote-562)

This observation, in fact, would not justify Don Bosco’s continuous use of these two terms here and elsewhere, distinguishing them in context. *Every morning … meditation and a little spiritual reading* says the first text examined; …*meditation or at least a little spiritual reading* says the second.

Nothing, therefore, allows us to suppose either in Don Bosco or in the young people any theoretical or real confusion between these two very different *practices* which the *piety* of the nineteenth century was probably better able to distinguish than that of our century.

In 1864, Don Bosco told the young people at the Valdocco oratory about a dream he had had on the night of 18 April, according to Fr Lemoyne’s testimony.[[562]](#footnote-563) This is one of the longest and most detailed stories told by the saint.[[563]](#footnote-564) It is the so-called *dream to hell and back.*

Let’s summarise briefly: a mysterious friend leads the saint along a road where young people from the oratory, caught in invisible traps, are grabbed and dragged towards a hideous cave, where a monster draws them towards him. Each of these traps has its “title” written on it: pride, disobedience, envy, theft... But an important “resource” is available to them to cut these invisible ties.

Let us now leave the floor to the biographer’s account:

Looking even more closely, I spotted knives among the traps. A providential hand had put them there for cutting oneself free. The bigger ones, symbolizing meditation, were for use against the trap of pride; Others, not quite as big, symbolized spiritual reading well made. There were also two swords Representing devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, especially through frequent Holy Communion, and to the Blessed Virgin...[[564]](#footnote-565)

Once again, the distinction made between spiritual reading and meditation leaves no room for confusion or uncertainty in interpretation.

Once again, I feel I can reiterate my personal conviction that Don Bosco also recommended meditation on various occasions to young people as a valuable tool for supporting their journey of faith.

#### 2.6 Silence after the “good night”

Another element that I feel is important to emphasise is the habit of silence, which characterises, in particular, the experience of the *house attached* to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.

In the evening, after prayers and the rector’s “good night”,*[[565]](#footnote-566)* “strict silence” was required until morning prayers, which promoted order and contributed to contemplation.[[566]](#footnote-567) This traditional custom of the Salesian oratory was highlighted by Fr Franz Weyergans:

What did his “good night” represent if not an examination of conscience, which I would call social because it concerned the whole day of the community for each person? His pedagogical spirituality found an extremely effective expression, since the evening and the silence and natural recollection of the early hours of rest, followed by the secret development of his ideas and gestures in the consciousness of the young people, achieved their goal with almost unfailing certainty.

The sense of God’s presence was permanent and complete in him, like an element of life and action.[[567]](#footnote-568)

The tradition of maintaining silence after evening prayers was constantly recommended and subsequently preserved for the religious community as well. In fact, we read in the acts of the first General Chapter of 1877: “In the evening after prayers, private conversations are prohibited; therefore, everyone should retire to their rooms in silence.”[[568]](#footnote-569)

#### 2.7 Attentive vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer

In this second part of the fourth chapter I have tried to answer the question: what kind of prayer at Don Bosco’s school?

I conclude my brief overview of the education of young people in prayer with two other references characteristic of Salesian piety since the early years of the oratory: vocal prayer well done, where the mind and heart are in perfect harmony with the words pronounced, and the frequent practice of ejaculatory prayer, brief prayers, a true synthesis between *vocal prayer*  and *mental prayer* and an effective tool for acquiring the habit of constantly *thinking* about God.

“Behaviour during prayer,“ Fr Desramaut said, “and how the words were said, concerned him greatly.”[[569]](#footnote-570) There are numerous documents attesting to Don Bosco's exhortations to vocal prayer that is *attentive* and *well done*. Here are some by way of example.

In the *Draft Regulations*, already mentioned on other occasions in this chapter, in *Chapter I* of *Part II*, entitled *On piety* we find: “ Pray fervently and frequently; never disturb those near you or pray unwillingly. It would be better not to pray at all than to pray badly.”[[570]](#footnote-571) “He often recommended to everyone,” Fr Francesco Giacomelli, his seminary companion says, referring to the period of about two years, starting in November 1849, when he lived at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, “that they say their prayers devoutly, pronouncing the words distinctly and paying attention to their meaning.”[[571]](#footnote-572) “In the evening, you will say the Rosary,” Don Bosco writes in *The Companion of Youth* “... but devoutly, not too quickly.”[[572]](#footnote-573) “We will be very well behaved during prayer” say the regulations for the *Immaculate Conception Sodality* in 1856.[[573]](#footnote-574) “Pray better” he often repeats among the *Avvisi dati a nome della B.V. Maria* to the young people of the oratory on January 1, 1862.[[574]](#footnote-575) “Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul,’ he would say a few years later to his young confreres during the retreats.[[575]](#footnote-576)

As for *ejaculatory prayer*, nineteenth-century piety is steeped in them and Don Bosco was a convinced disseminator of them; all the devotional manuals he composed in those years contain any number of them.[[576]](#footnote-577) We read in *Il Cattolico Provveduto*, a few years after the period considered here:

Ejaculations are short prayers, and almost thrusts of the heart towards God. The holy and great Bishop St Francis de Sales believes that these brief elevations of the heart to God are equal in merit and effectiveness to other prayers, even though they are much longer. For this reason, they were always very familiar to every Christian who desired to serve God with a little zeal, and the faithful used them at all times, in all places, and in all occupations to strengthen their spirit, purify their intentions, and attract divine assistance upon themselves and their work. Because of these spiritual transports, Christians live here below in almost continuous union with God, and they give all their actions greater value and a special goodness.[[577]](#footnote-578)

Attention to *behaviour* in vocal prayer, to the conscious pronunciation of formulas and the exhortation to use these short expressions of *mixed prayer* (vocal and mental together) were a constant feature of Don Bosco’s pedagogy of faith and, as we shall see, were also characteristic elements of the prayer life of the fledgling Salesian congregation.

### 3. Mental prayer and models of youthful holiness: the first biographies of young people

In the third chapter of his *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco,* entitled *Orizzonti di spiritualità giovanile nel Giovane Provveduto,* Fr Pietro Stella seeks to dispel the prejudice that this devotional manual is, in fact, only a manual.. “‘The GP [CoY],” he says, “is a way of life, a Christian way of life.”[[578]](#footnote-579) Further on he explicitly says:

We can affirm that the importance of the CoY is essential: in fact. therein is the fruit of DB’s first priestly and literary activity, where we find the programme of youth holiness that he conceived and formulated. Over the years, his experience in education, events and literary activity would lead to deeper contemplation and clarification in certain areas; but in the CoY the seed is already there, indeed more than a seed, there is already a plant developed in its main branches.

We can therefore describe the CoY as the programme and the proclamation of spirituality proposed by DB to young people, to which the Saint remained faithful until the end of his days. In its directness and almost schematic nature, in the apparent disconnect between its constituent elements, we actually discover the method of holiness, that is, of Christian perfection, of which he was the Master and Promoter.

While agreeing with the statement that this work by Don Bosco, which, I remind you, reached 520 pages in the 1885 edition, is not merely a prayer manual, I do not feel I can take some of the author’s expressions literally[[579]](#footnote-580) to conclude that *The Companion of Youth* contains all the elements of the model of spirituality or youth holiness proposed by the saintly educator.

In my opinion, Don Bosco’s proposal is, from the outset, much richer and more articulate. To understand it, it is necessary to carefully analyse some other sources that are at least as important, such as the numerous biographies (Lives) of young people he wrote or the regulations of the *sodalities*, which were true centres for the dissemination of youth spirituality.

With a somewhat unusual image, which is certainly imperfect, I feel I can say that the spirituality proposed by Don Bosco to young people can be imagined as a set of concentric circles, at the centre of which we find the model of youthful holiness. In the outer circle, on the other hand, are the conditions *sufficient[[580]](#footnote-581)* to one day become “fortunate inhabitants of heaven”;[[581]](#footnote-582) in this sense, *The Companion of Youth* expresses Don Bosco’s fundamental concern that all young people should be saved and his characteristic belief that this is possible and, all things considered, not too difficult.

However, Don Bosco’s spiritual proposal is not “satisfied” with this *minimum*, but continually and dynamically pushes young people towards more concentric circles closer to the centre.

Leaving metaphors aside, I feel I can say that it would be very reductive to consider the proposal contained in *The Companion of Youth* as a “horizon of youth spirituality”.[[582]](#footnote-583) Don Bosco’s gaze and “educational drive” aim much higher, clearly indicating that not only salvation, but holiness itself is possible for everyone.

Don Bosco’s project of youth spirituality cannot be understood unless we reread these Lives of his boys through the lens of *imitation*.

An interesting page by Fr Desramaut is helpful for this reflection:

Don Bosco croyait à la force moralisatrice des exemples capables de susciter la sympathie et, par elle, l'imitation du témoin. Leur proximité psychologique était nécessaire. Dans les récits de cette période, elle était certaine: Dominique Savio était proche de ses élèves, les saints savoyards ou piémontais l'étaient de ses compatriotes des Etats sardes. Il partageait en effet sur l'éducation des idées qui flottaient dans l'air de son siècle…

L'imitation est un des mécanismes psychosociaux du développement et des apprentissages. La situation interpersonnelle d'imitation et de modélisation est une forme particulière de la relation expert‑novice, où se réalise la médiation sociale nécessaire aux acquisitions .

Pour don Bosco, les saints de la région Savoie‑Piémont, Dominique Savio en particulier, étaient des êtres avec lesquels ses lecteurs pouvaient aisément entrer en sympathie admirative et imitative. A les regarder et à les étudier, ses compatriotes ne pouvaient manquer d'être au moins portés à les prendre pour modèles, à se les approprier, en un mot à les imiter.[[583]](#footnote-584)

To understand Don Bosco’s *mindset* , it is very helpful to read the preface to his first published work, *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo* (Historical Notes on the Life of the Cleric Louis Comollo) from 1844*,* and especially its development in the subsequent edition of 1854. Already in the title, the word *cleric* is replaced with *young person,* with the clear intention of emphasising that the model of life proposed does not concern only seminarians but every young person and every person of good will; this emerges clearly from the variants introduced:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **TO SEMINARIANS**  IN CHIERI | **TO THE READER** |  |
| Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than any elegant discourse, it is not unreasonable to present you with a historical account of the life of someone who lived in the same place and under the same discipline as you, and who can serve as a true model for you to become worthy of the sublime goal to which you aspire, and one day become excellent Levites in the Lord’s vineyard.  (…)  If, as you read this writing, you feel inspired to follow any of the virtues mentioned, give glory to God, who I pray will always be favourable to you, and to whom I dedicate these few pages.[[584]](#footnote-585) | Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than any elegant discourse, it would not be unreasonable to offer an account of the life of a young man who in a short period of time practised such beautiful virtues that he could be proposed as a model for any faithful Christian who looks to the salvation of his own soul. There is nothing extraordinary here, but everything is done with outstanding perfection so that we could apply to young Comollo the words of Holy Scripture: Qui timet Deum nihil negligit... Here we find many deeds and just a few reflections, leaving each one to apply whatever seems appropriate to his own state.  (…)  So, Christian reader, read on gladly and if you stop to meditate on something along the way, you certainly will have something to savour, and something to gain for a truly virtuous tenor of life.  If, as you read this writing, you feel inspired to follow any of the virtues mentioned, give glory to God, who I pray will always be favourable to you, and to whom I dedicate these few pages.[[585]](#footnote-586) | |

Don Bosco’s proposal, as we will also see in some other biographies he wrote, is clear; using a current theological category we could say that Don Bosco was aware of the universal call to holiness.[[586]](#footnote-587) He proposes to everyone, young and old, a horizon of a holy and happy life.[[587]](#footnote-588)

In 1859, in the presentation of the *Life of Dominic Savio* he wrote*:*

In the meantime, reading about Dominic’s life, say to yourselves what the great St Augustine said in similar circumstances: *“Si ille, cur non ego?”* That is, if a boy of my age, just like me in every way, who had to meet the same temptations as I have to or worse, could follow Christ with such courage and wholeheartedness, why should I not do the same? Remember that true religion does not mean simply saying things, but doing them. If you read something that you admire, don’t content yourself with saying “*This is great. I like this*” but rather: “*I want to do the things I have read about others. They make me wonder.”[[588]](#footnote-589)*

But what role does prayer, and in particular mental prayer, play in this *model of holiness* proposed by Don Bosco from the very beginning of his experience as a pastor and educator? Alongside this question, another of a historical and spiritual nature arouses our interest: is it possible to glimpse a substantial evolution, over the course of his life, in relation to the proposed model?

I believe I can answer this last question immediately. With regard to prayer, we cannot discern any significant differences in Don Bosco’s approach to young people throughout his earthly existence.[[589]](#footnote-590) This assertion seems to be supported by the numerous re-editions of his biographies which, in relation to the question, do not present any substantial differences overall. The life of Dominic Savio, published in 1859, was republished in Italian in 1861, 1866, 1878, and 1880; that of Michael Magone, in 1861, was republished in 1866 and 1880; that of Francis Besucco, published in 1864, was republished again in 1878 and 1886.[[590]](#footnote-591) Comollo’s biography, published in 1844, was also reprinted three times, in 1854, 1867 and 1884, four years before Don Bosco’s death;[[591]](#footnote-592) similarly for *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S. Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del santo* (The six Sundays and novena to St Aloysius Gonzaga with notes on the saint’s life) published in 1846, which had nine editions until 1888, with various additions and variations,[[592]](#footnote-593) and whose main body was already included in the first edition of *The Companion of Youth.*

Don Bosco, after all, continues to present the same models, or rather, with the necessary distinctions, the same model of youthful holiness to different generations of young people and in different social and cultural contexts.[[593]](#footnote-594)

Despite the obvious biographical differences and some significant traits that distinguish the personalities of these young people,[[594]](#footnote-595) each of them is, in some way, “superimposable” on the other, as if in a preordained pattern that nevertheless highlights certain characteristic peculiarities.

An exemplary childhood, avoiding sin, careful choice of companions, active apostolate among peers, love without limits of time for prayer, Marian and Eucharistic devotion, frequent confession and communion, and finally, a premature and edifying death: these are the main elements that recur almost as a supporting structure and that we find consistently, albeit with different emphases, in each of the biographies. From Aloysius Gonzaga to Comollo, from Savio to Magone, from Besucco to Louis Fleury Antoine Colle, Don Bosco’s project of youth holiness emerges with clear and distinctive features.[[595]](#footnote-596)

The Lives of Savio, Magone and Besucco, then, give us back the features of the Oratory experience of those years and, therefore, reveal to us to a greater extent the apostolic heart of the father and, at the same time, a more concrete and particular model of “Oratorian holiness”. A characteristic and recurring feature, for example, is the insistence on presenting these young people in prayer during *recreation time.*

This striking similarity between the lives of these young men had already been highlighted several years ago by Fr Alberto Caviglia, editor of the edition of *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco* (Don Bosco’s published and unpublished works). In the preliminary note to the *Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo* (Notes on the life of Louis Comollo), Fr Caviglia wrote:

Allow me, dear reader, to propose an idea that is somewhat unusual, but helpful in helping me understand. I would like it to be permissible, notwithstanding the conventions, to draft a comparative table, with as many columns as there are young saints celebrated by Don Bosco (and we can add Saccardi, who was entirely his own, as educated in his style by Bonetti, and died in the arms of the Saint): in the first column, one could place, one by one, the individual traits of the virtues and the virtuous and spiritual attitudes and habits of the first, including any supernatural events; In the other columns, we should indicate the corresponding chapter or page numbers from the various Lives that show similarities with those in the first column, while leaving blank spaces in each column for aspects that are notably unique and particular to each individual. Well, I would say that there are few gaps, just enough to mark a personality, and almost all the titles (the essential and indispensable ones, of course, all of them) would find a full and total correspondence and an eloquent parallelism....

It is now almost our duty to describe these common, traditional or fundamental characteristics that can be seen in the life of the young saint and are reflected in Don Bosco, as the forefathers of the spiritual heritage of the Holy Educator.[[596]](#footnote-597) It would result in a broad and, at the present moment, disproportionate discussion that would specifically involve the parallelism and the genetic history of the spiritual pedagogy of Don Bosco, which must be the subject of a specific study or systematic and comprehensive exposition.[[597]](#footnote-598)

The similarities between the spiritual experiences of these young people can certainly raise doubts about the historicity of these biographies and about a possible desire on the part of their author to “bend” the chronicle of events to a preconceived model.

This objection is not new, as evidenced by Fr Caviglia’s aforementioned *Preliminary Note* , which includes some controversial remarks about those who, even back then, had attempted to undermine the historical truth of the events described.[[598]](#footnote-599)

This strictly apologetic position, in my opinion, is no longer sustainable; that is, it is certainly possible that some of the events narrated are influenced by the exhortatory and spiritual purpose of these writings.

Nevertheless, I believe that the issue of the strict historical accuracy of the events narrated is of little or no importance in the specific context of this study. Whether Don Bosco sticks strictly to the facts or forces them into a pre-established model, his intention in these biographies is to provide us with the “coordinates” of the model of youth holiness that he proposed throughout his life to the young people who attended his oratories and works. Let us say, rather, that paradoxically, where the facts narrated do not correspond to historical truth, it is precisely there that we can seek to recognise the most characteristic and personal traits of the model proposed by Don Bosco, because it is precisely these elements, these “exaggerations”, that reveal his intention to indicate a path to follow, even if it means “forcing” the historical data.

In any case, a certain affinity, particularly between the figures of Comollo, Savio, Magone and Besucco, is undoubtedly linked to the process of imitation that binds them together: Savio decides to choose Comollo as a role model for himself and his friends. In the “regulations” of the *Immaculate Conception Sodality*, founded by Dominic Savio among his companions at the Valdocco oratory, it says: “Whoever wants to be part of this Society must first purge their conscience through the Sacrament of Penance, approach the Eucharistic Altar, and then demonstrate their conduct through a week of novitiate, carefully read the life of Louis Comollo and these rules and promise to observe them...”[[599]](#footnote-600) The promise made by the first group of zealous young people began with the words: "We ... promise before Her (the Immaculate Virgin) altar and our Spiritual Director, that we wish to imitate, as far as our strength will allow, Louis Comollo. We therefore undertake to...”[[600]](#footnote-601)

In turn, Francesco Besucco made Savio’s *Life* his constant reference point, and Magone, who died before seeing it published, at least had the joy of reading the first few chapters.[[601]](#footnote-602) In his Life of Besucco, Don Bosco says:

He wanted to know the exact spot where Dominic Savio used to kneel to pray in front of Our Lady’s Altar; He would go there to pray also, his heart greatly consoled. Oh! he used to say that he would dearly like to stay there from morning till evening to pray to Our Lady. “Because I seem to have Savio praying with me; he seems to answer my prayers, and his fervour instils itself into my heart.”[[602]](#footnote-603)

Taking into account what has been said regarding the *consistency* and *continuity* of the proposed model, I will now examine, in addition to Comollo’s biography, the other most important biographies of young people, in particular Savio, who died in 1857 (the biography was published in 1859, at the end of the period we are particularly interested in), Michael Magone and Francis Besucco, which followed immediately afterwards (1861 and 1864), and also, briefly, Louis Fleury Antoine Colle, much later, dating back to 1882.[[603]](#footnote-604)

#### 3.1 *I cenni storici sulla vita del chierico luigi comollo* (Historical notes on the life of the cleric Louis Comollo)

As I have already stated, this is the first work to come “more from the heart than from the pen of the saint, who was not yet thirty years old.”[[604]](#footnote-605) This text, certainly an emotional one, and vibrant with feelings, was revised at least two times by Don Bosco as an adult, ten years and twenty-three years respectively after its first edition.[[605]](#footnote-606)

I have already mentioned how important Don Bosco’s friendship with his young seminary companion was in his human and spiritual experience. Whether it was friendship that created such a deep spiritual affinity, or whether, on the contrary, it was affinity that created friendship, we cannot know; in any case, the two perspectives are complementary.

Fr Caviglia pushes this affinity to a kind of “identification”, which allows us to understand, almost in spite of himself, Don Bosco’s spiritual experience:

Those who read Comollo feel Don Bosco alive in another person, reflected in him, and what the Saint says must be read, as one does with Leonardo's writings, with a mirror in hand, turning them from left to right, and then one sees the figure of the writer. The writer certainly did not know that he was describing himself with the characteristics of Comollo, but that is what happened. This had already been said when, in his letter of 16 April 1843 (a year before the publication of this book), he outlined a profile of the holy cleric Giuseppe Burzio, whom he had known and assisted at the Seminary of Chieri. The good Father Felice Giordano, reporting this in 1846, said that “in discussing the edifying life of a young servant of God, without realising it, he was portraying himself”.

But here the similarity, which approaches identity, is to be understood differently and more deeply. The souls of the two friends have, apart from a few minor details, the same appearance and the privilege of the extraordinary vocation that is characteristic of our Saint.[[606]](#footnote-607)

Note here the inseparable link that exists, in Don Bosco as in every other saint, between spiritual experience and apostolic experience. The model of holiness that Don Bosco proposes to young people cannot be separated from what he proposed to himself from his youth and what he would propose to the congregation he founded. From this perspective, we can understand Caviglia’s seemingly anachronistic statement: “*Comollo is already a Salesian soul.”*

There is more, in fact there is more, and it is crucial, and it is precious. If the affinity, or, as I have said, the sameness of the two spirits provides us with one of the most enlightening documents for understanding our Founder’s youth, not so much in terms of facts, which are now well known, as in the most hidden recesses of the soul and in the tendencies of his spiritual instinct, it also proves and explains the origin, or at least the first revelation of the spiritual tendencies that Don Bosco later transferred to his work as an educator and founder of a religious institute. Comollo is already a Salesian soul, and what he shows, what he does and what he is, matches the guidelines and views of the Saintly Master/Teacher.[[607]](#footnote-608)

Let me now finally try to highlight some passages from the biography that are directly or indirectly related to this study. I will pick them out, for this biography as well as for the subsequent ones, thematically and not in relation to their chronological placement in the development of the biography.

##### 3.1.1 The “time” for prayer. Affective prayer

“He never showed aversion to or slackness in prayer, something common in children; in fact the longer the prayer time, the more content and happy he was.”[[608]](#footnote-609) Even *recreation time* becomes a propitious occasion to elevate the mind to God.[[609]](#footnote-610) The author recounts in the 1884 edition reporting the chronicle of an outing:

...at some point during the recreation, word spread that Comollo was missing. They feared a mishap, especially since a few days earlier a young man had died, drowned in the waters of the Fontana Rossa a few steps away from there. Everyone was therefore filled with fear and began to search all around, but to no avail. In the end, they found him in a place that no one thought of. He was hiding near the nearby chapel between a bush and one of its pillars.[[610]](#footnote-611)

The length of Comollo’s prayers does not necessarily refer to mental prayer; the multiplication of vocal prayers and devotions is in fact characteristic of 19th-century spirituality.

The following text, however, refers more explicitly to an intimate, affective prayer: “He combined spiritual and sacramental communion with frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, whose love he felt so deeply that he often spent hours pouring out his fervent and tender affections to his beloved Jesus.”[[611]](#footnote-612) Even more explicit is the variant introduced in 1884 in the same text: “Frequent visits to the Church were added to spiritual and sacramental communion. He felt so embraced by the presence of Jesus that often he would spend entire hours there, pouring out his fervent and tender feelings of affection.”[[612]](#footnote-613)

##### 3.1.2 Importance of meditation

An early reference can be found in all editions of the *Cenni storici.* “He kept away from others sometimes,” Don Bosco tells us, “but to withdraw to some quiet corner of the house to pray, or meditate.”[[613]](#footnote-614)

A second, more relevant reference is introduced in the 1884 edition.

At the time of his clerical clothing, a friend asked him why he had decided to become a cleric. In his reply, Comollo indicated, in addition to frequent reception of the sacraments, full confidence in a confessor and spiritual director. Among other things, this friend received this valuable advice:

I never failed to do two things based on his advice. Meditation and examination of conscience every day. Young people mainly find these things boring at first. But if they persevere for a while in these two practices of piety, beyond the spiritual benefit, they will experience such consolation and pleasure that they will never abandon them.[[614]](#footnote-615)

The author’s intention here is very clear: the need for a spiritual director and the two practices of piety are indicated as indispensable tools for those who wish to make a serious discernment about their state of life; the friend’s question and Comollo’s reply seem to be nothing more than a literary device constructed to emphasise these conclusions.

##### 3.1.3 Asceticism and mental prayer

Although Don Bosco seems to disapprove of some of the excessive penances that Comollo imposed on himself, his judgement hints at the positive role that a certain degree of asceticism can play in gathering one’s thoughts before God. "(Louis) was getting ready for his clothing,” the author says. “I would not know how to clearly express all the feelings of tenderness that he experienced in that situation. He prayed and asked others to pray for him, fasted, often broke down in tears, spent a lot of time in church...”[[615]](#footnote-616) A second text is more explicit:

These were the main external acts of penance that I noticed, from which one can imagine what he practised in his heart, and how Comollo’s soul was constantly taken up in affectionate love for God, active charity towards his neighbour and a burning desire to suffer for love of Jesus Christ.[[616]](#footnote-617)

##### 3.1.4 Ecstasy, tears and raptures. Contemplative prayer

According to Don Bosco, his friend’s spirituality was profound and involved all of his inner and external faculties:

Circumstances had it that for a few months I went to the Cathedral precisely at the time that Louis went there to spend time with Jesus. So I would be happy to describe what he was like there. He would take up a place near the altar if he could, kneel down, join his hands, bow his head slightly, cast his eyes down and would stay absolutely still; he would be insensitive to any voice or sound. It would often happen that when I had finished my duties, I wanted to invite him to come home with me. So I would nod my head or, coming a bit closer, would cough, to get him to move; he would always stay the same until I actually came up and touched him. Then, as if woken up from sleep, he would move and although a little unwillingly, would accept my invitation.”[[617]](#footnote-618)

In Savio, we find even clearer signs of passive contemplation, something Don Bosco proved to be profoundly aware of. In the following text, his opinion on Comollo’s raptures shows us his spiritual discretion in his desire to curb his friend’s outward manifestations; at the same time, however, his sincere esteem for his “show of emotion” that showed how he was “well advanced on the way of perfection” emerges:

When it was time for him to approach the altar I saw him taken up with the most lofty and devout thoughts. With full composure, walking slowly and deliberately with his eyes cast down, and at times trembling with emotion, he would approach the Holy of Holies. When he had returned quickly to his place he seemed beside himself, deeply moved and fully taken up in devotion. He prayed, but his prayer was interrupted by sobs, groans and tears; he could not quieten his rapture of affectionate piety until Mass was over and the morning hymn began. He was often warned to curb his external show of emotion since it might offend others: “I feel so full of affection and so happy of heart”, he told me, “that if I can’t express it I feel I will suffocate”... From this anyone can see clearly that Comollo was well advanced on the way of perfection. Those movements of love of God, of gentleness, of contentment in spiritual matters are the result of his keen faith, his burning charity which was deeply rooted in his heart and constantly guided him in his actions.[[618]](#footnote-619)

##### 3.1.5 Method in prayer

Don Bosco says: “He had a timetable for prayer, spiritual reading, visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and he observed it scrupulously.”[[619]](#footnote-620)

Not much is said about the possible use of a method for prayer. One text, however, contains an interesting indication in relation to the possible role of *imagination* in mental prayer:

It was in this year, too,[[620]](#footnote-621) that he discovered the secret of praying at length without distraction. “Do you want to know,” he told me, “how I begin to pray? It is a very material image that will make you laugh. I close my eyes, and in my thoughts I am carried into a large hall whose ceiling is held up by many columns that are most exquisitely decorated, and towards the back of the hall a huge throne rises up above which I imagine God is in all his majesty; then around him all the choirs of the Blessed. I prostrate myself before this and then with all the respect I can muster, I begin to pray.” Following what the spiritual teachers say, this demonstrates how much Comollo’s mind was detached from sensible things and how much control he could exercise in gathering up all his faculties of mind when he wanted to.[[621]](#footnote-622)

An 1884 variant better specifies Comollo’s suggestion and the author’s positive judgement:

... around him all the choirs of the Blessed. This material image serves me wonderfully well to lift my thoughts to the infinite Divine Majesty, before whom I prostrate myself and, with all the respect I can muster, offer my prayer.”

Following what the spiritual teachers say, this demonstrates how much Comollo’s mind was detached from sensible things and how much control he could exercise in gathering up all his faculties of mind to engage in spiritual conversations with God. Which points to a high degree of perfection.[[622]](#footnote-623)

#### 3.2 The six Sundays in Honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga

Although not strictly speaking a biography, the booklet *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S. Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del santo* (The Six Sundays and Novena of St Aloysius Gonzaga with a brief account of the saint’s life) deserves a mention here. It was first published anonymously in 1846 and added as an appendix the following year to the prayer manual *The Companion of Youth*. It was republished separately seven more times in Italian before 1888, starting in 1878 together with the rules of the *St Aloysius Sodality*, founded in 1847.[[623]](#footnote-624)

The purpose of this booklet is to spread devotion to the young saint through pious practice and, above all, to encourage young people in particular to imitate his virtues, his spirit of penance, his purity, his detachment from earthly goods, his love for neighbour and for God, his readiness to give himself to the Lord, his spirit of prayer, and his serenity in the face of death. These are the topics addressed by the meditations that accompany the proposed devotion.

On the penultimate day of the novena Don Bosco presents Saint Aloysius to his young readers, as a model for prayer:

At the age of four he would withdraw from the company of the others and would be found by his mother kneeling on the ground in some corner with his hands joined fervently in prayer. So absorbed was he in the delight he found in talking to God that he could hardly hear those who called him. This manner of life became so perfect as Aloysius grew older that he obtained from heaven the rare privilege of being free from distractions in his prayers. It was a great penance for him to interrupt his prayer. By this means he reached a sublime degree of holiness that is almost without parallel.

Let us also strive to acquire this spirit of prayer. In all our needs, sufferings, troubles, and difficult undertakings let us never fail to have recourse to God. But above all let us call trustingly on him for the needs of our soul and we can be sure we will be heard. Let us also beg God to let us know the state of life he wants us to serve him with, that we may spend the time which has been given to us well and on which depends our eternal salvation.[[624]](#footnote-625)

In the last part of the quotation, Don Bosco’s perspective seems to be that of *petite et accipietis;* education to prayer is enriched by this aspect of simple and trusting confidence that is particularly important in the religiosity of children and adolescents.

The fact remains, however, that even this young model, constantly presented to young people, and patron saint of the Salesian congregation until 1947, stood out for his spirit of prayer and lengthy prayers. “From the age of seven,” Don Bosco writes in the second edition of 1854, “he began to have set times for prayer, and he was so strict in observing them that even during an eighteen-month bout of malaria, which had greatly weakened him, he never omitted his appointed times.”[[625]](#footnote-626) “From almost the cradle,” he notes later, “he had a sublime gift for prayer; the Spirit was his great teacher. One day, Cardinal Bellarmine, while giving the spiritual exercises in a college in Rome, when he gave his students some precepts to meditate on, often said to them: “*I learned this from Aloysius.*’”[[626]](#footnote-627) “After lengthy prayers,” Don Bosco recounted in a *panegyric*, the autograph of which is preserved and which Fr Lemoyne dates to around 1844,[[627]](#footnote-628) describing the difficulties encountered in the family on the occasion of his *choice* of state of life, “fasting, mortification, he was finally granted his wish in the following way: one day, after five hours of prayer, he felt an inner urge to go to his father and try one last time...”[[628]](#footnote-629)

#### 3.3 Vita del giovanetto Sovio Domenico (Life of Dominic Savio)

Dominic, born in Riva di Chieri in 1842, arrived at the Valdocco oratory at the age of twelve, in October 1854, following a meeting with Don Bosco a few weeks earlier. A true apostle among his companions and an inspiring model of virtue, he founded the *Immaculate Conception Sodality* at the oratory, an army of young apostles and a valuable tool in Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy. He was forced to leave Valdocco due to poor health shortly before his death on 9 March 1857.[[629]](#footnote-630) Don Bosco published his Life for the first time in 1859, more than a year and a half after his death.

The *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales[[630]](#footnote-631)* (Life of the young Dominic Savio, a student of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales), is one of Don Bosco’s most immediate and personal writings[[631]](#footnote-632) and an important document that allows us to focus on his spiritual pedagogy.  *“Si ille, cur non ego?”* says the author, quoting Augustine, in the preface. This exhortation seems all the more surprising in view of the extraordinary gifts that this young model of virtue had received, according to his own spiritual director.

The role of prayer and the sacraments, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Virgin Mary, the importance of fraternal and trusting contact with the educator and confessor, a committed and joyful spiritual life, personal apostolate among one’s companions, the beneficial role of associations, spiritual combat for the preservation of purity, the constantly present horizon of a good death: all the most characteristic themes of Don Bosco’s educational system, his *pedagogy of holiness*, are found here harmonised not in a theoretical framework or in a treatise on asceticism, but in the everyday events of the life of this young man, “contemplated by his Teacher with loving amazement.”[[632]](#footnote-633)

A page by Caviglia highlights the particular importance of this biography and its excellence compared to others:

... this one of ours surpasses all others. Not only for the excellence of the subject (in which it is on a par with Cafasso), but mainly and truly for the deeper and more intimate relationship between the spirit of the writer and that of his spiritual son. To use technical terminology, it is a causal relationship: as I have been saying, the events of the biographical story are inspired by the ideas and spirit of the master, the author, and the form of holiness, as seen and experienced by the holy educator, became the soul and form of the holiness experienced by the disciple. The Preface to the book makes us think of this, when the Author lovingly explains, and almost apologizes, for the fact that he will have to almost always talk about himself. And from this, I believe, we can explain that dominant tone of tenderness that blends with the loving wonder that continually pervades Don Bosco’s soul as he contemplates the events, one by one, of that famously wonderful life. Like a father and a mother, they are tenderly amazed at the unthinkable revelations that are being revealed in their children. It moves him so much that he can never think or reread his book without tears.[[633]](#footnote-634) It is this indefinable sense of affectionate fatherhood that makes the book so dear and compelling to anyone who reads it.[[634]](#footnote-635)

It is not my task here to study this valuable document, which is certainly one of the most important for recognising the apostolic and spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians, as well as Savio’s spiritual journey. Once again, I will focus solely on those considerations that most directly relate to the topic at hand.

##### 3.3.1 Contemplative prayer

Among the virtues of this young man, the *gift* of prayer stands out in a very special way. Don Bosco is clearly aware of this when he says: “Among the gifts with which God had enriched Dominic was fervour in prayer. As a result of his efforts he got so accustomed to talk with God, that no matter where he was, or what noise was going on round about him, he could briefly recollect himself, sending his heart soaring to God.”[[635]](#footnote-636) “It was a real delight for him,” the author continues, “to be able to spend a few hours before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”[[636]](#footnote-637)

In particular, Don Bosco shows himself capable of recognising the gift of *Contemplative prayer* in Savio’s spiritual experience. Fr Stella writes:

Don Bosco shows himself to be attentive to what reveals a detachment from creatures, a state of perfection, an absorption in God. Therefore, although he does not confide in us his personal experiences of “contemplation” and of a state of union and presence, nor does he offer us a theory on unitive prayer and contemplation, he nevertheless shows himself willing to explain certain stages of spiritual life found in people with whom he lived as union and loving co-presence.[[637]](#footnote-638)

“Even beyond the Eucharistic theme,” Stella continues further on, “we are easily introduced to the theme of God’s gifts, gifts that would seem to predispose us to contemplation. And yet it is not mentioned.”[[638]](#footnote-639)

In reality, it seems to me that this *Life of young Dominic Savio* leaves no room for doubt not only about the ability of the *master* to recognise in his *disciple* the extraordinary signs of *infused or passive mental prayer*[[639]](#footnote-640)*,* but also about his precise desire to “call a spade a spade” and to demonstrate, without any ambiguity, his awareness of being in the presence of supernatural gifts.

His preparation for Holy Communion was most thorough, Don Bosco tells us. Before going to bed the previous evening, he said a special prayer to prepare himself... In the morning he carried on his preparation, but his thanksgiving was liable to have no end to it. F he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he in prayer or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy.[[640]](#footnote-641)

An entire chapter of Savio’s biography is dedicated to *special Graces and particular deeds.*. Fr Alberto Caviglia pointed out in his study *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco* in 1942:

... It is Don Bosco himself who, through that chapter of his Life, gives us the material we need to reconstruct the supernatural life of his little Saint, much of which has already emerged when we spoke of his spirit of prayer and the attitudes of his soul in the presence of God. What was commented on there as psychological reality, with the idea of not yet transcending into what is supernatural (and this was, as the reader has seen, not entirely easy, and here and there almost impossible): all that discussion, I say, finally finds its true conclusion here, and is illuminated and understood.[[641]](#footnote-642)

At the beginning of the chapter, Don Bosco expresses his awareness that the events he is about to recount are not ordinary and “may give rise to some doubt,” but that they are in perfect harmony with Sacred Scripture and the history of spirituality:

Now... I would like to present some incidents and special graces which were out of the ordinary. I am conscious that these may give rise to some doubt in those who read about them. I should like to state categorically that anything recounted here which seems paralleled by incidents in the Scriptures or the lives of the saints, was seen with my own eyes and that the accounts written of them are written with a scrupulous concern for the truth. I leave each one free to form his own opinions.[[642]](#footnote-643)

Thus begins the story of the young lad’s long ecstasy:

On a number of occasions when I have been in church when Dominic was making his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I have seen him obviously quite oblivious to what was going on around him; he would continue in this state without noticing the time unless he was reminded it was time for something else. One day he was missing from breakfast, morning lessons, the midday meal and no one knew where he was, he was not in the study room, not even in bed! The matter was referred to the Rector, who suspected what might be the case, that he would be in the church. He went to the Church and there in the little chapel behind the high altar he saw Dominic standing motionless like a statue. One foot was on top of the other, one hand resting on the reading lectern; his other hand was on his breast and his gaze was fixed immovably on the tabernacle. He called him but there was no response. He shook him, and he looked around at him saying: “Oh, is Mass already over?” “Look,” said his director, showing him his watch “it is two o’clock.”...[[643]](#footnote-644)

About seven hours had passed since the end of the Eucharistic celebration; therefore, there is no reasonable doubt about the biographer’s awareness of the *mystical* nature of the phenomenon described.

##### 3.3.2 Locutions and visions

Still in the chapter on *special graces* and extraordinary gifts bestowed upon Savio, Don Bosco recounts another episode which, using classical terminology, can be classified as a *locution.*

Another time, as I was going out of the sacristy after finishing my thanksgiving, I heard a voice which seemed to be engaged in argument. It came from the little chapel behind the high altar and when I went there I saw Dominic. He was speaking and then stopping as though waiting for someone else’s reply. Among other things I heard quite clearly these words: “Yes, my God, I have already said it and I say it again: I love you and I wish to go on loving you till my last breath. If you see that I am going to offend you, let me die: I much prefer to die than to offend you by sin.”...[[644]](#footnote-645)

And a little later the biographer adds: “I asked him sometimes what went on at these times and he replied with great simplicity: ‘It is silly of me; I get a distraction and lose the thread of my prayers and then I see such wonderful things that the hours pass by like minutes.’[[645]](#footnote-646)

The supernatural life is certainly a gift of Grace. However, it requires the active participation of the creature: moral life, purity of heart, *the desire for heavenly things*, and the constant habit of “thinking about God” are the ordinary means through which nature and grace cooperate. This awareness manifests itself in the biographer when he states:

The innocence of his life, his love of God and great desire for the things of God so developed Dominic’s mind that he came to be habitually united with God. Sometimes he would stop playing a game and withdrawing from his companions walk by himself. When asked why he did this he replied: “These distractions come to me suddenly, and sometimes I seem to see heaven open above me and I have to go away from my companions so that I do not say things which could only seem ridiculous to them.” These things would happen to him in the study hall, on the way to and from school, and in class itself.[[646]](#footnote-647)

The testimonies in Savio’s cause of beatification often refer to this particular gift of prayer and also to such *supernatural[[647]](#footnote-648)* manifestations; I will not dwell on this because the life of this young boy is not, directly, the subject of this study. My goal, in fact, has been to capture the “feeling”, what Don Bosco ’ s judgement was when faced with this young pupil’s spiritual experience. In this regard, it seems important to emphasise that the very *innocence of life*, the very *love of God*, the very *desire for heavenly things* which, according to his spiritual director, predisposed Dominic to this state of *habitual absorption in God*, characteristic of the contemplative experience, were also prerogatives of Don Bosco’s religious experience in his youth.

It is Fr Alberto Caviglia, in particular, who emphasises the special *affinity* that links these two saints in his study *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco*:

Which brings us back here – we read at the conclusion of his work – at the end of this hopefully not futile examination which could be called a construction of the spiritual history of the “little, indeed great giant of the spirit”. We return to our assumption, which we have followed throughout our study: to show Don Bosco reflected in Savio, and in Dominic Savio the masterpiece of Don Bosco’s educational work, the embodiment of his spirit, that is, of Salesian spirituality....

It was not Don Bosco who made Dominic Savio a saint: rather, Dominic Savio became a saint by embodying the idea of sanctification that Don Bosco instilled in him, and which shapes Don Bosco’s personality in the spiritual history of the Church. Readers must believe and see that this holiness, being distinct and unique in its light and form, is the embodiment of the concept that inspired Don Bosco and was alive in his mind for the salvation of youth and the Christian rebirth of modern society.

Dominic Savio and Don Bosco are two names that are inseparable, as they are the joint expression of a single spiritual phenomenon which permeated contemporary society and formed the historical originality and pedestal of the human and Christian glory of the Holy Educator: the word of love in the spirituality of education and lived experience.[[648]](#footnote-649)

#### 3.4 The “Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele” (The Biographical Sketch of young Michael Magone)

Young Michael Magone (1845-1859) had arrived at the oratory of St Francis de Sales a few months after Savio’s death.

Two years after his untimely death, Don Bosco published his biography, which was expanded in 1866 and republished again in 1880.[[649]](#footnote-650)

Magone is one of the most characteristic “products” of Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy. Don Bosco’s account presents him as a courageous, likeable urchin whom he met in front of Carmagnola station and who, in fourteen months of life at the oratory, thanks to the spiritual resources that the environment was rich in, achieved an exemplary life and a holy death.

It is Don Bosco himself, in the preface to the third edition, who emphasises the fundamental difference between this young boy and Savio:

In the life of Dominic Savio you saw innate virtue cultivated to a point of heroism right throughout his life.

In Magone’s life we have a lad left to his own devices, who was at risk of treading the sad path of evil but fortunately the Lord invited him to follow him. Michael listened to this loving call and constantly corresponding with divine grace, came to be admired by all who knew him, thus demonstrating how marvellous are the effects of God’s grace on those who make use of it.

You will find here many things you can admire and imitate...[[650]](#footnote-651)

Like the others, this short, entertaining biography also has clear educational aims. Being the story of a young convert, it provides an opportunity to highlight certain aspects of the sacrament of penance, such as the need for trust in the confessor and the joy of receiving forgiveness.[[651]](#footnote-652)

The description of the night following the first confession is also interesting from our particular point of view:

It is difficult to put into words all that I felt that unforgettable night. I hardly slept at all...

About halfway through the night I was so overcome by emotion that I had to get up, kneel by my bed and say over and over again: Oh, how wretched are those who fell into sin! but how much more unhappy are those who live in sin. I believe that if they could only experience for even a single minute the great consolation that being in the state of grace brings they would all go to confession to placate the anger of God, to remove remorse of conscience and to experience peace of heart...[[652]](#footnote-653)

But now we come to a few traits that are more directly related to the topic of this study. Confession, frequent communion, joy in the playground and prayer... without time limits: these were once again the ingredients of this young boy’s holiness: “In recreation he was like an unbridled horse. At first he was ill at ease in church but soon controlled himself so as to become a model for any fervent Christian..”[[653]](#footnote-654) And the second edition of 1866 adds at this point: “Sometimes he was seen to wait four, even five hours in recollection, still, on his knees on the bare floor, waiting for the chance to go to confession..”[[654]](#footnote-655)

As already pointed out for Comollo and Savio, for him too, thanksgiving after Communion was prolonged in an intimacy where the external senses seem to be suspended:

After the customary thanksgiving after Confession or Communion or after the sacred functions he remained a long time before the Blessed Sacrament or before the Blessed Virgin to recite some special prayers. He was so attentive, recollected and composed that he seemed insensible to all external activity. Sometimes his companions, going out of church or passing him, gave him a bump; often they stood on his toes and even hit him. But he carried on with his prayers or meditation as if nothing had happened.[[655]](#footnote-656)

One last quote shows us once again how he preferred to remain before the Blessed Sacrament rather than join his companions in recreation and leisure activities.

One day our boys went for a walk in the nearby woods. Some went looking for mushrooms, whilst others searched for chestnuts and other nuts; others heaped up leaves or other things - in short, they were really enjoying themselves. Whilst they were busy Michael quietly slipped away and went back to the house. One lad saw him, however, and fearing that he might not be well, followed him. Michael, convinced that no-one had seen him, reached the house but, without saying a word to anyone, he went straight to the church. The boy who followed him found him kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament rapt in fervent prayer.[[656]](#footnote-657)

##### 3.5 Il pastorello delle Alpi, o La Vita del giovane Besucco Francesco (*The Little Shepherd Boy of the Alps, or the Life of young Francis Besucco*)

Unlike Magone’s, the spiritual experience of this young boy, who also died at the age of fourteen after just six months at the oratory, had its roots deep in his family environment. This young shepherd boy was probably a victim of his own zeal and the penances he had imposed on himself.[[657]](#footnote-658) Don Bosco published his life story in two different printing houses just a few months after his death[[658]](#footnote-659) in 1864, reprinting it in 1878 and 1886.[[659]](#footnote-660)

Fr Braido thus highlights the different educational perspectives that distinguish Besucco’s biography from that of Magone:

As a general guide to reading ... it can perhaps be said briefly that while Magone’s life spontaneously becomes a celebration of the pedagogy of the heart for “the many” among young people, Besucco’s almost systematic biography is intended above all to be a reflective document of Don Bosco’s method understood as “spiritual pedagogy” in which the religious, supernatural and Christian component is the essential core, the alpha and omega. Of course, all other aspects, which have been claimed elsewhere and never denied, are not ignored or underestimated.[[660]](#footnote-661)

The abundance of supernatural elements in this boy’s life and a certain spiritual affinity linked to his human experience could explain Don Bosco’s eagerness to publish his life story.

A fragment of the human and spiritual experience of young Francis brings us back to the life of the shepherd boy John Bosco:

To help provide for his family, Francis’ father undertook to look after the common flock and he often set Francis this task, particularly on feast days so that his brothers might take part in parish functions at least on those days. Francis accepted the task obediently and willingly. “If I can’t go to Church on these days, I shall try to sanctify the feast in some other way.” He would tell his brothers to remember him in Church. When it was time for the devotions, he would take the animals to a safe spot, then he would kneel down before a makeshift crucifix to say his prayers or engage in spiritual reading. Sometimes he would hide in a cave in the hills, kneel before a picture he had in his book and recite the very same prayers being said in Church. Afterwards he would make the Stations of the Cross. In the evening he sang Vespers on his own and said the Rosary. It was really a great feast day for him when he could find companions to help him praise God. His companions often found him in such fervent prayer and meditation that his appearance resembled that of an angel. If he happened to find indulgent companions, he would beg them to keep an eye on his sheep, saying that he had something to do, and so he would leave for a while. But his companions, aware of his habit, mostly lent themselves willingly to it.[[661]](#footnote-662)

##### 3.5.1 Love for prayer

The most striking feature of this young boy, from his earliest childhood, was his love of prayer: “Love for prayer appeared to be second nature to him” Don Bosco tells us. His parents, brothers and sisters tell us that from the age of three he never had to be invited to pray; he pestered them to teach him new prayers.[[662]](#footnote-663) This constant feature of his life would also shape his final months at the oratory. Don Bosco tells us:

He was so fond of prayer, and had become so accustomed to it, that as soon as he was alone or had a moment's leisure, he immediately began to recite some prayer. He often began to pray during recreation, and at times involuntarily used little spontaneous prayers during his games. One day he saw his Superior, ran up to him, greeted him by name and then said to him, “*Oh, Holy Mary.”* Another time he wanted to call out to a companion with whom he was playing and he shouted: “*Oh, Pater Noster.”* Whilst these actions caused his companions to laugh at him, they also showed his love for prayer and his ability to recollect himself, to raise his mind to God. According to masters of the spiritual life this denotes a high degree of perfection which is rarely seen in people even far advanced in virtue.[[663]](#footnote-664)

##### 3.5.2 Time for prayer, and union with God

The time for prayer is recreation or daily activities, but also, of course, the ordinary devotional practices, vocal prayer, and long periods of adoration. It was his custom not only to go to Church every day for the sacred ceremonies, but also for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. He would kneel in front of Our Lady’s Altar for a long time.[[664]](#footnote-665)

This biography also contains several explicit references to a kind of *mystical union2: “The thought of the presence of God was so much part of him in the last years of his life that he could be said to be in continual union with God.”*[[665]](#footnote-666)

These courageous statements by Don Bosco show readers a clear goal, a point of arrival on the path to Christian perfection: *continuous prayer*. “In short, if we examine the spirit of prayer of this boy we can say that he literally followed the precept of Our Saviour who commanded us to pray always, because he passed his days and nights in continuous prayer,“ Don Bosco tells us at the end of this biography.[[666]](#footnote-667)

This union with God has as its main effect complete conformity to his will:

It was at this fire that our Francis became so inflamed with love for God that he desired nothing else in this world but to do the holy divine will. “I am beside myself,” he said, “when I consider that on the days on which I go to Communion, I feel myself so drawn to prayer that I seem to be speaking to Jesus himself and I tell him: *Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus.* His heart was emptied of the things of this world, and God filled it with his grace. He days on which he went to Communion were entirely spent at home or in Church, and he would ask his companions to go with him to evening devotions so as to make a perfect end to a solemn day.[[667]](#footnote-668)

##### 3.5.3 Prayer during the night

This is perhaps the most typical characteristic of Besucco, distinguishing his spiritual experience from that of the other young people. While still a child, he promised: “If I wake up at night, I will continue to pray.”[[668]](#footnote-669)

On the evening before each confession, Francis “spent the whole night praying or examining himself in order to better prepare himself In the morning, without speaking to anyone, he went to church and there prepared himself for the great event with the greatest recollection.”[[669]](#footnote-670)

Saying goodbye to his parish priest before leaving for the oratory in Turin, he was deeply moved. Don Bosco tells us about it through the words of this priest: “When he met me in the street later that day, he told me that he was sorry to be leaving me but that the good reports I would get would console me. That night he could not sleep, but he passed it in continuous prayer and union with God.”[[670]](#footnote-671)

Drawing on his personal memories of Francis’ brief time at the oratory, Don Bosco tells us:

More than once I have had to go into the church after the evening meal to perform some duty whilst the boarders were happily engaged in a lively recreation in the yard. I did not have a lamp in my hands and I tripped over what seemed to be a sack of wheat. I was quite surprised to find out that I had bumped into Besucco who was kneeling in the dark behind the altar but quite near it. He was praying to his beloved Jesus asking for heavenly help to make himself better, or even to make him a saint. [[671]](#footnote-672)

And further on:

After night prayers said in common every evening he went to the dormitory and knelt down on top of his trunk - not a very comfortable position - for a quarter of an hour or even half an hour to pray. When he was told that this disturbed his companions who were already in bed, he shortened his prayers and made sure that he was in bed at the same time as his companions. However, as soon as he settled into bed, he joined his hands on his breast and prayed until he fell asleep. If he woke up during the night he immediately began to pray for the souls in purgatory and he experienced great displeasure if sleep overtook him before he finished his prayer. “I’m sorry,” he told a companion “that I can’t spend some time in bed without sleeping...[[672]](#footnote-673)

##### 3.5.4 Raptures and ecstasy

Even in Besucco’s life, we find expressions that bring us back to what, in classical mysticism, are defined as “*rapture*s”, “*ecstasy*”, “*suspension of the* external senses”: He would linger with pleasure in prayer coming and going from the fields. “We would often meet him,” said his parish priest “and he was so absorbed in prayer that he did not notice us.”[[673]](#footnote-674)

This is how Don Bosco describes the day of his first communion and his “sacramental life”:

He seemed to be ecstatic just after receiving Communion; his face changed colour and reflected the joy which filled his heart. The acts of love towards Jesus on such an occasion were proportionate to the care he took in preparing for Communion.

From then onwards he went to Confession every month and he went to Communion as often as his confessor would allow it. In later years he used to help younger boys to prepare for Communion and make their thanksgiving. After Communion he heard Mass with the greatest recollection; he did not even want to serve it on those days so that he could be more recollected. During the Mass he was completely absorbed, as he himself said, in contemplating the infinite condescension of Jesus; he did not even read his prayer book but spent the precious time, his face hidden in his hands, in continuous acts of the love of God.[[674]](#footnote-675)

*He did not even read his prayer book…* The reference to an affective, mental, silent, intimate and personal prayer is more clearly expressed here than elsewhere.

Frequent reception of the sacraments, innocence of life, prayer and recollection, witness among one's companions: these are, once again in Don Bosco’s reinterpretation of the life of Francis Besucco, the “ingredients” of youthful holiness.

#### 3.6 The Biographie du jeune Fleury Antoine Colle (The Life of young Antoine Colle Fleury)

I wanted to make one last, very brief mention of this biography, which came later and is certainly less relevant, but perfectly in tune with the previous ones; this is why I have chosen to include it at this point in the study.

The only child of a noble French family, this young man met Don Bosco during the period of his final illness; he died in 1881 at the age of sixteen. Don Bosco wrote his memoir in French; these were edited, in literary form, by Fr De Barruel.[[675]](#footnote-676)

Close to sixty-seven years of age, Don Bosco wrote: “Parmi les vertus dont notre bien-aimé Louis Colle nous a donné l’exemple, la première qui se présente à ma mémoire est *son grand amour pour le silence...*”[[676]](#footnote-677)

“Ils ne pouvaient se lasser d’admirer” Don Bosco says further on “ce petit enfant, assis, à côté de sa mère, demeurant immobile, les mains jointes et les yeux fixés sur l’autel avec une indicible expression d’affection et de respect. Evidemment cette âme innocente, toute brillante encore des eaux de la régénération, tresaillait sous la touche harmonieuse de l’Esprit Divin; sa foi, naïve et forte, enflammait toutes ses puissances et les tenait conçentrées et ravies dans l’unité d’un pur regard d’amour; comme les Séraphins, elle contemplait des yeux du coeur le Dieu caché dont elle ne connaissait encore que la sainte présence et la souveraine bonté[[677]](#footnote-678).

Don Bosco uses the language of classic mysticism, without embellishment, as he had done at other times in his life, to describe the spiritual experience of this young man. By telling us about this boy whose faith *kindled all his powers* and who *contemplated the hidden God with the eyes of his heart*, he shows us his “suitability” for recognising these raptures and, above all, his clear desire to offer them to the admiration and imitation of young readers.

### 4. Conclusion: youthful holiness and Salesian holiness

This fourth chapter of the study has enabled me to highlight some elements of *youth spirituality* that characterise the *model of holiness* proposed by Don Bosco to young people in the years leading up to the actual *foundation* of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

A simple reading of the numerous and widespread *biographies of young people* and, in particular, of the many passages that refer to the *time* and *manner* of personal prayer, allows me to conclude that the role of silent prayer, meditation, and recollection in the Christian life proposed to young people is undoubtedly more significant than can be deduced from a reading of *The Companion of Youth* alone; a manual which remains, however, of fundamental importance for understanding *Salesian youth piety* in its origins.

The numerous reissues of these biographies prove, as I have already stated, the substantial continuity of this project throughout the founder’s life.

At this point, we might ask ourselves: why, in a study dedicated to the hermeneutics of the *role of mental prayer in the founding charism*, have so many pages been devoted to this period of *preparation* and, in particular, to the education of young people in prayer or to writings not directly related to formation for religious life?

The topics to be addressed seem to revolve around four considerations:

\* The study of this first period of Don Bosco’s pastoral and apostolic experience, in relation to the education of young people in prayer, has allowed me, first of all, to highlight the continuity and consistency with the formation he himself received throughout his childhood and in his various educational experiences in Chieri and, in particular, at the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin. I stress, among other things, the importance given to retreats, Eucharistic devotion, and the habit of constantly thinking about God.

\* Careful analysis of the spiritual life proposed in Don Bosco’s writings allows us to recognise the esteem he had for personal prayer, silence, long *conversations* and *colloquies*, and even the various manifestations of contemplative experience.

\* The same analysis also indirectly reveals some aspects of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience (particularly in the biographies of Comollo and Savio) and allows me to formulate some reasonable hypotheses about the role of prayer in the model of holiness towards which he directed his inner resources.

\* Finally, I emphasise the importance of understanding the particular spiritual atmsphere in which the first generation of Salesians was formed, whose ideal of Christian life matured through vibrant and personal contact with these young models of holiness and through a vital knowledge of Don Bosco’s reinterpretation of their brief human experience.

Michael Rua, Don Bosco’s first successor, John Cagliero, the first Salesian bishop, Giovanni Bonetti, Councillor and Spiritual Director of the congregation, and Celestino Durando, who was also a member of the Superior Council for forty years from 1865, together with Dominic Savio, solemnly promised on 8 June 1856 “ to imitate, as far as possible, the virtues of Louis Comollo”.[[678]](#footnote-679) And also Carlo Ghivarello, first Secretary General and then Economer General of the congregation, Francesco Cerruti, General Councillor, and Giovanni Battista Francesia, Spiritual Director and Provincial, who were part of the first group of young people who gave life to the Salesian Society in December 1859, were companions of Savio, whose life was published for the first time that same year; and all these and many others among the first Salesians knew Magone and Besucco and certainly read and reread their lives. Fr Giulio Barberis himself, ten years younger than Michael Rua and first novice director of the Salesian congregation, arrived at the Valdocco oratory in 1861, the year Michael Magone’s biography was published, and became a companion and admirer of Francis Besucco.[[679]](#footnote-680)

The content of this chapter, therefore, directly reconstructs the formative environment of the *first group of disciples* and, therefore, of the fledgling congregation*.* Don Bosco, in fact, starting precisely from that first group of young people, gave life to the *Society of St Francis de Sales.*

Fr Alessio Barberis made the following observation, which I believe to be very astute:

Don Bosco formed the Salesian Society truly out of nothing and, with brilliant intuition, wanted the cornerstones of his Institute to be chosen from among those young boys who came to him after their early childhood and had known, so to speak, no other family than that of the Oratory. He was able to form them entirely according to his spirit, in his image and likeness. A new development, if I am not mistaken, in the history of the founding of congregations, was that the new institution arose not with adult and educated members, but almost exclusively with boys educated by the founder himself. It was providentially certain that these young men, once they became priests and religious, would have no other views than those of their Father, would place their absolute trust in him, and would thus be better able to pass on his spirit unaltered to future generations.[[680]](#footnote-681)

I will therefore entrust the next chapter with the task of immersing us in the heart of this *founding experience*, and more immediately in the period between the drafting of the first draft of the constitutions and their final approval.

# CHAPTER 5

## Don Bosco, founder and spiritual author

### 1. Founder

The period I would like to focus on now spans approximately sixteen years, from 1858, the year in which the first manuscript of the constitutions in our possession probably dates back to, until 1874, the year of the final approval of the constitutions of the *Society of St Francis de Sales.*

For Don Bosco, these were the years of maturity, years in which the project of the foundation gradually took shape, in a fruitful but not always easy dialogue with those in the ecclesial community who had the responsibility for accepting, discerning and confirming his charism as founder.

These were the years when the seed took root and the tender plant began to grow, the years of institutionalisation and initial expansion beyond the borders of Turin and Piedmont, the years when, despite countless difficulties, dreams began to take shape. These were also the most fruitful years of his literary production[[681]](#footnote-682) and the ones in which the foundations were laid for a new foundation on behalf of young women, the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whose constitutions were later approved by the diocese in 1876.[[682]](#footnote-683)

When and how did he become aware of his vocation as a founder? Furthermore, how did the *model* of religious life that Don Bosco proposed to his followers develop over the course of his life? Even today this is still an open question.

Fr Pietro Braido wrote in 1988:

The entire issue of the genesis and development of his understanding of the religious state, his intuition of his vocation as a founder, the development of his consciousness, culture, and competence in his specific field, and the evolution of the mental and operational structures that characterised him in the various phases of the conception, regulation, organisation, and consolidation of the Society of St Francis de Sales, in particular, is still considered widely open to research.[[683]](#footnote-684)

The understanding of the “religious state” and the life project contained in the constitutions, as we shall see, underwent a number of changes, some of which were the result of dialogue with the civil and religious environment of the time, others were necessary for the canonical approval of the *Society*, and still others probably arose from Don Bosco’s desire to gradually reveal his founding project, which would have seemed excessively demanding to his first young collaborators.

This initial careful approach to articulating the requirements of the religious state, grounded in an appreciation for the developmental pace of the emerging organisation, was subsequently acknowledged by the original group of disciples. In this regard, what Fr Lemoyne wrote around 1904 but referring to the early 1850s is very significant:

Don Bosco, meanwhile, was not losing sight of the religious congregation that he was destined to found. Often, over the years, when pleasantly conversing with some boys or young clerics grouped around him, he would sit on the ground, Indian style, and the others would follow suit. He would then shape his handkerchief into a ball and toss it from one hand to the other. As the boys watched silently, he would suddenly exclaim: “If I had twelve boys as manageable as this handkerchief, I would spread our Faith Not only throughout Europe, but far, far into the remotest lands....

Moreover, in his sermons, conferences, or informal talks Don Bosco tried to instill in his boys love for a life totally dedicated to God and to the salvation of souls. Occasionally he would speak about the advantages of community life, such as freedom from worry for the future or the daily necessities of life, thanks to the protection by Divine Providence of those who served God. But his approach to this topic was always indirect; he would not specifically allude to the religious life. At times he would recount some edifying episode in the lives of saints who had consecrated their lives to God in monasteries, but he did so in such a way as to make the religious life attractive and to impress upon them that it was a state of perfection; however, he never appeared to promote vocations.[[684]](#footnote-685)

As regards the hypotheses put forward on the genesis of the idea of the foundation, interpretations vary from a psychological interpretation which seems to leave no room for the supernatural[[685]](#footnote-686), to the “edifying” interpretation of some of the early biographers who emphasise supernatural elements, dreams and divine warnings. Between these two extremes, I believe it is possible to attempt a historico-critical interpretation that recovers and harmoniously integrates natural, supernatural elements, to arrive at hypotheses consistent with what we know about God’s way of acting in the history of salvation and, in particular, in the lives of other saints who were founders.

There is no doubt, however, that at the end of his life Don Bosco himself was convinced that some extraordinary signs had marked his entire life. He wrote, at the beginning of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, concerning the famous *dream at nine years of age*:

...I was unable to cast that dream out of my mind. The things I shall have to say later will give some meaning to all this. I kept quiet about these things, and my relatives paid little attention to them. But when I went to Rome in 1858 to speak to the Pope about the Salesian Congregation, he asked me to tell him everything that had even the suggestion of the supernatural about it. It was only then, for the first time, that I said anything about this dream which I had when I was nine or ten years old. The Pope ordered me to write out the dream in all its detail and to leave it as an encouragement to the sons of that Congregation whose formation was the reason for that visit to Rome.[[686]](#footnote-687)

The same belief inspires the following account by Fr Lemoyne which, regardless of its strict *fidelity* to history, expresses in any case the feelings of the first generation of Salesians:

... the Oratory was visited for a few days by Father Seraphim Allievi, a learned, zealous priest and a true apostle of youth who was doing good work as director of the St Aloysius Oratory in Milan. Don Bosco, who had been his guest in 1850, warmly welcomed him, and one evening asked him to give the “Good Night“ to the boys. Father Allievi was planning to open a home for derelict boys and to found a religious congregation to look after them, and so he sought Don Bosco’s advice. Well aware of the serious difficulties involved in such an undertaking, Don Bosco asked him – for his own sake – if he had ever experienced anything of a supernatural character which could assure him that this was God’s will. Father Allievi answered negatively. Thereupon Don Bosco dissuaded him from the attempt, though he encouraged him to continue unflaggingly in his work. Father Allievi was grateful for the advice. However, he did make some attempts toward realizing his plans, but with little success...

Having himself received divine assurances, Don Bosco never bypassed any opportunity of trying to make his pupils worthy of them.[[687]](#footnote-688)

*“*In good time you will understand everything,” the “lady of stately appearance” in *his childhood dream[[688]](#footnote-689)* had told him; and at the end of his life Don Bosco now had a clear conviction that Providence had guided his personal history and that of the congregation.[[689]](#footnote-690)

We do not know at what point in his life the perception of this particular *vocation* began to emerge in a reflective way; what we do know, however, is that from the very the beginning, Don Bosco sought to bring together the energies of lay people and clergy around his work, and that he soon felt the need to entrust the life of the oratory to [[690]](#footnote-691)regulations*, differentiating and valuing the tasks of each individual;* these facts probably foreshadow the idea of a religious society devoted to active apostolate among young people.[[691]](#footnote-692)

But what can be considered the first real “clue” of a plan for a religious congregation?

A written testimonial by Fr Michael Rua, who went to live at the oratory in 1852 at the age of seventeen and was ordained a priest shortly afterwards, dates a commitment that already contained the premises of consecration in view of a [[692]](#footnote-693)practical exercise of charity *back to 1854.* Fr Rua tells us:

On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco’s room: Don Bosco, Rocchietti, Artiglia, Cagliero and Rua; we were invited to engage, with the help of God and of St Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbour, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord. From that evening the name Salesians was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise.[[693]](#footnote-694)

That same year, Fr Vittorio Alasonatti[[694]](#footnote-695) joined the oratory and would later become the first *Prefect General[[695]](#footnote-696)* of the fledgling congregation. The following year, according to the account in the *Biographical memoirs*, cleric Rua and Fr Alasonatti privately made annual vows, followed, in 1856 by Giovanni Battista Francesia, another of the young men who had grown up at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.[[696]](#footnote-697)

It is Fr Lemoyne who once again emphasises Don Bosco’s prudence and, at the same time, his awareness of his plan in accepting the first profession of cleric Rua:

In all this Don Bosco saw the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin; in turn he did his best to meet Her expectations. This is the secret reason that made him take a first step toward what was to be his greatest achievement – the founding of his long-desired Salesian Congregation. Thus, after explaining at length in conferences to several of his most trusted young clerics the three religious vows, he one day encouraged the cleric [Michael] Rua – then in his second year of – make these vows for a year. But he did not disclose his grand plan. Rua agreed, thinking that these vows only meant that he was to live with Don Bosco and help him with his work at the Oratory.[[697]](#footnote-698)

As I have already said, it is only possible to make assumptions about when and how the “awareness of being a founder” developed, in a reflective way. In general, the idea of *institutionalising this seems to have come a few years later.* A meeting with Minister Rattazzi in 1857, in particular, made Don Bosco realise the need to give continuity to his work and the specific legal form to be given to the new congregation, in order to avoid government measures and any possible confiscation of ecclesiastical property.[[698]](#footnote-699) A trip to Rome in 1858 and the audiences granted to him by Pope Pius IX between 9 March and 6 April of that year would finally contribute to laying the “foundations” of the new *Society*.

Salesian Fr Ramón Alberdi wrote:

When he set out on his journey to Rome in February 1858, Don Bosco had decided to discuss with the Holy Father the possibility of founding a religious institute proper, but he intended to do so only verbally. Upon arriving in the capital, in order to get some practical advice, he visited his friend, the Dominican Cardinal Gaude.[[699]](#footnote-700) He advised him not to present himself to the Pope without a written plan. Calling on what was happening in the house at the Oratory, Don Bosco then drew up a “brief plan for a religious congregation” which included both elements concerning a draft of rules or constitutions that the future Salesians had begun to practise, and regulations drawn from the old regulations for life at the Oratory.[[700]](#footnote-701)

On several occasions, during the difficult dialogue with the ecclesiastical authorities that would lead to the final approval of the constitutions, Don Bosco referred to these audiences in 1858 to emphasise that it was the Pope himself who had laid the foundations for this *new society*. In his *Cenno istorico sulla congregazione di S.Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti* (Historical Note on the Congregation of St Francis de Sales and Related Clarifications) a document prepared in view of the final approval in 1874, he said:

This incomparable Pontiff welcomed me most kindly; he asked me to explain in detail the origins of this institution, what had motivated me to start it, what it involved and how it was organised. Then he added: My dear friend, you have set many things in motion; but you are a man, and if God calls you where every man must go, where will your undertakings end up?

Holy Father, I replied, this is the purpose of my coming before you, this is the subject of my Archbishop’s letter. Begging Your Holiness to give me the foundations of an Institution that is compatible with the times and places in which we live.

– The undertaking is not so difficult. It is about living in the world without being known by the world. But if you are carrying out God’s will in this work, he will enlighten us. Go, pray about it, and after a few days come back and I will tell you my thoughts.

A week later, I returned to the Holy Father, who, upon seeing me, immediately began to speak thus: Your plan can do much good for poor young people. An Association, a Society, or Religious Congregation seems necessary amid these troubled times. It must be founded on the following principles: A society of simple vows, because without vows there would be no appropriate bonds between members and between superiors and inferiors.

The manner of dress, practice of piety should not make it stand out in the world. The rules should be simple and easy to follow. Take care to see that each member is a religious before the Church yet a free citizen in civil society. - Perhaps it would be better to call it a Society rather than a Congregation; because it would be less scrutinised under this name. Try to adapt your rules to these principles, and when the work is done, give it to Cardinal Gaudi; he will speak to me about it in due course.

Based on these principles suggested by the Holy Father, and having received his special blessing, I immediately set about harmonising the written constitutions that had been practised in Turin for several years with what had been proposed to me.

Cardinal Gaudi read everything with great kindness; and treasuring his wise reflections and advice, having once again received the blessing and encouragement of the Holy Father, I returned to Turin to the bosom of the Valdocco family.[[701]](#footnote-702)

The oldest manuscript we have of the constitutions dates back to around 1858 and contains some local critique. It was written by Fr Rua, then aged 21, who accompanied Don Bosco on his trip to Rome that year.[[702]](#footnote-703) It tells us that “The individuals who currently profess these rules are fifteen in number: priests N. 5, clerics 8, lay people 2”.[[703]](#footnote-704)

I will come back to these first *constitutions* or *rules[[704]](#footnote-705)*, especially in relation to *practices of piety* and, in particular, *meditation*. I will also consider, in relation to this, the development of this first text until its final approval.

We can now take a look at the main events directly or indirectly connected with this study in the life of Don Bosco and the fledgling congregation from 1858 to 1874, the year of the final approval of the rules. This will allow us, once again, to better contextualise and appreciate some of the considerations that follow.[[705]](#footnote-706)

### 2. A look at the main events

On the evening of 18 December 1859, following a proposal made by Don Bosco himself a few days earlier, seventeen volunteers gathered in his room to establish a *society or congregation*, as attested by a report bearing the signatures of the participants. Other than Don Bosco, only Vittorio Alasonatti was already a priest. Excluding these two, the average age of this first group was less than twenty-one; there were also some very young members: Francesco Cerruti was 15, Luigi Chiapale 16, and Antonio Rovetto 17.[[706]](#footnote-707)

The small assembly also elected a *chapter*: together with Don Bosco and Fr Alasonatti, who was appointed *prefect*, it included Michele Rua (aged 22) as *spiritual director*, Angelo Savio (aged 24) as *economer*,Giovanni Cagliero, Giovanni Bonetti and Carlo Ghivarello (aged 21, 21 and 24 respectively) as *councillors.*

The life of Dominic Savio was published the same year, the secondary school at the oratory was completed, and the St Joseph’s Sodality was established for artisans.

The following year, a painful event was solemnly commemorated in the small church at the oratory dedicated to St Francis de Sales. On 23 June, at the age of forty-nine, Fr Giuseppe Cafasso, Don Bosco’s spiritual director and confessor, died suddenly. A police search, carried out two weeks earlier at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico,* where Cafasso was then Rector, had shaken him deeply, aggravating his already precarious health.

The Convitto, which he had left more than fifteen years earlier, remained a constant point of reference for Don Bosco; Cafasso had even kept a room for him where, during all those years, the founder of the Salesians continued to retreat almost daily to study and write, with the help of the library there.[[707]](#footnote-708)

Even after Cafasso’s death, when he was succeeded by Canon Eugenio Galletti, and until the end of the period under consideration, Don Bosco continued to frequent the Convitto, which was then closed in 1878 by the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Gastaldi, and, as we have seen, he also continued to go to the Sanctuary of St Ignatius above Lanzo. For his weekly confession, he chose to confide in Fr Felice Golzio, who succeeded Galletti in 1864. He wrote about Golzio in the *Memoirs of the Oratory:*

Dr Felix Golzio, a hidden gold mine amongst the Turinese clergy, was also at the Convitto. In his modest life-style he was hardly noticeable. But he was a tireless worker, humble and knowledgeable; he was a real support, or better, Guala and Caffasso’s right-hand man. The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes, the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy.[[708]](#footnote-709)

In that same year, 1860, a text of the constitutions was sent to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Luigi Franzoni, in exile in Lyon; the text carried twenty-six handwritten signatures of *congregati* (members), including Don Bosco.

Archbishop Franzoni’s reply expressed his satisfaction with the text submitted to him and his willingness to approve it quickly, which, as I have already mentioned, would only happen fourteen years later. Meanwhile, on 29 July 1860, cleric Michael Rua was ordained a priest.

The first attempt to expand Salesian work also dates back to that same year. Five Salesians, a priest and four clerics, were sent, at the request of the archbishop, as animators of the minor seminary in Giaveno, where Canon Giovanni Grissino had become rector.[[709]](#footnote-710) However, this collaboration came to an end during the following school year, partly due to the death of the archbishop on 26 March 1862. Don Bosco thus lost one of the most enthusiastic supporters of his work.

On the evening of 14 May 1862, the first twenty-two Salesians publicly professed their vows for three years. Upon receiving the vows, Don Bosco declared that he too had made them “in perpetuity before this crucifix. I offered myself in sacrifice to the Lord, ready to bear anything for His greater glory and the welfare of souls.”[[710]](#footnote-711)

In 1863, the Salesian work experienced its first real expansion outside the city of Turin. At the invitation of the parish priest of Mirabello, a village in the diocese of Casale Monferrato, about a hundred kilometres from Turin, who wanted to have a college within his parish, Don Bosco accepted the donation of a piece of land and, once the construction work was completed, sent Fr Michael Rua to start the new work in the autumn of 1863. It was especially aimed at boys who aspired to the clerical state. In 1870, this *junior seminary* was transferred to Borgo San Martino. The following year, in 1864, a new facility opened in Lanzo, forty kilometres from Turin, not far from the sanctuary of St Ignatius. The first rector of this work was the 24-year-old priest Domenico Ruffino, who had been part of the first group of Salesians who, on 14 May two years earlier, had taken their first vows in the Society. He died the following year and was succeeded by Giovan Battista Lemoyne, who was just over a year older than him.

On 23 July 1864, the first important step was taken towards the legal consolidation of the new institution. The *Decretum laudis* marked the true beginning of the approval of the *Society,* appointing Don Bosco as Rector Major for life and allowing perpetual professions, which began to be professed the following year. However, in accordance with the practice of the time, the decree deferred approval of the constitutions, since the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had reserved the right to make some *animadversiones.*

The most significant objections concerned the faculty required to admit members to the orders, the position of so-called *extern members*, certain powers granted to the superior general, such as the power to dispense from perpetual vows or to oblige members “under pain of mortal sin”[[711]](#footnote-712) and one of the *animadversiones*, as we shall see, also concerned prayer.

1866 marked another important milestone in the growth of the young organisation. In a house donated to Don Bosco at the beginning of that year, located in the municipality of Trofarello a few kilometres south-east of Turin, the first two “self-managed” retreats took place at the end of the summer. up until this date the Salesians had made their retreats together with the young people from the oratory. Many others, before 1866, had accompanied Don Bosco on his retreats to St Ignatius above Lanzo; among these were many of the first “pillars” of the new congregation, such as Rua, Cagliero, Angelo Savio, Francesia and others.[[712]](#footnote-713)

In 1868, the large church of Mary Help of Christians was consecrated in Valdocco. Its construction had begun five years earlier. The consecrating archbishop was Archbishop Alessandro Ottaviano dei Conti Riccardi di Netro, successor to Archbishop Franzoni.

The following year, the Holy See issued the official decree approving the *Society of St Francis de Sales*, which, however, once again postponed approval of the constitutions. Among other things, Don Bosco was granted the right to admit young men who had entered a Salesian house as pupils before the age of fourteen to holy orders. That same year, a new foundation was also opened in Cherasco, in the diocese of Alba; the work included a parish, a school for day students, and a boarding school with primary and secondary classes.[[713]](#footnote-714)

The 1870s were marked by the expansion of the congregation outside Piedmont. In 1870, the Alassio facility opened, followed by those in Varazze, Marassi, and Sampierdarena (the following year), all in Liguria. The latter foundation was probably the closest to the mother house in Valdocco in terms of structure and target population. Its first director was Fr Paul Albera, who on 14 May 1862, at the age of almost seventeen, had taken his triennial vows together with the first group of Salesians, and who would later become Don Bosco’s second successor.

The following year, after much hesitation and at the suggestion of the new archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, the running of the college in Valsalice was accepted. That same year, on 5 August, the first five Daughters of Mary Help of Christians made their first profession in Mornese.

In 1873 Fr Felice Golzio, Don Bosco’s confessor, died; the following year, Don Bosco made his retreat at St Ignatius for the last time.

On 3 April 1874, the long-awaited final approval of the constitutions arrived. To the *animadversiones* of 1864 were added many other *observations* by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which contributed to reworking the text of the constitutions, despite the “strenuous defence” of the founder on certain points which he considered to be closely related to the charismatic identity of the new institution.[[714]](#footnote-715)

Fr Ramón Alberdi writes:

Despite Don Bosco’s diplomatic and literary efforts – pleas, insistence, explanations, justifications – despite his indisputable prestige in many Roman circles and despite his friendship with Pius IX and Cardinal Secretary of State Antonelli, the aforementioned Congregation – made up of Cardinals Patrizi, De Lucca, Bizzarri and Martinelli — took the hasty route of fait accompli, deleting, inserting and changing several points in the constitutions.

In this undertaking, they adhered to traditional principles: ecclesiastical centralisation, the binding force of vows, although they were simple vows, independence from civil powers, experimental pedagogy, freedom of conscience...

The articles concerning the above-mentioned topics were therefore revised, such as civil rights, the vow of poverty, dispensation from vows, the management of seminaries, practices of piety, the establishment of the novitiate, and the organisation of studies. So the direction that, for one reason or another, Don Bosco had expressed regarding flexibility, the application of the principle of subsidiarity, the relationships with civil and secular reality... disappeared completely or were very much watered down.[[715]](#footnote-716)

Nevertheless, Don Bosco was very satisfied. On 16 March of that year, he sent a circular from Rome, establishing three days of fasting to coincide with the date on which the commission’s decision was expected and asking that “all Salesian members spend as much time as possible before the Blessed Sacrament.”.’[[716]](#footnote-717) And the day after the decree of approval, he wrote to Fr Rua: “Our constitutions were definitively approved with the faculty of dimissorials without exception. When you know everything, you will say that it was truly the result of prayer...”[[717]](#footnote-718)

### 2. Spiritual author

I have already mentioned that Don Bosco’s mature years were also years of prolific literary production.

Don Bosco’s commitment in this direction, which certainly originated from his formation at the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, was twofold: in addition to being an author, Don Bosco was also a publisher and promoter of *good press.[[718]](#footnote-719)*

Among his works, in addition to prayer manuals and religious instruction books and hagiographic accounts, we also find entertaining and theatrical writings, school texts, especially to do with history, apologetic and doctrinal texts, and texts and accounts concerning the history of the congregation.[[719]](#footnote-720)

Two elements or constants seem to run through all his literary works. The first is the *centrality of religion*, that is, the sole motivation behind all his writings: “using all the means that charity will prompt, so that, both through the spoken and the written word, a barrier may be erected against irreligion and heresy”;[[720]](#footnote-721) Don Bosco did not write out of literary or artistic intent, but solely to spread the message of the Church in every social environment. The second constant, which can in some ways be considered a consequence of the first, seems to me to be the continuous effort to maintain an immediate and popular style, a choice that sacrifices any cultural or stylistic pretensions.[[721]](#footnote-722)

At this point, we can ask ourselves: Can Don Bosco be considered a *spiritual author*? In particular, is it possible to discern a “speculative intent” in his writings, or at least find the rigour or original systematisation of a theologian in some of them? Is there anything in his literary works that resembles a treatise on prayer or mental prayer?

Let me say from the outset that Don Bosco cannot be considered a theologian or author of treatises on spiritual theology in the modern sense of the term. His writings, many of which are compilations, lack the rigour of a systematic treatise. A few years ago, Fr Raffaele Farina wrote:

In general, it can be said that Don Bosco’s temperament would have made him incapable of writing a systematic treatise on any subject. Whenever he attempted to do so, he found himself in difficulty and never ceased to make adjustments, improvements and changes. All his writings (like his concrete achievements) reveal the same approach: moving forward in stages.... constant modification... under the influence of various factors that are not always easy to identify today. One of the causes was certainly his reaction and prompt response to immediate, everyday needs.[[722]](#footnote-723)

Fr Joseph Aubry expresses a similar opinion in the introduction to an anthology of spiritual writings by the founder. He also reminds us of the objective difficulties encountered in any attempt to gain direct knowledge of the saint’s spiritual experience:

He wrote nothing comparable to the *Treatise on the Love of God* or even to the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. And we are even less likely to find in his writings pages similar to those of *The Pilgrim's Story* or *The Story of a Soul.* Don Bosco has nothing of the speculative theologian about him and is alien to spiritual introspection.

Extremely intelligent, Don Bosco remained a Piedmontese farmer, more sensitive to experience than to ideas.... *The place par excellence of his doctrine is his own life, his own spiritual experience, which was extremely rich*, the experience of one of the Church’s greatest charismatic figures. But even here, unfortunately, we are not well served. He revealed almost nothing about his innermost life. This is due both to his temperament (he experiments without worrying about analysing afterwards) and because of his natural reserve (he fears drawing attention to the instrument to the detriment of the One who makes use of it), and perhaps also because of a lack of means of interpretation and expression (he is not very familiar with mystical literature and does not feel at all inclined to add to it).[[723]](#footnote-724)

This latter statement, in light of what I have tried to say so far, does not seem entirely acceptable to me. While it is true that Don Bosco never wrote a treatise on mysticism (nor, for that matter, did he ever write a proper treatise on pedagogy),[[724]](#footnote-725) it is also true that, as Fr Caviglia so effectively puts it, he “teaches by example to produce others”[[725]](#footnote-726) and that he certainly did not avoid, in some of the biographies he wrote, referring to extraordinary events or mystical phenomena; all this in keeping with a certain revival of some themes characteristic of classical mysticism, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century. Fr Eulogio Pacho, who numbers Don Bosco among the “great spiritual masters” and “the greatest mystical figures” of the 19th century, writes:[[726]](#footnote-727)

As is well known, Jansenism and Quietism led to a great discrediting of mysticism; in different ways, sometimes opposed, they created a hostile environment of distrust towards any form of mystical expression. For almost two centuries, there was a certain prejudice against any spiritual phenomenon considered extraordinary. On the other hand, rationalism or enlightenment sought to discredit such manifestations as symptoms of fanaticism, credulity or superstition. For a variety of reasons, the religious climate throughout the 18th and 19th centuries appeared distrustful of mystical spirituality...

In any case, the religious “restoration” of the early nineteenth century paved the way for the “rebirth of mysticism” as a pastoral and doctrinal concern. At the time of its decisive affirmation, several factors converged; among the most important to note are... certain marvellous or extraordinary facts or phenomena which, spreading throughout the Church, created a new environment characterised by great devotion and admiration for mystical or mysterious manifestations.[[727]](#footnote-728)

The fact remains, however, that the European nineteenth century did not produce any great mystics comparable to those of the *Golden Age*, such as St John of the Cross or Teresa of Avila. This is what Fr Pietro Stella has to say on the matter:

The religious 19th century in Piedmont could not draw on contemporary mystical experiences, nor could it take root in a renewed dogmatic theology, such as that of Moehler, Scheeben or Newman. The theological and spiritual background of the nineteenth century in the subalpine region was still the literature of previous centuries. Spirituality still reached back into the past to draw nourishment from Granata, Rodríguez, Ludovico da Ponte, Bossuet, Francis de Sales, St Alphonsus, the Bible translated and annotated by Martini, Bishop Casati’s Catechism, and more recent imports from neighbouring France. Piedmontese spiritual production in the nineteenth century was fairly poor, if considered in isolation and regardless of the times.[[728]](#footnote-729)

For the purposes of this discussion, it would be very interesting to conduct a careful study of the authors who had the greatest influence on Don Bosco’s spiritual experience and writings.[[729]](#footnote-730)

Don Bosco often uses *sources* that he does not bother to cite, given the mostly “informative” and popular nature of his writings. In the preface to *Il Cattolico Provveduto*, he invokes the reader's “benevolent compassion”, describing himself as nothing more than a “poor compiler who wishes you every heavenly blessing and commends himself to the charity of your prayers.”[[730]](#footnote-731) Other texts, on the contrary, have a character of immediacy; among these, the biographies of young people, which I have already presented, are certainly to be included.

In any case, the compilatory nature of some of the writings, from the particular perspective of this study, does not diminish their spiritual value. The fact that Don Bosco draws on another author, even without citing him, may compromise the originality of the writing, but not the saint’s conviction about the content of the quotation. In any case, that text ends up Don Bosco’s thoughts, especially when there is no “dissonance” with the totality of his spiritual experience and with the rest of his literary production. This latter consideration will also allow me, in some cases with a certain degree of confidence, to use some texts attributed to him but entrusted, in their final draft, to one of his disciples; texts which, in any case, were often presented, revised and signed by Don Bosco himself. They can help reconstruct the spiritual “climate” of the Oratory’s early years and the “feel” of the saint and his closest collaborators, thus helping us shed light on the founder’s charism.

Fr Stella writes:

... Don Bosco’s writings, however they were compiled, by him or by others, with original or borrowed sentences, are of considerable, and we would say essential importance for an investigation into the personality of the Saint or his fortunes, linked also to the use of language which, as he desired, placed him in immediate and complete harmony with the people and environments in which he worked.[[731]](#footnote-732)

Let us now examine some of these writings that refer more directly to the theme of mental prayer, referring to the literary production of the period 1858-1874 now under examination.

#### 3.1 The Mese di maggio and the Porta teco of 1858

Published for the first time in 1858 *Il Mese di Maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo* had twelve editions until 1885.[[732]](#footnote-733)

The main purpose of the book was to spread the popular practice introduced in Italy by Jesuit Annibale Dionisi at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[[733]](#footnote-734)

For each day of the month, Don Bosco presents classic *meditations* divided into three points, which conclude with an *example*, a *short prayer* and a *prayer* to the Virgin Mary.

Contrary to what one might expect, the topics of these meditations are not Marian, with the exception of the last two. They are in fact a series of dogmatic or moral reflections that follow the most common subjects in the preaching of the *spiritual exercises[[734]](#footnote-735)*: God the Creator, the soul, the Church, faith, the sacraments, the salvation of the soul, sin, the last things, the Mass, purity... The twelfth day is dedicated to meditation on the end of man; the one prior to that deals with a subject that we know was dear to Don Bosco: the presence of God. We read:

God is in heaven, on earth, everywhere. God knows everything, sees everything, is present to everything. God is on your right, God is on your left, God is above you, God is within you. In God we live, says the Apostle, in God we move, and in God we have our being. Go wherever you want, and you will always be in God's presence. The prophet David said: if I ascend to heaven, you are there, O my God; if I descend into hell, there you are; if I take wings like a bird and fly to the ends of the sea, even there your hand will hold me and your right hand will not let me fall. After these things, the prophet David, inspired by God, speaks thus: Will darkness hide me from your face? Perhaps the darkness of the night will hide me from your sight, so that I may give myself over to pleasure? But no: for darkness is not dark before You, and the night shines as bright as the noonday sun.[[735]](#footnote-736)

A few months later, also in the Catholic Readings series, the *Porta teco cristiano* (Take Christ with You) was published, which had only one other edition, twenty years later.

It is a sort of *vademecum* for obtaining eternal salvation, an anthology of advice and warnings collected, as Don Bosco himself states in the introduction, from Sacred Scripture, the Fathers, St Charles Borromeo, St Vincent de Paul, St Philip Neri and, finally, Blessed Sebastian Valfré. It is intended for all Christian faithful.

Among the advice and suggestions are two letters from Blessed Sebastiano Valfré addressed to two mothers. The former reads: “If you could meditate for a quarter of an hour on something about the passion of the Lord or something else of benefit to you, that would be good; but at least try to read a point of meditation either in Canale, or in Spinola, or in another similar book’;[[736]](#footnote-737) and the latter: “Do a little mental prayer every morning, for at least a quarter of an hour...”[[737]](#footnote-738) Don Bosco gave the same recommendation, this time mediated by Saint Alphonsus, at the end of his short book *Il pontificato di San Sisto II* (The Pontificate of Saint Sixtus II) in 1860:

EVERY DAY. In the morning, upon rising from bed (always at a reasonable hour after approximately seven hours of rest), kneel before the crucifix or another sacred image and do what is described on the following page. Attend Holy Mass, which is the treasure of Christians, and spend half an hour during that or at least a quarter of an hour in meditation at another time (for which a Plenary Indulgence is granted each month, provided you have been to confession and received Holy Communion within that time). Do not abandon meditation because of dryness, distraction or busyness; it can also be done while performing daily tasks: those who do not abandon it will certainly be saved. After lunch, read some spiritual books or the lives of saints, visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady; and if bringing the Viaticum to the sick, accompany them always if possible. In the evening, say the Rosary as a family with the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and examine your conscience before going to rest.[[738]](#footnote-739)

#### 3.2 Sermon notes: Forty Hours devotion, Eucharistic piety

Eucharistic devotion continued to be a constant reference point in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience and in the Oratory setting in which the Salesian congregation came into being and developed.

According to the *Biographical Memoirs*, the *Forty Hour devotion*[[739]](#footnote-740) was introduced at Valdocco as early as 1850. Then, in 1862, Don Bosco added a chapter entitled *Pratiche particolari di cristiana pietà* (Special practices of piety) to the *Regolamento dell’Oratorio Festivo* (Regulations of the Festive Oratory) which established the celebration of the Forty Hours in the last week of May.[[740]](#footnote-741)

Some unpublished pages by Don Bosco, taken from an autographed notebook of sermons kept in the Central Archives, contain a *Discorso per le Quarantore* (A sermon on the Forty Hours), which, according to the title page, he delivered in 1859 in the church of Santa Croce in Cavallermaggiore and in 1861 in Provonda, a hamlet of Giaveno, also in the province of Turin.[[741]](#footnote-742) Apart from a few already-mentioned sermons for young people, there are not many manuscripts by Don Bosco that convey the content of his preaching; often they are outlines or notes rather than complete homilies. In this case, however, we are faced with a handwritten text text and compiled in full.

In the first half of his sermon, Don Bosco focuses mainly on *frequency* in receiving Holy Communion. The second part introduces the topic of *Eucharistic adoration* and prayer:

I will say something more about the adoration of J(esus) Christ exposed in the tabernacle. Here, too, it would take a long time to deal with this subject adequately. I will just tell you what is the most essential.

So, J(esus) hidden in the tabernacle is called by Isaiah a source of living water; a fountain that always flows outward, always gushes forth, and never reveals the vessel from which it flows. The more water is drawn from it, the more abundantly it gushes forth, clear and limpid. Such is Jesus in the tabernacle of the altar; every day he has infinite graces ready to give to those who ask for them; indeed, he calls everyone and gently invites them. O you who are thirsty, come, come and draw water joyfully from the fountain of the Saviour...[[742]](#footnote-743)

But what should one do when kneeling before Jesus, Don Bosco asks, interpreting the difficulty of those present. “What should I say to him when I go to visit him often?”

To speak in this way is to seriously insult Jesus, as if he were not rich enough to satisfy our every request. A zealous handmaid of God ... who was called the bride of the Sacrament because of her love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, when asked to spend so many hours in his Venerable presence, replied: I would stay for hours and I would stay for all eternity. Is not the essence of God, which is the delight of the blessed in Heaven, here before me? Good God, what should we do before Him, and what should we not do? Love him, praise him, thank him, ask him. What does a sick person do when faced with a Doctor? What does someone who is thirsty do when in front of a clear fountain? What does a hungry person do in front of a Holy Table?[[743]](#footnote-744)

A few years after Don Bosco’s death, Fr Giulio Barberis, the first novice director of the fledgling congregation after the final approval of the constitutions, wrote in an unpublished and incomplete work entitled *Mille fatti autentici (A Thousand Authentic Facts),* the manuscript of which we still have: “(Don Bosco) also established that three days of exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament take place every year in his churches, and ordered that the young students and artisans, arranged in groups led by priests and clerics, should take turns every hour in adoration, and he himself went there to spend an hour in adoration with great devotion.”[[744]](#footnote-745)

Another document, despite its uncertain authorship, helps us to gain further insight into the *Eucharistic climate* of those years. It is a lengthy prayer published in 1865 in the *Galantuomo,* the almanac for the *Letture Cattoliche*. It was addressed to the *lampada del SS. Sacramento* (Sanctuary lamp).Here is a passage from it:

When night spreads its dark veil over the world, and when the vain noises of the earthly valley cease, your flame watches alone and shines in the shadows like a star in the thick of night. And when the dawn of a new day shines, when the sunrise appears with its golden clouds, your sweet fire, a wonderful image of watchful love, still sparkles. Next to the hidden God, your life is consumed; he is close to you who love to speak to his heart; it seems that your sight inspires the soul that prays to him with more love, more faith, more ardour...And so my jealous eye often gazes upon you, O my lamp; I would like to share your happiness, dwell with you within the walls of the church and consume myself with love at the Saviour’s feet. When the white star trembles in the sky, when the world falls asleep, broken by pleasures, lifting the long veil of sacred mysteries, alone at the foot of the altars I would like to love, to groan and to pray... You at least, O sweet and pure flame whom I envy, speak to my God, speak for me! Tell him that his love is my joy and my life... Tell him that my poor soul sighs in exile, and that nothing earthly can delight it. O my lamp, tell him that my heart breathes only to please him and love him...[[745]](#footnote-746)

In 1866, the oratory's printing press published the booklet *Pratiche divote per l'adorazione del SS. Sacramento* (Devotional Practices for the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament); in the chapter entitled *Invito alla frequente comunione* (Invitation to Frequent Communion), Don Stella identified a correspondence with one of the meditations in *Il mese di maggio* (The Month of May). These pages are thus attributed to Don Bosco in the *Bibliografia Generale* and reproduced in the *Opere Edite[[746]](#footnote-747)*. With regard to thanksgiving after communion we read:

As for how long to remain with this divine guest after Communion, it is true that this is not determined, but let us consider that the longer we remain, the better; however, depending on one’s occupations and devotion, each one should spend an hour, or half an hour, or at least a quarter of an hour...

After these acts of adoration, thanksgiving, offering, supplication and profession, when we leave the Lord’s house let us not forget that we too have become temples of God, and therefore, in order to preserve the fervour of devotion that the Eucharist arouses in us, let us keep our senses, which are the windows of the soul, well recollected, and practise works of virtue, praying, attending divine services, reading spiritual books, visiting churches, the sick, prisoners, hospitals, etc. And may each of our communions bear fruit in an increase of holy love, lively faith, and profound humility, virtues through which Jesus Christ alone will always have a home in our souls.[[747]](#footnote-748)

#### 3.3 The Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso (The Life of Father Jospeh Cafasso)

Fr Giuseppe Cafasso died on 23 June 1860.

Don Bosco, at that time, was almost forty-five years old. Two weeks later in the church of the oratory, his voice repeatedly interrupted by emotion,[[748]](#footnote-749) he celebrated a mass of suffrage. About two months later, on 30 August, another Eucharist was celebrated in the church of St Francis of Assisi attached to the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*; on that occasion, too, Don Bosco delivered the funeral oration.

At the end of the year, two of his sermons were brought together in an issue of the *Letture Cattoliche.* Don Bosco added an introduction, the solemn notices posted on the occasion of his teacher's death, some devotions promoted by Cafasso, promising to work on a proper biography at a later date.

The frequency and depth of the relationship between these two saints means we need to approach these pages with particular attention.

“Who are you, I ask myself,” Don Bosco says at one point, “that you presume to recount the marvellous deeds of this hero? Don’t you know that his most beautiful deeds are known only to God?”[[749]](#footnote-750)

Despite this premise, it is precisely on this “private” life that Don Bosco shows he wants to focus the reader’s attention. “By private life, I mean particularly the exercise of virtues practised in one’s private family life, those things which for the most part appear insignificant in the eyes of the world, but which are perhaps the most meritorious before God.”[[750]](#footnote-751)

What is most striking in these two addresses is Don Bosco’s ability to grasp, in Cafasso’s spiritual experience, the particular synthesis of apostolic charity and asceticism, of tireless work and prayer.

Don Bosco notes, regarding Cafasso’s youth: “How regularly he goes to church, takes part in sacred functions, and frequents the holy sacraments! That is where the wonders begin. He goes to listen to the word of God, then repeats it to his companions and friends. He works, but his efforts are mixed with brief prayers, acts of patience, and continuous offerings of his heart to God.”[[751]](#footnote-752)

Fr Cafasso combined heroic charity with a profound spirit of prayer:

Fr Caffasso attends tirelessly to study bible history, church history, the holy fathers, moral theology, dogmatic theology, ascetic theology, mystical theology, and preaching. He prepares cases for parish courses, hears confession, and meanwhile I come to this church, I see him kneeling before the altar of Mary praying, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration, or attending to the confessional surrounded by a long line of faithful eager to expose the anguish of their consciences and receive from him the rules of good living: go to the Consolata Sanctuary and see Fr Cafasso in devotion; visit the churches where the Forty Hours are held, and there you will find him prostrate, pouring out his sweet affections to his beloved Jesus.[[752]](#footnote-753)

The first funeral oration on this same topic says: “So, in the bitter cold of winter, even when he was suffering from stomach pains, headaches and toothaches, which made it difficult for him to stand upright, before four in the morning he was already on his knees praying, meditating or carrying out some of his particular tasks.”[[753]](#footnote-754)

What is the “secret” of this “marvellous number of disparate actions” that, nevertheless, does not distract the Saint from his life of prayer? Don Bosco identifies not one but five such:[[754]](#footnote-755)

– his constant tranquillity;

– the long practice of business combined with great confidence in God;

– his exact and constant occupation of time;

– his temperance;

– his moderation regarding sleep. In this regard, Don Bosco writes:

Fr Caffasso gained time by being sparing with his time for sleep. The only relief his weak body received during the day was the three quarters of an hour after lunch, when he shut himself in his room and mostly prayed, meditated or engaged in some special act of piety. In the evening he was always the last to go to bed and in the morning he was always the first to get up. The duration of rest at night time never exceeded five hours, often it was four and sometimes only three. He used to say that a man of the Church should wake up only once during the night. With these words, he assures us that he would wake up, whatever the hour, and immediately get out of bed to pray, meditate, or attend to some other matter.[[755]](#footnote-756)

These secrets, which he “could not keep hidden enough to prevent them from reaching the ears of those who admired his holy deeds and mirrored themselves in his rare virtues”,[[756]](#footnote-757) and which arouse the grateful admiration of his disciple, allow us once again to gain a deeper understanding of Don Bosco's “feelings”.

With regard to this this *biography* and the *spiritual affinity* between the two saints, Fr Valentini wrote:

There is another reason why we find such remarkable coincidences in these pages. And it is that every man, when he portrays others, is portraying himself to a large extent.

We tend to overlook the fact that the traits in other people that resonate with us, are those that fall within our sphere of interest and that offer insights into the solutions for the issues we are concerned about.[[757]](#footnote-758)

This intriguing hypothesis (... *every man, when he portrays others, is portraying himself to a large extent...)*  seems to be confirmed by some testimonies from the Salesian tradition.

On 29 September 1926, Fr Philip Rinaldi,[[758]](#footnote-759) then Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, addressed a letter to Cardinal Antonio Vico, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, in which, binding himself by oath, he stated, among other things:

In his final years... every day he used to remain secluded in his room from 2 to 3 p.m., and his superiors did not allow him to be disturbed during that time. But since I was in charge of a house for the formation of aspirants to the priesthood from 1883 until the death of the Servant of God, and since he had told me to visit him whenever I needed to, perhaps indiscreetly so that I could approach him more easily, I broke his instructions several times, and not only at the oratory, but also in Lanzo and S. Benigno, where he often went, and in Mathi and in the house of St John the Evangelist in Turin, I went to see him several times at that very hour to talk to him. And at that hour, everywhere and always, I found him each time, recollected, with his hands clasped, in meditation.[[759]](#footnote-760)

The correspondence is remarkable, but, on reflection, not surprising; there is nothing more natural than for a disciple to assimilate the habits of his master in whose hands he had for so many years placed *every decision, all [his] study, every activity of [his] life.*[[760]](#footnote-761)

It is possible to find a correspondence in Don Bosco’s life even with regard to Cafasso’s “night-time habits”. Until the age of forty-five, in fact, according to a confidential remark he made to Fr Lemoyne on 5 April 1884, Don Bosco never slept more than five hours a night, skipping one whole night every week;[[761]](#footnote-762) only later, overcome by illness, did he relax this demanding standard of living.

Once again, therefore, studying the writings of the founder proves to be a valuable tool for indirect knowledge, allowing us to formulate well-founded and reasonable hypotheses about his spiritual experience.

#### 3.4 La biografia della Beata Maria degli Angeli (The Life of Blessed Mary of the Angels)

The Carmelite nun from Turin, Sister Mary of the Angels, born Maria Anna Fontanella, who died in 1717, was proclaimed blessed on 14 May 1865 by Pope Pius IX. Don Bosco dedicated the last issue of *Letture cattoliche* of that same year[[762]](#footnote-763) to her.

This is how Fr Lemoyne informs us about the composition of this biography:

Don Bosco had managed to write this biography between trips and other tasks. Many of his callers, not finding him at the Oratory, had come to know that now and then he would hide a few hours at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in order to work in peace. Naturally they began to flock there and thus forced him to seek other hideouts in the homes of benefactors and friends...

His favorite hideout was the apartment of Joseph Brosio [*il bersagliere*] who had helped him so much in the first difficult years of the Oratory... When Father John Bonetti asked Brosio about Don Bosco’s use of his apartment, Brosio sent him this written account: “When Don Bosco Was writing the life of Blessed Mary of the Angels or other saints, he often spent a few hours in my home in order to work undisturbed...”[[763]](#footnote-764)

In the preface, Don Bosco clearly states that the purpose of the book is not merely edifying. He intended to move every reader, each *according to their own state,* to imitate the life of this contemplative woman:

In short, dear reader, you will find in the life of Blessed Mary of the Angels a perfect model of virtue and holiness, such that every Christian can imitate her according to their own state of life. And it is in view of all this that we have decided to publish this compendium of the life of this illustrious bride of Jesus Christ in the *Letture cattoliche*, in order to offer our readers an opportunity to draw spiritual benefit from it... And you, dear reader, if ever you feel a good intention arise in your heart while reading this little book, please! do not reject it; it is a grace that the Lord gives you, it is a favour that Blessed Mary of the Angels obtains for you from Heaven.

May a virtuous life make us followers of the example of our Blessed and make us happy in time and in eternity.[[764]](#footnote-765)

In the same preface, Don Bosco provides us with exhaustive information about the sources he used:

We believe we are doing the reader a favour by immediately stating the sources from which we have obtained the memoirs concerning the wonderful deeds of Blessed Mary of the Angels.

Firstly, from Father Elia of St Teresa the Carmelite, who wrote the life of the Blessed a few years after her death; from Father Anselmo of St Aloysius Gonzaga of the same order; and finally, in our own times, from Father Teppa Barnabita —all of them learned and pious writers.[[765]](#footnote-766)

A careful comparison with the sources used by Don Bosco allows us to highlight the differences and points of contact.[[766]](#footnote-767) Fr Stella says In this regard:

A comparison between the life of Mary of the Angels as recounted by Don Bosco and that of Elia of St Teresa, the first biographer of the Carmelite nun, makes it even clearer that we are dealing with two different types of language, which suggest different criteria of interpretation. Elia of St Teresa observes the Carmelite nun from Turin in light of the spiritual experience of Teresa of Avila and based on the teachings of St John of the Cross. The continuous physical and moral afflictions suffered by Mary of the Angels for about fifteen years are presented as a spiritual night, in whose darkness the soul, according to the teachings of John of the Cross, “already has the beginnings of the perfect union of love that it awaits.”[[767]](#footnote-768)

What seems clear, in my opinion too, is a certain difference in language, as referred to by Fr Stella. In particular, Don Bosco avoids any explicit reference to St John of the Cross, who is often mentioned by other biographers; his language is, as always, popular and direct. His aim is not so much to surprise the reader with the story and detailed description of numerous revelations or ecstasies,[[768]](#footnote-769) but rather, as he himself announced in the preface, to make this figure, although endowed with “extraordinary graces” and “superhuman gifts”,[[769]](#footnote-770) a model “to be imitated”.

Beyond this, however, I do not believe that we can speak of “different criteria of interpretation”, as if Don Bosco were “reducing” the spiritual experience of this contemplative woman, distancing himself from mystical and supernatural events. The doctrine of St John of the Cross remains, in some passages, as a backdrop to the narrative, even without explicit references. Don Bosco recounts, for example, the experience of dryness and the *dark night[[770]](#footnote-771)* “(The blessed) raises her heart more frequently and her voice more strongly to her Jesus, that he may kindly open the door of his sweetness to her, that he may send light into that frightening and unprecedented darkness; but Jesus is hidden and does not respond.”[[771]](#footnote-772) Further on he says:

Our Blessed, belonging to the number of these chosen souls, was placed by God in these sufferings, through which He purified her, as gold is purified in fire, for almost fourteen years. - Generous souls who wish to devote yourselves to virtue and belong entirely to God, prepare yourselves for these trials. Meanwhile, observe how Sister Mary of the Angels behaved, and follow in her footsteps. After taking her solemn vows, she began to experience the inner turmoil to which she had already been subjected on other occasions. The sweetness with which God had often refreshed her before disappeared. She found herself dry and barren in prayer, without the slightest inner consolation in the practice of virtue. So, with her heart full of sorrow, but with the confidence of a true lover, she sometimes turned to God and, almost sweetly complaining to Him, said: “You have deceived me, O my God. When I was free, you gave me comfort and kindness; now that I am bound, you give me nothing but bitterness.”[[772]](#footnote-773)

After fourteen years of dryness, the time of *spiritual marriage* finally arrived. Don Bosco describes it as follows:

But now the end of these fierce battles, these harsh trials of our Blessed, was drawing near. As this happy time drew nearer, she felt a very strong desire to unite herself with God, and this desire grew so strong that it transported her out of herself. The Lord wanted to give her an early taste of this sweet union at the end of 1683, one morning after Holy Communion. Let us hear it from her own lips, as she recounts it to her spiritual director out of obedience. ‘When I received it, my soul felt such union with God that I understood well the words of St Paul*: I no longer live, but my God lives in me.* O God of my soul, who will give me the words to express the mercy I received at that time from your immeasurable kindness? I honestly do not know how to say it or explain it. Finally, the moment arrived of such heavenly favour, of such a sublime union, which even on this earth makes souls similar to the blessed in Heaven. Because of it a soul walks always in the presence of God; it keeps its thoughts and heart fixed on God without any effort; it sees God in everything, hears Him, enjoys Him, and where before it would have had to force itself to turn to Him, now it must force itself to turn its thoughts away from Him. Oh! what an enviable state! God had prepared the Blessed Mary of the Angels with every hardship for almost fourteen years for this sweet and perfect union. Great rewards, as St Gregory says, cannot be attained except through great effort and hardship. Finally, Jesus, her sweetest spouse, appeared to her and filled her with supernal sweetness, which only those who have already tasted it can imagine. From this point , her ecstasies were very frequent. It was enough for her to speak or hear someone else speak of God to be immediately transported out of her senses.[[773]](#footnote-774)

Avoiding mystical terminology as far as possible, Don Bosco goes along with the ‘feel’ of his spiritual environment and, so to speak, “popularises” the experience of this contemplative woman, all in perfect harmony with his often-expressed desire to present a form of holiness that is “within everyone’s reach”.

The themes of this biography are integrated and, in some cases, overlap with those of other biographies. Blessed Mary of the Angels also spent part of her nights in prayer: “During the night ... when others were fast asleep, she rose vigilantly and, kneeling on the hard floor, enjoyed a sweeter and more salutary rest with her Jesus.”[[774]](#footnote-775) For her too, the sacramental presence of Christ under the Eucharistic species became the driving force and focal point of her personal piety:

She spent part of the night in prayer, and in the morning her first breaths were for her Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Having received him in her heart, she spent most of her time in sweet ecstasy, giving thanks. She frequently went to adore him, and never wished to leave him on his own. Every time she passed by, she poured out her heart to Him with fervent invocations. Being away from Him was painful for her, and so she spent every hour she could steal from her outside activities keeping company with her beloved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In the last years of her life, she prayed and obtained permission from her superior to retire at will to a small choir loft, which belonged to the holy Tabernacle, and there, as if in a paradise of delights, she remained with her Jesus, almost always in ecstasy, until she was called elsewhere by obedience. Her tender devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament gave her indescribable joy when she was assigned the office of sacristan, precisely because this office gave her the opportunity to be in church more often and to spend time with Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament. Ah! it is true that for a soul that has living faith, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is everything. He was her peace, her hope, her comfort, her delight, her treasure. And a soul most devoted to Jesus said well that visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament often and spending time with Him is not the duty of a human being, but of an angel. Therefore, dear reader, let us often perform this angelic duty on earth, so that we may have the good fortune to perform it forever in Heaven.[[775]](#footnote-776)

Don Bosco does not neglect to exhort the reader once again to imitate her: *Therefore, let us often perform this angelic duty...*

Another characteristic of this Blessed’s spiritual experience is her ability to constantly keep the thought of *God’s presence* in her mind during her various activities, in her *recreation* and *especially immediately after lunch:*[[776]](#footnote-777)

I resolve – this is one of the resolutions made by the Blessed Virgin on the day of her religious profession – to entertain myself inwardly with God, because all my good depends on this; to be eager never to miss any opportunity to work for the Lord; to steal all the scraps of time to pray, whether arid or dry, as God wills, without clinging to inner sweetness, but only to what seems to me to be pleasing to God; to consider during recreation that I have God speaking within me, and therefore to listen to him, while always saying a few words so as not to appear strange.[[777]](#footnote-778)

Further on Don Bosco writes:

She was so constant in her thoughts of God that she reached the point where even if she wanted to, she could not drive them from her mind. She conversed with Him even during the most distracting activities. She used to burst into fiery invocations, which could not fail to gently wound the heart of her beloved Jesus ... Whether she was sick or healthy, active or at rest, in her cell, at the table, during recreation, in the parlour, or anywhere else, she was always sweetly united with God. She used to say, “I find my good Jesus everywhere, and I am never tired of spending time with Him”. She was once asked how she could remain so constantly united with her Lord without becoming too tired, especially immediately after lunch, and she candidly replied: “I have nothing good; however, I confess that the Lord grants me the grace of always being happy in His presence; nor do I make any particular effort to achieve this, for I need to exert a great deal of strength to apply myself to external things…”[[778]](#footnote-779)

The *Conclusion* of the book is another warm exhortation to its readers*:*

Here, devout reader, is a brief account of the life, death and glory of Blessed Mary of the Angels. I have reason to believe that, as you read these few pages, you will be able to admire the beautiful virtues of this illustrious bride of Jesus Christ. But i beg you, do not be content with admiring her, but also resolve to imitate her effectively, to follow her footsteps courageously, to reform your ways, and to think seriously about the health of your soul. For one of the purposes for which God raises up saints in his Church is that they may be an example to all the faithful and a powerful incentive to do good. Since, in seeing the law of God and of the Church and the evangelical counsels themselves practised by so many, everyone can say to themselves, as the great Augustine did: If these men and women became holy, why can I not be?[[779]](#footnote-780)

#### 3.5 From the Epistolario

Fr Stella wrote: “Where Don Bosco shows himself to be more personal and also more relaxed in his writing is in his correspondence, especially in the letters he wrote to the Salesians, to the young people at the Oratory or in other houses, and to benefactors he knew personally... Here there are few hindrances in the manuscript; his thoughts flow freely.”[[780]](#footnote-781)

The critical edition of Don Bosco’s rich correspondence is currently a work in progress. The previous edition, edited by Fr Eugenio Ceria and completed in 1959, contained 2,845 letters divided into four volumes. The current edition, edited by Fr Francesco Motto, already contains 1,273 letters, following the publication of the first two volumes, which do not include the last twenty years of the saint’s life.

Among the letters published in this second edition there are some that are of particular interest to our topic and refer to the period under consideration;[[781]](#footnote-782) among these, in particular, are two circular letters sent to the young people at the junior seminary in Mirabello, opened in 1863, and to those of the college in Lanzo, opened the following year.

In both cases, these are advice given to pupils at the end of the school year, just before the holidays. Don Bosco reminds children and young people of the importance of participating in Holy Mass, receiving Communion, going to confession, and other practices of piety.

In the first letter, dated 26 July 1866, he recommends: “At home, do the usual meditation, Mass, daily reading as you did at college. The same frequency in confession and communion”;[[782]](#footnote-783) in the second, written exactly one year later, he writes similarly: “While you are at home, receive Holy Communion at least on Sundays. Throughout the week, don’t forget your meditation every morning.”[[783]](#footnote-784)

This is essentially the same kind of “holiday advice” already spoken about in the previous chapter.

Another important document dates back to 1866 and concerns the spiritual exercises preached by Fr Giovanni Bonetti, then rector of the junior seminary at Mirabello, in the college at Lanzo where Fr Lemoyne was rector at the time. We have a notebook of handwritten outlines of the meditations he gave, entitled *Esercizi spirituali - Anno 1866 - Collegio Convitto di Lanzo.* One of the sermons is entitled *Meditation*. The content is of great interest to us:

Three parts – Preparation – Consideration – Thanksgiving.

Preparation has three acts: - Presence of Almighty God the Creator before us. The angels in heaven and the spirits in hell tremble. - Hide in the side of Jesus Christ and make an act of love. – Raise your head trustingly and ask him for the grace to meditate.

Consideration has three acts: - Consider the truth as if you saw it with your own eyes painted in a picture and measure it. – Reflect on that truth and recognise how we are different. – Make specific resolutions to be implemented immediately.

Thanksgiving consists of three acts: - Giving thanks to God for the good thoughts he has put into our minds and asking him for the strength to carry out those good intentions. – Make a spiritual communion. – Pray for sinners.[[784]](#footnote-785)

This pattern not only confirms the belief that young people were also taught meditation in those years, but also provides us with the basic outline of a *threefold method* that exemplifies the Ignatian method which, as we will see in the next chapter, was taught to Salesians even during the years of their first “canonical” novitiate.

I note here that, just over two months later, on 29 August 1866, Fr Bonetti himself was called by Don Bosco to give the meditations for the second round of spiritual exercises at Trofarello,[[785]](#footnote-786) exercises in which, as we shall see, Don Bosco would preach the instructions. This was the year of the first “Salesian spiritual exercises” in the history of the congregation.

At this point, it seems to me that the belief of some authors that “in seeking the language most suited to young people... Don Bosco wanted to avoid the word *meditation*” needs to be revised.[[786]](#footnote-787) Further on, Fr Pietro Stella says, in his *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco:*

Clearly, Don Bosco does not require young people to meditate in the way conceived by the more classical schools of asceticism. However, since spiritual reading is not separate from a certain amount of reflection (and therefore open to meditation proper), Don Bosco interprets spiritual reading as meditation and is content to require this minimum from the boys.[[787]](#footnote-788)

In reality, during these years, whether addressing young people, adults or Salesians, Don Bosco clearly distinguished between *meditation* and *spiritual reading*; there is no valid reason to claim that he was unaware of the difference, nor that his listeners were unaware of it.

In 1862, he wrote to Cavaliere Ugo Grimaldi di Bellino: “Every morning, Mass and meditation. In the afternoon a little spiritual reading…”[[788]](#footnote-789) He wrote to Fr Giovanni Anfossi, a past pupil of the Oratory at Valdocco, in 1867: “Meditation and visiting the Blessed Sacrament will be two powerful safeguards for you: take advantage of them.”[[789]](#footnote-790) “I recommend three things to you,” he wrote in the same year to cleric Luigi Vaccaneo, “attention to morning meditation; frequent company of companions who are more devoted to piety; moderation in food.”[[790]](#footnote-791) In 1868, he wrote to Cavaliere Federico Oreglia, another friend and benefactor of the oratory: “Do not forget to do your meditation and spiritual reading every day.”[[791]](#footnote-792)

Another letter from those years seems worth quoting. It is a kind of affectionate, paternal reminder prepared by Don Bosco for Fr Michael Rua, ordained a priest three years earlier, who had been sent by him in 1863, at the age of twenty-six, as rector of the new foundation in Mirabello. At the end of October, Don Bosco, at the request of Fr Rua himself, sent his “beloved son” a small collection of reminders.

Since I cannot always be at your side to suggest those things that you may have heard or seen us practise many times and that I would often like to repeat to you, I hope that you will appreciate my writing to you here with some advice that may serve as a guide in your work. I speak to you with the voice of a loving father who opens his heart to one of his dearest children. I want to write them with my own hand so that you may have a token of the great affection I bear you, and so that they may be a permanent reminder of my fervent desire that you may win many souls for the Lord.[[792]](#footnote-793)

In the long letter, the recommendations to the new rector are divided into six short chapters: *For yourself, With the teachers, With the assistants and those in charge of dormitories, With the service staff, With the young students, With outsiders.*

In the first part, *For yourself,* Don Bosco gives Fr Rua six recommendations:

1. Let nothing disturb you,

2. Avoid austerity in food, and get no less than six hours of rest each night. This is useful for your health and to be able to promote the good of the souls of young people entrusted to you.

3. Celebrate the holy mass and say the breviary *pie, devote, attente.* This is to encourage you to do so yourself and to encourage your dependants to do as well.

4. Every morning never omit meditation and during the day a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. For other things, do as indicated in the Rules of the Society.

5. Learn how to make yourself loved rather than feared. When commanding and correcting, always show that you seek the good of souls. Put up with anything when it is a matter of preventing sin. Let all your concerns be directed towards the spiritual, health and educational well-being of the young people entrusted to you by divine providence.

6. In matters of greater importance always lift your heart briefly to God before making a decision.[[793]](#footnote-794) When some report is made to you, listen to everything but try to discern the facts well and listen to both parties before making a judgement. Often on first hearing of them, things seem like wooden beams that are merely splinters.[[794]](#footnote-795)

In 1871 this letter, initially strictly private in nature, along with some revisions and additions, became a kind of programmatic circular for all rectors of Salesian houses. Don Bosco presented it with the title *Confidential Reminders for Rectors* or with another title, *Testament Addressed to the Rectors of Particular Houses.*

Fr Francesco Motto, who in 1984 edited the critical edition of the letter to Fr Rua and subsequent “circular’ versions, writes:

In Don Bosco's mind, the “Confidential Reminders” were intended to outline a clear and precise course of action for the rectors of all Salesian works. And this was also the conviction of those who succeeded him in the general responsibility for the Salesian congregation. The various Rectors Major promoted its dissemination through continuous editions and commentaries.

During Fr Rua’s term as Rector Major, at the beginning of each session of the 6th and 7th General Chapters, it was read *per partes*  and Fr Rua himself highlighted, in the words of Fr Ricaldone, “its beauty and value, as if they were inspired words and heavenly advice.” The Salesian Regulations, from 1924 to 1966 without interruption, stated: “[The Rector] should frequently reread Don Bosco’s Confidential Reminders to the Rectors.”

Faced with a text that has become a classic in Salesian tradition and has been defined as the “short Gospel” of the Rector’s role, with “almost the value of a code and a testament”’ “a mirror by which every Superior and every Salesian will make an excellent examination of conscience,” there is no one who does not see the vital importance of a critical edition. I would venture to say that it is somewhat surprising that such an initiative had not been taken before, and that efforts have been limited to publishing manuscripts in a manner that is not always reliable, or to reproducing them, in whole or in part, with modest critical adjustments, in anthologies of pedagogical or spiritual writings.[[795]](#footnote-796)

Let us not overlook, therefore, the importance of this text, with five versions that we know of (1863, 1871, 1875, 1876, 1886). The final version dates back to two years before Don Bosco’s death.

We can also note that already in the second draft, dated 1871, point 4 of the first part was modified and “strengthened” as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1863 TEXT | 1871 AND SUBSEQUENT TEXTS |
| 4. Every morning some meditation and during the day a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. For other things, do as indicated in the Rules of the Society. | 4. Never omit meditation every morning and a visit throughout the day to the Blessed Sacrament. For other things, do as indicated in the Rules of the Society.[[796]](#footnote-797) |

One might wonder why Don Bosco felt the need to recommend meditation to his rectors, even after 1874 when the approved rules of the society clearly stated: “Singulis diebus unusquisque praeter orationes vocales saltem per dimidium horae orationi mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam impediatur ob exercitium sacri ministerii.”[[797]](#footnote-798) It is possible that he intended, with regard to rectors, to eliminate any possible exception provided for in the constitutional text: *nisi impediatur…*?

In any case, however, the advice emphasises the desire to highlight and particularly recommend to those responsible for government, among others, this practice of piety that should *never be omitted.*

The last quote from the *Epistolario,* relating to the period we are considering, is taken from a circular letter to the Salesians dating back to the end of April 1868. At that time, the *Society of St Francis de Sales*, in addition to its mother house in Valdocco, was engaged in the foundations at Mirabello and Lanzo and managed the retreat house in Trofarello; the Salesians who had already professed the rules of the *Society* were already about seventy in number, but from the outset there were defections and departures.[[798]](#footnote-799)

In this context, the *Circular Letter to the Salesians* of 1868 is a characteristic example of *community spiritual direction*. Don Bosco touches on the themes of religious observance, obedience, unity of spirit and administration, and poverty.

By unity of spirit, Don Bosco emphasises, I mean a firm and constant decision to want or not to want those things that the superior judges to be for the greater glory of God. This resolution should never falter, no matter how serious the obstacles are that stand in the way of spiritual and ternal good, according to the teaching of St Paul: *Caritas omnia suffert, omma sustinet.[[799]](#footnote-800)*

It is this *unity of spirit*, this fundamental choice, Don Bosco says, and not merely obedience to a rule, that must underpin observance of the rules and, in particular, of the prescribed *practices of piety:*

This resolution prompts the confrere to be punctual in his duties not only because of the command given to him, but for the glory of God, which he intends to promote. This leads to promptness in doing meditation, prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, examining one's conscience, and spiritual reading at the appointed time. It is true that these things are prescribed by rules, but if we do not make an effort to observe them for a supernatural reason, our rules fall into disuse.[[800]](#footnote-801)

#### 3.6 Fr Bonetti’s revision of Il cattolico provveduto

I would like to dedicate a few words separately to this voluminous devotional manual for adults (766 pages in its single edition)[[801]](#footnote-802) published in 1868, which took about four years to prepare.[[802]](#footnote-803)

The Salesian Central Archives hold part of the manuscript of this challenging work, which, however, certainly did not enjoy the same popularity as *Il Giovane provveduto* or *La Figlia Cristiana Provveduta.*

The manuscript by Fr Giovanni Bonetti, then his secretary, was revised and corrected by Don Bosco himself; the preface to the printed text bears the saint’s signature.

Giovanni Bonetti, born in Caramagna on 5 November 1838, entered the oratory at the age of seventeen. He was a companion of Savio’s and was part of the first group of disciples, on 18 December 1859, who joined the newly formed Society of St Francis de Sales. At the time of the book’s publication, he was therefore thirty years old. A man of versatile intellect and passionate temperament,[[803]](#footnote-804) he became a member of the Superior Council and *Spiritual Director* of the congregation in 1886.[[804]](#footnote-805) His dedication and attachment to Don Bosco were immense.[[805]](#footnote-806) Fr Lemoyne informs us: “Even before he became a priest, Don Bosco would give Fr Bonetti his works intended for publication to review and correct, and sometimes to complete. And so it continued throughout his life.”[[806]](#footnote-807)

We are therefore faced with a text from the Salesian tradition, certainly revised and corrected by Don Bosco, who claimed authorship. This is a typical and not uncommon case; in my opinion it would be a mistake to disregard these texts because of their “non-authenticity”. This and other texts undoubtedly offer us *indirect* elements of knowledge of the saint’s *spiritual sentiment*, and at the same time in an absolutely *direct* way, the *spiritual sentiment* of the first generation of Salesians.

The first twenty pages of this manual by Don Bonetti are a veritable *treatise* on prayer. Don Bosco’s numerous additions to the text, as well as the authority of the original author, are sufficient guarantee for us to consider it, to all intents and purposes, to be a document of *Salesian spirituality*. In the following quotations in this paragraph, I will highlight the changes made by Don Bosco in italics.[[807]](#footnote-808)

The first section is entitled *What does it mean to pray?* and opens with a lengthy “definition” of prayer:

Praying means lifting up your heart to God and *conversing* with him through holy thoughts and devout feelings. Therefore, every thought of God and every glance towards him is prayer when it is accompanied by a *sentiment* of piety. Therefore, whoever thinks of the Lord or of his infinite perfections, and in this thought feels an *emotion* of joy, veneration, love, and admiration, is praying. Those who consider the *great* benefits received from the Creator, Preserver, and Father, and feel grateful and included, are praying. Anyone who finds themselves in danger because of their innocence and virtue, aware of their own weakness, and begs the Lord to help them, is praying. Whoever finally turns to God with contrition of heart and remembers that he has outraged his Father, offended his Judge, and lost the greatest good, and begs forgiveness and proposes to amend his life, is praying.

Prayer is therefore very easy. Everyone can lift up their heart to God at any time, anywhere, through pious sentiments. There is no need for sophisticated and exquisite words, but simple thoughts accompanied by sincere inner affection are enough. A prayer consisting solely of thoughts, e.g. in quiet admiration of divine greatness and omnipotence, is an internal prayer, or meditation, or contemplation. If it is expressed through words, *it is called* vocal prayer.

Both ways of praying should be dear to Christians who love God. A good son thinks fondly of his father and pours out *to* him *the affections* of his heart...[[808]](#footnote-809)

Note how this “definition” of prayer refers to a spiritual tradition that considers prayer not only as *petition*, but also as simple intimacy of thoughts and feelings, that is, as *affective mental prayer.*

The second section in this first part is entitled *Prayer is a duty.* From the very nature of prayer and from certain considerations on the “creatural” relationship that binds man to God, the *necessity* of prayer is deduced:

Therefore, *we should not be surprised* when the Apostle Paul tells us: pray without ceasing. Nor is it an exaggeration to say, as Bishop Massillon teaches: “A Christian who does not pray is a man without God, without worship, without religion and without hope.” Because he lives as if there were no God. Add to this that prayer is an inseparable companion of Christian life, since Christian life is essentially a spiritual life, and prayer is the first nourishment of the spirit, just as bread is the food of the body.[[809]](#footnote-810)

Christ himself taught this lesson through his words and his life: “How necessary, important, salutary, and beneficial prayer is, the divine Redeemer taught us not only with words, but also by his example, for he prayed often *and long* during the day and throughout the night...”[[810]](#footnote-811)

The third section, entitled *How prayer should be done,* then indicates some characteristic *methods*: the opportunity to be in a state of grace, the spirit of faith, humility, the need to respect an “order” in prayer of supplication, praying in the name of Jesus, hope, unity with the mystical body, perseverance, preparation for prayer, the position of the body and other things.[[811]](#footnote-812)

The next section, *The first fruits of the day*, is another lesson on the importance of continuous prayer.

Next to the title, there is an addition by Don Bosco, which was later deleted. It reads: “*Although it is the duty of Christians to pray without ceasing, there are certain times that are more appropriate for prayer.”[[812]](#footnote-813) Fr Bonetti continues, revised by Don Bosco:*

Know, Christian, that the only *true good* of our soul *is God; that we are made for him and on him alone we must* keep our eyes fixed day and night; *and* to imitate the angels and saints, who never cease to praise and glorify him. But our miserable condition does not allow us to do much; because *we are forced to devote ourselves* to the needs of the body, which sometimes demands relief, and at other time rest from daily toil. I do not wish to call this time lost for us: because rest, food, and well-regulated sleep are also things pleasing to the Lord. I would just like to point out that the saints *of all times* deplored having to spend a large part of their lives in these *occupations* without being able to keep their thoughts and affections *always turned* to God. They therefore preferred to spend the whole night, or at least a large part *of it, i*n prayer, rather than abandon themselves to rest and cease thinking about God. We read in Holy Scripture that King David rose from his bed at midnight to pray, regretting that he had spent so much time with his mind *unoccupied* with his God.

We read in the lives of the *saints* that Saint Anthony the Abbot spent entire nights in prayer and contemplation, and when day broke, he complained to the sun for disturbing him. St Aloysius Gonzaga, son of a prince, while still a young man, would rise from his bed in the middle of the night, even in the cold season, and kneel on the bare ground, spending several hours in prayer, *seeking* in this way to join the saints in heaven in praising and blessing God. *But not everyone is able* to make such sacrifices, nor does God demand them of us, *so we can limit our prayers to certain times.*[[813]](#footnote-814)

These gifts, therefore, have not been given to everyone and, consequently, are not demanded of everyone. There are therefore *times* for prayer and, among these, says the author, morning prayer is fundamental:

What a beautiful moment it is for someone who loves God to wake up in the morning! What *sweet* joy he feels *thinking* that after spending the night under *the* wings of divine providence, after *resting* in the protection of his Lord, he can *now* regain new strength on his journey to heaven...

Dear Christian, ... imitate the examples of the saints, who as soon as they open their eyes to the light of day, immediately rise to contemplate with the eyes of their mind the light of God, and consecrate to him the first affections of their heart.”[[814]](#footnote-815)

At the end of this lengthy introduction, the manual develops into a detailed set of instructions, devotions, advice and prayers which I will not dwell on here. I will just share a few parts of a prayer whose origin is unknown, but which is meaningful in the context of this *spirituality of presence,* which attempts to value every tool, even the simplest ones, to “rediscover” God in everyday life. The *habit* of continuous prayer is certainly a *grace* from God, but *nature* participates with means and instruments of its own:

Almighty eternal God, my Creator and Lord! you know my desire to praise you, pray to you, love you unceasingly, and think of you every moment if I could. But you, who with your providence have arranged the events of my life and my condition, and who want me to faithfully fulfil all my obligations, know that it is not possible for me to always think of you, and always praise and honour you with the acts of my mind and heart. I therefore beg you, my heavenly Father, to accept my good will and my intention to do everything for your glory and in union with all the actions of your divine Son. Grant my prayer and accept the pact I make with you today in the presence of my Guardian Angel.

As often as I gaze at the sky, with equal ardour I desire to go and see you, to possess you and rest with you, to die to myself in order to live with you alone, and with the fervour of my heart to sing to you with the seraphim on fire with love: *Holy, Holy, Holy...* Every time I think of you, or speak of you, I always mean to offer you my life, my passion, the Blood of my Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary.... Every time I place my hand on my heart, I intend to stir within myself, for love of you, repentance and contrition for all my sins, indeed for the sins of the whole world... Every time I hear the signal for Mass, or the signal for the elevation, I offer you all the Masses that are celebrated... Whenever I look at the image of a saint, I intend to thank you for the immense gifts of nature and grace that your mercy has bestowed upon him... Every step I take, every action, every thought, every feeling, every word I utter today, I intend to be acts of ardent love towards you... All this, O Lord, I intend to do for your greater glory...[[815]](#footnote-816)

We will see later how Fr Bonetti, who became rector of the house in Borgo San Martino a few years after the publication of *Il Cattolico Provveduto*, *translated this* spirituality of presence into a concrete programme of life where prayer and constant thought of God shaped the rhythm of daily life.

### 4. Mental prayer and practices of piety in Don Bosco’s constitutions

The ratification process for the Salesian Constitutions, as I have already mentioned, was rather long and laborious;[[816]](#footnote-817) about ten years passed from the official recognition of the congregation, which took place with the *Decretum laudis* of 1864, to the final approval of the Constitutions.[[817]](#footnote-818)

Don Bosco worked energetically on his project, modifying the constitutional text several times, writing letters to the consultors, and travelling to Rome himself to plead his cause. In this work, the role of his collaborators was ultimately secondary.[[818]](#footnote-819)

Fr Mario Midali notes:

Don Bosco must certainly be numbered among the founders who encountered legal difficulties on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities in getting their religious congregation approved. But these difficulties should not be exaggerated. If we compare the many obstacles faced by numerous religious institutes in the last century in order to be approved by Rome with the difficulties encountered by the founder of the Salesian Society, we find that certain Salesian literature has tended to highlight them. [[819]](#footnote-820)

The process of *institutionalisation* of the *Society of St Francis de Sales*, however, appears to me to be a fruitful moment during which some of the most characteristic features of the new foundation become more evident.[[820]](#footnote-821) The latter, in fact, emerge in relation to some of the difficulties reported by the consultors.

From the outset, Don Bosco imagined, for example, uniting those bound by vows and his lay collaborators, the so-called *extern[[821]](#footnote-822) members, under the same rules.* “Quicumque” he once again says in his last published text of 1873, before the approval of the final text in which the chapter on *extern members* was removed, “licet in saeculo vivat, in domo sua, in sinu familiae suae ad hanc Societatem potest pertinere.” Furthermore, he did not conceive of a novitiate entirely free from *practical tests* that contribute to verifying the candidates’ aptitude for the works of the institute, and even seeks to avoid the term, so as not to offend the sensibilities of the civil authorities;[[822]](#footnote-823) he claims for himself the right to form clerics[[823]](#footnote-824) and to exercise certain privileges, such as granting dispensation from certain practices of piety.[[824]](#footnote-825)

His “formation strategies” and his very concept of religious life were quite distant from those of his time and, in some respects, prophetic. In particular, he found it difficult to accept the idea of isolating Salesians during their formation, probably because his experience at the Convitto had taught him the educational value of a balanced harmony between study, piety and apostolic experiences. During those years, he wrote in his *Memoirs of the Oratory* about the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*: “Here one learnt to be a priest.”[[825]](#footnote-826)

As regards the drafting of the constitutional text[[826]](#footnote-827), it was Don Bosco himself who, in a sheet attached to the request for approval of the Society written to the Holy Father on 12 February 1864, informed us of the main *sources* used:

With regard to content of the rules – he states in this memo titled *Cose da notarsi intorno alle costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* (Things to note regarding the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales) – I have consulted and, when appropriate, also followed the statutes of the Cavanis Work in Venice, the constitutions of the Rosminians, the statutes of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, all corporations or religious societies approved by the Holy See. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 on the vows, on the other hand, were taken in their near entirety from the Redemptorist constitutions. The formula of profession was adapted from that of the Jesuit rule.[[827]](#footnote-828)

Given the importance of this first profession formula, let us briefly examine it in comparison with its “source”; it appears in the Italian version of 1860, sent to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Fransoni, then in exile in France, for diocesan approval.[[828]](#footnote-829)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES | SOCIETY OF JESUS (SIMPLE VOWS) |
| Nella piena cognizione della fragilità e instabilità della volontà mia, desideroso per l'avvenire di fare costantemente quelle cose che possono tornare a maggior gloria di Dio ed a vantaggio delle anime, io N.N. mi metto alla vostra presenza, onnipotente e sempiterno Iddio e sebbene indegno del vostro cospetto, tuttavia confidato nella vostra bontà e misericordia infinita, mosso unicamente dal desiderio di amarvi e servirvi, in presenza della Beatis-sima Vergine Maria, di S. Francesco di Sales e di tutti i santi del Paradiso, fo voto di castità, povertà ed ubbidienza a Dio ed a Voi mio Superiore per lo spazio di tre anni, pregandovi umilmente di volermi senza riserbo comandare quelle cose che sembreranno di maggior gloria di Dio e vantaggio delle anime.[[829]](#footnote-830) | Onnipotente sempiterno Iddio, io (N.N.) quantunque indegnissimo del vostro divino cospetto, confidato nondimeno nella pietà e misericordia vostra infinita, e mosso dal desiderio di servirvi, fo voto in presenza della Sacratissima Vergine Maria e di tutta la corte celeste, alla Divina Maestà Vostra di POVERTÀ, CASTITÀ E UBBIDIENZA perpetua nella Compagnia di Gesù; e prometto d’entrare per vivere e morire in quella, il tutto intendendo conforme alle Costituzioni di essa Compagnia. Domando dunque umilmente dall’immensa bontà e clemenza vostra, pel Sangue di Gesù Cristo, che vi degniate di accettare questo olocausto in odore di soavità, e che siccome m’avete data grazia di desiderarlo e di offerirlo, così me la vogliate abbondantemente concedere per adempirlo.[[830]](#footnote-831) |

In the following pages, I will focus solely on the chapter on *practices of piety[[831]](#footnote-832)* and, in particular, on the article concerning prayer and *meditation.* I will first examine the different versions of the text with the necessary care, leaving the appropriate comments for later.

#### 4.1 Evolution of the constitutional provisions in relation to practices of piety and daily meditation

The first known draft of the chapter on *practices of piety*[[832]](#footnote-833) is found at the end of the *Rua autograph* (1858?). The manuscript by cleric Michael Rua concludes with nine articles written this time by Don Bosco himself, which follow the chapter on *Accettazioni* (Admissions).

The first of these nine articles, which remained virtually unchanged until its final approval in 1874, places the *Society of St Francis de Sales,* using current terminology, among the *congregations of active life.* It says there: “The active life to which our society is committed deprives its members of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common. They shall [accordingly] endeavour to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfilment of the general duties of a Christian.”[[833]](#footnote-834)

The second article refers to the *clear, devout pronunciation* of the words of the office; the fourth to the daily recitation of the rosary; the sixth to the monthly exercise for a *happy death*, while the following article gives the rector the power to dispense from these practices for the time being and for those individuals for who,m he judges it best in the Lord; articles 8 and 9 prescribe the suffrages to be celebrated in the event of the death of a member of the congregation or his parents.[[834]](#footnote-835)

The third article, more directly dedicated to prayer, originally stated: ‘Every day there shall be at least half-an-hour of mental and vocal prayer, except when one is prevented from doing so by the exercise of the sacred ministry.” However, the text was corrected by Don Bosco himself and ultimately reads: “Every day there will be *no less than* half an hour of mental or at least vocal prayer, unless one is prevented from doing so by the exercise of the sacred ministry.”[[835]](#footnote-836)

In another manuscript, subsequent to the first but not later than the early 1860s,[[836]](#footnote-837) Article 3 of Carlo Ghivarello’s transcription[[837]](#footnote-838) is corrected by Don Bosco himself as follows: “Every day there shall be no less than half an hour of prayer, *tra* [which can be translated to mean ‘to amount to half-an-hour jointly’] mental and vocal...” In this version, we also find the addition, among the practices of piety, of *spiritual reading* and *weekly attendance at the Holy Sacraments.[[838]](#footnote-839)*

The text of the manuscript, probably sent in 1860 to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, in exile in Lyon, does not present any variations in relation to the chapter on practices of piety, compared to these previous outlines. This manuscript by Giovanni Boggero,[[839]](#footnote-840) bearing twenty-five handwritten signatures of “congregati” (members), however, contains subsequent corrections by Don Bosco,[[840]](#footnote-841) which Fr Francesco Motto dates to the end of 1860 or the beginning of 1861.[[841]](#footnote-842) Article 3 was amended by Don Bosco (changes and additions in italics): “Every day there shall be no less than *one hour* of mental and vocal prayer, except when one is prevented from doing so by the exercise of the sacred ministry. *In this case, he shall make up for it by reciting more frequent ejaculatory prayers and directing to God with greater intensity of affection those works which prevent him from his ordinary exercises of piety.”*[[842]](#footnote-843)

The Italian edition, followed by the *Decretum laudis* of 23 July 1864, includes this same text as an article on prayer (which in the new outline has become number 4).[[843]](#footnote-844) However, the decree is only the first official step towards final approval.

On that occasion, the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would summarise the observations made by the consultant Fra Angelo Savini on the constitutional text in thirteen *animadversiones*; the eighth observation concerned the content of our article and, at the same time, the number of days of spiritual exercises prescribed, stating: “Optandum est, ut socii plusquam unius horae spatio orationi vocali, et mentali quotidie vacent, et ut quolibet anno per decem dies spiritualia peragant exercitia.”[[844]](#footnote-845)

Don Bosco replied to this *animadversio* in his long note *Supra animadversiones in Constitutiones sociorum sub titulo S. Francisci Salesii in Diocesi Taurinensi*: “Cum haec animadversio de meliore Societatis bono sit, libenti animo admittitur, atque hoc sensu in Constitutionibus accomodatur.”[[845]](#footnote-846)

Despite this positive observation, the first Latin text of the constitutions, which was resubmitted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1867, did not take into account the consultor’s observation and remained virtually unchanged: “Omnibus diebus unusquisque non minus unius horae spatio orationi vocali et mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam impediatur ob exercitium sacrii ministerii; tunc maiori, qua fieri poterit, frequentia eas per iaculatorias preces supplebit, maiorique affectus vehementia Deo offeret opera, quibus a constitutis pietatis exercitiis arcetur”.[[846]](#footnote-847)

The *Institute’s approval* was granted on 19 February 1869; however, as previously stated, the decree, which was published two weeks later, postponed the final approval of the constitutions. In subsequent years, the Latin text was revised and, in 1873, reprinted in the Oratory'’s printing house, with virtually no changes to our article and the Latin text of 1867.

This time the observations of the new consultor, Dominican Raimondo Bianchi, were thirty-eight in number. It reads: “It was said (*in the previous* animadversio *no. 8)* that it was desirable for members to devote themselves to mental prayer *for more than an hour* ... Now it says that they will do mental prayer *for at least an hour...”[[847]](#footnote-848)* In the twenty-eight new *animadversiones*  by Secretary Monsignor Vitelleschi, which officially summarise the observations of the consultor, this observation no longer appears, perhaps because it does not correspond to the original text of *animadversio* no. 8 or because it is unclear.[[848]](#footnote-849)

The manuscript, which was finally approved on 3 April 1874, after further revision by Don Bosco and additional changes introduced by a special commission composed of four cardinals,[[849]](#footnote-850) contains some new features. A distinction is made between mental prayer (no less than half an hour) and vocal prayer: “Singulis diebus unusquisque practer orationes vocales saltem per dimidium horae orationi mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam impediatur ob exercitium sacri ministeri; tunc majori, qua fieri poterit, frequentia eas per iaculatorias preces supplebit, majorique affectus vehementia Deo offeret opera, quibus a constitutis pietatis exercitiis arcetur”.[[850]](#footnote-851)

After the final approval of the manuscript, Don Bosco prepared the Latin text for printing in the same year *iuxta adprobationis decretum die 3 aprilis 1874,* and, the following year, the Italian text; both, as a whole, contain further changes, partly due to stylistic concerns and perhaps, as Fr Francesco Motto states, because of “the intention to adapt the text according to certain powers granted to him by the Pope  *vivae vocis oraculo”.*[[851]](#footnote-852)

It may be interesting to note that, with regard to the printed Latin text of our article, Don Bosco introduces a slight change concerning the “exceptions” provided for. It reads: “… saltem per dimidium horae orationi mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam forte ob exercitium sacri ministerii impediatur…”[[852]](#footnote-853) The adverb *forte* (by chance, occasionally...) reduces the likelihood of an exception.

#### 4.2 Assessments of the constitutional text

The constitutional text on practices of piety deserves further examination, given its importance in relation to this study.

Article 3, as I pointed out previously, has undergone some changes. The original text, which stated *... every day there shall be no less than half an hour of mental prayer or at least vocal prayer...*, becomes, in the final version: *Each person, in addition to vocal prayer, shall spend no less than half an hour each day in mental prayer...*[[853]](#footnote-854)

This last version, therefore, says nothing about the *total* time for prayer, which, in the 1873 version, immediately preceding the approved one, was set by the expression ... *non minus unius horae spatio orationi vocali et mentali* (no less than one hour including vocal and mental prayer)*.* This *total* time had been increased by Don Bosco from half an hour to an hour shortly after the first draft of the text,[[854]](#footnote-855) without there being any trace, at that juncture, of a request from the ecclesiastical authorities in this regard.[[855]](#footnote-856)

I think it is important to emphasise here, in order to avoid any reductive interpretation of the Salesian *piety* of the early days, that these times for prayer are *in addition* to those spent fulfilling the “general duties of a Christian”[[856]](#footnote-857) (morning and evening prayers), the particular duties of clerics (recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, daily Eucharist), and the numerous weekday, Sunday and periodic customs and practices (ejaculatory prayer, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary in common, Vespers of Our Lady, Eucharistic adoration and Benediction, exercise for a happy death, Forty Hours, etc.).[[857]](#footnote-858)

Fr Francis Desramaut wrote 1989:

Don Bosco’s century and Don Bosco himself had a deep dislike of parasites, especially religious ones. In the early Salesian constitutions, the chapter on *Practices of Piety* reflected this spirit well. *Work and temperance* was Don Bosco’s motto for his disciples. The spirit of prayer had to permeate their entire day, whether they were religious, religious sisters or cooperators. Prayer as such occupied only a tiny part of their life. One article of the Constitutions recognised this at a glance: “The active life to which our society is committed deprives its members of the opportunity of engaging in many practices in common.; They shall [accordingly] endeavour to make up [for this lack] by mutual good example and by the perfect fulfilment of the general duties of a Christian.” And a subsequent article stated that Salesians should devote “no less than half an hour” to both mental and vocal prayer. Don Bosco was called to order because of this; in any case, his intention is clear. He despised the idleness of the *friars,* who were ridiculed by the liberal press of the time, in reference to the situation of the place.[[858]](#footnote-859)

I believe I have amply demonstrated, in this and previous chapters, that Don Bosco’s *intention*, to which Fr Desramaut refers, is completely different from what this author claims. Nothing in his writings reveals this kind of *contempt* for time spent in prayer, which Don Bosco would never define as *idleness*. Furthermore, nothing authorises us to consider the first constitutional text as decisive in understanding the *mindset* of the founder, who may have adapted the requirements of his religious life project to the times in which the first group of disciples grew. “If the Congregation is what it is today,” Fr Giovanni Battista Lemoyne stated in 1930, “it is because at that time it was content to be what it could be.”[[859]](#footnote-860)

Don Bosco’s project, then, concerned a congregation *of active life*; it was therefore natural to renounce the *choir* and reduce *communal practices.* The constitutions of the Society of Jesus, for example, moved in this direction, prescribing the following for professed members:

In view of the time and well-proven life expected of those who are admitted to the Society to be incorporated as professed members and also as spiritual assistants, it is assumed that they will be spiritual and mature persons who can run the way of Christ our Lord, as far as their physical strength and external occupations of charity and obedience allow. For this reason, with regard to prayer, meditation and study, as well as the practice of fasting, vigils and other forms of bodily austerity or penance, it does not seem that any rule should be imposed on them other than that which discreet charity suggests... Only this will be said in general: care should be taken that the immoderate use of these things does not take up so much time and weaken the physical forces to such an extent that they are then insufficient for spiritual help to others, according to our Institute; nor, on the contrary, that such relaxation be given to them that the spirit is cooled and the lower human passions are kindled.[[860]](#footnote-861)

Constitutions, therefore, as Salesian Fr Carlo Colli observed a few years ago, regulate only *common practices* and not *private devotions,* which Don Bosco continually encouraged young people, Salesians and lay people to practise. “The reference to ‘in common’,” Fr Colli says, “lets us see how many of the individual practices of piety which had punctuated the day and life of every good Christian in the 19th century, were not only not excluded but positively encouraged.”[[861]](#footnote-862)

“Just as food nourishes and preserves the body,” Don Bosco wrote in 1875, in the introduction to the first Italian edition of the approved rules, “so the practices of piety nourish the soul and make it strong in the face of temptation.”[[862]](#footnote-863) This conviction is constantly expressed in Don Bosco’s writings.[[863]](#footnote-864)

In response to the observations of the consultors (*…unius horae spatio orationi vocali, et mentali quotidie vacent…*), he himself replied, as we have seen, in 1864: “Cum haec animadversio de meliore Societatis bono sit, libenti animo admittitur, atque hoc sensu in Constitutionibus accomodatur”.[[864]](#footnote-865)

In this particular aspect of dialogue with ecclesiastical authorities, it also seems to me that two different concepts of prayer are being expressed. On the one hand, what seems important is the time *formally* dedicated to communal prayer; on the other hand, there is a concept of spiritual life and a practice that seeks to educate people to *think of God continuously*. Among the *principal virtues proposed for study by novices and for practice by professed sisters* in the 1871 constitutions for the fledgling Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, we read: “Spirit of prayer, by which the Sisters keep themselves perpetually in the presence of God and abandon themselves to His providence.”[[865]](#footnote-866)

The tendency towards this *spirituality of presence* also emerges, for example, from a handwritten note by Fr Giovanni Bonetti, the author of *Il Cattolico Provveduto* and Don Bosco’s “official proofreader”*,* undated but attributable to the period between 1870 and 1877.[[866]](#footnote-867) The title, written by Fr Bonetti himself, who turned thirty-two in 1870, is: *Schedule of the day, week, month, year, and life of a Salesian priest, rector.*  It is a folded sheet written on just over three pages, with several additions and deletions. Here is a *simple transcription:*[[867]](#footnote-868)

1. In the morning, rising at the usual time.

2. Before or after hearing confessions, recite the Hours.

3. Do some meditation or spiritual reading in preparation for the celebration of Holy Mass.

4. After Mass and thanksgiving, read a chapter from the “Memoriale Sacerdotum” or “Regola del Sacerdote” or another similar book.

5. A light breakfast, so that you can get straight to study if necessary.

6. Written correspondence.

7. Before noon, read a chapter from the Bible.

8. At lunch, do not refuse anything that is served.

9. After midday recreation, reading of a chapter from the *Imitation [Of Christ]*.

10. Vespers and Compline

11. Tasks around the house.

12. During snack time, visit the Blessed Sacrament.

13. Matins and Lauds.

14. Study of Theology.

15. Before supper, meditation together with the teachers.

16. A light supper, so as to have a clear head for the vigil.

17. Prayers with the boys and a brief warm talk.

18. Rosary.

19. Reading from the life of the saint of the day, or something similar.

20. Sleep, commending the entire House to God and to the Virgin Mary.

Note. As far as possible during recreation, remain among the boys or with some teacher or cleric, and do not openly take part in anything objectionable, so as not to lose the trust of anyone.

21. Every Friday, Confession and the prescribed fast.

22. Every Saturday, some good deed in honour of Mary.

23. Every month, monthly confession and the prayer for a happy death. For Church History, etc., at least *nullus mensis sine linea.*

24. Every year, the annual Confession and public or private Retreat

25. From time to time, compiling booklets for publication in the *Letture Cattoliche*.

26. At all times and in all places, keep in mind that the life of a priest is a life of sacrifice like that of Jesus Christ, and therefore never shy away from any effort or hardship that may bring greater glory to God and benefit to souls.

27. Rather, eagerly seek work, considering the day to be a most fortunate one when, at evening, you feel most tired [having worked for] God, for the Church, and for souls.[[868]](#footnote-869)

This page reveals a strong spiritual and, at the same time, apostolic tension; there is no moment of the day that is not focused on God, marked by thoughts of him and prayer and, at the same time, by educational concerns. In light of this text, the contrast can emerge that I mentioned between the *formal* aspect of the constitutional text (... *no less than half an hour ...*) and the certainly more significant features of this *spirituality of the origins,* which I have tried to highlight on other occasions.

We should also interpret the instruction given in 1860 in this same light, in the case of those prevented by the sacred ministry from fulfilling their obligation of meditation: “In this case, he shall make up for it by reciting more frequent ejaculatory prayers and directing to God with greater intensity of affection those works which prevent him from his ordinary exercises of piety.”[[869]](#footnote-870) We are faced with the classic doctrine expressed by St Francis de Sales in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*: ‘“But if you are unable all day to make up for the omission, you must remedy it as far as may be by ejaculatory prayer, and by reading some spiritual book, together with an act of penitence for the neglect, together with a steadfast resolution to do better the next day.”[[870]](#footnote-871)

Now, in the practice of this spiritual retreat and ejaculatory prayers, de Sales writes later, in the chapter *Aspirations, ejaculatory prayers and holy thoughts* ’ the great work of devotion lies; it can supply all other deficiencies, but there is hardly any means of making up where this is lacking. Without it no one can lead a true contemplative life, and the active life will be but imperfect where it is omitted: Without it rest is but indolence, labour but weariness,—therefore I beseech you to adopt it heartily, and never let it go.[[871]](#footnote-872)

Similarly, we read in the *Introduction* to the meditations by Father Luis de la Puente, a text recommended, as we shall see, by the first General Chapter of 1877, regarding meditation by Salesians:

Finally, so that no one may consider themselves exempt from this sublime and useful exercise, I would add that everyone in general, both those who have time set aside for private prayer, if they wish to preserve their devotion, and those who do not have such time to make up for this deficiency, should practise mental prayer or short vocal prayers, which we call ejaculatory prayers...[[872]](#footnote-873)

The founder’s intention, therefore, even when he claims the right to “dispense from these practices for the time and for those individuals whom he judges best in the Lord”,[[873]](#footnote-874) does not stem from a concept of religious life in which prayer occupies *a ultimately tiny part*, or from the identification of *work* and *prayer*, but rather from a profound consideration of the life of piety and, at the same time, of the responsibility entrusted to each individual, beyond what is prescribed by the common life.

Some of the active congregations which Don Bosco drew inspiration from were moving in the same direction. For example, the *Rules of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary* of Pio Brunone Lanteri state: “Each one shall meditate and engage in spiritual reading for the time assigned to him by his Superior...”[[874]](#footnote-875) And the rules of the *Scholae Charitatis* of the Cavanis brothers: “If anyone, with the permission of their superiors, fails to participate in communal mental prayer, they should take care to make up for it as soon as possible.”[[875]](#footnote-876)

I believe that an observation made by Fr Stella in 1981 can be placed in this context:

The Salesians are not devoted to prayer in choir, but to the education of young people above all else. As a Congregation dedicated to the education of young people, the Salesian Society is not intended to welcome penitents who wish to withdraw from the dangers of the world, but men of solid virtue, especially in matters of chastity. The sackcloth for Salesians would be work...

The pressure on Salesians weighed down by their work logically leads to a decline in the so-called “practices of piety” in the community. Don Bosco had been able to learn about the work carried out at the Barolo Institutes and at Cottolengo; he had experience of the Seminary in Chieri, the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin and the local diocesan clergy. He wanted to establish the “minimum necessary” of common practices for the Salesians. In this area too, he stubbornly resisted all external pressure. Fr Marcantonio Durando in Turin and other censors in Rome did not agree with such restraint in collective practices and such vagueness in those left to the responsibility of each individual. There were fears that the spirit of the Institute would be lost.[[876]](#footnote-877)

In any case, it is clear that liturgical sensitivity and guidelines on the communal dimension of prayer were influenced by nineteenth-century theological perspectives.[[877]](#footnote-878) However, I find the reference contained in the second article of the first chapter on practices of piety interesting, an article on which I have found no mention in the main sources used for the drafting of the constitutions.[[878]](#footnote-879) Don Bosco writes: “Personal composure [*compostezza della persona*], a clear, devout, distinct pronunciation of the words of the divine offices,[[879]](#footnote-880) modesty in speech, looks and gait both inside and outside the house, ought to be the distinctive characteristics of our gathered-members [*congregati*].[[880]](#footnote-881)

This indication would remain virtually unchanged in subsequent drafts and also in the final approved text.[[881]](#footnote-882)

#### 4.3 Towards the formation of religious awareness

I have already stressed how, from the very beginning of his work of Christian education for young people, Don Bosco was able to create a spiritual and apostolic movement around him which, in his awareness, was already, at least in embryo, the *Society of St Francis de Sales.*

This movement, which quickly grew to significant proportions, involved young people, clerics, priests, consecrated and non-consecrated lay people in a single *spiritual current*; a complex and apparently undifferentiated reality that aroused considerable perplexity in the eyes of the Archbishop of Turin himself, Archbishop Alessandro Riccardi:

It is impossible to understand, he wrote in 1868 at the end of a letter preserved in Rome in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious, what a Congregation made up of so many disparate elements that cannot have unity of purpose can achieve. The College in Turin is already in chaos, being a mixture of artisans, students, lay people, clerics and priests. It will become increasingly so as it expands its sphere of action.[[882]](#footnote-883)

This perplexity regarding the oratory as a suitable environment for the formation of priests and religious was also shared by his successor, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, and by some of the bishops and consultors of the Roman congregation.

In reality, the spiritual environment of the oratory presented, especially in the first twenty years after its initial establishment, a substantial unity of purpose and proposal. Fr Valentini wrote: “Don Bosco used only one method throughout his life, both in the education of young people and in the formation of his confreres. It is a single spirit that pervades all his work, a single choice of characteristic means to which he entrusted the formative effectiveness of his spirituality.”[[883]](#footnote-884)

Most of the devotional practices are carried out together, with the participation of all the “components”, in an atmosphere that we would describe as one of intense spiritual tension to which all the “resources” of Don Bosco’s pedagogical genius contribute to this atmosphere, in particular the *sodalities*, the promotion and devout preparation of numerous religious celebrations, the atmosphere of joyful confidence, the *good press,* the exhortation to imitate the *models* of young people, of whom we have spoken at length, and the numerous devotions. Fr Stella notes:

In concrete terms, those same practices of good Christian living that were common in Piedmont and collected in *Il Giovane provveduto* became practices for the Salesians. Don Bosco did not make the young people who stayed with him feel any shock in this: the *Giovane provveduto,* “method of life” and collection of pious practices, was a manual of piety for them Salesians too. Young people accustomed to morning and evening prayers in their own parishes did not have to learn new ones when they came to Don Bosco’s houses.

In the early days, the Salesians’ devotional practices were therefore the same as those of the young people: practising good Christian behaviour every day (morning and evening prayers, prayers before meals and work, the rosary, the *Angelus...).* ), weekly confession and communion, monthly exercises for a happy death, annual retreat.

However, it is clear that from the very beginning, the practices of the Salesian religious were influenced by their own educational institutions. The boarding school leads to various practices in common with young people: morning and evening practices are carried out with them, daily and Sunday Masses were “heard” with them, and the exercise of a happy death is done with them.

Since the late 1860s, however, the founder’s vision became increasingly clear and distinct in my view.[[884]](#footnote-885) Don Bosco seemed to gradually abandon all hesitation and concerned himself more openly with forming an awareness of being religious in his *disciples*.

One of the first signs of this change in direction seems to be the experience of the first retreat for the newly formed congregation, which took place in the municipality of Trofarello, a few kilometres from Turin, from 1866 onwards for the first four years.

According to Fr Lemoyne, Don Bosco always reserved the *instructions* for himself, entrusting the *meditations* to another preacher.[[885]](#footnote-886) Again according to Lemoyne, the founder continued to preach the retreat to the Salesians as long as his health permitted.[[886]](#footnote-887)

I will come back to these instructions at Trofarello at length, further on. We have both handwritten and other notes from them. However, I would like to emphasise from the outset that the topics covered by Don Bosco in his instructions concern vocation, vows, religious life and the aims of the congregation.[[887]](#footnote-888) The Trofarello texts are therefore extremely important because, in my opinion, they reveal some of the most characteristic features of the *founding experience*.

Another indicator of the founder's intention to form awareness of being religious in a more manifest way is the *circulars* that Don Bosco began to send to all Salesians, starting from 1867.

Our Society – we read at the beginning of the first circular – will perhaps soon be finally approved, and therefore I need to speak to my beloved sons more frequently. Since I cannot always do this in person, I will endeavour to do so at least by letter.

I will therefore begin by saying a few words about the general purpose of the Society, and then move on to discuss its specific rules and regulations at another time.[[888]](#footnote-889)

These circulars, as I have previously indicated, represent a true *spiritual direction for the community.*

Another important element are the so-called *General Conferences* which, starting in 1868, according to Fr Lemoyne.[[889]](#footnote-890) Don Bosco held for all the rectors of the works, with the aim of “making the spirit of his disciples homogeneous”.[[890]](#footnote-891) These conferences were held as if they were *general chapters,* during which the problems of each individual foundation were discussed.

Then, on 15 August 1869, a few months after the decree of approval, a circular letter from Don Bosco established the rule of a *monthly rendiconto to the local superior in the fledgling congregation.* “Giving an account of oneself to one’s superior,” Don Bosco writes, “is a general practice in all religious houses and is found to be of great benefit, so that I hope it will also be of great benefit among us, especially in order to achieve the much-needed peace of heart and tranquillity of conscience.”[[891]](#footnote-892)

Year after year, therefore, Don Bosco seemed to devote himself more and more openly to the spiritual and religious consolidation of the new foundation; his “strategy of government”, however, continued to be characterised by a great ability to adapt to the human and spiritual reality of his *soci* (members) and *ascritti* (what we would his novices today).

Fr Ceria writes: “Don Bosco needed patience to create the right environment! There was a time when the word *novices* would have struck fear into the hearts of adults and terrified the children. It was only in ‘74 that Don Bosco dared to use it; in ‘75, it could be heard on the lips of the *ascritti* themselves, who now fearlessly called each other by that name.”[[892]](#footnote-893)

“What lack of regularity and discipline in those days!” Fr Ceria writes, recounting a memory of the founder! “Conflicts among the clerics arguing over literature and theology without any regard to time or place; continuous and serious disturbances in the study hall when the boys were not there; mornings, many clerics remained in bed; others skipped classes without a word to their Superiors; no spiritual reading, no meditation, and no other practices of piety except those performed with the boys. Now it is different. Things improved little by little, took root and became permanent.

Nevertheless, though aware of all these disorders, I had to make the best of a bad situation. Had I tried to remedy matters all at once, I would have been forced to close down the Oratory and send all the boys home. The clerics would never have adapted themselves to strict regulations, and all would have left. I realized that, thoughtless though they were, many of them worked willingly, were goodhearted and morally sound. I knew that once their youthful exuberance had waned, they would be of great help to me....”

“We must remember, however, that those times were different; our Congregation could not have been established in the usual manner.”[[893]](#footnote-894)

In this work of *normalisation*, Fr Ceria goes on to say, “Piety was the cornerstone upon which the religious life of the Oratory was to be based if regularity was to be established. Among the practices of piety two are of the utmost importance: the annual spiritual retreat and the daily meditation.”[[894]](#footnote-895)

### 5. The spiritual exercises/retreats for the Salesians: the beginnings

The first retreat for the Salesians took place in Trofarello in 1866. It lasted five days and there were two rounds to make it easy for everyone to be involved.

Donated by Fr Matteo Franco to the Salesian Society in that very year, the house in Trofarello was used from the outset for retats and also as a place of rest for convalescent confreres. It was the third work of the fledgling congregation after the *Junior Seminary* in Mirabello (1863) and the *St Philip Neri College - Boarding house* in Lanzo (1864). Don Bosco wrote in a historical memoir presented on 20 January 1870 to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars: “The house in Trofarello, in the diocese of Turin, is especially designated for the spiritual exercises that are held regularly every year during the holidays for all those belonging to the Society.”[[895]](#footnote-896)

However, starting in 1870, in order to avoid having to resort to a third round, given the growing number of Salesians and the modest size of the building, the exercises began to take place in the college in Lanzo; the house in Trofarello was subsequently sold.

Some testimonies and documents regarding these first eight retreat rounds for the Salesian congregation, which always took place in August or September during the school holidays, and whose instructions were always given by Don Bosco, have been preserved.[[896]](#footnote-897) In particular:

- With regard to the two rounds held in 1866, from the *Biographical Memoirs* we know the names of the preachers of the meditations (Canon Gastaldi and Fr Bonetti) and the subjects of Don Bosco’s instructions. Among other things, we read... *vocation and means of preserving it*; *temporal and spiritual advantages of religious life; the three vows*...[[897]](#footnote-898). We also have a handwritten sheet from one of the retreatants, which contains *Ricordi di Don Bosco negli Esercizi spirituali di Trofarello* and a copy of it.[[898]](#footnote-899)

- Of the two rounds held in 1867, we know the names of the two preachers (Fr Bona and Fr Rua) and the topics covered, again from the *Biographical Memoirs*. Once again, some of the topics directly concern religious life, the evangelical counsels, the aims of the congregation and practices of piety. An important confirmation comes this time from a manuscript by the cleric Gioachino Berto, then twenty years old. He had professed perpetual vows in December 1865,[[899]](#footnote-900) and became Don Bosco’s secretary at the beginning of the following year, a position he would hold for about twenty years.[[900]](#footnote-901) This notebook of Berto’s, entitled *Esercizi dei preti e chierici - Trofarello 1° agosto 1867- D. Bona e D. Bosco pred.,* which therefore refers to the first round in 1867, contains, in its 78 numbered pages, notes from meditations, instructions and also spiritual readings.[[901]](#footnote-902)

- With regard to the two rounds held in 1868, we know nothing more than the dates, which have been confirmed by the saint’s correspondence.[[902]](#footnote-903) As for the texts of some of the conferences, attributed by Fr Lemoyne to the first and second rounds that year, I believe there are some inaccuracies; there is in fact a clear correspondence between these texts and the Berto manuscript from the previous year.[[903]](#footnote-904) Of course, one could hypothesise that Don Bosco was “replicating” the same topics, but the similarities between the two texts seem too numerous and too precise. So it seems more logical to imagine that Fr Lemoyne, who does not appear to be familiar with Berto’s manuscript, came across another manuscript, probably undated, written by another retreat member from the previous year, and mistakenly linked it to the retreat in 1860s.

- Finally, in addition to what is stated in the *Memoirs,* we have a notebook written by Don Bosco, with fourteen large numbered pages and a summary sheet glued at the beginning, entitled (written by Fr Berto) *Tracce ed Abbozzi di Esercizi spirituali scritti dal Sig. D. Bosco pei Salesiani* (Outlines and Drafts of Spiritual Exercises written by D. Bosco for the Salesians). *1869;[[904]](#footnote-905)* a copy of this manuscript entitled *Abbozzi e tracce d’Esercizi spirituali dettati da D. Bosco ai Salesiani in varie occasioni, scritti da lui medesimo cominciando nel 1869 in Trofarello* (Drafts and outlines of Spiritual Exercises given by Don Bosco to the Salesians on various occasions, written by him beginning in 1869 in Trofarello).This copy adds to the end of the text transcribed from the aforementioned notebook the contents of two other folded, undated sheets, kept separately and also written by Don Bosco on a total of six pages;[[905]](#footnote-906) these sheets, which would therefore rightly be placed by Fr Lemoyne in the context of the Trofarello retreat,[[906]](#footnote-907) deal with the topics of *Prayer,*  Mortification  *and*  Fraternal Correction. *In relation to these courses in 1869,* in addition to Don Bosco’s manuscript and its copy, and the two sheets mentioned above, there is also another notebook of notes by his secretary Fr Gioachino Berto, relating to the first course in 1869, entitled [[907]](#footnote-908)*Esercizi di Trofarello 1869* (Trofarello Exercises 1869). *Monday 13 September. Ch.(ieri)ci dell’orat., Lanzo, Mirabello. D. Bosco per le Istruzioni. D.Rua per le meditazioni.[[908]](#footnote-909)* The notebook corresponds to the summary notes in Don Bosco’s manuscript, and in some cases expands on their content. It is natural to assume that the preacher enriched the outlines with other considerations and contributions.

Due to their content and the particular context in which they were given, these instructions are, in my opinion, as I have already stated, of great importance for understanding the particular historical moment that the congregation is experiencing and certain aspects of its *founding experience.*

In the instructions for these exercises, Don Bosco outlines the basic structure of the new foundation and some characteristic elements of his model of religious life.

In this study, however, I will only examine those elements that are most directly relevant to our topic.

#### 5.1 From Fr Berto's notes of 186**7**

The beginning of the notebook is entitled: *Pred. 1.a Addì 6 Agosto sera. D. Bosco (1st sermon, on evening of 6th August. D. Bosco).* The text, in good handwriting, continues thus:

Our divine Saviour, after sending his apostles to one place or another to preach the kingdom of God, called them and led them into a desert. So he called us here to Trofarello from our studies, from whatever occupation we were engaged in, into solitude, because the Lord never speaks amid noise, the Lord speaks only to those who withdraw from worldly things; only in silence does the Lord grant his graces. Therefore, let each one of us make a commitment during these days to do these Holy Exercises well, because we are no longer sure that we will be able to do them again next year.

Over these days, let us think about what we need to avoid, acquire, and practise for the future.

Let us remember that the Priest does not go to Hell or Heaven alone, but accompanied.

During these days, let us observe silence at all times except in the morning at breakfast, after lunch and after supper.[[909]](#footnote-910)

Further on, under the heading *Addì 7 sera (On the evening of the 7th). D. Bosco*, we read:

We have a great enemy who never leaves us alone night or day-our own body. We must resist it, lest it rebel; we must mortify it to keep it under subjection...

There are two ways to fight our bodies: fasting and prayer. It is called fasting first because a man who does not mortify his body is not even capable of praying well. All the Apostles mortified their lives like all the holy Fathers and many other good clerics, good priests who set an example. And the reason is that the body abandoned to intemperance turns man into a beast, man in this state no longer feels the things of God, but only his appetites, and it is unnecessary to say how harmful this is to a cleric who must be a good example to others. Therefore, in order to keep the body subject to the Spirit, we must always keep it occupied, spare no effort that may help to tame it, give it no rest except what is strictly necessary for its preservation, make it sleep on the ground if necessary, work even at night, watch over all the senses...[[910]](#footnote-911)

“To preserve the virtue of chastity,” the same instruction states, “three things are required: silence, control of all feelings ... and temperance.”[[911]](#footnote-912)

Don Bosco’s last instruction, entitled *Conclusione D. Bosco 11 Ag. Sabato,* is dedicated to practices of piety. There it says:

I would have liked to talk about the practices of piety in our house but I see that we have run out of time, so I will just mention a few things. Our practices of piety are meditation, spiritual reading, visiting the Blessed Sacrament and examination of conscience.

Meditation could be done as follows. Choose the subject wisely, first placing oneself in God's presence, then meditate on it carefully, then choose those things to apply to ourselves, come to a conclusion, that is, resolve to abandon those faults or practise those virtues, and stir ourselves to affection. Then thank God and practise or avoid throughout the day what we resolved in the morning.

Those who are unable to make this meditation because they are travelling or have other commitments should do the merchants’ meditation, which consists of fixing the subject in their mind and then practising or avoiding what we propose, and in the evening before going to bed, examine whether we have put it into practice. If not, repeat it the next day until we have practised that virtue or avoided that vice or defect.

Therefore, I recommend mental prayer.

The Blessed Sacrament. Just say a Pater, an Ave and a Gloria when you can do no more; this is enough to make us strong against temptation. Anyone who has faith and makes this visit to J(esus) in the Blessed Sacrament and meditates every day, provided that they do not do so for worldly reasons, cannot possibly sin.

I also recommend spiritual reading. Those who are unable to meditate without a book should read a passage, reflect on it carefully, and take from it what is useful for them. We should always strive to practise some virtue or avoid some fault, to fall more and more in love with God, to weep for our sins, and to take heart to save souls.

Those who can, should make this visit and read together; those who cannot, should do so privately. You can also meditate in your room.[[912]](#footnote-913)

The text is very rich and would require many comments; reserving the right to collect them at the end of this *excursus* on the Trofarello documents, I include here, instead, the similar text taken from the *Biographical Memoirs*, which Fr Lemoyne attributes instead to the conclusion of the 1868 exercises.[[913]](#footnote-914) The almost perfect correspondence with the 1867 manuscript seems to indicate a probable error in dating. However, the text is enriched with some other details; I have highlighted the most significant ones in italics for clarity:

During the past few days I would like to have spoken of our practices of piety, but time has run out. *Though we dealt at length on our vows and religious life,* I shall still say something about meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the examination of conscience.

*Meditation is mental prayer*. *“Nostra conversatio in coelis est,” says St Paul;* How does one go about meditation? First, let him place himself in God's presence and choose the subject he wants to consider. Next, let him concentrate on that subject and apply it to himself as it fits him. Finally, let him conclude by resolving to over come certain faults and practice certain virtues. Throughout the day let him follow up his meditation by practising his resolve. *We must also try to arouse ourselves to sentiments of love,* *gratitude, and humility toward God; we should ask Him for the graces we need and in true sorrow and tears beg His pardon for our sins.. Let us always remember that God is our Father and we are his sons. I therefore recommend mental prayer.*

If you cannot meditate this way because of travel or some other urgent duty, do at least what businessmen do.  *No matter where they are, their thoughts are always on business: buying, reselling at a profit, avoiding losses or making up for them, rejoicing in their profits or planning to increase them. Our examination of conscience resembles that. Before retiring, let us check if we have practiced our resolutions on some specific fault; let us ascertain our gain or loss in a sort of spiritual auditing. If we discover a failure in our resolution, let us renew it the next day, until we have succeeded in acquiring the virtue we are striving for or shall have destroyed or avoided the fault we wished to correct.*

I also suggest visits to the Blessed Sacrament. *“Our most sweet Lord Jesus Christ is there in person,” the curé of Ars used to exclaim*; If time is limited, let us at least kneel before the tabernacle and say a *Pater, Ave* and *Gloria*. This alone will steel us against temptation. I assure you that the man of faith who visits the Blessed Sacrament and makes a daily meditation with sincerity of heart will not fall into sin.

I urge spiritual reading, especially to those who need a book to meditate. Let us read a passage and reflect on it to discover what needs correcting in our lives. This will help us also to love the Lord increasingly and encourage us *to save our soul.[[914]](#footnote-915)*

If possible, make your spiritual reading and your visit to the Blessed Sacrament with the community; otherwise do so in private. You can also meditate in your room.[[915]](#footnote-916)

The similarities between the notes of these two retreatants and, at the same time, the different emphases confirm the substantial fidelity of these two manuscripts to the instructions given by Don Bosco.

#### 5.2 From Don Bosco’s handwritten notebook from 1869 and the corresponding notebook of Don Berto’s notes.

With regard to the 1869 retreat, and in particular the first course that took place from 13 to 18 September,[[916]](#footnote-917) a text by Don Bosco and his correspondents can be found in Berto’s notes and then in Fr Lemoyne’s summary.[[917]](#footnote-918)

The context of the passage is the instruction on the vow of chastity. After extolling this virtue, Don Bosco lists the appropriate means for preserving it: prayer, avoiding idleness, frequent confession and the willingness to be vigilant even in small things. We read from Don Bosco’s notes:

FRIDAY EVENING - POSITIVE MEANS

1. Ordinary prayers, meditation, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Breviary and Mass well celebrated or well served. Ejaculatory prayers, medals, crucifixes, etc. Special devotions to the B.V...[[918]](#footnote-919)

Berto’s notes on the conference show how the initial outline was expanded. The first *positive means* presented here is, once again, prayer:

Prayer means everything that lifts our affections to God. Just as morning meditation is the first thing to do. Everyone should always do it, but it should be something practical; ultimately, everyone should always resolve to gain something from it, such as avoiding a fault or practising a virtue. You have to prayer” if you want to achieve something. Therefore, the prayers said in common in the morning and evening, which serve to ask God for everything we need for our souls and bodies, should be said well and always. Everyone should always do them when they can, together with others; if you can’t, never mind, but don’t forget them. Then everyone should read devout, good books... And then priests and those close to orders should study the Rubrics, the reason for everything. And let us begin to serve well, and let the priests preach well, which builds up the Church so much, performing the ceremonies properly. That young man serving Mass with such composure is a sight to behold. Recite the breviary well and with your heart and the Rosary.[[919]](#footnote-920)

With regard to the breviary, Fr Lemoyne’s text, which is essentially equivalent to Fr Berto’s manuscript, specifies: “Priests, recite your Breviary *digne, attente ac devote,* and, if possible, before the holy tabernacle. Make sure you genuflect and make the sign of the cross properly, to get into the spirit of prayer.”[[920]](#footnote-921)

#### 5.3 Two undated manuscript sheets

These are two folded sheets, each with four sides;[[921]](#footnote-922) the last two sides of the second sheet are blank, while the first side bears the title *Orazione* (Prayer). This is the most important text for us among those relating to the Trofarello exercises, both because it is handwritten by Don Bosco and because of its rich content. The probable date of these sheets, which may have been used several times by Don Bosco, has been determined on the basis of the Berto manuscript copy, placing them in the context of the 1869 exercises.[[922]](#footnote-923)

Once again, this is more of an outline than the text of a conference. We read:

The devil always works to prevent prayer. - We must therefore fight against him, praying always to avoid his snares.

Necessity: Sine intermissione orate (Ia to the Thessalonians 5:17). Petite et accipietis (Ioan. 16-24). Qui petit accipit... et pulsanti aperietur (Matt. 7-8). The Fathers call it the golden chain with which we ascend to heaven; Jacob’s ladder. St. Justin calls it the bread of the soul. Key to heaven; as warmth to the body. St. Thomas of Villanova: weapon of the soldier in battle.

Vocal Prayer - Prayers of our Society. Morning and Evening prayer. Rosary, Angelus*,* before and after eating. Mass and breviary, for those with the obligation. Benediction on weekdays and Sundays. Before and after communion.

Meditation. Short or long always do it. With a book if you can. Let it be a mirror for us, says St. Nilus, to recognise our vices and our lack of virtues; but let it never be omitted. A man without prayer is a man lost (Saint Teresa). In meditatione mea exardescet ignis (Ps 38:4). To the soul it is like warmth to the body.

Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul. The Lord’s complaint: Populus hic labiis me honorat: cor autem eorum longe est a me (Mark 7:6).

Ejaculatory Prayers. - They briefly unite vocal and mental prayers. “From St Bonaventure calls them aspirations because, like a breath, they start from the heart and go to God. They are fiery darts that send the affections of the heart to God and wound the enemies of the soul, temptations, vices, etc... St Cassian recommends this: Deus in adiutorium.

All those who devoted themselves to the service of the Lord constantly practised mental and vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer.[[923]](#footnote-924)

#### 5.4 Some brief conclusions on the documents regarding the Exercises at Trofarello

As I said, these are very “rich” texts which bring out many important elements, almost a small treatise on prayer and mental prayer.

Let’s try to summarise the main points very briefly, without following any particular order of priority:

- In these texts, we find references to the *necessity* of prayer[[924]](#footnote-925) and of prayer that is *sine intermissione (uninterrupted);*

- prayer, rather than a request or petition, is presented in these texts as *everything that lifts our affections to God;*

- *silence* and *retreat/withdrawal* are valued as privileged “places” in which *the Lord grants his graces;*

- the need for a certain asceticism is emphasised, so that man may learn to feel *the things of God;*

- the priority importance of meditation is highlighted (*… morning meditation is the first…*);

- these texts contain an invitation to meditate regularly ( … short or long, always do it...; *...never omit it...*) and the simple explanation of a “method” that essentially follows the teaching of St Francis de Sales (*...choose the subject...place yourself in the presence of God...then meditate on it thoroughly...come to a conclusion...resolve to abandon those faults or practise those virtues...stir yourself to affection...give thanks...*);

- the involvement of *affections* in meditation is emphasised (...*we must also be filled with love, gratitude and humility towards God...*);

- *meditation* must contribute to kindling devotion and love for God and neighbour (...*in meditatione mea exardescet ignis...*; ...*take heart to save souls...*);

- the necessity of mental and vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer is emphasised for those who wish to give themselves *to the service of the Lord*…;

- the function of ejaculatory prayer is reiterated, which *combine vocal and mental prayers*;

- meditation is also an *examination of conscience,* a *mirror for the soul*;

- *Meditation with a book* is considered more suitable for beginners (*...those who are unable to meditate without a book...*).

- Those who cannot meditate in a group should do so *in their room;*

- the purpose of meditation is to cultivate *virtues* within ourselves; for this reason, it must always be accompanied by *resolutions*;

- Vocal prayer must be accompanied by the *heart* and mental prayer. *Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul…*

### 6. The spiritual exercises and the exercise for a happy death in Don Bosco’s constitutions

The first draft in our possession of the chapter on *Practices of Piety* does not yet contain a reference to annual spiritual exercises or retreats.[[925]](#footnote-926) However, it should be noted, as I mentioned earlier, that the *Rua manuscript,* which predates this first draft, lists among members’ commitments the commitment to preach retreats from time to time...*[[926]](#footnote-927)*. This is one of the *purposes* of the Society.

In this first attempt to regulate the *practices of piety*, Don Bosco nevertheless provides for the monthly exercise for a *happy death.* We read: “The last day of every month shall be one of spiritual retreat. Each one shall make the exercise for a happy death, disposing all his affairs both spiritual and temporal as though he had to leave the world and set out for eternity.”[[927]](#footnote-928); an article that remained substantially unchanged until the final approval of the constitutions.

Fr Stella informs us:

The exercise for a happy death is an effloresence of the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius. Fr Croiset, promoting monthly retreats in France, argued that many people were able to find one day a month to spend in spiritual tranquillity but could not find several days to attend a whole course of exercises. At the beginning of the 18th century, Jesuit Giuseppe Antonio Bordoni promoted the pious practice of the happy death in Turin... Bordoni himself founded a *Compagnia della buona morte* (Society for a Happy Death) in the church of the Holy Martyrs in 1719, run by the Jesuits.[[928]](#footnote-929)

The question of death and eternal salvation constantly accompanied Don Bosco and the men of his century in their personal experience. It is therefore not surprising that he made the preparation for a happy death one of the key elements of his educational and spiritual work. “In dealing with our (Salesians), tell them and urge them never to neglect the monthly exercise for a happy death,” he wrote to Fr Giovanni Cagliero in 1876. “This is the key to everything.”[[929]](#footnote-930) We will see later how this retreat will be regulated by the introduction to the constitutions and by the first General Chapter of the congregation.

As for spiritual exercises, we know that Don Bosco initially adapted them to the young age of his collaborators, in keeping with the spirit of St Ignatius’ *Exercises*, who wrote in the eighteenth *annotation* : “These exercises must be applied in relation to the condition of the people, that is, according to their age, education or intelligence...”

Fr Pietro Brocardo notes: “Also in terms of the exercises, Don Bosco did what he could: he had high ideals, but he knew that such a demanding practice could only arise and develop gradually. His collaborators were still far from understanding what religious life meant.”[[930]](#footnote-931)

This *gradual approach*, whose pace is often marked by the recommendations of the consultors, emerges from a comparison of the successive drafts of the constitutional text.

The text preceding the *Decretum Laudis* of 1864 states: “Every year each one shall make a spiritual retreat that he shall conclude with his annual confession.. Every one before being received into the Society shall devote a few days [*qualche giorno*] to a spiritual retreat and shall make a general confession.”[[931]](#footnote-932)

Three years later, following an *animadversio* by the Roman consultors, who considered the article too vague because it did not specify the number of days, Don Bosco corrected the constitutional article; the Latin text of 1867 specifies *per dies ferme decem*. “Cum haec animadversio” it would say, as already mentioned in a note sent to Rome, “de meliore Societatis bono sit, libendi animo admittitur, atque hoc sensu in Constitutionibus accomodatur”.[[932]](#footnote-933)

The definitively approved text, in its faithful Italian translation of 1875, would say: “*Ogni anno ognuno farà circa dieci o almeno sei giorni di esercizi spirituali, che termineranno con la confessione annuale* (Every year, everyone shall make about ten or at least six days of spiritual retreat, which shall end with the annual confession). *Ognuno prima di essere ricevuto nella società e prima di emettere i voti farà dieci giorni di esercizi spirituali sotto la direzione di maestri di spirito, e la confessione generale”* (Before being accepted into the society and before taking their vows, each member shall undergo ten days of spiritual exercises under the guidance of spiritual masters, and make a general confession).[[933]](#footnote-934)

In the introduction to the Constitutions prepared for the first Italian edition in 1875 Don Bosco would say: “The fundamental part of the practices of piety, which in a certain sense embraces all the others, consists in making a spiritual retreat every year and the exercise for a happy death every month.”[[934]](#footnote-935) *During the third General Chapter of the Congregation, as we shall see, he wanted an appropriate* regulation *to be prepared for the confreres’ retreats, a regulation which he then corrected in his own hand.* “The retreat,” it reads, “can be called the support of religious congregations and the treasure of the members who attend it.”[[935]](#footnote-936)

# CHAPTER 6

# Consolidation of the foundation

### 1. Consolidation and expansion

The final approval of the Constitutions of the Society, ratified by the papal decree of 3 April 1874, marked a fundamental moment in the history of the Salesian congregation and in the personal life of its founder, who was just over a month away from his 59th birthday.

Two weeks later, Don Bosco, who had remained in Rome since the end of December of the previous year together with his secretary Fr Gioachino Berto, returned to Turin satisfied, despite the revisions that the consultors had imposed on the text presented. However, at the founder’s request, there was no immediate celebration for his return and for the important recognition. A few days earlier, one of the “eldest” confreres of those who had signed the founding act of the Salesian Society in 1859, Fr Francesco Provera, had died in Turin.[[936]](#footnote-937) In 1874, Fr Provera was not yet thirty-eight years old.

The celebration of the recognition took place solemnly on the 19th of that same month with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the singing of the *Te Deum.* Shortly afterwards, with the help of a Latin scholar, Professor Lanfranchi, Don Bosco began working on the first Latin edition of the text, which was published that same year. The following year, the first Italian edition of the text was published, preceded by the introduction *Ai soci salesiani* (To the Salesian confreres), which will be discussed in detail later. At the same time, given the irrevocable rejection of the constitutional chapter on so-called *extern members*, Don Bosco sought to outline a project for a lay association, which he initially named *Union of St Francis de Sales*, but which two years later was recognised by a brief of Pius IX on 9 May 1876 with the title *Union of Salesian Cooperators.* Its first regulations stated:

The Salesian cooperators are offered the same mission as the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, with which they intend to associate themselves.

1. Promote novenas, triduums, spiritual exercises and catechism classes, especially in places where material and moral resources are lacking.

2. Since there is currently a serious shortage of vocations to the clerical state, those who are able to do so should take special care of young people and adults who, endowed with the necessary moral qualities and aptitude for study, show signs of being called to this vocation...

3. Oppose irreligious press with good press, through the dissemination of good books, cards, and printed leaflets of all kinds in those places and among those families where it seems prudent to do so.

4. Finally, charity to children at risk, gathering them and instructing them in the faith. Introducing them to sacred functions, advising them in times of danger, and guiding them to places where they can be educated in religion are other tasks of the Salesian Cooperators.[[937]](#footnote-938)

A popular periodical, whose first issue was published the following year, was aimed at them. It was called *Bibliofilo Salesiano* (which became the *Bollettino Salesiano* a year later).[[938]](#footnote-939) This monthly magazine, which was sent out free of charge, reached a circulation of more than forty thousand copies at the time of the founder’s death. Thus began what we can consider the last period in the history of the foundation, a period of consolidation and further expansion; in my opinion, this was the most important (and perhaps least studied) period for understanding the characteristic features of the religious life project that Don Bosco had developed and which he increasingly revealed to his disciples.[[939]](#footnote-940)

The expansion of the congregation during the last fourteen years of the founder’s life was gradual and steady. Some data, taken from a table compiled by Fr Pietro Braido, allow us to estimate the numerical growth in the period 1875-1886.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| YEAR | PERPETUAL PROFESSED | TEMP. PROFESSED | NOVICES | TOTAL PROFESSED | TOTAL |
| 1875 | 64 | 107 | 84 | 171 | 225 |
| 1876 | 108 | 79 | 74 | 187 | 261 |
| 1877 | 162 | 78 | 112 | 240 | 352 |
| 1878 | 206 | 93 | 142 | 299 | 441 |
| 1879 | 253 | 94 | 147 | 347 | 494 |
| 1880 | 325 | 80 | 146 | 405 | 551 |
| 1881 | 405 | 47 | 144 | 452 | 596 |
| 1882 | 445 | 37 | 167 | 482 | 649 |
| 1883 | 484 | 36 | 173 | 520 | 693 |
| 1884 | 512 | 41 | 210 | 553 | 763 |
| 1885 | 544 | 49 | 212 | 593 | 805 |
| 1886 | 576 | 60 | 254 | 636 | 890 |

Despite rapid growth, or perhaps precisely because of it, this period was not without problems, defections and difficulties relating to the formation of new Salesians.

Starting in 1874, the novitiate took on a more regular form. Already the previous year, during one of the general conferences of rectors and prefects (vice-rectors and administrators), the need for a regular novitiate house had been emphasised.[[940]](#footnote-941) The *Memorie Biografiche* bear witness to this*:* “Until 1874 ... the special care of the *ascritti* [novices] in the Pious Society was entrusted to Fr Rua, and on 7 November 1874, Fr Giulio Barberis was elected Director of Novices”;[[941]](#footnote-942) this circumstance is also confirmed by some handwritten notes by Fr Barberis himself:

On Saturday, 7 November 1874, I began to take up my position as director of novices. Since there was no regular novitiate before, it can be said that the regular novitiate for our humble congregation of St Francis de Sales began on this day.

There were actually 105 novices in the various houses, but primarily 19 clerics studying philosophy, who began to receive special care.

There were another 13 cleric novices doing higher courses at the Oratory and 18 coadjutors. The rest were in other colleges.[[942]](#footnote-943)

After 1874, new foundations in Italy grew at an average rate of two per year. In December, Don Bosco travelled to Nice, France, at the invitation of Bishop Pietro Sola and the local St Vincent de Paul Society, to lay the foundations for the first French foundation, which began less than a year later.[[943]](#footnote-944) After France, two other European countries, Spain (in 1881) and England (in 1887), welcomed the new congregation during the founder’s lifetime.[[944]](#footnote-945)

In November 1875, the first missionary expedition left for Latin America; two years later, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians also began their missionary adventure. There were eleven Salesian expeditions before 1888, all headed for South America.

The first expedition to Patagonia, prompted by the Argentine consul in Savona, Giovanni Battista Gazzolo,[[945]](#footnote-946) was led by the then 37-year-old Fr Giovanni Cagliero, who had been part of the “constituent assembly” of 1859 and who, nine years after his departure for America, on 7 December 1884, would receive episcopal ordination in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, becoming titular of the Apostolic Vicariate of Patagonia.

Starting in 1877, the *annuario pontificio* mentions an “American province”.[[946]](#footnote-947) However, it was not until 1879 that a real division into four provinces or *ispettorie* began: Piedmont, Liguria (including Nice), Rome and America.

As early as 1876, as Fr Barberis attests, a novitiate was opened in Buenos Aires, followed in 1879 by one in Las Piedras, Uruguay, then in Marseille and Sarrià (Barcelona) in 1883, and in Foglizzo, Italy, in 1886. In the meantime, the novitiate in Valdocco had moved in 1879 from the mother house in Turin to a house more suitable for the purpose, San Benigno, which remained, after the opening of Foglizzo, as a novitiate house for lay coadjutors.[[947]](#footnote-948) The last novitiate opened during Don Bosco’s lifetime, was the one at Valsalice in 1887.

The first General Chapters, which were initially held every three years starting in 1877, in accordance with the constitutions, played a key role in organising and consolidating the fledgling foundation. The tasks and areas of competence of these Chapters were as indicated by the constitutions:

3. Capitulum Generale ordinarie habebitur singulis trienniis ad pertractandas res majoris momenti, quae ad Societatem spectant, et ad eas sollicitudines adhibendas, quae tum Societatis necessitates, tum tempora et loca requirent.

4. Capitulum ut supra convocatum poterit etiam, si vera necessitas exige, eos articulos proponere Constitutionibus addendos vel immutandos quos magis opportunos judicabit, ita tamen ut semper et omnino respondeant sensui et rationi quibus ipsae Constitutiones probatae sunt. Hujusmodi autem, articuli, postquarn absoluta suffragiorum pluralitate accepti fuerint, numquam habebunt vim obligandi, nisi prius Sanctae Sedis approbationem obtinuerint.

5. Acta omnia Capitulorum Generalium, ad Sacram Episcoporum et Regularium Congregationem mittenda erunt pro approbatione.[[948]](#footnote-949)

The final act of official recognition of the congregation and its equal status with other older religious institutes was completed in 1884. Pope Leo XIII granted the Salesians the same privileges and canonical facilities that had been recognised for congregations of pontifical right such as the Redemptorists and Lanteri’s Oblates of Mary Immaculate and, in particular, the faculty for the superior to issue *dimissorial letters* without any reservation; Archbishop Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin, had died on 25 March of the previous year, and was succeeded by the more benevolent Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda, a deep admirer of the Salesian work.[[949]](#footnote-950)

In the autumn of that same year, at the express request of the Pope, given his declining health, Don Bosco secretly appointed Fr Michael Rua,[[950]](#footnote-951) who had just turned 47, as his vicar general and successor. This would only be made public at the end of the following year.[[951]](#footnote-952)

The last Italian edition of the Salesian Constitutions was published in 1885, during Don Bosco’s lifetime, and it was also the last edition of the Constitutions of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whose superior general had become Mother Caterina Daghero after the death of the co-foundress, Mary Domenica Mazzarello, in 1881.

In 1886, Don Bosco opened the last of the four General Chapters he presided over. The following year, on 14 May 1887, the church dedicated to the Sacred Heart was consecrated in Rome. This was practically Don Bosco’s last trip outside Turin.

Surrounded by his Salesians, Don Bosco he received the anointing of the sick on 24 December 1887, at the hands of Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, who had returned from America upon hearing of his beloved father’s illness.

On 31 January 1888, at quarter to five in the morning, Don Bosco died at the age of seventy-two. A few days before his death, he had declared with confidence in his followers: “The congregation has nothing to fear: it has formed men.”[[952]](#footnote-953)

### 2. The first canonical novitiate and teachings on mental prayer

The brief, essential information on the history of the Salesian congregation which I have tried to present in the previous section, was intended, once again, to enable me to better frame some contributions more specifically relevant to the issue at hand and thus highlight their “authority” in relation to the hermeneutics of the founding charism.

The aim of this section, in particular, is to attempt to reconstruct the spiritual environment of the first novitiate in relation to the teachings and practice of mental prayer. To do this, it is essential to examine the figure of the first director of novices and try to understand, in particular, his relationship with the founder. This investigation is all the more important when we consider that Fr Barberis held this position for twenty-five years, contributing to the formation of many subsequent “generations” through his writings and, in particular, through *Il vade mecum dei giovani salesiani* (The Handbook for Young Salesians), which was republished even after the second half of the twentieth century.[[953]](#footnote-954)

The importance given to this handbook in Salesian tradition is the first and most immediate testimony to the credit that Fr Barberis earned as a faithful interpreter of the founder’s charism. At the end of the preface to the first edition in 1901, Blessed Michael Rua, then Rector Major of the Salesian congregation and faithful interpreter of the founder’s spirit, wrote:

NB. - All the *ascritti* [novices] should have a copy of this handbook: during their novitiate year they should read it carefully and reverently several times, and practise it with absolute precision. It should also serve them in the following years; because what is expressed here is not exclusive to the novitiate year, but should also serve for the various years of *formation*, that is, for as long as one remains in the novitiate and studentate, and generally for the time of the triennial vows, which are considered a third test.[[954]](#footnote-955)

Some biographical details can help us to better understand his relationship with the founder of the Salesians.[[955]](#footnote-956)

#### 2.1 Biographical notes on Fr Giulio Barberis, director of novices

Fr Giulio Barberis was born on 7 June 1847 in Mathi Torinese, the youngest of eight children of Vincenzo Barberis and Teresa Tesio.

On a day in March 1861, he arrived at the oratory in Valdocco; he continued to cherish memories of that happy day and the welcome he received from Don Bosco, for the rest of his life.[[956]](#footnote-957) Dominic Savio had died four years earlier. His biography had been published in 1859. In 1861, a biographical sketch of young Michael Magone was published. Francis Besucco was a companion and admirer of Barberis.[[957]](#footnote-958) These are important years, the true “cradle” of the founding experience.

In 1864, as he himself recalls, he received his clerical habit “in Don Bosco’s room”.[[958]](#footnote-959)

Under his guidance, as well as Fr Rua’s and Fr Cagliero’s, he completed his novitiate at the end of 1865, taking his triennial vows. The first perpetual professions of Rua, Cagliero, Ghivarello, Bonetti, Berto, Francesia and a dozen other Salesians were celebrated in those same days, following the *Decretum Laudis* of 1864, which marked the first approval of the fledgling congregation.

On 16 September 1869, at the end of his retreat at Trofarello, he made his perpetual profession at the age of twenty-two. That same year, Don Bosco entrusted him with the direction of the Valdocco oratory, calling him, while still a cleric, to participate in a sort of General Chapter which was held on 10 December of that year.[[959]](#footnote-960)

The following year, on 17 December 1870, he was ordained a priest; three years later, he obtained a degree in theology from the University of Turin[[960]](#footnote-961); but in the meantime, he attended moral conferences at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin. On an autographed sheet, where Fr Barberis himself jotted down some autobiographical details, preserved in the Salesian Central Archives, we read: “In November 1870, I began attending lectures on Moral Theology at St Francis of Assisi,[[961]](#footnote-962) then at the Consolata, and I attended them intermittently for three years.”[[962]](#footnote-963) There he would learn about and appreciate the teachings of Saint Alphonsus.[[963]](#footnote-964) “As soon as he was ordained a priest,” his biographer writes, “Blessed Don Bosco, who had complete trust in Fr Giulio Barberis, wanted him to practise preaching and hearing confessions.”[[964]](#footnote-965) As we recalled, it was precisely during those years that the Saint expressed his admiration for the “educational model” of the Convitto in Turin, writing in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*: “Here one learned to be a priest”.[[965]](#footnote-966)

Since 1874, as already mentioned, he was director of novices at Valdocco; from that year onwards and practically for the rest of his life, he held positions of responsibility within the congregation: director of novices, rector of the studentate, spiritual director of the congregation.

During this initial period in his role as formator, he was greatly comforted by the closeness of Don Bosco himself. “The good Father himself,” he wrote in *Il vade mecum dei giovani salesiani*, “pointed out to the Director of Novices those improvements he believed most appropriate to introduce in order to have a novitiate in accordance with his spirit.”[[966]](#footnote-967)

Between 1875 and 1879, he wrote a *cronichetta,* a series of short articles which are among the most valuable and immediate sources of information about life at the oratory during those years.[[967]](#footnote-968)

In one of these notebooks, on 16 March 1876, he wrote, referring to the novices: “It seems that Don Bosco would have no difficulty in sending them outside Turin...; but as for the management, how can they be far from Don Bosco? Poor me! miserable me! I begin to tremble just thinking about it; for I would be the one who would find myself in the trap.”[[968]](#footnote-969)

In 1877, he collaborated with Don Bosco in drafting the second edition of the introduction to the constitutions, *Ai Soci Salesiani[[969]](#footnote-970) (To Salesian Confreres).* Two years later, the novitiate was effectively moved to the new foundation in San Benigno Canavese, where Fr Barberis became rector, a position he held until 1887. He then became rector in Valsalice, where the philosophy studentate had also been established, until 1891.

The choice of a specific house represented a further step towards the desired regularisation of the novitiate,[[970]](#footnote-971) which, according to Fr Barberis, had also been requested by Pope Leo XIII during an audience granted to Don Bosco on 16 March 1878.[[971]](#footnote-972)

From 1892 to 1900, he was called to the Superior Council with the title of Director of Novices; he was then Provincial for nine years and finally Spiritual Director of the congregation, a position he had already held on a temporary basis, and which he then held permanently from 1922 until his death in 1927; Fr Philip Rinaldi was then Rector Major of the congregation.[[972]](#footnote-973)

His fervent ministry in the congregation included numerous spiritual retreats, whose conferences he often transcribed in neat, regular handwriting, some fifteen publications on history, asceticism and sacred pedagogy, and numerous trips that took him not only to many Italian cities, but also to France, England, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Spain, Portugal and the Middle East. Judging by the reports and letters that have been preserved, his duties were of a spiritual nature and also involved ‘inspection’ in relation to the formation courses.[[973]](#footnote-974)

Fr Barberis died at the age of eighty on 25 January 1927. In his eulogy, his nephew and biographer, Fr Alessio Barberis, wrote:

...I do not believe that my affection for the dear departed prevents me from seeing the truth when I say that he faithfully fulfilled his task as a formator of Salesian consciences according to the spirit of the Father, *sufficit ei ut sit sicut magister eius!*

This is demonstrated by the fact that he was chosen by Don Bosco for this delicate task, that he began his work under his watchful eye and with his approval...

I have spoken to and questioned a large number of authoritative Salesians from all parts of the world and have gathered unanimous and favourable statements on this point, on what is essential in this regard.

I can draw on my own personal experience, since I live in an institute that attracts theology students from all over the Salesian world[[974]](#footnote-975) ... I have had the opportunity to experience that the spirit of the new Salesian generations is that of Don Bosco, instilled by our Fr Giulio in those who in turn became formators of consciences wherever the name of the Founder was known and loved.

The asceticism taught by Fr Giulio was therefore that of the Founder.[[975]](#footnote-976)

Again Fr Alessio Barberis, concluding his introduction to his uncle’s biography, writes:

I have not held back in my comments on the things narrated; but I have dared to hope that they will present themselves spontaneously to the reader. However, I would suggest one of a general nature, which is to read these biographical notes placing Fr Giulio Barberis in the light of Blessed Don Bosco, whom he loved like a son and who loved him like a father. Oh! how well Fr Barberis understands D. Bosco! This is what the Blessed said one day while talking to Rev. Fr Luigi Nai. Truly Fr Barberis had no other ideals and sorrows, no other anxieties and joys, than those of Blessed D. Bosco. While writing these pages, I sometimes felt as if I were writing a chapter of the Blessed’s life, a chapter that I would have entitled: ‑ How the Blessed formed the first disciples sent to him by Providence in his own image. I will return to this observation at the end of these Notes as their fitting conclusion, and I conclude the presentation of this modest work with it.[[976]](#footnote-977)

The *Biographical Memoirs* also give us a similar assessment. “Of this simple, upright, deeply pious priest, Don Bosco once said,” Fr Ceria writes, “Father Barberis understands me.”[[977]](#footnote-978)

Less than two years after his death, Salesian Fr Stefano Trione, who had worked with him during the last period of his life, wrote to Fr Philip Rinaldi, Rector Major:

I believe that it is divine inspiration to promote the Ordinary’s process of gathering information on the reputation for holiness, virtues and graces of the Servant of God Fr Giulio Barberis... and to proceed *quam citius, ne pereant probationes.*

The reputation for holiness of Fr Giulio Barberis is not sensational, but real and deeply felt by the many who knew him and throughout our Salesian Society.

With regard to his heroic virtues, which were constant and never wavered throughout his life, it can truly be said that *bene omnia fecit*, and we can apply to him what Pope Benedict XIV, the canonist par excellence of the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation, used to require of a religious, namely, the exact and constant observance of the duties of his Congregation or Order.[[978]](#footnote-979)

However, there is no trace in the archives of the congregation of the actual start of the canonical process invoked by Fr Trione, who states in the same letter that “it would be urgent to search for the clothes of the Servant of God and preserve them as indirect relics.”

#### 2.2 Fr Barberis’ personality and the identity of the first novitiate

An objective assessment of Fr Barberis’ personality could emerge from reading his numerous published and unpublished writings, as well as from a more accurate reconstruction of his historical and personal life; this clearly goes beyond the scope of this work.

Fr Francis Desramaut describes Fr Barberis’ personality and actions as follows:

Courtois, aimable et tolérant, les éclats de la libre jeunesse ne lui posaient pas de grands problèmes. A la bonté, qui constituait le fond de son caractère, il joignait un grand esprit de piété, de travail et de mortification. Ce courageux n'arrêtait d'oeuvrer qu'au bord de l'épuisement, surtout quand ils'agissait du maître de son âme. Barberis mettait toutes ses ressources au service de don Bosco. Au reste, l'amour qu'il lui vouait décuplait ses énergies. Et son admiration pour lui transfigurera son enseignement aux futurs religieux. Inlassablement, il racontera don Bosco, il décrira don Bosco, il reconstituera la vie de don Bosco devant ses auditeurs. Avec lui, le fondateur des salésiens disposa d'un relais idéal pour la formacion de ses recrues. Quitte, à les transformer ingénument, don Barberis ne pensait qu'à transmettre avec fidélité sa pensée, et ses exemples à la congrégation naissante. Il allait être ainsi, sous le regard attentiif de don Bosco, le formateur de la deuxième génération de la nouvelle société religieuse.[[979]](#footnote-980)

This total dedication to Don Bosco and this commitment to fidelity to tradition and to the teachings received seem to me to be undoubtedly the most evident constant in the ministry exercised by Fr Barberis in the Salesian congregation.

Fr Barberis himself must have been aware of this particular affinity when, during the process for the beatification of the founder, he declared:

I believe I was one of those whom Don Bosco loved most dearly; even before I was a cleric, he would send me to his room to write letters or copy something. When I became a cleric, he entrusted me with the care of the library, which was next to his room, and he would come there when he was very tired to walk a little with me. When I was assigned to teaching, he himself suggested how to teach; he corrected my notebooks and drafts, then made me director of the novices, and often took me with him on his travels, even confiding in me about his supernatural gifts.[[980]](#footnote-981)

I find Fr Francis Desramaut’s harsh judgement less well-founded and acceptable when he describes him as “completely lacking in critical spirit”;[[981]](#footnote-982) to understand this, it is sufficient to read a passage from a note written at the request of Fr Ceria on 18 May 1932 by Fr Angelo Maria Rocca, who had taken part with Fr Barberis in the second General Chapter in 1880:

He always wanted to talk,” Fr Rocca writes, referring to Fr Barberis. “His view alone had to triumph He found fault with what others proposed, almost continuously interrupting those who were speaking, including Don Bosco himself! In the end, somewhat annoyed by this behaviour, he addressed Fr Barberis in good Piedmontese with a few words that made us laugh ...[[982]](#footnote-983)

At the time of that Chapter, Fr Barberis was thirty-three years old, while Don Bosco was already sixty-five; an attitude of deferential submission could be considered entirely natural, given the age difference and Don Bosco’s strong personality, without necessarily implying a lack of critical ability. On the contrary, the young novice director had arrived from San Benigno with a long written proposal, written in decisive tones, which testified to his proactive ability and courageous and convincing argumentation, as well as a clear awareness of the importance of his role as a formator; all this without losing his spirit of faithful obedience.

These are four large sheets, copied in small, elegant, neat handwriting.[[983]](#footnote-984) The requests made by Fr Barberis and his council are mainly fourfold: a more careful selection of formation personnel, a more regular presence of the Superior Chapter (or even its transfer to the novitiate house), the appointment of a kind of Provincial “solely responsible for recognising whether the rules are being accurately followed in the various houses of the Congregation” and finally, greater attention to the physical health of the confreres, which can bring many benefits to the congregation, and to the economy of time.

Let us quickly review some passages that can help us understand how, gradually, the identity of the novitiate developed and awareness of its centrality grew:

... we believe that the unique nature of this novitiate house requires it to stand out among the others, not as a source of authority, but as a model and perfect example of Salesian communities...

From what has been said, it is clear that in order to achieve this goal, it is necessary above all to provide this house with superiors who combine holiness of life and the most exquisite charity with wisdom of counsel and the most sensible experience in the arduous office of Christian education...; it is precisely this balance of rigour and gentleness that constitutes the very special character of our Congregation...

Where else can the guiding principle of human beings reside if not in the mind and heart? Applying this analogy to our Congregation, where else would its mind and heart be but in the novitiate, where the minds and hearts of those who will one day form the core of our Society are educated and developed? Furthermore, parents in a well-ordered family, when they still have children to educate, establish their residence among them, rather than in the homes of the most experienced... It is therefore easy to understand how convenient it would be for the Superior Chapter to move its paternal headquarters to the centre, to the heart of the Salesian family, where it is most necessary to keep the spirit of the Congregation alive and intact...[[984]](#footnote-985)

Fr Barberis’ chronicles tell us about the conversations that took place in Valdocco between himself and Don Bosco before the novitiate was transferred to San Benigno, regarding its management.

Fr Barberis noted on 11 May 1878:

Having been able to spend a lot of time with Don Bosco over the last few days, we talked especially about the Novitiate. Don Bosco believes that the villa S. Anna near Caselle, left to us by Baron Bianco, should serve as a holiday residence for the *Ascritti*. He told me to visit it and arrange for this plan to be carried out. It also seems to be his wish, as it has long been his desire, to build a separate house for the novitiate, and that this villa be used for this purpose. We would specifically spend some time on holidays there to see if it is worth continuing.

Another aspect of the novitiate, which indicates a step forward for our Congregation, is that I agreed with Don Bosco that, since our *Ascritti* study with us all year round, it would be good if, at least during the last few months in preparation for their vows, they led an ascetic life, as is done throughout the year in other religious orders. Not exactly doing everything this year, but starting the three months of vacation, which are the most dangerous for the vocation, and making them the most fruitful.[[985]](#footnote-986)

Has Don Bosco’s idea of the novitiate changed, as Fr Desramaut seems to suggest,[[986]](#footnote-987) or is this once again the gradual manifestation of a project that the founder had already intuited some time ago and was able to patiently develop?

We can only speculate; it seems more plausible to me that Don Bosco wisely assessed the youthful energies of his collaborators, but never imagined an “alternative” model of religious life, where the ascetic dimension was opposed to the apostolic dimension.

All of Fr Barberis’ teachings, which unfortunately I do not have the opportunity to explore in depth here, as well as the living experience of the founder, seem to indicate and bear witness to the fruitfulness of this synthesis.

#### 2.3 Mental prayer in Fr Giulio Barberis’ first conferences to the novices

Fr Barberis’ 1901 *Vade mecum* dedicates two of the sixteen chapters of the second volume to meditation, the eleventh and twelfth, entitled *On Meditation* and *The Practical Way of Meditating*; another chapter is entitled *On Prayer* and contains several insights on the importance of *praying continually*, of living constantly in the *presence of God.* Another chapter is devoted to *examination of conscience,* another to *spiritual exercises* and one to the *exercise for a happy death.* The subject of prayer and mental prayer is therefore extensively developed.

In this study, however, I will not limit myself to examining the content of these pages, whose date of publication would distance us from the actual period of consolidation of the foundation, but rather the content of some older unpublished manuscripts which date back to the years when the novitiate, newly established from a canonical point of view, was still located in Valdocco, under the watchful eye of the founder.[[987]](#footnote-988) In fact, the Central Archives contain the autograph notebooks in which Fr Barberis transcribed, in an orderly and extensive manner, the text of many conferences given to novices starting in 1875.

These documents are very important for establishing the content that was actually passed on to those generations of young Salesians.

The first notebook preserved is therefore the one relating to the year 1875-76; on the first page, the title *Conferences* is clearly written with the subtitle *Held for the members of the Salesian Congregation – year 1875-76.* Then comes the first date, which is *15 November.*

The front page contains a warm exhortation and best wishes for the new year, which began just over a week before. “What could there be,” he asks himself at the beginning of the next chapter, “that could serve to inspire us greatly, to make us courageous, to maintain goodness... Two things in particular. Fervent communions made frequently and properly-made meditation.”[[988]](#footnote-989)

The first conference, which occupies nine dense pages of the notebook, is dedicated precisely to *Meditation and how to make it.* Given its importance, I will reproduce here some passages from the first part, which focus on the importance of meditation, and the second part in its entirety, which deals with *how to make it well.*[[989]](#footnote-990)

The first pages, therefore, are dedicated to a lengthy exhortation on the *necessity of making meditation.*

*Desolatione desolata est –* Fr Barberis begins – *terra quia nemo est qui recogitet corde,* the earth is desolate because no one meditates in their heart. The Prophet Jeremiah, seeing so much evil on earth in his time, seeing that there was almost no concept of justice or honesty left, sought the reasons for this and could find no other cause than this: that people no longer meditated. If the earth is desolate with great desolation, it is for this reason: that no one meditates with a true heart.

Isn't our soul in the same circumstances? Why is it desolate, why does it have no virtues, why does it have so many imperfections? *Nemo est qui recogitet corde*. So how do we get back to being fervent? David tells us in his psalms: *In meditatio mea exardescet ignis,* meditation rekindles fervour like a fiery plain. But does meditation really have this virtue? So that it is so useful? So necessary? Oh yes, it is so, it really is so. The Lord reassures us more and more about David in the psalm: *“Beatus vir qui in lege Domini meditatur in die ac nocte...”[[990]](#footnote-991)*

“To understand the things of God,” the novice director emphasises later, “to penetrate their core, to show ourselves filled with the Holy Spirit, mental prayer is absolutely necessary.”[[991]](#footnote-992)

But what is most important for us religious – he continues later – who strive for perfection in our profession, is that without meditation, one cannot even understand what perfection is, speaking in practical terms; on the other hand, it cannot be otherwise than that someone who meditates well and is not tempted to do otherwise will not strive earnestly for perfection. Oh, if only I could entice you a little today; if only I could make you understand the usefulness that can be gained from it, if only I could teach you really well how to do it; then I would leave this conference feeling happy and comforted, and I could say: Oh Lord, I have set many on the right path, I have given many others the key to perseverance; I have rekindled the fire of fervour in those who had lost it. May the Lord make it so.[[992]](#footnote-993)

Meditation, therefore, is proposed as *necessary* not only for novices, but for all those who strive for a life of perfection.

At this point, the second part of this conference on meditation begins, dedicated, as I said, to *how to make it.*

The method taught by Fr Barberis is essentially that of Ignatius, with some references to Saint Alphonsus and Saint Francis de Sales, as stated by the author himself.[[993]](#footnote-994)

To analyse it, we will first compare Barberis’ manuscript text[[994]](#footnote-995) with a very general outline of the *Ignatian meditation* taken from Giacomo Lercaro’s text, *Metodi di orazione mentale[[995]](#footnote-996)* (Methods of Mental Prayer). Although this comparison has no historical value, it may make the subject easier to read by organising it. I have also attempted to reconstruct possible references to the text of St Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*.

Later on, I will also include a contemporary text on the same subject.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***LERCARO OUTLINE*** | **BARBERIS MANUSCRIPT** |
| ***A. PREPARATION:***  *1.* ***PROXIMATE***  *1.1. Prepare the ‘points’ the evening before and decide on the grace to ask for in the Prelude.*  *1.2 Think about them briefly before falling asleep, fixing the time to wake.*  *1.3 Think back as soon as you wake up.*  ***2. IMMEDIATE****:*  *2.1 Go to the place where you are to meditate, pause for a moment and place yourself in God’s presence; make an act of adoration, if possible also outwardly.*  *2.2 PREPARATORY PRAYER.*  *2.3 – PRELUDES.*  *2.3.1 HISTORICAL PRELUDE: briefly recall the fact on which one is meditating. (Omit when meditating on theoretical truths).*  *2.3.2 IMAGINATIVE PRELUDE OR COMPOSITION OF PLACE: imagine the place where the event takes place; if possible, use other forms of imagination when the Meditation is not about an event.*  *2.3.3 PRELUDE OF PETITION: asking for the grace that is the fruit of Meditation.*  *B.****BODY OF THE MEDIT.***  *For each point:*  *1.* ***AN EXERCISE OF MEMORY***  *Recall the parts of the subject to be meditated upon and almost run them through your mind’s eye.*  *2.* ***EXERCISE OF THE INTELLECT***  *Reflections: Making the subject of meditation your own by exploring it in depth. Applications: Practical conclusions are drawn for one’s conduct and the means to be used are planned.*  *3.* ***EXERCISE OF THE WILL***  *Affection: These are the pious feelings (adoration, praise, love, repentance) aroused in us by reflection. - Throughout the Meditation, especially at the end, make resolutions: practical, specific, related to the present, and humble.*  EXTERNAL NOTE: Regarding conversations, Lercaro’s outline states further on: ‘“..conversation can be interspersed with meditation...”  ***C. CONCLUSION***  *COLLOQUIO Conversation with God (or Our Lord or the Virgin Mary), in which graces are asked for and personal matters are communicated; it can be inserted into the Meditation; it must not be omitted at the end.*  *VOCAL PRAYER Short (Our Father, Hail Mary, Anima Christi, ).*  ***D. AFTER THE MEDITATION***  *EXAMEN on how the Meditation was conducted.*  *TAKE NOTE of the illustrations and emotions felt.* | Meditation consists of three parts: 1) preparation, 2) meditation proper, or the points of meditation, and 3) conclusion.  **Preparation.** One remote, the other proximate..  **Remote preparation** a) Remote preparation is that which is done before arriving at the place and time of meditation. St Ignatius prescribes that each person should set the points of meditation the evening before. And it would be good for us to think for a moment before going to sleep about the point of the meditation we will do tomorrow. Even without reading them the evening before, we can deduce the subject for tomorrow from the order of the material. In the morning, do not digress at all; do not chat or laugh; do not be careless; but when you get up, wash, come to the place of meditation, pray or think good thoughts.[[996]](#footnote-997)  **Proximate preparation.** b) The proximate preparation consists of three acts.  1st Place yourself in the presence of God. When we are in church before the Blessed Sacrament, we do not have to imagine something abstract when God is truly present in his Blessed Sacrament. If we are not in church, we will imagine ourselves, or rather, we will try to remember that we are standing before God, who will judge us. And here it will be fitting to make an act of faith in his presence, adoring his divine Majesty, repenting for having offended him so many times and thus rendering ourselves unworthy of his graces and even unworthy of being in his presence.[[997]](#footnote-998)  2nd Take up the position of mystery, that is, set ourselves the mystery we need to meditate on, briefly, with a general overview;[[998]](#footnote-999) and this must be kept clearly in mind; imagine seeing with our own eyes, right before us, those people or those actions we are meditating on; for example, if we are meditating on hell, imagine seeing it as a great fiery furnace, and ourselves standing on the edge, about to fall into it; if we focus on a particular point of the Passion, imagine seeing Jesus suffering on one side and the Jews on the other, etc. This way, distractions are much less frequent.[[999]](#footnote-1000)  The third thing to do in preparation is to commend ourselves to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to the saints, asking them to help us meditate well. All these things can be done quickly with practice, in 3 minutes.[[1000]](#footnote-1001)  **The points or body of the meditation**  Once the preparation is complete, we must move on to the body of meditation, that is, to reflect on or ponder some mystery of our Holy Religion or some point in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In practice, after completing both the remote and immediate preparation, we read a passage from the book and then pause for a while to meditate on it. This is the most difficult part of meditation, because it is not easy to keep your mind focused at that moment, and you don’t know how to make good use of those moments of time. This is what I want to explain to you today more than anything else. Ascetic writers say that there are various acts to perform, namely, applying one's intellect, memory, will, and prayer to the point that has been read.[[1001]](#footnote-1002)  1. *Intellect and memory* thinking about the mystery itself, and repeating it in our minds, almost reciting among ourselves the point we have heard while reading, then expanding on it by noting the circumstances. That is, to thoroughly examine the subject concerning the intellect and memory, one must imagine oneself present at the mystery and consider the people, actions, and words that intervene or are spoken while pondering that mystery.[[1002]](#footnote-1003) 1. People, e.g. Jesus, God of infinite majesty, so great, so powerful, yet suffering; the Jews and executioners, vile, abject people, who nevertheless dare to mistreat the giver of all good, thus allowing God to punish my sins; 2. Actions, e.g. in Jesus receiving the scourging, giving himself up humbly, without counting himself or complaining; nor the Jews who beat him mercilessly, e.g. in Jesus climbing Calvary, all bent over, bloodied, bent under the weight of the cross; in the Jews who look at him with contempt, mock him, threaten him, in the pious women who weep and come to embrace him, to wipe his sweat, the words e.g. to these pious women, the Divine Saviour, full of love, says: *filae jerusalem, nolite flere super me*... ponder each word. Applying intellect and memory in this way will prevent distractions.  2. Will, that is, bending one’s will to good intentions. Ascetic writers say that we should not change our resolutions every day, for those who want too much achieve nothing; we should set ourselves the goal we want to achieve through meditation beforehand and focus our resolve on that point. Unfortunately, everyone has flaws, especially one dominant flaw; then they realise that they lack a virtue that is necessary for their state. Or this person must endeavour in every meditation to bend his will to this, considering, for example, that J. Chr. suffers so much for me, I want to amend myself absolutely from this or that vice which was the cause of Jesus’ sufferings.  With all these warnings, however, to apply one’s intellect, memory and will to the mystery being meditated upon, it is sometimes fitting that one should find oneself dry and without thoughts; then one should not remain there doing nothing, but should pray, indeed, even when one has much to meditate upon, one should pray fervently for a few moments, with affection and sighs, and if even these are lacking, then we will resort to the rule (which Fr Bruno gave us so aptly in Lanzo:[[1003]](#footnote-1004) do as he did) of the person, when he could not keep his mind well collected or meditate, who stood there in all humility, imagining himself in the presence of the Lord and saying: Lord, what alms *Giuvanin à le si*. Thus, the Lord will not let us leave our meditation empty-handed. And this is a point on which St Alphonsus insists so much that we should pray fervently in meditation, with affection and sighs; and as St Ignatius says, colloquies, for he says, what good does it do me to have pondered hell well, for example, and promised not to go there, and therefore not to do those bad works anymore, if I do not at the same time ask the Lord insistently for the grace to remain constant in keeping away from those things?*[[1004]](#footnote-1005)* We can sow and build, but the seed will rot before it sprouts or will not bear fruit if J. C. does not give it growth.  Thus, the intellect, memory, will and affections or prayers are applied by pondering the first point; meanwhile, the reader will read the second point and the same operations will be repeated, and so on after the third point, and so forth. But to achieve this application, special efforts are required, especially for those who are new to the art of meditation. You have heard many times about St Aloysius's recollection, how he was always free from distractions; indeed, when asked how much time he had spent in prayer and meditation during six months, he confessed candidly that, at most, if he added up all the distractions he had had during those six months, they would have taken the time it takes to recite the Hail Mary.[[1005]](#footnote-1006) Some say: Oh, if only I could be like that, oh, what a consolation! We must understand that St Aloysius made many, many efforts as a young man to reach this point. He set himself the goal of meditating for an entire hour without thinking about anything else; if he got distracted during that time, he would start over, and sometimes it would take him most of the night before he succeeded. But in this way he won.  **Conclusion**  The third part of the meditation and the conclusion. It consists of three acts 1. Let us make some good resolutions and seek ways to put them into practice, or as **St Francis de Sales** says, let us make a spiritual bouquet. Our saint insists greatly on this as the most important part of meditation. This spiritual bouquet consists in searching our hearts for our main fault and resolving absolutely to overcome it; then we must consider which virtues we lack most, which we need most for our state, and we must strive to adorn our hearts with them... as I said above.  2. Thank the Lord of lights who communicated this to us in that meditation.  3. Let us examine ourselves for a moment to see if we have done everything possible to do this meditation well. If not, let us ask God for forgiveness and promise to be more diligent in the future.  By doing this, I hope that we too can obtain from meditation the fruits that Luigi da Ponte, Granata, St Bernard, St Aloysius, etc., did, who after meditation felt themselves all inflamed with love for the Lord; they no longer felt any pleasure in earthly things, they showed themselves ready to do anything, even the most difficult, even to suffer martyrdom, for the love of the Lord, or rather than to offend him even in the smallest things. |

Let us consider the same subject in the presentation made by one of Don Bosco’s contemporaries, Fr Secondo Franco (1817-1893), a Jesuit. As we shall see, he was very knowledgeable about Salesian work and was called several times by Don Bosco to preach in the Church of Mary Help of Christians[[1006]](#footnote-1007) and then invited by him to attend the first General Chapter of the congregation. So there is no doubt that Fr Barberis himself had been in contact with him.

The conference from which the passage quoted here is taken is taken from a volume of *Istruzioni per le Religiose* (Instructions for Religious Women) published in the *Opere complete* series at the end of his life, a series, starting in 1882, bringing together his life’s fruitful spiritual production.

In the fifth paragraph of the second instruction, entitled *Meditation,* we read:

Let us now briefly indicate how we can restart the meditation that is so necessary for so many reasons. It has three parts, which can be explained very simply. It consists of an introduction, the meditation itself, and a conclusion. The first consists in placing oneself in the presence of God: this is not difficult, since it is a truth of faith that God is everywhere in essence, presence and power. Then one must recognise him with an act of adoration and immediately ask him for the grace to be able to use the powers of the soul and the forces of the body in the present meditation. These acts can be done very briefly, but they should be done with some seriousness. Once this has been done, we come to meditation: in which one thinks about the subject one wishes to meditate on: this will always be a truth of faith, that is, the last things, or the gravity of sins, or the attributes of God, but more frequently some mystery of the life, passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Once that subject is chosen, the three powers of the soul, memory, intellect and will, are put into action. Memory recalls the mystery and presents it to the mind with all its circumstances: the intellect begins to reflect on it, investigating it in all its parts, asking itself who is in that that mystery, to what end, in what way, what it is really doing, what conclusions can be drawn from that fact or statement, what virtues and practical conduct can be deduced from it, and so on. Behind all these considerations finally comes the will, which must burst forth in feelings proportionate to what has been meditated upon, and in generous resolutions of what must then be practised in the future. And this is the most important part of meditation.[[1007]](#footnote-1008)

We find in Fr Franco’s tripartite scheme and summary the characteristic elements of Ignatian meditation that we have already recognised in what Fr Giulio Barberis taught.

Fr Barberis’ teaching on meditation did not undergo any substantial changes in the following years; his notes contain numerous references to the importance and *necessity* of meditation.

In 1876, in the conference notebook, on *Monday, 30 October*  he noted: “The way to make a Holy Meditation was explained”.[[1008]](#footnote-1009) A few days later, on 9 November, speaking about practices of piety, immediately after mentioning Holy Mass he writes: “Then there is meditation. Everyone needs to do that too. Those who cannot do it together for some reason should know that they must do it regardless.”[[1009]](#footnote-1010)

In his notes for his first lecture in 1877, he writes:

After rising, come together to meditate; and do this well. Some may not yet know how to do this, but they will learn as soon as possible; however, the commitment should be evident from the outset and carried out willingly and to the best of one's ability. Let it be known that the rule says that everyone will do half an hour a day. Those who can, come and do it here with the others; those who cannot do it in common find a way to make time to do it privately; but always do it.[[1010]](#footnote-1011)

That same year, on 20 March, he briefly notes:

Another thing I would like to focus on is meditation – Just a few words – Don’t digress first. When placing ourselves in God's presence, we should imagine that God is present (Vigliocco)[[1011]](#footnote-1012) propose to do well, but trust more and much more in the Lord's help. During meditation, if you lose focus on the subject of meditation, do not remain idle, but pray, pray, ask for the grace to do better, then *Giovanin l’è sì[[1012]](#footnote-1013).* At the end, make your resolutions your own. Those who did not do well enough during meditation still have time to make up for most of it...[[1013]](#footnote-1014)

On 8 November 1878, Fr Barberis wrote:

St Aloysius had difficulty in doing meditation. He had a good inspiration and realised that it came from God, and that if he applied himself strongly to it, meditation would save him. He did so, albeit with great effort, since sometimes he had to spend half the night in prayer, wanting to spend a whole hour in meditation without distraction; but finally he succeeded and brought back those graces and that holiness that made him happy for eternity.

Someone else begins to say that meditation is rather difficult and does not apply himself to it: he will not learn, unsupported by this he will decline, will be lucky if he is not lost for eternity.”[[1014]](#footnote-1015)

This reference to Saint ALoysius, which was already contained in the first draft, can also be found in the *Vade mecum* in the paragraph on how to meditate.[[1015]](#footnote-1016)

The notebook from the same year informs us that two weeks later, on 25 November, therefore still at the beginning of the novitiate year, the method of meditation had already been explained.[[1016]](#footnote-1017)

In his early notebooks, written after 1875, Fr Barberis no longer provides a detailed explanation of the *method of meditation*; we can reasonably assume that he referred to his earlier notebooks for this and other topics. Some documents, moreover, lead us to believe that the doctrine he presented in those early years and throughout his ministry as a teacher remained essentially unchanged, although it was sometimes enriched with new examples. In fact:

\* in a notebook written by cleric Ducatto during the conferences given by the master to the novices in 1878 we find instructions on *the practical way to meditate*. The teaching contained therein is essentially the same, although some examples and considerations vary. The subject matter is also enriched by a few other elements that would subsequently be included in the *Vade mecum.* Among the ways to place ourselves in God's presence, we read, for example:[[1017]](#footnote-1018)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| NOTES DUCATTO  ...by bringing us in our thoughts to Calvary and representing to our minds Jesus agonising on the cross, all wounded and bloodless, calling us to himself and telling us to quickly prepare a place for ourselves near him in beautiful paradise, if we think to do well in holy meditation. | VADE MECUM  ...look at the crucifix, and focus on yourself, imagine that you really see Jesus on the cross, as he is in agony from the immense pain he is suffering, and that he turns his gaze towards you, and finds some relief if you meditate with great devotion, while new pains would be added to the many he already suffers if he saw you distracted and cold in your meditation. |

\* Another notebook, also written by cleric Ducatto, records, on *Friday, 1 September 1882,* a conference entitled *Del modo pratico di fare la meditazione* (The practical way of meditating). Once again, we find much of the content of the 1875 conference, enriched with further considerations and examples. Let’s look at some of them:

Let us remember those words: *In meditatione mea exardescet ignis;* the fire of my spirit burns ever brighter as I meditate... It will surely be beneficial for us to lift our spirits to Mount Calvary, where Christ hangs on the cross between two thieves, laden and covered with wounds, crowned with thorns, pierced by a thousand wounds and a thousand stings, covered in blood, so that he no longer looks like a man; and then let us say to ourselves: My soul, your God is hanging on a hard piece of wood; now meditate on why.

Let us conclude this first point of meditation and say together: To meditate well, I will always place myself in God's presence, imagining that he himself, in mortal form, is watching me.

Therefore, in the morning, when meditation is done, no one should go about their business until they have firmly impressed upon their mind some of these truths and have firmly resolved to remember them well during the day that is about to begin and to observe them punctually.

Every lunch time, when we go to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, let us renew our morning resolutions at the foot of the altar, remember the maxims we have learned and the truths we have come to know, and, ever convinced of the great good that Holy Meditation brings us, let us resolve ever more firmly to conduct ourselves better for the rest of the day, to end it in the grace of the Lord, and to carry out all the actions that are our duty. Then in the evening after supper, when we have said our prayers, when we hear these words: *Let us pause for a few moments to consider the state of our conscience,* immediately let us recollect ourselves, think about our morning meditation, recall in our minds the resolutions we made and remember what happened after lunch, and if, upon such examination, we see that we have practised them, let us continue to do so in the future.[[1018]](#footnote-1019)

\* Finally, further confirmation of the substantial continuity of Fr Barberis’ teaching on meditation can be found in the content of chapter XII of the *Vade mecum*, entitled *Meditation the practical way.* The material presented is more extensive than the manuscript we have already seen, but the printed text includes all the contents of the 1875 conference in the same order. To convince ourselves, let us look at the two diagrams below:[[1019]](#footnote-1020)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **BARBERIS (MANUSCRIPT)**  PREPARATION:  REMOTE PREPARATION  PROXIMATE PREPARATION  1st Place ourselves in the presence of God.  2nd Make an act of repentance  3rd Recommend ourselves to God, to the B.V., together with the  angels and saints who help us to  meditate well  THE POINTS OR BODY OF THE MED.  \* The *intellect* and *memory* ponder  the mystery: *people*, *actions*,  *words.*  \* Bend the *will* to make good *resolutions.*  \* Let there be *affection and sighs*  CONCLUSION  1. Let’s make some good resolutions  2. Let us thank the Lord.  3. Let us examine ourselves to see if we have done everything possible to do mediation well. | **BARBERIS (VADE MECUM)**  1) PREPARATION  REMOTE PREPARATION  PROXIMATE PREPARATION  a) Place ourselves in the presence of God  b) Ask forgiveness for our sins  c) Ask for the grace to be able to meditate well  d) Representation of the subject  2) MEDITATION POINTS  a) Exercise of the intellect  b) Representation of the place  c) Application of the senses  d) Exercise of the will  e) Resolutions  f) Affections and colloquies  3 . CONCLUSION  a) Resolution  Let the resolution be practical  b) Thank the Lord  c) Examine oneself and repent |

I will return to the subject of meditation among the Salesians during the years of consolidation of the foundation when I examine the resolutions of the first General Chapter. However, I can say at this point that knowledge of the *Ignatian method* was assured in those years by some of the texts used for meditation, in particular by the long introduction to a text by Jesuit Fr Luis del la Puente, “which should be read a hundred times,” according to the minutes compiled by Fr Barberis himself, “and learned by heart because it is worth its weight in gold.”[[1020]](#footnote-1021)

#### 2.4 Mental prayer and practices of piety in some other of Fr Barberis’ notes

Let us take a final, quick look at some other notes by Fr Barberis, again relating to this early period of his ministry.

In his 1878 *cronichetta*, Fr Barberis reports on a conference given by Don Bosco at the end of that year’s religious professions, which took place on 30 May during the feast of the Ascension.

The order of the service, Fr Barberis informs us, is usually as follows: some spiritual reading from the *Imitation of Christ* is done at the beginning. When Don Bosco arrives, the *Veni Creator* begins, followed by the Litany recited with the other items according to the formula. This is immediately followed by the customary questioning, the professing of vows and the signing of the respective documents by each new confrere. When this is finished D. Bosco gives his conference...[[1021]](#footnote-1022)

According to Don Barberis' account, that year’s lengthy conference, attended by professed members, novices and spirants, took its cue from the liturgical feast of the Ascension to discuss detachment from the world, vows and chastity. Once again, among the *positive means* for preserving the virtue of chastity, *prayer is mentioned in first place.*

With this word – Don Bosco would have said, according to Barberis’ notes – I mean all kinds of prayer, both mental and vocal, ejaculatory prayer, sermons, spiritual readings. Those who pray will surely overcome every temptation, however strong and powerful it may be; those who do not pray are in imminent danger of falling. Prayer must be something very dear to us; it is like a weapon that we must always have ready to defend ourselves in times of danger. I recommend this prayer especially in the evening when you go to rest.[[1022]](#footnote-1023)

The theme of prayer, considered a *positive means* of preserving the virtue of chastity, recurs frequently in Fr Barberis’ notes and note of many other Salesians during those years, especially in the context of a retreat.

In the outline of a meditation prepared in 1882 for the retreat for his confreres, Fr Barberis notes:

Positive means to preserve chastity

Practices of piety and especially weekly confession always with the same established confessor. Follow the confessor’s advice well.

Frequent but fervent communion.

Visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin.

Daily meditation

Especially Frequent and fervent ejaculatory prayers.

Without intending to broaden the scope of the research, but only by way of example, I also include a couple of outlines taken from the handwritten notes of two other Salesians: Fr Giovanni Bonetti, already mentioned in the previous chapter, and Fr Giuseppe Bertello.

The first outline, undated,[[1023]](#footnote-1024) is by Fr Bonetti; the title is *Topics for instruction for exercises for the Salesian fathers.* It looks like this:

1st. Vocation to the religious state

1. its excellence 2. advantages

2nd. Observance of the rules

1. how to observe them 2. when 3. where 4 by whom

3rd. Meditation

1. it is necessary 2. response 3. teach to do it

excuses when and where

4th. Confession

1. confessor 2 confidence 3 dispositions

steady/stable and frequency

5th. chastity

1. excellent 2. indispensable 3. two means for

guarding it

6th. Other means for chastity

1. prayer 2. mortification.[[1024]](#footnote-1025)

A similar outline, again by Fr Bonetti, refers to the retreat preached in the novitiate at San Benigno in 1880. In this case, the sixth instruction is dedicated to the means of preserving chastity, the eleventh and twelfth to meditation and how to practise it.[[1025]](#footnote-1026)

A more interesting and complete outline was provided by Fr Giuseppe Bertello, who was ordained in Trofarello in 1868 and later became Provincial, Councillor and Economer General of the congregation.[[1026]](#footnote-1027) He distinguishes between the topics of the *meditations* and those of the *instructions:*[[1027]](#footnote-1028)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Meditations**  1. End of man and the priest  2. Sin in man and in the priest  3. venial sin  4. Death of the priest  5. Judgement  5. Hell  7. The dignity of the priest  8. Scandal by the priest  9. Time for the priest | **Instructions**  1. What is holiness and the obligation to aspire to it  2. Purity in the priest  3. Means to preserve it  4. Poverty...  5. Humility and means to acquire it  6. Prayer and the office  7. Celebration of mass  8. Sacrament of penance  9° Zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls |

This outline also includes references to ways of preserving chastity and an instruction entirely devoted to prayer.

A notebook belonging to the cleric Ducatto, on the other hand, provides us with a kind of *exegesis* of the constitutional dictum relating to the chapter on *practices of piety*, taken from a conference given by Fr Barberis during the retreat at San Benigno on 31 August 1882.

With regard to the first article referring to *active life*  which makes it impossible to *do many practices of piety in common,* Fr Barberis authoritatively clarifies:

Indeed, the occupations of Salesians in individual houses are extremely varied; some teach, some assist in workshops, some assist in primary classes, secondary classes or high schools, some go out shopping, some work as craftsmen... Furthermore, it follows that not everyone can conform to a single timetable, given that needs are pressing and therefore the rules do not oblige all Salesian members to always take part together in all the practices of piety. For example, meditation is done in the morning when you get up, or at nine o'clock; spiritual reading at two in the afternoon, the exercise for a happy death at the end of each month; now, there will be someone who cannot go to meditation because he may feel ill; nor can he go to the nine o’clock meditation because he has to teach, assist in the workshops, go out on errands, and so on...

Well, that being the case, because we don’t have the time, because we can’t practise this or that form of piety in common, I ask, can we therefore neglect it altogether? No, certainly not; for if we pay attention to the spirit of the rule, it tells us that if we cannot do practices of piety in common we must do so privately, each one on his own as soon as he can, and never neglect them...[[1028]](#footnote-1029)

Explaining the subsequent articles of the constitution, Fr Barberis focuses on individual practices of piety, in particular vocal prayers, which he recommends be done “with true attention of mind and warm affection of heart”, and on meditation.

The third article of Chapter XII then discusses mental prayer, otherwise known as meditation, which should be made for at least half an hour every day. And this *at least* indicates that we can do even more, depending on how we feel, but that we are not required to do more; however, we must all do at least half an hour every day.[[1029]](#footnote-1030)

Referring then to those who are “truly unable” to do so, he reminds us that even they are still obliged to “make up for it with more frequent ejaculations”; strictly speaking, therefore, the rule does not exempt anyone:

Everyone, meaning no one excepted. Why so strict? … Ah! My dear confreres, meditation is something, a practice of piety that I will not only describe as important, useful, or extremely useful, but I am about to say necessary for us religious. Now, it is not my task to discuss this importance, this necessity; but I do see that it cannot be dispensed with, and so I hope to be able to speak to you about it specifically in some of my future instructions. In the meantime, I will speak to you about the necessity that we religious have to do it, about the great benefits it brings us when it is done well, and about how one should conduct oneself in order to do it truly well.[[1030]](#footnote-1031)

The theme of the importance of prayer and meditation recurs in Fr Barberis’ notes relating to the second retreat round in 1876, which took place in the house in Lanzo; the instructions were preached by Fr Gaspare Olmi.[[1031]](#footnote-1032) Fr Barberis notes:

Nothing more necessary for man than meditation...

And first of all J. C. gave us an example. *Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei.* During the day he preached, healed, etc., and during the night he meditated, and note well: everything that Jesus Christ did is for our instruction. He spent forty days in continuous meditation and in silence. The Bethlehem grotto was chosen to study outside the noise of the city. There was no quieter dwelling than the house in Nazareth…. Until the age of thirty, nothing but solitude, obedience, silence, meditation...

The Saints. Oh the saints can be said to do nothing but meditate. All day long, even in their normal occupations, they kept their minds fixed on God, they meditated. St Anthony, when the morning sun appeared, gently complained to it for disturbing the pleasant meditations he had been engaged in all night. St Francis of Assisi would withdraw for weeks without ever speaking to anyone or seeing anyone; he would just meditate. St Ignatius of Loyola, what was it that brought about his conversion, that elevated him to such a life? Meditation! …

You are almost all Salesians or are just joining, and this is where meditation takes place. Well, do it willingly. But what about those who are not, and who are free or will be: does it matter to you to go to paradise? Do you want to live a Christian life, so that you will not be remorseful when you die? Always do some daily meditation.[[1032]](#footnote-1033)

#### 2.5 Novitiate and mental prayer: Conclusions

This study could be further enriched by other writings and testimonies, but I believe that the documents examined are sufficient to substantiate certain claims, which I present here as a summary conclusion.

\* From the early years of the canonically established novitiate, in the mother house in Valdocco, under the watchful eye of the founder, the novices were taught the *importance* and *necessity* of meditation (also known as *mental prayer[[1033]](#footnote-1034)).*

\* The particular importance given to this teaching is emphasised by its placement at the beginning of the novitiate year.

\* Although the rule refers to meditation *in common,* the texts examined reiterate the need to do it *in private,* if it is impossible to keep to the common schedule.

\* Meditation is recommended as an indispensable tool for those who live a life of perfection, not only during the novitiate year.

\* Novices are also taught a *method* for doing this from the outset.

\* The method presented is essentially based on the Ignatian tradition.

### 3. The Italian editions of the Constitutions and the introduction “To the Salesian confreres”

The constitutions of the *Society of St Francis de Sales* were definitively approved on 3 April 1874; ten days later, the official decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was signed.

Back in Rome, Don Bosco continued to work on the approved text. Fr Francesco Motto, editor of the critical edition of the constitutions, informs us: “Together with Professor Lanfranchi (Don Bosco) undertook a revision of the text, motivated in part by stylistic concerns and perhaps also by the intention of adapting the text in accordance with certain powers granted to him by the Pope *vivae vocis oraculo*”.[[1034]](#footnote-1035)

Before the end of the year, the Latin text was printed.1[[1035]](#footnote-1036)

A few months later, on 16 April 1875, during one of the *General Conferences* which periodically brought together the members of the Superior Council and the rectors of the works, it was decided to prepare an Italian translation as soon as possible, which was eagerly awaited by the confreres, accompanied by a preface by Don Bosco.[[1036]](#footnote-1037)

This is how the first draft of the introduction to the Constitutions came about, entitled *To the Salesian confreres.*

The first manuscript, a large notebook with fourteen pages written and then corrected by Don Bosco himself, is dated 24 May 1875.[[1037]](#footnote-1038) This first draft, together with some additions that we keep on separate sheets, also written by Don Bosco, was copied by his secretary Fr Gioachino Berto and then corrected by Don Bosco and Fr Rua.[[1038]](#footnote-1039) It was then sent to press together with the first Italian translation of the approved Constitutions in the autumn of 1875.[[1039]](#footnote-1040) Don Bosco chose another Marian feast day as the definitive date: *the feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, 15 August 1875.*

*To the Salesian confreres* occupies, in this first printed version, thirty-eight pages and precedes the constitutional text; apart from a few corrections made by Fr Rua this introduction is, therefore, entirely written by Don Bosco.[[1040]](#footnote-1041)

In the subsequent printed edition of 1877, it was considerably expanded by:

\* several additions attributed to Fr Giulio Barberis, revised and corrected by Don Bosco himself;[[1041]](#footnote-1042)

\* the addition of a *Letter from St Vincent de Paul addressed to his religious on rising at the same hour.*

In the third and final edition of the Constitutions in Italian, during Don Bosco’s lifetime, the one in 1885, the text of the introduction was revised and enriched with some quotations, but it is not possible to trace the author of the corrections because no handwritten revision of the 1877 text has come down to us. Furthermore, St Vincent’s letter was no longer to be found at the end of the introduction but at the end of the constitutional text, preceded by an introductory paragraph and followed by six *Letters from St Alphonsus Liguori to the religious of his Congregation.*

The importance of the introduction *To the Salesian confreres* in Salesian tradition is undisputed; proof of this is its inclusion in the current text of the renewed Constitutions, in the appendix, together with some other texts by the founder.[[1042]](#footnote-1043) Fr Desramaut observes in this regard:

Le noyau de l'introduction représentait bien la pensée de don Bosco. On l'y entend avec son langage simplement persuasif. Cent ans après, ses successeurs sont retombés sur ses paragraphes de 1875 quand, sous le titre: *San Giovanni Bosco ai soci salesiani, ils ont voulu reprendre une partie du document en annexe de leurs constitutions rénovées. Par là, ils ont assuré à l'humble lettre de 1875 une vie plus longue qu'aux constitutions solennellement approuvées l'année précédente.*[[1043]](#footnote-1044)

The particular placement of this introduction and the important historical moment in which it was written have made it a sort of *directory*; at the same time, we could say that it sheds light on the 1884 constitutions, because it makes more explicit the underlying theological framework and the particular concept of religious life that becomes the hermeneutical key to the constitutional text.

The introduction and constitutions thus shed light on each other, and this light is also reflected, as we shall see, in the seven letters that complete the 1885 edition.

With regard to the *sources* used by Don Bosco in compiling these pages, Fr Braido informs us:

The sources that Don Bosco draws on most extensively and explicitly in composing the pages of *Ai Soci Salesiani* are undoubtedly the *Esercizio di perfezione e di virtù cristiane* (*virtù religiose*, in the third volume, which is of most interest) by the Jesuit Alfonso Rodriguez (1541-1616) and *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo* and the *Opuscoli sullo stato religioso*  by the founder of the Redemptorists, St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787).[[1044]](#footnote-1045)

In any case, these texts and, in particular, the expanded one of 1877 reveal Don Bosco’s attention to the more characteristically “religious” dimension of the congregation he founded.

In young organisations that have grown too quickly, there is no shortage of vocational uncertainties, “growing pains” and defections; all of this increases the founder’s concerns about formation.

The text of the introduction *To the Salesian confreres* thus reveals Don Bosco’s intention, already highlighted in relation to the years preceding the final approval of the Constitutions and in particular during the first retreat at Trofarello, to contribute to the formation of his disciples awareness of being religious, who in the autumn of 1875 already numbered more than two hundred and fifty.[[1045]](#footnote-1046)

This intention is clear from the simple list of topics covered. Here is a quick look at the section headings in the three different editions, taken from the critical edition of this introduction, edited by Fr Pietro Braido:

**1875 1877 1885**

\* [Preface] \* [Preface] \* [Preface]

\* Entry into religion \* Entry into religion \* Entry into religion

- \* Importance of following \* Importance of following one’s

one’s vocation vocation

- \* Promptly following one’s \* Promptly following one’s

vocation vocation

- \* Means for guarding one’s \* Means for guarding one’s

vocation vocation

\* Temporal advantages \* Temporal advantages \* Temporal advantages

\* Spiritual advantages \* Spiritual advantages \* Spiritual advantages

\* The vows \* The vows \* The vows

\* Obedience \* Obedience \* Obedience

- \* *Rendicontos* and their -

importance

\* Poverty \* Poverty \* Poverty

\* Chastity \* Chastity \* Chastity

- \* Fraternal charity \* Fraternal charity

\* Practices of piety \* Practices of piety \* Practices of piety

- - \* *Rendicontos* and

their importance

\* Five important reminders \* Five important reminders \* Doubt about one’s vocation

\* Doubt about one’s vocation\* Doubt about one’s vocation\* Five faults to avoid

\* Dear Salesians \* Dear Salesians \* Dear Salesians.[[1046]](#footnote-1047)

In the preface Don Bosco announces:

The constitutions of our humble congregation, o beloved sons in JC, were definitively approved by the Holy See on April 3rd, 1874. We should welcome this event as among the most glorious in the annals of our Society, since through it we have the assurance that in observing our rules, we rest upon a secure, firm and, I may add, infallible basis since the judgement of the Supreme Head of the Church sanctioning them is infallible.

Yet no matter what its inherent value may be, this approbation would be of little avail if the rules were not known and faithfully observed.

Don Bosco's aim, in this case too, is therefore eminently practical; it is not a question of writing a treatise on the theology of religious life,[[1047]](#footnote-1048) but of exhorting in a fatherly manner, of encouraging observance of the rules, of motivating, admonishing and advising.

Let us now consider the contents of this introduction, with particular reference to the topic of this study.

#### 3.1 practices of piety and meditation in the introduction to the constitutions, *to the Salesian confreres*

The topic of *practices of piety* is introduced towards the end of the section dedicated to the vow of *chastity.* Here too, as already noted with regard to the topics of the Trofarello retreat and the teachings of the first novitiate, the life of prayer is considered a *means* for maintaining the commitment made with the profession of the evangelical counsels.

Don Bosco says: “The exact observance of our holy rules, and especially of the vows and the practices of piety, triumphs over every vice, and is the faithful guardian of chastity.”[[1048]](#footnote-1049) “Let us then, dear sons, ” Don Bosco concludes further on, “be faithful to the exact observance of our rules, if we want to be faithful to the divine commandments. Let us also with constancy and diligence that we be solicitous in the exact observance of the practices of piety, the foundation and support of all religious institutes.”[[1049]](#footnote-1050)

In the section entitled “Practices of piety,” Don Bosco reiterates the importance of a life of prayer and fidelity to all the practices prescribed by the rules. I think it is appropriate to quote it here in its entirety, as it appears in the first printed edition of 1875:

Just as food nourishes and preserves the body so do the practices of piety nourish the soul and make it strong in time of temptation. As long as we observe our practices of piety, we shall live in harmony with everyone and we shall see the Salesian cheerful in spirit and happy in his vocation. If on the other hand he neglects them, he will begin to have doubts about his vocation and will undergo strong temptations. Church history shows us that Religious Orders and Congregations have all flourished and promoted the good of religion as long as piety was maintained in vigour amongst them; on the other hand we have seen not a few fall into decay, and others cease to exist, and when? Only when the spirit of piety grew lax and their members began to seek *quae sua sunt, non quae sunt Iesu Christi.* ( the things that were their own, and not the things which are of Jesus Christ).

If therefore, my sons, we value the glory of our Congregation; if we want it to spread and continue its prosperity for the good of our own and for our neighbours’ souls, let us be really solicitous never to omit meditation, spiritual reading, the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our weekly Confession, frequent and devout Communion, the Rosary of Our Lady, a little mortification on Friday and other things like that. Although each one of these practices taken by itself does not seem to be a thing of any great necessity, nevertheless it contributes efficaciously to the building up of our Christian perfection and salvation. If you would increase and grow great in God's sight says St Augustine, begin with the little things. *Si vis magnus esse a minimo incipe*.

The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all, consists in making the retreat each year and the exercise for a happy death every month. It is my belief that the salvation of a religious may justly be said to be assured if he approaches the Sacraments every month and puts his conscience in order as if he were really about to leave this life for eternity. F therefore we hold the honour of our Congregation dear, if we really desire the salvation of our soul, let us be observant of our rule and let us also be exact in the most ordinary things, for he who fears God neglects nothing which contributes to his greater glory *Qui timet Deum nihil negligit.[[1050]](#footnote-1051)*

The 1877 text then specifies the *ways* for doing the *exercise for a happy death.* The original [Italian] spelling, later corrected by Don Bosco, is by Fr Barberis:

...making the retreat each year and the exercise for a happy death every month.

He who cannot make this latter exercise in common, should with the permission of his Superior, make it by himself, and he whose occupations will not allow him to employ a whole day upon it should employ at least a part, putting off to another day such work as is not strictly necessary. But let all, more or less, follow these rules:

1. Besides the usual morning meditation, let there be a half-hour’s meditation as well the preceding evening on the last things.

2. The Confession which all should make on that day should be more than an ordinary act, having in mind that it may indeed be the last, and holy communion should be received as though it were Viaticum

3. Let each one reflect for at least half an hour on the progress or otherwise in virtue during the month, and this especially with regard to observance of the rule; and let form resolutions be made.

4. Let all the rules of the Congregation, or at least part thereof, be read on that day.

5. It would be well to choose on that day some saint as a protector for the coming month.[[1051]](#footnote-1052)

These texts are certainly in line with what I have tried to highlight in the study regarding the importance Don Bosco gave to the practice of the annual retreat, *The fundamental practice of piety which in some way embraces them all...*

As for the *exercise for a happy death*, to be done communally or, in case of impediment, even alone, it represents, as we have seen, another of the cornerstones of Salesian piety. In this text, which was later taken up and made normative by the second General Chapter in 1880,[[1052]](#footnote-1053) in addition to half an hour of meditation in the morning, another half hour was dedicated to a sort of *general examination*: “Let each one reflect for at least half an hour on the progress or otherwise in virtue during the month, and this especially with regard to observance of the rule; and let form resolutions be made.”[[1053]](#footnote-1054)

With regard to the *half hour of meditation in the evening,* in addition to one in the morning, I note here, incidentally, that about ten years after the founder’s death, during Fr Michael Rua’s term of office, it became a daily requirement during the novitiate year.[[1054]](#footnote-1055).

#### 3.2 St Vincent de Paul’s letter on everyone rising at the same time

Another important indication is contained in this 1877 edition.

As I have already mentioned, at the end of the introduction *To the Salesian confreres,* Don Bosco decided to add a letter from St Vincent de Paul, written on 15 January 1650 by the founder of the *Congregation of the Mission* for his religious.[[1055]](#footnote-1056)

“Put this after the introduction and before the text of the Rules,” he writes in his own hand on the copy prepared by a scribe for the printer. A short introduction, handwritten by Barberis, has been deleted[[1056]](#footnote-1057) and the title he originally gave it, *Sul levarsi tutti alla stessa ora del mattino (On rising all at the same time in the morning),* is replaced by Don Bosco with *Lettera di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli indirizzata ai suoi religiosi sul levarsi tutti all’ora medesima (Letter from St Vincent de Paul addressed to his religious on rising all at the same time),* which then appears in the printed copy.[[1057]](#footnote-1058) Some other corrections, mostly stylistic, were made by Don Bosco to the copied text of the letter.[[1058]](#footnote-1059)

Before going into the details of this letter, I would like to highlight a circumstance that makes it even more significant.

In 1848, Don Bosco anonymously published a booklet entitled *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo De' Paoli*[[1059]](#footnote-1060)(The Christian guided in virtue and civilisation according to the spirit of St Vincent de Paul)*.* In 1876, almost thirty years later, this booklet was republished by the oratory’s printing house, this time with the author’s name. in 1877, the same year that this second Italian edition of the constitutions was published, a reprint of this edition was also prepared.[[1060]](#footnote-1061)

I asked myself: is this double publication of *Il cristiano guidato…*, coinciding with the inclusion of the saint’s letter in the Salesian Constitutions, a coincidence? Or rather, did Don Bosco, at this particular moment of spiritual consolidation of the congregation, see in St Vincent de Paul, in his spiritual experience and in the congregation he founded, a particular *model* to be held up to his religious?

Starting from this last hypothesis, let us briefly examine this biography, which would also see another edition before Don Bosco’s death, and try to understand something about the relationship between these two saints.[[1061]](#footnote-1062)

##### 3.2.1 *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo De' Paoli* ***[The Christian guided in virtue and civilisation according to the spirit of St Vincent de Paul]***

The spiritual affinity and even one of “character” between Don Bosco and Saint Vincent de Paul was highlighted in 1978 by Fr Eugenio Valentini in his article *Don Bosco e San Vincenzo de’ Paoli.* Fr Lemoyne wrote in his *Biographical Memoirs*: “Don Bosco, although short-tempered by nature like St Vincent, nevertheless succeeded in imitating his gentleness and self-restraint in order to win more easily the hearts of men.”[[1062]](#footnote-1063)

The model of congregation he founded must have particularly appealed to Don Bosco who, like St Vincent, felt he had to contribute to responding to the urgent needs of the world with a congregation *of active life.* One of the first biographers of the founder of the Salesians, the Frenchman Albert Du Boÿs, emphasises this:

Si, à l’exemple de saint Vincent de Paul, dom Bosco a fondé une societé active plutôt que cotemplative, ce n’est pas que lui et ses disciples ne comprissent pas la sublimité des enfants de saint Bruno, des filles dei Sainte-Théreèse et de Sainte Claire. C’est que, dans ce moment, le plus pressé, le plus urgent était de créer des communautés religieuses qui pussent se consacrer au bien de l’humanité et rendre des services, visibles et tangibles à la société humaine.[[1063]](#footnote-1064)

Don Bosco therefore offers St Vincent’s spiritual experience as an example to all Christians, but especially to all members of the clergy.

... the God who raised up Vincent [writes Don Bosco in the preface] as a shining torch to bring the light of truth to barbarian and civilised peoples, the God who wanted to take a lowly man from the common people and place him on the throne of his princes, so that with his heroic virtues he might change the face of France and Europe together; may that same God rekindle the same devotion and zeal in the clergy, so that they may work tirelessly for the salvation of souls...[[1064]](#footnote-1065)

In the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, the founder of the Salesians, who in the same preface explains that he *literally drew* his own from the work entitled *Lo spirito di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli,[[1065]](#footnote-1066)* probably had to grasp the tension towards a perfect synthesis between love of God and love of neighbour, between prayer and works of charity, which he had already highlighted in the biography of Cafasso and which characterised the life of the founder of the Lazarists (Vincentians).

In the meditation for the *fourth day*, entitled *The Saint's Love for God,* Don Bosco, who here depends entirely on his source, emphasises the gift of combining the love of *affection* with the love of *effect*. A quotation from St Vincent is then followed by a reflection:

*Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.* The Apostle teaches us that good deeds are the only things that accompany us into the next life. Let us therefore reflect on this, especially since in our days there are many who seem virtuous, and indeed are so, yet are inclined to a sweet and soft life rather than to solid and laborious devotion. He compared the Church to a large harvest that needs workers to labour in it. There is nothing more in keeping with the Gospel than gathering together minds and energies through prayer, reading and solitude, and thus sharing this spiritual pasture with others. It is to imitate what was done by our Lord, and after him by the Apostles; it is to combine the office of Martha and Mary; it is to follow the example of the dove, which digests half of the food it has swallowed, and then with its own beak passes the rest to its chicks to feed them. This is how we must show God that we love him through our works: *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit”.*

As a result, the holy man always saw our Lord Jesus Christ in others, so as to inspire his heart more effectively to show them all the duties of charity.[[1066]](#footnote-1067)

In Turin at that time, Saint Vincent represented the true *prototype* of tireless charity, service to the humble and needy, and zeal for souls.[[1067]](#footnote-1068)

Yet Don Bosco, who had recently republished his life, decided to invoke the authority of this popular saint not to speak to his followers about love for the poor or zeal for souls, but about the importance of prayer and morning meditation. This contrast, as well as its unusual placement, gives this letter, in my opinion, a particular importance.

##### 3.2.2 The contents of the letter

In the 1877 edition of the constitutions, the letter occupies more than eight of the forty-nine pages preceding the constitutional text.

Let us some up its contents helped by adding some subheadings.

a) *Decline of some of the Society’s houses and difficulty in identifying the cause.[[1068]](#footnote-1069)*

God allows even the holiest congregations to be subject to some decline. This seems to have happened in some houses of the *Congregation of the Mission*, without it being easy to identify the cause at first. St Vincent emphasises:

To discover this, it took a little patience and attention on our part; Finally, God showed us that the freedom of some to rest more than the rule allowed had produced this bad effect; moreover, not being at prayer with the others, they were deprived of the advantages of doing it in common, and often did little or nothing in private.[[1069]](#footnote-1070)

b) *Reason for the letter: remedying this disorder.[[1070]](#footnote-1071)*

The cause of this disorder must be removed, so that the rule may be observed and everyone may be more attentive to their spiritual welfare.

c) *The eight advantages that come from getting up on time[[1071]](#footnote-1072)*.

The following are presented:

- the rule is fulfilled and, therefore, God’s will is done;

- the obedience rendered at that hour is particularly pleasing to God;

- the first action of the day must be given to God and not to the devil;

- occasional concessions can risk becoming bad habits;

- Jesus had nowhere to lay his head; we too must be ready to leave our bed to go to him;

- those who sleep for a long time never become a man and are more subject to temptations;

- time must be used to serve God worthily. Even businessmen and thieves are ready to get out of bed for their worldly business ;

- morning is the most propitious time for prayer. “Even the ancient hermits and saints” St Vincent says “followed David’s example, praying and meditating. The Israelites had to get up in the morning to gather manna; and we who are without grace and without virtue, why should we not do the same in order to have it?”[[1072]](#footnote-1073)

d) *Positive results and drawbacks.[[1073]](#footnote-1074)*

Punctuality, recollection and modesty are a great support for our vocation. On the contrary, carelessness in getting up in the morning is the cause of the infidelity of many.

Neglect has driven many away. Unable to sleep as they pleased, they could not grow fond of their situation. What help is there in willingly going to prayer if one rises only reluctantly? How can one meditate willingly when one is only in church halfway through and solely out of convenience? On the contrary, those who love to get up in the morning usually persevere, do not become lax, and make rapid progress. The grace of vocation is linked to prayer, and the grace of prayer is linked to getting up.. If we are faithful to this first action, if we find ourselves together and before our Lord, and together we present ourselves to him, as the first Christians did, he will give himself to us, enlighten us with his light, and do in us and for us the good that we are obliged to do in his Church, and finally grant us the grace to reach the degree of perfection that he desires from us, so that we may one day possess him fully in the eternity of the ages.[[1074]](#footnote-1075)

e) *Some possible objections and answers to them.[[1075]](#footnote-1076)*

The saint responds decisively to those who invoke pretexts or health reasons, with arguments drawn from experience and medical science.

Our rule and custom dictate that we all get up at the same time. If laxity has only been in place for a short time, and only in some houses, due to individuals’ abuse and the tolerance of superiors, in other houses the practice of rising early has always been faithfully observed; therefore, they have always been blessed. Thinking one is ill in order to interrupt this precision is a figment of the imagination, and experience shows the opposite to be true. After everyone gets up, we have no sick person here that wasn't already before, and we don't have any elsewhere.[[1076]](#footnote-1077)

f) *Ways for being faithful.[[1077]](#footnote-1078)*

St Vincent distinguishes his *own means or ways* from *general means or ways*. The first are:

- convince oneself that ‘rising on time is one of the most important practices of the Society’;[[1078]](#footnote-1079)

- give yourself to God in the evening when going to bed and ask him for the strength to overcome yourself in the morning;

- imagine that the bell is the voice of God;

- do not delay in this exact practice, so as not to make it more and more difficult.

The *general means* instead are:

- set up a “wake-up service”, with someone going round the rooms, and *visitors* following shortly afterwards;

- a degree of severity on the part of these persons in charge.

g) *Conclusion.[[1079]](#footnote-1080)*

In conclusion, it is stated that those who are not faithful cannot be employed in *positions* in the Society, in order to avoid any laxity.

May God grant us – these are the final words of the letter – forgiveness for our past failings, and grant us the grace to correct ourselves, so that we may be like those blessed servants whom the master will find watchful upon his arrival. Truly I tell you, says our Lord, that he will seat them at his table and serve them; and likewise, if he arrives at the second watch and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! Truly I tell you, he will set them over all his possessions.[[1080]](#footnote-1081)

##### 5.2.3 Some concluding remarks

St Vincent de Paul’s letter would continue to accompany the constitutions of the *Society of Saint Francis de Sales[[1081]](#footnote-1082) for about thirty years.*

In the 1885 edition, it was moved to the end of the constitutional text and precedes six other letters by Saint Alphonsus, which appear here for the first time.

These seven letters are preceded by a preface:

It was deemed appropriate to follow these rules with a letter from St Vincent de Paul and several others from St Alphonsus Liguori, the former founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St Lazarus, and the latter, the founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

From them, the Salesians can learn the importance of being faithful to their rules, paying attention to small things, living as good religious and persevering in their vocation. Let us read them from time to time, keeping in mind that it is two saints who are speaking.[[1082]](#footnote-1083)

Once again I note that in the 1903 edition, the letter is preceded by another introduction, which clarifies the founder’s intention:

Since we have such a great need to establish ourselves firmly in the matter of rising early, to do so all at the same time, and early, in order to follow the common rule, and also to be able to arrive on time for meditation, which is usually done together in the morning before Mass, Don Bosco wanted this letter from St Vincent de Paul to be printed in the second edition of our rules, as it strongly emphasises this practice with well-considered reasons, with the intention that we should take the reasons given by St Vincent to his Lazarists as given by him to us Salesians. Let us therefore also endeavour to derive from it the benefit that Don Bosco hoped to gain from it.[[1083]](#footnote-1084)

The context in which this long letter is set, its contents and also the contents of these brief introductions make it clear that the founder’s intention is to indicate an *urgency*, which we can assume is aimed at preventing or correcting certain disorders in the practice of meditation: *...what is more, not being present at prayer with others, they were deprived of the advantages of doing it in common, and often did little or nothing in private.*

The central statement of the entire letter seems to us to be this: *The grace of vocation is linked to prayer. And the grace of prayer is linked to getting up.*

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse why St Vincent’s letter disappeared after thirty years from subsequent editions of the Constitutions; however, in my opinion, it offers another important clue to understanding the founder’s feelings at this particular moment in the history of the Congregation.

This is the year of the first General Chapter, which would conclude in early October, the year of consolidation for the new institution. Fr Desramaut writes:

L’année 1877, celle de la consolidation spirituelle et structurelle de la congrégation salésienne, telle qu’il la voulait, fut décisive dans la vie de Don Bosco. Depuis la fondation de sa société, il avait veillé sur ses structures et lui avait insufflé un esprit, qui, au bout du compe, était le sien. Les structures, ébauchées dans ses constitutions primitives, avaient progressivement gagné en fermeté sous l’oeil critique des congrégationes romaines. Simultanément, par l’exemple et des exhortations, il trasmettait à ses fils une spiritualité.[[1084]](#footnote-1085)

#### 3.3 the letters of St Alphonsus. Outlines

Less relevant to our topic are the six letters of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, added to the constitutional text for the first time in 1885 and more directly aimed at recommending obedience, observance of rules, humility and mutual charity.

These are six circular letters addressed to the Congregation of the *Redemptorists* between 1754 and 1774. After what I have said about St Vincent’s letter on *everyone rising at the same time,* I will quote here *passim* and without comment only a few brief passages that seem to me to be most directly related to the subject of this study.

In our sermons, we insinuate nothing more than this love for Jesus Christ who suffered passionately...

And with that, I ask everyone to love their room and not waste their day wandering around. We are stingy with our time, which we could spend in prayer, visiting the Blessed Sacrament (who is with us for this very purpose) and also in study, because this is still absolutely necessary for us.[[1085]](#footnote-1086)

Let us always help one another with our prayers, with visits, and always, always, always; otherwise, all our good intentions and promises will be lost: and therefore I recommend that you meditate mostly on my books...[[1086]](#footnote-1087)

You already know that the most effective way to endure adversity is to love Jesus Christ deeply: we must pray to him fervently: loving Jesus Christ is the greatest work we can do on this earth; and it is a work, a gift that we cannot obtain on our own: it must come from him, and he is ready to give it to those who ask for it; so if we lack it, it is because of our negligence: Therefore, the saints have always devoted themselves to prayer, and this has been their greatest concern.[[1087]](#footnote-1088)

### 4. Prayer and mental prayer in the first Salesian necrologies (obituaries)

I wanted to devote some pages of the study to the analysis of some commemorations of confreres who died during the founder’s lifetime. These pages, often influenced by a laudatory and celebratory perspective, reveal to us, perhaps precisely through their idealisation, the model of religious life and holiness that forms the backdrop to these short biographies.

Starting in 1872, the Oratory of St Francis de Sales Printing House published a sort of catalogue or yearbook of the Society, in which, in addition to the list of confreres and works, brief memoirs of deceased confreres were added each year.[[1088]](#footnote-1089)

The preface to these biographies, which vary in length,[[1089]](#footnote-1090) is almost always signed by Don Bosco. The biographies themselves, composed in various ways, were written by Don Bosco or, more often, by one of his closest collaborators[[1090]](#footnote-1091) and revised by him. The testimonies of some of those who knew the confrere are also used.[[1091]](#footnote-1092)

Don Bosco’s goal is openly one of edification. In the introduction to the small volume *Società di S. Francesco di Sales* published in 1875, an introduction of which we possess the autograph and also the copy corrected for printing, he writes:

The year 1874, Beloved Sons, was a very memorable one for us. His Holiness the Reigning Pius IX, after having granted us great favours on 3 April, deigned to definitively approve our humble Congregation. While this glorious event filled us all with true joy, it was soon bitterly marred by a series of events. In fact, on the 13th of the same month, God called to himself Fr Provera, then Fr Pestarino, then the cleric Ghione and Fr Giuseppe Cagliero, and all this in the space of only four months...

... we have good reason to believe that these confreres, having ceased to work with us on earth, have become our protectors in heaven.

It is therefore considered appropriate to give you a brief account of each of their lives, so that their memory may be preserved among us. What we do for them, with the Lord’s help, we hope will be done for our confreres already called to eternal life in times past and for those whom God may call in the future.

We will do this for three specific reasons:

1. Because other religious orders and congregations in the Church usually do this.

2. So that those who lived among us and practised the same rules in an exemplary manner may inspire us to follow them in promoting good and avoiding evil.

3. So that, by preserving their names and their principal deeds, we may more easily remember to raise prayers to God for the eternal repose of their souls...[[1092]](#footnote-1093)

We read more explicitly in the preface to the small volume *Letture amene ed edificanti ossia biografie salesiane* (Pleasant and edifying readings, or Salesian biographies) in the first handwritten draft by Fr Michael Rua:

Man lives by imitation; and the good or bad example of others is at all times an inexhaustible source of great vices and great virtues.

However, if the wicked boast of their proselytism in the ugliness of sin and the ignominy of impiety, the good, in exchange, with the sweet fragrance of their virtues and the powerful attraction of their good example, entice many to follow in their footsteps on the glorious path of Christian perfection, having the good example of the miraculous and exerting a truly magical influence on souls.

It actually imposes itself on the mind, I am about to say, and deliberately directs or changes its ideas; on the heart, it secretly transforms its affections for the better. Nor could it be otherwise; for it not only paints virtues in the most beautiful perspectives... but also shows them to be easily accessible, alive and active in the outstanding deeds of virtuous and pious men.

And how many, moved to emotion by the spectacle offered by those virtuous and holy souls, exclaimed with St Augustine: *Si iste et ille, cur non ego?*[[1093]](#footnote-1094)

Fr Stella writes in regard to these texts: “The biographies of Salesians are clearly intended to be another form of meditation on the religious ideals that could be achieved by being with Don Bosco... (They) always follow ascetic assumptions that determine the selection and even the elaboration of the facts.”[[1094]](#footnote-1095)

Once again, therefore, we are faced with texts whose edifying intent does not allow us to accept *sine glossa* the subject matter narrated;[[1095]](#footnote-1096) but once again I say that these texts have, in my opinion, an important *historical value* because they are an expression of the feelings of Don Bosco and the first generation of Salesians. They allow us to reconstruct the model of religious life that they set themselves as an ideal goal and to highlight the reflected awareness of the importance given to prayer and, in particular, to meditation.[[1096]](#footnote-1097)

#### 4.1 Some recurring themes in relation to prayer

Reading many of these necrologies [Tr note: the correct term in English would be ‘obituaries’, but we have become accustomed to the term ‘necrologies’ in Salesian language] brings us back to the same themes we found in the biographies of Comollo, Savio and other young Oratory boys; many of these deceased Salesians, moreover, were young clerics in their twenties who died prematurely. Let’s try to bring together some passages from these necrologies around some core themes.

\* *Eucharistic presence* is the catalyst for the devotion of these first confreres. The biographer tells us about cleric Antonio Vallega, who died in 1876 at the age of almost eighteen:

How admirable his recollection in prayer was! With his head bowed, his hands clasped to his chest, motionless, you would have said he was not a man of the earth, but a seraphim from heaven. That if his eyes, often moist with precious tears, rose from the ground, it was only to fix them on that adored tabernacle where Jesus was enclosed, the delight and sigh of his soul.[[1097]](#footnote-1098)

Cleric Giovanni Arata, too, who died at home home in Lanzo in 1878 after four days of “violent illness”, was, like Louis Comollo, unable to curb the tangible manifestations of his Eucharistic fervour:[[1098]](#footnote-1099)

He was seen, at the time of the Elevation, turning red, praying fervently and, sometimes, prostrating himself with his face bowed, remaining there until he went to receive Communion. Alerted by a companion that this was attracting attention, he stopped doing it. After Communion, he remained motionless until it was time to leave. He told some of his companions that he would spend the entire day before Holy Thursday in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and that he would spend the entire night from Holy Thursday to Good Friday kneeling at the Holy Sepulchre, and that he would be willing to spend many more nights there if he were allowed to do so.[[1099]](#footnote-1100)

We have the original autograph of Fr Barberis on the biography of cleric Michele Giovannetti, which has several corrections made by Don Bosco. We read about this cleric, who died in 1877 at around the age of twenty and who had donned the cassock just over a year earlier:

Knowing how important the step he was about to take in donning the clerical habit was, every morning he could be seen approaching Holy Communion in order to prepare himself better; and throughout the day, his frequent and lengthy visits to the Blessed Sacrament made him detest the faults of his past life more and more, as he himself said, and made him fall in love beyond words with the new way of life he was about to embrace. In the evening, it was wonderful to see him before bedtime, kneeling beside his bed, praying long and hard to the Lord that he might become not only a cleric, but a holy cleric.[[1100]](#footnote-1101)

\* *Prayer time* expands to include the moment of *recreation*; this is a recurring exhortation in the tradition of the oratory, for young people and Salesians alike. “In the hours when others were relaxing or going out for a walk,” the biography of cleric Luigi Ghione tells us, “he used to visit the Blessed Sacrament...”[[1101]](#footnote-1102)

Fr Giulio Barberis, his novice director, said of cleric Francesco Zappelli:

...he said his prayers with a solemn demeanour and with complete composure, clearly showing how his mind accompanied his words. He soon joined that select group of young people who, after lunch and dinner, gathered at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians to pay homage to them. Among them, he was one of the most devout, prolonging his visits considerably, especially when the breaks were longer.[[1102]](#footnote-1103)

The coadjutor Antonio Lanteri, who entered the congregation in 1871 at the age of thirty, after abandoning the “dear solitude” of his life as a shepherd,[[1103]](#footnote-1104) died four years later, continuing his *exercises of piety* and his devotions without neglecting his duties as sacristan:

He spent all his free time from service of the church doing housework and praying. He was never asked to do anything that showed the slightest difficulty or reluctance on his part. The only thing he would have found difficult to adapt to would have been limiting the time he wanted to devote to exercises of piety. However, he never neglected to do what obedience required of him in order to devote himself to religious practices of his own choosing; rather, he tried to make up for this with frequent ejaculations and visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy during recreation hours and sometimes even during rest periods.[[1104]](#footnote-1105)

And cleric Cesare Peloso, who had chosen to join the congregation after a long conversation with Don Bosco himself in Lanzo[[1105]](#footnote-1106) “.. prayed fervently, went very often to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament during recreation time; he would have spent the whole day in church if obedience or some duty had not taken him away.”[[1106]](#footnote-1107)

Regarding cleric Giacomo Delmastro, who died in 1879, Fr Rua, using a letter from his parish priest Fr Pietro Conti,[[1107]](#footnote-1108) testifies:

Such a virtuous and pious young man at home, there is no need to ask whether he attended church and how he behaved there. He was among the first to arrive and always among the last to leave, and not infrequently on holidays, arriving before dawn and not returning home until midday. And breakfast? And lunch? He gave no thought to it at all; he was with his Jesus, completely absorbed in him and thinking only of heavenly things.

During the rigours of winter; everything was white with snow, which was still falling in thick, swirling flakes; and before dawn broke he was awake, left the warmth of his bed, left the tepid atmosphere of his poor little room, and trampled through the cold snow to go and worship the Lord. At the height of summer: lightning flashing, thunder rumblings, rain pouring down: the distant rumble of the storm can be heard: the hurricane rages and threatens, but he was not afraid; he passed fearlessly through the streets, which had become streams, and already his soul reached out in sweet affection towards its blessed Jesus.[[1108]](#footnote-1109)

\* Another consideration already seen several times in this study concerns *prayer at night*. After his retreat in Lanzo, cleric Giovanni Arata requested and obtained to be *enrolled* in the Salesian congregation. Fr Barberis writes:

... while the spirit of prayer in our Giovanni was already great, and I would say continuous, it was even greater during the retreat, in which he seemed unable to tear himself away from the church, not only during the day but even at night. In truth, after evening prayers, he prolonged his prayer so much that if he had not been warned by someone who cared for him, he would perhaps have forgotten to go to rest. The news of his acceptance filled him with joy, as this fulfilled his fervent desire to devote himself to God in a religious congregation.[[1109]](#footnote-1110)

Regarding Giacomo Vigliocco, whom Don Bosco “loved tenderly”[[1110]](#footnote-1111) and whom he describes as a ‘precious cleric’ in a letter addressed to Fr Giovanni Cagliero, we read: “He was caught several times in his adolescence praying at night, and even for very long periods.”[[1111]](#footnote-1112)

\* The relationship between *ardour in prayer* and *apostolic zeal* is also often emphasised. Cleric Carlo Becchio, who had been “devoted to the exercises of piety”[[1112]](#footnote-1113) since childhood, took his perpetual vows in the autumn of 1876, at the age of thirty-two, after a hardworking and peaceful youth. “If the Lord had not deemed him ready for heaven before he was ordained a priest,” it is emphasised, “he would undoubtedly have made him a copy of the Curé of Ars.”[[1113]](#footnote-1114)

We read in his regard:

Frequent Communion, long and devout visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the continuous practice of all religious duties kept alive in him the two flames of love for God and neighbour. As a result, while in church he appeared to be an angel, completely absorbed in God, outside he was cheerful, affable, and charitable to all, and not only did he never cause any offence to others, but he kindly rendered all the services he could; and wherever he saw an opportunity to do good, he hastened to do so; nor did he refuse to care for the sick, whom he visited and consoled with the most affectionate charity. In this way, this beautiful flower grew, which in a short time, thanks to its virtues, would give off a sweet fragrance that would attract the eyes of the Lord, making itself worthy of being transplanted into the mystical garden of the Salesian Congregation, where, having been definitively accepted, it was able to take its perpetual vows on 27 September 1876.[[1114]](#footnote-1115)

The night before Giacomo Delmastro’s first communion is recounted as follows:

It was the night of his First Communion, and our little Giacomino had fallen peacefully asleep with his thoughts fixed on God: the last words of his long and fervent prayer were: *Jesus and Mary.* As soon as he opened his eyes to worldly things, oh immortal God, what a beautiful sight appeared before him! He sees a charming child surrounded by a shining halo, amid the splendour of the saints: he is crowned by a beautiful choir of angels and a crowd of holy virgins in white robes, who, following the divine Lamb, sing on golden lyres that new hymn which no one else is allowed to sing: he sees that little child looking at him with a sweet smile: he hears a delicate voice: it is Jesus repeating in his ear and in his heart the words spoken the day before: *I am here, all yours.*

The comforting vision disappears, but the holy exultation that had filled his soul does not disappear, and the next morning, as soon as he awoke, his mind still full of what he had seen in his dream, he recounted in minute detail, to the ineffable joy of his listeners, something that I do not know whether to call a dream or a vision. After this, it is no wonder that our dear Delmastro showed such affection for pious things, such constant fervour in approaching the Holy Sacraments, such sympathy for the poor and such indifference to praise and ridicule, to pleasure and pain, that he appeared cold, insensitive, apathetic to everything that did not concern God.[[1115]](#footnote-1116)

#### 4.2 meditation

Alongside these recurring elements referring to prayer, these necrologies reveal several indications of an awareness of the importance of meditation in priestly and religious life.

Cleric Antonio Vallega “never neglected his daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy, nor the recitation of the Rosary, nor meditation, nor any other practices of piety so necessary in clerical and religious life.”[[1116]](#footnote-1117) “He put special effort into meditating well,” says Fr Barberis, biographer of Fr Michele Giovannetti. “He never skipped it. When for some reason he couldn’t do it with others, he would find time during the day and do it on his own, and even when he was already ill, he would make an effort to do what little he could.”[[1117]](#footnote-1118)

Young Pietro Scappini, after an exemplary childhood, took his first triennial vows when he was not yet twenty years old.

In particular, his biographer tells us, daily meditation on eternal truths helped him to progress on the path of virtue and to remain steadfast in his vocation. He used to say that without meditation he would never have been able to overcome his many deep-rooted flaws. This exercise took a great deal of effort, since his vivid imagination naturally led him to other thoughts; but with perseverance he managed to do it so well that he could say that many meditations passed without any distraction.[[1118]](#footnote-1119)

Giovanni Battista Caraglio, from the diocese of Cuneo, took his first vows in the Salesian congregation at the age of twenty-six. The following year, he was ordained a priest, continuing to serve as a teacher and assistant. He died in 1882, aged less than thirty.

He never neglected meditation and recitation of the Holy Rosary; and when he became a priest, whenever his duties prevented him from participating in common, he never failed to make up for it privately before going to rest. He used to say that meditation and the Holy Rosary are indispensable practices for religious and priests, and that those who are not faithful to them can hardly persevere in their vocation. He never failed to visit the Blessed Sacrament, and it was beautiful to see him often surrounded by a circle of young people whom he led with him to the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, thus confirming his exhortations by his example.[[1119]](#footnote-1120)

It may be interesting to note that in this last testimony, as in one of the previous ones, reference is also made to the opportunity to meditate in private when it is not possible to do so together with the community.

However, perhaps the most significant texts on this subject are those concerning the “precious cleric” Giacomo Vigliocco and Fr Giovanni Arata.[[1120]](#footnote-1121)

Arriving at the Valdocco oratory in 1873, Giacomo Vigliocco was enrolled in the Salesian Society the following year. The biographer tells us:

As soon as he understood the supreme importance of meditation for spiritual progress, he embraced it with such love that he never ceased practising it, even during his illness. At first he encountered difficulties, but he was so committed that he soon succeeded in doing it as if he were an expert in the art of meditation. He searched in various books for the method he should follow; he hung on his master’s every word when he explained the rules that help to do it profitably, and it was beautiful to see him at the beginning of each meditation, so absorbed in himself that he heard and saw nothing else but what belonged to that subject.[[1121]](#footnote-1122)

The long passage that follows makes more explicit the awareness of the importance of a *method* in meditation:

One of his secrets for meditating well was this: at the beginning, when placing himself in the presence of God, he imagined that the face of Jesus Crucified appeared before him, and that from the Cross he was watching him to see if he was doing it with all his heart. During meditation, as if to increase his fervour, he cast various glances with his mind at the Crucified Lord, and, seeming to receive a rebuke from him, he began to consider ever more deeply the truth he was meditating on. Finally, he prayed fervently to this same Jesus to let at least a few drops of his precious blood fall upon him, as a pledge of the forgiveness he was receiving for his sins and of the abundant grace that was pouring into his heart. At the end of meditation, when it came to making good resolutions, his commitment to fulfilling them well was more evident than ever, even outwardly.[[1122]](#footnote-1123)

*In meditatione mea exardescet ignis.* This awareness, already expressed several times in other documents cited in this study, is further clarified here:

Thinking constantly about Jesus Crucified in his meditations was what led him to make great practical resolutions, which he then sought to carry out with all his might, scrutinising every hidden recess of his heart to see if there was still the seed of some vice to be eradicated, or what virtues he most needed to enrich himself. Oh, how many times, unable to contain the fullness of his heart, he would vent his feelings to his teacher, expressing his desire to give his life to save souls; his desire to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ more than all the men in the world; his desire to throw himself among men to bring about their conversion! It was through frequent Communion and meditation that he learned to control himself so well that his companions and superiors could not find even the smallest thing to criticise him for! It was from these two sources that he drew that love for contempt, whereby not only was he not offended when he was insulted or despised, but which led him to ask his master several times for permission to do something strange, so that he might be despised by his companions...[[1123]](#footnote-1124)

The biography of cleric Giovanni Arata reveals his particular care in avoiding even the slightest *distraction* during meditation:

He performed his acts of piety with such commitment and fervour that all his companions called him an angel, another St Aloysius. Morning and evening prayers, reciting the Holy Rosary, and attending Holy Mass were things that filled him with edification. He was so absorbed in meditation that sometimes he could not hear any noise, no matter how loud it was. But that was not enough for him: he knew that St Aloysius had managed to spend his hour of meditation without any distraction whatsoever, and he regretted this, saying: “I regret that I cannot imitate him: there are various meditations in which I remain distracted for two or three minutes.” This seemed to him to be a great distraction, and he had to confess that in certain months when he felt greater fervour, even this did not happen to him regularly.[[1124]](#footnote-1125)

This particular attention paid by the cleric Arata also emerges from a written testimony by one of his companions, which we have in our archives:

No matter how busy he was, writes Fr Luigi Deppert, his classmate in his first philosophy course, he never, ever skipped his daily half hour of meditation. Oh! how many times did I see him shut up in his little room in the workshop, deep in meditation! And to concentrate even more on what he was reading,[[1125]](#footnote-1126) he always kept a small crucifix, blessed by the Pope, in front of him, and from time to time he would stare at it with tears in his eyes.[[1126]](#footnote-1127)

He himself, in a written account, with regular and neat handwriting, writes to his master Fr Barberis:

Very Reverend Director

The things I remember and consider important enough to include in the monthly *rendiconto* (manifestation) are as follows. In truth (I don’t know why, but it must be due to my negligence), I am not satisfied with my behaviour this month.

What pains me greatly is the distraction I experienced during prayer.

In meditation, I find it very difficult to recollect myself, to truly consider myself in the presence of God, to think seriously about the subject matter, to develop it, and what is more, I am little moved by the subject I am meditating on. The benefits of meditation seem very small to me; perhaps this is greatly influenced by the fact that during the day I rarely remember what I meditated on in the morning. I was very distracted during the vocal prayer, and I don’t know why.[[1127]](#footnote-1128)

The *rendiconto* continues with further references to acts of piety, modesty, studies and physical health, but the initial reference to prayer remains the most extensive and detailed.

Was mental prayer *always* a topic for the *monthly rendiconto*?

In the extensive introduction to the Italian edition of the *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* of 1877, we read the following regarding the *rendiconto*:

The chief points with which such a manifestation ought deal are as follows:

a) Health.

b) Study or work

c) Whether he is able to fulfil his obligations and what diligence he shows.

d) Whether he has sufficient time to perform his religious duties and what diligence he shows in fulfilling them.

e) How he conducts himself during prayer and meditation.

f) With what frequency, devotion and fruit he approaches the Sacraments.

g) How he observes his vows and whether he has any doubts about his vocation. But it should be noted well that the manifestation only concerns external matters and not matters for Confession, unless the confrere himself raises it for his spiritual benefit.

h) Whether he has any vexations or troubles, or feels any coolness towards anyone and if he has confidence in his Spiritual Director.

i) Whether he knows of any disorder to which a remedy can be applied, especially if it is a case of preventing some offence against God.[[1128]](#footnote-1129)

More directly, the *rendiconto*, which had been introduced in 1869 and codified by a circular letter from Don Bosco,[[1129]](#footnote-1130) considered the true “key to the proper running of the house and that of the congregation,”[[1130]](#footnote-1131) would seem to have as its main objective, in the founder’s intentions, the good governance of the house, the effective verification of the office carried out by the confrere, the timely identification of disorders and also good relations with the superior, who “On his part, with due charity, the director shall be at the confrere’s disposal at a chosen time. He shall also make sure to ask each confrere privately about his health, duties, religious observance, studies, or tasks entrusted to him.”[[1131]](#footnote-1132) The reference to prayer and meditation, however, is certainly important and stems from the awareness, already expressed by Don Bosco in the introduction to the 1875 edition, that “all religious orders and all ecclesiastical congregations flourished and promoted the good of religion until piety held its place.”

In the first draft of the rules of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in our possession, dating back to 1871, we find written:

In order to advance on the path of virtue and religious perfection, it will be very beneficial for them to have a heart that is open to their Superior, as she is destined by God to guide them on the path to perfection after their Confessor. Therefore, at least once a month, they will express their inner feelings to her with simplicity and clarity, and they will receive advice and guidance on how to succeed in mental prayer, in the practice of mortification, and in observance of the Holy Rules of the Institute.[[1132]](#footnote-1133)

However, this explicit reference to mental prayer is no longer found in the 1877 printed edition.[[1133]](#footnote-1134) The constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would, in fact, become increasingly uniform with those of the Salesians, distancing themselves from the original model; in any case, what has been established for the Salesians’ *rendiconto* would also be extended to the sisters.[[1134]](#footnote-1135)

Beyond this last reference to the *monthly rendiconto*, the texts examined in this part of the study bring us back to considerations, made on other occasions, about the substantial unity and coherence of the model of holiness proposed to young people, lay people and religious during Don Bosco’s apostolic experience.

Some more explicit references to the importance of meditation are probably the result of the more profound ascetic formation that could be given to the young confreres after the canonical establishment of the novitiate.

In any case, however, the model of religious life that emerges overall from these biographies does not radically contrast the *active* life and the *contemplative* life. Some of these confreres, presented as *models* to be imitated, seem to push the time spent in prayer beyond what is “reasonable”, and this is in perfect continuity with the model of apostolic life presented by Don Bosco to his congregation.

### 5. The first four general chapters of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales

The constitutions of 1874, As I have already indicated, prescribed: “Capitulum Generale ordinarie habebitur singulis trienniis ad pertractandas res majoris momenti, quae ad Societatem spectant, et ad eas sollicitudines adhibendas, quae tum Societatis necessitates, tum tempora et loca requirent”.[[1135]](#footnote-1136)

The approval of the constitutions marks a new starting point in the stabilisation and consolidation of the new foundation; the first General Chapters would be one of the most important tools in this new phase of growth for the congregation.

During Don Bosco's lifetime, four would be held, one every three years starting from 1877.

Participation in these first General Chapters was regulated by a note to the Italian text of 1875: “The General Chapter is composed of the members of the Superior Chapter[[1136]](#footnote-1137) and the Rectors of the particular houses. Each rector will meet with his particular chapter, and with it will discuss the matters deemed most necessary to be proposed in the future General Chapter.[[1137]](#footnote-1138)

The first two chapters, in 1877 and 1880, take place in the Salesian house in Lanzo; the third and fourth at Valsalice. There would be 23 participants in the first, 27 in the second, 35 in the third and 37 in the fourth. The first and second would last approximately two weeks, while the third and fourth would last just under a week.[[1138]](#footnote-1139)

Fr Marcel Verhulst, who edited a brief historical study on the first General Chapter, notes:

The total number of Salesians (temporary and perpetual professed) was rapidly increasing... All this made the active participation of the Superior Council and the General Chapter in the management of the Congregation increasingly indispensable.[[1139]](#footnote-1140)

Firstly, the SC’s participation in the ordinary government of the Congregation grew. Before 1874, Fr Michael Rua was practically the only person assisting Don Bosco. After this date, however, Don Bosco felt it was increasingly urgent that all members of the SC take an active part in government and therefore be completely exempted from other commitments in Valdocco and elsewhere.[[1140]](#footnote-1141)

The topics covered by these first four General Chapters are considerably varied. The first and second were mainly concerned with religious life, the government and administration of the congregation, temporal needs as well as the organisation of schools, the press and youth *associations*, ecclesiastical studies, relations with the *Cooperators* and with the sisters; the third and fourth turned their attention to the regulations for retreats, to certain aspects and “places” characteristic of pastoral activity, to oratories, to vocational schools, and to parishes. Other measures concerned the formation of Salesians and, in particular, a better “differentiation” of the formation paths of clerics and coadjutors.

#### 5.1 The text for meditation and retreats in the First General Chapter

The first General Chapter took place between 5 September and 5 October 1877, with several long interruptions; however, preparations had already begun in April 1877. Don Bosco had sent a booklet to the houses at that time, containing the topics to be discussed, in order to encourage discussion in the local chapters and arrive at the General Chapter with appropriate proposals and reflections.[[1141]](#footnote-1142)

The first secretary of the Chapter was Fr Giulio Barberis “so he could draw up the minutes”;[[1142]](#footnote-1143) he was assisted by Fr Gioachino Berto, who was already Don Bosco’s secretary and was appointed second secretary of the Chapter, and other scribes.

We have three notebooks of Fr Barberis’ notes which would be reviewed, copied and corrected by various people (Cagliero, Rua, Bonetti, etc.). However, these original notes written by the novice director are sometimes more detailed than the later copies.

The minutes were then included in the printed edition of the *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877,* published the following year by the Salesian Printing House and Bookshop in Turin.

Before addressing some specific issues, I feel it is appropriate to point out that this first General Chapter was attended not only by members with voting rights and a few other Salesians who were *invited*, but also by two priests of the Society of Jesus, Fr Secondo Franco, whom I have already mentioned in connection with Fr Barberis’ teaching on meditation, and Fr Giovanni Battista Rostagno. Fr Ceria states in the *Biographical Memoirs* that “(Don Bosco) had held several conferences with them in previous evenings with the aim of arranging things in the manner most in keeping with the sacred canons and customs of religious congregations.”[[1143]](#footnote-1144)

Fr Secondo Franco was born in Turin on 22 January 1817. A well-known preacher and author of numerous publications, mainly on pastoral and spiritual topics,[[1144]](#footnote-1145) this zealous Jesuit had known Don Bosco for at least a decade.[[1145]](#footnote-1146) Founder of the new Jesuit residence in Turin in 1869, he was its superior practically until his death in 1893, except for the years from 1882 to 1885 when he was superior of the novitiate in Chieri.[[1146]](#footnote-1147)

Fr Barberis, in the first notebook of the *Verbali delle Conf. tenute pel primo Capitolo Generale Salesiano* , reports the content of one of his speeches at the Chapter *conference* (assembly):

First of all, I must congratulate and rejoice with those who were kind enough to invite me to this first Salesian General Chapter. I consider myself fortunate in this, because when the Lord, seeing the sadness of our times, sent Don Bosco to his church, I always took an interest in his affairs as much as I could, and I never expected him to hold me in such high regard. This congregation, which fills a void in our times, cannot but be called the Lord’s envoy. Seeing its rapid progress, one is led to say that *digitus Dei est hic.* Therefore, on behalf of myself and all my confreres, *I rejoice* wholeheartedly with all of them and with the entire Congregation...

We are certain that in whatever way my confreres and I, on whose behalf I expressly say these things, can be of assistance, you may always count on us...[[1147]](#footnote-1148)

Don Bosco’s response reveals the warmth of the relations he had established with the Society of Jesus. Fr Barberis writes:

Here, Don Bosco took the floor to thank the Father and the Society on his own behalf and on behalf of the entire congregation. We were founded yesterday and are therefore inexperienced; we have already sought help and advice from the Fathers of the Society many times; now, seeing such kindness, we will seek it even more frequently, and we will certainly disturb you often. We and the entire Congregation will always consider you models of religious life, and we consider ourselves to be younger brothers and servants ready to do whatever we can in our small way to carry out your commands. We hope that by remaining united we will strive more profitably for the greater glory of God.[[1148]](#footnote-1149)

The other Jesuit at this first General Chapter was Fr Giovanni Battista Rostagno, also from Turin and a contemporary of Fr Franco’s. He was a professor of canon law at the University of Louvain in Belgium and at Verceil in France,[[1149]](#footnote-1150) and was probably invited by Don Bosco or by his own confrere as a consultant on legal matters. Judging by the minutes, however, his role was less significant than Fr Franco’s.

##### 5.1.1 The Question of the Meditation Text

One of the issues discussed in this first Chapter of the Salesian congregation, which is of particular interest to this study, was that of the *text for meditation by beginners.*

Fr Barberis’ minutes contain some corrections and adjustments. Let’s compare the original text with the text after corrections made by the same author:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ORIGINAL TEXT | CORRECTED TEXT |
| It was later called the book best suited for meditation by beginners. It was observed that Da Ponte has immense material but is not particularly suited to beginners, being intended for those skilled in the art of meditation.[[1150]](#footnote-1151)  But when talking about Da Ponte, Fr Franco praised him most effusively;[[1151]](#footnote-1152) he had not found any better ones, despite having read many; and once he opened up to Fr Rotan, who is a true celebrity, telling him that he had not found any better than Da Ponte, even though he had read many similar books in Italian, Latin and French. And I, Fr Rotan added, used many of them in German, English, Polish, and Russian, and I have not found anyone who could match Da Ponte. However, when Fr Franco pointed out that it was dry and uninspiring in places, he replied: meditation is something that must be learned. It is nothing more than an exercise of the three faculties of intelligence, memory and will, as Da Ponte himself teaches in his introduction. This introduction should be read a hundred times and memorised, as it is worth its weight in gold. Those who follow what is said in it will find meditation immensely easier; but patience is required; beginners must be well instructed; care must be taken to ensure that they all have the book at hand, and they must be taught according to that method. | It was later called the book best suited for meditation by beginners. For others, there is Da Ponte, and one can continue with that given the immense subject matter, and once finished, one can start again many times; but it is not particularly suitable for beginners. For these very useful works, see *Apparecchio alla morte* by St. Alphonsus, *La scuola di Gesù appassionato* by a Passionist priest,[[1152]](#footnote-1153) etc.  But when they spoke of Da Ponte, they praised him most effusively.  The Introduction is especially commendable. This introduction should be read a hundred times and memorised, as it is worth its weight in gold. Those who follow what is said in it will find meditation immensely easier; but the book at hand, and they must be taught according to that method.[[1153]](#footnote-1154) |

Note that the final text removes the reference to the author of the intervention, as well as reference to the Jesuit Fr Roothaan, who was General of the Society from 1829 to 1853, thus attributing praise of the ‘Da Ponte’ text to the Salesian Chapter members; [[1154]](#footnote-1155) Fr Barberis also adds important information about the practice of those years: *For the others* (those who are not beginners) *there is Da Ponte and they can continue with that...*

“Da Ponte” is none other than the Spanish Jesuit Fr Luis de La Puente (1554-1624). His widespread*Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra santa fe, con la práctica de la oración mental sobre ellos,* published for the first time in Valladolid in 1605[[1155]](#footnote-1156), saw numerous editions in many languages.

This text was originally written for students of the Society of Jesus, and quickly spread during the author’s lifetime. Fr Miguel Nicolau, who edited the entry “La Puente” in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité,*  says as follows:

Cet ouvrage constitue la collection de méditations la plus importante et, nous semble-t-il, la meilleure qui ait été réalisée depuis le début de l’époque moderne. A sa valeur a répondu le succès de librairie. L’établissement de la bibliographie des éditions, traductions, abrégés et adaptations est difficile. On peut compter au moins quatre cents publications, qui à elles seules témoignent de l’influence très large de l’ouvrage.[[1156]](#footnote-1157)

The author adds on the same page: “On relève l’influence des *Meditaciones* chez des saints comme Robert Bellarmin, François de Sales, Jeanne de Chantal, Antoine-Marie Claret, Jean Bosco....; tous pratiquent et recommandent l’ouvrage de La Puente”.

The general plan of the work brings together the classical “theory” of the three ways (purgative, illuminative, unitive) with the structure and dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius.[[1157]](#footnote-1158) The author presents, in essence, the treasure of Catholic revelation and theology, but he is careful to interweave prayers, supplications, and ejaculatory prayers.

Just two years before this first General Chapter of the Salesians, the Marietti publishing house in Turin had published an eighth edition of this work, translated from Spanish by Giulio Cesare Braccini and corrected by Fr Giacomo Bonaretti.

In this edition the aforementioned *Introduction,* which *should be read a hundred times and learned by heart since it is worth its weight in gold* occupies thirty-six dense pages.[[1158]](#footnote-1159) This is a veritable treatise on mental prayer, according to the method of Saint Ignatius. Given the importance that the first General Chapter attributed to it, let me summarise its content.

The title specifies: *Introduction providing a brief summary of the things that encompass the practice and exercise of mental prayer.*

The introduction, entitled *The Holy Spirit, the first teacher of mental prayer,* speaks of the eminence of the exercise of mental prayer, “by which we deal familiarly with God our Lord.”[[1159]](#footnote-1160) The introduction is then divided into thirteen paragraphs:[[1160]](#footnote-1161)

I. *What is mental prayer* (pp. 2-5). It is said that it is an exercise of the three powers of the soul: memory, intellect, will (which moves the affections and urges towards virtue). This first part also teaches how to exercise these three powers in prayer.

II. *How to talk to God in mental prayer* (pp. 5-8). The first purpose of the prayer is to praise and thank him; the second is to ask him for graces.

III. *The virtues that accompany mental prayer, and its excellence.* (pp. 8-10). Mental prayer makes man like the angels.

IV. *On the subject of mental prayer in relation to meditation* (pp. 10-12). We talk about the three ways (purgative, illuminating, unitive) and the subject of prayer.

V. *The principle of prayer* (pp. 12-15). The author insists on preparation and “entry” into prayer.

VI. *The way we meditate and talk in prayer; and how we have to resist the distractions that assail us there* (pp. 15-18). Means to protect ourselves and to fight distractions. Trust in God.

VII. *The way we have to use imagination, language and other powers for mental prayer* (pp. 18-19)*.* How to use even the external senses in prayer.

VIII. *On the examination of prayer, and the fruits it has [for us] to draw from* (pp. 19-20). At the end of prayer it is very useful to examine what happened to us, how it happened, what the fruits were.

IX. *On the various ways in which one should pray on different subjects, adapted to different people and times* (pp. 20-23). The *three ways of praying* according to St Ignatius are taught (cf. *Spiritual Exercises,* nos. 238-260).

X. *On contemplation, and on how some people can pray mentally without many words* (pp. 23-25). Contemplation is a gift from God that is ordinarily given only after a long exercise in meditation.

XI. *On the extraordinary ways of mental prayer, and the many ways in which God communicates himself in it* (pp. 25-29). Prayer is a special gift of the Holy Spirit. We speak of the “spiritual senses” as an exercise of infused contemplation: inner sight, inner hearing, spiritual smell, spiritual taste, spiritual touch.

XII. *On the ordinary and extraordinary time that should be devoted to mental prayer, and on ejaculatory prayers* (pp. 30-32). How much time to devote to prayer. Being faithful to the established times. The necessity, convenience and usefulness of ejaculatory prayer

XIII. *Some advice regarding the following meditations* (pp. 32-35). How to use this book: spiritual reading, material for mental prayer, meditations for others, sermons and homilies. How these meditations can help climb the mystical Jacob’s Ladder.

The lengthy introduction concludes with the *Annotations that Saint Ignatius prefaces to his book of the Exercises.*

These, then, are the main points of the introduction; as for the meditations that follow, according to Fr Barberis’ own words, they constitute *immense material* (which)*, once finished, can be revisited many times...*

At the heart of this meditation, as in the other two texts mentioned, lies the mystery of the passion and death of the Redeemer. Nineteenth-century piety often draws on this reflection to stir up *affections* and move the *will* to firm resolutions.

##### 5.1.2 A reference to Trofarello’s first spiritual exercises or retreat

The question of the *spiritual exercises* of the Salesians will be addressed more directly, as we will see, in the third General Chapter. Nevertheless, even in 1877 there were some interesting references to the practice of those years, which give us a glimpse of the importance given to the experience of the exercises at this particular moment in the life of the congregation.

The rapid expansion began to create issues of *identity.* The division into *provinces*, and, in particular, the new American province, made it impossible to hold all the courses for Salesians in Lanzo. For America, it was decided that the seminary in Buenos Aires, with the permission of the archbishop, would be the most suitable place to hold them, given the city’s more central location. Other suitable locations were identified for the *Roman province* and for the *Ligurian province.*

But the fundamental problem was to give *unity* to these various experiences: “We see ... the importance,” we read in the minutes of the first Chapter, “that, since the Spiritual Exercises would henceforth be carried out in several places, those norms that had been traditionally preserved should be put in writing, so that, by separating things little by little, no rules or methods that differed from one another would arise.”[[1161]](#footnote-1162)

The same minutes also report a statement that clearly confirms what I have tried to express when talking about the first retreat in Trofarello: “We have seen,” it states, “that here it can be said that the Congregation has undergone a somewhat marked development only since the time when they began to do the Spiritual Exercises specifically.”[[1162]](#footnote-1163)

It was therefore clear, in relation to the history of those years, that there was a keen awareness of the importance of retreats for the consolidation of the congregation.

##### 5.1.3 The recommended texts for preaching the Spiritual Exercises

Another issue, which I mention, is related to the completion of clerical studies and the preaching of spiritual exercises.

Referring to the Constitutions,[[1163]](#footnote-1164) the preparatory document had formulated a question: “Priests should all prepare and write a triduum for the Forty Hours, a series of meditations and instructions for a complete retreat course (Chapter 12 of our rules). Which authors seem best suited to preparing a retreat course for young people? Which ones for the people?”[[1164]](#footnote-1165)

The Chapter members respond to this question with a long list of authors and titles:

Among the authors who seem most suitable for preparing a set of exercises, both for young people and for the general public, we particularly recommend the following to our members:

a) For the meditations:

- St Alphonsus Liguori – especially *Apparecchio alla morte* amd *Sermoni sui*

*Vangeli*.

- Fr Cattaneo.

- St Leonardo da Porto Maurizio.

- Biamonti – Da Ponte – Segneri Juniore.

- Granata – *Guida ovvero scorta dei peccatori.*

- Personio – *Guida degli uomini alla loro eterna salute.*

- Frassinetti – *Esercizi spirituali ai giovani.*

- Belasio – *Conferenze – Meditazioni – Prediche, ecc.*

- Belleccio – *Exercises of St Ignatius translated by Bresciani.*

- Bartoli – *L’eternità consigliera – L’uomo in punto di morte.*

- Nieremberg – *La bilancia del tempo.*

b) For the Instructions

- The Works of St Francis de Sales.

- Paolo Segneri – Especially *Il cristiano istruito.*

- St Leonardo da Porto Maurizio. Leonardo – Cattaneo – Biamonti mentioned above.

- Giovannini – *I doveri cristiani.*

*-* Giordano – *I vizi capitali.*

- Catechetical explanations of Piano – Bersani – Guillois – Rayneri – Schmid

- Ferreri – Gaume etc.

- Rodriguez – *Esercizio di perfezione* etc.

- Scaramelli – *Direttorio ascetico.*

- *Method pour confesser les enfants*.

- Timon-David – *Confession de la jeunesse.*

- Bosco – Various works, especially *Disputa tra un Avv. e un protestante sul*

dogma della Confessione.

- Gobinet – *Istruzioni per la gioventù.*

c) For the Forty Hours:

- Pagani – *L’anime divota della SS.ma Eucarestia.*

- Giordano – *I giovedì eucaristici.*

- Faber – *Tutto per Gesù – Il SS.mo Sacramento.*

- St Alphonsus – Vaious works – espec. *Pratica d’amar Gesù.*

- Frassinetti – *Il convito Eucaristico.*

- Ségur – *La presenza reale* etc.

This long list would deserve closer study. It could serve as an objective reference point for a more in-depth study of spiritual exercises/retreats in the Salesian tradition. All this goes beyond the tasks I have set myself. I will restrict myself here here to noting that more than a third of the authors cited are members of the Society of Jesus,[[1165]](#footnote-1166) which is understandable given the subject matter.

#### 5.2 The second General Chapter

In continuity with the first, the Second General Chapter, held in Lanzo from 3 to 15 September 1880, was dedicated above all to the consolidation of religious life.   
The topic of obedience, in particular, seems to be one of the founder’s main interests.[[1166]](#footnote-1167)

The printed text of the *Resolutions of the Second General Chapter* essentially covers much of the material dealt with in the First General Chapter, again organising the resolutions around four fundamental themes: *study, community life, piety and morality, and economy.[[1167]](#footnote-1168)*

This text contains some of the topics discussed in the First General Chapter which had not been previously reported. Don Bosco himself wrote in the preface to the printed volume of the deliberations of the first chapter: “For now, begin accepting what has been established regarding ... The other things will also be communicated to you shortly.”[[1168]](#footnote-1169)

Here, in particular, in the section dedicated to *Studii Ecclesiastici*, we find a long list of authors “who seem most suitable for a series of Exercises for young people and the [ordinary] people.” The list is essentially the same as that in the previous handwritten minutes.

#### 5.3 The Third General Chapter and regulations for the spiritual exercises

In preparation for the third General Chapter, which took place in Valsalice from 1 to 7 September 1883, a four-page document entitled *Matters to be discussed at the Third General Chapter in September 1883 was sent to the houses.*

The form is a kind of outline where eight “headings” are announced, and space is left blank for the confreres to make observations; at the end, after the space for signatures, a *Nota Bene* informs the rectors and members of their councils that any other matters may be suggested and added, even on separate sheets, for the benefit of the congregation and the greater glory of God.

Here are the topics announced:

I. Regulations for the spiritual exercises/retreats

II. Regulations for the novices and their study

III. Regulations for Parishes directed and run by Salesians.

IV. Culture (education) of coadjutor confreres.

V. Addressing the working class in Salesian houses and ways to develop the vocation of young artisans.

VI. Rules for the dismissal of members.

VII. Establishment and development of festive oratories in Salesian houses

VIII. Revision and modification of the Regulations for the houses.[[1169]](#footnote-1170)

Many of these forms, compiled in whole or in part by Salesians and signed by them, are kept in the Central Archives. Here I will examine only those that refer to the first topic, regulation of the exercises, together with the subsequent conclusions of the Chapter on the same subject.

I would like to stress, however, that Don Bosco’s main concern in this third Chapter seems to be the order and morality of the congregation, as evidenced, among other things, by the numerous regulations he introduced and his concluding recommendations.[[1170]](#footnote-1171)

Nemo repente fit summus, nemo fit malus – Don Bosco is reported to have said in the third of his six final recommendations, according to the minutes of his secretary Fr Giovanni Marenco. So let us adhere to principles to prevent great evil in the future. Experience tells us so. If someone has deceived the Rec. and the House, has begun to abandon meditation, the practice of piety, then a few newspapers, some special friendships, in short, disorder. [[1171]](#footnote-1172)

The process leading to “moral disorder”, therefore, would begin with the abandonment of the practices of piety, foremost among which is meditation.

This focus on the life of prayer also emerges from the discussion regarding the regulations for novices. Don Bosco said:

The Holy Father Pius IX repeatedly told me that in forming Salesians, the aim should be to make them exemplary priests in the world. Therefore, exercises of piety leading to this end are required: at the same time, it is good that the novices [ascritti] have their duties to perform, so that their aptitudes and dispositions may be seen. However, care must be taken to ensure that the practices of piety are not impeded.[[1172]](#footnote-1173)

This last statement would confirm, in the founder’s plan, a harmonious *composition*, rather than a *contrast*, between an *ascetic novitiate* and an *apostolic novitiate.*

##### 5.3.1 Some observations on the regulations for the Spiritual Exercises

From the forms filled out by some confreres in preparation for this third chapter, and from the summary of these forms, which I have reorganised into twenty-seven observations,[[1173]](#footnote-1174) I offer some comment here *passim*:

- ...that meditations should take this form, that is, they should not merely instruct, but motivate, and therefore also in form they should have their *preludes* made by the preacher himself on behalf of all, and ordinarily end with a *colloquy*, which is so beneficial... (*Fr Giuseppe Vespignani).[[1174]](#footnote-1175)*

- The Holy Spiritual Exercises, especially among the Novices, triennial and perpetually Professed, given with the kind of rigour practised in the Society (of Jesus), produce admirable and lasting effects (*Carlo Pane).[[1175]](#footnote-1176)*

- In order that they may be of real benefit to the souls of both the Salesians and the young people, it is advisable to adopt the whole system of St Ignatius. In this way, true Salesians will be formed, who, by seriously striving to acquire every virtue, will sanctify themselves and those dependent on them. To achieve this, it is necessary to study it thoroughly and apply it in all circumstances compatible with the particular circumstances of the Salesian Congregation (*Fr Pietro Pozzan).[[1176]](#footnote-1177)*

- Silence and contemplation are highly recommended (R 4).

- No one should omitted them unless it is absolutely impossible or due to illness (R 15).

- It is proposed that greater importance and more time be given to both general and particular examination of conscience so that members may maintain the habit of doing so throughout the year (R 18).

- It is recommended to those who give the exercises that they study the book of the Exercises of St Ignatius more thoroughly (R 19).

Overall, all the comments collected demonstrate an awareness of the importance of the Exercises.

Among the acts of this Third General Chapter, there is also a *Regulations for making the Spiritual Exercises according to the method of St Ignatius*, adapted to the needs of the Salesian Congregation, followed by some *Norms for those who give the exercises*.

We read in the Regulations:

During the exercises, observe perfect silence with the outside world so as to speak only with God. Therefore, speak to no one except your director, leave all business and correspondence aside, love solitude and seclusion, and keep all your senses guarded, especially your eyes. The more solitary the soul is, the more it will speak with God and hear his voice.

Meditation will be made with reverence, integrity and fervour, following the rules laid down by Saint Ignatius for making meditation well. With reverence in regard to position, with integrity in regard to the time assigned, with fervour in regard to application, while trying not to commit oneself to *fare voti* [making promises?], that is, striving to avoid tears or sensitive emotions.[[1177]](#footnote-1178)

Below are the eight rules for the one directing the Exercises and the introduction that precedes them:

The task of those responsible for giving the Exercises to both young people and Salesians is extremely important. It can be said that the greater or lesser fruit of the retreatants depends on them, so they should endeavour to practise the following:

l. Begin with a serious, thorough and extensive study of St Ignatius’ golden book of exercises. He divides his work into four weeks.

The first includes meditations for the purgative way, in order to reform one’s way of life: “deformata reformare”. In the second, he applies the meditations of the conformative way, that is, “reformata conformare”. The third contains those of the illuminative way, so it can be resolved as “confomata confirmare”. The last one refers to the unitive way, which can be reduced to “confirmata transformare”. However, a serious and in-depth study of the text is not enough; it is also worth studying the interpreters, especially Bellecio, the Most Reverend Father Roothaan, who, together with Father Viscardini, carried out an extremely thorough study of the book, and other authors.

2. After studying, it will be helpful to write down all your meditations, not in the form of sermons, but as true meditations. The instructions themselves will be written down, applying both of them to the quality of the listeners.

3. They will never last more than three quarters of an hour or less than half an hour.

4. It should always be preceded by thorough preparation, which consists of a thoughtful study of the topic to be discussed before God.

5. Always stir the minds and hearts of your listeners with practical conclusions.

6. Speak clearly and like a true minister of God, putting your finger on the sore spot without hesitation.

7. Begin with a brief and affectionate conversation with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to ask for enlightenment and to move the will to obtain the fruit he proposes. Sometimes you may end your meditation with a prayer to the Lord.

8. Make sure that the retreatants are given enough time and material to meditate on their own, and try to gently guide them yourself.[[1178]](#footnote-1179)

It can be noted here, however, that these regulations and subsequent rules were not included among the resolutions of the Chapter, but are part of the proposals presented by the confreres; in any case, they are of some historical interest to us.[[1179]](#footnote-1180)

##### 5.3.2 The final text of the Regulations for the spiritual exercises/retreats

This first *Regolamento degli Esercizi Spirituali nelle case della Pia Società di San Francesco di Sales*, was prepared by Fr Michael Rua. [[1180]](#footnote-1181)The manuscript consists of thirteen large handwritten pages and contains numerous corrections made by Don Bosco himself.

The regulations, detailed and meticulous in all their parts, refer us, in their content, to those of the Sanctuary of St Ignatius above Lanzo, which I have already mentioned in this study. Fr Rua, moreover, had been, as I have already said, among the frequent visitors to the sanctuary, particularly before 1866.

First, let us compare some aspects of these two regulations, starting with the time of day:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | SANCTUARY OF ST IGNATIUS |  | FIRST SALESIAN REGULATIONS |
| 5.30  6  7.45  9.30  11.30  12.00  2.00  3.30  5.30  7.45  9.30 | Rising  Prime – Points for meditation and review in one’s room.  Mass - Terce – Coffee in one’s room.  Sext – Instruction – Reflections in one’s room.  Nones – Reading in church.  *Angelus –* Lunch – Recreation.  Litany of Our Lady in church, then rest.  Vespers – Instruction, reflection in one’s room.  Matins and lauds – Meditation and repetition.  Holy Rosary – *Angelus –* Supper and recreation.  Litany of the Saints in church, then rest. | 5.30  6.00  9.00  11.30  12.00  2.00  3.00  5.30  9.00 | Rising  Morning prayers with litanies and the other usual prayers to be recited after the rosary. Veni Creator, etc. Meditation. Community Mass – Prime and Terce – Breakfast in silence.  Sext and Nones – Reading for 10 or 15 minutes - Instruction - Hymn of sacred praise Reflection in the room  Visit to the Blessed Sacrament – Examen of conscience – *Angelus*  Lunch. Thanksgiving with the recitation of the Miserere, which ends at the church if it can be done comfortably;  Litany of the Saints and rest  Vespers and Compline; Instruction; Hymn of sacred praise; Recreation in silence.  Matins and Lauds; Veni Creator, etc. Meditation; Reflections for a few minutes, Ave Maris Stella Rosary and Tantum Ergo. Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament and De Profundis;  Supper and recreation;  Evening prayers and rest. |

The timetable for the Salesian Exercises therefore essentially follows the one for the exercises at the sanctuary of St Ignatius, according to Fr Guala’s regulations.

General outline for the Salesian Exercises includes.

Advice for Provincials

Rules for the Moderator

Rules for the economer

Rules for the Prefect of Sacristy

Hebdomadary [the priest assigned to leading liturgy, office, etc. ]

Reader

Assistant to the preachers

Assistant for the refectory and dormitory

General rules

Let us compare, by way of example, the rules for the weekly schedule, which are present in both regulations.[[1181]](#footnote-1182)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SANCTUARY OF ST IGNATIUS | FIRST SALESIAN REGULATIONS |
| ADVICE FOR THE HEBDOMADARY | THE HEBDOMADARY |
| 1. He will ensure that the office is recited with composure, that the asterisk is observed, and that the voice is modulated in a manner suitable for the majority.  2. He will choose one of the six supporters of the choir to read the martyrology  3. Every morning, when the retreatants arrive at the church, before beginning the *hour of Prime*, they shall say the *Angelus Domini* without delay*.*  4. At 12 noon, before lunch, the *Angelus Domini* will be said in the church.  5. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the Litany of the B.V. will be said in the church.  6. At 9.30 in the evening, after recreation, at the sound of the bell, the Litany of the Saints will be said...[[1182]](#footnote-1183) | 1. The Hebdomadary must direct the singing and recitation of the divine offices, intone the hymns, lead the morning and evening prayers and the Rosary.  2. He shall ensure that all these prayers and hymns are done with decorum and solemnity, dividing the retreatants into two choirs.  3. It will be very helpful to recite the divine office slowly, pausing at the asterisks, to make it easier for those who are not very practised or fluent in reading Latin.  4. His special focus should be on punctuality in attending church; however, before starting, allow a few minutes for everyone to gather.  5. If the office of the day is said according to the Calendar, the instructions in the Calendar itself must be read aloud and slowly at Vespers and Matins.  6. When singing Lauds and hymns, it is best to choose the ones best known among the retreatants, and to sing them in a tone that is neither too loud nor too soft, but within the general range of voices.  7. After each sermon, allow five minutes for reflection before beginning any hymns or prayers.  8.. Remember that if the singing is well performed and the offices and prayers are well recited, they will greatly help to obtain good results from the exercises themselves. |

A comparison between the two texts does not seem to show, in the latter case, a direct dependence, but rather highlights the richness of the Salesian regulations, which appear, here as elsewhere, more detailed and carefully crafted. There are also some individual indications or recurring parts, such as the rules for the *Sacristan* or for the *Table Invigilator.*

Among the *General Rules* with which the Salesian text concludes, we read, for example, some notices, the corresponding ones of which can be found:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SANCTUARY OF ST IGNATIUS | FIRST SALESIAN REGULATIONS |
| I. Outside of recreation times, everyone must observe strict silence...  VI. It is forbidden to leave the Sanctuary...  IV. ... anyone who gets up before the signal in the morning is asked to remain in their room or to go to church slowly and quietly so as not to wake the others.  … we have gathered in this place of solitude to seriously think about the soul, about God, about eternity…  X. Please do not write or make any marks on the walls...[[1183]](#footnote-1184) | 3. During the exercises, silence must be observed at all times except during recreation after lunch and after dinner, when talking is permitted. Be careful, however, not to indulge in entertainment that could lead to distraction. During recreation after Mass, you may only speak in a low voice.  5. To avoid distraction, which is a serious obstacle to the success of the exercises, no one should leave the grounds of the house designated for the exercises.  6. No one should get up in the morning before the appointed time for rising without a valid reason; when this happens, take care not to disturb those who still need to rest, and do not linger in corridors or courtyards, but go to the church.  It is recommended that everyone be punctual in observing the timetable, and keep in mind God, the soul, and eternity.  Everyone should refrain from causing any damage in the dormitory, corridors and especially in the gardens, and should also refrain from writing on the walls. |

Regarding *silence* during exercises, the minutes of this Third General Chapter state: “There is discussion as to whether it is appropriate to order absolute silence after breakfast (the tradition of allowing quiet conversation survived for a long time) or whether moderate recreation should be allowed.” The Chapter decided to continue as before, with 17 votes in favour and 15 against.

Fr Brocardo tells us more about this:

There was a time when the Congregation discussed whether to abolish moderate recreation in the afternoon and evening during the exercises. The Chapter, presided over by Don Bosco, weighed up the pros and cons and proceeded to a vote. Six voted for the *status quo*, a vote for complete silence. It was believed, Fr Ceria commented, that this was Fr Rua. However, in a letter from Fr Cartier, which I discovered in the archives, it states, “Fr Rua told me that the vote in favour of total silence was given by Don Bosco.”[[1184]](#footnote-1185)

This particular attention devoted by Don Bosco to the *spiritual exercises* in the Third General Chapter is perfectly consistent with what I have tried to highlight so far regarding the esteem that the founder of the Salesians always had for this particular experience of the spirit; his personal experience at the Shrine of St Ignatius, the indications in the *introduction* to the rules, where the exercises are defined as *the fundamental part of the practices of piety*, and the practice of the congregation confirm this.

The very beginning of the *regulations* we have been discussing stated: “These exercises may be called support for religious congregations and a treasure for the members who attend them”.[[1185]](#footnote-1186)

### 5.4 The Fourth General Chapter

This last General Chapter during Don Bosco’s lifetime was held in the same period and in the same town as the previous one.

Of the various issues addressed, only one relates to this study.

In the discussion concerning the *Regulations for the parishes,* in fact, the difficulty of finding time in the morning for daily meditation was raised. The minutes say:

In addition to celebrating Holy Mass and reciting the Office, it is the duty of every Salesian to spend at least half an hour a day in meditation. Since it is more difficult to do this together in the morning in a parish, the rector of the house should establish this practice in the afternoon, around 5 o'clock, as is already done in some houses and among the Filippini with great success.[[1186]](#footnote-1187)

The printed text of the *Resolutions* specifies:

In a parish house, the exact observance of our rules is certainly more difficult. However, the Parish Priest and his Coadjutors must, as a general rule, adhere to common life both for the practices of piety, and with regard to food, clothing and rest. The parish priest should take care to set the most appropriate time for daily meditation and spiritual reading, ensuring that his Coadjutors participate regularly. If possible, do it in church, so that the parishioners may be edified.[[1187]](#footnote-1188)

These two quotations also testify to the attention paid in those years to the observance of the practices of piety and, in particular, to daily meditation.

### 6. His final years

The last decade of Don Bosco's life was therefore marked by the first four General Chapters of the Congregation.

Once the difficulties surrounding the approval of the society had been overcome and dialogue with the Turin curia had improved, starting in 1883,[[1188]](#footnote-1189) the founder's concerns turned, as we have seen, to the spiritual and moral consolidation of religious life.

At the end of 1877, on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, he preached to professed members, novices and candidates about morning meditation. As we read in Fr Barberis’ *cronichetta:*

It is true that there are many good Christians in the world but there are also many dangers, and how many difficulties must be overcome in order to do a little good!

Take, for example, Christians who practise meditation. There are very few of them in the world, but let us look for those Christians who can do it best. Here, fortunately, there is a holy custom of meditating, so if we want to do it all together, we just have to get up early in the morning. We get up at five and do it all together without anyone disturbing us. In the world, however, it is not possible for many people to do this; throughout the day, it is difficult to find the right moment because household chores are constantly demanding attention. Let’s not talk about getting up early, which some people expect to be 7 or 8 or even 10 o'clock...

… if we also did this, what would happen to meditation? We wouldn't talk about meditation anymore![[1189]](#footnote-1190)

The most constant and severe criticism of the Turin Curia had focused on the recruitment and formation of young Salesians; now Don Bosco’s attention seemed to be concentrated precisely in this direction. Fr Desramaut notes: “A partir de 1878, avec l’explosion de sa petite société, il semble que Don Bosco ait dû au moins partiellement reconnaître le bien-fondé de ces remarques. Ses interventions en chapitre en 1878, 1880 et 1883 ne laissent que peu de doutes à ce sujet”.[[1190]](#footnote-1191)

Some of Don Bosco’s long *dreams*, recounted *for the instruction of the Pious Salesian Society*, also reveal this concern for formation.[[1191]](#footnote-1192)

The years after 1884 were the years of physical decline.

Probably starting in January of that year,[[1192]](#footnote-1193) Don Bosco began writing a notebook, whose title on the cover is *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio Bosco a’ suoi figliuoli salesiani* but whose contents are better known to Don Bosco’s sons under the name *Spiritual Testament*; Don Bosco’s last entry in this notebook was on 24 December 1887, just over a month before his death.

In the first part of the notebook, Don Bosco jotted down some memories of his early years as a priest, some guidelines for his family, and the resolutions he had made: “...every day I will devote some time to meditation and spiritual reading...” “I will do at least a quarter of an hour of preparation and another quarter of an hour of thanks after the Holy Mass...” “I will endeavour to recite the Breviary devoutly and preferably in church so that it may serve as a visit to the Blessed Sacrament...”[[1193]](#footnote-1194)

After these first pages, the actual *spiritual testament* begins, with instructions for benefactors, recommendations for *after his death*, for vocation ministry, for communities, for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and requests for suffrage; finally, a *profession of faith*, an exhortation to poverty, sacrifice and apostolic zeal, and a request for forgiveness. “I humbly ask God for forgiveness for all my sins...” wrote Don Bosco, probably towards the end of 1886. However, I must apologise if anyone noticed that on several occasions I gave too brief a preparation or too brief a thanksgiving at Holy Mass. I was in a way forced to do so by the crowd of people who interrupted me in the sacristy and prevented me from praying both before and after Holy Mass...”"[[1194]](#footnote-1195) “Our congregation,” he says a little further on, “has a bright future ahead of it, prepared by divine providence, and its glory will be lasting as long as our rules are observed.”[[1195]](#footnote-1196)

A personal recollection of Blessed Fr Philip Rinaldi, who in 1879 was part of the first group of novices at the first true novitiate house in San Benigno Canavese and who, as rector in Turin from 1883, enjoyed a true spiritual closeness to Don Bosco during the last years of his life, concludes this part of my study.[[1196]](#footnote-1197)

In 1922, he became Rector Major of the Salesian congregation and, about ten years later, he wrote a confidential circular letter[[1197]](#footnote-1198) addressed to all novice directors, which begins with the words *Dear Directors of Novices...*

The main purpose of the letter is to offer novice directors two different *methods* for organising the content and some guidance on the necessary scrutinies to be distributed throughout the novitiate year.

Between the explanation of the first and second methods, Fr Rinaldi inserts a *strong recommendation*. It consists of five pages, all dedicated to the importance of learning to *meditate* well during the novitiate period. The topics are taken from Holy Scripture, but above all from the personal experience of the founder.

...prayer and a spirit of union with God are necessary, Fr Rinaldi says at one point: we must pray and meditate a lot; we must make the novices pray and teach them to meditate well from an early age... Therefore, let your first great concern at the beginning of the novitiate be to teach meditation, firmly convinced that only when they have begun to acquire a taste for meditation will the novices be able to make real progress on the spiritual path.[[1198]](#footnote-1199)

To the novice directors, to confirm *the immense esteem that our dear Blessed had for meditation as an element of formation and perfection in the spiritual life*, he offers *with paternal freedom* a personal memory of an encounter with Don Bosco, by then nearing the end of his life.

Would you like further confirmation of the immense esteem in which our dear Father held meditation as an element of formation and perfection in the spiritual life? I choose it from among thousands, recalling a personal memory that I wish to share with paternal freedom. When I went to visit my dear Father in the last year, indeed in the last months of his life, and eager to confess to him once again, I begged him to listen to me. I knew very well that everyone had been forbidden to go to Don Bosco for confession, but I believed I would not have transgressed this order by acting as I will now tell you. “You mustn’t tire yourself,” I said to Don Bosco, “you mustn’t speak: I’ll do the talking; you just say one word to me.” - Notice my plea, just one word. After listening to me, the good Father addressed me with just one word: and do you know what it was? *Meditation!* ... He added nothing else, no explanation or comment. One word: Meditation! But that word meant more to me than a long speech. And after so many years I still seem to see the Father in that attitude of holy and quiet abandonment and to hear him repeat: *Meditation!*[[1199]](#footnote-1200)

# CHAPTER 7

# Mental prayer in Don Bosco’s religious experience

# Testimonies of contemporaries

### 1. Holiness from up close

This lengthy analytical section concludes with a chapter devoted to several testimonies from contemporaries regarding the role of mental prayer in the founder’s spiritual experience.

In the introduction to *Don Bosco con Dio*, which is still one of the most original and evocative biographies of St John Bosco, Fr Eugenio Ceria warns: “No, let no one who does not know how much of a man of prayer he was delude themselves into thinking they understand Don Bosco; those who focus too much on biographical facts without properly understanding his innermost thoughts and habits will gain very little from his admirable life.”[[1200]](#footnote-1201)

Unfortunately, however, most of the time these *intimate and habitual movements* remained jealously guarded in the secrecy of his inner self.

At the beginning of this section, I pointed out the extreme scarcity of autobiographical sources that would allow us to gain a deeper understanding of Don Bosco’s *spiritual experience*. He does not allow anyone to *remove the veil* from the sanctuary of his life of prayer; he does not indulge in confidences about his private life, nor does he write a spiritual autobiography or a diary. In his numerous letters, he never reveals his soul to such an extent as to allow us to understand, in depth, the “rhythms” of his life of prayer, his spiritual *movements*, his *consolations*, his very states of mind.

Fr Armando Castellani, one of the main biographers of Saint Leonard Murialdo, wrote:

...the life of every human being, especially that of a saint, even after its earthly cycle has ended, in its deepest essence is an entirely intimate, secret matter: the most precious part of its external and internal history escapes all scrutiny and remains beyond any posthumous investigation. No attempt at exploration can safely reach the innermost zone of his soul and spirituality, nor can it accurately grasp and record that mystery which always accompanies the gestures and most common manifestations of God‘s friends and lovers.[[1201]](#footnote-1202)

Nevertheless, some tools, even if indirect, can allow us to recognise or, at least, glimpse the inner world of the saint.

The analysis of Don Bosco’s formative experience, of some constants in his project of educating young people to prayer, of some of his writings and biographies, of the genesis and development of the *founding experience* provide us with an important frame of reference which undoubtedly allows us to understand his concrete proposal for Christian and religious life, but also to distinguish his spiritual universe, his way of *judging* and *feeling*.

Another indirect means of attempting to penetrate the sanctuary of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience is provided by the testimonies of his contemporaries who refer to his life of prayer and, in particular, by the sworn statements that some witnesses deposited with the ecclesiastical tribunals during the cause for his beatification and canonisation.  
Clearly, these testimonies must also be subjected to historical criticism or psychological analysis. In this regard, Fr Francis Desramaut writes:

De son temps déjà, les témoins avaient orienté en fonction de leurs propre répresentations - sur le saint idéal par exemple – leurs reportages directs et surtout indirects sur lui. C’était inevitable. Il ne faut surtout pas croire que les témoins des procès de canonisation, parce que protégés par leurs serments et par l’appareil canonique, furent indemnes de ces sortes d’infirmités. Leurs apologistes inconditionnels, fréquents dans le cas don Bosco, connaissent bien mal la psycologie humaine. Dans ou sous le stuc des témoignages, il convient de remonter aux propos, aux comportements, aux sentiments et aux idées de l’acteur.[[1202]](#footnote-1203)

While I agree with the basic premise of this observation and the need for a less “naive” approach to the testimonies of contemporaries, I feel I must say once again that the shared history of the early protagonists of the founding experience or their mutual feelings do not *ipso facto* render their statements unusable. In my opinion, it would be unacceptable to adopt the principle that in order to write the history of a human being it is necessary to give priority to the more “objective” accounts of *outsiders* (or even *opponents*). compared to those of his *neighbours*, of those who knew and loved him, merely because their inner involvement would make them in themselves less *neutral.*[[1203]](#footnote-1204)This prejudice would seem even less acceptable in the specific case where the investigation concerns *private life,* something that is certainly less known and understood in depth by occasional visitors or by those who do not have a particular *affinity* with the protagonist of the story being reconstructed.

This is why, precisely in the attempt to draw *as close as possible* to the spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians, I cannot think that it is my task to disregard the testimonies of the cause. The proximity of the *witnesses* to the founder and the mutual influences between them must be taken into account, but their voices also constitute a valuable, irreplaceable *resource*; the particular context of their statements and the oath they are required to take in any case testify to their substantial *good faith.*[[1204]](#footnote-1205)Qqqqqq

A general criterion for evaluating the data emerging from these statements seems to me to be their *consistency* with the overall picture of the human and spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians, as it emerges from the history of his life, his path of formation, the content of his writings, and the project of holiness proposed to young people and Salesians.

### 2. The cause of beatification and canonisation

Before comparing some of the statements made by the witnesses, I will attempt to outline a brief chronology of the process in this section, with particular reference to the debate concerning the saint’s life of prayer.[[1205]](#footnote-1206) I will therefore focus on some testimonies, grouping them by theme, and on the definitive *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones,* which paved the way for the *Declaration on the Heroicity of Virtues,* pronounced on 8 February 1927 during the session of the General Congregation of Rites in the presence of Pope Pius XI.

Some of the difficulties and objections relating to Don Bosco’s prayer life and the corresponding *responsiones* also represented, in my opinion, a favourable opportunity to shed light on certain aspects of his spiritual life.

#### 2.1 Brief history of the process

Just twenty-four hours had passed since Don Bosco’s funeral when, on 2 February 1888, the Superior Chapter of the Salesians, presided over by Fr Michael Rua,[[1206]](#footnote-1207) considered the possibility of promoting his cause.[[1207]](#footnote-1208)

The preparations were so intense that the ordinary diocesan process began two years and five months later, on 4 June 1890.[[1208]](#footnote-1209) Don Bosco’s reputation for holiness, already well established, and the strong prevalence of the “supernatural” in his life, accelerated the process and convinced everyone that it would be one of the swiftest in history. But this, perhaps providentially, did not happen.[[1209]](#footnote-1210)

The second phase of the process, the *apostolic* phase, overseen directly by the Sacred Congregation of Rites of the Holy See, officially began with the Decree of Introduction of the Cause, which was issued on 24 July 1907.

Among the first *animadversiones* (objections) to the heroism of Don Bosco’s virtues raised by the Promoter of the Faith, Monsignor Alessandro Verde, and aimed at preventing the start of this second phase, none concerned his life of prayer; rather, the unique personality of the saint was questioned in a more general way. The response, entrusted to the then young lawyer Fr Carlo Salotti, was convincing and the apostolic process could begin.

The path towards the declaration of the *heroicity of virtues* encountered two fundamental difficulties in the subsequent stages, concerning the life of prayer.[[1210]](#footnote-1211)

The first, in chronological order, relates to the dispensation from saying the breviary, obtained by Don Bosco in 1858; it already appears in the *animadversiones* presented after the *Positio super virtutibus* of 1923. This difficulty, which would be raised several times by the Promoter of the Faith, only indirectly concerns our topic, as it relates to vocal prayer; however, I will mention the solution to the controversy.

The second difficulty, however, refers to the time devoted by the Saint to *formal mental prayer.* The Promoter of the Faith said in the *Novae animadversiones:* “...ab aliquo teste dicatur quod Servus Dei non multum oraret suae institutionis negotiis implicatus. Hoc autem alienum esse ab hominibus vere sanctis et multiplicibus curis oppressis neminem latet; imo sic multiplicatis istis, orationibus illi magis instabant.”[[1211]](#footnote-1212) Taking up some testimonies, including one from Fr Barberis, who said: “In his very active life, we never saw him doing it (meditation) with a book in his hand or in a group, as he was unable to do so....”[[1212]](#footnote-1213), The Promotor concludes: “Quaeram iterum, non possit heroicus in *pietate* reputari Sacerdos, Religiosus Congregationis Conditor, de quo ex pluribus de visu testibus sibi addictissimis, constat certissime, ipsum habitualiter orationem mentalem propie dictam praetermisisse?”[[1213]](#footnote-1214)

The arguments and testimonies cited on this issue by the *Responsio ad novas animadversiones* were not considered convincing.

Thus, on 26 August 1926, the *Aliae novae animadversiones* once again raised the two objections concerning mental and vocal prayer. The next definitive *responsio* [[1214]](#footnote-1215)opened the way for the final phase of the process.

“Unlike today’s procedure,” Monsignor Papa stressed, “the one followed for Don Bosco, which was normal at the time, stands out for the intensity of the meetings and the far greater number of interventions.”[[1215]](#footnote-1216)

After a preliminary meeting and two preparatory meetings, in which some fifty cardinals discussed the heroic virtues of Don Bosco, the general congregation was held in the presence of the Holy Father on 8 February 1927. “The 33 votes cast, all *affirmative*, paved the way for the final gesture.”[[1216]](#footnote-1217)

The next *super miraculis* phases were without particular difficulties.

On 2 June 1929, John Bosco was declared Blessed.

On 1 April 1934, Pope Pius XI presided over the solemn ceremony of canonisation.

#### 2.2 Some testimonies from the cause

In this section, I will attempt to compile an anthology of testimonies on the life of prayer and, more specifically, on mental prayer, taken from various stages of the process and organised according to their content. Since the reliability of these accounts is also linked to the “quality” of the witnesses and their “proximity” to the founder, I will try to provide some brief biographical references about them, where this has not already been done.

##### 2.2.1 Testimonies of continuous union with God

This is what many classical authors have defined as *simple union* or even *prayer of loving attention to God,[[1217]](#footnote-1218)* and it represents a form of diffused mental prayer.*[[1218]](#footnote-1219)* Don Bosco showed he was capable of recognising this *extraordinary gift*, as we have seen, in the lives of some of the protagonists of the biographies he wrote.

The testimonies, in this regard, are numerous.

Bishop Giovanni Cagliero, a compatriot of Don Bosco, was one of the first four young people who in 1854 had adhered to the saint’s idea of forming the Salesian Society. He also belonged to the first group of disciples who, in December 1859, signed the constitutions; at that time, Giovanni Cagliero was twenty-one years old.[[1219]](#footnote-1220)

Don Bosco constantly surrounded him with esteem and trust[[1220]](#footnote-1221) and received Holy Communion from his hands shortly before he died.[[1221]](#footnote-1222)

He left numerous testimonies on the subject of *continuous prayer* and *union with God*: “The Venerable Don Bosco always prayed because everything he did was directed to the glory of God, and he did it in his presence. So his continuous, holy, incredible work was also prayer for him, uniting the contemplative life with the active life with admirable perfection.”[[1222]](#footnote-1223)

He was imperturbable in the midst of the world – we read in the documents of the information process *-* because he had thrown himself into God’s arms. His faith was so alive that he was always in God’s presence, spending every moment of his life for God’s glory. I remember and will always remember the last visit that [Cardinal Alimonda] made to Don Bosco when he was ill at the end of 1887, before leaving for Rome. I was present at that visit. Don Bosco recommended to the Cardinal, holding his nightcap in his hand and with tears in his eyes, to pray for the salvation of his soul, and then, his face lighting up, he added, as I have said and as he had already said to me, to tell the Pope that his work was and would be, like his life, entirely for the defence of the authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Alimonda was amazed to see him so calm, so unperturbed by the pains of his illness and so full of thoughts of God. As he left, he turned to me and said, “Don Bosco is always with God; he is *in intimate union with God.*[[1223]](#footnote-1224)

Bishop Cagliero once again says: “God was the constant thought of his mind, the flame of his heart, the goal of all his actions, the life of his life.”[[1224]](#footnote-1225) “He was imperturbable in the midst of the world because he had thrown himself into God’s arms. His faith was so alive that he was always in God’s presence, spending every moment of his life for God’s glory.”[[1225]](#footnote-1226)

The following, on the other hand, is by Fr Michael Rua, reported in the *Responsio ad novas animadversiones*:

Ab hoc autem consilio numquam deflexit, et toto vitae tempore Deo ita vacavit, ut Cardinalis Alimonda Ven.Bosco his verbis definire non dubitaverit: “UNIONE CON DIO”. “This truth,” testatur Rev.mus D.Rua, “was demonstrated especially by his never speaking of any subject without introducing the thought of God or some truth of our holy religion; *thus, for example, passing through the streets of the city, he would sometimes stop to gaze at the shop windows of fruit sellers, where many kinds of seasonal fruit were neatly displayed...* he contemplated them and then, moved, turned to his neighbour and said: How admirable and lovable is Divine Providence; how many beautiful fruits of different colours, shapes and flavours he has prepared for us, all for the service of mankind! At other times, contemplating the starry sky, he would pause to discuss the immensity of God, pointing out the innumerable number of stars, their immense distance from one another, their extraordinary size, and highlighting his omnipotence and infinite wisdom in the order established among them and in the ease of creation, having needed only a single *fiat*.” Et iterum: “The Servant of God... was called *Union with God* and such really was the case, for it seemed that he could not speak without introducing the thought of God and some hint of religious truth into what he said. Similia passim tradunt ceteri testes. Nunc in Deum cogitationem suam iugiter ferre, cum Deo mente et corpore sine intermissione esse unitum, nonne idem est ac orationi mentali continuo vacare?[[1226]](#footnote-1227)

Fr Giulio Barberis also highlighted this characteristic of Don Bosco during the canonical process: “The Venerable always lived in the presence of God, and thinking of God’s presence, he sought nothing other than what was according to His will.” “I saw him hundreds of times, I could say, going up and down the stairs, always praying. Even along the street he prayed. He suffered from eye pain for a long time and his doctor had strictly forbidden him to read or write under artificial light. I went into his room many times during those days and always found him praying... When travelling, when he wasn't proofreading, I always saw him praying.”[[1227]](#footnote-1228)

Fr Francesco Cerruti was also part of the first core group of the *Salesian Society*[[1228]](#footnote-1229) *in 1859.* “Among the men whom Divine Providence raised up alongside Don Bosco,” wrote Fr Amedeo Rodinò, “to help him organise the fledgling Congregation with a firm and sure hand, Fr Cerruti stands out along with few others.”[[1229]](#footnote-1230)

At the process, Fr Cerruti testified: “From the moment I first met Don Bosco, his life always seemed to me to be in constant union with God. Whenever he was questioned, even in the midst of the driest and most distracting business, he responded as if he were absorbed in meditation.”[[1230]](#footnote-1231)

“Although I cannot respond in detail to what is requested in this questioning process,” declared Fr Secondo Marchisio, a Salesian and the youngest of the witnesses at the diocesan inquiry[[1231]](#footnote-1232), “because I would never finish recounting all the little incidents that prove it, I must confidently affirm that the Venerable always showed true love and a deep spirit of prayer and union with God, as we were able to ascertain every time we approached him.”[[1232]](#footnote-1233)

Vincentian Giovanni Vincenzo Tasso, a former pupil of the Oratory in Turin from 1862 to 1865, became Bishop of Aosta in 1908.[[1233]](#footnote-1234) He said of his relationship with Don Bosco and the Salesian work:

As a priest and missionary during my stay in Turin, I had many opportunities to see him, talk to him and deal with him. I also preached the Exercises to his novices at S. Benigno Canavese, and to his young students in the oratory in Turin, living with him during those days. Sometimes he even asked me for advice on how to run his pious society. Having lived in Turin for about thirty years, I had many opportunities to hear about him and his works, both from clergy and lay people...

I have always had great veneration for the Servant of God since I was a boy when I entered his Oratory, a veneration that grew not only during the three years I remained at the Oratory, but also afterwards, as I gained a greater knowledge of his virtues and works.[[1234]](#footnote-1235)

Two excerpts from his lengthy testimony at the apostolic process bring us back to the theme of union with God:

“It has always been my firm belief,” Bishop Tasso stated, “that all the great works begun and accomplished by the Venerable Servant of God, in the midst of so many difficulties, had their roots and fruitful source in his faith...It was enough to spend a little time with him to immediately realise that he was truly a *homo Dei*; and faith and the supernatural shone through every word he spoke and his whole person. I experienced this firsthand.

From the sentiments that the Venerable expressed not only in his sermons but also in private conversations, it was clear that he continually contemplated and meditated on the great mysteries of the Faith...[[1235]](#footnote-1236)

The statement filed shortly afterwards was even more explicit:

The Venerable always burned with the greatest love for God, and I am convinced that he lived in continuous union with God. I remember that among us young people there was this belief that the Venerable spoke directly with the Lord, especially when he had advice to give us about our future.

Before answering anything, he would pause for a moment, raise his eyes to the heavens as if to receive from God what he was to say to us.[[1236]](#footnote-1237)

##### 2.2.2 Formal mental prayer

According to Bishop Giacomo Lercaro, it is “that particular exercise of spiritual life by which we consecrate, daily or at regular intervals, a specific amount of time to spend with God, to the exclusion of all other activities, without the use of pre-established verbal formulas.”[[1237]](#footnote-1238) Its most common expression, as we know, is *meditation,* also known, in the spiritual context of the nineteenth century, as *mental prayer*.

This is what Fr Gioachino Berto, who, we recall, had been Don Bosco’s secretary for over twenty years, testified: “The Venerable had a perfect union of spirit with God ... and gave luminous proof of this through his daily mental and vocal prayer. With regard to his mental prayer, I remember that after Mass I often brought him the book *Regula Cleri*, which he used for his daily meditation.[[1238]](#footnote-1239) When he could no longer read by himself, he had others read the points of meditation to him.”[[1239]](#footnote-1240)

Fr Francesco Cerruti testified once again:

When his headache and chest pain were so severe that his eyes, which were no longer of any use to him, prevented him from doing anything, it was both painful and comforting to see him spend long hours sitting on his poor sofa, sometimes in semi-darkness so that his eyes would not be hurt by the light, always calm and smiling, with his rosary in his hand, his lips moving in prayer and his hands rising from time to time, expressing in their silent language that complete and total conformity to God’s will which, due to excessive fatigue, he could no longer express in words. As for me, as I now testify, I am deeply convinced, and have heard from others who knew him closely, that his life, especially in his last years, was a continuous prayer to God. So much so that when we entered his room to see him and talk to him, we found him as if he were engaged in the most profound meditation, even though he did not appear to be, for his face was always cheerful, serene and calm, as were the words that came from his mouth, which were full of peace, charity and faith.[[1240]](#footnote-1241)

“As for mental prayer,” Fr Giovan Battista Lemoyne, his principal biographer, said, “it can be said to have been a practice inherent in him. The many meditations written in his notebooks attest to this.”[[1241]](#footnote-1242)

The time before and after the Eucharistic celebration and the time spent *visiting the Blessed Sacrament* are also moments he reserved for mental prayer. “The thanksgiving after Mass,” Fr Michael Rua testified, “usually lasted half an hour.” “When travelling or visiting his houses, as far as he could, his first visit was to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, returning there on the following days and remaining there with all the devotion and edification of those who accompanied him.”[[1242]](#footnote-1243)

“The Venerable celebrated Holy Mass with inner and outward devotion,” testified the Servant of God Giuseppe Allamano, nephew of St Joseph Cafasso, “to the edification of those present, and I often admired him kneeling in long preparation and thanksgiving.”[[1243]](#footnote-1244)

Canon Giovanni Battista Anfossi[[1244]](#footnote-1245) declared:

From what I could observe, the Servant of God always maintained a contemplative and elevated attitude in the morning, so much so that he did not even notice people approaching him. He did not greet people, and although I cannot say that I saw him kneeling in meditation, I am deeply convinced that in the morning, before going down to celebrate Mass, the Servant of God nourished his mind with holy thoughts. There was a sign of this state of mind, entirely focused on heavenly thoughts. Upon leaving his room, he repeated prayers to himself and, upon arriving in the sacristy, he did not converse with anyone, but after a prayer recited kneeling motionless, he attended to the confessions of young people... or prepared himself for the celebration of Mass.[[1245]](#footnote-1246)

Fr Felice Reviglio had been a regular visitor to the oratory of St Francis de Sales since the time of its establishment.[[1246]](#footnote-1247) At the diocesan inquiry, he testified: “...he was seen praying with such devotion and in such a pious posture that Bishop Bertagna said to me that he had *something of the Angelic about him.* The works already mentioned were many expressions of his love for God.”[[1247]](#footnote-1248)

Don Bosco recommended meditation to his followers: “With regard to mental prayer,” Fr Giovan Battista Francesia said, and who, like Cagliero and Rua, was a Salesian *from the very beginning,*[[1248]](#footnote-1249) “he recommended it to all his followers, and when he was finally relieved of his duties in the Congregation, he had spiritual books read to him every evening for meditation.”..[[1249]](#footnote-1250) “He strongly recommended to his subjects,” Fr Michael Rua also declared, “the use of meditation, spiritual reading, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament.”[[1250]](#footnote-1251) “I can attest, to the best of my knowledge and having heard it said,” Fr Luigi Piscetta[[1251]](#footnote-1252) testified, “that the Venerable inculcated meditation on the mysteries of Christianity, especially on the childhood of Jesus, his Passion, and the Eucharist. I heard him speak several times about these mysteries, and I was left with the impression that such mysteries were habitually present in his mind and that his soul had been imbued with them.”[[1252]](#footnote-1253)

##### 2.2.3 Ejaculatory prayer

Although ejaculations are, strictly speaking, vocal prayers, as I have already pointed out, they manifest the *habitus* of mental prayer.

Several testimonies refer to this habit of Don Bosco. Let’s look at just a few:

Meditation on eternal truths, as Bishop Cagliero testifies, was habitual for him and often came out in ardent sighs and fervent ejaculations. We who heard him and were part of his devout and fervent environment felt ourselves warmed by an unusual love for God and also for him who loved us so much in the Lord. From this we can understand his union with God when he devoted himself directly to prayer, celebrating Holy Mass, reciting the Divine Office or other prayers.[[1253]](#footnote-1254)

“The use of ejaculations,” Fr Francesco Cerruti declared, “was very frequent for him. Blessed be God! ... All for the love of God! ... these were invocations that frequently came from his lips, always spoken without a trace of affectation and with the deepest conviction of a true believer...”[[1254]](#footnote-1255) “Many times in his old age,” Fr Giulio Barberis testified, “when he could no longer go to church, I saw him turn his gaze towards it and burst into fervent ejaculations.”[[1255]](#footnote-1256)

In 1859, Fr Francesco Dalmazzo was accepted at the Valdocco oratory, becoming rector of the Valsalice college, then of the Sacred Heart in Rome and of the new foundation in London, and finally Procurator General of the *Pious Salesian Society*. At the diocesan informative process he declared: “The Servant of God had a heart so full of love for the Lord that his thoughts and words were always directed towards him. And that this was so could easily be deduced from seeing how every action he performed was solely directed towards the glory of God and the salvation of souls, from hearing with what ardour he spoke of God, and from the frequent ejaculations and sighs he sent up to heaven.”[[1256]](#footnote-1257)

##### 2.2.4 The gift of tears

I wanted to add to this collection of testimonies a section dedicated to the gift of tears and a more general one concerning certain other manifestations of *mystical life*, particularly those linked to the celebration of the holy mysteries.

Fr Agostino Poulain wrote:[[1257]](#footnote-1258) “It is said that someone has the gift of tears when certain devout thoughts make him cry often and abundantly; and moreover, this faculty can only be attributed to divine action.”[[1258]](#footnote-1259) “The restriction that ends this definition,” he adds, “is important. Tears can also have other causes... Very often they can be the result of being overly sensitive... or of a neuropathic condition. In the current state of science, it is difficult to determine the role that temperament may play in this.”[[1259]](#footnote-1260)

Can we say with certainty that Don Bosco had the *mystical gift* of tears? Let us examine some of the evidence presented in the cause, and then comment briefly on it.

“As far as faith was concerned,” Fr Carlo Viglietti, Don Bosco’s secretary during the last years of his life, testified, “it is well known with what fervour and passion he celebrated Holy Mass. When celebrating in the Church of Mary Help of Christians or elsewhere, in the last years of his life, it was common to see him with both hands resting on the altar, weeping profusely.”[[1260]](#footnote-1261)

“Nonnunquam” we read in the *Informatio* of 1925, “in exstasim raptus inter sacra apparuit; alias conspectus est (shed tears so profusely that the corporal was soaked) ut refert Testis Rua qui loquitur etiam (of a kind of holy tremor that seized him at the solemn moment of the Consecration)”. And further on: “Tanta erat illius devotio in Iesu Christi passionem ut ad lacrymas commoveretur cum de ea sermonem haberet”.[[1261]](#footnote-1262)

I saw this especially when he was travelling,” Fr Barberis confirmed, “many times he would raise his eyes to the heavens, sigh, and he knew how to take every little thing as an opportunity to magnify either the wisdom, power or goodness of God. I even saw him crying with emotion as he spoke of the Lord’s goodness towards us.”[[1262]](#footnote-1263) And Fr Rua: “He turned to Mary ... in his spiritual and temporal needs ... very often. When speaking of her, he was moved to tears, stirring general emotion in his listeners.”[[1263]](#footnote-1264)

Despite his occasional reluctance to show any “visible” signs of his inner life, Don Bosco was often seen by those close to him shedding copious tears, particularly during the celebration of the Eucharist. This, then, is the *fact*; let us now attempt to give an *interpretation of it.*

Fr Pietro Stella wrote:

Jesus dominated Don Bosco’s spiritual life... When spending time with him in his old age, when he was no longer able to control himself fully, Don Bosco betrayed his affection and his Masses were bathed in tears and interrupted by the very sobs that he had not approved of in Comollo. In his final years, when he found it difficult to move around, he spent long hours in his rooms while his Salesians were busy with the young people. During those years, there were also phenomena of levitation and irradiation of the face, which were witnessed by the young man who served Mass and who later became a Salesian and missionary.[[1264]](#footnote-1265)

The author in question, while making no mention of a mystical interpretation of Don Bosco’s numerous tears, shows himself, here and elsewhere, willing to interpret certain episodes in Don Bosco’s life as [[1265]](#footnote-1266)extraordinaryand, in particular, certain *levitations* that probably took place around 1878*.*[[1266]](#footnote-1267)

The criteria of interpretation of Salesian historian Fr Francis Desramaut seem to be of a completely different nature when he writes, invoking medical science:

Il ne refrénait plus ses larmes… Le phénomène est connu des gérontologues. “Le veillard a généralement des réactions émotionnelles intenses, disproportionnées avec la situation qui les déclenche”. Quand son cortex cérébral est atteint, ses crises de rire et de pleurs peuvent même être violentes et incoercibles. Ne trasformons donc pas trop vite les signes pathologiques de la débilité d’un vieillard en manifestations d’origine mystique (don des larmes), comme une piété filiale pourrait être tentée de le faire.[[1267]](#footnote-1268)

Desramaut’s opinion is diametrically opposed to the one expressed by psychologist Giacomo Dacquino, author of *La psicologia di Don Bosco*, who states in this study:

Many witnesses recalled his tears when, by then elderly, he celebrated his first Mass in Rome, in the Church of the Sacred Heart. Moreover, in his final years, Don Bosco’s Masses were bathed in tears and interrupted by sobs.

These tears should not be mistaken for a symptom of senile decline, nor as signs of weakness. Adults avoid crying because they identify crying as an expression of weakness, femininity or childishness. But those who cannot allow themselves to cry, that is, feel sorrow, are unable to allow themselves to smile, that is, feel serenity. After all, both crying and laughing serve to release tension.[[1268]](#footnote-1269)

Dr Dacquino’s interpretation, which does not go beyond the scope of his specific expertise, makes no mention of mystical manifestations; however, he categorically rules out both *senile regression* and *weakness,* psychological fragility.

My personal opinion is based on Dacquino’s judgement, which I essentially agree with, also considering that not all instances of crying occurred in the last years of Don Bosco’s life. It would therefore seem entirely inappropriate to speak of *weakened cerebral cortex* due to episodes that occurred during his youth or mature years.[[1269]](#footnote-1270)

While acknowledging the likelihood that, at least in some cases, we are dealing with a *mystical gift*, linked, like others in Don BoscoBs life, directly to a divine initiative, I also consider it possible that these tears are, in other cases, the *sensible* *expression* of his *love for God,* that animated the spiritual life and apostolic action of the saint and continued to grow with the passing of the years.

Expressions of deep emotion accompanied Don Bosco’s religious and apostolic experience, probably without interruption. Fr Rua, for example, testifies about a retreat preached in 1850: “(Don Bosco’s) ... preaching was animated with ardent concern for the salvation of souls. One day he was so moved by his own words that he broke into sobs.”[[1270]](#footnote-1271)

##### 2.2.5 Other external signs and attitudes of the body

Some testimonies refer to other “signs” characteristic of a particular intimacy with God, in particular during the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

Salesian Brother Pietro Enria,[[1271]](#footnote-1272) taken in by Don Bosco together with his brother in 1854 at the age of thirteen after being left without parents, was the saint’s nurse on several occasions and also during his final illness. During the “information” phase of the process he declared:

Don Bosco prayed, and when you saw him praying, he looked like a saint, a seraph; there was nothing affected in his attitude. He knelt upright with his hands clasped, his head slightly bowed, and a smile on his face. Those close to him could not help but pray well themselves. I lived with him for almost 25 years, and I always saw him praying like this, even when he was ill. When hen said Mass, he looked like a saint. He had a dignified demeanor, without affection, he pronounced the words well and clearly; at the elevation then you could see Don Bosco in all his holiness. With what faith did he adore the Blessed Sacrament! Sometimes his face changed colour, so much was the love he bore for Jesus. I believe that in those sublime moments Don BoscoBs heart was so united with the Heart of Jesus as to form one heart. He would prepare for Mass and then give thanks, and he did not want to be disturbed.[[1272]](#footnote-1273)

Recounting the aforementioned episode of *levitation*, Bishop Giovanni Cagliero put it as follows:

Fr Evasio Garrone, a missionary in Patagonia, told me that when he was a cleric and assistant in the infirmary in Turin, one day, while serving Mass for the Servant of God, after the elevation, he saw him rise a hand’s breadth above the altar, to his great amazement. After Mass, Garrone turned to Don Bosco and asked him what he had felt after the elevation. And D. Bosco turned red in the face and gave no answer.[[1273]](#footnote-1274)

Fr Cagliero would testify a few years later:

Upon returning from America, I found the Servant of God more sensitive and ardent in his charity, more united with God, and more filled with spiritual goodness; indeed, if filial love does not deceive me, I saw his venerable grey hair surrounded by a kind of heavenly halo and angelic appearance, and in some way already glorified for his life spent entirely in sacrifice of himself for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.[[1274]](#footnote-1275)

Referring to the final period of his earthly existence, Fr Francesco Dalmazzo had declared: “Despite his advanced age and the ailments that afflicted him, and especially due to the extraordinary swelling of his legs, which made it difficult for him to kneel, he would prostrate himself on the ground to adore the Blessed Sacrament.”[[1275]](#footnote-1276)

In addition to these testimonies on the life of prayer, there are many others concerning different manifestations of the mystical life, such as *dreams* and *visions*. However, I do not intend to enter into this delicate and controversial area, as it is beyond the scope of this study.[[1276]](#footnote-1277)

#### 2.3 The *Aliae novae animadversiones* and definitive *Responsiones*

On 4 July 1922, the processes relating to the beatification of Don Bosco were recognised as valid. Thus began a new phase of the process with the presentation of the *Positio super virtutibus.*

In the subsequent *animadversiones,[[1277]](#footnote-1278)* the objection relating to Don Bosco’s request for dispensation from saying the breviary appears for the first time, an objection that would also recur later. The following year, in the *Novae animadversiones*, and then again in *Aliae novae aniamdversiones,* the main objections relating to the life of prayer also appeared.

We can summarise them as follows:

\* the huge amount of external activity suggests a lack of the necessary spirit of prayer;

\* this difficulty certainly does not constitute “grave matter”, but it diminishes the virtue, which must instead be declared heroic;

\* nothing proves continuity and perseverance in *formal* mental prayer;

\* Don Bosco, albeit with good intentions, “sicut acqua effusus videretur”; that is, he seemed to disperse his inner energies in multiple activities;

\* True virtue does not consist in disorderly and tumultuous activity; this must be clear to a founder, especially at a time when lack of prayer is one of the greatest problems in the life of the cleric.[[1278]](#footnote-1279)

The response in the tribunal was preceded by a letter from the then Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, Fr Philip Rinaldi, addressed to Cardinal Antonio Vico, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.[[1279]](#footnote-1280)

In the letter, binding himself by oath, Fr Rinaldi stated, among other things:

In his final years... every day he used to remain secluded in his room from 2 to 3 p.m., and his superiors did not allow him to be disturbed during that time. But since I was in charge of a house for the formation of aspirants to the priesthood from 1883 until the death of the Servant of God, and since he had told me to visit him whenever I needed to, perhaps indiscreetly so that I could approach him more easily, I broke his instructions several times, and not only at the oratory, but also in Lanzo and S. Benigno, where he often went, and in Mathi and in the house of St John the Evangelist in Turin, I went to see him several times at that very hour to talk to him. And from that moment on, everywhere and always, I came upon him him every time, recollected, with his hands clasped, in meditation.[[1280]](#footnote-1281)

Fr Rinaldi’s letter also reiterates the fact that the dispensation requested and obtained by Don Bosco regarding the saying of the breviary was linked to an eye affliction which, at certain times, prevented him from reading. Numerous testimonies of Don Bosco’s illness can be found, dating back to well before the process.

For example, Fr Giulio Barberis wrote in the *Cronichetta* on 6 December 1878:

Maybe I haven’t mentioned it elsewhere yet. D. Bosco is in danger of losing his sight. He had suffered from an eye affliction many years ago after being struck by lightning; it recurred several times. Perhaps as a consequence of that, his right eye was almost always half clouded. Now, since the days have grown shorter and we have to work long hours by lamplight in the evening, he has once again been afflicted by eye pain, and about ten days ago this worsened, almost completely extinguishing the light in his already diseased eye, and now he can no longer see anything out of that eye. He summoned Dr. Reimon, renowned as the best ophthalmologist, because his left eye was also growing weaker: after a couple of examinations, he confirmed that it too was in real danger of becoming clouded over in a short time. And he ordered Don Bosco to stop reading and writing: transgression of this command could soon prove fatal to him.[[1281]](#footnote-1282)

But the real news, in relation to the debate on the objections raised against Don Bosco's life of prayer, is contained in the *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones.*

A new lawyer, Msgr. Giovanni Della Cioppa, was appointed to draft this new *Responsio.*[[1282]](#footnote-1283) His effort was to organise the subject matter in a more rigorous manner; he did not limit himself, as had sometimes been done previously, to a simple repetition of some testimonies on the subject, but attempted what in today’s terms we might call a true analysis of the saint’s religious experience, drawing on some elements of classical asceticism and some accredited authors.

The testimonies were thus organised and almost “set” within a broad and doctrinally effective framework, a sort of small compendium of spiritual theology. Let’s try to isolate and outline the subsequent steps of this well-organised “defence”.

##### 2.3.1 Some premises

It is said that, according to the law and as confirmed by St Augustine and St Thomas, the excellence of vocal prayer can be inferred from certain external acts such as tears, composure of the body, and radiance of the face; all things with which the Servant of God was adorned.

Referring to the teachings of St Thomas, it is also stated that *mental* prayer should be preferred to *vocal* prayer, and the former is divided into *meditative* and *contemplative prayer.* In the *contemplation of divine truths,* both the intellect and the will are involved.

Through meditation, one can achieve a certain intimacy with God, but only through *contemplative prayer* can one achieve true *union with God,* which in this case is called *mystical* and produces unity of spirit between God and the soul.

The moral and proximate causes of this union are, on the part of the soul, *perfect contemplation* and *perfect charity;* on the part of God, his influence in the soul through the gift of the Spirit, who enlightens the intellect and inflames the will.[[1283]](#footnote-1284)

##### 2.3.2 Distinction between acquired and infused contemplation

The classic distinction between *acquired contemplation* and *infused contemplation*, or mystical marriage, is therefore affirmed. Furthermore, the excellence of the *mixed life*, practised by Christ, the Apostles and certain saints,[[1284]](#footnote-1285) is affirmed.

##### 2.3.3 *Ad perfectam cum Deo unionem pervenit*

Having established these premises, I will now examine, in chronological order, the entire series of testimonies on Don Bosco’s life of prayer, to demonstrate how, over the years, he progressed from meditation to contemplation until he reached *perfect union with God.*[[1285]](#footnote-1286)

All the major stages of his life are examined. Testimonies are cited concerning his childhood, his years spent in the seminary, his resolutions as a young man, and then the statements of Coadjutor Brother Pietro Enria, Fr Barberis and Fr Cerruti, and Cardinal Alimonda, Archbishop of Turin, who described him as “intimately united with God”. Whenever you approached him, it was as if he had just stepped out of a conversation with God, according to lawyer Della Cioppa: “Nemo dat quod non habet”.

“I lived with him for ALMOST **25** YEARS,” said Brother Pietro Enria, “and I ALWAYS *saw him praying*.”[[1286]](#footnote-1287) “Nonne constat igitur de constanti et perpetuo orationis spiritu?” the lawyer representing the case then said energetically. “Quomodo non probata dici licet Ven. Dei Famuli oratio, praesertim quod attinet ad continuitatem et ad perseverantiam?”[[1287]](#footnote-1288)

##### 2.3.4 Conformity to the divine will

At this point, the *Responsio,* referring to the teaching of Jesuit Fr Franz Neumayr, says that the man whose will does not differ in any way from the divine will is perfect in a spiritual sense. From the process records regarding the Servant of God, it is stated and proven that this was always his will. Some testimonies are offered as proof.

Only from this attitude of abandonment to divine will did his marvellous industriousness spring forth.[[1288]](#footnote-1289)

##### 2.3.5 Apostolic concern and continuous presence with God

Another quote clarifies the last statement in the previous paragraph. This is a commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius by Jesuit Fr Antonio Ciccolini. Emphasising the Apostle Paul’s concern for the churches he founded, Fr Ciccolini states:

... since these **afflictions and suffering ARISE FROM CHARITY, there is nothing SWEETER, nor more pleasant, nor more full of DEVOTION, nor anything that TAKES US FURTHER AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE of God. This is the reason why charity itself, which raises the Apostle aloft to CONTEMPLATE AND LOVE GOD, caused him to comply with and share in the good of his brothers...** When we have some mental excess of contemplation and love, it is in our relationship with God: and when we accommodate ourselves to the common and human way, it is out of consideration for you and your benefit; because the charity of Christ impels us and gives us strength...[[1289]](#footnote-1290)

There is no contrast, therefore, between apostolic concern and continuous presence with God.

##### 2.3.6 Contemplative life and active life

Starting from the above topics, the central question, namely whether active life prevents contemplative life, is finally addressed. First of all, a maxim from Saint Gregory the Great is quoted: *Qui contemplationis arcem tenere desiderant, prius se in campo operis per exercitium probent* (6 Moral. cap. 17). At this point, invoking the authority of St Thomas, it is stated that not only does active life not prevent contemplative life, but that it is *convenient* for it, because it helps to calm human passions.[[1290]](#footnote-1291) This leads to the following conclusion:

Concludendum est Ven. Dei Famulum, quamvis in operibus exterioribus fuerit implicatus, constanter tamen et perpetuo orasse, adeo ut eius opera cum a caritate procederent, magis ac magis in dies eius orationis ac meditationis spiritum fortius corroborarent, atque, caritate Christi semper urgente, eius cum Deo unionem intimius firmarent, et ita per contemplationem ipse summum perfectionis gradum est assecutus.[[1291]](#footnote-1292)

Although the Servant of God was engaged in external activities, he prayed continuously and, as Fr Rua testified, “seemed unable to speak without introducing the thought of God into his conversations.”

##### 2.3.7 Extraordinary gifts

The virtues practised by Don Bosco grew with advancing years, until he attained *union with God.*

This, it is said, is proven by the great number of extraordinary gifts that testify to God's action in him: “Ven Dei Famulo,” it is stated, “non solum per Spiritum sermo sapientiae, et sermo scientiae secundum eumdem spiritum et fides in eodem spiritu *sed et gratia sanitatum; operatio virtutum, prophetia, discretio spiritum*, fere sicut habitus, data fuere.”[[1292]](#footnote-1293)

His contemporaries and Don Bosco himself were aware of these extraordinary gifts.

“Quare Ven. Dei Famulus – sicut aqua effusu minime erat -, immo semper funditus in Deo erat immersus.”[[1293]](#footnote-1294) This statement is proven, during the defence, by the words of Bishop Manacorda:

*Anyone who studies* the history of the Servant of God, Fr John Bosco, his origins, his circumstances, his limited means and his very character, and then reviews his great works, cannot help but exclaim: IT IS GOD WHO IS AT WORK IN HIS SERVANT; IT IS GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS STEPS; IT IS GOD WHO INSPIRES HIS PLANS. THE SPIRIT OF GOD WAS AT WORK IN DON BOSCO, INSPIRED HIS MIND, SUSTAINED HIS WILL AND INFLAMED HIS HEART, ALWAYS PRESERVING AN UNSHAKABLE CALM AND AN UNWAVERING CONSTANCY IN HIM.[[1294]](#footnote-1295)

This last testimony (whose “probative force” seems to be emphasised by the author through the typographical style) closes the pages of the *Responsio* relating to the matter of the *spirit of prayer* of the founder of the Salesians and, ultimately, the debate on this subject in the process.[[1295]](#footnote-1296)

#### 2.4 Conclusions

The “quality” of his life, his supernatural gifts, his external acts, his perfect conformity to the divine will, and the excellence of his charity bear witness to the Saint’s gradual correspondence to the gift of *infused contemplation,* and the attainment of *mystical union with God.*

Since, as stated in the introduction, this mystical union presupposes the *gift* (which comes from God and is therefore *infused,* passive) of *contemplative prayer*, which is, in an eminent sense, *mental prayer*, the long and articulate *responsio* effectively achieved its goal and no other reply from the consultors returned to the question of *formal mental prayer.*

These pages, still today, represent an interesting contribution to the analysis of the spiritual experience of the founder.

### 3. Other authoritative testimonies

At the end of this chapter, I would like to share some other testimonies from people connected with Don Bosco regarding the role of mental and *contemplative* prayer in Don Bosco’s spiritual life.

#### 3.1 Fr Paul Albera

Fr Paul Albera was born in None in 1845.[[1296]](#footnote-1297) At the age of about thirteen, he entered the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, and two years later he was admitted to the *Pious Society.*

In 1862, he was among the first twenty-two Salesians whose vows (for three years) of poverty, chastity and obedience were accepted by Don Bosco. A few years later, during his first retreat in Trofarello, which has been mentioned on other occasions, he made his perpetual profession, one month after receiving priestly ordination.

In 1871, at the age of twenty-six, he was sent by Don Bosco to Genoa to open and direct the new foundation in Marassi, which moved to Sampierdarena the following year. He remained in Liguria for ten years before being sent to Marseille as rector and first Provincial of the houses in France and Belgium.

Four years after the death of Don Bosco, who on his deathbed had asked for his dear presence,[[1297]](#footnote-1298) the 6th General Chapter elected him Spiritual Director of the congregation, a position he held until 16 August 1910. On that day, in fact, the 9th General Chapter elected him Rector Major of the *Society of St Francis de Sales,* Don Bosco’s second successor after Fr Michael Rua, who had died a few months earlier*.* He held this responsibility until his death in Turin on 29 October 1921.

From a page written by Fr Guido Favini, who published his biography in 1975, we learn of the special esteem in which Fr Albera was held by Don Bosco:

...three of his first most loyal followers loved Don Bosco with transparent devotion: Michael, John and Paul: Rua, Cagliero, and Albera.

Just carefully read the history of the Salesian Society.

... he knew how to entrust to each of those who bound themselves to him for life the mission that best suited them, enabling them to render to the Congregation, to the Church, and to contemporary society the service appropriate to their abilities, skills, and competences. So it was that he structured a Congregation for the modern age, particularly relevant for its times and for the future, endowed with an intelligent and faithful energy ...

But Don Bosco reserved the most important international responsibilities for three individuals who, with the benefit of hindsight, appear to have been chosen with great intelligence and charismatic insight: Fr Michael Rua, Fr John Cagliero and Fr Paul Albera.[[1298]](#footnote-1299)

Less than a year after his election as Rector Major, Fr Albera sent his confreres a circular entitled *On the spirit of piety,* the second of his teachings as leader of the congregation.

The letter is a heartfelt exhortation to consider the dangers of an active life that is not animated by a true and solid *spirit of piety*. “This spirit ensures that our union with God is never interrupted; indeed, it communicates to every act, even profane ones, an intimately religious character, raising it to supernatural merit, so that, like fragrant incense, it forms part of that uninterrupted worship that we must offer to God.”[[1299]](#footnote-1300) “The entire educational system taught by Don Bosco,” he adds later, “is based on piety.”[[1300]](#footnote-1301)

In the paragraph entitled *The characteristic feature of Don Bosco,* after mentioning the statements made a few years earlier during the diocesan inquiry, he testifies:

It would seem that the life of the Servant of God was a continuous prayer, an uninterrupted union with God. This was evident in the unchanging serenity that shone through his invariably smiling face. Whenever we turned to him for advice, he seemed to interrupt his conversations with God to listen to us, and it was as if God inspired the thoughts and words of encouragement he gave us...

I will never forget the impression he made on me when he gave the blessing of Mary Help of Christians to the sick. As he said the *Hail Mary* and the words of the blessing, it seemed as if his face was changing; his eyes filled with tears and his voice trembled on his lips. For me, these were signs that *virtus de illo exibat*; therefore, I was not surprised by the miraculous effects that followed, namely that the afflicted were comforted and the sick were healed.[[1301]](#footnote-1302)

“Our Venerable Father,” Fr Albera continues further on, “threw himself into God from his earliest childhood, and then for the rest of his life did nothing but increase this enthusiasm, until he attained intimate union with God amid uninterrupted and very varied occupations.”

At the end of his term of office and a few months before his death, in another circular entitled *Don Bosco, model of the Salesian priest,* Fr Albera returned more extensively to the founder’s life of prayer and the path he had traced for the congregation. In the section entitled *Method for praying well,* after explaining how “each degree of perfection corresponds to a special way of praying,” the author states:

As the strength of our passions diminishes, and the desire for spiritual progress becomes more vivid and our love of God more ardent, intellectual work will play an increasingly minor role in our prayer, while the movements of the heart, holy desires, supplicatory requests and fervent resolutions will prevail. This is the so-called affective prayer, which in turn leads to unitive prayer, called ordinary contemplative prayer by spiritual masters.

Some may think that a Salesian should not aim so high, and that Don Bosco did not want this from his sons, since from the beginning he did not even impose methodical meditation in common on them.

But I can assure you that it was always his desire to see his sons rise, through meditation, to that intimate union with God that he had so admirably achieved in himself, and he never tired of encouraging us to do so at every opportunity.[[1302]](#footnote-1303)

Fr Albera’s interpretation of the Constitutions in the same circular is also authoritative: “The *prayer*, which the Constitutions prescribe for us as nourishment for the spirit,” he states, “is mental prayer, which according to St Teresa is ‘a pure communion of friendship, by which the soul converses alone with God, and never tires of manifesting its love to Him by whom it knows it is loved’...”[[1303]](#footnote-1304) “We therefore, my dear confreres, in order to conform to the spirit of the Constitutions, must give mental prayer the character of true intimate conversation, of simple and affectionate conversation with God.”[[1304]](#footnote-1305)

#### 3.2 Fr Philip Rinaldi

Fr Philip Rinaldi was only thirty-two years old when the founder died. In 1883, a few months after his ordination as a priest, he became rector of the Salesian house in Mathi Torinese. The following year, he had to move the work, a kind of seminary for adult vocations, to St John the Evangelist in Turin, where he was able to live alongside Don Bosco during the last period of his life.

In the previous chapter, I already mentioned Fr Rinaldi’s testimony regarding the last confession of his that Don Bosco heard shortly before his death, and the single word uttered by the founder, which is considered a kind of spiritual testament: “Meditation!” Fr Eugenio Ceria recounts: “Fr Rinaldi, narrating the event, used to point out that there was nothing in his accusation that referred to meditation; whereupon he added: ‘That is why this word made such an impression on me and was like a revelation of the importance Don Bosco attached to meditation.’”[[1305]](#footnote-1306)

Fr Rinaldi, who became Don Bosco’s third successor upon his death, wrote to the novice directors, quoting a passage from the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

“From then on,” writes Blessed Don Bosco, “I began to savour the spiritual life; up to then I had acted in a purely mechanical way, without knowing the reasons why.”

These words, written by our Holy Founder many years later, already accomplished in holiness and in the full maturity of his experience, is worthy of great esteem and consideration.[[1306]](#footnote-1307) And we must frequently remind our novices, and also those who have recently taken their vows: *Without meditation, it is impossible to understand and enjoy the spiritual life.* And note that by meditation, Don Bosco does not mean only the recollection or concentration in prayer that dispels voluntary distractions: he means true meditation as we practise it today, that is, reflection and pious consideration of the truths of the faith, the life of Jesus Christ, and Christian and religious virtues, in order to derive pious sentiments and effective resolutions for a better life.

And we know how he always continued to meditate, even amid the vicissitudes of those harsh and difficult years.[[1307]](#footnote-1308)

#### 3.3 Pius XI and Cardinal Salotti

On 1 April 1934, Pope Pius XI solemnly proclaimed Don Bosco a saint.

Elected to the papal throne on 6 February 1922, Achille Ratti granted an audience on 25 June of that same year to the Salesians from the Sacred Heart Institute in Rome and their pupils. On that occasion he said among other things:

We are deeply honoured to be among the oldest personal friends of the venerable Don Bosco. We saw him, your glorious father and benefactor, we saw him with our own eyes. We were close to him, heart to heart. There was a lengthy and respectful exchange of ideas, thoughts and considerations. We saw this great advocate of Christian education, we observed him in the place where he gave himself among his own people, which was also an eminent position of leadership, as vast as the world and as vast as it was beneficial.[[1308]](#footnote-1309)

As a young priest, Achille Ratti had in fact met Don Bosco. He travelled to Turin, probably to ask for news of a young man who had been a pupil at the oratory, and stayed for a long conversation with him. “He admired Don Bosco,” said Salesian Giovan Battista Borino, who had personally gained his trust in 1915, when Archbishop Achille Ratti was Prefect of the Vatican Library, “for his human courage, his trust in God and his good-natured way of instilling it in his listeners. He had had an immediate and precise sense of his holiness. Whenever he mentioned Don Bosco, his voice would pause slightly, then take on an affectionate tone, followed by a hint of pride.[[1309]](#footnote-1310)

About two years before Don Bosco’s canonisation, on 17 June 1932, Pius XI said the following during an audience with the students of the Pontifical Roman Seminaries:

His whole life was a continuous sacrifice of charity, a continuous recollection in prayer: this is the impression one had of him from his conversation: a man who was attentive to everything that happened before him. People were coming from all directions, some with one thing, some with another: and he stood there, on his two feet, as if it were a momentary thing, hearing everything, grasping everything, and always in deep recollection. It seemed as if he was not listening to anything that was being said around him: it seemed as if his thoughts were elsewhere: he was with God in a spirit of union; but then he would respond to everyone: and he had the right words for everything and for himself, so much so that it was astonishing: first he surprised you, and then he truly amazed you. This was the life of holiness and contemplation, of assiduous prayer that the Blessed led during the night and amid all the continuous and relentless occupations of the daytime hours.[[1310]](#footnote-1311)

A few years later, another authoritative voice would refer to unceasing prayer and habitual contemplation. This was Monsignor (a domestic prelate at the time) Carlo Salotti, who played a decisive role in the cause for beatification and canonisation of the saint, first as a lawyer and, in the most important period, as Promoter of the Faith. Salotti was only eighteen when Don Bosco died, and we do not know if he ever met him personally. A Salesian, Fr Matteo Ottonello, had been Rector of the seminary in Orvieto, where Salotti was a cleric, and this had allowed him to appreciate the Salesians’ educational method.[[1311]](#footnote-1312) His unique position in the process allowed him to hear the testimony and get to know the witnesses in the cause.

A page from *Il Beato Don Bosco,* published by him in 1930, the year after Don Bosco’s beatification, summarises the Blessed’s life of prayer as follows:

His work was a continual prayer; and his prayer was the foundation and soul of all his work.

And prayer for him did not mean merely saying the office, reciting rosaries, expressing liturgical formulas and pious ejaculations, or celebrating Holy Mass every day, or cultivating devotions dear to the heart of every believer; but it meant doing all this in such an excellent manner that he lived entirely and continuously in God. Prayer for him was an elevation of the spirit, a withdrawing from all earthly cares, an intimate and profound union of his thoughts and will with the thoughts and will of God Himself. In this sense, his life was entirely absorbed in the divine and the eternal, even when he was attending to ordinary matters, which seem so far removed from spiritual ideals. Therefore, whenever anyone went to him for advice, it seemed as if he interrupted his conversations with God, and that the advice and encouragement he gave came from God Himself.

He spent days and many hours of the night working unceasingly; and when he felt the need for a little relief, he prayed. Calm and gentle was his devotion in prayer. Motionless and upright, hands clasped on the kneeler or resting on the chest, head slightly bowed, gaze fixed, face smiling...[[1312]](#footnote-1313).

This reference to night-time, which is also found in the previous testimony and in some passages of the *Biographical Memoirs*[[1313]](#footnote-1314), remains, for the “positivist” historian, without objective evidence. Yet as we have already seen, in the biographies written by Don Bosco, or in other writings of the Salesian tradition, the night-time hours are often presented as a privileged time for prayer.[[1314]](#footnote-1315) It is a sort of *fil rouge* that runs “discreetly” through the history of the origins and certainly confirms these words of Pius XI and Salotti.

### 4. An attempt at an analysis of the spiritual experience: Fr Ceria’s *Don Bosco con Dio*

As this chapter dedicated to some testimonies on the prayer life of the founder of the Salesians concludes, I wanted to devote a section to some pages by Fr Eugenio Ceria, which represent, in my opinion, the first real attempt to analyse the spiritual experience of the founder using the tools of spiritual theology.

A few preliminary considerations seem necessary in order to better understand and, in some way, establish the procedure followed by Fr Ceria in *Don Bosco con Dio.*

The subject of *spiritual theology* is, as is well known, the *Christian spiritual experience*; its task, therefore, is to describe its gradual development and to make known its *structures* and *laws.[[1315]](#footnote-1316)*

These *laws* of spiritual experience, obviously, are not absolute necessities or some kind of determinism; they are *statistical* or *qualitative* laws which always preserve the freedom of God and man, but which *in most cases* are reflected in the spiritual life of Christians and, in a special way, of the saints. Charles André Bernard S.I. wrote: “*Law*, here, does not mean physical, measurable law, but rather psychological law or a norm that is spelt out with the clause ‘ut in pluribus’, and leaves room for human freedom.”[[1316]](#footnote-1317)

From the particular *subject* of spiritual theology and its specific objective arises its characteristic *method*; it is a matter of operating, as Hans Urs von Balthasar stated, “on the basis of the phenomenological method, which, as far as it is possible for man, grasps the essence, the form, the intelligible in the sensible in the concrete phenomenon”.[[1317]](#footnote-1318)

This theoretical framework provides the basis for Fr Eugenio Ceria’s attempt and, in particular, the argument *a priori* that prepares his lengthy argument and the laws of Poulain and Vallgornera that are invoked to prove his hypotheses.

#### 4.1 Information about the author and origins of the book

Ceria entered the Salesian college of San Benigno Canavese in 1885 at the age of fifteen, and from 1929, the year of Don Bosco’s beatification, he was the official historian of the Congregation. In this role, he edited the last nine volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs*, the four volumes of the *Annali della Società Salesiana*, the four volumes of the *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco* and numerous profiles and biographies of Salesians.[[1318]](#footnote-1319)

His name remains linked above all to a short biography of the saint, which for the first time clearly highlighted his “mystical” experience.

The preface to the first edition is dated 26 May 1929, just one week before Don Bosco’s beatification. The author himself recounts the occasion that prompted him to work on this piece:

I recalled ... that the Benedictine Dom Chautard, in his well-known book *L'âme de tout apostolat*, lists Don Bosco among those modern priests and religious who, devoted to an intensely active life, promoted the good of souls solely because they were men of profound interior life. I also recalled how Monsignor Virili, postulator in the cause of Blessed Cafasso, when testifying in Don Bosco’s cause, had declared that he considered Don Bosco a saint, not only for his works, but also for his spirit of prayer and recollection in the Lord. Here, I said to myself, here is a side of Don Bosco that has perhaps not been highlighted enough and deserves to be shown in the year of his probable beatification.

Captivated by the wonders of his multifarious activity, they admired his triumphs without even considering that *omnis gloria eius ab intus*. Even the generation that came up after his death looked by preference to Don Bosco’s works, studying their forms and developments without giving any thought to thoroughly scrutinising their animating principle, the principle that was the great secret of the saints: the spirit of prayer and union with God.[[1319]](#footnote-1320)

This preliminary observation and the deep conviction that “there is no holiness without interior life, nor will there ever be interior life without a spirit of prayer”,[[1320]](#footnote-1321) as well as a certain controversy with the *followers of the historical method,* who claim to study the history of a saint *regardless of holiness,[[1321]](#footnote-1322)* led him to retrace Don Bosco’s human experience in order to highlight all the elements that finally bring out his true *life* and not just his *history.*

The pages of Fr Ceria’s *Don Bosco con Dio* are at times influenced by the enthusiastic and edifying style common in that particular phase of the congregation’s history, which accompanied the journey towards the canonisation of its founder, as well as by the limitations inherent in a use of the historical method that was not always sufficiently documented. It sometimes indulges in describing extraordinary and supernatural events; in any case, it is a text that is now seventy years old.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is the first documented attempt to reinterpret the *phenomenon* that is Don Bosco’s concrete life as a divine mystery, the *kind* that comes from above.[[1322]](#footnote-1323)

“In the study of the saints,” Fr Ceria writes, “how can we ignore holiness?” And whoever speaks of holiness speaks of a reality that positive science, whether historical or psychological, may gloss over, but never those whose eyes are trained in investigating facts belonging to a higher order, where the human encounters the divine and intimately unites with it.”[[1323]](#footnote-1324)

To organise his material, taking his cue from a biblical image Fr Ceria distinguishes three phases or periods in the life of the saint: dawn, noon and the bright sunset, the passage to the firmament of the church triumphant.[[1324]](#footnote-1325) The last chapter of Part Three, which concludes the first edition of *Don Bosco con Dio*, is entitled *Dono di orazione (The Gift of Prayer).*

In my opinion, these are the best pages of Ceria’s text.

The author attempts a rigorous analysis of the saint’s prayer life, with the help of some doctrinal references and some authors of asceticism: Dominican Tomás Vallgornera, Jesuits Agoustin Poulain and Giovanni Battista Scaramelli, Sulpician Adolphe Tanquerey, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Alphonsus, Saint Francis de Sales and others.

I will now focus our attention on this chapter, which is about fifteen pages long in the first edition with some minor additions in the subsequent edition, and will also “visit” some of the references suggested by the author.

#### 4.2 The chapter on the *gift of prayer*

The fundamental objective of these pages by Fr Ceria is contained in the question that Fr Ceria himself asks at the beginning of the chapter:

Now we ask ourselves: given that Don Bosco displayed the external manifestations usually associated with the mystical life[[1325]](#footnote-1326), can we safely assume that he was truly elevated to mystical union? and to what degree? In other words, since this is achieved through infused contemplation, is it possible to discover whether and to what extent this gift of infused contemplation was bestowed upon the most chosen soul of Don Bosco?[[1326]](#footnote-1327)

The previous chapter was devoted to *dreams, ecstasies, visions*; mystical phenomena in which “the higher powers of intelligence and will remain as if absorbed by light and divine operations, the senses fail and are no longer able to function.”[[1327]](#footnote-1328) Here, however, the focus shifts to manifestations that do not involve “loss of lower powers”, to the habitual presence of God in the soul, to that “experiential perception of supernatural life” that also occurred in the humanity of Jesus and Mary during their earthly lives.

Is it possible, Fr Ceria asks himself, *to discover whether and to what extent this gift of infused contemplation* was also given by God to Don Bosco?

His arguments are basically divided as follows:

- first of all, he puts forward an *a priori argument*, based on the teachings of Pope Benedict XIV and theologian Agostino Poulain;

- secondly, he focuses on the *type* or *degree* of *mystical union* that Don Bosco is thought to have attained, using the definitions of Teresa of Avila, Alphonsus Liguori and, once again, the reflections of Poulain. It is assumed that it was the so-called *internal union* or *simple* or *full union*; the witnesses of the cause are also examined;

- drawing on the teachings of Sulpician Vallgornera, who in turn refers to Saint Thomas Aquinas, Fr Ceria lists and describes the *seven effects of simple union*, finding them present in Don Bosco;

- finally he draws some conclusions.

Let us now look at the details of his argument, expanding it with the necessary references.

##### 4.2.1 Introduction: an argument *a priori*

The introduction consists of a kind of *axiom*, based on these words of Pope Benedict XIV: “Almost all saints, and especially the founders of orders, have received divine visions and revelations.”[[1328]](#footnote-1329) This is precisely one of those *laws* of spiritual theology that I referred to above.

The sentence, also quoted by Poulain in his treatise on *mystical theology* entitled *On the Graces of Prayer*, is clarified by the author himself. “Did all the saints,” he asks, “have the mystical state?”[[1329]](#footnote-1330) “The question I am raising,” continues the author, “*is purely historical.”* I am not asking whether the mystical state is indispensable for attaining high perfection; the answer would be no, since mystical graces are a means, and God can use others. It is simply a matter of knowing whether, *in practice*, this is the means routinely used.”[[1330]](#footnote-1331)

After making a few distinctions, Poulain formulates the following *thesis*: “*Almost all canonised saints* had mystical union, and generally in abundance.”[[1331]](#footnote-1332) If it sometimes seems that someone has been deprived of it, this is mainly because there are not always historical documents to prove it. He then quotes Benedict XIV, repeated by Fr Ceria, and the opinion of Francis de Sales, finally arriving at the *proof of the thesis*:

This is striking when you look through a collection of saints’ lives. If it appears that any of them lack extraordinary graces, we realise that we lack documentation concerning them, so we have no positive evidence against the above conclusion. The relative lack of documents is easy to explain in the case of priests... It is more difficult for women to remain unknown, since they need advice and, indeed, have often left behind detailed autobiographies written at the behest of their superiors.[[1332]](#footnote-1333)

At this point in his discourse, Poulain goes on to examine some *examples* of saints “who were sometimes believed to be less favoured’: St Vincent de Paul, St John Baptist de La Salle, St John Mary Vianney, St John Berchmans, St Francis de Sales and others, showing how certain characteristics of their prayer life do not belong to *ordinary prayer* and are therefore signs of extraordinary graces.

Let us no return to *Don Bosco con Dio*. Sfter expressing Poulain’s thesis and the author’s regret that historical documents are sometimes lacking to prove that all canonised saints were usually favoured by extraordinary gifts, Fr Ceria concludes: “Fortunately, Don Bosco’s precautions did not prevent us, as we have seen, from observing all the external manifestations of his mystical life, so that we do not lack arguments *a posteriori.[[1333]](#footnote-1334)* Rather, we would like to have equal certainty in determining the degree of his mystical union with God.”[[1334]](#footnote-1335)

Fr Ceria now turns his attention to this last question.

##### 4.2.2. Type or degree of mystical union. Simple union and confirmation of the testimonies from the cause

The third part of *Delle grazie di orazione* is dedicated by Poulain to the *particular study of each degree of mystical action.* He distinguishes four degrees of (passive) contemplation, which he corresponds to the last four *mansions* of the *Interior Castle*  of Saint Teresa of Avila:

1. *quietude*  or incomplete union, where divine action does not yet prevent distractions;

2. the *full union* or *simple union,* where the soul is fully occupied by the divine, has no distractions, but the senses continue to operate;

3. *ecstasy,* where even the *external senses* are alienated;

4. *spiritual marriage*  or *transforming union,*  which is the supreme goal of all mystical actions.[[1335]](#footnote-1336)

Let’s leave the word to Fr Ceria:

After careful consideration, it seems to us that, apart from special moments when the intensity may have been greater, we believe it can be demonstrated that he habitually possessed that grace of prayer which is called by Saint Teresa *internal union,* by Poulain *full union,* by others, especially Italians such as Scaramelli and Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *simple union.* Saint Alphonsus describes it as follows: “In simple union, the powers are suspended, not the bodily senses, although these are greatly impeded in their operations.“ Therefore, such a gift of prayer has two characteristics: the soul is completely absorbed by the divine object, without any other thoughts distracting it; in a word, it has no distractions; the senses, on the other hand, continue to function more or less normally, that is, they are not deprived of the possibility of communicating with the external world, so that the person can see, hear, speak, walk and therefore also freely leave the state of prayer.[[1336]](#footnote-1337)

This, then, is Fr Ceria’s opinion: Don Bosco’s soul enjoyed union with God *without interruption*: “It seems, in fact, that this was his gift, never to allow himself to be distracted from loving thoughts of the Lord, however many and serious and uninterrupted his occupations were.”[[1337]](#footnote-1338) In his case, we can therefore speak of “at least” *full union*[[1338]](#footnote-1339)*.*

As proof of this assertion, the author begins to scroll through the *Summarium* of the *Positio super virtutibus*, finding some of the most significant testimonies: those of Don Bosco’s first three successors, seven other Salesians, and two prelates.[[1339]](#footnote-1340) “In conclusion,” he states at the end of his *excursus*, “as St Bonaventure says of the ancient chronicler, that in his writings he made every truth a prayer, so too must this statement be extended to every act of Don Bosco’s admirable life: whatever he did, it was prayer.”[[1340]](#footnote-1341)

##### 4.2.3 The seven effects of simple union in the Life of St John Bosco

After discussing the argument *a priori* and examining some testimonies, Fr Ceria resorts to the teaching of the Dominican Fr Tomás de Vallgornera[[1341]](#footnote-1342) to complete his “demonstration” with an argument *a posteriori*. “Authoritative mystical writers,” he says, “drawing on St Thomas’ fundamental notions on this delicate matter, list and describe seven effects of simple union; and we ... will quickly review them, noting their presence in Don Bosco.”[[1342]](#footnote-1343)

Once again, we are faced with a typical *law* of spiritual theology,[[1343]](#footnote-1344) deduced with the help of inductive reasoning based on the analysis of lived experience, as is the case, for example, in the field of experimental psychology. These *spiritual laws*, such as the *Seven effects of simple union* formulated by Vallgornera, or, for example, those for the *discernment of spirits* by Saint Ignatius, once deduced from the exegesis of the *divine mystery* revealed in the existence of the saints[[1344]](#footnote-1345) are then intended to guide us to an understanding of the spiritual experience of other believers.

Let us now review the pages of Vallgornera in the second *articulus* of the second *disputatio* of the fourth *quaestio,* entitled *De effectibus orationis unionis passivae;* we can skip over the testimonies of the cause, which are mostly already known to us, and which Fr Ceria reports point by point as proof of the presence of these seven *effects* in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience.

\* The first effect of the *prayer of passive union* is the so-called *liquefaction.*

“Primus effectus huius orationis est maximum animae gaudium, quod aliquando sic naturam liquefaciendo debilitat, quod anima languens penitus deficere videatur… Et propter hoc amor dicitur liquefacere cor, quia liquidum suis terminis non continetur”[[1345]](#footnote-1346). “It could be described,” Fr Ceria says, “as a yearning of the heart for the most ardent fire of charity or, outside of metaphor, a sweet feeling of divine love that fills the soul with inexpressible joy.”[[1346]](#footnote-1347)

\* “Secundus effectus est tenerissimus devotionis sensus; transacta siquidem hac oratione, vellet anima se totam consumere, non poenis, sed deliciosis quibusdam lachrymis, se saepius illis madefactam reperit, non advertens quando vel quomodo sparserit”.[[1347]](#footnote-1348) This “sweet need to cry” that takes hold of the soul had already been highlighted by Saint Thomas: “…lachrymae prorumpunt non solum ex tristitia, sed etiam ex quadam affectus teneritudine, praecipue consideratur aliquid delectabile cum permixtione alicujus tristabilis: sicut solent homines lachrymari ex pietatis affectu, cum recuperant filios vel charos amicos… Et per hunc modum lachrymae ex devotione procedunt”.[[1348]](#footnote-1349) “Don Bosco,” Fr Ceria confidently asserts, “had the gift of tears, which often surpassed his ability to control himself;”[[1349]](#footnote-1350)

\* “Terzius effectus est memoria celestium communicationum, quas tempore huius unionis recipit anima…; Deus autem ita se intimis velut animae praecordiis imprimit, quod in se ipsam reversa, nullo modo dubitare potest quin fuerit in Deo et Deus in ipsa; quae veritas tam firmiter inhaeret ei, quod quamvis per multum tempus Deus eamdem gratiam ei non faceret, non tamen posset anima illius oblivisci”.[[1350]](#footnote-1351)

This “feeling of God”s presence with a certainty that excludes even the possibility of doubt,” as Fr Ceria points out, was also described by Saint Teresa, who in the first chapter of the [[1351]](#footnote-1352)Fifth Mansion *of* The Interior Castlestates: *“God comes and places himself so deeply within the soul that, having returned to itself, it cannot in any way doubt that it has been in God or that God has been in it; this truth remains so firmly imprinted that, even if many years passed without it being raised again to that state, it would not be possible for it to forget the favour it had received or to doubt its reality.”*

\* “Quartus effectus est ingens animus, ita ut si propter Deum aliquid foret animae tolerandum, imo patiendum usque ad mortem, velut magnum solamen et mirabile beneficium arbitraretur”[[1352]](#footnote-1353). It is “strength, courage, unwavering patience,” Fr Ceria says, “to suffer everything for the love of God. Indeed, these souls are so inflamed with divine love that they burn with the desire to suffer for God; this desire grows ever stronger, together with the desire to belong more fully to him. Don Bosco was like that”;[[1353]](#footnote-1354)

\* “Quintus effectus est desiderium laudandi Deum: vellet anima in linguas converti, et sic tota in laudando Deum occuparetur, unde seipsam non capit, et suavem in hoc patitur inquietudinem”.[[1354]](#footnote-1355) This “ardent desire to praise God” means that the soul finds no greater delight than in honouring, adoring and thanking God.

“Don Bosco,” Fr Ceria writes, “had three ways of inviting and encouraging people to praise God: he took the utmost care in the decorum of divine worship, he spoke with unction about God and divine things to all those who even casually approached him, and he sacrificed himself with unquenchable zeal to promote the divine glory at all times;”[[1355]](#footnote-1356)

\* “Sextus effectus est desiderium juvandi proximum, et quasi nesciens illum adjuvat, per hoc quod alii virtutum ejus odore tracti, ad desiderabilem ac suavissimum earum fructum carpendum currunt”[[1356]](#footnote-1357). “To speak of Don Bosco,” Fr Ceria notes, “is to speak of charity: inexhaustible charity in dealing with others, ineffable charity in lifting up the afflicted and comforting the dying, heroic charity in seeking the means to practise charity.”[[1357]](#footnote-1358)

\* Seventh and final effect of the prayer of simple union is the habitual practice of the theological, cardinal and moral virtues to a heroic degree. “Septimus effectus est gradus heroicus omnium virtutum, ut ipsamet advertit anima, se enim mutatam et totaliter renovatam miratur, quia nescit quomodo factum hoc fuerit…: Deus enim coelestis hortulanus illas plantavit, illas rigavit, et illas ad gradum heroicum auxit”[[1358]](#footnote-1359). “In this state,” F Ceria explains, “due to the overflowing showering of heavenly graces, the soul has no choice but to cooperate through its simple consent.”[[1359]](#footnote-1360) Once again quoting Fr Poulain, he adds:

God doesn’t just come into the soul. His sanctifying action is all the greater the more elevated the prayer. The soul, saturated with God in mystical union, feels itself filled with love, humility and the spirit of sacrifice, without knowing how. God himself gives it the opportunity to practise this, sending it trial after trial: temptations, illnesses, failures, injustices, contempt.[[1360]](#footnote-1361)

Don Bosco experienced such proofs of love throughout his entire life, Fr Ceria concludes.

##### 4.2.4 Fr Ceria’s conclusion

After demonstrating the presence of each of these “effects” with arguments drawn from process testimonies and his in-depth knowledge of the saint, Fr Ceria asks himself: “So was Don Bosco also a mystic? We are well aware that many will consider this, to say the least, a bizarre idea; but the fault certainly does not lie with the mystic.”[[1361]](#footnote-1362)

Here, the second expanded edition from 1946 features several additions. Let us look at both texts:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1929** | **1946** |
| ... the fault is certainly not the mystic’s.  One author[[1362]](#footnote-1363) who knows what he is talking about describes mystics as follows: “True mystics are people of practice and action, not of reasoning and theory. They have a sense of organisation, leadership skills and prove to have excellent business acumen...” This, if I am not mistaken, is a vivid portrait of Don Bosco, in whom contemplation illuminated and guided his actions.[[1363]](#footnote-1364) | ... the fault is certainly not the mystic’s.  Two false ideas confuse the minds of worldly types. They believe that *mystical* is opposed to *real*, while it is opposed to *physical*, i.e. natural. Mystical refers to something that constitutes a supernatural reality. And then they imagine that so-called mystics live so absorbed in their contemplations that they see nothing and understand nothing of the things of this world. Instead, one author who is an authority on the subject describes mystics as follows: “True mystics are men of practice and action, not of reasoning and theory. They have a sense of organisation, leadership skills and prove to have excellent business acumen...” This, if I am not mistaken, is a vivid portrait of Don Bosco, in whom contemplation illuminated and guided his actions.[[1364]](#footnote-1365) |

And in the expanded edition, Fr Ceria concludes the chapter as follows: “What was said of St Bernard, who was always busy with many things, can be applied to Don Bosco: “The periphery, in his life, did not disturb the centre, and the centre did not disturb the periphery.” The periphery was external activity, while the centre was mystical inner contemplation. That pure and enlightened souls are not good for anything, says the author quoted above,[[1365]](#footnote-1366) is a modern discovery.”[[1366]](#footnote-1367)

#### 4.3 Fr Ceria’s guidelines for evaluation

I wanted to devote several pages to this analysis by Fr Ceria because, although it is certainly influenced by the enthusiastic atmosphere of its origins and does not always use the available “sources” critically, it represents, in my opinion, the first and perhaps, so far, the only attempt to approach Don Bosco’s spiritual experience using the method of spiritual theology.

In 1991, theologian Fr Giorgio Gozzelino wrote: “What emerges from Fr Ceria’s pages is a penetrating and convincing inner portrait of Don Bosco, lucid in showing the true roots of the saint’s greatness.”[[1367]](#footnote-1368) The same author, in the preface to the latest edition in 1988, emphasises:

Thanks to its critical study of the subjective appropriation of the objective message of faith, spiritual theology combines the historical inductive method, focused on the concrete experience of a spiritual subject, with the systematic deductive method required by the presence of an authentic form of Christian life. Based on history, it presupposes a biography. Interpreting it in terms of faith requires a theological approach.

From this perspective, there is no shortage of authors – such as H.U. von Balthasar – who identify spiritual theology with theological hagiography. Well, the twenty chapters of Fr Ceria’s essay move entirely along these lines, including and bringing together both biography and systematic theological reflection.[[1368]](#footnote-1369)

This last observation regarding the method followed by Don Ceria, while confirming the reliability of his conclusions, opens the way to further exploration of the spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians.

# SUMMARY

# CHAPTER 8

# The role of mental prayer in

# St John Bosco’s founding charism

### 1. A coherent unity

The analytical study of the *sources* in relation to the role of *diffuse and formal mental prayer* in the charism of St John Bosco and, therefore, in the spirituality of the congregation he founded, reveals, in the first instance, a broad convergence and unity at several different levels:

– First of all, we can observe a vital harmony between the *formation* received by Don Bosco throughout his childhood and the end of his time at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, and the traits of the *spiritual experience* that we can glimpse through his autobiographical and other writings, the story of his life and the testimonies of those who shared a significant period of his human journey with him;

– Secondly, the same consistency can be observed in his numerous *spiritual writings*, which, although not theological treatises but rather popular or edifying writings which do not always possess the prerogative of *originality*, reveal, throughout his life, his constant judgement on the value of mental prayer in Christian and religious life;

– Another important indicator of continuity can be found in Don Bosco's long pastoral experience and, in particular, from his “project” for *educating young people in prayer,* which can be reconstructed from his educational practice, from the analysis of some widely used *manuals* and biographies of young people, and from the spiritual proposal contained in the programme of *sodalities* or youth associations.

– A final indicator of continuity, the most important in relation to the aim of focusing on the *founding charism,* is the consistency that guides the manifestation and development of the foundation project, as emerges in particular from the first constitutions, the texts that accompany their publication and promote their correct hermeneutics, the magisterium that guides the consolidation of the foundation, the teachings of the first novitiate and also from certain aspects of the spiritual experience of the first “interpreters” of the founder’s charism.

These four different aspects, which I will try to observe in their development throughout Don Bosco’s life, converge towards a single, coherent unity of thought and practice which allows us to re-read some *fragments* of his spiritual experience, his literary production and the testimonies of his life of prayer within an overall *totality* that brings us closer to *knowledge* of the founder and then returns to illuminate every single fragment, restoring it to us as the *part* of an ordered and coherent *whole.*

I refer here to what, in the field of contemporary hermeneutics, is described as the *principle of totality.* Emilio Betti wrote:

That the correlation between parts and the whole, that is to say their synthesis and internal coherence, responds to a need of our spirit – a need common to both the author and the interpreter – can be taken for granted even through common sense...

The criterion of mutual illumination between parts and the whole can be further developed if we consider how every discourse and every written work can in turn be regarded as a link in a chain, fully comprehensible only in the light of a more comprehensive chain. The overall totality into which the individual part must be integrated must be understood, according to Schleiermacher, with subjective and personal reference to the author’s life, as his entire life; in fact, each of his acts, connected to the whole of the others in terms of mutual influence and illumination, must be understood as a moment linked to all the other moments in the life of an entire personality.[[1369]](#footnote-1370)

The procedure I propose to follow here applies the principle of totality to our particular hermeneutical problem twice: recognising the role assumed by mental prayer in the founding charism through the spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians, his teachings, his pastoral experience, and the guidelines given to the congregation he founded.

First, I will try to verify the *consistency of content* within the four different perspectives I have described, each of which will be discussed in one of the following sections:

– mental prayer in initial formation and adult spiritual experience;

– mental prayer and spiritual writings;

– education of young people in the faith and mental prayer;

– mental prayer in the project of founding the Salesian congregation.

Secondly, in the subsequent section I will briefly attempt to combine the four points of view into a single overview in order to arrive at a more comprehensive interpretation which, ultimately, will shed light on each of the points of view considered and also on every single element of my analysis.

#### 1.1 Mental prayer in initial formation and adult spiritual experience

At the end of the long *process* of beatification of St John Bosco, the affirmations about the “quality” of his spiritual life, his supernatural gifts, his perfect adherence and conformity to the divine will, and the excellence of his charity testify to the saint’s correspondence to the gift of *passive contemplation* and the attainment of *mystical union with God.*[[1370]](#footnote-1371)

This prerogative of Don Bosco’s adult spiritual experience, although not supported by autobiographical evidence, is based on some important clues that allow us to recognise the early signs of contemplative experience.

The *sources* of Don Bosco’s religiosity are to be found above all in the education in the faith he received in the family and rural setting of the Becchi. The religious sense of life, instilled in him by his mother, his first “catechist”, and the gifts of nature and grace helped to guide and “gather” his human experience towards a reflective awareness of the constant and loving presence of God.

The experience of God, wrote André Godin, is never primary. It always has a long prehistory and, in most cases, a religious (or anti-religious) prehistory. Psychologically, every boy and girl comes to talk about God starting from a network of human relationships through which each person grows, via what is said about God in their environment: family, school, living or working environment, leisure activities... In the air that children breathe... there is religion or anti-religion.[[1371]](#footnote-1372)

Don Bosco's spiritual experience was also characterised, from the very beginning, by its particular *intensity* or *emotional resonance.* “God... reigns like the midday sun in Don Bosco's mind.”[[1372]](#footnote-1373) The *religious value* is quickly perceived as *absolute* and, imposing itself, organises the entire universe of meanings and motivations and guides, from childhood onwards, the first fundamental choices in life.

During the long periods of solitude he spent as a boy in the countryside or as a shepherd, the habit of thinking about God must have taken root in him more deeply. Fr Stella has written of those years: “They were not useless years, nor were they a mere interlude, but rather a time when his sense of God and contemplation took deeper root within him, which he was able to pursue in solitude or in conversation with God while working in the fields.”[[1373]](#footnote-1374)

Don Bosco’s “natural” inclination towards *diffused mental prayer* was always witnessed by those who came into contact with him throughout his life. He sought to “fill” the hearts and minds of the young people at the Oratory with an awareness of this loving presence.

The path of formation towards *formal mental prayer* or meditation seems to have begun, instead, in Don Bosco’s reflective consciousness, from an invitation to “make a short daily meditation”[[1374]](#footnote-1375) that came from the chaplain at Morialdo, Fr Calosso, who introduced him to “savour[ing] the spiritual life.”[[1375]](#footnote-1376)

Only after his entry into the Chieri seminary, where formal mental prayer was provided for by the regulations, would the daily rhythm of meditation probably begin to be more regular.[[1376]](#footnote-1377)

Don Bosco's adult opinion on this aspect of seminary life was positive. “The practices of piety,” he wrote after 1873 in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, referring to his years spent in the seminary, “were well conducted. Each morning we had Mass, meditation, and rosary; edifying books were read during meals...”[[1377]](#footnote-1378) But even more positive and encouraging is the opinion he consistently expressed about the intense prayer life of some of his young seminary companions. “As soon as some sacred function or customary exercise began,” Giuseppe Burzio, who later became an Oblate of the Virgin Mary, recounted in 1843, “for example, prayer or meditation, or even just setting foot in the chapel, he immediately composed all his senses in holy apprehension, so that everyone could see from his devout demeanour how much his heart was involved and how much the spirit of faith animated him.”[[1378]](#footnote-1379) “I could only wonder at my companion’s charity. I put myself entirely into his hands and let him guide me where and how he wished”, Don Bosco would say many years later in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, regarding his friend Louis Comollo. “By agreement with our friend Garigliano, we went together for confession, communion, meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and serving Holy Mass...”[[1379]](#footnote-1380)

Don Bosco's conviction that *formal mental prayer* is a means normally *necessary* for priestly life is expressed in the resolutions he formulated during his formation, particularly on the occasion of his ordination to the priesthood: “Every day I will devote some time to meditation”;[[1380]](#footnote-1381) resolutions which he copied at the beginning of a handwritten notebook of memoirs in 1884, by then at the end of his earthly experience.

The regulations of the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, where Don Bosco remained for three years after his ordination to the priesthood, also ensured time for daily meditation.[[1381]](#footnote-1382) The atmosphere of religious contemplation was expressly guaranteed by a rule: “Silence shall be observed at all times,” we read in the regulations drawn up by Fr Guala, “except during recreation time, when voices shall not be raised too loudly...”[[1382]](#footnote-1383)

The Convitto’s formation project had a decisive influence on Don Bosco’s spiritual experience. “Here one learned to be a priest,” he would say many years later. “Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life...”[[1383]](#footnote-1384)

In this “extraordinary seedbed”[[1384]](#footnote-1385) he would absorb the teachings of Cafasso, who, for about seventeen years after his resignation from the Convitto, would be his weekly confessor and spiritual director.

“Praying ... is not enough for a priest,” reads an instruction prepared by Cafasso for a course of spiritual exercises. “One must seek to be more a man of prayer, and to become one; many words are of no use, neither skill nor effort are of any use. What is needed is detachment and withdrawal from the world, the use of practices of piety and mortification, and finally and above all, the use of reflection and meditation...”[[1385]](#footnote-1386) “Union with God, purity of conscience, exemplarity of life, which are so proper to the priest, are useless to hope for or seek outside of withdrawal and solitude.”[[1386]](#footnote-1387)

Would there still be a time for *withdrawal* and *solitude* for Don Bosco after the beginning of his complex and fervent apostolic activity?

One could respond, in the words of a witness in the cause, that “his faith was so strong that he was always in the presence of God and spent every moment of his life for the glory of God.”[[1387]](#footnote-1388)

It must be said, however, that some other positive indications allow us to intuit that this *reserve,* or retiring life he often refers to in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*[[1388]](#footnote-1389) and which he promised to *love and practise* when he took donned his clerical clothing,[[1389]](#footnote-1390) remained a safe place for him where he could *overcome obstacles[[1390]](#footnote-1391)* and preserve his vocation.*[[1391]](#footnote-1392)* “Withdrawal and prayer,” preached Cafasso, “are the two wings that lift the priest so high that he becomes like a God on earth. Withdrawal and prayer are two inseparable qualities.”[[1392]](#footnote-1393) ‘Only in our room, will we find that quiet,” Don Bosco’s spiritual director says, “that tranquillity, that calm so necessary for forming a good priest.”[[1393]](#footnote-1394)

A first important clue is his habit of going to the Sanctuary of St Ignatius near Lanzo for his annual retreat, even after the beginning of the Salesian retreat experience at Trofarello, and the esteem he constantly showed for this privileged time of silence and recollection. “The fundamental part of the practices of piety” he would say in the introduction to the constitutions of the Society, “which in a certain sense embraces all the others, consists in making a spiritual retreat every year and the exercise for a happy death every month.”*[[1394]](#footnote-1395)*

Another interesting clue can be found in the “relationship” between Don Bosco and his *room.* “Since, when I arrive in the sacristy, I am usually asked to speak or hear confessions,” he writes in the notebook that also contains his *spiritual testament, “*I will therefore make a brief preparation for Holy Mass before leaving my room.”[[1395]](#footnote-1396) “I entered his room many times during those days,” the first novice director, Fr Giulio Barberis, testified regarding the last period of the founder’s life, “and I always found him praying.”[[1396]](#footnote-1397) “When we entered his room to see him and speak to him,” Fr Francesco Cerruti also said during the canonical process, “we found him as someone who was engaged in deep meditation, even though he did not appear to be, for his face was always cheerful, serene and calm, as were the words that came from his mouth, which were full of peace, charity and faith.”[[1397]](#footnote-1398) Fr Philip Rinaldi would testify:

In his final years... every day he used to remain secluded in his room from 2 to 3 p.m., and his superiors did not allow him to be disturbed during that time. But since I had been in charge of a house for the formation of aspirants to the priesthood from 1883 until the death of the Servant of God, and since he had told me to visit him whenever I needed to, I went to see him several times at that very hour to talk to him. And from that moment on, everywhere and always, I came upon him him every time, recollected, with his hands clasped, in meditation.[[1398]](#footnote-1399)

A final mention can also be made of *night time* as a time that Don Bosco considered privileged for recollection and prayer; numerous indications emerge in this direction from some of his writings.

Among the secrets of the holiness of his spiritual director, St Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco included, in 1860, his desire to “gain time through frugality in rest”.

In the evening, Don Bosco writes, he was always the last to go to bed and in the morning always the first to get up. The duration of rest at night time never exceeded five hours, often it was four and sometimes only three. He used to say that a man of the Church should wake up only once during the night. With these words, he assures us that he would [[1399]](#footnote-1400)wake up, whatever the hour, and immediately get out of bed to pray, meditate, or attend to some other matter.

Recalling the night before young Michael Magone’s first confession, Don Bosco wrote the following year:

It is difficult, he (Magone) used to say , to put into words all that I felt that unforgettable night. I hardly slept at all... About halfway through the night I was so overcome by emotion that I had to get up, kneel by my bed.[[1400]](#footnote-1401)

Three years later, he described the nights preceding each of young Francesco Besucco’s confessions: “He passed nearly the whole night praying and examining his conscience so as to be better prepared, although his whole life could be called a continual preparation. In the morning, without speaking to anyone, he went to church and there prepared himself for the great event with the greatest recollection.”[[1401]](#footnote-1402) “That night he could not sleep, but he passed it in prayer and union with God” he would say once more in his Life of Besucco.[[1402]](#footnote-1403)

His intention to inspire readers to emulate the life of this shepherd boy is even more explicit when he writes, in relation to the period spent by this young man at the oratory of St Francis de Sales:

More than once I have had to go into the church after the evening meal to perform some duty whilst the boarders were happily engaged in a lively recreation in the yard. I did not have a lamp in my hands and I tripped over what seemed to be a sack of wheat. I was quite surprised to find out that I had [[1403]](#footnote-1404)bumped into Besucco who was kneeling in the dark behind the altar but quite near it. He was praying to his beloved Jesus asking for heavenly help to make himself better, or even to make him a saint.

Blessed Mary of the Angels, too, according to Don Bosco’s account, “When others were fast asleep, [she] rose vigilantly and, kneeling on the hard floor, enjoyed a sweeter and more salutary rest with her Jesus.”[[1404]](#footnote-1405) She “spent part of the night in prayer, and in the morning her first breaths were for her Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”[[1405]](#footnote-1406)

The early Salesians must have felt much the same way, if Fr Bonetti, in his introduction to *Il cattolico provveduto*, revised and corrected by Don Bosco himself, wrote:

The saints of all ages lamented having to spend a large part of their lives in such occupations without being able to keep their thoughts and affections always turned to God. They therefore preferred to spend the whole night, or at least a large part of it, in prayer, rather than abandon themselves to rest and cease thinking about God. We read in Holy Scripture that King David rose from his bed at midnight to pray, regretting that he had spent so much time with his mind unoccupied with his God.

We read in the lives of the saints that Saint Anthony the Abbot spent entire nights in prayer and contemplation, and when day broke, he complained to the sun for disturbing him. St Aloysius Gonzaga, son of a prince, still a young boy, would rise from his bed in the middle of the night, even in the coldest season, and kneel on the bare ground, spending hours in prayer...[[1406]](#footnote-1407)

“As a teenager, he was caught” we read in the mortuary letter of a young cleric, “several times praying at night, and even for very long periods.”[[1407]](#footnote-1408)

These texts reveal the feelings of Don Bosco and the young congregation, but are they sufficient to testify to Don Bosco’s habit of prayer during the night?

Obviously, in the absence of objective evidence, we can only speculate; however, there are a number of “clues” that make such speculation reasonable.

Until the age of forty-five, in fact, according to a confidential statement he made to Fr Lemoyne on 5 April 1884, Don Bosco never slept more than five hours a night, skipping one whole night every week;[[1408]](#footnote-1409) only later, overcome by illness, did he relax this demanding *standard* of living. Fr Lemoyne writes, “The fervour of his unceasing prayer kept Don Bosco always united with God. Father Ascanio Savio was convinced that Don Bosco kept vigil during long hours of the night and sometimes for the whole night, deep in prayer....”[[1409]](#footnote-1410)

This *frugality in rest*, which he had indicated as one of the secrets of the spiritual life of his teacher, Cafasso, who *woke up, whatever the hour, and immediately got out of bed to pray,* is, in my opinion, sufficient evidence in the broader context of the other elements that have emerged, to believe that Don Bosco’s nights were also accompanied by the same *love for God* that informed his daily apostolate on behalf of young people.

#### 1.2 Mental prayer and spiritual writings

Don Bosco's commitment to promoting *good press* continued unabated for more than forty years. His literary output, in particular, is rich in expressions that are not always original but constantly animated by pastoral charity and inspired by edifying intentions.

This particular intention and the total absence of literary and stylistic pretensions contribute to making Don Bosco’s work rather homogeneous. Beyond the variety of topics and audiences or the different literary genres, it could be said that practically all of his writings have a spiritual intent, even if their author cannot be defined as a true *spiritual author* in the modern sense.

With regard to the question of prayer, in particular, I believe we can discern a consistency of thought and judgement throughout his entire body of work.

Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy does not require theoretical explanations. Instead, he strives to *teach by example how to produce other facts;*[[1410]](#footnote-1411) for this reason, he does not write *treatises,* but rather prefers the literary genre of *biography.*

These edifying stories also represent, in general, Don Bosco’s most original literary production, that which depends least on other literary sources.

Beyond the rigorous *historicity* of some of the events narrated, the analysis of these biographies, often re-edited throughout Don Bosco’s lifetime, would allow us to write the *treatise on prayer* that their author never attempted to write.

Don Bosco’s judgement, in any case, is consistent in evaluating the different manifestations of mental prayer positively, including mystical ones, in explicitly or implicitly recommending them to the reader, and in considering them signs of a mature spiritual experience.

As Don Bosco tells us with regard to Louis Comollo: “He prayed, but his prayer was interrupted by sobs, groans and tears... From this anyone can see clearly that Comollo was well advanced on the way of perfection. Those movements of love of God, of gentleness, of contentment in spiritual matters are the result of his keen faith, his burning charity which was deeply rooted in his heart and constantly guided him in his actions.”[[1411]](#footnote-1412) Of Dominic Savio he wrote: “If he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he in prayer or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy.”[[1412]](#footnote-1413) “I am beside myself,” Don Bosco had him say, speaking about Besucco “when I consider that on the days on which I go to Communion, I feel myself so drawn to prayer that I seem to be speaking to Jesus himself And I tell him: Speak, *Lord, for your servant is listening.[[1413]](#footnote-1414)”* “Go to the Consolata Sanctuary,” Don Bosco exhorts during his funeral eulogy for Cafasso, “and see D. Caffasso in devotion; visit the churches where the Forty Hours are being held, and there you will find him prostrate, pouring out his sweet affections to his beloved Jesus.”[[1414]](#footnote-1415) “She was so consistent in thinking about God,“ says Don Bosco of Blessed Mary of the Angels, “that she reached the point where even if she wanted to, she could not take him out of her thoughts. She conversed with Him even in the most distracting activities... Whether she was ill or healthy, active or at rest, in her cell, at the table, during recreation, in the parlour, or anywhere else, she was always sweetly united with God.”[[1415]](#footnote-1416) “Sa foi, naïve et forte” Don Bosco writes of young Louis Colle, “enflammait toutes ses puissances et les tenait concentrées et ravies dans l’unité d’un pur regard d’amour; comme les Séraphins, elle contemplait des yeux du coeur le Dieu caché dont elle ne connaissait encore que la sainte présence et la souveraine bonté.”[[1416]](#footnote-1417)

From *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo* from 1844 to *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S. Luigi Gonzaga*; from the *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* of 1859, to the *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso* the following year, from the *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele* to the *Pastorello delle Alpi,* respectively in 1861 and 1864, from the *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli* to the biographies of his deceased confreres, written or revised by him, up to the late *Biographie du jeune Fleury Antoine Colle* of 1884, it is possible to discern a concept of prayer that is intimate and affective dialogue rather than petition or request, prolonged conversation with God, rather than recourse to a manual or formula.

The numerous short biographies of deceased confreres are particularly important because they allow us, even through certain emphases, to reconstruct the model of holiness proposed to the young congregation. They are further confirmation of the importance given to silent prayer, meditation, and the contemplative dimension of spiritual and religious life.

#### 3.3 Education of the young to faith and mental prayer

The previous reference to some biographies of young people brings us back to another indicator of continuity that emerges from the study of sources and is contained in Don Bosco’s teachings and in the concrete practice of education in the faith, especially of young people.

The dissemination of these biographies is one of the most characteristic features of Don Bosco's educational project, which believed in the need to inspire young people, adults and Salesians to admire and emulate certain significant role models. Even the *Immaculate Conception Sodality*, another valuable tool in Don Bosco’s education of the young, entrusted the growth of its members to this psychological mechanism, as they expressed their promise to “imitate Louis Comollo as far as our strength will allow”.[[1417]](#footnote-1418)

St Aloysius Gonzaga, Comollo, and St Dominic Savio are probably the models most consistently held up to young people; all three, like Francesco Besucco and Antoine Colle Fleury, are particularly distinguished by their spirit of prayer, long adoration and silent prayers, and emotional and even mystical expressions.

This is the model of youthful holiness constantly presented by Don Bosco.

This consideration seems to me to be full of consequences also in relation to the charism of the congregation he founded, if we reflect on the fact that most of the first disciples knew Savio, Besucco, Magone or were part of the *Immaculate Conception Sodality* or lived in that climate of strong spiritual tension skilfully created by Don Bosco around these young figures. “With brilliant intuition,” Fr Alessio Barberis wrote in 1932, “he wanted the cornerstones of his Institute to be chosen from among those young boys who came to him after their early childhood and had known, so to speak, no other family than that of the Oratory... It was providentially certain that these young boys, once they became priests, would have no other views than those of their Father, would place absolute trust in him, and would thus be better able to pass on the spirit unaltered to future generations.”[[1418]](#footnote-1419)

Don Bosco also recommended meditation to young people. The *holiday reminders*, he gave to boarders since the mid-1850s and repeated constantly in subsequent years, advised: “Every day: attend Holy Mass if possible, meditation and some spiritual reading.”[[1419]](#footnote-1420)

The distinction made here, as in other texts, between meditation and spiritual reading allows us to understand that, although Don Bosco probably did not expect his young people to engage in meditation as conceived by the various schools of asceticism, there are good reasons to believe that, neither in his own mind nor in that of his young listeners, was there any theoretical or real confusion between the two different practices of piety.[[1420]](#footnote-1421)The texts constantly recommended for spiritual reading by the widely read manual *Il giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth), on the other hand, and in particular *The Introduction to the Devout Life* by Francis de Sales and *Gesù al cuore del giovane* by Giuseppe Zama-Mellini, can be considered, in relation to the meaning of meditation in the life of a Christian and also to the *method* for practising it, a common theoretical reference point.

Some other elements are constantly found in Don Bosco's practice in relation to *education in mental prayer.*

The exhortation to constantly remember God's presence, the simple confidence suggested by the introduction to supplicatory prayer, the invitation to make frequent use of ejaculatory prayers, the insistence on vocal prayer *well done,* attention to *silence* in the evening, the spread of *Eucharistic piety,* the value he placed on the atmosphere of silence during the time of *preparation for a happy death* or the *retreats,* represent some of the other resources constantly used by Don Bosco throughout his pastoral experience.

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, in particular, in Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy, contributed to nourishing the affective piety that opened the hearts of young people to a simple and profound trust in Him who is *Always Present* and is “rich in graces to be distributed to those who ask for them.”[[1421]](#footnote-1422) The Eucharistic fervour he describes in his best young people thus reveals to us an intimacy in which vocal prayer and ordinary devotions are often nothing more than a preparation for a more personal and profound prayer, which is an expression of *love for God.*

He writes of Besucco: “During the Mass he was completely absorbed, as he himself said, in contemplating the infinite condescension of Jesus; he did not even read his prayer book but spent the precious time, his face hidden in his hands, in continuous acts of the love of God.”[[1422]](#footnote-1423)

#### 1.4 Mental prayer in the project of founding the Salesian Congregation

The genesis and development of the Salesian Congregation are a continuation of Don Bosco’s educational work on behalf of young people, which began during his early pastoral experiences at the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin.

This conviction, repeatedly expressed by Don Bosco himself,[[1423]](#footnote-1424) and the observation that in the gradual process leading from the formation of young people to the first group of disciples, it is not possible to recognise any abrupt “leaps in quality” in content or “spiritual pedagogy”, encourage me to consider the project of religious life proposed by the founder in the more general context of the Oratory environment at the end of the 1850s.[[1424]](#footnote-1425) In fact, he involves young people, Salesians, and his first lay collaborators in a single *spiritual movement*.[[1425]](#footnote-1426)

This intense spiritual climate remains in the background of the institutionalisation process, which can be traced back to the first draft of the constitutions. This process would encourage the development or emergence of certain differences[[1426]](#footnote-1427) and the progress of a more traditional model of religious life in which the role of *formal* mental prayer would be structured according to certain characteristic approaches.

When, around 1858, Don Bosco worked on the first draft of the constitutions, his main objective was probably to give continuity to the *institution* he had founded *for the benefit of poor youth.* The new *society* was founded with the fundamental intention of “an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbour”.[[1427]](#footnote-1428)

In this initial phase, therefore, Don Bosco was probably more concerned with binding some of his young collaborators to himself than with formalising prayer times. The *Rua manuscript*[[1428]](#footnote-1429) thus speaks of the purpose of the congregation, its *form,* the *vows,* the *government,* the *external members,* but says nothing about the *practices of piety* of the new congregation.

The *practice*, moreover, is already widespread, and the *centrality of religion*[[1429]](#footnote-1430) is not in question in the new institution. Fr Barberis would write a few years later in his *cronichetta* describing the atmosphere of the oratory, “He so imbued the young people with practices of piety that, I would almost say, it intoxicated them. The very atmosphere they breathe is imbued with the practices of our holy religion.”[[1430]](#footnote-1431)

This last consideration allows us to *interpret*, without undue “reductions”, the first formulation of the third article of the chapter on *practices of piety* added by Don Bosco at the end of the *Rua manuscript.* The text states: “Every day there shall be no less than half an hour of mental or at least vocal prayer...”[[1431]](#footnote-1432) A text written shortly afterwards even states: “...no less than half an hour of prayer, both mental and vocal.”[[1432]](#footnote-1433)

So was the prayer life of the first young generation of Salesians really so *short*?

Anyone who said that would, in my opinion, be making a big mistake. Let’s try to outline the reasons for this:

\* First of all, it should be remembered that this half hour of *mental or at least vocal prayer* is in addition to the ordinary devotions that structured the life of the oratory, the general duties of a good Christian, morning and evening prayers, the special duties of clerics, daily Holy Mass, the rosary, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, prayers before and after meals or before and after school or study, the *Angelus,* Eucharistic adoration, Vespers of Our Lady, and then, periodically, the Forty Hours, the exercise for a happy death, spiritual exercises/retreat, triduums, novenas and all the private and public practices and devotions that characterised the piety of the nineteenth century.

\* Secondly, I feel it is important to emphasise that the constitutional rule is, in any case, a *minimum* reference point; it regulates common practices and not personal prayer life; it gives us no indication of the actual *praxis* of this first generation of Salesians; a praxis which, from other sources, we know to be rich in manifestations of the *spirit of prayer* constantly instilled by the founder.[[1433]](#footnote-1434)

Once again, it is a matter of interpreting the historical *fragment* before us without losing sight of the *whole* of the founder’s spiritual proposal. It was precisely during the months when the Salesian congregation was founded among Savio’s companions that Don Bosco wrote in his biography: “It was a real delight for him to be able to spend a few hours before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”[[1434]](#footnote-1435) And again: “On a number of occasions when I have been in church when Dominic was making his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I have seen him obviously quite oblivious to what was going on around him; he would continue in this state without noticing the time unless he was reminded it was time for something else”.[[1435]](#footnote-1436) And in the introduction, he had urged: “In the meantime, reading about Dominic’s life, say to yourselves what the great St Augustine said in similar circumstances: *Si ille cur non ego?* If you read something that you admire, don't content yourself with saying: ‘*This is great*’; say rather, ‘*I am going to do the same*’;[[1436]](#footnote-1437)

\* Thirdly, it is important not to forget that this first constitutional text will undergo changes. Nothing allows us to assert that, simply because it is the oldest, it contains the true *mindset* of the founder in relation to the particular aspect I have examined here. The articles relating to the *practices of piety* would evolve, thanks also to the observations of the consultors of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, observations that Don Bosco would accept *with a willing heart* for the *greater good* of the Society,[[1437]](#footnote-1438) setting, in accordance with the practice in use in other congregations, *no less than half an hour* for formal mental prayer.

In 1858, Don Bosco turned 43; the process of institutionalising and consolidating the Society of St Francis de Sales would see him play a leading role for another 30 years, the years of his full human and spiritual maturity.

When this process began, some of his “religious” were not even sixteen years old.[[1438]](#footnote-1439) A healthy realism and the principle of gradualism, as well as the desire to avoid burdening any of them with moral obligations beyond their strength, probably inspired Don Bosco to exercise sound prudence.

As the years went by, the founder’s programme would *develop* or *reveal itself* more and more clearly; we cannot know to what extent his plan for religious life matured over the years, or rather, how gradually the “manifestation” of a plan already conceived some time ago but shared gradually with his first young collaborators, grew.

When in 1866 the congregation began the experience of “self-managed” spiritual exercises or retreats, the process that would lead to the formation of an [[1439]](#footnote-1440)awareness of being religious *had already begun. Commitment to this direction became a priority for Don Bosco when, after the final approval of the constitutions, he was finally free from institutional concerns.*

The first retreat experiences at Trofarello would remain, in the collective consciousness of the congregation, as a fundamental step on the path towards consolidation. “We have seen” we read in the minutes of the First General Chapter in 1877, ”that here it can be said that the Congregation has undergone a somewhat marked development only since the time when they began to do the Spiritual Exercises specifically.”[[1440]](#footnote-1441)

During this retreat, Don Bosco addresses the topic of religious life in his *instructions* openly and without hesitation. In laying the foundations of the new building, Don Bosco did not neglect to mention mental prayer: “The devil always works to prevent prayer. We must therefore fight against him, praying always to avoid his snares. Required: *Sine intermissione orate...* Meditation: short or long, always do it... Let it be a mirror for us, says St Nilus, to recognise our vices and lack of virtues; but never omit it. A man without prayer is a man lost (Saint Teresa). *In meditatione mea exardescet ignis.* To the soul it is like warmth to the body... Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul... All those who devoted themselves to the service of the Lord constantly practised mental and vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer.”[[1441]](#footnote-1442)

On 26 July 1866, he wrote to the students at the junior seminary in Mirabello: “Do your usual meditation, Mass and daily reading at home, just as you did at the college.”[[1442]](#footnote-1443) And to Fr Giovanni Anfossi, the following year, he wrote, “Meditation and visits to the Blessed Sacrament will be two powerful safeguards for you: take advantage of them.”[[1443]](#footnote-1444) Also in 1867, he gave the following advice to cleric Luigi Vaccaneo: “I recommend three things to you: attention to morning meditation; frequent company of companions who are more devoted to piety; moderation in food.”[[1444]](#footnote-1445) “Never omit meditation every morning,” he wrote again in his [[1445]](#footnote-1446)confidential reminders to rectors *in 1871.*

Therefore, in those years there were explicit references to daily meditation, the duration of which was definitively established in the constitutions approved in 1874: *saltem per dimidium horae…*[[1446]](#footnote-1447) The teachings of the first canonical novitiate, which for the first five years after the approval of the constitutions would still be in the mother house in Valdocco under the guidance of the novice director Fr Giulio Barberis and under the watchful eye of the founder, would reaffirm the *necessity* of mental prayer and would introduce an appropriate *method* for doing it.*[[1447]](#footnote-1448)*

The First General Chapter would then indicate some texts for meditation for beginners and confirm the use of the text of meditations by Jesuit Luis de la Puente as an aid for the more experienced and as a guide for both groups.[[1448]](#footnote-1449)

Fr Ceria wrote in 1875: “In that year, the novitiate was urged forward considerably on the path to normality... In the work of normalisation, piety was the cornerstone of the religious edifice, and two practices are of paramount importance in piety: annual spiritual exercises and daily meditation.”[[1449]](#footnote-1450)

Yet, in 1877, when Don Bosco added the long *Letter of St. Vincent de Paul to his religious on rising at the same hour* to the Italian edition of the Rules or Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales, he perhaps still had some disorders to correct. Reflecting on this letter, he wrote in the preface to the latest edition of the Constitutions of 1885, “Salesians can learn the importance of being faithful to their rules and paying attention to small things, living as good religious and persevering in their vocation.”[[1450]](#footnote-1451)

The authority of Saint Vincent, who can be considered the most “accredited” of the saints of charity in nineteenth-century Piedmontese sentiment, is invoked not to tell the young congregation that “if you leave your prayers to assist a poor person, this is serving God,”*[[1451]](#footnote-1452)* but rather to remind them that “those who love to rise early in the morning usually persevere, do not relax, and make rapid progress” and that “the grace of vocation is linked to prayer, and the grace of prayer to that of rising early.”[[1452]](#footnote-1453)

Don Bosco is probably aiming at reiterating the profound unity that exists between a life of prayer and apostolic charity, between religious observance and daily meditation, and fidelity to one’s vocation. “Neglect,” the letter continues, “has driven many away, unable to sleep as they pleased, they could not grow fond of their situation. What help is there in willingly going to prayer if one rises only reluctantly? How can one meditate willingly when one is only in church halfway through and solely out of convenience?”[[1453]](#footnote-1454)

The importance Don Bosco gave to practices of piety emerges even more clearly in those years from the introduction *To the Salesian confreres* to the first Italian edition of the Constitutions: “If we therefore, my children, love the glory of our Congregation, if we desire that it spread and remain flourishing for the benefit of our souls and those of our brothers, let us take the utmost care never to neglect meditation, spiritual reading, and daily visits to the Blessed Sacrament... Although each one of these practices taken by itself does not seem to be a thing of any great necessity, nevertheless it contributes efficaciously to the building up of our Christian perfection and salvation.”[[1454]](#footnote-1455)

These interventions by Don Bosco during the period of *consolidation* acquired great importance and are, in my opinion, the most suitable for revealing the characteristic features of the charism of the foundation and his concept of religious life. The approval process was completed in 1874; the *animadversiones* of the consultors ultimately gave way to the concerns of government. Don Bosco was almost sixty years old and had before him a religious family that was still young and certainly still faced many growing pains. He must now think about strengthening the new foundation.

Formation issues are a priority; the observations of the Turin curia regarding the overly easy “recruitment” of some young clerics and the lack of consistency in their formation may have contributed to a clearer perception of this.

Some of Don Bosco’s expressions reported by Fr Ceria, regardless of their exact historical accuracy, clearly express the passing of the era of “tolerance” and the beginning of a time of “observance”. “Though aware of all these disorders,” Don Bosco said around 1875, referring to the beginnings, “I had to make the best of a bad situation. Had I tried to remedy matters all at once, I would have been forced to close down the Oratory and send all the boys home. The clerics would never have adapted themselves to strict regulations, and all would have left...We must remember, however, that those times were different; our Congregation could not have been established in the usual manner.”[[1455]](#footnote-1456)

The short biographies of deceased confreres, written or revised by Don Bosco and published from 1872 onwards, also testify to the importance given in those years to formal mental prayer and the method for practising it. Despite their emphasis and exhortatory intent, they reveal in a simple and immediate way the model of religious life dear to that first core group of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales.

These short biographies revisit topics such as diffused mental prayer, constant thought of God, prayer as a long, affectionate conversation with God, and contemplative prayer. ”He was caught several times in his adolescence praying at night, and even for very long periods” says the manuscript of the mortuary letter for cleric Giacomo Vigliocco, certainly revised by Don Bosco.[[1456]](#footnote-1457) “As soon as he understood the supreme importance of meditation for spiritual progress, he embraced it with such love that he never ceased practising it,” the biographer continues, “it was beautiful to see him at the beginning of each meditation, so absorbed in himself that he heard and saw nothing else..”[[1457]](#footnote-1458) And of Giacomo Dalmastro, who died in 1879, Fr Rua recounts: “And breakfast? And lunch? He gave no thought to it at all; he was with his Jesus, completely absorbed in him and thinking only of heavenly things.”[[1458]](#footnote-1459)

“He would spend entire days in front of the Blessed Sacrament,” wrote the biographer of cleric Giovanni Arata in 1884, “and he would spend the entire night from Holy Thursday to Good Friday kneeling at the Holy Sepulchre, and he would have been ready to spend many more, if he had been allowed to.”[[1459]](#footnote-1460) “… if the spirit of prayer in our Giovanni was already great” we read further about him, “and I would say continuous, it was even greater during the retreat, in which he seemed unable to tear himself away from the church, not only during the day but even at night. In truth, after evening prayers, he prolonged his prayer so much that if he had not been warned by someone who cared for him, he would perhaps have forgotten to go to rest.”[[1460]](#footnote-1461)

“Frequent Communion,” we read finally of cleric Carlo Becchio in 1879, “long and devout visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the continuous practice of all religious duties kept alive in him the two flames of love for God and neighbour... In this way, this beautiful flower grew, which in a short time, thanks to its virtues, would give off a sweet fragrance that would attract the eyes of the Lord, making itself worthy of being transplanted into the mystical garden of the Salesian Congregation.”[[1461]](#footnote-1462)

Rereading these biographical fragments, I feel I can say that the congregation founded by St John Bosco with the intention of an experiment in “... a practical exercise in charity towards neighbour”[[1462]](#footnote-1463) was not at all concerned, at the end of its founder’s life, with distancing itself from a concept of prayer that also included contemplative experience.

### 2. Spiritual experience, founding charism and mental prayer

The approach I have attempted to take in the first part of this chapter has allowed us to come into contact with the founder as a person and his experiences, with his way of feeling in relation to mental prayer, with his writings and his “spiritual journeys”, and with some aspects of his founding project.

Knowledge of these elements, especially in the absence of other autobiographical evidence, is crucial for a correct hermeneutic interpretation of the founding charism. Fr Fabio Ciardi wrote:

Lived experience is the first *locus theologicus* from where the charism must be drawn. The charism is an experience of the Spirit; an experience, therefore, even before it is a doctrinal elaboration. Even in the far from infrequent case that founders have not left writings, we can still access the founding experience. Their teaching is all there in their lived experience.[[1463]](#footnote-1464)

It is precisely this *experience* that I have sought to investigate thus far, using all available *sources*.

The summary has sought to highlight the various elements of *continuity* within certain specific perspectives observed throughout the life of the founder of the Salesians. It is now a matter of bringing these different contributions together in order to grasp, in a unified *whole*, the particular gift that the Spirit, through the founder, wanted to communicate permanently to the congregation he founded, for the good of the Church.

The testimonies of the cause for beatification and canonisation agree in recognising Don Bosco’s *gift* of effectively combining the *active* and *contemplative lives.* These statements, in addition to the authority of the witnesses, find significant confirmation in the various elements that emerged from our analysis and, in particular, in the content of the formation in prayer he received, in the judgements he expressed, in his ability to recognise and in his willingness to highlight, in the spiritual experience of others, the gifts of the *mystical life*, in the very content of his *formation proposal* to young people*,* which is based on the *emulation* of a model of holiness that never pits the apostolate to one’s companions against a significant life of prayer, or love for one’s neighbour against love for God.

For a correct hermeneutic interpretation of the founding charism, however, the question remains whether this particular *gift* granted by God to the founder of the Salesians, should be considered a “personal” gift or whether it is part of that *proprium* which, handed down through the founder to the congregation he founded, must be preserved and developed as a characteristic heritage of the entire Institute.

To understand this, it is essential to consider, in an overview, the *magisterium* exercised by the founder, the instructions given to the congregation, particularly during the period of consolidation of the foundation. This was a period in which the absence of institutional concerns and human and spiritual maturity allowed Don Bosco to devote himself more systematically to the formation of his followers’ awareness that they were religious.

However, what Don Bosco taught the young congregation must be read in continuity with the entire spiritual movement he inspired. It was among his young people and his first collaborators that he formed the first nucleus of the congregation.

This last observation allows us to reflect on the fact that there are no breaks in continuity, nor any major “leaps in quality” in the formation strategies and content mediated in the early stages of the institutionalisation process. Only a few months separate the preparation of the first draft of the constitutional chapter on *practices of piety*, where Don Bosco does not ask his followers for *half an hour of vocal and mental prayer*, from the publication of the *Life of Dominic Savio* companion of those first Salesians, and from the account of his mystical ecstasies and lengthy adoration, recommended for emulation by readers.

So what was Don Bosco’s plan for his congregation? Was his proposal merely to do “ a practical exercise in charity towards neighbour”?[[1464]](#footnote-1465)

It seems to me that Don Bosco’s plan is quite different. Already in the first draft of 1858, in the chapter dedicated to the aims for which the Society of St Francis de Sales was founded, we read:

1. It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together members, priests, clerics and laymen too, for the purpose of aspiring to perfection through the imitation of the virtues of our Divine Saviour.

2. Jesus Christ began to do and to teach; likewise shall the members begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of interior and exterior virtues and through the acquisition of knowledge; and then shall they go to work for the benefit of their neighbour.[[1465]](#footnote-1466)

These first two purposes are followed by three other *apostolic* purposes, which refer to festive oratories, boarding schools, and, finally, the apostolate of the press and the preaching of spiritual exercises.

Using a current theological category, we could say that already in this first text, which does not differ greatly from subsequent versions, it is clear in Don Bosco's concept of religious life that *consecration* takes priority over *mission.*

Beyond this text, however, I feel we can say that Don Bosco passed on to his first group of young collaborators not only an awareness of an *urgent need*, the salvation of poor and abandoned youth, but also his spiritual experience and the example of a life “gathered in God”, the conviction of the *centrality of religion* in an authentically educational work, a practice that accustomed them to constant thought of God, and also a love of silence and *reserve* (*ritiratezza*), his esteem for the experience of the spiritual exercises, and his appreciation for manifestations of the mystical life that he recognised in some of his best young people.

It is precisely in this *lived experience,* as Ciardi says, that we are called to grasp Don Bosco’s guidelines for the congregation he founded.

Charity towards young people and educational intuition, in harmony with a moral perspective far removed from imposing obligations greater than those that individual consciences could bear, inspired him to adopt the principle of *gradualnes* which, in my opinion, governs not so much the development of his concept of religious life as its gradual “unveiling” to the fledgling Society.

It would therefore be reductive, in my opinion, to stop and consider, somehow statically, any moment in the history of the origins or of the constitutional text itself, without grasping the dynamic “forward push” that is at the heart of Don Bosco’s “formation strategy”, a strategy that unites young people and collaborators and persists in presenting “holiness possible for all” as the only common norm, as the only true *constitutional text.*

However, Don Bosco did not fail to provide his Salesians with clear guidelines on the paths to and *ordinary* means of sanctification in religious life. Starting from the second half of the 1860s, in particular, the importance of practices of piety, meditation, and spiritual exercises would be a constant theme in his teachings and in common reflection, including in appropriate institutional settings such as the first General Chapters of the Congregation.

The active life conceived by Don Bosco for his congregation, while not allowing for many communal practices, does not exclude a significant life of prayer. The biographies of deceased confreres, which were compiled starting in the 1870s, allow us to glimpse a religious life project that combines active and contemplative life.

This is not surprising if we consider, as a whole, the teachings received from Don Bosco, the religious experience of his formator Fr Cafasso, the educational proposal made to the young people at the Valdocco oratory, his literary output and, ultimately, the characteristic features of his own spiritual experience. Everything seems to come together in a coherent unity.

### 3. Brief treatise on meditation in the Salesian tradition at the beginnings

The term *trattatello* (brief treatise) is dear to the Salesian tradition because it recalls to memory the few pages in which Don Bosco outlines the guiding principles of the *preventive system* for the education of youth.[[1466]](#footnote-1467)

Starting from the writings of Don Bosco and some other pages from the early Salesian tradition, I will now attempt to compile, in anthological form, a kind of *brief treatise on formal mental prayer* or meditation, with the aim of organising the subject matter under consideration and highlighting some conclusions.[[1467]](#footnote-1468)

#### 3.1 The necessity of meditation in religious life

In Don Bosco's handwritten notes used during his first spiritual exercises in Trofarello, we read: “Meditation. Short or long always do it.”[[1468]](#footnote-1469) “All those who devoted themselves to the service of the Lord constantly practised mental and vocal prayer and ejaculatory prayer.”[[1469]](#footnote-1470)

For Don Bosco, practices of piety were nourishment for the soul, making it strong. ““Therefore,” he writes in the introduction to the Constitutions, as long as we are zealous in observing the practices of piety, our hearts will be in harmony with everyone and we will see Salesians who are cheerful and content with their vocation.” “Let us be really solicitous never to omit meditation, spiritual reading, the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our weekly Confession, frequent and devout Communion, the Rosary of Our Lady, a little mortification on Friday... Although each one of these practices taken by itself does not seem to be a thing of any great necessity, nevertheless it contributes efficaciously to the building up of our Christian perfection and salvation.”[[1470]](#footnote-1471)

The “necessity”[[1471]](#footnote-1472) of meditation in religious life was emphasised by Fr Giulio Barberis from the early years when the regular novitiate was established for the members of the new congregation.

Let’s go through, *passim*, some of his notebooks, used for conferences to novices. “To understand the things of God, to penetrate their core, to show ourselves filled with the Holy Spirit, mental prayer is absolutely necessary.”[[1472]](#footnote-1473) “Nothing more necessary for man than meditation And first of all J. C. gave us an example. *Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei.* During the day he preached, healed, etc., and during the night he meditated, and note well: everything that Jesus Christ did is for our instruction He spent forty days in continuous meditation and in silence.”[[1473]](#footnote-1474) “St Ignatius of Loyola, what was it that brought about his conversion, that elevated him to such a life? Meditation! …”[[1474]](#footnote-1475) “Meditation rekindles fervour like a fiery plain. But does meditation really have this virtue? So that it is so useful? So necessary? Oh yes, it is so, it really is so. The Lord reassures us more and more about David in the psalm: *Beatus vir qui in lege Domini meditatur in die ac nocte*...”[[1475]](#footnote-1476)

Even more explicit is a passage from 1882, taken from a notebook of cleric Ducatto and relating to instructions for spiritual exercises that year.

My dear confreres, we read there, meditation is something, a practice of piety that I will not only describe as important, useful, or extremely useful, but I am about to say necessary for us religious. Now, it is not my task to discuss this importance, this necessity; but I do see that it cannot be dispensed with, and so I hope to be able to speak to you about it specifically in some of my future instructions. In the meantime, I will speak to you about the necessity that we religious have to do it, about the great benefits it brings us when it is done well, and about how one should conduct oneself in order to do it truly well.[[1476]](#footnote-1477)

#### 3.2 Meditation and progress in the theological virtues

“Salesian” meditation is assigned the task of promoting progress in the theological virtues. The *Biographical Memoirs* report an instruction by Don Bosco at the end of the spiritual exercises in 1867.

This meditation, Don Bosco says, is also an examination of conscience. In the evening before going to bed, let us examine whether we have put into practice the resolutions we have already made regarding a particular fault: whether we have gained or lost. Let us take stock spiritually; if we see that we have failed to keep our resolutions, let us repeat them the next day, until we have practised that virtue or avoided that vice or defect.[[1477]](#footnote-1478)

Fr Gioachino Berto’s notes (he was secretary to Don Bosco at the time), relating to the exercises that same year, confirm this conviction of the founder even more explicitly. “Anyone who has faith and makes this visit to J(esus) in the Blessed Sacrament and meditates every day, provided that they do not do so for worldly reasons, cannot possibly sin.”[[1478]](#footnote-1479)

The same doctrine is also reflected in the teachings of the novitiate: “What is most important for us religious,” Fr Barberis wrote in 1875, “who strive for perfection in our profession, is that without meditation, one cannot even understand what perfection is, speaking in practical terms; on the other hand, it cannot be otherwise than that someone who meditates well and is not tempted to do otherwise will not strive earnestly for perfection.”[[1479]](#footnote-1480)

Therefore, in the morning, when meditation is done, no one should go about their business until they have firmly impressed upon their mind some of these truths and have firmly resolved to remember them well during the day that is about to begin and to observe them punctually.

Every lunch time, when we go to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, let us renew our morning resolutions at the foot of the altar, remember the maxims we have learned and the truths we have come to know, and, ever convinced of the great good that Holy Meditation brings us, let us resolve ever more firmly to conduct ourselves better for the rest of the day, to end it in the grace of the Lord, and to carry out all the actions that are our duty. Then in the evening after supper, when we hear these words: Let us pause for a few moments to consider the state of our conscience, immediately let us recollect ourselves, think about our morning meditation, recall in our minds the resolutions we made and remember what happened after lunch, and if, upon such examination, we see that we have practised them, let us continue to do so in the future.[[1480]](#footnote-1481)

This practice must have been widespread among the Salesians, if the biographer of cleric Pietro Scappini writes:

In particular, daily meditation on eternal truths helped him to progress on the path of virtue and to remain steadfast in his vocation. He used to say that without meditation he would never have been able to overcome his many deep-rooted flaws. This exercise took a great deal of effort, since his vivid imagination naturally led him to other thoughts; but with perseverance he managed to do it so well that he could say that many meditations passed without any distraction.[[1481]](#footnote-1482)

Similarly, we read in the biography of Giacomo Vigliocco:

It was through frequent Communion and meditation that he learned to control himself so well that his companions and superiors could not find even the smallest thing to criticise him for! It was from these two sources that he drew that love for contempt, whereby not only was he not offended when he was insulted or despised, but which led him to ask his master several times for permission to do something strange, so that he might be despised by his companions...[[1482]](#footnote-1483)

#### 3.3 Importance of its daily practice

For mental prayer to be effective it must be *daily.* The loss of this *habit* can have serious consequences for religious life.

The minutes of the Third General Chapter reflect this conviction of the founder of the Salesians: “*Nemo repente fit summus, nemo fit malus”*  Don Bosco said in the third of his six final recommendations, according to the minutes by secretary Fr Giovanni Marenco. So let us adhere to principles to prevent great evil in the future. Experience tells us so. If someone has deceived the Rec. and the House, has begun to abandon meditation, the practice of piety, then a few newspapers, some special friendships, in short, disorder.”[[1483]](#footnote-1484)

According to Fr Berto's notes, he had stated a few years earlier during the exercises in Trofarello: “By prayer we mean everything that lifts our affections to God. Just as morning meditation is the first thing to do. Everyone should always do it.”[[1484]](#footnote-1485)

Fr Barberis’ teaching once again echoes the founder’s thinking: “You are almost all Salesians or are just joining, and this is where meditation takes place. Well, do it willingly. But what about those who are not, and who are free or will be: does it matter to you to go to paradise? Do you want to live a Christian life, so that you will not be remorseful when you die? Always do some daily meditation.”[[1485]](#footnote-1486)

#### 3.4 Usefulness of doing meditation in the morning

It is best to meditate in the morning, before starting the day’s activities. Fr Barberis’ *cronichetta* reports this opinion of Don Bosco:

It is true that there are many good Christians in the world but there are also many dangers, and how many difficulties must be overcome in order to do a little good!

Take, for example, Christians who practise meditation. There are very few of them in the world, but let us look for those Christians who can do it best. Here, fortunately, there is a holy custom of meditating, so if we want to do it all together, we just have to get up early in the morning. We get up at five and do it all together without anyone disturbing us. In the world, however, it is not possible for many people to do this; throughout the day, it is difficult to find the right moment because household chores are constantly demanding attention. Let’s not talk about getting up early, which some people expect to be 7 or 8 or even 10 o'clock...

… if we also did this, what would happen to meditation? We wouldn’t talk about meditation anymore![[1486]](#footnote-1487)

The long letter of St Vincent de Paul, included for the first time in the Italian edition of the Constitutions in 1877, confirms Don Bosco’s desire to insist on this principle.

The grace of vocation is linked to prayer, and the grace of prayer to that of rising early. If we are faithful to this first action, if we find ourselves together and before our Lord, and together we present ourselves to him, as the first Christians did, he will give himself to us, enlighten us with his light, and do in us and for us the good that we are obliged to do in his Church, and finally grant us the grace to reach the degree of perfection that he desires from us, so that we may one day possess him fully in the eternity of the ages.[[1487]](#footnote-1488)

#### 3.5 Meditation in common and in private

The practice of meditation, as a practice of piety to be carried out in common, became regular probably from the 1870s. A few years earlier, also in Trofarello, Don Bosco had said: “Those who can, should make this visit and read together; those who cannot, should do so privately. You can also meditate in your room.”[[1488]](#footnote-1489)

Some teachings of the novitiate emphasise not only the importance of meditation, but also the need to do it in private when it cannot be done together with others.

After rising – we read in Fr Barberis’ notes from 1877 – let us gather together for meditation; and let this be done well. Some may not yet know how to do this, but they will learn as soon as possible; however, the commitment should be evident from the outset and carried out willingly and to the best of one's ability. Let it be known that the rule says that everyone will do half an hour a day. Those who can, come and do it here with the others; those who cannot do it in common find a way to make time to do it privately; but always do it.[[1489]](#footnote-1490)

And again on the same theme:

Indeed, the occupations of Salesians in individual houses are extremely varied; some teach, some assist in workshops, some assist in primary classes, secondary classes or high schools, some go out shopping, some work as craftsmen... Furthermore, it follows that not everyone can conform to a single timetable, given that needs are pressing and therefore the rules do not oblige all Salesian members to always take part together in all the practices of piety. For example, meditation is done in the morning when you get up, or at nine o'clock; spiritual reading at two in the afternoon, the exercise for a happy death at the end of each month; now, there will be someone who cannot go to meditation because he may feel ill; nor can he go to the nine o’clock meditation because he has to teach, assist in the workshops, go out on errands, and so on...

Well, that being the case, because we don’t have the time, because we can’t practise this or that form of piety in common, I ask, can we therefore neglect it altogether? No, certainly not; for if we pay attention to the spirit of the rule, it tells us that if we cannot do practices of piety in common, we must do so privately, each one on his own as soon as he can, and never neglect them...[[1490]](#footnote-1491)

The Salesians also had to adopt this principle, if we are to believe what Giovanni Battista Caraglio’s biographer writes: “He never neglected meditation and recitation of the Holy Rosary; and when he became a priest, whenever his duties prevented him from participating in common, he never failed to make up for it privately before going to rest. He used to say that meditation and the Holy Rosary are indispensable practices for religious and priests.”[[1491]](#footnote-1492)

I believe, however, that it can be said that in the common understanding of the founder and the congregation, meditation in common is to be preferred, probably also for reasons of healthy “prudence”. This idea is in the *Letter of Saint Vincent de Paul* to the religious of his congregation *about getting up at the same time,* which I already mentioned. In one passage of this letter, St Vincent says that he identified the reason for the decline of some houses in his congregation precisely in the loss of the *habitus* of meditation in common: “To discover this,” says the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, “it took a little patience and attention on our part; Finally, God showed us that the freedom of some to rest more than the rule allowed had produced this bad effect; moreover, not being at prayer with the others, they were deprived of the advantages of doing it in common, and often did little or nothing in private.”[[1492]](#footnote-1493)

The desire to maintain the practice of meditation in common is also evidenced by some deliberations of the Fourth General Chapter of 1886, regarding the daily timetable to be followed in parishes. In order to preserve the opportunity to participate together in this practice of piety, it was decided to hold it in the afternoon or at any other more convenient time.[[1493]](#footnote-1494)

#### 3.6 Duration of meditation

The duration of meditation, prescribed by the constitutions, was definitively established by the text approved in 1874: “Singulis diebus unusquisque praeter orationes vocales saltem per dimidium horae orationi mentali vacabit, nisi quisquam impediatur ob exercitium sacri ministerii.”[[1494]](#footnote-1495)

A clarification by Fr Barberis, dating back to 1882, makes the constitutional provision explicit: “The third article of Chapter XII discusses mental prayer, otherwise known as meditation, which must be practised for at least half an hour every day. And this at least indicates that we can do even more, depending on how we feel, but that we are not required to do more; however, we must all do at least half an hour every day.[[1495]](#footnote-1496)

Once again, it may be useful to take a look at how things are done in practice. Fr Luigi Deppert, his classmate in his first philosophy course, wrote the following about cleric Giovanni Arata: "No matter how busy he was, he never, ever skipped his daily half hour of meditation. Oh! how many times did I see him shut up in his little room in the workshop, deep in meditation! And to concentrate even more on what he was reading, he always kept a small crucifix, blessed by the Pope, in front of him, and from time to time he would stare at it with tears in his eyes.”[[1496]](#footnote-1497)

#### 3.7 Meditation, affective prayer and the imagination

The last quote in the previous paragraph leads us to reflect on the role of emotions in “Salesian” meditation.

“*In meditatione mea exardescet ignis (Ps 38,4)*. To the soul it is like warmth to the body”.[[1497]](#footnote-1498) This belief of Don Bosco, expressed in his handwritten notes at Trofarello and often repeated in early Salesian literature, assigns meditation the specific role of *stirring up the affections*. “We must also try to arouse ourselves to sentiments of love,” we read in the notes by Fr Gioachino Berto taken during during one of Don Bosco’s instructions, gratitude, and humility toward God; we should ask Him for the graces we need and in true sorrow and tears beg His pardon for our sins. Let us always remember that God is our Father and we are his children. I therefore recommend mental prayer.”[[1498]](#footnote-1499)

In Ignatian meditation, which was taught in the novitiate at Valdocco after the approval of the constitutions,[[1499]](#footnote-1500) the role of the emotions is particularly important. Fr Secondo Franco writes, after discussing the role of the *intellect* and *memory* in meditation: “Behind all these considerations finally comes the will, which must burst forth in affections proportionate to what has been meditated upon, and in generous resolutions of what must then be practised in the future. And this is the most important part of meditation.”[[1500]](#footnote-1501)

Awareness of this importance runs through many of Fr Giulio Barberis’ teachings: “Isn’t our soul in the same circumstances? Why is it desolate, why does it have no virtues, why does it have so many imperfections? *Nemo est qui recogitet corde*. So how do we get back to being fervent? David tells us in his psalms: *In meditatio mea exardescet ignis*, meditation rekindles fervour like a fiery plain.”[[1501]](#footnote-1502) On another occasion he writes:

Let us remember those words: *In meditatione mea exardescet ignis;* the fire of my spirit burns ever brighter as I meditate... [[1502]](#footnote-1503)It will surely be beneficial for us to lift our spirits to Mount Calvary, where Christ hangs on the cross between two thieves, laden and covered with wounds, crowned with thorns, pierced by a thousand wounds and a thousand stings, covered in blood, so that he no longer looks like a man; and then let us say to ourselves: My soul, your God is hanging on a hard piece of wood; now meditate on why.

This last teaching of Fr Barberis also offers us the opportunity to highlight the role assigned to the *imagination.* “One must imagine oneself present at the mystery and consider the people, actions, and words that intervene or are spoken while pondering that mystery”[[1503]](#footnote-1504) he taught in 1875 in one of the first conferences of the 1875-76 novitiate year.

The *transporting of oneself in spirit to Mount Calvary,* clearly has the purpose of moving the will and the heart, as well as keeping all the other *powers more focused.*

Cleric Giacomo Vigliocco’s meditation seems to put these teachings into practice. Moreover, he follows the Ignatian tradition.[[1504]](#footnote-1505) The “result” reported by the biographer is, once again, growth in the theological virtue of love for God and neighbour.

One of his secrets for meditating well was this: at the beginning, when placing himself in the presence of God, he imagined that the face of Jesus Crucified appeared before him, and that from the Cross he was watching him to see if he was doing it with all his heart...

Thinking constantly about Jesus Crucified in his meditations was what led him to make great practical resolutions, which he then sought to carry out with all his might, scrutinising every hidden recess of his heart to see if there was still the seed of some vice to be eradicated, or what virtues he most needed to enrich himself. Oh, how many times, unable to contain the fullness of his heart, he would vent his feelings to his teacher, expressing his desire to give his life to save souls; his desire to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ more than all the men in the world; his desire to throw himself among men to bring about their conversion![[1505]](#footnote-1506)

#### 3.8 Importance and usefulness of a method

A method, essential but well structured in its parts, was suggested as early as 1867 by Don Bosco to the young Salesians in Trofarello: “Meditation,” we read in Fr Berto’s notes, “could be done in this way. Choose the subject wisely, first placing oneself in God's presence, then meditate on it carefully, then choose those things to apply to ourselves, come to a conclusion, that is, resolve to abandon those faults or practise those virtues, and stir ourselves to affection. Then thank God and practise or avoid throughout the day what we resolved in the morning...”[[1506]](#footnote-1507)

It would then be the teachings of the first canonical novitiate that would give ample space to instruction on the *way* to meditate. Finally, the first General Chapter would indicate a “theoretical reference” for all Salesians in the introduction to the text of meditations by Fr Luis de la Puente. We read in the minutes:

(Meditation) It is nothing more than an exercise of the three faculties of intelligence, memory and will, as Da Ponte himself teaches in his introduction. This introduction should be read a hundred times and memorised, as it is worth its weight in gold. Those who follow what is said in it will find meditation immensely easier; but patience is required; beginners must be well instructed; care must be taken to ensure that they all have the book at hand, and they must be taught according to that method.”[[1507]](#footnote-1508)

#### 3.9 Rendiconto (manifestation) and meditation

One of the points on which the Salesian’s *rendiconto* or manifestation must focus, according to the first General Chapter, concerns “how (he) conducts himslef during prayers and meditations.”[[1508]](#footnote-1509)

Similarly, in the first draft of the constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, dating back to 1871, we find:

In order to advance on the path of virtue and religious perfection, it will be very beneficial for them to have a heart that is open to their Superior, as she is destined by God to guide them on the path to perfection after their Confessor. Therefore, at least once a month, they will express their inner feelings to her with simplicity and clarity, and they will receive advice and guidance on how to succeed in mental prayer, in the practice of mortification, and in observance of the Holy Rules of the Institute.[[1509]](#footnote-1510)

A *rendiconto* by cleric Giovanni Arata, presented in writing to his rector, Fr Giulio Barberis, confirms that daily meditation was, in practice, subject to periodic review.

The things I remember, he writes, and which seem to me worthy of inclusion in the monthly *rendiconto*, are as follows. In truth (I don’t know why, but it must be due to my negligence), I am not satisfied with my behaviour this month.

What pains me greatly is the distraction I experienced during prayer.

In meditation, I find it very difficult to recollect myself, to truly consider myself in the presence of God, to think seriously about the subject matter, to develop it, and what is more, I am little moved by the subject I am meditating on. The benefits of meditation seem very small to me; perhaps this is greatly influenced by the fact that during the day I rarely remember what I meditated on in the morning. I was very distracted during the vocal prayer, and I don’t know why.[[1510]](#footnote-1511)

# CONCLUSION - EVALUATION

# CHAPTER 9

# Concluding evaluation and research prospects

### 1. An overview of the approach followed

This study began with the conviction that research on Don Bosco in the second half of the twentieth century did not give priority to the content and methodology of spiritual theology. From this point of view, I believe that this work is a useful contribution to a reinterpretation of the spiritual experience of the founder within the overall context of his life, his literary output, his apostolic experience, and the religious life he proposed to the congregation he founded.

One of the most general contributions of my investigation seems to me to be linked to a re-evaluation, within the rich heritage of published and unpublished sources, of certain resources that are not always sufficiently valued, not only because of a certain loss of interest in some of the characteristic issues of spiritual theology, but also because of the caution that has sometimes accompanied the approach to some of the writings of the founder and the first disciples, which, although not original or of uncertain literary or historical value, nevertheless give us, in any case, the Christian and religious life project of the early days and give us a glimpse of the model of holiness proposed.

In particular, I have endeavoured to understand the role assigned to formal and diffused mental prayer in this project. The extensive analysis and conclusions of the study point, in this regard, towards an appreciation of the *contemplative dimension* in the spiritual experience of St John Bosco and in the founding charism of the Salesian congregation.

These considerations led me to distance myself from any reductive interpretation of the founder’s experience and of the project he conceived for the *Society of St Francis de Sales.*[[1511]](#footnote-1512)

Certainly, the active life to which the Society aspires implies that not many *practices in common* were prescribed; among these, however, formal mental prayer or meditation was constantly recommended. However, the founder’s proposal emerges well beyond the essential nature of certain *obligations*, moving towards a concept of the life of prayer that encourages widespread mental prayer*,* continuous thought of God, affective and silent prayer “without time limits”, and does not exclude the horizon of contemplative experience; this fact is even more relevant in the context of nineteenth-century Piedmontese spirituality, which was not particularly inclined to manifestations of mystical life.

The charism of the founder of the Salesians and the project he proposed to the *Society of St Francis de Sales* and, more generally, to the *spiritual movement* he gave life to, does not place the *active life* in opposition to the *contemplative life*, but rather combines them both as different manifestations of the same *love for God* which Don Bosco himself, according to the Church’s declaration of his canonisation, lived in an *heroic manner.*

In this sense, it seems to me that the words *contemplative in action*, with the necessary clarifications, adequately describes the spiritual experience proposed to the Salesian congregation.

First of all, it needs to be made clear that service and mission do not include *spiritual inspiration* *ipso facto*; a theoretical or practical confusion between prayer and apostolic action cannot find any basis in the teachings of the founder, nor, even less so, in the recent Magisterium of the Church on religious life.[[1512]](#footnote-1513)

A well-known page of Ignatian spirituality helps us to grasp the meaning of this expression: “Your life,” Peter Favre, one of Ignatius of Loyola's first companions, writes, “must follow Martha and Mary together, be based on prayer but also on good deeds, be active but also contemplative. However, if you must practise one type of life in view of the other and not for itself, as often happens, that is, if you undertake prayer as a means to act better, or, conversely, action is in view of prayer, it will be more appropriate, all things considered, to direct your prayers towards the treasures of good works instead of, conversely, directing your actions towards the rewards achieved through prayer.”[[1513]](#footnote-1514)

So I can state more explicitly that contemplative prayer, in the strictest sense of the term, is not “contrary” to Salesian religious life. I have found, in fact, that not only *infused* contemplation and its characteristic manifestations, a special gift from God, but also other forms of *acquired* contemplation, prayer of *simplicity* or *affective* prayer, are by no means foreign to the legacy traced by the writings and spiritual experience of the founder of the Salesians for the congregation he founded.

A page, already mentioned, by Fr Paul Albera, Don Bosco’s second successor, confirms my conclusions:

As the strength of our passions diminishes, this authoritative interpreter of Don Bosco says in a circular from 1921, and the desire for spiritual progress becomes more vivid and our love of God more ardent, intellectual work will play an increasingly minor role in our prayer, while the movements of the heart, holy desires, supplicatory requests and fervent resolutions will prevail. This is the so-called affective prayer, which in turn leads to unitive prayer, called ordinary contemplative prayer by spiritual masters.

Some may think that a Salesian should not aim so high, and that Don Bosco did not want this from his sons, since from the beginning he did not even impose methodical meditation in common on them.

But I can assure you that it was always his desire to see his sons rise, through meditation, to that intimate union with God that he had so admirably achieved in himself, and he never tired of encouraging us to do so at every opportunity.[[1514]](#footnote-1515)

Thirty years later, Fr Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco’s fourth successor, commented on this page: “May the Lord grant the grace of contemplation to many of Don Bosco’s sons, so that they may imitate their Father and Founder more and more perfectly by reviving the flame of their zeal in contemplative prayer.”[[1515]](#footnote-1516)

My attempt to *appreciate the role of mental prayer in the founding charism of St John Bosco, founder of the Society of St Francis de Sales,* seems to me to have significant implications for a better understanding of the *mission* entrusted to the Salesian congregation, particularly with regard to the education of young people in prayer and the importance given by the founder to the apostolate of the *spiritual exercises*, the preaching of which is constantly considered, in all the different editions of the constitutions, as one of the main *purposes* of the congregation.[[1516]](#footnote-1517)

### 2. Special contributions and research prospects

My research required a very broad view not only of the sources, but also of the entire landscape of previous studies, whose contributions were often welcomed and integrated into the development of the research, and at other times critically discussed.

This perspective required a long period of preparation and made it possible, at the end of the journey, to attempt to apply the hermeneutical principle of *totality* or *coherence of meanings* to the entire spiritual and apostolic experience of the founder of the Salesians, so that every *fragment* emerging in the analysis would contribute to shedding light on the whole and, at the same time, would itself be enlightened by this more general perspective.

This overview has also allowed me to glimpse some intermediate objectives along the way, which are both specific contributions and possible avenues for further exploration.

Let’s quickly examine a few of these.

#### 2.1 Influences of Ignatian spirituality on the spiritual and apostolic experience of St John Bosco

One of the contributions that the study makes, albeit indirectly, to research on Don Bosco is a better understanding of the direct and indirect influences of the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola on Don Bosco’s spiritual and apostolic experience and on the religious life he proposed to his Salesians.[[1517]](#footnote-1518)

Numerous “clues” emerged in this direction in the analysis. Let’s quickly gather a few:

– The formative environment of the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin was indirectly influenced by Jesuit Nicolaus Joseph Albert von Diessbach and directly by his disciple Pio Brunone Lanteri. In particular, *the Ignatian* spiritual exercises*, of which Diessbach, Lanteri, Guala and Cafasso were convinced proponents, occupied an important place in the formation programme* at the Convitto. The emphasis placed on *sacred eloquence*, the practical exercise of preaching, and the ministry of reconciliation directed young clergy towards the apostolate of the spiritual exercises.

– At the age of twenty-nine, at the end of three years spent at the Convitto, Don Bosco decided to “enter religion” with Pio Bruno Lanteri’s Oblates of the Virgin Mary, a congregation whose sole mission was to teach courses based on St Ignatius’ method.

– For thirty years, Don Bosco went for his annual spiritual exercises/retreat at the sanctuary of St Ignatius above Lanzo. He continued this practice even after the start of the “self-managed” exercises for the fledgling congregation;

– certain practices and devotions that arose within the spirituality of the Society of Jesus would become some of the main points of reference for the *Salesian life of piety* of the early days*.* In particular, the *month of May* and the *exercise for a happy death*;

– the horizon, constantly recalled to his followers,[[1518]](#footnote-1519) of a life spent *ad maiorem Dei gloriam[[1519]](#footnote-1520),* is expressed in the first profession formula of the fledgling Salesian congregation, a formula that derives directly from the constitutions of the Society of Jesus;

– The teachings of the first novitiate on meditation are based on the Ignatian method, as are some of the first texts used as aids for meditation, in particular the one by the Jesuit Luis de la Puente.

– Don Bosco’s decision to invite two priests from the Society to the first General Chapter as consultants on legal and spiritual matters, and the opinions he expressed on that occasion, express the esteem he had for the spiritual experience of the Society;

– Don Bosco constantly held the same esteem for the experience of the exercises. The preaching of spiritual exercises was also one of the main aims of the congregation in all the different versions of the constitutions, up until the death of Don Bosco.

– The choice of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga as patron saint of the Salesian congregation, alongside Saint Francis de Sales, can be interpreted in the same way.

Even the simple listing of these elements, which all emerge directly from the analytical section of this study, encourages scholars to explore further.[[1520]](#footnote-1521) In my opinion, it would also be possible to identify some other correspondences that have not been mentioned in this conclusion, as they were not explored in depth during the investigation.[[1521]](#footnote-1522)

#### 2.2 Appreciation of the formative role of the Diocesan Convitto Ecclesiastico in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience and life

The formative influence of the Diocesan *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, which emerges particularly in the analytical section of this research, has not been overlooked by some previous studies.[[1522]](#footnote-1523) However, in my opinion, there are still some important avenues for further research:

– First of all, I believe that a complete and exhaustive historical study of this remarkable institution, which had such a great influence on the Piedmontese clergy of the nineteenth century and was a true school of priestly life, is urgently needed. The study of the particular “model” of priesthood that grew at the Convitto, as well as shedding light on the spiritual experience of Don Bosco and those who, like him, were formed in this “priestly forge”,[[1523]](#footnote-1524) could also provide interesting insights for the pastoral formation of young priests today;

– even the main “protagonists” of the Convitto’s formative experience would demand to be treated with greater care. In particular, in order to gain a deeper understanding of Don Bosco’s spiritual experience, I believe it is essential to study Cafasso’s biography and to gain a more thorough knowledge of his writings, most of which are unpublished, and of his particular theological “journey”, which undoubtedly had a great influence on Don Bosco’s thinking and practice.

– One of the elements that made Don Bosco’s relationships with the Turin curia difficult for many years was, in my opinion, the irreconcilable distance between the two different schools of priestly life: the rigorous and Gallican one of the Turin seminary and the Alphonsian and Ultramontane one of the Convitto. It seems to me that this aspect of the problem has often been underestimated by scholars when considering the reasons for a conflict which is too often attributed almost exclusively to temperamental causes or a desire for supremacy. It should not be forgotten that it was Archbishop Gastaldi himself who claimed responsibility for the priestly formation of Salesian clerics and for the seminary in Turin. It was he who closed the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin in 1878.[[1524]](#footnote-1525)

#### 2.3 The first group of disciples

Another potential area for further study in the field of spiritual theology, closely linked to a correct hermeneutic of the founding charism, could be directed towards a better understanding of the *first group of disciples.*

Despite the rapid expansion of the Salesian congregation, it would not be difficult, in my opinion, to show that this term (first disciples) can be more properly restricted to some of the first Salesians who often occupied the most important institutional roles, as desired by the founder himself. The term *first disciples* is therefore not linked to purely chronological criteria, but rather to the significance of the role taken up in the fledgling institution before 1888.[[1525]](#footnote-1526)

Very few scientific resources have been devoted to the biographical study of these first disciples and to the critical study of their manuscripts, many of which are preserved in the Central Archives. This fact can probably be explained by the fact that the dominant figure of Don Bosco naturally attracted the interest of scholars. The analysis of certain figures, in particular that of the first novice director Fr Giulio Barberis, would contribute to a better understanding of the original religious life project.

#### 2.4 The model of religious life at the origins of the Society

Another possible avenue for further study that emerges from my research seems to be a more comprehensive study of the concept of religious life that emerges from the founder’s writings and, in particular, from the approved constitutions, the practice of the fledgling congregation, and the early Salesian magisterium.

Today’s teachings of the Magisterium and the current insights of theology on consecrated life allow us to re-examine the results of that study and to appreciate some of its contributions. Every generation, in fact, is called to advance the interpretation of its own charism, drawing on the past as well as on its own experience of life and on the renewed reality of the Church. This continuous *return to the sources* would bring about that *hermeneutical circle* which makes the charism a living reality and allows us to avoid any possible *reduction* of it.

In relation to the concept of religious life in its early days, a study of the *necrologies* (obituaries) and *mortuary letters* that began to be written during the period when the foundation was consolidated could be of particular interest.

#### 2.5 Further studies on other aspects of the founding charism

The general criteria for the hermeneutics of the founding charism, set out in the second chapter of this study and applied to my specific theme, refer, in my opinion, to a courageous revision of some other aspects of the founding charism.

The continuous *return to the sources* and the desire to constantly relive, in a creative way, the history of the origins are an effective antidote against the danger of a *reduction of the charism* and an effective stimulus for the continuous *refounding* of religious life.

What I have tried to do in this study in relation to the *role of mental prayer in the founding charism* should therefore be extended to other significant aspects of religious life in its origins, such as the content of the *vows* or the role of *asceticism* or, indeed, the particular concept of *community life*.

This is what Salesian Fr Pietro Brocardo has recently contributed to the discussion on the subject of the *rendiconto*, which he courageously defines, at the conclusion of his study, as “an indispensable charismatic given”,[[1526]](#footnote-1527) politely denouncing those who, too simplistically, justify its abandonment in practice.

“Faced with the very real temptation,” he said, “of considering the *rendiconto* a thing of the past, we must not forget that the ideal, if it is human, always transcends us; and it is worth more than life itself, if it is charism and a gift of grace.”[[1527]](#footnote-1528)

#### 2.6 Role of mental prayer in the founding charism of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The same approach taken with the sources for the Society of St Francis de Sales could also be usefully applied to the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, despite the different origins of this religious family and the lesser availability of documentary sources.

### 3. Difficulties and limitations of this study

Don Bosco’s abundant published and unpublished works, the long period of over seventy-two years of his life, the documents of the cause for beatification and canonisation, the complex history of the origins and difficult process leading up to the definitive approval of the Salesian Society, the large amount of unpublished material relating to the first group of disciples: all this required long and patient preparatory work, which was essential in order to explore the specific subject of this study and place it in a more general context, and made the analytical section of the work more extensive and demanding.

My investigation also required extensive research not only into sources but also into the entire landscape of previous studies, whose contributions were often accepted and integrated into the development of my research, and at other times critically discussed.

This “global” approach, which made it possible to attempt, at the end of my journey, the hermeneutical principle of *totality* or *coherence of meanings* with regard to the entire spiritual and apostolic experience of the founder of the Salesians, sometimes forced me to forego some specific insights that would have been of great interest to the study. In particular, contact with the historical and spiritual experience of the first disciples has not benefited from adequate biographical or critical studies.

Furthermore, in the summary section, the attempt to systematically organise Don Bosco’s thoughts on *formal mental prayer* or *meditation* could have been extended, more generally, to his *theology of prayer.* This further exploration, as well as the study of the particular “concept of God” that emerges from his thought and practice in relation to education in prayer, could be the subject of a specific study, integrating the elements that have emerged in relation to *mental prayer* with the study of other aspects and forms of Christian prayer, such as *vocal* or *liturgical* prayer.

Another limitation of the study, which also calls for further investigation and specific expertise, is the limited use of psychological sciences which make an important contribution to the method of studying spiritual experience. A more in-depth analysis of the content of the writings of the founder of the Salesians, and in particular of the numerous biographies, would probably have provided me with interesting hypotheses on some other aspects of his spiritual life.

# EPILOGUE

O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,

who have made all things by your word,

and by your wisdom have formed humankind,

to have dominion over the creatures you have made,

and rule the world in holiness and righteousness

and pronounce judgement in uprightness of soul,

give me the wisdom that sits by your throne,

and do not reject me from among your servants.

for I am your servant, the son of your servant-girl,

a man who is weak and short-lived,

with little understanding of judgement and laws;

For even one who is perfect among human beings

will be regarded as nothing without the wisdom that comes from you.

With you is wisdom, she who knows your works,

and was present when you made the world;

she understands what is pleasing in your sight

and what is right according to your commandments.

Send her forth from the holy heavens,

and from the throne of your glory send her,

that she may labour at my side,

and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.

For she knows and understands all things,

and she will guide me wisely in my actions

and guard me with her glory.

*[Wis 9:1-6, 9-11]*

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

**A SOURCES**

**----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**A.1 UNPUBLISHED SOURCES**

ARCHIVIO CENTRALE SALESIANO (at the Casa Generalizia – via della Pisana 1111 - ROMA)

In particular, the following *scatole* (boxes) were used:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SCATOLA** | **TITLE – SUBTITLE - PERSON/SUBTITLE 2**  ***Contents*** |
| A 000 | DON BOSCO – CRONACHE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *Avvenimenti dell’Oratorio S.Francesco di Sales negli anni 1875-1876* |
| A 001 | DON BOSCO – CRONACHE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *Avvenimenti dell’Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales negli anni 1875-1879. Verbali del Capitolo Superiore (fogli sciolti: 10/12/1875-21/05/1889)* |
| A 002 | DON BOSCO – CRONACHE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *Avvenimenti dell’Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales negli anni 1871-1889* |
| A 003 | DON BOSCO – CRONACHE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *Avvenimenti dell’Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales negli anni 1841-1886* |
| A 022 | DON BOSCO – DOCUMENTI E ATTIVITÀ  *Documentazioni riguardanti lotterie svoltesi in alcune case* |
| A 025 | DON BOSCO – DOCUMENTI E ATTIVITÀ  *Raccolta di testi di prediche fatte da Don Bosco in occasione di Ritiri, Esercizi Spirituali, ecc. – Raccolta di sue profezie* |
| A 220 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – AUTOGRAFI  *Autografi (non lettere) di Don Bosco: Contratti – Fioretti – Esercizi Spirituali – Lotteria - Dialoghi sul Sistema Preventivo* |
| A 225 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – AUTOGRAFI  *Autografi (non lettere) di Don Bosco: Prediche e Conferenze* |
| A 227 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – AUTOGRAFI  *Autografi (non lettere) di Don Bosco: Quaderni e Taccuini con appunti di vario genere – Testamento spirituale* |
| A 228 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – MSS. PER STAMPE  *Da Associazione dei divoti di Maria Ausiliatrice a Letture Cattoliche – Biografie di SDB scritte da Don Bosco* |
| A 229 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – MSS. PER STAMPE  *Il Cattolico Istruito: Osservazioni dell’Ab. Peyron A. – Il Cattolico nel Secolo – Il Cattolico Provveduto* |
| A 240 | DON BOSCO – MANOSCRITTI – OPERE STAMPATE  *16 Opere di Don Bosco date alle stampe* |
| A 384 | RETTOR MAGGIORE – RINALDI FILIPPO – CIRCOLARI  *Circolari – Conferenze - Rendiconti* |
| B 485 | SOCIETÀ SALESIANA – VESCOVI SALESIANI – CAGLIERO GIOVANNI  *Don Cagliero G.: Quinterni e quaderni con appunti di Prediche, Conferenze in Case Salesiane e di FMA* |
| B 506 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Documenti personali – Appunti autobiografici – Processo informativo sulla fama di santità (proposte) – Relazioni viaggi* |
| B 507 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Corrispondenza* |
| B 508 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Schemi di prediche, discorsi, conferenze* |
| B 509 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Prediche e conferenze* |
| B 510 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Appunti di opere* |
| B 511 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – DIRETTORE SPIRITUALE – BARBERIS GIULIO  *D.Barberis Giulio: Correzione di bozze di stampe* |
| B 514 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – CONSIGLIERE PROFESSIONALE – BERTELLO GIUSEPPE  *D.Bertello Giuseppe: Prediche* |
| B 515 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – CONSIGLIERE – BONETTI GIOVANNI  *D.Bonetti Giovanni: Documenti personali e Corrispondenza* |
| B 516 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – CONSIGLIERE – BONETTI GIOVANNI  *D.Bonetti Giovanni: Scritti vari* |
| B 517 | CONSIGLIO GENERALE – CONSIGLIERE – BONETTI GIOVANNI  *D.Bonetti Giovanni: Prediche e Istruzioni* |
| D 472 | SOCIETÀ SALESIANA – COSTITUZIONI  *Costituzioni (1856-1873)* |
| D 473 | SOCIETÀ SALESIANA – COSTITUZIONI  *Costituzioni (1874-1877)* |
| D 578 | CAPITOLI GENERALI – CAPITOLO GENERALE 1  *Capitolo Generale 1 (1877): Atti – Elenchi – Documenti – Deliberazioni* |
| D 579 | CAPITOLI GENERALI – CAP. GEN. 2-3-4  *Capitolo Generale 2 (1880) – 3 (1883) – 4 (1886): Atti – Elenchi - Deliberazioni - Documenti* |

ARCHIVIO SALESIANO CENTRALE, *Fondo Don Bosco. Microschedatura e descrizione,* a cura di TORRAS A., Roma 1980.

ARCHIVIO SALESIANO CENTRALE, *Fondo Don Rua. With annexes concerning Don Bosco (complements) and Mary Domenica Mazzarello. Microschede - Descrizione,* a cura di TORRAS A., Roma 1996.

CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* [Copia Corgiatti], vv. 9, conservata presso la biblioteca del Centro Studi Don Bosco della Università Pontificia Salesiana – Piazza dell’Ateneo Salesiano 1 – Roma.

**A.2 PUBLISHED SOURCES**

**A.2.1 Writings of Don Bosco particularly consulted**

**A.2.1.1 Critical editions**

BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S.Francesco di Sales [1858] - 1875.* Testi critici a cura di Motto F., LAS, Roma 1992.

BOSCO G., *Costituzioni per l’Istituto Delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885),* a cura di ROMERO C., LAS, Roma 1983.

BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* a cura di MOTTO F., vv. 2 (subsequent ones currently being edited), LAS, Roma 1991- 1996.

BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S.Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di FERREIRA DA SILVA A., LAS, Roma 1991.

BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco fondatore. “Ai soci salesiani” (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici,* LAS, Roma 1995.

BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’”Oratorio”. Una “Congregazione degli Oratori”. Documenti,* LAS, Roma 1988.

BRAIDO P., *L’inedito “Breve catechismo per i fanciulli ad uso della Diocesi di Torino” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1979.

MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1984.

MOTTO F., *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio Bosco a’ suoi figliuoli salesiani,* LAS, Roma 1985.

**A.2.1.2 Other editions (in chronological order)**

[BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega,* Tip. Speirani e Ferrero, Torino 1844.

[BOSCO G.], *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S.Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del Santo,* Tip. Speirani e Ferrero, Torino 1846.

[BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell’Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de’ principali Vespri dell’anno coll’aggiunta di laudi sacre ecc.,* Tipografia Paravia e Comp., Torino 1847.

[BOSCO G.], *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo De' Paoli. Opera che può servire a consacrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo Santo,* Tipografia Paravia e Comp., Torino 1848.

BOSCO G., *Cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue virtù, scritti dal sacerdote Bosco Giovanni suo collega,* Tipografia P. De Agostini, Torino 1854.

BOSCO G., *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*, Tipografia G.B. Paravia, Torino 1858.

BOSCO G., *Porta teco cristiano ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocché ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1858.

BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tip. G.B.Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859.

BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1860.

BOSCO G., *Il pontificato di S. Sisto II e le glorie di S. Lorenzo martire*, Tipografia G.B. Paravia Torino 1860.

BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1860.

BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1861.

BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864.

BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864.

[BOSCO G.], *Il Galantuomo e le sue avventure. Almanacco nazionale per l’anno 1865. Strenna offerta ai cattolici italiani,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1865.

BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli carmelitana scalza torinese,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1865.

[BOSCO G.], “Invito alla frequente comunione”, in *Pratiche divote per l’adorazione del SS. Sacramento,* Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1866.

[BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1868.

BOSCO G., *Angelina o l’orfanella degli Appennini pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1869.

BOSCO G., *Cenno istorico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi chiarimenti,* Tipografia Poliglotta della S.Congregazione di Propaganda, Roma 1874.

[BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1875,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1875.

[BOSCO G.], *Brevi biografie dei Confratelli Salesiani chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna*, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1876.

[BOSCO G.], *Confratelli chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna nell’anno 1875,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1876.

[BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877.

[BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1879.

[BOSCO G.], *Letture amene ed edificanti ossia biografie salesiane,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1880.

[BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1880.

BOSCO G., *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle,* Imprimerie Salésienne, Turin 1882.

[BOSCO G.], *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1882.

[BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882,* Tip. S. Vincenzo, S. Pier d’Arena 1883.

[BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1885.

BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S.Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855,* SEI, Torino 1946.

BOSCO G., *La “Buona Notte”,* a cura di CERIA E., Morcelliana, Brescia 1951.

BOSCO G., *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco,* a cura di Ceria E., 4 vv., SEI, Torino 1955.

CAVIGLIA A. (a cura di), *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco. Nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti. A cura della Pia Società Salesiana* , vv. 6, SEI, Torino 1965.

AUBRY J. (a cura di), *Giovanni Bosco. Scritti spirituali,* Città Nuova, Roma 1976.

BOSCO G., *Buona notte,* a cura di PEDRINI A., Esse Gi Esse, Roma 1981.

BOSCO G., *Opere edite.* Prima serie: *Libri e opuscoli,* 37 volumi (ristampa anastatica), LAS, Roma 1977-1978. Seconda serie: *Contributi su giornali e periodici,*1 volume, LAS, Roma 1987.

**A.2.1.3 Constitutions**

[BOSCO G.], *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii juxta approbationis decretum die 3 aprilis 1874,* Ex Officina Asceterii Salesiani, Augustae Taurinorum 1874.

[BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1875.

[BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1877.

**A.2.2 ACTS OF CANONISATION PROCESSES**

CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Joannis Bosco Fundatoris Piae Societatis Salesianae et Instituti Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis,* Torino*.* Sono stati utilizzati i primi 12 volumi: *Positio super revisione scriptorum* (1906); *Positio super introductione causae* (1907); *Positio super non cultu* (1908); *Positio super fama sanctitatis* (1915); *Positio super dubium* (1921); *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium* (1023); *Informatio. Animadversiones. Responsiones* (1925); *Nova positio super virtutibus* (1926); *Alia nova positio super virtutibus* (1926); *Novissima positio super virtutibus* (1927); *Positio super validitatem processuum* (1927).

[SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO], *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Dominici Savio adolescentis laici alumni oratorii salesiani. Summarium super dubio,* Taurinen 1926.

[SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO], *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso sacerdotis saecularis Collegii ecclesiastici Taurinensis moderatoris*, Romae 1906.

**A.2.3 Early biographies**

ALBERTOTTI G., *Chi era Don Bosco ossia Biografia fisio-psico-patologica di Don Bosco scritta dal suo medico Dott. Albertotti Giovanni,* Poligrafica San Giorgio, Genova 1929.

DU BOYS A., *Dom Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salésiens*, J. Gervais, Paris 1884.

ESPINEY C. de, *Don Bosco*, Imprimerie‑libr. Salésienne du Patronage St.‑Pierre, Nice 1888.

JOERGENSEN J.J., *Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1930.

LEMOYNE G.B., *Vita del Venerabile Servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco Fondatore della Pia Società Salesiana, dell’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice e dei Cooperatori Salesiani,* 2 voll., Libreria Editrice Internazionale “Buona Stampa”, Torino 1913.

LEMOYNE G.B. - AMADEI A. - CERIA E., *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco,* 19 volumi di testo e due di indici, Edizione extracommerciale, S.Benigno Canavese (Torino) 1898-1948.

**A.2.4 Annals and other sources**

ALBERA P., *Lettere circolari ai salesiani,* SEI, Torino 1922.

ALFONSO MARIA DE’ LIGUORI, *Opere ascetiche*, Marietti, Torino 1845.

CAFASSO G., *Istruzioni per Esercizi Spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano,* Tipografia Fratelli Canonica, Torino 1893.

CAFASSO G., *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero. Pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Canonica, Torino1892.

CAFASSO G., *Sacre missioni al popolo,* Scuola Tipografica Missionaria, Torino 1923.

CAPETTI G., *Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice. Cronistoria,* 5 voll., Scuola Tipografica privata FMA, Roma 1974-1978.

CERIA E., *Annali della Società Salesiana.* v. 1, *Dalle origini alla morte di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1941.

*Constitutiones congregationis Sacerdotum Saecularium Scholarum Charitatis,* Ex Tipis Francisci Andreola, Venezia, 1837.

*Costituzioni e Regole dell’Istituto delle Suore di S. Anna della Provvidenza,* Per gli Eredi Botta Tip. Arcivescovili, Torino 1846.

*Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.,* Tip. Eredi Botta, Torino 1851.

*Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo-Torinese nel settembre 1877,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1878.

*Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1882.

*Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale delle Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice tenuto in Nizza Monferrato nell’agosto del 1886,* [Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1886].

*Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86,* Tipografia Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1887.

*Don Bosco santo e le sue opere nell’augusta parola di S.S. Pio PP. XI,* Scuola Salesiana del Libro, Roma 1934.

FAVINI G. (a cura di), *Virtù e glorie di S.Giovanni Bosco*, SEI, Torino 1934.

[IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA], *Regole della Compagnia di Gesù,* Tipografia Salviucci, Roma 1834.

[LANTERI P.B.], *Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.,* Tip. Eredi Botta, Torino 1851.

PUENTE de la L., *Meditazioni del P.Ludovico Da Ponte della Compagnia di Gesù già tradotte dall’idioma castigliano nel nostro volgare da Giulio Cesare Braccini e poi rivedute e corrette e a miglior forma ridotte dal P. Giacomo Bonaretti,* Stabilimento Tipografico di Andrea Festa, Napoli 1851.

PUENTE L. de la, *Meditazioni del Ven. Padre Ludovico da Ponte della Compagnia di Gesù tradotte dallo spagnolo dal Signor Giulio Cesare Braccini corrette e a miglior forma ridotte dal P. Giacomo Bonaretti della stessa Compagnia,* Marietti, Torino 18758.

RUA M., *Lettere circolari ai salesiani,* SAID, Torino 1910.

**B BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, pp. 1357-1389.

DIEKMANN H., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco. Deutschsprachige Don-Bosco-Literatur 1883-1994*, LAS, Roma 1997.

GIANNOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco, Bibliografia italiana 1844-1992*, LAS, Roma 1995.

RICALDONE P., *Don Bosco educatore,* v. 2, SEI, Colle Don Bosco 1952, pp. 631-650.

STELLA P., *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1977.

**C STUDIES**

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**C.1 BIOGRAPHIES OF DON BOSCO**

CERIA E., *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere,* SEI, Torino 1938.

DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996.

FAVINI G., *Virtù e glorie di S.Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1934.

LEMOYNE G.B., *San Giovanni Bosco seminarista,* SEI, Torino 1941.

PIO XI, *Don Bosco santo e le sue opere nell’augusta parola di S.S. Pio PP. XI,* Scuola Salesiana del Libro, Roma 1934.

SALOTTI C., *Il Beato Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1929.

**C.2 GENERAL STUDIES ON DON BOSCO**

ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 149-196.

AUBRY J., *Mamma Margherita, la prima collaboratrice di Don Bosco,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1994.

BENZIGER M., *Mamma Margherita, st. John Bosco's mother,* Benziger Sisters, Altadena 1979.

BORINO G.B., *Don Bosco. Sei scritti e un modo di vederlo. Con una appendice: Pio XI e Don Bosco,* SEI, Roma 19402.

BRAIDO P.,  *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità : studi e testimonianze,* LAS, Roma 1987.

BRAIDO P., *“Memorie” del futuro,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 11(1992) 20, pp. 97-127.

BRAIDO P., *Breve storia del "Sistema preventivo",* LAS, Roma 1993.

BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco educatore*, LAS, Roma 1992.

BRAIDO P., *Il "sistema preventivo" in un "decalogo" per educatori*, LAS, Roma 1985.

BRAIDO P., *Il progetto operativo di don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana,*  LAS, Roma 1982.

BRAIDO P., *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù,* LAS, Roma 1985.

BRAIDO P., *La lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884,* LAS, Roma 1984.

BRAIDO P., *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1988.

BRAIDO P., *Prospettive di ricerca su don Bosco,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesine” 9 (1990) pp. 254-267.

BRAIDO P., *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali di Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1987.

CASELLE S., *Cascinali e contadini in Monferrato. I Bosco di Chieri nel secolo XVIII*, LAS, Roma 1974.

CASELLE S., *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri. 1831-1841. Dieci anni che valgono una vita,* Edizioni Acclaim, Torino 1988.

CAVIGLIA A, *Il “Magone Michele”. Una classica esperienza educativa,* in “Salesianum” (1949) pp. 450-481. 588-614.

CAVIGLIA A., “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco”, in *Don Bosco. Opere e scritti editi ed inediti,* vol. IV, SEI, Torino 1977, pp. 1-590.

CERRATO N., *Don Bosco e il suo mondo*, LAS, Roma 1994.

CERRATO N., *Don Bosco e le virtù della sua gente*, LAS, Roma 1985.

D’AQUINO G., *La psicologia di Don Bosco*, SEI, Torino 1988.

DESRAMAUT F., “Don Bosco fondatore”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 113-145.

DICASTERO PER LA FORMAZIONE, *Sussidi 1. Il tempo di Don Bosco*, Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1986.

DICASTERO PER LA FORMAZIONE, *Sussidi 2. Dizionarietto. Alcune situazioni, istituzioni e personaggi dell'ambiente in cui visse Don Bosco*, Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1988.

DICASTERO PER LA FORMAZIONE, *Sussidi 3. Per una lettura di Don Bosco,* Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1989.

FANTOZZI A., *Mamma Margherita. La madre di Don Bosco,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1992.

FARINA R., “Leggere Don Bosco oggi”, in *La formazione permanente interpella gli istituti religiosi,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1976, pp. 349-404.

GIRAUDI F., *L’oratorio di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1935.

GIRAUDO A. - BIANCARDI G., *Qui è vissuto Don Bosco. Itinerari storico-geografici e spirituali*, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1988.

GIRAUDO A., *Clero, seminario e società,* LAS, Roma 1992.

HENRION A., *Mamma Margherita, la collaboratrice di Don Bosco,* Consiglio Superiore U.D.C.I., Roma 1928.

KLEIN J. – VALENTINI E., *Una rettificazione cronologica delle “Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco”,* in “Salesianum” 17 (1955) 3-4, pp. 581-610.

LAPPIN P., *Sunshine in the shadows,* Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle N.Y. 1980.

LEMOYNE G.B., *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto ameno ed edificante,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1886.

MALFAIT D. – SCHEPENS J., “*Il cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli”. Analisi del lavoro redazionale compiuto da Don Bosco,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 15 [1996] pp. 377-378.

MIDALI M., “Tipi di approccio a Don Bosco fondatore”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 27-80.

MOTTO F., “Don Bosco fondatore e la curia romana”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 225-246.

PAPA G., *La causa di beatificazione e canonizzazione di S.Giovanni Bosco,* Basilica di S.Giovanni Bosco, Roma 1984.

PEDRINI A., “Giovanni Bosco (santo)”, in *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità* a cura di ANCILLI E., Città Nuova, Roma 1990, pp. 1132-1144.

SALOTTI C., *Il Beato Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1930.

STELLA P., "Le ricerche su Don Bosco nel venticinquennio 1960‑1985: bilancio, problemi e prospettive”, in BRAIDO P. (a cura di), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze*, LAS, Roma 1987, pp. 373-396.

STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* 3 vv., LAS, Roma 1979-1988.

STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870),* LAS, Roma 1980.

STELLA P., *I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il “Mese di maggio” di don Bosco,* in “Salesianum” 20(1958) pp. 648-694.

STICKLER G., *Dalla perdita del padre a un progetto di paternità. Studio della evoluzione psicologica della personalità di Don Bosco,* in “Rivista di Scienze dell’educazione” 25 (1987) pp. 337-375.

STICKLER G., *Lo sviluppo dell’identità paterna di Don Bosco,* in “Vita consacrata” 24 (1988) pp. 443-459.

TUNINETTI G., “Gli arcivescovi di Torino e don Bosco fondatore”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 247-278.

VENTURUZZO, O., *A mãe de Dom Bosco*, Guiratinga 1985.

VERANDE J. de la,  *Don Bosco, le XIXe saint Jean,* Fayard, Paris 1951.

**C.3 STUDIES ON DON BOSCO’S PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY**

AGUILERA A., *Ensayos sobre el Espíritu del Ven. don Bosco,* Escuela Tipografica Salesiana, Punta Arenas 1918*.*

AUBRY J., *Giovanni Bosco. Scritti spirituali,* Città Nuova, Roma 1976.

BOUQUIER H., *Les pas dans les pas de Don Bosco ou la spiritualité salésienne,* Imprimerie Saint-Léon, Marseille 1953.

BROCARDO P., “Don Bosco profeta di santità per la nuova cultura”, in MIDALI M. (a cura di), *Spiritualità dell’azione* a cura di Midali M., LAS, Roma 1977.

BROCARDO P., “Gli Esercizi Spirituali nella esperienza di D. Bosco e della vita salesiana”, in BROCARDO P. – CAPITANIO I. (a cura di), *Il rinnovamento degli Esercizi Spirituali. Simposio salesiano europeo,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1975, pp. 23-77.

BROCARDO P., ”Gli esercizi spirituali in Piemonte nel secolo XIX e Don Bosco”, in AA.VV.*, La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino 1969, pp. 175-183.

BROCARDO P., *Don Bosco profondamente uomo, profondamente santo,* LAS, Roma 1985.

CAMILLERI N., *La grande indulgenza del lavoro,* Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Torino-Leumann 1962.

CAVIGLIA A., *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano,* Centro Mariano Salesiano, Torino 1985.

CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* a cura di GOZZELINO G., Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1988.

CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* SEI, Torino 1929.

DELEIDI A., “Don Bosco e Maria Domenica Mazzarello: rapporto storico-spirituale”, in MIDALI M: (a cura di ), *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1990, pp. 205-216.

DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco e la vita spirituale,* LDC, Torino-Leumann 1970.

DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della famiglia salesiana. Atti del Simposio. Roma-Salesianum (22-26 gennaio 1989),* a cura di MIDALI M., Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989.

GOZZELINO G., *Don Bosco con Dio. Ritratto di un santo,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS - Roma, n. 6 (1991) pp. 5-37.

MARCOCCHI M., “Alle radici della spiritualità di Don Bosco”, in MIDALI M. (a cura di), *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1990, pp. 157-176.

PEDRINI A., *Contemplativo nell’azione,* in "Rivista di vita spirituale" 45 (1991) pp. 186-203.

PEDRINI A., *Don Bosco guida all’esperienza dello Spirito. Ricerca storico-ascetica,* in "Rivista di ascetica e mistica", 20 (1995) pp. 88-113.

PEDRINI A., *L’unione con Dio nella dottrina e nella prassi salesiana,* in "Rivista di vita spirituale" 36 (1982) pp. 189-201; 576-588.

PICCA J., *La meditazione nel pensiero e nella prassi di Don Bosco,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS-Roma, n. 2 (1985) pp. 16-40.

POSADA M. E., “L’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in rapporto a Don Bosco”, in MIDALI M. (a cura di), *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1990, pp. 217-229.

SCOTTI P., *La dottrina spirituale di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 19392.

STELLA P., *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco,* Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi di Don Bosco, Roma 1960.

VALENTINI E., *Don Bosco e Sant’Alfonso,* Casa Editrice S. Alfonso, Pagani (SA) 1972.

VALENTINI E., *La pedagogia eucaristica di S. Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1952.

VALENTINI E., *La spiritualità di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1952.

**C.4 STUDIES ON SALESIAN HISTORY AND SPIRITUALITY**

AA.VV., *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino-Leumann 1969.

AUBRY J., *La prière de la communauté salesienne,* in "Cahiers du Groupe Lyonnais de Recherches Salésiennes" , n. 33 (1972) pp. 1-39.

BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis direttore spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, San Benigno Canavese 1932.

BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani. Ammaestramenti e consigli esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* vv. 2, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1901.

BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum dei giovani salesiani. Ammaestramenti e consigli esposti agli ascritti e agli studenti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* vv. 3, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1905.

BARBERIS G., *Lettere a don Paolo Albera e a Don Calogero Gusmano durante la loro visita alle case d’America (1900-1903),* a cura di CASALI B., LAS, Roma 1998.

BARTOLOME’ J.J., *La vita apostolica come preghiera salesiana,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS-Roma, n. 6 (1991) pp. 61-72.0

BONETTI G., *Cinque lustri di storia dell’Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1887.

BROCARDO P. – CAPITANIO I. (a cura di), *Il rinnovamento degli Esercizi Spirituali. Simposio salesiano europeo,* Elle Di Ci, Torino 1975.

CASSANO G., *Il Cardinale Giovanni Cagliero,* vv. 2, SEI, Torino 1935.

CERIA E., *Profili dei capitolari salesiani,* LDC, Colle Don Bosco (To) 1951.

CERIA E., *Vita del servo di Dio Don Michele Rua, primo successore di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1949.

CERIA E., *Vita del Servo di Dio Sac. Filippo Rinaldi,* SEI, Torino 1948.

COLLI C., “Elementi di spiritualità salesiana contenuti nelle costituzioni SDB. Sintesi e verifica”, in Contributi di studio su costituzioni e regolamenti SDB. CGXXII - Sussidi, Roma 1982.

DESRAMAUT F., “Il capitolo delle “Pratiche di pietà” nelle costituzioni salesiane” in AA.VV.*, La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino 1969, pp. 57-88.

FAVINI G., *Don Paolo Albera. “Le petit Don Bosco”,* SEI, Torino 1975.

MIDALI M., *Il carisma permanente di Don Bosco,* LDC, Torino-Leumann 1970.

RICALDONE P.,  *La pietà,* LDC, Colle Don Bosco (To) 1955.

STELLA P., “Le pratiche di pietà dei salesiani dalle origini della congregazione alla morte di Don Bosco” in AA.VV.*, La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino 1969, pp. 13-28.

STELLA P., *Valori spirituali del Giovane Provveduto di San Giovanni Bosco,* Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, Roma 1960.

TERRONE L., *Il Salesiano. Piccolo trattato di vita religiosa,* LSE, Genova 1932.

VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* a cura dell’Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, Scuola Grafica Salesiana, Torino 1969.

VALENTINI E., *Don Ceria scrittore,* SEI, Torino 1957.

VALENTINI E., *Mons. Gastaldi e Mons. G.B. Bertagna,* in "Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose", 7 (1969) n. 1, pp. 27-43; 44-107.

WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani. Centocinquant’anni di storia,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1970.

**C.5 GENERAL STUDIES OF SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY**

BALTHASAR H.U. von, *Sorelle nello Spirito. Teresa di Lisieux e Elisabetta di Digione,* Jaca Book, Milano 19913.

BERNARD C.A., *Teologia spirituale,* Ed. Paoline, Roma 1993.

DE GUIBERT J., *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mistica,* Ed. Università Gregoriana, Roma 1952.

GORDINI G. (a cura di), *Santità e agiografia. Atti dell'VIII Congresso di Terni,*.*,* Marietti, Genova 1991.

GREGOIRE R.,  *Manuale di agiologia : introduzione alla letteratura agiografica,* Monastero San Silvestro Abate, Fabriano 1987.

HERRERA J. – PARDO V., *San Vicente de Paul : biografía y selección de escritos,* BAC, Madrid 1955.

MOIOLI G., *L'esperienza spirituale. Lezioni introduttive*, Glossa, Milano 19942.

MORETTI G.M., *I santi dalla loro scrittura,* Paoline, Roma 1975.

SICARI A., *La vita spirituale del cristiano* , Jaca Book, Milano 1997.

SICARI A., *Ritratti di Santi,* Jaca Book, Milano 1988.

SIMON DIAZ J., *Jesuitas de los siglos XVI y XVII: escritos localizados,* Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca - Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid 1975.

VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica Theologia D. Thomae,* Marietti, Torino 1889.

WEYERGANS F., *Mistici del nostro tempo,* Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1960.

**C.6 STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY**

ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale di san Giuseppe Cafasso,* Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Torino 1958.

ANSART A. J., *L'esprit de S. Vincent de Paul, ou modéle de conduite proposé a tous les ecclésiastiques, dans ses vertus, ses actions et ses paroles*, Libraire Rue du Jardinet, Paris 1780.

ANSELMO DI S. LUIGI GONZAGA, *Vita della B. Maria degli Angeli religiosa professa Carmelitana scalza,* Tip. G. Speirani, Torino 18662.

BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”. Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830),* Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, Torino 1962.

BOTTINO F., *San Giuseppe Cafasso maestro e modello del clero,* Fiamma del Sacro Cuore, Chieri 1960; AA.VV., *Morale e pastorale alla luce di san Giuseppe Cafasso,* LICE, Torino 1961.

BRUSTOLON A., *Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine. Punti chiari e punti oscuri,* Edizione Lanteri, Torino 1995.

CALLIARI P., *Pio Bruno Lanteri, fondatore degli Oblati di Maria Vergine nella storia religiosa del suo tempo,* Editrice Lanteriana, San Vittorino 1980.

CASTELLANI A., *Il Beato Leonardo Murialdo,* v. 1, Tipografia S. Pio X, Roma 1966.

CICCOLINI A., *Raccolta di meditazioni e documenti secondo la materia e la forma proposte da S.Ignazio di Loyola nei suoi esercizi spirituali,* Camillo Dongo, Roma 1880.

COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Canonica, Torino 1895.

COLPO M., “Franco (Secondo)”, in DSp*,* v. 5. coll. 1014-1016.

DE ROSA G., *Il movimento cattolico in Italia. Dalla Restaurazione all’età giolittiana,* Laterza, Bari 19882**.**

DI ROBILANT L.N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso confondatore del Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, 2 vv., Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, Torino 1912.

FIAT A., *Avvisi e conferenze spirituali di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli ai membri della congregazione,* Tip. S. Giuseppe degli Artigianelli, Torino 1898.

FRANCESCO DI SALES, *Introduzione alla vita devota - Trattato dell’amor di Dio,* a cura di MARCHISANO F., UTET, Torino 1969.

FRANCO S., *Istruzioni per le religiose in tempo di esercizi,* Tipografia Pontificia ed Arcivescovile, Modena [?].

GALLAGHER T., *Gli Esercizi di S.Ignazio nella spiritualità e carisma di fondatore di Pio Brunone Lanteri,* TESI PUG, Roma 1983.

GASTALDI P., *Della Vita del Servo di Dio Pio Brunone Lanteri,* Marietti, Torino 1870.

GENSAC H. de, “Poulain (Augustin- François)”, in DSp v. 12/II, coll. 2025-2027.

GIORDANO F., *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a' giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio,* Dalla Stamperia degli Artisti Tipografi, Torino 1846.

GOFFI T., *La spiritualità dell’Ottocento,* EDB, Bologna 1989.

GUIBERT de J.,  *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico,*  Città Nuova, Roma 1992.

IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, “Costituzioni” in GIOIA M. (a cura di), Gli scritti di Ignazio di Loyola, UTET, Torino 1988.

IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizj spirituali di S. Ignazio di Loyola col Direttorio pel buon uso de’ suddetti Esercizj,* Marietti, Torino 1829.

KEUSCH K., *La dottrina spirituale di sant'Alfonso Maria de' Liguori,* Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1931.

LOPEZ SANTIDRIÁN S., “Vallgornera (Tomás de)”, in DSp v. 16, coll. 213-216.

MARSILI S., “Storia del movimento liturgico italiano dalle origini all’Enciclica ‘Mediator Dei’, in ROUSSEAU O., *Storia del movimento liturgico,* Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1961.

MUGNAI L., *S. Giuseppe Cafasso prete torinese,* Cantagalli, Siena 1972.

PACHO E., *Storia della spiritualità moderna,* Teresianum, Roma 1984.

PEDRINI A., *Il ven. Pio Brunone Lanteri e la spiritualità salesiana nel Piemonte del primo Ottocento. Aspetti storico-ascetici,* Isituto Padano di Arti Grafiche, Rovigo 1982.

PENCO G., *Storia della Chiesa in Italia,* v. 2, Jaca Book, Milano 1978.

QUINZIO S., *Domande sulla santitá : Don Bosco, Cafasso, Cottolengo,* Gruppo Abele, Torino 1986.

ROSMINI A., *Costituzioni dell’Istituto della Carità,* a cura di SARTORI D., Istituto di Studi Filosofici – Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani - Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1996.

SALOTTI C., *Il santo Giuseppe Cafasso. La perla del clero italiano*, La Palatina, Torino 19473.

SIMON DIAZ J., *Jesuitas de los siglos XVI y XVII: escritos localizados,* Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca - Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid 1975.

SOMMERVOGEL C., *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus,* Schepens, Bruxelles 1894.

STELLA P., *Crisi religiose nel primo ottocento piemontese,* SEI, Torino 1959.

TANQUEREY A., *Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique,* Desclée, Paris 1924.

TEPPA A.M., *Vita della venerabile Maria degli Angeli carmelitana scalza*, G. Marietti, Torino 1864.

TUBALDO I., *Giuseppe Allamano, Il suo tempo, la sua opera,* Edizioni Missioni Consolata, Torino 1982.

TUNINETTI G., “Mons. Lorenzo Gastaldi, vescovo di Saluzzo [1867-1871] ed arcivescovo di Torino [1871-1883] tra rosminianesimo ed ultramontanesimo”, in APPENDINI F.N., *Chiesa e società nella II metà del XIX secolo in Piemonte,* Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1982.

TUNINETTI G., *Don Clemente Marchisio,* Centro Studi “Carlo Trabucco”, Torino 1986.

USSEGLIO G., *Il Teologo Guala e il convitto ecclesiastico di Torino,* SEI, Torino 1948.

VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate nel 1860 da San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1960.

VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia divi Thomae utriusque theologiae scholasticae et mysticae principis,* v. 2, Typ. Pontificia Marietti, Augustae Taurinorum 19113.

ZAMA MELLINI G., *Gesù al cuore del giovane. Con aggiunta di un metodo per fare l’orazione mentale. Modo per ascoltare con frutto la S. Messa. Un breve apparecchio alla S. Confessione e Comunione. Adorazione alle sacratissime piaghe di Gesù Cristo. Suppliche a San Luigi Gonzaga ecc.* Tipografia Guglielmone, Vercelli 1847.

ZANZI L., *Lo spirito interiore del beato Giuseppe Cafasso: proposto ai sacerdoti e ai militanti nell'Azione cattolica,*V. Fontana, Bassano del Grappa 1928.

**C.7 STUDIES ON PRAYER AND MENTAL PRAYER**

AUBRY J., “Il ruolo della preghiera nel religioso di vita attiva” in *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino 1969, pp. 139-157.

DESRAMAUT F., *Le rôle de la prière chez le religieux actif* in "Cahiers du Groupe Lyonnais de Recherches Salésiennes" n. 18 (1969) pp. 1-29.

GOZZELINO G., *La pratica della meditazione: precisazioni e consigli,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS-Roma, n. 3 (1986) pp. 33-53.

GRANERO J.M.*, La meditación ignaciana,* in "Manresa" 41 (1969) pp. 255-264.

KONIGBAUER L., “La vita di preghiera nella spiritualità di Francesco di Sales”*,* in *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* LDC, Torino 1969, pp. 165-173.

LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,*  Ed.Massimo, Milano 1969.

POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione. Trattato di Teologia mistica. Versione riveduta dall’autore sulla settima edizione francese,* Tipografia pontificia e della Sacra Congregazione dei Riti, Marietti, Torino 1912.

SODI M., *L’orazione mentale: argomento fuori moda, di rinnovata attualità o in perenne ricerca di soluzione?,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS-Roma, n. 3 (1986) pp. 11-32.

STRUS J., *La meditazione “salesiana” nell’itinerario cristiano verso la contemplazione,* in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana" a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità dell’UPS-Roma, n. 2 (1985) pp. 5-15.

**C.8 STUDIES ON CONSECRATED LIFE, THE FOUNDING CHARISM AND ITS HERMENEUTICS**

AUBRY J., “La fondamentale dimensione carismatica della vita consacrata” in AA.VV., *Vita consacrata. Un dono del Signore alla sua Chiesa,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1993, pp. 137-154.

AUBRY J., “Teologia della vita consacrata” in AA.VV., *Vita consacrata. Un dono del Signore alla sua Chiesa,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1993, pp. 129-170.

BEYER J., “Il rinnovamento attuale delle famiglie religiose: realizzazioni e difficoltà” in AA.VV., *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione attuale nella Chiesa di oggi. Casa Generalizia (Roma 21-27 gennaio 1973),* Elle Di Ci, Torino- Leumann 1973, pp. 19-62.

CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica del carisma dei fondatori,* Città Nuova, Roma 1996.

CIARDI F., *Riscoperta del carisma dei fondatori,* in “Vita Consacrata” 29 (1993), pp. 660-670.

CONZELMANN, “Charisma” in *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento,* XV, Paideia, Brescia 1988, coll.606-616.

FUTRELL J.C., *Discovering the founder’s charism,* in “The Way Supplement” 14 (1971) pp. 62-70.

GEORGE A. – fundamentalGRELOT P., “Charismes” in *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique* diretto da DUFOUR LÉON X., Cerf, Paris 1962, pp. 117-121.

GHIRLANDA G., “Ecclesialità della vita consacrata”, in GHIRLANDA G. - DE PAOLIS V. - MONTAN A., *La vita consacrata,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1983, pp. 13-52.

GHIRLANDA G., *Carisma di un istituto e sua tutela,* in “Vita consacrata” 28 (1992) pp. 465-477 e 554-562.

GONZALES SILVA S., “Carisma de los fundatores: una experiencia del Espíritu”, in AA.VV., *En el aprieto me diste anchura. ¿Cómo regenerar y adiestrar la vida consacrada para el próximo futuro?,* Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1992.

HASENHÜTTL G., *Carisma. Principio fondamentale per l’ordinamento della Chiesa,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1973.

LABONTÉ L., “Charisme du fondateur et ‘souci primordial’ d’un institut” in CONFÉRENCE RELIGIEUSE CANADIENNE, *L’esprit des fondateurs et notre renouveau religieux,* Ottawa 1976, pp. 373-399.

LOZANO J.M., *Founder and Community,* in “Review for Religious” 37 (1978) pp. 214-236.

MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* in “Bollettino UISG”, n. 58 (1981) pp. 34-48.

MARITAIN J., *Per una filosofia della storia*, Morcelliana, Brescia 19794.

MIDALI M., “Tipi di approccio a Don Bosco fondatore. Rilievi valutativi alla luce della riflessione contemporanea”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore. Atti del Simposio. Roma-Salesianum (22-26 gennaio 1989),* a cura di MIDALI M., Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 27-80.

PICCOLA SORELLA MAGDELAINE, *Il Padrone dell’impossibile,* Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1994.

REGAMEY P.R., “Carismi” in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione,* a cura di PELICCIA G.-ROCCA G., II, Paoline, Roma 1975, pp. 299-315.

ROCCA G., *Il carisma del fondatore,* Ancora, Milano 1998.

ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* Ancora, Milano 1989.

ROMERO A., “Carisma” in *Dicionario teológico de la vida consagrada,* Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1989, pp. 142-158.

RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carisma dei fondatori”, in *Vaticano II: bilancio e prospettive venticinque anni dopo (1962-1987),* II, Assisi 1987, pp. 1063-1083.

SARTORI L., “Carismi”, in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia* a cura di BARBAGLIO G. – DIANICH S., Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 19885, pp. 79-98.

VANHOYE A., “I carismi nella comunità di Corinto”, in AA.VV., *Carisma e istituzione. Lo Spirito interroga i religiosi,* Rogate, Roma 1983, pp. 11-40.

WHYTLEY C.M., *Revitalizing religious life,* in “Review for Religious” 36 (1997) pp. 70-77.

**C.9 STUDIES OF PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS**

BETTI E., *L’ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito,* Città Nuova, Roma 1987.

BLEICHER J., *L’ermeneutica contemporanea,* Il Mulino, Bologna 1986.

MURA G., *Ermeneutica e verità,* Città Nuova, Roma 1990.

SCHÖKEL A. – BRAVO ARAGON J.M., *Appunti di ermeneutica,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1994.

1. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* SEI, Torino 1929, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. P. STELLA, “Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali”, 167 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. On this subject, see Hans Urs von Balthasar’s reflections on the role of *hagiography* in theological research; a summary of his thinking and the necessary bibliography can be found in G. Buccellato, “Agiografia, dogmatica e teologia spirituale”. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The expression is von Balthasar’s. The saints fulfil the “task” of handing down to the Church their *interpretation and explanation of Sacred Scripture*, not through their theological reflections, but through their lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. For a systematic study on the subject of spiritual exercises or retreats in Don Bosco’s life and in the original Salesian tradition, see G. Buccellato, “Gli esercizi spirituali”. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Cf. JOHN PAULII, *Esortazione apostolica post-sinodaleVita Consecrata,* 25 March 1996, no. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. *Vita Consecrata* I.IV [AAS 88 (1996) p. 408]. This is the title of part four of the Exhortation’s first chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Cf. *Vita Consecrata* n. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Cf. *ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. *Orientale lumen* no. 16 [AAS 87 (1995) p. 762]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *Vita Consecrata* no. 38 [AAS 88 (1996) pp. 411- 412]. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. By way of example see the following documents: *Mutuae Relationes* nos. 4. 15. 16; *Ecclesiae Sanctae,* no. 21; *Evangelica testificatio* nos. 42. 45. 46; *Orientale Lumen* no. 16; CJC can. 663. We find the same concept expressed in a circular letter by Fr Egidio Viganò, Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation from 1978 to 1995: “No to reflect on prayer” writes Fr Viganò in his letter entitled *Charisma and prayer* in 1991, “Now to reflect on prayer we must first move beyond charisms, but nevertheless it will be useful to make some basic points about the relaunching of our own; they shake us up a good deal: without prayer no one can have a synthesis between faith and life; for us there is no reciprocal relationship between education and evangelization; there is no unity between consecration and professional work; there is no correspondence between interior disposition and external activity. In other words, without a prayerful interior: work is not sanctifying, human competence is not evangelical witness, educative commitments have no pastoral effect; and daily life is not religious.” (VIGANÒ E., *Lettere circolari di don Egidio Viganò ai salesiani,* v. 3, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Roma 1996, pp. 1176-1177). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Cf. *Mutuae Relationes* no. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. *Vita Consecrata* no. 72 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 448]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Cf. VIGANÒ E., *Lettere circolari…,* cit., p. 1182. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* no. 21 [AAS 58 (1966) p. 779]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. PACHO E., “Preghiera” in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione,* a cura di PELICCIA G.-ROCCA G., VII, Paoline, Roma 1975, pp. 689-690. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. PAUL VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI,* v. 7, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Roma 1969, p. 1013. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. PAUL VI, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI,* vol. VIII, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Roma 1970, p. 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. For an overview of research on Don Bosco, updated to the early 1990s, see the three contributions: STELLA P., “Le ricerche su Don Bosco nel venticinquennio 1960-1985: bilancio, problemi e prospettive”, in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità,* by BRAIDO P., LAS, Roma 1970, pp. 373-396; BRAIDO P., *Prospettive di ricerca su Don Bosco,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 9 (1990) pp.253-267; STELLA P., “Bilancio delle forme di conoscenza e degli studi su Don Bosco”, in *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco (Università Pontificia Salesiana – Roma 16-20 gennaio 1989,* ed. MIDALI M., LAS, Roma 1990, pp. 21-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. I refer here exclusively to scientific publications and not to the numerous popular works on the subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. STELLA P., “Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo” in *La Famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione nella chiesa di oggi,*  by BROCARDO P. – MIDALI M., Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1973, pp. 167-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. In reality, however, as I will discuss later when talking about Don Bosco as a *spiritual author,* even in the pedagogical or pastoral sphere, it is not possible to consider the founder of the Salesians as a *theorist*, an original or systematic author. Fr Stella wrote: “With greater clarity and using historical methods, the ecclesiastical culture within which Don Bosco was situated becomes clear. The culture and language of the Piedmontese saint appear in his own writings as the product and cultural mark of a pastorally committed middle-class clergy during the long period of crisis in ecclesiastical studies between the French Revolution and the early 20th century. There is nothing in Don Bosco’s writings that can be compared to those of Giambattista Vasco, the Piedmontese Dominican who advocated freedom for grain; nor is there anything comparable to the speculations of the Savoyard Barnabite Cardinal Giacinto Sigismondo Gerdil or to the physiocratic and liberalist theses proposed in Tuscany by various priests in charge of souls in the age of the Enlightenment reforms.” (STELLA P., *Le ricerche su Don Bosco…,* cit., p. 387). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. BRAIDO P., *Prospettive di ricerca…,* cit., pp. 263-267. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. *Perfectae Caritatis* no. 2 [EV v. 1, no. 706]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Cf. MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* in “Bollettino UISG”, 58 (1981) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. The subject index of the *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco. Bibliografia italiana. 1844-1992,* edited by Fr Saverio Gianotti, does not contain, among its more than three hundred entries, the words *orazione, preghiera*, *meditazione*, *esercizi spirituali*, [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. For the meaning of the term prayer see DUPUY M., “Oraison”, in DSp v. 11, coll. 831-846. Despite some necessary distinctions, which are reflected in the history of spirituality, the term *orazione* in its current usage can be considered synonymous with the term *preghiera* and will be used by me in this particular semantic sense. [Tr note: ‘oazione’ is translated simply as ‘prayer’] [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. GUIBERT J. de, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica. Quaestiones selectae in praelectionum usum,* Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, Romae 19524, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. ALBINO DEL BAMBINO GESÙ, *Compendio di Teologia Spirituale,* Marietti, Torino 1966, p. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. DUPUY M., “Oraison”, cit., col. 837. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Cf. *Orientale Lumen* no. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* Massimo, Milano 19693, p. 3. I note here, however, that this definition by Lercaro does not sufficiently highlight, in my opinion, the dimension of *dialogue,* *communication*, *spending time with God* which are connected with any genuine prayer; the term *pious thought,* in fact, could also refer to a *discursive* or theological reflection. However, I am not questioning the author's awareness here, but rather the appropriateness of the expression. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Cf. GAUTHIER A., “Pratiche di pietà”, in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* a cura di PELLACCIA G. - ROCCA G., Ed. Paoline, Roma 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. The term meditation would also need some clarification. In addition to indicating *formal mental prayer*, it is used to designate an element of the same, that is, its discursive, reflective part (as in the classical method of *Lectio divina,* where a distinction is made between *lectio*, *meditatio,* *oratio* and *contemplatio*), in philosophy (as, for example, in Descartes), in non-Christian contexts, to designate certain methods of internalisation or reflection on the sacred texts of Islam, in psychotherapy (cf. SEVERUS E. von – SOLIGNAC A., “Meditation”, in DSp, v. 10, coll. 906-914). In this study the term will be almost exclusively adopted in the narrower and more particularly in the sense of *formal mental prayer,* or practice of piety; the general context, in any case, will serve to dispel any doubts. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Cf. LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* cit., p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S.Francesco di Sales [1858] – 1875*, Testi critici a cura di MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1992, P. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. This is a folded sheet of paper with writing on four sides, which we will discuss later, preserved in the Salesian Central Archives in Rome. (ACS A 225.04.03). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. The method is a tool, an aid to *meditation*; its use is consistent with the laws governing one of the two protagonists of the particular dialogue which is prayer; it therefore belongs to the order of *means,* and cannot therefore be considered *necessary* but rather *useful* for prayer; in some cases, however, it could even be an *obstacle,* an unnecessary complication*.* On this subject, see the paragraph entitled “Character and value of the method as an aid” in the text by Cardinal Lercaro cited several times above (cf. pp. 36-39). The various traditional *methods* of *mental prayer* can essentially be traced back to a particular *organisation or structuring* of prayer time, which facilitates the work of the *powers* (intellect, memory, will, affections, imagination...) in order to foster *dialogue* and growth in the *theological virtues*. Throughout the Eastern and Western ascetic tradition (beginning with Cassian), traces of methods and advice for prayer can be found. Starting in the twelfth century, awareness of the role of *meditation* in religious life gave rise to some more “structured” elaborations; among these, the best known is probably *Lectio divina,* which we referred to in a previous note, and which dates back to the Cistercian monk William of St Thierry († 1150), a disciple of St Bernard. Other authors worth mentioning include Aelred of Rievaulx († 1166), Guigo II (†1193), probably the author of the *Scala claustralium, Hugh of St Victor* († 1141), St Bonaventure († 1274), Ludolph of Saxony († 1377), author of the famous *Vita D. N. Jesu Christi*, which contributed to the conversion of St. Ignatius and where we find, for example, elements of the Ignatian method of *composition of place* (cf. LUDOLPHE le CHARTREUX, *La grande vie de Jésus Christ,* v. 1, C. Dillet Libraire Editeur, Paris 1883, p. XLVIII). For further details and references on the origin of methods of *meditation*, see LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione,* cit., pp. 28-36. In light of what we have said, it is therefore inaccurate to assert, as some authors do, that these methods originated in the period of the *devotio moderna* (cf. COGNET L., *Introduction à la vie chrétienne,* v. 3, Les Èditions du Cerf, Paris 1967, pp. 141-143). Despite the particular development of these methods from the 14th century onwards, it is possible to find substantial continuity with the previous tradition (cf. GOESSENS M., “Méditation”, in DSp, v. 10, col. 914). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* cit., p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Cf. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione. Trattato di Teologia mistica. Versione riveduta dall’autore sulla settima edizione francese,* Tipografia pontificia e della Sacra Congregazione dei Riti, Marietti, Torino 1912, pp. 213-316. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Cf. GUIBERT J. de, *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica. Quaestiones selectae in praelectionum usum,* Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregorianae, Romae 19524, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. I will return at length to the meaning I attribute to this expression. Let me say at once, however, that its semantic content is essentially equivalent to that of the other two: *charism of the founder* and *charism of the Institute.* All three expressions, ultimately, refer strictly to the particular gift given by the Spirit to the person of the founder in view of the foundation of the Institute and for the common good of the Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Cf. *Vita Consecrata* no.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Cf. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* Ancora, Milano 1989, pp. 57-68. In these pages, the author brings together several passages from the Magisterium (the first of which dates back to 1791 and is by Pius VI) that clearly say that divine inspiration is at the basis of the founders’ project. The reality of religious life, seen as a *gift* for the benefit of the ecclesial community, emerges even more clearly in the ecclesiological perspective of the Second Vatican Council. According to Pauline doctrine, God’s gifts are often presented as given to the Church for the common good. (cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Cf. LOZANO J.M., “Carisma” in *Dicionario teológico de la vida consagrada,* Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1989, p. 150; RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carisma dei fondatori” in *Vaticano II: bilancio e prospettive venticinque anni dopo (1962-1987),* II, Assisi 1987, pp. 1065-1069; ROMANO A., “Carisma” in *Dizionario enciclopedico di spiritualità* ed. ANCILLI E., Città Nuova, Roma 1990, p. 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carisma dei fondatori”, cit., p.1066. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. *Lumen Gentium* no. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. See, for example, nos. 4. 12. 39. 42. 46 of *Lumen Gentium,* nos. 1 and 8 of *Perfectae Caritatis* and no. 23 of *Ad Gentes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Cf. the *Motu Proprio* of PaulVI *Ecclesiae Sanctae* in 1966 no. 16 or the instruction *Renovationis Causam* of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (1969) no. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. There are many studies on the use of term *charism* in Paul. Among others: GEORGE A. – GRELOT P., “Charismes” in *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique* diretto da DUFOUR LÉON X., Cerf, Paris 1962, pp. 117-121; HASENHÜTTL G., *Carisma. Principio fondamentale per l’ordinamento della Chiesa,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1973; CONZELMANN, “Charisma” in *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento,* XV, Paideia, Brescia 1988, coll.606-616; REGAMEY P.R., “Carismi” in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione,* ed. PELICCIA G.-ROCCA G., II, Paoline, Roma 1975, pp. 299-315; ROMANO A., “Carisma” in *Dizionario enciclopedico di spiritualità* ed. ANCILLI E., Città Nuova, Roma 1990, pp. 426-430; VANHOYE A., “I carismi nella comunità di Corinto” in AA.VV., *Carisma e istituzione. Lo Spirito interroga i religiosi,* Rogate, Roma 1983; SARTORI L., “Carismi” in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia* a cura di BARBAGLIO G. – DIANICH S., Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 19885, 79-98; ROCCA G., *Il carisma del fondatore,* Ancora, Milano 1998, pp. 9-18. This latest book is nothing more than a reprint of a long article with the same title that appeared in “Claretianum”, 34 (1994) pp. 31-105; the latest edition is always quoted here. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Cf. *Rm* 1,11; 5:15.16; 6:23; 11:29; 12,6; *1 Cor* 1:7; 7:7; 12:4; 12:9,28,30,31; *2 Cor* 1:11; *1 Tm* 4:14; *2 Tm* 1:6. In the New Testament, the term appears only once more, in the First Letter of Peter (*1 Pt* 4:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica del carisma dei fondatori,* Città Nuova, Roma 1996, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. However, the aforementioned contribution ‘Consecrated Life and the Charism of Founders’ by Father Ruiz Jurado shows how traces of the problem relating to the *charismatic* nature of religious life can be found in the conciliar debate that accompanied the drafting of the sixth chapter of the *Lumen Gentium* and of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (cf. RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carisma…”, cit., pp. 1065-1069). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. *Evangelica Testificatio,* no. 11 [in AAS 63 (1971) p. 503]. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. In particular in no. 11 we find the famous definition of the *charism of the founders* which we will come back to later [cf. AAS 70 (1978) p. 480]. Also interesting for our purposes are nos. 12, 14 and 51 of the same document. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Among the official texts of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes see for example the document *Optiones Evangelicae* on “Religious and human promotion” of 1980 (cf. no. 29), the document *Essential Elements of the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life* del 1983 (cf. nos. 11.41) and *Potissimum Institutioni of* 1990, which establishes certain guidelines on formation in religious institutes (cf. no. 17); among papal documents, the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* of 1984 (cf. no. 15); Among the addresses and teachings of Pope John Paul II, the address to the members of the Chapter of the Legionaries of Christ on 18 September 1992, published in *L’Osservatore Romano* 25 December the same year or the message to the Capuchins in *L’osservatore Romano* 2 July 1994. The *Code of Canon Law*  of 1983, while not using the term *charism* in reference to religious life*, embodies the new ecclesial and pneumatological perspective on religious life.* [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Cf. MIDALI M., “Carisma del fondatore e della fondatrice” in AA.VV., *Come rileggere oggi il carisma fondazionale,* Rogate, Roma 1995, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. *Redemptoris donum,* no. 15 [in AAS 76 (1984) pp. 541-542]. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Cf. SINODO DEI VESCOVI, *La vita consacrata e la sua missione nella Chiesa e nel mondo. Lineamenta,* LEV, Città del Vaticano, 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. CIARDI F., *Riscoperta del carisma dei fondatori,* in “Vita Consacrata” 29 (1993) 660-661. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. JOHN PAUL II, *L’influsso dello Spirito Santo nella Vita Consacrata,* in “L’Osservatore Romano”, 23 March 1995, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. See nos. 9, 10, 12, 16, 19, 25, 30, 31, 36 (7 times), 37, 42, 45, 46, 47, 48 (twice) 49 (3 times), 53, 54, 55, 59, 60 (twice). 61, 62 (4 times), 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68 (twice), 71 (twice), 72 (twice), 73 (twice), 74, 77, 79 (twice), 80 (twice), 81, 82, 83 (3 times), 93, 94 (twice), 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 108, 109, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Cf. nos. 49, 56, 70, 85 (2 v.). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. Cf. nos. 12, 36 (twice). 61, 73, 79, 80, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. Cf. nos. 19, 25, 36, 47, 65, 80, 83 (twice), 94, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. Cf. nos. 48, 49, 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. Cf. nos. 1, 4, 5, 10, 19, 31, 36, 47, 64, 72, 85, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Cf. nos. 1, 9, 19, 46, 48, 49, 60. This ecclesiological perspective pervades the entire document. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. Cf. nos. 2, 4, 5, 10, 16, 31, 47, 48, 49, 53, 62, 70, 71, 74, 85, 98, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. Cf. nos. 36, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. Cf. nos. 9, 10, 19, 42 (twice). 46, 49, 53, 59, 60, 61, 63, 68, 79, 82, 83 (3 times), 94, 101, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. Cf. nos. 62, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. Cf. no. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. Cf. no. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. *Perfectae Caritatis* no. 2 *[EV v. 1, no. 708].*  [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. CJC can. 576. This canon is also referred to in the exhortation *Vitae Consecrata* in no. 48. On the subject of the responsibility of the hierarchy regarding the authenticity of the charism of individual institutes, there are several references in official documents. *Lumen Gentium,* no. 45, states: ‘(The Church) also aids by its vigilant and safeguarding authority those institutes variously established for the building up of Christ's Body in order that these same institutes may grow and flourish according to the spirit of the founders.’ This article is also referred to in *Mutuae Relationes*, no. 8. Similarly, *Essential Elements of the Church's Teaching on Religious Life* states in no. 41: ‘As a particularly significant example of these manifold gifts, every religious institute, for the authentic recognition of its original charism, depends on the ministry entrusted by God to the hierarchy’. For a more detailed legal discussion of this topic, see the article by

    GHIRLANDA G., *Carisma di un istituto e sua tutela,* in “Vita consacrata” 28 (1992) pp. 465-477 e 554-562. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. A rich and detailed summary of the different positions and terminological choices in the theological landscape of the last thirty years can be found on pp. 35-63 of the text by Giancarlo Rocca mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
82. ROCCA G., *Il carisma del fondatore*, cit., p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
83. The semantic distinction between the charism *of the founder* and the charism *of the institute,* as we will explain later, can derive, for example, from the choice to consider the charism of a religious family as constantly evolving. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
84. The figure of a founder can be analysed on an institutional level from various perspectives. Antonio Romano lists five: historical-legal, historical-theological, historical-sociological, theological-charismatic, and charismatic-analogical (cf. ROMANO A:, *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., 96-97). Mario Midali, approaching the figure of Don Bosco as founder, distinguishes 11 different possible approaches: historical, historical-psychological, historical-sociological, historical-legal, historical-theological, experiential-charismatic, theological-spiritual, theoretical-practical, ascetic, liturgical, and historical-comparative. MIDALI M., “Tipi di approccio a Don Bosco fondatore. Rilievi valutativi alla luce della riflessione contemporanea”, in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore. Atti del Simposio. Roma-Salesianum (22-26 gennaio 1989),* a cura di MIDALI M., Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, 27-80. These are the proceedings of a symposium organised by the Salesian Family Department, which examined the figure of Don Bosco, founder of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the female congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the lay association of Salesian Cooperators. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
85. REGAMEY P.M., “Carismi”, cit., 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
86. On page 69 of his *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica del carisma dei fondatori,* Fabio Ciardi says. “In 1982, I proposed the distinction between “charism *of* founder” and “charism *of* *the* founder” ... This continues to be used today ...”. However, the terminology is not consistent. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
87. The expression *charism if founder,* however, probably dates back to Fr Joseph Famerée who already used it in 1966, as Giancarlo Rocca indicates in *Il carisma del fondatore,* cit., pp. 35-36. Fr Famerée recognised the possibility of this particular charism being “added” to the list of charisms provided by Paul. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
88. The use of the term in its usual meaning could lead us astray. For example, we say: ‘That person has the charism *of*  a leader.’ Here, the particle effectively specifies the type of charism possessed. But if we emphasise that the charism of foundation is a particular gift of God in view of a specific foundation, the distinction becomes superfluous; the charism *of* foundation, seen as a gift of God, is charism *for a* foundation. Even in the case of multiple foundations by the same founder, it is always essential, in my opinion, to distinguish adequately between the different charisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
89. Cf. AUBRY J., “Teologia della vita consacrata” in AA.VV., *Vita consacrata. Un dono del Signore alla sua Chiesa,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1993, pp. 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
90. One of the greatest difficulties in regulating vocabulary, as desired by various authors (cf. COSTA G., “Il carisma del fondatore”, cit., 77), stems from the different approaches that have sometimes been necessary in view of the wide variety of founders. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
91. Fr Antonio Romano writes: ‘The term “cfd” (charism of the founder) generally refers to that gift of the Spirit graciously given by God to certain founders, men or women, to produce in them certain capacities for giving rise to new communities of consecrated life within the Church.’ (ROMANO A., “Carisma” in *Dizionario Enciclopedico di spiritualità,* ed. ANCILLI E., v. 1, Città Nuova, Roma 1990, p. 427). This definition corresponds more closely to Fabio Ciardi's expression ‘charism *of the* founder’. However, Romano himself writes a little further on: ‘... a connotative distinction must be made between the “charism *of* the founder” and the “charism *of* the founder”... The term “charism of the founder” refers to the more specific content of the gift inherent in each founder in a unique way to perceive, live and show in history a particular experience of the mystery of Christ according to original characteristic features’. This second definition seems to us not only rather hermetic, but also inconsistent with the previous one. Similarly, Juan Manuel Lozano defines the *charism of founders* as ‘that gift of the Spirit benevolently offered by God to some founders, men or women, to produce in them certain capacities that make them suitable for enlightening new communities of consecrated life in the Church’. (LOZANO J.M., “Carisma” in *Diccionario Teológico de la vida consagrada,* Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1989, 151). This is clearly what some other authors say about the charism *of the* founder. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
92. GHIRLANDA G., *Carisma di un istituto e sua tutela,* cit., p. 475. The expression *collective charism* was used by the *Instrumentum laboris* of the synod (cf. no. 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
93. Consider, among other things, the difficult origins of the Franciscan family. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
94. RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carismi dei fondatori”, cit., p. 1078. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
95. Cf. LABONTÉ L., “Charisme du fondateur et ‘souci primordial’ d’un institut” in CONFÉRENCE RELIGIEUSE CANADIENNE, *L’esprit des fondateurs et notre renouveau religieux,* Ottawa 1976, pp. 373-399. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
96. DE CANDIDO L. M., *Carisma dei religiosi,* in “Servitium” 4 (1970) pp. 813-814. Fr. Galot seems to have a completely different opinion, stating with certainty: “In a religious congregation, all members participate in the community charism.” (GALOT J., *Il carisma della vita religiosa e le sue note specifiche,* cit., p. 509). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
97. ROCCA G., *Il carisma del fondatore,* cit., pp. 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
98. Cf. *Mutuae Relationes* no. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
99. Cf. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito…,* cit., p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
100. MIDALI M., “Carisma del fondatore e della fondatrice”, cit. pp. 39-40. This is Fr Midali’s most recent study on this subject that we are aware of*.* He refers the expression *foundational charism* not only to the founder, but also to the first generation of disciples who handed down the charismatic experience of the founder to subsequent generations. With the expression *development of the original charism*, Fr Midali aims to emphasise that the charismatic experience of the origins is destined to develop and progress. Finally, the expression ‘charism of the institute’ refers to the present historical moment. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
101. MIDALI M., “Carisma del fondatore e della fondatrice”, cit., p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
102. MIDALI M., “Attuali correnti teologiche” in AA.VV., *Il carisma della vita religiosa dono dello Spirito alla Chiesa per il mondo*, Ancora, Milano 1981, p. 80. In an even older text, the same author writes: “Some charismatic aspects of Don Bosco and the origins have disappeared because they were exclusively linked to the personality of the founder (= charism of foundation). Other aspects, however, have remained and constitute the permanent Salesian charism.” (MIDALI M., *Il carisma permanente di Don Bosco,* cit., p. 74). Would this therefore be a sort of “natural selection”, which allows only certain aspects to survive, without any objective reference? How, in this perspective, should we interpret the constant references to “fidelity” to the ecclesiastical Magisterium? [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
103. AUBRY J., “La fondamentale dimensione carismatica della vita consacrata” in AA.VV., *Vita consacrata. Un dono del Signore alla sua Chiesa,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1993, pp. 144-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
104. *Evangelica Testificatio* no. 32 [AAS 68 (1971) p.515]. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
105. RUIZ JURADO M., “Vita consacrata e carisma dei fondatori”, cit., 1076.The concern of the Church's magisterium, as already noted in relation to the frequent references in the document *Vita Consecrata,* seems to be focused on *fidelity* to charism. In what sense can we speak of fidelity in the face of a charism that is constantly evolving? What criteria can be used to assess and verify fidelity? [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
106. Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* no. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
107. This comes from Lozano (cf. LOZANO J.M., *Founder and Community,* in “Review for Religious” 37 (1978) pp. 214-236). Fr Ruiz Jurado writes about this in the aforementioned contribution: “Regardless of the risks that this proposal entails, I think that the original formulation [of the founding charism] should be safeguarded as a critical point of reference for testing the fidelity or otherwise of such a reformulation. And, on the other hand, such a reformulation should pass through the competent authority of the Church, which confirms its fidelity to the Institute in its original formulation” (p. 1076). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
108. The ultimate responsibility for the fidelity of the constitutions to the charism of the founder lies, as we have said, with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. “Codex huismodi “ states the Code of Canon Law regarding constitutions, “a competenti autorictate Ecclesiae approbatur et tantummodo cum eiusdem consensu mutari potest” (CJC can. 587). [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
109. FUTRELL J.C., *Discovering the founder’s charism,* in “The Way Supplement” 14 (1971) p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
110. ROCCA G:, “Il carisma di fondazione”, cit., p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
111. MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* in “Bollettino UISG”, no .58 (1981) p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
112. *Evangelica Testificatio* no. 51 [AAS 63 (1971) p. 523]. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
113. https://lxer.com/The expression *founding experience* is used by many authors (Lozano, Ghirlanda, Romano, Ciardi...). Antonio Romano defines it as follows: “The founding experience is, in practice, the fundamental spiritual experience that originates and is recapitulated in the impact between the life of the founder, with his original founding charism, and the life of the first group of disciples with their personal charisms. This experience of the origins leaves a deep mark both on the period in which the community is born and on its entire future development, marking the future of the community itself with its essential spiritual features." (ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., p. 149). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
114. LOZANO J.M., “Carisma”, cit., 152. On this page, Lozano also expresses his opinion on the possibility of a certain “transmission” of charism to disciples. “The transmission of charism to disciples ... involves, in effect, a profound interaction with the charism *of* and *from* the disciple, a gift offered to certain people to relate fruitfully to the very experience of the founding spirit ..” This perspective, however, appears to me, once again, to be purely *analogical*, because if a charism is a gift from God, it is only his Spirit who can pass it on it; it would be better to speak of the *grace of vocation* given to disciples to follow the inspiration of evangelical life contained in the charism granted to the founder. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
115. Cf. GONZALES SILVA S., “Carisma de los fundatores: una experiencia del Espíritu”, in AA.VV., *En el aprieto me diste anchura. ¿Cómo regenerar y adiestrar la vida consacrada para el próximo futuro?,* Publicaciones Claretianas, Madrid 1992, p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
116. *Vita consecrata*  no. 36 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 410]. Emphasis is mine, but the italics are in the official document. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
117. This refers to the threefold relationship or orientation that religious life has with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
118. *Vita consecrata*  no. 36 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 410]. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
119. *Vita consecrata*  no. 37 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 411]. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
120. Cf. *Vita consecrata*  no. 37 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 411]. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
121. Cf. WHYTLEY C.M., *Revitalizing religious life,* in “Review for Religious” 36 (1997) p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
122. *Perfectae Caritatis* no. 2 [EV v. 1, no. 706]. Several other ecclesial documents have expressed this need for a continuous return to the sources. Consider, for example, *Ecclesiae Sanctae* no. 16, *Renovationis Causam* no. 15, *Ecclesiae Sanctae* no. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
123. SICARI A., *La vita spirituale del cristiano* , Jaca Book, Milano 1997, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
124. BALTHASAR H.U. von, *Sorelle nello Spirito. Teresa di Lisieux e Elisabetta di Digione,* Jaca Book, Milano 19913, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
125. ARNÁIZ J.M. – CRISTOREY GARCÍA PAREDES J. – MACCISE C., “Come comprendere e presentare la Vita Consacrata oggi nella Chiesa e nel mondo”, in USG, *Carismi nella Chiesa per il mondo,* San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1994, p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
126. See *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* le voci: AA.VV., “Riforme”, v. 7 (1983) pp. 1748-1763; FOIS M., “Osservanza”, v. 6 (1980) pp. 1036-1057; AA.VV., “Recollezione”, v. 7 (1983) pp. 1322-1348; PACHO E., “Scalzatura”, v. 8 (1988) pp. 1006-1014. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
127. Cf. CJC cann. 578. 631. 677. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
128. ROMANO A., “Carisma dei fondatori e processo di istituzionalizzazione”, in AA.VV., *Come rileggere oggi il carisma fondazionale,* Rogate, Roma 1995, pp. 97-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
129. ROMANO A., “Carisma dei fondatori e processo di istituzionalizzazione”, cit., p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
130. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., pp. 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
131. *Vita consecrata*  no. 37 [AAS 88 (1996) p. 411]. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
132. GHIRLANDA G., “Ecclesialità della vita consacrata”, in GHIRLANDA G. - DE PAOLIS V. - MONTAN A., *La vita consacrata,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1983, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
133. Cf. *Evangelica Testificatio* 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
134. The passage is taken from an address by the Holy Father on 4 October 1979, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II,* II/2 (1979) pp. 621-622. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
135. *Mutuae Relationes* 11, [AAS 70 (1978) p. 480]. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
136. CJC can. 578. Cf. also can. 677. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
137. This is an excerpt from the speech given by the Holy Father to the religious sisters of Maria Bambina on 30 October 1982. in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II,* V/3 (1982) p. 881. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
138. *Mutuae Relationes* no. 11 [AAS 70 (1978) p. 480]. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
139. *Optiones Evangelicae* no. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
140. MIDALI M., “Attuali correnti teologiche”, cit., 81-82. A reminder that consistent with this approach, Midali distinguishes between the charism of the foundation and the charism of the Institute. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
141. ROMANO A., “Carisma dei fondatori e processo di istituzionalizzazione”, cit., 101. There are many references on the subject of *inculturation*. See, for example, ROMANO A., “Carismi dei fondatori e processo di istituzionalizzazione”, cit., 100-113; CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
142. A few years ago, the Archbishop of Bari, Mariano Magrassi, entitled one of his pastoral letters: *Diventa quello che sei: dal battesimo a una maturità di fede e coerenza di vita* (Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1983). This expression seems particularly effective in explaining the particular *development that* must accompany the charism of foundation. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
143. PICCOLA SORELLA MAGDELAINE, *Il Padrone dell’impossibile,* Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1994, p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
144. Cf. FUTRELL J.C., *Discovering the founder’s charism,* in “The Way Supplement” 14 (1971) pp. 62-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
145. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
146. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., pp. 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
147. Cf. MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* cit., p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
148. Ciardi, Midali, Romano, George, Futrell, Lozano and several others seem to agree substantially on this arrangement. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
149. Cf. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., pp. 178-179. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
150. Cf. ROMANO A., *I fondatori…,* cit., pp. 179-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
151. MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* cit., p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
152. Antonio Romano prefers to define this particular approach as hermeneutic-spiritual.(cf. ROMANO A., *I fondatori…,* cit., p.182). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
153. Among these authors, I believe we can mention, albeit with different emphases, Antonio Romano, F. George, José María Lozano, Mario Midali, and Fabio Ciardi. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
154. ROMANO A., “Carisma dei fondatori e processo di istituzionalizzazione”, cit., p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
155. For a brief overview of contemporary hermeneutics, see BLEICHER J., *L’ermeneutica contemporanea,* Il Mulino, Bologna 1986; BETTI E., *L’ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito,* Città Nuova, Roma 1987; SCHÖKEL A. – BRAVO ARAGON J.M., *Appunti di ermeneutica,* Dehoniane, Bologna 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
156. Cf. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., pp. 87-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
157. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., pp. 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
158. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
159. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
160. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit. p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
161. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., pp. 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
162. Cf. *1 Cor* 2,10. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
163. Cf. *Rev* 21, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
164. Cf. BEYER J., “Il rinnovamento attuale delle famiglie religiose: realizzazioni e difficoltà” in AA.VV., *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla sua vocazione attuale nella Chiesa di oggi. Casa Generalizia (Roma 21-27 gennaio 1973),* Elle Di Ci, Torino- Leumann 1973, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
165. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
166. The conclusions of the philosophical and theological debate of recent years, in relation to the concepts of “experience”, “Christian experience” and “spiritual experience”, are not always unanimous; the term “experience”, in particular, arouses some mistrust. I include here a recent “description” of the term experience that I believe can serve as a semantic reference. Mario Midali writes: “Experience can be considered to arise from the awareness of desires and tendencies in a given situation and indicates a highly complex process through which a person situates themselves in relation to the world and others, and through which these are configured in their personal universe. It inseparably involves emotional, cognitive, motivational, operational and social dynamics and cannot be reduced to any of these, because they are its constituent components. In other words, experience does not mean only ‘subjective’ be it because it refers to the other, person or thing. It does not mean only ‘feeling’ because it also implies knowledge and will. It does not mean only ‘direct experimentation’ because it always involves mediation. It does not mean ‘irrationality’ because it involves reason and the world of values. (...) Understood in this way, experience takes on the character of a ‘horizon’, a global perspective in which a person relates to everything that is other than themselves, or an energetic and luminous ‘source’ which, through ways that are not always known, guides the person, showing them a path to follow and hiding others from them. In the Christian context, it can be said that ‘the experience of the Spirit’ includes a religious imagination, a set of motivations, attitudes and behaviours and related linguistic systems with which Christians live and build their relationship with the Spirit of Christ and the Father, believed and accepted as present and active in their lives and actions, and seek to give voice and language to this experience.” (MIDALI M., “Carisma del fondatore e della fondatrice” in AA.VV., *Come rileggere oggi il carisma fondazionale*, Rogate, Roma 1995, p. 38). For further information on this topic, please refer to the extensive bibliography; in particular, see the well-known text by Giovanni Moioli entitled *L'esperienza spirituale. Lezioni introduttive*, Glossa, Milano 19942, the article by A. Léonard nel *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* in the entry “Expérience*”,* the entry “Esperienza religiosa” in the *Enciclopedia cattolica,* LEV edited by C. Fabro, and “Esperienza religiosa” edited by J.B. Lotz nella *Enciclopedia filosofica* from the Centro di Studi Filosofici di Gallarate, Sansoni, Firenze 19822 and again SCOLA A., “Esperienza cristiana e teologia” in AA.VV., *Teologi in rivolta*, Logos, Roma 1990; BERNARD C.A., *Teologia spirituale*, Paoline, Roma 1982. In the recent SICARI A., *La vita spirituale del cristiano* , Jaca Book, Milano 1997, the author devotes a lengthy, well-documented introduction to this topic (cf. pp. 15-69). [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
167. GONZALEZ SILVA S.M., *Nuovi criteri di lettura nei santi Fondatori (secoli XVIII-XIX),* in “Claretianum”, 26 (1986) pp. 102-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
168. Those who “saw the founder up close” and lived with him are certainly “influenced” by his doctrine, as well as by his person. The testimonies will have to be critically examined, but I do not find the position of those who think that they should not be taken into consideration at all acceptable. We would in fact be deprived of irreplaceable information which may concern not only the history of the foundation but also the inner life of the founder. With the same attentive and open attitude, it is necessary to evaluate any testimonies from the causes for beatification and canonisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
169. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
170. MAINKA R., *Carisma e storia nella vita religiosa,* cit., p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
171. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., pp. 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
172. Cf. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
173. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
174. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., pp. 104-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
175. Cf. MURA G., *Ermeneutica e verità,* Città Nuova, Roma 1990, pp. 276-277. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
176. Cf. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
177. ROMANO A., *I fondatori profezia della storia,* cit., p. 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
178. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
179. Murialdo, beatified in 1963, was canonised by Paul VI on 3 May 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
180. Founder of the Congregation of St Joseph, Murialdo (1828-1900) testified in 1893 at the diocesan inquiry for the beatification of Don Bosco. (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 3 [La canonizzazione], LAS, Roma 1988, p. 119). On the relationship between these two 19th century saints, see CASTELLANI A., *Leonardo Murialdo*, 2 voll., Tipografia S. PioX, Roma 1966-1968, especially pp. 404-406 of the first volume, and the booklet published by the Formation Department (which we will indicate as DpF) of the Salesian Congregation, titled *Sussidi 2. Dizionarietto. Alcune situazioni, istituzioni e personaggi dell'ambiente in cui visse Don Bosco*, Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1988, alle pp. 300-304. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
181. *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI,* 1963 v. 1, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1965, p. 279 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
182. The most extensive of these is contained in the 19 volumes by LEMOYNE G.B. - AMADEI A. - CERIA E., *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco,* 19 vv., SEI, S. Benigno Canavese (To) 1898-1948. I will refer to it from here on with the initials MB. This monumental work was prepared over many years with the patient cataloguing of documents, letters and testimonies collected by the Salesian Fr Giambattista Lemoyne, who in 1883 was appointed by the Superior Chapter as secretary, chronicler and memoirist of the congregation (a position he held for twenty-seven years). This material was organised into forty volumes, which he himself entitled *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell’Oratorio di S.Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione Salesiana*.Le *Memorie Biografiche.* For some years now, they have been viewed with a certain degree of suspicion by historians of the Congregation. The influence of the “romanticised” hagiographic style, the emphasis on praise and laudatory remarks, the excessive attachment to the founder, the lack of shadows in the presentation of the saint's figure, modern developments in historical criticism, and some chronological errors have sometimes led to an overall “rejection” of the work. The fact remains that this impressive work, whose different pages should be distinguished and therefore evaluated according to their different *literary genres*, is a very important historical document of the “reinterpretation” of the life of Don Bosco by the closest witnesses to the origins of the Salesian congregation and the human experience of the founder. It therefore constitutes, in our opinion, an obligatory and essential point of reference, even if, like any other written work, it is subject to historical criticism.. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
183. The *Istituto Storico Salesiano* in Rome has already published the first two volumes of the *Bibliografia Generale di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1995-1997, edited by Saverio Gianotti and Herbert Diekmann respectively. The first volume contains the Italian bibliography (publications of Don Bosco and *about* Don Bosco) from 1844 to 1992 with a total of 3305 titles; The second volume contains the general bibliography in German (1883-1994) with a total of 960 titles. The volumes of the bibliography in French, Spanish and Portuguese are currently being prepared. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
184. Cf. MOIOLI G., *L'esperienza spirituale. Lezioni introduttive*, Glossa, Milano 19942, pp. 57-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
185. Fr Pietro Stella, a Salesian priest, renowned historian and scholar of Jansenism, is undoubtedly one of the greatest experts on the literary works of Don Bosco. In addition to the three volumes of the work *Don Bosco nella religiosità cattolica,* already translated into various languages, He has written several monographs, contributions and articles on Salesian history. In particular, I mention *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco,* Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi di Don Bosco, Roma 1960; *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco*, LAS, Roma 1977; *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870),* LAS, Roma 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
186. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 1 [Vita e opere], LAS, Roma 19792, p. 17 [my emph..]. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
187. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2 [Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità], LAS, Roma 1981, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
188. In addition to the letters contained in the four volumes of the correspondence edited by Don Ceria (published by SEI in Turin between 1955 and 1959), which include 2,845 letters by Don Bosco, many others have been collected in recent years. Fr Francesco Motto is working on a critical edition of the new collection of letters, the first two volumes of which have already been published. (BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di Francesco Motto, LAS, Roma 1991;1997). When citing the *Epistolario* I will indicate in square brackets whether I am referring to the edition edited by Fr Ceria or the edition edited by Fr Motto when mentioning the volume and pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
189. D’AQUINO G., *La psicologia di Don Bosco*, SEI, Torino 1988, p. 8. There are not many other psychological studies on Don Bosco’s personality. In 1929 Giuseppe Albertotti published a book in memory of his father, who had been Don Bosco’s doctor, entitled *Chi era Don Bosco ossia Biografia fisio-psico-patologica di Don Bosco scritta dal suo medico Dott. Albertotti Giovanni* (Poligrafica San Giorgio, Genova 1929), a text that cannot, however, be classified, in the current sense of the term, as a psychology text. The volume *Don Bosco rivelato* by journalist *Michele Straniero* which uses certain criteria of psychological analysis but, in my opinion, not without some preconceived prejudices. More well-known in Salesian circles are the pages that MORETTI G.M., *I santi dalla loro scrittura,* Paoline, Roma 1975, dedicates to Don Bosco. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
190. D’AQUINO G., *La psicologia di Don Bosco,* cit., p. 8 [my emphasis]. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
191. The complete title of this much-discussed work of Don Bosco is the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855.* Written in the form of an autobiographical account, the Memoirs were published in their entirety only almost sixty years after the founder's death. The reason for this delay is linked to the Saint's own wishes. At the beginning of the manuscript (kept in the Central Salesian Archives in Rome in folder A 203; there are also several handwritten copies, one of which was written by Fr Gioacchino Berto, then secretary to Don Bosco, and corrected by Don Bosco himself), the author states: “First of all, I must say that I am writing for my dearest Salesian sons, with the request that these things not be made public either before or after my death. (the emphasis is the the manuscript itself). SO in the founder’s mind, it is a writing *ad uso interno* of the new Congregation. As for the *historical* value of the *Memoirs* I will say something about this shortly; note here that when Don Bosco began writing it (1873), he was entering his fifty-eighth year of life. The most “recent” events he recounts, dating back to 1855, are therefore almost twenty years old. The story is deliberately narrative and edifying. Francis Desramaut, in his most recent biography of the saint, expresses himself as follows on the *historical* value of this work: “Il me semble qu’il faut classer les *Memorie dell’Oratorio* comme un peu tous les récits d’origines dans la catégorie des histoires populaires, vraies (plus ou moins!) dans leur fond et rendues pittoresques par l’art du narrateur” (DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, p. 1007). Fr Pietro Braido, on the other hand, emphasises that their value lies precisely in this “reinterpretation” of events, which at the same time becomes a programme for the future of the congregation. A critical edition of the *Memorie dell'Oratorio* has also been available since 1991, edited by Salesian Fr Antonio da Silva Ferreira and published by LAS. The extensive *Introduzione* vengono tackles all the problems relating to the history and dating of the text (cf. BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S.Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di FERREIRA DA SILVA A., LAS, Roma 1991, pp. 5-28). [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
192. MO p. [54] [my emphasis]. For citations from the *Memorie dell’Oratorio…* I will refer to the pages of the critical edition already mentioned, using the abbreviation MO. Don Bosco traces the origin of the text back to his first trip to Rome in 1858 and to a ‘call’ from Pope Pius IX in an audience almost ten years later; these elements can only be deduced from the account of the *Memorie Biografiche* (cf. MB v. 5, p. 882; v. 8, p. 587). [Tr. note: actual citations from Don Bosco’s text of the MO in English come from the more recent English version (2024) by Salesian Publishers, New Rochelle, New York. These will be simply indicated in square brackets each time] [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
193. The funeral eulogy by Msgr. Velluti di San Clemente is recorded in the documents of the Cause for Beatification and Canonisation in SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIONE, *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco sacerdotis fundatoris Societatis Salesianae. Confutazione delle accuse formulate contro la causa del Ven. Giovanni Bosco,* Romae 1922, pp. 262 - 269. In the following, citing the documents of the cause for beatification, I will limit myself to referring only to the part of the process where it is included. (e.g: *Positio super dubio*) and the year of the edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
194. This second eulogy, delivered a week after the saint's death, is recorded in*V irtù e glorie di S.Giovanni Bosco* a cura di FAVINI G., SEI, Torino 1934, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
195. The accuracy of this quotation is impossible to verify. In any case, it certainly does not call into question the esteem that Fr Joseph Cafasso had for Don Bosco. Canonised in 1947, Cafasso (1811-1860) was Don Bosco's confessor from the time he entered the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin (1841) until his death in 1860. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
196. ESPINEY C. de, *Don Bosco. Dixième édition entièrement refondue et enrichie... Ouvrage approuvé par les salésiens, Imprimerie‑libr. salésienne du Patronage St.*‑Pierre, Nice 1888, p. XI [my emphasis]. This passage also appears in MB v. 2, p. 351 and MB v. 4, p. 588 but has been reworked and “toned down” by Fr Lemoyne with the removal of certain expressions. (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 3*,* cit., p. 133). D'Espiney's expression was quoted in 1907 by the promoter of the faith, Alessandro Verde, during the cause for beatification of the saint, in order to highlight a cunning that was not compatible with a declaration of heroic virtue. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
197. Natale Cerrato entitled Chapter VI of his book *Don Bosco e le virtù della sua gente* , LAS, Rome 1985, *Volontà di fatti e non parole*. “Every individual,” he states in the opening pages of the book, “belongs to a specific society and reveals in his person, in his way of thinking, speaking and acting, a wealth of ideas, qualities and customs that characterise the members of that society. According to cultural anthropologists, this is a ‘basic personality’ that is formed mainly in the early years of life” (p. 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
198. This possibility is also suggested by Don Bosco’s habit, witnessed by his first disciples, of speaking about himself in the third person. For example, Fr Lemoyne writes in an autographed notebook from 1884, describing some difficult moments in the early days: “Those were terrible days for the oratory... All the priests and clerics had abandoned Don Bosco, he said, speaking of himself in the third person, according to his habit…” (LEMOYNE G.B., *Ricordi di gabinetto,* 16 febbraio 1884). [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
199. PEDRINI A., “Giovanni Bosco (santo)” in *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità* ed. ANCILLI E., Città Nuova, Roma 1990, p. 1138. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
200. Having entered the Salesian College at S. Benigno Canavese at 15 years of age, by 1929 (the year of Don Bosco’s beatification) Fr Eugenio Ceria (1870-1957) was the official historian of the Congregation. It was in this role that he saw to the last nine volumes of the *Memorie Biografiche,*  the four volumes of the *Annali della Società Salesiana*, the four volumes of the *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco* and many profiles and biographies of Salesians. He was also a worthy humanist, cultivator and commentator of Greek and Latin classics and a writer in ascetics. His name is especially tied to a small biography of the saint entitled *Don Bosco con Dio* which for the first time highlighted the “mystical” dimension. For Fr Ceria’s biographical sketches and information on his literary work, see VALENTINI E., *Don Ceria scrittore,* SEI, Torino 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
201. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1988, 22. This is an extra-commercial edition published on the occasion of the centenary of Don Bosco’s death by the Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco. *Don Bosco con Dio by Fr* Ceria saw several editions in its two “versions”, which differ not only in terms of certain details but especially because five new chapters were added to the second version. The first version was published for the first time by SEI in Turin in 1929. This first edition is divided into three parts with evocative titles: I. *Aurora consurgens* (childhood and formation); II. *Sol in meridie* (mature years); III. *Lucis ante terminum* (extraordinary gifts). The book concludes with a chapter dedicated to the *Dono di orazione* (The gifts of prayer). This spiritual biography which, as Fr Giorgio Gozzelino, author of the *Presentazione* in the final edition stresses, takes shape in the author’s mind, precisely following the observation regarding the lack of attention given by contemporaries to St John Bosco’s interior life before and after his death (cf. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio*, cit., pp. 4-5). It is still probably the best articulated and systematic attempt to explore the saint’s spiritual experience, regardless of the limitations deriving from a strongly “affective” and not always enlightened historical criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
202. Cf. HERRERA J. – PARDO V., *San Vicente de Paul : biografía y selección de escritos,* BAC, Madrid 1955, pp. 12-13. The authors of the introduction to the biography and writings of Saint Vincent de Paul indicated three different ways of interpreting a saint and writing his biography: 1. devotional interpretation (exclusively supernatural); 2. simply human interpretation (exaggerating faults and attributing “successes” exclusively to natural causes); 3. objective biographies:“son las que se ajustan a las reglas de la crítica de documentos y de hechos históricos, discutiendo su veracidad con serena reflexión” (p. 12). Bibliography on the “new hagiography” is abundant; of note is GREGOIRE R.,  *Manuale di agiologia : introduzione alla letteratura agiografica,* Monastero San Silvestro Abate, Fabriano 1987*;* AA.VV., *Santità e agiografia. Atti dell'VIII Congresso di Terni,* ed. GORDINI G.*,* Marietti, Genova 1991*;* SICARI A., *Ritratti di Santi,* Jaca Book, Milano 1988. After 1988 Antonio Sicari published a further 3 volumes with new portraits of saints. This new attention to hagiography could also be found in reflections by Von Balthasar. See, for example, BALTHASAR H.U. von, *Sorelle nello Spirito. Teresa di Lisieux ed Elisabetta di Digione,* Jaca Book, Milano 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
203. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 29 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
204. MARITAIN J., *Per una filosofia della storia*, Morcelliana, Brescia 19794, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
205. John Bosco spent his childhood in the small rural hamlet of the Becchi, a few kilometres from Castelnuovo d’Asti, today Castelnuovo Don Bosco. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
206. For a deeper understanding of the family and social setting into which Don Bosco was born, see: CASELLE S., *Cascinali e contadini in Monferrato. I Bosco di Chieri nel secolo XVIII*, LAS, Roma 1974; CERRATO N., *Don Bosco e le virtù della sua gente*, LAS, Roma 1985; CERRATO N., *Don Bosco e il suo mondo*, LAS, Roma 1994; GIRAUDO A. - BIANCARDI G., *Qui è vissuto Don Bosco. Itinerari storico-geografici e spirituali*, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1988. On pages 46-47 of the text cited from Secondo Caselle, *Cascinali e contadini…,* a general bibliography can be found regarding study of the economic, demographic and religious history of Piedmont in the early 19th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
207. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., pp. 279-283. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
208. See, by way of example, CECCA F., *Le veglie dei contadini cristiani. Dialoghi familiari, istruttivi, morali sopra le quattro parti della dottrina cristiana…,* Paravia, Torino 1806, especially pp. 116-120. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
209. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
210. This is the perspective taken, for example, by a French biography of Don Bosco published in 1951: LA VERANDE J. De,  *Don Bosco, le XIXe saint Jean,* Fayard, Paris 1951. The author asserts that Don Bosco remained a farmer from the beginning to the end of his life. His tenacity, his desire to increase his “property”, his cheerfulness and good nature as a good gardener, his fatalism, his feeling of being like farmers, constantly in the hands of an unknown force that he called Providence: all this would prove it. (cf. pp. 7-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
211. Francis Desramaut dwells on this aspect of Don Bosco's childhood several times in his recent biography of Don Bosco. “Sa quête d'un père” says the author of *Don Bosco en son temps on p. 15 “*parmi les prêtres, parmi les maîtres, parmi les supérieurs laïcs ou ecclésiastiques et jusqu'auprès du pape de Rome, serait permanente”. This consideration, which recurs several times in Desramaut’s text, does not seem entirely acceptable to me, as well as being in contradiction with the assumptions of ‘objective’ historiography that form the basis of his study. Attachment to the Pope and high regard for spiritual guidance are emerging themes in the educational environment of the seminary and the boarding school, as we shall see, and in nineteenth-century spirituality. But above all, remaining strictly within the realm of psychology, it seems to me that Don Bosco does not display a “weak ego”, characteristic of those who pay for the absence of a father figure with insecurity. Psychologist Giacomo D'Aquino seems to agree with this view when he writes: “The future of every human being finds its impetus in the past. The deep relationship between mother and son played a decisive role in Don Bosco's life. Throughout his life, he was accompanied not only by his mother’s words and example, but above all by the ‘primary trust’ built up in his relationship with her. Little John, therefore, despite the emotional void caused by the loss of his father and the physical void caused by the scarcity of food, grew up with a strong sense of self... Self-esteem, self-confidence and awareness of one's own qualities are the building blocks of a person's charm and, therefore, of their power of seduction. And little John had to possess these qualities in order to perform in front of the group of adults and peers who listened to him.” (D’AQUINO G, *La psicologia di Don Bosco,* cit., pp. 22-23). See also two articles by Gertrud Stickler on this: *Dalla perdita del padre a un progetto di paternità. Studio della evoluzione psicologica della personalità di Don Bosco,* in “Rivista di Scienze dell’educazione” 25 (1987) 337-375; *Lo sviluppo dell’identità paterna di Don Bosco,* in “Vita consacrata” 24 (1988) 443-459. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
212. The cause for beatification of Don Bosco’s mother is currently underway. Born in Capriglio, in the municipality of Asti, on 1 April 1788, Margaret Occhiena died at the Oratory of Valdocco in Turin on 25 November 1856, after sharing her son's mission for about ten years. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne recounted her life in 1886 in the booklet *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto ameno ed edificante,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1886. Some other biographies have been written over these years, most of them aimed at edification. Among others: HENRION A., *Mamma Margherita, la collaboratrice di Don Bosco,* Consiglio Superiore U.D.C.I., Roma 1928; BENZIGER M., *Mamma Margherita, St. John Bosco’s mother,* Benziger Sisters, Altadena 1979; LAPPIN P., *Sunshine in the shadows,* Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle N.Y. 1980; VENTURUZZO, O., *A mãe de Dom Bosco*, Guiratinga 1985; FANTOZZI A., *Mamma Margherita. La madre di Don Bosco,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1992; AUBRY J., *Mamma Margherita, la prima collaboratrice di Don Bosco,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
213. The first edition, entitled *Don Bosco,* was published in 1929 in Danish by Gyldendaskle Boghandel. The following year, SEI in Turin would publish the Italian translation by Salesian Fr Antonio Coiazzi; my citation is taken from this edition in 1930 p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
214. The previously cited text by Fr Aldo Fantozzi, *Mamma Margherita. La mamma di Don Bosco*, dedicates a chapter to this particular aspect of Margaret Occhiena’s life, entitling it: *Una mamma catechista* ( pp. 49-56). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
215. MO pp. 33-34 [54]. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
216. BM v. 1, p.119. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
217. BM v. 3, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
218. BM v. 1, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
219. Cf. BRAIDO P., *L’inedito “Breve catechismo per i fanciulli ad uso della Diocesi di Torino” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1979, p.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
220. Margaret Occhiena herself was illiterate, as can easily be proven from official documents where, next to her name, there is always a cross, as required of those who cannot sign their name. (cf. FANTOZZI A.,  *Mamma Margherita…,* cit., p.49). [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
221. FANTOZZI A., *Mamma Margherita…,* cit., pp. 51-52 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
222. MO pp. 42-43 [64-65 ] [my emph.] . [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
223. A few years later, however, it seemed to Don Bosco that even the catechism promulgated by Franzoni could not be put *sic et simpliciter* into the hands of his boys, and he decided to compile a catechism, which remained unpublished, entitled *Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della Diocesi di Torino Preceduto dalle Preghiere del mattino e della sera, da un compendio di Storia Sacra e da un Sunto di catechismo per quelli che si dispongono a ricevere il Sacramento della cresima, della confessione e comunione*. Fr Pietro Braido, who edited the critical edition of this manuscript, states: “It is not Don Bosco’s *Breve catechismo* (which remains the diocesan catechism), but what should have preceded it, namely: morning and evening prayers – a *Compendio di Storia Sacra pei fanciulli* (Compendium of Bible History for Children) – a summary of the diocesan catechism in preparation for the three sacraments of childhood and early adolescence (confirmation, confession and communion). The unchanged text of the diocesan *Breve catechismo* (more out of formal respect than out of actual necessity, since what had preceded it served exactly the same purpose.)” (BRAIDO P., *L’inedito “Breve catechismo…,* cit., p.8). [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
224. BRAIDO P., *L’inedito “Breve catechismo…,* cit., p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
225. Cf. FANTOZZI A., *Mamma Margherita…,* cit., p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
226. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
227. The dating of the two manuscripts of the *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, comprising nine notebooks, the first three of which were almost entirely written and corrected by Don Bosco and the second six being copies of the first three made by his secretary Fr Gioacchino Berto with corrections in the saint's own hand, presents some problems of internal criticism. In any case, however, their drafting, which began in 1873, continued beyond 1880. (cf. DA SILVA FERREIRA A., “Introduzione” in BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio…,* pp. 7-11;18-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
228. The first difficulties already come from determining the date of birth. “I was born on the day dedicated to Mary Assumed into Heaven in 1815 in Murialdo near Castelnuovo d’Asti” (MO p. 55). So was this 15 August, Feast of the Assumption? Don Bosco does not explicitly say this but one of his secretaries, Fr Bonetti, did say so in 1879 (so, while Don Bosco was alive) in his History of the Oratory published in the *Bollettino Salesiano,* as also did Du Boys in his biography in 1883 (cf. DU BOYS A., *Dom Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salésiens*, J. Gervais, Paris 1884, p. 2 ) and the Italian translation, in the following year by G. NOVELLI and published at San Benigno Canavese by the Salesian Press. Yet we find written in the baptismal register in the Parish of St Andrew the Apostle at Castelnuovo: “Die decima septima Augusti 1815 ‑ BOSCO JOHANNES MELCHIOR, filius Francisci Aloysii ac Margaritae Ochiena, jugalium Bosco, heri vespere natus et hoc vespere solemníter baptizatus ab adm. R.do Dom. Josepho Festa V.C. Patrini fuere Melchior Ochiena loci Caprilii et Magdalena Bosco, vidua quondam Secundi Ochiena, huius loci. ‑ Joseph Sismondo Praep.us Vic. For.” (from the Register of Baptisms of the Parish Archives of St Andrew the Apostle in Castelnuovo d'Asti - Year 1815) [my emph.]. Therefore, Don Bosco would have been born on the 16th and not on the 15th of August; we say “would have been” because it is not possible to rule out, a priori, an error in transcription. In any case, Don Bosco’s account is not without some chronological inaccuracies which historians have tried to highlight. See, for example,DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 14-15. On the issue of the date of birth, a brief summary of the matter with a proposed solution can be found in CERRATO N., *Don Bosco e il suo mondo*, cit., pp. 171-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
229. The narrative covers the period from 1815 (birth) to the end of 1854. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
230. Fr Pietro Braido, a Salesian and one of the most important scholars of Don Bosco's preventive system, has published numerous books and articles in recent years, which have been translated into several languages, and has edited numerous critical editions. Among others, I would like to mention: *L’inedito “Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1979; *Il progetto operativo di don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana,*  LAS, Roma 1982; *La lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884,* LAS, Roma 1984; *Il «sistema preventivo» in un «decalogo» per educatori*, LAS, Roma 1985; *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù,* LAS, Roma 1985; *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali di Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1987; *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità : studi e testimonianze,* LAS, Roma 1987; *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1988; *Prospettive di ricerca su don Bosco,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 9 (1990) pp. 254-267 ; *Don Bosco educatore* (with other authors), LAS, Roma 1992; *Breve storia del «Sistema preventivo»,* LAS, Roma 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
231. Cf. BRAIDO P., *“Memorie” del futuro,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 11(1992) 20, pp. 97-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
232. BRAIDO P., “*Memorie” del futuro,* cit., p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
233. MO p. 30 [54]. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
234. Cf. *Mutuae Relationes* no. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
235. BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù,* a cura di BRAIDO P., La Scuola Editrice, Brescia 1965, p. 4 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
236. The observation is from Fr Raffaele Farina in his contribution “Gli scritti di Don Bosco” in *La formazione permanente interpella gli istituti religiosi,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1976, p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
237. In particular I am referring to the famous *dream at nine years of age* that “all my life remained deeply impressed on my mind” (MO p. 58) and in which he perceived the signs of a divine communication concerning his future mission. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
238. The date of Fr Giovanni Melchiorre Calosso’s arrival in Morialdo is uncertain; Fr Pietro Stella’s hypothesis is that it was 1829 and not 1826 as Don Bosco would seem to be saying (cf. MO pp. 44-45 [66]. See, in relation to the chronological reconstruction of this period of Don Bosco's childhood, KLEIN J. – VALENTINI E., *Una rettificazione cronologica delle “Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco”,* in “Salesianum” 17 (1955) 3-4, pp. 581-610. Calosso (1760-1830) would die suddenly, to the great dismay of fifteen-year-old John Bosco. (cf. MO pp. 50-51 [69–70]). For some information on the life and personality of this benefactor of Don Bosco’s see GIRAUDO A., *Clero, seminario e società,* LAS, Roma 1992, pp. 42-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
239. MO p. [68] [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
240. Cf. BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo …,* a cura di BRAIDO P., cit., p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
241. This distinction made by Don Bosco will be useful later on, together with other more relevant elements, to question some interpretations of the first constitutional text that I consider reductive, as well as the guidelines given to the Salesian Congregation on the importance of meditation, which Don Bosco consciously distinguished from spiritual reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
242. This is some eight kilometres from the Becchi, near Capriglio, Margaret Occhiena’s birthplace. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
243. It is difficult to establish the reason for such silence, something many historians have queried. See for example, DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p.38, nota 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
244. Giorgio Lorenzo Maria Moglia, son of Luigi Moglia, John Bosco’s “employer”, was born 2 2 October 1825; He was therefore not even three years old when Don Bosco arrived in Moncucco. His testimony at the trial is based on memories and anecdotes heard from his parents and other family members.. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
245. *Positio super introductione causae,* Romae 1907, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
246. *Nova positio super virtutibus. Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Romae 1926, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
247. *Positio super virtutibus,* Romae 1923, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
248. Fr Secondo Marchisio, a Salesian, testified as early as 1891 at the diocesan inquiry, at the age of 35. A native of Castelnuovo d’Asti, he enriched his personal testimony with some memories gathered from his family. Fr Ceria informs us: “Fr Secondo Marchisio, from Castelnovo, spent thirteen consecutive years in the Oratory during Don Bosco’s lifetime. After Don Bosco’s death, he travelled around the lands surrounding Becchi, visiting those who had seen Don Bosco or heard about him in their families and gathering information, memories and anecdotes to use in his biography” (MB v. 18, pp. 577-578. This information is not in the English translation of the BM). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
249. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
250. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
251. The reliability of these latter elements is not disputed by historians. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., pp. 35-36; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 26-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
252. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 36 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
253. These are Don Bosco’s words in BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Domenico Savio allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tip. G.B.Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
254. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…*, v. 2, cit., p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
255. For this lengthy period spent in Chieri see especially CASELLE S., *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri. 1831-1841. Dieci anni che valgono una vita,* Edizioni Acclaim, Torino 1988. This monograph is enriched by numerous historical documents and photographs. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
256. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…*, v. 1, cit., pp. 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
257. Guglielmo Garigliano would also be Don Bosco’s companion in the seminary and at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*; Paolo Vittorio Braja, on the other hand, would die prematurely in the summer of 1832. (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 48). [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
258. Secondo Caselle informs us: “The ‘marvellous catechism’ was held for the population on public holidays in the afternoon by Fr Isaja Carminati, from Bergamo, born on 12 January 1798. He arrived in Chieri at the beginning of the 1831-1832 school year and until 1836, in the Novitiate House at Chieri (Casa S. Antonio), in addition to teaching literature to Jesuit students, he was also *praefectus catechismi,* or in other words he led catechism class in St Anthony’s Church. In 1837‑38 he was still in Chieri as teacher and minister at the House; but no longer as catechist. He was succeeded in this in 1837 by Fr Lorenzo Mainardi and in 1838 by Fr Andrea Zuccherini” (CASELLE S., *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri…,* cit., p.50). [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
259. This is the name of the small association formed among classmates back in the school year 1831-32. (cf. MO p. 61 [79]; STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 48). [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
260. MO p. 62 [77]. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
261. Cf. MO pp. 66-69 [86–89]; On the probable identity of this young convert, see STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 49, note 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
262. Don Bosco wrote a biography of Luigi Comollo which was first published anonymously in 1844. I will return to this biography later, given the relevance of Don Bosco's early writings to the subject of my study. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
263. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
264. CASELLE S., *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri,* cit., pp. 53-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
265. He himself says this in the *Memoirs of the Oratory:* “I would like to note something about the college at Chieri that certainly exemplifies the spirit of piety that flourished there. During my four years us a student in the college, I do not remember ever hearing any talk, not a single word that could be considered immoral or irreligious. At the end of rhetoric course, of the 25 students, 21 embraced the clerical state…” (MO p. 86 [98]). [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
266. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
267. Provost at Cinzano, Father Giuseppe Comollo. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
268. MO p. 85 [97–98]. Is Don Bosco’s account accurate? Once again, we cannot know for sure; however, it is possible to draw some conclusions from the different *levels* mentioned by Fr Braido. Don Bosco tells us that choosing a way of life requires a special atmosphere of prayer and the advice of a spiritual person. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
269. He entered as a pupil there on 28 January 1834 (cf. F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,*  cit., pp. 70; 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
270. Giuseppe (Joseph) Cafasso, born in Castelnuovo d'Asti on 15 January 1811, was ordained on 15 January 1833. Don Bosco had met him a few years earlier, as he himself recounts in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (cf. MO 51-52 [71–72]). For information on when this first meeting took place, see DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
271. MO p. 87 [100]. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
272. MO p. 89 [102] [my emph.]. Once again, the two practices of piety are clearly distinct. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
273. MO p. 89 [102]. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
274. The seminary in Chieri had been opened a few years earlier by the Camaldolese Colombano Chiaverotti, Archbishop of Turin, in the premises of a former convent of the Filippini. It represented, in the Archbishop’s intentions, a ‘safe haven’ called for by parish priests and clergy who often still had to personally provide for the formation of numerous clerics. Already in 1829, its first year of operation, the seminary hosted 76 clerics in five different theology courses. For more information and further details, see GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società,* LAS, Roma 1993, especially pp. 155-213; DpF, *Sussidi 2,* Roma, 1988, pp. 186-187; 252-255; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 81-82; CASELLE S., *Giovanni Bosco a Chieri...,* cit., pp. 148-152. On the tensions and different theological currents in Turin’s seminaries, see STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...,* v. 1, cit., pp. 51-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
275. The triduum at the beginning was laid down by the seminary’s *Constitutions* which will be discussed further on. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
276. Cf. MO pp. 90-91 [103]. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
277. These *Constitutions* were never in print; There are two handwritten versions currently preserved in the Archives of the Metropolitan Seminary of Turin. (cf. GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società...,* cit., p. 215). [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
278. Cf. GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società...,* cit., pp. 216.384. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
279. This observation, which I agree with, comes from Aldo Giraudo, who compared these regulations with those of other diocesan seminaries from the same period. Cf. GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società...,* cit., p.215. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
280. The text of the *Regolamento del seminario di Chieri*, which derives from this, is somewhat simplified, but essentially follows it. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
281. The devotion to the Immaculate Conception, St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga, cultivated in the seminary in Chieri, would remain indelibly imprinted on Don Bosco’s spiritual experience, which he would pass on to his ‘sons’. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
282. GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società,* cit., pp. 370-371. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
283. Meditation had been introduced into seminary regulations as early as the end of the sixteenth century by the Archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo. (cf. DEROO A., *Saint Charles Borromée cardinal réformateur,* Ed. Saint-Paul, Paris 1963, pp. 331-332). [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
284. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps...,* cit., p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
285. MO pp. 92-93 [105] [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
286. MO p. 106 [116–117]. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
287. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia...,*  v. 1, cit., p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
288. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit. pp. 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
289. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni per l’Istituto Delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885),* ed. ROMERO C., LAS, Roma 1983, p. 324. This is the critical edition of the constitutions of the second religious family founded by Don Bosco, edited by Sister Cecilia Romero. Don Bosco’s clarification does not appear in the previous printed text of 1878. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
290. Cf. MO p. 92 [104-105]. In addition to the presence of some companions unsuited to the seminary environment, Don Bosco also regretted the “distance” between superiors and seminarians. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
291. Giovanni Francesco Giacomelli, born in Avigliana in 1820, entered the seminary in Chieri in 1836. He was a companion of Don Bosco at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*. After serving as assistant parish priest for many years, he became director of the *Ospedaletto di Santa Filomena*, which was part of the work of the Marchioness Barolo, a benefactor of Don Bosco for many years. After the death of Fr Felice Golzio in 1873, he was chosen by Don Bosco as his ordinary confessor and, in turn, wen to confession to Don Bosco on a weekly basis. He testified in April 1892, at the age of 72, in the diocesan informative process for the cause of beatification and canonisation of Don Bosco.. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
292. MO p. 92 [105]. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
293. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
294. MO p. 95 [106–107]. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament were often accompanied by some devotions and vocal prayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
295. Luigi (Louis) Comollo was born 7 April 1817 at Caselle. He was a companion of Don Bosco’s at the college in Chieri and then at the seminary from 1833 to 1839, the year of his untimely death. Don Bosco collected some notes on the life of this exemplary young man from 1839, the year of his death. In 1844, he published anonymously, for the seminarians of Chieri, the booklet *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo. Morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù. Scritti da un suo collega*  (printer by Speirani e Ferrero inTorino) in order to inspire them to imitate the young man who had been a model of Christian virtue for him. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
296. The final edition while Don Bosco was still alive dates back to a few years before the saint’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
297. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,.*v. 1, cit., p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
298. Don Bosco himself stresses this, for example: “In one thing alone I did not even try to emulate him, and that was in mortification. He was a young man of nineteen, yet he fasted rigourously for the whole of Lent and at other times laid down by the Church. In honour of the B.V., he fasted every Saturday. Often he went without breakfast....” (MO p. 95 [107]). [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
299. Here, clearly, as we will return to when discussing the biography of Dominic Savio or other biographies written by the Saint, what is not of primary importance from our particular point of view is the *historical accuracy* of the events narrated, but rather the fact that, *as they are narrated*, they are presented as examples for young people. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
300. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella ...,* v. 1, cit., p. 82. Fr Stella himself points out, in a note, the large number of editions that were made of this booklet. In the “regulations” of the *Immaculate Conception Sodality* founded by Dominic Savio among his companions at the Oratory in Valdocco, we read in n.7 : “Before accepting anyone, let them read the life of Luigi Comollo” (BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico,* Tipografia G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859, p. 83). The promise made by the first group of zealous young people began with these words: “We, Dominic Savio, etc., promise... with the consent of our Spiritual Director, that we wish to imitate, as far as our strength will allow, LOUIS COMOLLO. From this we are obliged...” (BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto…,* cit., p. 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
301. MO p. 70 [84]. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
302. We can imagine that the “circumstances” that led John Bosco to the Cathedral were not very different from those that led his friend and role model there. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
303. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici…,* cit., pp. 22- 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
304. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici…,* cit., pp. 33-34 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
305. MO p. 109 [119]. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
306. This is the retreat mentioned in MO p. 106 [115]. Fr Giovanni Borel (1801-1873), who would become spiritual director at the school of St Francis di Paola and in the works of the Marchioness Barolo, had preached the retreat at the seminary in Chieri at the beginning of the 1837-1838 school year, thus at the beginning of Bosco’s first year of theology. Cf. *Elenco dei signori predicatori del sacro triduo e degli esercizi spirituali nel Seminario di Chieri dall’anno scolastico 1834 sino all’anno presente 1856,*  in the Archbishop’s Archives, Turin, reproduced in GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società...,* pp. 453-457. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
307. MO 110 [119]. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
308. This is a letter of 24 March 1872; the original of this letter, not yet part included in the critical edition of the *Epistolario*, which is under preparation, can be found at the Salesian house in Chiari (Brescia). [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
309. MO p. 89 [102]. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
310. See, for example, the first five resolutions made during the clerical clothing ceremony. (cf. MO p. 89 [102]). [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
311. CAFASSO G., *Istruzioni per Esercizi Spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano,* Tipografia Fratelli Canonica, Torino 1893, pp. 88-89 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
312. Fr Francesco Motto edited the critical edition of this 140-page booklet in 1985. The volume is published by LAS in Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
313. For this information about the redaction of the booklet, see the introduction by Fr Motto in BOSCO G., *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6…,* LAS, Roma 1985, pp. 5-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
314. There are also numerous names of benefactors, a circular letter addressed to them, and rough drafts of various letters. The disorderly structure of this document may explain its limited circulation, as noted by Francesco Motto on pp. 7-8. o the *Introduzione* to the critical edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
315. The figure of Archbishop Luigi Fransoni (usually referred to as Franzoni by Don Bosco) was linked to Don Bosco for about thirty years. Born in Genoa in 1789, he was Archbishop of Turin from 1832 and died in exile in Lyon in 1862. Don Lemoyne describes him in the *Memorie Biografiche, as* “a father to Don Bosco, his mainstay and sincere friend” (BM v. 1, p. 181). [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
316. Don Bosco *Caffasso* with two ‘f’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
317. FdB 748 D 7-10 [my emph.]. In the critical edition see pp. 20-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
318. BOSCO G., *Memorie dal 1841…,* cit., p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
319. BOSCO G., *Memorie dal 1841…,* cit., p. 58 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
320. MO p. 110 [119–120]. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
321. MO p. 116 [123–124]. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
322. Lanteri was born in Cuneo on 12 May 1759. He settled in Turin, where he attended the Faculty of Theology at the Royal University, and had as his spiritual director Nicolaus von Diessbach, founder of the *Amicizia cristiana*, a secret association of clerics and lay people who promoted the spread of good press, the fight against Jansenism and regalism or jurisdictionalism, and a firm adherence to the Pope in the context of ultramontanism. Ordained a priest in 1782, he also gave impetus to the *Amicizia cristiana*. Involved in the tragic events surrounding the relationship between Napoleon and Pius VII, he strongly reaffirmed papal authority and primacy and was therefore placed under surveillance by the French police (cf. DE ROSA G., *Il movimento cattolico in Italia. Dalla Restaurazione all’età giolittiana,* Laterza, Bari 19882, pp. 6-7). After 1814, he resumed his apostolate by reorganising the *Amicizia cristiana* into two different associations, the *Amicizia cattolica,* reserved for lay people, and the *Amicizia sacerdotale*. In 1816, he founded the religious congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, which was dissolved four years later and then reconstituted in 1826 with the approval of the Pope. The main purpose of the new congregation was to devote itself to preaching spiritual exercises according to the method of St Ignatius of Loyola. In close contact with many former Jesuits during the suppression of the Society, Lanteri, following the dissolution of the Oblates, asked to become a Jesuit in 1824, but was advised against joining the order by his friend Guala. (cf. TUNINETTI G., “Mons. Lorenzo Gastaldi, vescovo di Saluzzo [1867-1871] ed arcivescovo di Torino [1871-1883] tra rosminianesimo ed ultramontanesimo”, in APPENDINO F.N., *Chiesa e società nella II metà del XIX secolo in Piemonte,* Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1982, p. 35). He was a keen scholar of St Thomas, St Ignatius and St Alphonsus; it was precisely his choice to follow St Alphonsus that earned him the opposition of Archbishop Chiaverotti, which ultimately led to the dissolution of his congregation. He died in Pinerolo in 1830. In 1920, the cause for his beatification was introduced; in 1965, he was declared Venerable. On Lanteri’s spirituality and his relationship with Diessbach, see also BRUSTOLON A., *Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine. Punti chiari e punti oscuri,* Edizione Lanteri, Torino 1995, especially pp. 82-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
323. Luigi Maria Fortunato Guala was born in Turin in 1775. Ordained a priest in 1799, he taught at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Turin. A friend of Lanteri, in 1807 he obtained the reopening of the Sanctuary of St. Ignatius above Lanzo, where he began, with Lanteri himself, to preach spiritual exercises to the clergy and laity. In 1808, he became rector of the church of St Francis of Assisi and, a few years later, administrator of the Sanctuary of St Ignatius. In 1821, he obtained ecclesiastical approval from Monsignor Chiaverotti for a training programme for young priests, which had begun a few years earlier, inspired by Lanteri, in the premises of the former Franciscan convent attached to the church of San Francesco. Thus, the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* of Turin was born. When he died in 1848, he left his material and spiritual heritage to Cafasso. (cf. USSEGLIO G., *Il Teologo Guala e il convitto ecclesiastico di Torino,* SEI, Torino 1948). For more information on the figure and work of this leading figure in priestly formation in Piedmont, see in particular pages 273-283 of the text by BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”. Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830),* Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, Torino 1962. Guala was a friend and benefactor of Don Bosco. For a brief overview of Guala and his relationship with Don Bosco, see DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 290-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
324. The credit for conceiving and establishing the Turin Convitto has been variously attributed to Guala or Lanteri; some reasons for caution probably prevented Lanteri from exposing himself “in person” in the foundation, of which he was probably the true creator and inspirer; Guala was, rather, a disciple of Lanteri, just as Lanteri was of Diessbach. This is the opinion of Paolo Calliari when he writes: “Here is a certain point of reference to which we must always return whenever we seek the true origins of the Convitto Ecclesiastico: the trinity of Diessbach, Lanteri and Guala”.CALLIARI P., *Gli Oblati di Maria. Fondazione a Carignano. Primi quattro anni di vita. 1816-1820,* Editrice Lanteriana, San Vittorino 1980, p. 123). And further on: “(Lanteri) a leading man who courageously faces the most difficult and intricate situations when it comes to doing good or preventing evil, knowing how to step aside at the right moment so as not to appear before the public” (p. 163). Calliari’s discussion of the Convitto is rich and well documented (cf. pp. 118-174). In any case, the two *friends* initially dedicated themselves to the project together. Fr Gastaldi, a member of the congregation founded by Lanteri, wrote in 1870 about its founder: “Experience... had taught him that it was extremely useful and necessary for many, after completing their studies at university or in seminaries, to withdraw for a period of time under the guidance of clerics filled with the spirit of God and knowledge, so that they might direct them in the practical study of moral theology... And the Lord... gave Brunone the means to fulfil his desire... the rector of the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Turin... the priest and theologian Luigi Guala, a man of excellent knowledge and prudence; he was a disciple of Brunone, and so much so that they were, as they say, like two fingers of one hand. Bruno confided all his thoughts to his friend, who, being himself very zealous, could not but approve the plan proposed to him; and after many prayers to God... they set about compiling some very wise rules for the proper conduct of the work they had planned..." (GASTALDI P., *Della Vita del Servo di Dio Pio Brunone Lanteri,* Marietti, Torino 1870, pp.217-218). Fr Giuseppe Usseglio, who devotes several pages of the text cited in the previous note to the question of the “authorship” of the Convitto, concludes similarly: “As for the respective works of Lanteri and Guala, we would like to summarise them... in verse 34 of Canto 12 of Dante’s Paradiso, where, alluding to the two great champions of the faith, St Francis and St Dominic, it is said: *Degno è che, dov’è l’un, l’altro s’induca”* (p. 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
325. The Rule compiled by Fr Guala, is recorded in DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 70-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
326. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
327. For further information on the history and role played by the Convitto in the Turin church, see COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Canonica, Torino 1895; DI ROBILANT L.N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso confondatore del Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, 2 vv., Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, Torino 1912; USSEGLIO G., *Il Teologo Guala e il Convitto Ecclesiastico di Torino,* SEI, Torino 1948; STELLA P., *Crisi religiose nel primo ottocento piemontese,* SEI, Torino 1959; BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”. Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830),* Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, Torino 1962; TUNINETTI G., *Don Clemente Marchisio,* Centro Studi “Carlo Trabucco”, Torino 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
328. Born in 1732, Nicolaus Joseph Albert von Diessbach, after being widowed, entered the Society of Jesus in Turin in 1759, where his thinking and work continued to spread even after the suppression of the Society in 1773. He fought against Jansenism and jurisdictionalism, defending the pope and opposing current errors. Diessbach set out to respond to the propaganda of his opponents with “good press” and the “secret” union of men of good will, founding the *Amicizie cristiane* (Cf. DE ROSA G., *Il movimento cattolico in Italia…,* cit., pp. 3-4). The most complete work on the *Amicizie* is still the one cited by Fr Candido Bona (BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”. Società segrete e rinascita religiosa [1770-1830],* Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, Torino 1962). See also pp. 12-37 of the text by De Rosa, already cited in this note and BRUSTOLON A., *Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine…,* cit., pp. 75-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
329. Pio Brunone Lanteri contributed greatly to spreading the works of Saint Alphonsus throughout Piedmont, particularly the Latin translation of a kind of manual for confessors entitled *Homo apostlicus instructus in sua vocatione ad audiendas confessiones sive Praxis et instructio confessariorum,* published by Giacinto Marietti in Turin in 1844 (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 148). On the influence of St. Alphonsus’ thinking on Lanteri’s doctrine and work, see BRUSTOLON A., *Alle origini della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine…,*pp. 107-127. The doctrine of Saint Alphonsus would also have a significant influence on Don Bosco’s thinking and practice. Desramaut writes: “In our opinion, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, as explained by Professor Cafasso at the *convitto* in Turin, triumphed over all other ‘spiritual’ sources of Don Bosco, at least considering the number and breadth of the texts from which he drew inspiration” (DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco nella vita spirituale,* cit., p.38). [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
330. I think it is appropriate to include here a note by Fr Pietro Stella concerning Don Bosco and Cafasso, which helps to understand the particular pastoral perspective of moral theology teaching at the Convitto: “St Alphonsus, no less than Antoine Arnauld, shows that he has a very high sense of the sanctity of the Sacrament and, with more warmth than Arnauld, recommends that it should not be profaned sacrilegiously.... Don Bosco, too, while deploring Jansenist rigorism, says that frequent communion should not be granted to those who fall repeatedly into the same serious sin during the week.” (STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 87). Further on, the same author states: “In penitential practice, neither Don Cafasso nor Don Bosco were minimalist or lax confessors. The reason is that both approached the confessional with a keen sense of sin and of the life of grace; not only as judges, but also and especially as fathers and pastors, not concerned solely with what was necessary for valid absolution, but eager to establish and increase the life of grace in their penitents.” (p. 94). [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
331. Cf. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
332. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
333. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
334. Don Bosco tells us: “The first thing he did was to begin to take me to the prisons, where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me. Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates. What shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, within a few days of their release.” (MO p. 119 [125]). [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
335. The primary purpose of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, founded by Pio Brunone Lanteri, was precisely that of “consecrating themselves particularly to giving the Holy Exercises whenever requested with the consent of the Ordinaries, and to promoting their use as much as possible, both in public and in private.” (from the *Costituzioni e Regole* of the Oblates of the B.V. approved by the brief *Etsi Dei Filius* on 1 September 1826). The citation is taken from GALLAGHER T., *Gli Esercizi di s.Ignazio nella spiritualità e carisma di fondatore di Pio Brunone Lanteri,* TESI PUG, Roma 1983, p. 31). I have already mentioned Guala in connection with the reopening of the Sanctuary of St Ignatius at Lanzo; I will talk more about Cafasso and his disciple Don Bosco later on. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
336. The so-called *scrittura di schiavitudine* is well known, in which the twenty-two-year-old Brunone Lanteri gave himself “as a perpetual slave to the Blessed Virgin Mary Our Lady with a pure, free, perfect donation of his person and all his possessions.” The quotation, taken from the *Directory and other writings,* is reported in GOFFI T., *La spiritualità dell’Ottocento,* EDB, Bologna 1989, p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
337. On the influence of the spirituality of St Francis de Sales on the thinking and work of Pio Brunone Lanteri, see PEDRINI A., *Il ven. Pio Brunone Lanteri e la spiritualità salesiana nel Piemonte del primo Ottocento. Aspetti storico-ascetici,* Isituto Padano di Arti Grafiche, Rovigo 1982; this booklet contains three articles that appeared in issues 20, 21 and 22 of *Palestra del Clero* in the same year. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
338. GOFFI T., *La spiritualità dell’Ottocento,* cit., p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
339. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., on p. 70 informs us that the most commonly used texts were the *Direttorio ascetico* by Giovan Battista Scaramelli and the *Esercizio di perfezione* by Rodriguez. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
340. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 71-72 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
341. Very indicative in this regard is an article referring to the Convitto’s fees. It reads: “Since the board is modest, to the extent that everyone sees it as necessary to add a considerable sum, it is hoped that each resident will commit himself to applying himself to his studies with the utmost diligence, with piety, and to maintaining the most cordial union and charity with his companions, keeping in mind the example of the Apostles who, before setting out to preach throughout the world, as the residents will one day set out for their ecclesiastical duties, were united among themselves in holy bonds of perfect charity, encouraging one another with holy words and plans for the apostolate. In short, it is hoped that each one will take advantage with diligence of the beautiful opportunity that divine Providence offers him to be as useful as possible to himself and to the Church, so that he may enter Paradise with many of those souls whom the Divine Redeemer will deign to entrust to his care.” (DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., 76). [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
342. See in this regard pp. 92-101 of the first volume of the text by Pietro Stella which we have often quoted. However, this topic could be the subject of a more extensive and detailed study. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
343. Felice Golzio (1807-1873) was spiritual director at the Convitto, where he had been Cafasso’s pupil, and then became his confessor (cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, p. 196). He was endowed with great humility and knowledge, as Don Bosco attests. After Cafasso’s death in 1860, he was Don Bosco’s confessor until 1873, the year of his death. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
344. MO pp. 116-119 [125]. Emphasis is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
345. Giuseppe Burzio (1822–1842) arrived at the seminary in Chieri at the beginning of the last year of theology of the cleric John Bosco, in November 1840. Don Bosco, ordained a subdeacon in September of that year, had been appointed ‘prefetto di camera’ and immediately formed a good spiritual friendship with Burzio. In September 1841, Giuseppe Burzio entered Lanteri’s Congregation; he fell seriously ill and died with a reputation for holiness in 1842. One of his confreres, Fr Felice Giordano, wanted to collect some testimonies from those who had known him during his short life in order to compose a biography, which was then published in 1846. Fr Giordano also asked Don Bosco to send him a memoir about his young companion for this purpose; Don Bosco’s testimony can be found scattered throughout the short biography. It can be found in its entirety in BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* ed. MOTTO F., v. 1, LAS, Roma 1991, pp. 48-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
346. GIORDANO F., *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a' giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio,* Dalla Stamperia degli Artisti Tipografi, Torino 1846, pp. 139-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
347. The *Biographical Memoirs* with a lengthy passage on this memoir (cf. BM v. 1, pp. 375–379) claim that it was sent by the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* on 16 April 1843. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
348. Generally, in Don Bosco’s writings we find *Caffasso.* For a biographical and spiritual study see: *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso sacerdotis saecularis collegii ecclesiastici taurinensis moderatoris…,*5 vv.,Tip. Guerra et Mírri, Roma 1906-1922; COLOMbero g., *Vita del Servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso,* Torino 1895; DI ROBILANT L., *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* 2 vv., Torino 1912; ZANZI L., *Lo spirito interiore del beato Giuseppe Cafasso : proposto ai sacerdoti e ai militanti nell'Azione cattolica,*V. Fontana, Bassano del Grappa 1928; SALOTTI C., *Il santo Giuseppe Cafasso. La perla del clero italiano*, La Palatina, Torino 19473; GRAZIOLI A., *La pratica dei confessori nello spirito di san Giuseppe Cafasso*, Elle Di Ci, Colle Don Bosco (AT) 1953; AA.VV., *San Giuseppe Cafasso maestro e modello del clero,* Fiamma del Sacro Cuore, Chieri 1960; AA.VV., *Morale e pastorale alla luce di san Giuseppe Cafasso,* LICE, Torino 1961; MUGNAI L., *S. Giuseppe Cafasso prete torinese,* Cantagalli, Siena 1972; QUINZIO S., *Domande sulla santitá : Don Bosco, Cafasso, Cottolengo,* Gruppo Abele, Torino 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
349. For a systematic and documented study of Cafasso’s spiritual doctrine, see ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale di san Giuseppe Cafasso,* Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Torino 1958. In this study, Accornero draws almost exclusively on Cafasso’s numerous manuscripts and the testimonies from the cause for beatification. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
350. The description is by Don Bosco in MO p. 51 [71]. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
351. Cafasso held the chair of *practical moral theology* for 24 years, taking as his fundamental reference point the doctrine of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, while a rigorous approach still dominated much of official teaching. “An eminently practical apostle, he did not intend to found a ‘school’ of moral theology, nor to endorse one system over another, even though, precisely in order to remain faithful to his purpose of seeking the salvation of souls by all means, he serenely accepted probabilism.” (DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., p. 246). [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
352. As I have already pointed out when discussing the *Convitto Ecclesiastico,* these “pastoral experiences” were also part of the formation of young priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
353. The Servant of God Giuseppe Allamano, who was Rector of the Consolata Shrine in Turin and of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* and Founder of the Consolata Foreign Missions, was the son of one of Cafasso’s sisters. As he himself testified during the cause for beatification, he saw his uncle only once, at the age of six. His testimony, in addition to information gathered from his family, was also based on the sermons and confidences of Don Bosco, whom he met during his four-year stay at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, where he completed his secondary education.(cf. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso…, Positio super introductione causae,* pp. 9-10). Sulla figura del Servo di Dio si veda TUBALDO I., *Giuseppe Allamano, Il suo tempo, la sua opera,* Edizioni Missioni Consolata, Torino 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
354. Cf. CAFASSO G., *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero. Pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Canonica, Torino1892; CAFASSO G. *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero. Pubblicate per cura del can. Giuseppe Allamano*, Canonica, Torino 1893; CAFASSO G., *Sacre missioni al popolo,* Scuola Tipografica Missionaria, Torino 1923. These are part of the five-volume collction of the *Opere complete* published in Turin by the Consolata International College for Foreign Missions from 1923 al 1925. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
355. VALENTINI E., “Joseph Cafasso (saint)” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualitè,* v. 8, c.1330 [my emph.]. In this column and the next, you can also find some essential biographical information. Fr Valentini informs us that nine volumes of Cafasso’s manuscripts are preserved at the seminary in Turin, where you can find lectures on moral theology, instructions and meditations for spiritual exercises, and letters. The *Centro Studi Don Bosco* library at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome preserves a handwritten copy of Cafasso’s writings, made on the occasions of his cause of beatification and with the *vidimus* of the ecclesiastical authorities, written in beautiful calligraphy by Fr Pietro Corgiatti (1871-1924). I will cite this copy by specifying the name of the scribe in a footnote.. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
356. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale…,* cit., pp. 155. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
357. MO p. 119 [125] [my emph.]. Fr Pietro Stella notes: “For the first time, Don Bosco, recalling his own life, speaks of a spiritual director, and he does so in a context in which he is certainly to be understood as the person to whom he revealed his conscience regarding the direction to give to his religious life, but also as the person who heard sacramental confessions and acted as an authoritative advisor in every important decision.” (STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 100). [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
358. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso… Positio super introductione causae,*  p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
359. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso… Nova positio super virtutibus. Virtutum heroicarum expositio,* p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
360. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1860. This is the second booklet published by Don Bosco in 1860, on the occasion of the death of Fr Cafasso. The first, published a few months earlier, also by Tipografia Paravia, was entitled *Rimembranza storico-funebre dei giovani dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales verso il Sacerdote Cafasso Giuseppe, loro insigne benefattore, pel Sac. Bosco Giovanni.* These two booklets do not constitute a true biography; the second, in particular, contains some announcements and *ragionamenti funebri* and includes in the appendix some of Cafasso’s thoughts and devotions. (cf. VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate nel 1860 da San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1960, cit. pp. 36-37). [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
361. VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie …* , cit., p. 6 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
362. For a summary of the main events see pages 208-230 of the second volume of the already mentioned *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso* by Di Robilant and Colombero’s buiography, *Vita del Servo di Dio…* pp. 188-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
363. Cf. KLEIN J. – VALENTINI E., *Una rettificazione cronologica delle “Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco”,* in “Salesianum” 17 (1955) 3-4, pp. 581-610. The *Memoirs of the Oratory…* place this first meeting, instead, in 1827. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
364. It is worth noting here that Fr Cafasso supported Don Bosco’s work from the very beginning, not only spiritually but also as a generous benefactor. At the time of his death, Cafasso was still the owner of part of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, which he left to Don Bosco, together with a cash donation and the cancellation of all debts. (cf. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio D.Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., p. 198). [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
365. Cf. MO p. 52 [117]; BM v. 1, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
366. Cf. BM v. 1, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
367. Cf. BM v. 1, p. 272; [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
368. Cf. BM v. 1, pp. 366; MO p. 109 [119]. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
369. Cf. MO p. 116; MB v. 2, pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
370. Cf. MO p. 110 [123–124]. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
371. Cf. MO pp. 119-120 [125], 124 [130], 127 [132]. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
372. Cf. BM v. 2, p. 161: DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp. 215-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
373. Cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
374. Cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp. 216-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
375. Don Bosco stayed at the Convitto fir three years, instead of two as the regular programme planned. Colombero tells us that this favour “was granted to those who stood out more for piety and study” (cf. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio D.Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., p. 190). [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
376. Cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp. 222-223; COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio D.Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
377. Cf. VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate…,* cit., pp. 30-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
378. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Josephi Cafasso… Positio super introductione causae,* p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
379. He received this confidence from Don Bosco himself, who was nearing death. (cf. VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate…,* cit., pp. 33-34). [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
380. Cf. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale…,* cit., p. 94. The author dedicates a chapter of his book to each of these foundations of Cafasso’s spirituality (cf. pp. 62-106). [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
381. Cafasso dedicated an entire instruction to this topic in the Spiritual Exercises, entitled *Fuga dal mondo* (cf. , CAFASSO G., *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero,* cit., pp. 68-87). [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
382. Cf. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale…,* cit., pp. 71-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
383. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale…,* cit., p. 79 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
384. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* [Copy by Corgiatti], v. 5, pp. 2028-2029. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
385. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* [Copy by Corgiatti], v. 5, pp. 1874-1875 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
386. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* v. 5, p. 2085 B [p. 85]. For this quotation and the two that follow, I will draw on the work of Flavio Accornero, quoting from the nine volumes of Cafasso’s manuscripts, as indicated by the author, and, in square brackets, the page of the text where I found the quotation. The notations A and B refer to the fact that the pages of the manuscript often contain two different texts, separated by a horizontal line. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
387. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* v. 5, p. 1951 A [p. 85]. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
388. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* v. 6, p. 2453 B [p. 88]. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
389. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* [Copy by Corgiatti], v. 7, p. 2677. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
390. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale…,* cit., p. 97-98 [my emph..]. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
391. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copy by Corgiatti] v. 7, p. 2679. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
392. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copy by Corgiatti] v. 7, p. 2681. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
393. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copy by Corgiatti] v. 7, p. 2684. The underlining here and in the following quotations is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
394. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copy by Corgiatti] v. 7, pp. 2685-2686. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
395. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copia Corgiatti] v. 7, pp. 2693-2694. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
396. In this regard see: CAFASSO G., *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero,* cit., pp. 88-106; chapter entitled *Vita di orazione* in the text by ACCORNERO F.,  *La dottrina spirituale di San Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., pp. 94-106; DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp 355-367; SALOTTI C., *Il beato Giuseppe Cafasso. La perla del clero italiano,* Marietti, Torino 1925, pp. 30-35; ZANZI L., *Lo spirito interiore del Beato Giuseppe Cafasso…,* cit., pp.21-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
397. ACCORNERO F., *La dottrina spirituale di San Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., pp. 94-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
398. Cf. GUIBERT de J.,  *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico,*  Città Nuova, Roma 1992, pp. 386-387. The *Regolamento Organico* of 1822 stipulate that all students, with the exception of university students, must take part in spiritual exercises every year at Easter, from the evening of Good Friday to the morning of Holy Wednesday. (cf. *Raccolta degli Atti del governo di S.M. il re di Sardegna dall'anno 1814 a tutto il 1822*, vol. XII, nn. 1270‑1427, Torino 1822). [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
399. Don Bosco tells us in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* of “una solenne missione che ebbe luogo nel paese di Buttigliera” nell’anno 1826. “The preachers were well known and drew people from everywhere. I went with many others. We had an instruction and a meditation in the evening, after which we were free to return home.” (MO p. 44 [66]). On that occasion, little John surprised his future benefactor, Fr Calosso, with his ability to remember the content of the meditations he had heard, despite being only 11 years old. Among the preachers whose fame “drew people ffrom everywhere” was also Cafasso; In addition to the collection of meditations and instructions for spiritual exercises for the clergy that I have already mentioned, we also have a volume containing his meditations preached on the occasion of the *popular missions* (cf. CAFASSO G., *Sacre Missioni al popolo,* Scuola Tipografica Missionaria, Torino 1923). [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
400. Cf. *Enchiridion clericorum* nos. 139ff; NICOLAI G., *Il buon rettore del seminario,* Torino 1863. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
401. Cf. *Synodus dioecesana pinerolensis* habita diebus XXI, XXII, XXIII, sept. an. MDCCCXLI1 (Pinerolo 1842) no. 179; *Constitutiones editae ab ill.mo et Rev.ino Laurentio Gastaldi in sua prima Synodo dioecesana... (Torino 1873) no. 29.* [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
402. Cf. *Synodus dioecesana pinerolensis…,* n. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
403. BROCARDO P. – CAPITANIO I. (ed.), *Il rinnovamento degli Esercizi Spirituali. Simposio salesiano europeo,* Elle Di Ci, Torino 1975, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
404. Father Jan Philip Roothaan, born in Amsterdam in 1785, was elected General of the Society on 27 January 1829 and remained at its helm until his death on 8 May 1853. He was the third General of the Society after its re-establishment by Pius VII (1814). His work in favour of an authentic rediscovery of spirituality and the practice of the exercises, in fidelity to the founder, was constant and incisive. To encourage and assist this study, Roothaan also published a new Latin translation of the text of the Spiritual Exercises in 1835, which was more faithful to the Spanish text and accompanied by notes and explanations (Cf. GUIBERT de J.,  *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico,* cit., pp. 363-367). [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
405. On the origins and special charism of the founder of the Oblates, Pio Brunone Lanteri, see the two works, already mentioned, by Father Timothy Gallagher and Father Andrea Brustolon. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
406. Cf. BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”,* cit. p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
407. Cf. GALLAGHER T., *Gli esercizi di Sant’Ignazio…,* cit., pp. 37-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
408. Cf. BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”,* cit., p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
409. The passage is quoted by Gallagher on page 33 of his study [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
410. The observation is by Bona on p. 282 of the text mentioned several times. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
411. *Epistolae Ioannis Phil. Roothaan,* Apud Postulatorem Generalem S.I., Roma 1935, v. 1, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
412. Cf. GALLAGHER T., *Gli esercizi di Sant’Ignazio…,* cit., p 229; BRUSTOLON A., *Alle origini della …,* cit., pp. 98-106; DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 293-294. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
413. Cf. GALLAGHER T., *Gli esercizi di Sant’Ignazio…,* cit., pp. 68-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
414. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizj spirituali di S. Ignazio di Loyola col Direttorio pel buon uso de’ suddetti Esercizj,* Marietti, Torino 1829. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
415. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2*.,* cit., p. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
416. For this and other information on the sanctuary, see: *Storia del Santuario di Sant’Ignazio di Loiola presso Lanzo Torinese,* Fratelli Canonica, Torino 1894; DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp. 265-273; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 160-163; DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
417. In 1622, Ignatius of Loyola was proclaimed a saint. Six years later, in the village of Mezzenile in Val di Lanzo, a novena to the saint put an end to a dangerous invasion of wolves. The following year, a woman from a nearby village had a mysterious apparition, which was later repeated, in the place where the sanctuary of *Sant'Ignazio sopra Lanzo* would later be built. On that spot, popular devotion led to the construction of a small chapel dedicated to Saint Ignatius, which became the site of numerous pilgrimages and miraculous events attributed to the saint’s intercession. (cf. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, pp. 264-268). [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
418. BM v. 2, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
419. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio...,* cit., p.130. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
420. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio...,* cit., pp.367-379. The rule is included in its entirety but without any precise date. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
421. Cf. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio...,* cit., pp.375-376. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
422. Cf. DI ROBILANT, *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,*  v. 2, p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
423. The sanctuary could be reached on foot from Lanzo in about two hours (about seven from Turin). The rules for the spiritual exercises, compiled by Guala, stipulated that on the morning of the opening day of the exercises, the participants should find a large fire in the entrance hall “so that those who arrive sweaty may linger there for a moment before going to their rooms, which are rather cool even in the summer months.” (COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio...,* cit., p. 372). [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
424. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,*  v. 2, pp. 276-277 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
425. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio...,* cit., pp.374-375 (passim). [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
426. DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,*  v. 2, p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
427. Cf. BM v. 2, p. 98; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
428. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
429. BM v. 2, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
430. Il manoscritto, intitolato *Esercizi spirituali fatti nel Santuario di Sant’Ignazio presso Lanzo principianti il 7 giugno 1842* è conservato nell’Archivio Centrale della Casa Generalizia (A 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
431. Cf. ACS A 225.The documents in the Salesian Central Archives are identified by a letter and a three-digit number, which corresponds to a voluminous folder. Sometimes, where indicated, it is also possible to indicate two other groups of two digits each (the first indicates the subfolder, the second the document; e.g. ACS A 003.05.01 = document 01 in subfolder 05 of folder A 003) or even the page (in the case of notebooks with numbered pages in the original, for example). [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
432. This is a classic meditation of hte Ignatian Exercises (cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nn. 136-148). It also goes under the name *le due bandiere* (dallo spagnolo *banderas*)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
433. Fr Ferdinando Minini (1796-1870) appears in the catalogues of the Province of Turin of the Society of Jesus starting in 1816. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
434. The only exceptions were 1848 and 1849, because, due to political movements for Italian unity, the exercises at St Ignatius did not take place. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
435. After Cafasso’s death (1860) he was succeeded by Canon Eugenio Galletti as rector of the Convitto and the Sanctuary; then in 1864 Fr Felice Golzio, Don Bosco’s confessor from 1860 to 1873, the year of his death. After he died, Don Bosco still went to the Sanctuary for the Exercises; according to Fr Amadei, the cold reception he received that year convinced him not to return in subsequent years. (cf. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit. pp. 172; BM v. 10, 548–550). [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
436. Cf. CERIA E., *Annali della Società di San Francesco di Sales,* v. 1, SEI, Torino 1941, p.85; BM v. 5, p. 43; v. 5, p. 471; v. 6, p. 594. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
437. Cf. for example BM v. 2, p. 113; v. 3, p. 377; v. 10, p. 174. We note here that it is not always easy to deduce with certainty, from the information provided by the *Biographical Memoirs*, whether these “trips up the mountain” had as their main purpose the apostolate or personal retreat or both. In order to distinguish more clearly, it would be necessary to reconstruct from the archives of the diocese of Turin, if possible, the exact dates of the courses of exercises for the clergy and those for the laity and compare them with the data provided by the *Memoirs.* [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
438. BM v. 2, p. 112–113; [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
439. BM v. 3, p. 337. With regard to this regular presence of Don Bosco at St Ignatius, alongside Fr Cafasso, see also DI ROBILANT N., *Vita del Venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso,* cit., v. 2, p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
440. ACS 225.02.01 [my emph.]. It is an incomplete notebook with ten pages of text, written in fairly neat handwriting, with the title and date on the front page. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
441. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
442. I am not making reference here in this study to the Exercises for the Salesians. I will dedicate some pages to this further on. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
443. Cf. BM v. 2, pp. 160-162. In this situation of discernment, Don Bosco, following Cafasso’s advice, went with him to St Ignatius. At the end of the course of exercises, Lemoyne recounts, he still seemed determined to “enter religion” with the Oblates; but Cafasso replied, this time with a curt “no.” [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
444. ACS A 003.01.01, pp. 15.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
445. The *Memorie Biografiche* contain very many references to this (cf. for example v. 2, pp. 142,227-232; v. 3, pp. 221. 418 ff. 537 ff. 603 ff; v. 4, pp. 122 ff. 177, 178 ff. 474 ff; v. 5, pp. 62. 215 ff. 219 ff. 765 ff. 874 ff. 925 ff; v. 6, pp. 513, 843 ff. 892 ff; v. 7, pp. 419, 647 ff; v. 8, p. 473; v. 10, pp. 31, 49, 828; v. 11, p 362; v. 12, pp. 138, 163 ff; v. 14, pp. 257 ff; v. 15, pp. 453, 640 ff; v. 16, p. 308; v. 17, p. 558; v. 18, p. 175). [Tr note: references are to the Italian MB as not all can be found in the English BM] [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
446. Cf. BM v. 10, p. 171 and MO p. 189 [181]. In Fr Lemoyne’s reconstruction, the 1848 Exercises, which were also held in Valdocco, were led by Fr Borel and the Fr Gliemone, canon of Rivoli. (cf. BM v. 3, p. 297). From the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, let’s listen to the account of the first experience: “With this same purpose, in that year (1848) I put it to a test with a little spiritual retreat. About fifty boys gathered at the Oratory house for it. They all ate with me; but because there were not enough beds for all, some had to sleep with their own families and return to the Oratory in the morning. This coming and going to their homes risked almost all the benefit to be reaped from the sermons and instructions which are customary on such occasions. The retreat began on Sunday evening and finished on the following Saturday evening. It succeeded quite well. Many boys for whom I had laboured in vain for a long time really gave themselves to virtuous living. Several entered religious life; others, while continuing in the secular life, became models in their regular attendance at the Oratory.” (MO p. 189 [181]). [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
447. The preacher on that occasion was Fr Federico Albert (1820-1879) Palatine chaplain and then parish priest in Turin and Lanzo, proclaimed Blessed in 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
448. Cf. BM v. 3, pp 424 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
449. MO p. 126 [131]. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
450. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., pp. 145. 158. These two passages refer to the question of “extern members” and to the secret election of a vicar by the Rector of the Society. On the drafting of the first rules and the use of the Oblates’ constitutions, see what Fr Amadei says in MB v. 10, p. 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
451. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 574. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
452. This is the oldest manuscript in our possession. It probably dates back to 1858 (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S.Francesco di Sales [1858] – 1875*, Critical text by MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1992, P. 17) and was written in his own hand by Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco’s principal collaborator and first successor. Quotations from the Constitutions will always be taken from this critical edition, unless otherwise stated in the notes.. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
453. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., pp. 72-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
454. It may be interesting to note that this first draft of the constitutions, probably from 1858, does not yet refer to the obligation of annual exercises for the confreres, but already speaks of exercises as a possible field of apostolate. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
455. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., pp. 72-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
456. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
457. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
458. The Central Archives of the Congregation contain numerous collections of meditations for spiritual exercises written by the first Salesians. Among others, we mention those of Fr Giovanni Bonetti (ACS B 517), Fr Giulio Barberis (ACS B 508), Fr Giovanni Cagliero (ACS B 485), and Fr Giuseppe Bertello (ACS B 514). This material is almost entirely unexplored, certainly never classified or critically studied.. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
459. The statutes of the *Amicizia sacerdotale* are found in BONA C., *Le “Amicizie”… ,* cit. pp. 503-511. The same author also informs us that, in these priestly circles, the compositions were read, commented on and corrected, in order to “improve oneself and the compositions already made and the way of composing” cf. pp. 107-108). [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
460. *Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.,* Tip. Eredi Botta, Torino 1851, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
461. MO pp. 120 [126],122-123 [128-129]. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
462. CERIA E. (ed.), *Epistolaro di S.Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1956, v. 2, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
463. The text, taken from a memoir prepared by Don Bosco for the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Alessandro Ottaviano Riccardi dei Conti di Netro, is reported in MB v. 8, p. 809. [This is not found in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
464. BOSCO G., *Cenno istorico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi chiarimenti,* Tipografia Poliglotta della S.Congregazione di Propaganda, Roma 1874. There is a critical edition of this text in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’”Oratorio”. Una “Congregazione degli Oratori”. Documenti,* LAS, Roma 1988. The quotation is taken from that edition, on p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
465. Cf. MO pp.153-156. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
466. Cf. ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani” in DICASTERO DELLA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, p. 163. The first manuscript of the Constitutions in our possession is from 1858 (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875,* ed. MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1982, p. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
467. In 1864, in a note containing information sent to Pope Pius IX on the state of the Society of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco emphasised, for example, that the members of his congregation had been observing its rules for six years, that is, since 1858 (cf. MB v, 7, p. 892). On these contradictions, see Ramón Alberdi in the contribution already cited. “The founder of the Salesians,” the author emphasises, “did not always express himself in the same way when referring to the period when they began to organise themselves in accordance with certain rules or constitutions.” (ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani” …, cit*.,* p. 149). Probably, for Don Bosco, the providential inspiration that gave rise to the Institute remained more important than the legal institution that would result from it. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
468. Cf. ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani” …, cit*.,* p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
469. Two different traditions originated from Don Bosco himself. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* recount, in a detailed and evocative manner, the first encounter between the young priest and a boy named Bartholomew Garelli, who was completely ignorant of Christian doctrine. il *Cenno storico dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* of 1854 says instead: “This Oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summertime, the Rev. Fr Cafasso used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayers’ boys in a little room attached to the sacristy of the aforementioned church.… I took it up towards the end of 1841, and I began by gathering two young adults in that same place who were in serious need of religious instruction.” (BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit*.,* pp. 34-35). [Tr. Note: this text, and several to follow, can be found in English translation in *Salesian Sources I.* LAS Rome, and Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore, 2104.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
470. BOSCO G., *Cenno storico intorno alla Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1868],*  in MB v. 9, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
471. Cf. BOSCO G., *Cenni storici intorno all’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales,* in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit., p. 58; MO p. 130 [126]. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
472. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875,* ed. MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1982, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
473. Following the events in 1848 the civil authorities had ordered the closure of the diocesan seminary. “This is how,” Fr Alberdi emphasises, “the section of *seminary students* who also lived in Don Bosco’s house came into being. Starting mainly in 1855, this group became an integral part of the Valdocco oratory.” (ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore…”, cit., p. 156). [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
474. CERIA E., *Vita del servo di Dio Don Michele Rua, primo successore di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1949, p. 29. Two of these four young men, Michael Rua and John Cagliero, would become Don Bosco’s first successor and the first Salesian bishop, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
475. BOSCO G., *Piano di Regolamento…,* in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit., pp. 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
476. MO p. 206 [180]. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
477. For a more comprehensive summary, see pages 150-163 of the contribution by Rámon Alberdi, cited several times above. The period covered by Don Bosco’s autograph account in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* goes as far as 1855. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
478. This is the so-called *Manoscritto Rua* which I spoke of in an earlier note. The dating is supported by Fr Francesco Motto in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
479. As is well known, Don Bosco’s *preventive system* is based, in the same statement made by the saint in 1877, on *reason, religion* and *loving-kindness* (cf. BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù,* ed. BRAIDO P., La Scuola, Brescia 1965, pp. 291-299). His deep conviction of the primacy of religion can be summarised by a passage from this famous *trattatello*: “Frequent confession and communion and daily Mass are the pillars that must support the edifice of education... Never force young people to frequent the sacraments, but encourage them to do so and give them every opportunity. On occasions of retreats, triduums, novenas, sermons, and catechism classes, let the beauty, the grandeur, and holiness of the Catholic Religion be dwelt on, for in the sacrasments it offers to all of us an easy and useful means to attain our salvation and peace of heart. In this way, children take readily to these practices of piety, and will adopt them willingly with joy and benefit.” (BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema…,* cit., p. 295). On the question of the “primacy of religion” in Don Bosco’s educational work see pp. 82-84 of STELLA P., *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco,*  Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, Roma 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
480. BOSCO G., *Cenni storici…,* in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit., pp. 56-58 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
481. This “radical” perspective often emerges from the expressions that Fr Lemoyne attributes to Don Bosco in his *Biographical Memoirs*. “your eternal salvation. This is not only the main reason-it is the only reason why I am here.” ( v. 7, p. 303). “ A priest is always a priest, and such he must always appear in speaking. To be a priest means to be duty bound constantly to further God's interests, the salvation of souls.” (v. 3, p. 55). See also: v. 3, p. 100; v. 4, p. 203; v. 5, pp. 297, 428, 620; v. 6, pp. 203, 621, 636… [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
482. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali…,* cit., p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
483. BOSCO G., *Cenni storici…,* in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit., p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
484. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870),* LAS, Roma 1980, pp. 159-174. The seventh chapter of this text, from which the pages I have quoted are taken, corresponds to a historical study on *I giovani degli oratori festivi a Torino* (1841-1870). [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
485. For an overview of religious observances in Turin in the first half of the nineteenth century, see STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, LAS, Roma 1981, pp. 275-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
486. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia …*, v. 2, cit., pp. 303-309. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
487. Cf. GIANOTTI S. , *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco,* edited by the Istituto Storico Salesiano, LAS, Roma 1995, pp. 12-13. Please note that the term ‘edition’ should be understood in a different context from today’s; sometimes it refers simply to reprints, perhaps with a change of publisher. The complete title, from the first edition onwards, is *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell’Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de’ principali Vespri dell’anno coll’aggiunta di laudi sacre ecc.,* Tipografia Paravia e Comp., Torino 1847. The most comprehensive study of this manual, which has been reprinted and revised several times since the second half of the 20th century, is by STELLA P., *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco,*  Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, Roma 1960. On the practices of piety at Valdocco see STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, LAS, Roma 1981, p. 303-309. Don Bosco’s work as a writer (or compiler) and his apostolic commitment to *good press,* In line with the educational content assimilated at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, it began as early as 1844 with the publication of the *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo* mentioned earlier, and *I sette dolori di Maria considerati in forma di meditazione*; the following year saw the first edition of the *Storia Ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole* e *Il Divoto dell’Angelo Custode;* in 1846 he published the *Esercizio di divozione alla Misericordia di Dio, L’Enologo Italiano*  and *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S.Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno alla vita del Santo*; in the same year as *Il Giovane Provveduto* he also publishd the *Regolamento della Compagnia San Luigi* (cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., pp. 11-15). [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
488. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., pp. 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
489. Cf. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali…,* cit., pp. 21-45. In these pages, the author examines some fundamental characteristics of ascetic literature for young people in eighteenth-century Piedmont. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
490. Entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto* it was published by SEI for the last time in 1949; Ten years later, with a few changes, it was published as *In preghiera. Manuale di pietà ispirato al Giovane Provveduto di San Giovanni Bosco* edited by the Centro Compagnie Gioventù Salesiana. Some other editions followed up until 1970, but were increasingly different from the original (cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., pp. 12-13. 46). [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
491. This is *La figlia cristiana provveduta per la pratica de’ suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell’Uffizio della B.V., de’ Vespri di tutto l’anno e dell’Uffizio de’ morti coll’aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1878. Until 1888 there were 28 editions of this manual (cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., p. 36). [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
492. BARBERIS G., *Cronichetta autografa,* 27/11/1878 in ACS A 000.02.06 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
493. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
494. The canonical approval of the association is evidenced in the draft regulations kept in the Generalate Archives. The relevant microfiche can be found in the Don Bosco Fund (hereinafter referred to as FdB). The *Fondo Don Bosco* consists of microfiche documents relating to Don Bosco and the beginnings of the Salesian Congregation, created in 1980 to allow scholars from all over the world to access the sources preserved in the Salesian Central Archives. Each microfiche contains 60 frames (5 rows and 12 columns). The card is marked with a number, the row with a letter (from A to E) and the column with a number (from 1 to 12). The *Fondo Don Bosco* was expanded in 1996 by the so-called *Fondo Don Rua* (FdR), which contains several other documents relating to Don Bosco, but above all those relating to Don Rua and Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, co-founder of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The microfiche we refer to here is number 1869 of the *Fondo Don Bosco*, row D, frames 4 to 11 (abbreviated as FdB 1869 D 4-11). The manuscript, written in part by Don Bosco himself, is countersigned by Archbishop Franzoni, then Archbishop of Turin, and bears the date 12 April 1847 (cf. also BM v. 3, p. 148). These regulations, with some additions and amendments, were later appended to the booklet. *Le sei domeniche e la novena in onore di San Luigi Gonzaga,* already mentioned, in the 1878 edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
495. For a more detailed historical overview of the life and role of the *sodalities* see STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit. pp. 346-357. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
496. BM v. 4, p. 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
497. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864, pp. 113-114 [my emph.]. [Tr. Note: the English text can be found in *Salesian Sources I*.] [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
498. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
499. Cf. BM v. 1, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
500. BM v. 4, p. 476. This testimony by Lemoyne places it in 1858.. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
501. Fr Gioacchino Berto (1847-1914) was Don Bosco’s secretary for about twenty years. For some more detailed biographical data see VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* ed. Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, Scuola Grafica Salesiana, Torino 1969, pp. 38-39. I will have more to say about him in this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
502. SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIONE, *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco. Positio super introductione causae. Summarium et Literae Postulatoriae,* Schola Tip. Salesiana, Romae 1907, pp. 378-379. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
503. Accepted at the age of twelve into the Turin oratory in 1856, Fr Cerruti (1844-1917) was part of the first nucleus of the Salesian congregation that gathered around Don Bosco on 15 December 1859. He was Rector, Provincial and, from 1885, also General Councillor of the congregation. (cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit., p. 82). [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
504. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium et Literae Postulatoriae,* Romae 1907, p. 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
505. We read from the fifth edition in1878, entitled *La più bella delle virtù*: “How can I allow myself to be led to commit this sin in the presence of God, God the Creator, God the Saviour, God who in an instant can take my life, as he did to the first person who committed this kind of sin? ... I believe it is impossible that anyone who turns to God in such dangers should be overcome by temptation. We will see that the same “strategy” is suggested to Salesians as a positive means of preserving the virtue of chastity. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
506. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
507. Benedictine Fr Salvatore Marsili a few years ago described the nineteenth century as the period of greatest liturgical decline in the modern age, characterised by the proliferation of private devotions. (cf. MARSILI S., “Storia del movimento liturgico italiano dalle origini all’Enciclica ‘Mediator Dei’, in ROUSSEAU O., *Storia del movimento liturgico,* Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1961, pp. 263-369). [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
508. As I have already mentioned, this is one of the most characteristic elements of Alphonsian-inspired anti-Jansenism (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., Pp. 299-303). [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
509. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., pp. 305-306. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
510. Regarding this see VALENTINI E., *La pedagogia eucaristica di S. Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
511. VALENTINI E., *Don Bosco e Sant’Alfonso,* Casa Editrice S. Alfonso, Pagani (SA) 1972, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
512. This is taken from the first article of the *rules* for the Sodality, as reported by Fr Lemoyne in MB v. 3, p. 759-780 [not included in the English translation]. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
513. The brief work of St Alphonsus entitled *Visita al S. Sacramento e alla SS. Vergine* (1745-48?; cf. LIÉVIN G., “Alphonse de Liguori (Saint)”, in DSp, v. 1. col. 367) and other similar ones, such as *Pensieri e affetti devoti per le visite al SS. Sacramento* (1750) had contributed greatly to the spread of Eucharistic devotion. Carlo Keusch explains: “It was not Alphonsus who introduced into the Church the pious custom of *visiting* the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. All pious souls, all the saints of God have nourished their faith and increased their strength there. However, it is to our Saint that we owe the merit of having given a precise form to this holy practice with his very affectionate and classic *Visits*. And now that they had a fixed form, he assigned them a specific place and time during the day and in the plan of all the works ordered to perfection. *Just as devotion to Mary took on a popular form through the Rosary and the practice of the Way of the Cross was spread by St. Leonard of Porto Maurizio, so Alphonsus, with his Visits, contributed very effectively to promoting the adoration and worship of the Saviour hidden under the veil of bread*. “Taste and see how sweet the Lord is!” (KEUSCH K., *La dottrina spirituale di sant'Alfonso Maria de' Liguori,* Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1931, p. 413). [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
514. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega,* Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, Torino 1844, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
515. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto,* cit., p. 103. The *Memorie Biografiche* attribute to Don Bosco several exhortations to this simple confidence that turns into a prayer of supplication: “Do you want Our Lord to grant you many graces? Visit Him often. Do you want Him to grant you only a few? Visit Him but seldom.” (v. 8, p. 32). “People sweat and toil to make money, and yet in the tabernacle dwells the Lord of the universe. He will grant you what you ask, if you really need it. Do you need health? Memory? Intelligence? Do you need strength to carry your cross, help to overcome temptations? Is your family threatened by misfortune, afflicted by sickness, in need of a particular favor? On whom do your family possessions depend? Who controls wind and rain, storms and seasons? Isn't Our Lord Jesus Christ Lord and Master of all? Go to Him then. Ask and it shall be given you; knock and it shall be opened to you! Jesus longs to grant you favors, especially those you need for your soul. (v. 6, p. 171). “Let all promote frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament as an effective means-rather, as the only means-of averting the many calamities, public and private, which threaten us this year.” (v. 9, p. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
516. BOSCO G., *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S.Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del Santo,* Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, Torino 1846, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
517. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps …*, cit., p. 248. According to Fr Lemoyne, Don Bosco had known the ascetical works of St Alphonsus since his adolescence (cf. BM v. 1, p. 353). [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
518. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…,* cit., pp. 104-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
519. Cf. ALFONSO MARIA DE’ LIGUORI, *Opere ascetiche,* v. 1, Marietti, Torino 1845, pp. 371-372. The prayer is found in the bbrief work *Visita al SS. Sacramento ed a Maria SS. per ciascun giorno del mese.* [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
520. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* n. 234. The Italian translation came from the *Autografo* of St Ignatius (cf. *Gli scritti di Ignazio di Loyola* ed. Mario Gioia, UTET, Torino 1977, pp. 149-150). [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
521. Cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit., pp. 76-77. This first attempt to publish Don Bosco’s writings, enriched by the editor’s studies and considerations, was followed by the monumental work edited by the Centro Studi Don Bosco of the Pontifical Salesian University and published by LAS in 1976-77 (37 volumes of facsimile reprints of the originals) and 1987 (contributions to newspapers and periodicals in typographic form). [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
522. CAVIGLIA A., *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco. Nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti. A cura della Pia Società Salesiana* , v. 6, SEI, Torino 1965, pp. 191-192 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
523. BM v. 3, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
524. BM v. 3, p. 152-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
525. There are very many quotes we could look at. For now just referring to the MB in Italian, see for example, MB v. 3, pp. 537ff. 603ff; v. 4, pp. 122ff; v. 4, pp. 178ff. 474ff; v. 5, pp. 62, 215ff. 925ff; v. 6, pp. 513, 892ff; v. 7, pp. 419, 647ff; v. 8, 473; v. 10, pp. 31. 49; v. 12, pp. 138. 163ff; v. 13, pp. 419ff. 752. A page of Fr Lemoyne’s, referring to 1860, tells us that in that year, in addition to the three days of introduction and preparation for Easter, the regulations for the boarding section already included five full days of retreat. However, with regard to educational institutions, this practice was in line with the regulations in force for public schools. (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, p. 335). [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
526. Cf. BOSCO G., *Cenno storico…,* in BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani…,* cit., p. 50. According to Fr Lemoyne, however, the 1848 retreat was preached by the Canon of Rivoli, Fr Giuseppe Gliemone, and by Fr Borel. (cf. BM v. 3, p. 297). The fact that Fr Lemoyne also describes the experiences of July 1849 (cf. v. 3, p. 537; In relation to this change, we also have a handwritten list entitled “Giovani che fecero gli esercizi spirituali la prima settimana di luglio 1849” [Young people who made the retreat in the first week of July 1849]), dated December of the same year (cf. v. 3, p. 465) and 1850 (cf. v. 4, p. 78), makes the dating more controversial; in any case, from my point of view, the question is of relative importance. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
527. MO pp. 188-189 [181]. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
528. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* SEI, Torino 1929, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
529. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
530. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., pp. 48-49 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
531. Cf. BM v. 3, p. 377 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
532. Cf. BM v. 4, p. 78 ff. In 1860, the diocesan junior seminary in Giaveno was entrusted to the newly formed Salesian Society, which committed some of its resources to it, even though it did not have overall responsibility. However, this first “external” experience came to an end two years later due to some misunderstandings with the Turin curia (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 610-613). [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
533. BM v. 4, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
534. BM v. 4, p. 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
535. BM v. 7, p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
536. BM v. 7, pp. 511-512. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
537. Cf. MB v. 7, p. 421. [This is not included in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
538. These authors are among those who, in 1880, were recommended to the Salesians during the first General Chapter of the congregation for retreat preparation; the list was attached to the documents of the second (Cf. *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1882, p. 67). [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
539. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 336 [my emph.]. See also pp. 335-341. These few pages, rich and well documented, are one of the few scientific contributions to the historical and spiritual study of the *exercises* in Don Bosco’s educational experience. Given the importance given by the founder to this particular stage of the journey of education in the faith, the subject deserves, in my opinion, much more attention; the only more extensive study dates back some twenty-five years. It consists of the proceedings of an international symposium: BROCARDO P. – CAPITANIO I. [ed.], *Il rinnovamento degli esercizi spirituali,* Elle Di Ci, Torino- Leumann 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
540. PICCA J., *La meditazione nel pensiero e nella prassi di Don Bosco* in “Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana” 2 (1985) p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
541. BM v. 4, p. 556. This meditation was not required, according to the regulations, for artisans. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
542. [SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIO], *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Dominici Savio adolescentis laici alumni oratorii salesiani. Summarium super dubio,* Taurinen 1926, p. 202 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
543. *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Dominici Savio… Summarium super dubio,* cit., p. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
544. PICCA J., *La meditazione nel pensiero e nella prassi di Don Bosco…,* cit., p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
545. ACS B 509.03.01. The canonical novitiate officially began after the final approval of the constitutions in 1874. From that year onwards, and for about a quarter of a century, Fr Giulio Barberis (1847-1927) was the novice director. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
546. See, for example, the well-known text of S Alphonsus, *Apparecchio alla morte ovvero considerazioni sulle verità eterne. Utili a tutti per meditare e ai sacerdoti per predicare* from 1758 which, as we shall see, was recommended by Don Bosco to young people in *The Companion of Youth*. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
547. There is no proof of any direct dependence on the Ignatian text. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
548. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…,* cit., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
549. He we can note that the 1885 edition added, among others, *Alcune massime ricavate dagli scritti di San Francesco di Sales* (cf. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali...,* cit., p. 12). Among these we read: “Nothing serves to enlighten the intellect and spark the will as much as prayer, especially mental prayer, coming from the heart.” ([BOSCO G.], Il Giovane Provveduto…, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1885, p. 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
550. The text was published in Rome in 1833 and by Marietti in Turin in 1844. The version here instead is from 1847: ZAMA MELLINI G., *Gesù al cuore del giovane. Con aggiunta di un metodo per fare l’orazione mentale. Modo per ascoltare con frutto la S. Messa. Un breve apparecchio alla S. Confessione e Comunione. Adorazione alle sacratissime piaghe di Gesù Cristo. Suppliche a San Luigi Gonzaga ecc.* Tipografia Guglielmone, Vercelli 1847. It contains an initial addition which outlines the “short and easy method of mental prayer, already proposed by St Francis de Sales, in order to practise it fruitfully.” (p. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
551. Cf. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tip. Italiana di F.Martinengo e Comp., Torino 18602, pp. 100-104. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
552. Other topics covered include: the end (of man), death, judgement, hell, sin (2 meditations), relapse, pride, impurity (2 meditations), familiarity, scandal, sacrilegious communion, human respect, companions, books, idleness, entertainment, faith, hope, love of God, love of neighbour, venial sin, coldness, mortification, humility and meekness, obedience, frequent reception of the sacraments, choice of state, paradise. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
553. ZAMA MELLINI G., *Gesù al cuore del giovane…,* cit., p. 6-7 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
554. ZAMA MELLINI G., *Gesù al cuore del giovane…,* cit., p. 8 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
555. ZAMA MELLINI G., *Gesù al cuore del giovane…,* cit., p. 9-10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
556. Cf. BM v. 5, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
557. FdB 446 A 3 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
558. FdB 445 E 12 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
559. Cf. ACS A 225.04.03; cf. MB v. 9, p. 997 [Omitted in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
560. Cf. ACS A 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
561. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali …,* cit., p. 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
562. The question of Don Bosco’s dreams is rather complex. Are they dreams, visions or supernatural communications, or simply edifying stories? This is not the place to open such a debate. In any case, my attention here focuses on the teaching contained in this story of Don Bosco, as reported to us by Fr Lemoyne. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
563. The account occupies some fifteen pages in the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. v. 9, pp. 85-99). [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
564. BM v. 9, pp. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
565. This is one of the most characteristic traditions of the early Salesian environment, which is still reflected in today’s practice. In the evening, after the traditional prayers of a good Christian, Don Bosco ended the day with a spiritual thought, an edifying story, a warning or an exhortation. There are several studies and collections of these spiritual thoughts; see, for example, BOSCO G., *La “Buona Notte”,* ed. CERIA E., Morcelliana, Brescia 1951; BOSCO G., *Buona notte,* ed. PEDRINI A:, Esse Gi Esse, Roma 1981. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
566. Cf. *Primo piano di regolamento per la Casa annessa all’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* del 1854*,*  in BM v. 4, p. 545. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
567. WEYERGANS F., *Mistici del nostro tempo,* Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1960, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
568. [BOSCO G.], *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1878, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
569. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco nella vita spirituale*, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1970, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
570. BM v. 4, p. 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
571. BM v. 3, p. 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
572. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…*, cit., p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
573. FdB 1868 D 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
574. ACS A 220.06.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
575. ACS A 225.04.03; cf. MB v. 9, p. 997. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
576. See, for example, Il *Giovane Provveduto* from 1847 or *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata* from 1858. [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
577. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi*, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1868, pp. 191-192. The text is followed by several pages of ejaculations, suggested for different circumstances in life, all taken from Sacred Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
578. STELLA P., *Valori spiriutali…,* cit., p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
579. Don Bosco says, for example, in the introduction entitled *To the young*: “… I have drawn up a scheme of life, brief and easy enough, which will enable you to be a joy to your parents, and a glory to your country, making you good citizens upon earth, and one day blessed inhabitants of Heaven.” Fr Stella (almost forty years ago now) used this statement to support his hypothesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
580. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…*, cit., p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
581. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
582. Cf. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali…,* cit., p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
583. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 535 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
584. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo …,* cit., pp. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
585. BOSCO G., *Cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue virtù, scritti dal sacerdote Bosco Giovanni suo collega,* Tipografia P. De Agostini, Torino 1854, pp. 7-8 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
586. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* n. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
587. In the introduction to *The Companion of Youth* Don Bosco says: “There are two main snares by which the devil usually tempts young people away from virtue. The first is to convince them that the service of the Lord consists in living a life of melancholy, devoid of all pleasure and enjoyment. This is not the case, my dear friends. I would like to teach you a kind of Christian life that will make you happy and contented. I want to show you what true enjoyment and pleasure is, so that you may follow the advice of the holy prophet David: “Serve the Lord with gladness: *servite Domino in laetitia*.” This, then, is the purpose of the present book: to teach you how to serve God and to be always happy.” ([BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…,* cit., p. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
588. [BOSCO G.], *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859, pp. 9-10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
589. We will see, however, that the “proposal” made to the Salesians underwent a certain evolution, linked probably not so much to a growing awareness on the part of the founder of the role of prayer in religious life, but also to a skilful application of the principle of gradualness. [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
590. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., pp. 20-21.22.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
591. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
592. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco…,* cit., p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
593. Biographies of Savio, Michele Magone and Francesco Besucco were also translated into French, German (Savio) and Spanish (Magone) during the last years of Don Bosco's life (1878-1888). The biography of the young Frenchman *Louis Fleury Antoine Colle,* published for the first time in France in 1882 and translated into German five years later, was only translated into Italian in 1961. (cf. STELLA P., *Gli scritti a stampa di S. Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1977, pp. 61-79). [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
594. In Savio’s spiritual experience, in particular, we can recognise the traits of a mystical experience, as we will see when discussing his biography. [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
595. Iwill not examine here some other less relevant biographical accounts, such as *Angelina o l’orfanella degli Appennini pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1869, which was published only once and will not even include the biographical notes on St Aloysius Gonzaga in *Le sei domeniche …* mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
596. The immediate reference is to Louis Comollo. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
597. CAVIGLIA A., *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco…,* cit., v. 5, SEI, Torino 1965, p. 28. I also share the regret and expectations expressed by the author, who died in 1943, in a note found at the end of the previous quotation: “A desire, which was an intention, of those who attend to these studies, would be to construct a synthetic study that would encompass in a single glance and in a single conception the work of Don Bosco, Pedagogue of Holiness: the Spiritual Pedagogy of Don Bosco the Saint! The essential part, and, I may say, the substance, is already contained in the Special Studies conducted on the Lives of Savio, Besucco and, in part, Magone: it would suffice to draw up a systematic exposition, summarising and ordering what has already been said here and there, with appropriate references to the other writings and speeches of the Saint. This is no easy task, and it requires some study, but it is all the more glorious for Don Bosco and finally resolves the many conflicting issues that his person as “Patriarch of Christian education” has raised and continues to raise among scholars. Since I cannot hope to have the time or opportunity to do so, I entrust this task to others, hoping that my modest thoughts will be confirmed. A *S.cti Iohannis Bosco Paedagogia Spiritualis* would be useful (and even necessary?) for a full understanding of Don Bosco and his personality in the history of the Church.” [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
598. In the years between the two wars, the Benedictine Henri Quentin raised serious doubts about the historical accuracy of Savio’s biography and the credibility of Don Bosco himself and the witnesses to the cause for beatification. Some variations introduced by Don Bosco in the account of the young man’s death, which in some expressions echoed the biographies of St Aloysius Gonzaga, raised serious doubts; it was also claimed that the witnesses were too dependent on that popular biography. Caviglia responded energetically to these objections. On this question, Pietro Stella’s position seems very balanced when he states: “(Don Bosco) ... certainly did not have the soul of a forger. He jealously preserved, along with many other things, even the most varied testimonies relating to Dominic Savio. But it is an indisputable fact that he was, so to speak, free to use facts and words in accordance with what he was able to express according to rules of language that are not those of the learned culture that prevailed in the Western world” (STELLA P., “Le ricerche su Don Bosco nel venticinquennio 1960‑1985: bilancio, problemi e prospettive”, in ISS, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze*, ed. Pietro Braido, LAS, Roma 1987). Historical criticism has raised and continues to raise doubts about certain aspects of these biographies, as we have already seen in some previous notes on the subject of the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and the *Biographical Memoirs*. Fr Desramaut, for example, in the latest biography of the saint, referring to the story of a nocturnal apparition of Comollo’s soul in the dormitory of the seminary in Chieri, speaks of an “auditory hallucination”, prompted by the desire to receive news about his friend’s eternal salvation (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 115). [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
599. FdB 1868 D 5; cf. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico…,* cit., p.83 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
600. FdB 1868 D 6; cf. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico …,*cit., p. 77 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
601. The introduction to the Life of Magone makes reference to the young man’s great desire to read the *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico* which Don Bosco was writing at that time: “One of you who was anxiously awaiting the printing of the life of Dominic Savio was Michael Magone.... He only had time to read a few pages of this life before the Lord brought his mortal life to an end.…”. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
602. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864, pp115-116 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
603. I will, of course, only consider comments that refer directly or indirectly to our topic. [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
604. CAVIGLIA A., “Nota preliminare ai «Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo»” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* cit., v. 5, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
605. The fourth edition of 1884, the most heavily revised according to Fr Caviglia’s hypothesis, was edited by Fr Bonetti, but certainly also revised by Don Bosco.(CAVIGLIA A., “Nota preliminare ai «Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo»” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* cit., v. 5, pp. 16-19). Caviglia confidently states: “There is nothing that is not Don Bosco’s or that he did not want” (p. 19). In the second edition, some additions and variations were introduced which clearly show Don Bosco’s intention to present *to everyone*, in the life of the young Comollo, a true model of Christian virtues; the third edition of 1867 is substantially unchanged from the previous one. In my quotations, in this as in other biographies, I will mainly use the first edition; any significant changes or additions in subsequent editions that are relevant to the topic will be noted. I would like to emphasise once again that the 1854 edition also differs in its title (the word “cleric” is replaced by “young man”). [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
606. CAVIGLIA A., “Nota preliminare ai «Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo»” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* cit., v. 5, p. 9 [my emp.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
607. CAVIGLIA A., “Nota preliminare ai «Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo»”…*,* cit., v. 5, p. 10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
608. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo …,* cit., p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
609. As we shall see, this is a constant feature in the biographies of young people written by Don Bosco. [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
610. BOSCO G., *Nuovi cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo. Morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù,* Tipografia e libreria salesiana, Torino 18844, pp. 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
611. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo …,* cit., p. 10 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
612. BOSCO G., *Nuovi cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo…,* cit., p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
613. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
614. BOSCO G., *Nuovi cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo…,* cit., p. 41 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
615. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
616. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., pp. 36-37 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
617. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., pp. 22- 23 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
618. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., pp. 33-34 [my emph.]. Don Bosco shows himself capable of *discerning* the spiritual movements of his companion. Note that his reserved temperament, already mentioned, prompts him to advise his companion to avoid manifestations that might *catch the eye of others;* but what emerges clearly is the great consideration he has for these ‘phenomena’ and his ability to recognise spiritual *consolation* in them. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
619. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
620. It is 1838, the year before Comollo’s death. Don Bosco is 23 years old at the time, about two years older than his friend. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
621. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo…,* cit., pp. 47-48 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
622. BOSCO G., *Nuovi cenni storici sulla vita del giovane Luigi Comollo…* , cit., pp. 68-69 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
623. Cf. GIANOTTI S., *Bibliografia generale…,* cit., p. 12. Fr Stella informs us that the main source used by the author is the booklet by Fr Pasquale De Mattei entitled *Considerazioni per celebrare con frutto le sei domeniche e la novena in onore di s. Luigi Gonzaga della Compagnia di Gesù,* the first edition of which, printed in Rome, dates back to 1766 (cf. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali…,* cit., p. 70). On the same question see also DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit. pp. 233-234. [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
624. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto…,* cit., p. 69 [my emph.]. In 1846, Speirani e Ferrero printing house in Turin published the first anonymous edition, which I was unable to locate. I have reproduced here the version that appeared the following year in *Il giovane provveduto.* [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
625. [BOSCO G.], *Le sei domeniche e la novena in onore di San Luigi Gonzaga cool’ Infensus ed alcune lodi sacre,* Tip. dir. da P. De Agostini, Torino 1854, pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
626. [BOSCO G.], *Le sei domeniche…,* cit., p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
627. Cf. BM v. 16, p. 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
628. ACS A 225.07.07 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
629. Dominic Savio was beatified and canonised by Pius XII in 1950 and 1954 respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
630. In the second edition, published the following year, the author made some corrections, partly in response to comments made at the oratory about the events narrated (cf. MB v. 6, pp. 146-149), and added an appendix *sulle grazie ottenute per sua intercessione.* The third edition in 1861 established the text almost definitively, which remained essentially unchanged, except for a couple of additions and some stylistic touches, in the subsequent editions of 1866, 1878 and 1880. (cf. CAVIGLIA A., “La vita di Savio Domenico scritta da Don Bosco” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* v. 4, cit., pp. XI-XII). However, in relation to our topic, there are no significant variations; I will therefore only mention the first edition of 1859. [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
631. Fr Caviglia describes this booklet as “one of the few books by Don Bosco written without the aid of books.” “Here,” he explains, “there are no books involved; the source is the writer himself, who saw the events and was often inspired by them, and the programme is what he wants to give substance to his idea. Here there is only Don Bosco, all and only Don Bosco’. (CAVIGLIA A., “La vita di Savio Domenico scritta da Don Bosco” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* v. 4, cit. pp. XXII-XXIII). [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
632. CAVIGLIA A., “La vita di Savio Domenico…, cit., p. XXXVIII. I note here that the object of my considerations is not, directly, Savio’s spiritual experience but rather Don Bosco’s reinterpretation of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
633. This is what Fr Francesco Cerruti, a Salesian, testified at the process for Savio’s beatification: “I also remember hearing from Fr Trione that, while he was with the Venerable D. Bosco in Albano Laziale, while he was correcting the proofs of a new edition of the life of the Servant of God Don Bosco, he said to him: ‘I can never think of Savio’s life and attend to the correction of the proofs without weeping with emotion at the thought of him. I also know that Venerable Don Bosco wrote the lives of Louis Comollo, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco; yet reading these lives to those who knew Savio and knew the others did not produce the same attraction and special esteem that was shown towards the Servant of God. This was because in Savio they recognised something extraordinary, while in others ones who were simply good and virtuous young people.” (*Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Dominici Savio … Summarium super dubio,* cit., pp. 395-396). The records of the canonical processes repeatedly refer, after the testimonies relating to each charge, to the pages of Don Bosco’s biography, which often confirm or summarise them. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
634. CAVIGLIA A., “La vita di Savio Domenico … , cit., p. XXIV [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
635. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tip. G.B.Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859, p. 62 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
636. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico ….,* cit., p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
637. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, LAS, Roma 1981, p. 478. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
638. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
639. Cf. LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,*  Ed. Massimo, Milano 1969, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
640. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico…,* cit., pp. 70-71 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
641. CAVIGLIA A., “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* v. 4, cit., p. 394. This lengthy study by Caviglia (610 pages) is the only systematic approach to Savio's biography that I am aware of. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
642. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico …,* cit., p. 94 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
643. *Ibidem* [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
644. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico …*, cit., p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
645. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
646. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico …*, cit., p. 97 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
647. Cf. *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Dominici Savio… Summarium super dubio,* cit., pp. 125. 128. 132. 149. 190. 194. 195… [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
648. CAVIGLIA A., “Savio Domenico e Don Bosco” in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti…,* v. 4, cit., pp.589-590 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
649. For this and other information in this small biography see the study by CAVIGLIA A, *Il “Magone Michele”. Una classica esperienza educativa,* in “Salesianum” (1949) pp. 450-481. 588-614. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
650. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1861, pp. 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
651. Cf. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele…,* cit., pp. 24-29. This *Capo V* titled *Una parola alla gioventù* is a true catechesis on the sacrament of penance, inspired by Magone’s experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
652. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele…,* cit., pp. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
653. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele…,* cit., p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
654. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio San Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio San Francesco di Sales, Torino 18662, p. 26 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
655. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele…,* cit., p. 31 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
656. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele…,* cit., p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
657. Corporal penances were forbidden at the oratory, and Don Bosco made sure that no one, without his consent, undertook impossible tasks. Nevertheless, Besucco secretly decided not to cover himself at night during the winter, fell ill and then became a victim of his own imprudence. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
658. The biographies of Savio and Michael Magone, on the other hand, took longer to complete. Magone’s was published about two years after his death. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
659. In 1864, the biography was published by two different publishers. There are few differences between the second edition of 1878 and the third edition, which is identical to the second. As with other biographies, there is some question as to the historical accuracy of the events narrated. In the preface, Don Bosco informs us of the “sources” he used: “Some of you might question whether what I have written really happened. Briefly this is how I went about it. I collected information from the parish priest, the school teacher, his parents and his friends about the years that Francis spent at home; you could almost say that I have simply rewritten and rearranged what they sent me. For the time he spent with us it was simply a matter of collecting the information from many witnesses; these testimonies were written and signed by the witnesses themselves.” In any case, let me say once more that the historical issue is secondary for me. My aim is, in fact, to understand the author0s thinking and the role of prayer in the model of holiness proposed to his young people. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
660. BRAIDO P., “Due biografie” in BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù,* La Scuola Editrice, Brescia 1965, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
661. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco di Argentera,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864, pp. 43-44 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
662. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
663. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., pp. 117-118 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
664. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 52 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
665. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
666. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 119 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
667. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 67 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
668. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 31 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
669. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
670. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
671. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., pp. 111-112 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
672. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 118 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
673. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
674. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., pp. 66-67 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
675. Cf. BM v. 15, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
676. BOSCO G., *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle,* Imprimerie Salésienne, Turin 1882, p. 40 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
677. *Ibidem* [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
678. Cf. FdB 1868 E 2. These are the minutes of the promise made in the *Immaculate Conception Sodality,* of which cleric Michael Rua would be the first president (cf. BM v.5, p. 313). Rua was nineteen years old, Cagliero and Bonetti eighteen, Durando sixteen, while Savio was only fourteen. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
679. Cf. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis direttore spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, San Benigno Canavese 1932, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
680. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 26 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
681. Don Bosco’s literary activity, which began in the wake of his commitment to the apostolate of the good press, one of the cornerstones of the educational project of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, reached its most fruitful period during these years. Considering only the first editions and leaving out the pamphlets of a few pages or official documents, there are some fifty-five titles, compared to thirty in the previous period (1844-1857) and twelve in the following period (1875-1888). The calculation was made based on ISS, *Bibliografia generale.*.., cit. pp. 11-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
682. For an initial approach to the figure of Don Bosco as founder of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the following two contributions can be consulted: POSADA M. E., “The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in relation to Don Bosco”, in MIDALI M. (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia. Atti del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1990, pp. 217-229; DELEIDI A., “Don Bosco e Maria Domenica Mazzarello: rapporto storico-spirituale”, in MIDALI M: (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia…,* cit., pp. 205-216. The same content can also be found in two articles by the same authors in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco fondatore della famiglia salesiana. Atti del Simposio. Roma-Salesianum (22-26 gennaio 1989),* ed. MIDALI M., Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989. Henceforth I will use the abbreviation DpFS to indicate the Dicastero per la Famiglia Salesiana. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
683. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’«Oratorio». Una «Congregazione degli Oratori». Documenti,* LAS, Roma 1988, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
684. BM. 4, p. 294 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
685. This seems to be the perspective of historian Fr Francis Desramaut in his contribution “Don Bosco fondatore” in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore… ,* cit., pp. 113-145. For example, on p. 114 he writes: “Every founder is an actor. He innovates in the history of the Church with the creation – successful or not – of a religious society that did not exist before him. But this actor is first and foremost a man with a particular nature and personal history which inevitably leave their mark on the new foundation. It seems likely to me that the absence of a father and the concomitant presence of a tyrannical half-brother in the Bosco family favoured the establishment of this immense substitute family for boys called the Salesian society.” Desramaut attributes many other things to the absence of a father, such as the constant search for a spiritual director or the same attitude of loyalty to the Pope. (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* pp. 15. 1072). In reality, in my opinion, such an analysis risks appearing superficial if it does not take into account the complexity of Don Bosco’s motivational universe. Remaining within the realm of experimental psychology, the “absence of a father” does not *necessarily* determine deficiencies in psycho-affective development. (cf. DACQUINO G., *La psicologia di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1988, p. 28). Don Bosco’s personality, for example, shows no *insecurity* in decision-making or *fragility* in the sphere of will power; phenomena characteristic of dynamic psychology linked to certain emotional deficiencies and, in particular, to the absence of a father figure. [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
686. MO p. 37[60]. [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
687. BM v. 7, p. 36 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
688. Cf. MO p. 34-37[58-60]. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
689. On 16 May 1887, the day after the consecration of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, assisted by his secretary at the time, Fr Carlo Viglietti. During the celebration, he was moved to tears several times and had to pause. The story, recounted by Don Eugenio Ceria in volume eighteen of the *Biographical Memoirs* (pp. 340-341) is still recalled today by a small plaque at the left of the altar. 37. “Who is there that would not like to know the cause of such emotion? “ Fr Ceria says. “When Father Viglietti realised 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.” Fr Desramaut, in his recent biography of Don Bosco, dedicates two lines to the same event; the facts are also interpreted here (it would be futile to attempt to recount them in a completely neutral, objective manner), but in a completely different light: “Le 16 mai il célébra sans éclat la messe dans le nouveau temple à l'autel de Marie auxiliatrice avec une émotion très compréhensible. Il pleurait en se remémorant son enfance paysanne. Puis il rentra à Turin avec ses deux prêtres” (DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, pp. 1324-1325) [my emp.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
690. Ramon Alberdi notes that none of those early collaborators, however, would later profess in the Society of Saint Francis de Sales. (cf. ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 159). [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
691. The first draft regulation reported by the *Biographical Memoirs* is traced back by Fr Lemoyne to 1853 (cf. BM v. 4, pp. 542-559). [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
692. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale,* LAS, Roma 1980, p. 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
693. FdB 1989 C 10. This is a handwritten note, probably written after Don Bosco's death. (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 390). Of these four young men, only Rua and Cagliero remained *Salesians*. [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
694. Fr Vittorio Alasonatti (1812-1865) was ordained in Turin in 1835. A past pupil of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, he was the only one of the *first group of disciples* who was older than the founder. He was involved in administration of the Oratory until his death (cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* a cura dell’Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, Scuola Grafica Salesiana, Torino 1969, pp. 11-12). [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
695. It was a position that essentially combined the roles of Vicar and Economer. [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
696. Giovanni Battista Francesia (1838-1930) from 1865 would be the spiritual director of the congregation. A humanist and man of letters (he published around seventy works), he was Provincial of two provinces, Veneto (until 1895) and Piedmont-Lombardy, from 1878 to 1902. He spent the last forty years of his life, after Don Bosco's death, in the mother house in Valdocco, an enthusiastic witness to the early days of the Salesian work (cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit., pp. 128-130). [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
697. BM v. 5, pp. 137-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
698. We have a report of this conversation written by Don Bosco himself and reproduced by Fr Giovanni Bonetti in *Cinque lustri di storia dell’Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1887. Rattazzi, then Minister of the Interior of the Sardinian government, suggested to Don Bosco that he found a *society* of free citizens for charitable purposes; this would allow each member to retain their civil rights in the face of the claims of any liberal state. We recall, in fact, that a law of 29 May 1855 had decreed the suppression of all religious congregations and the confiscation of their property (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 1, LAS, Roma 1979, pp. 129-138). [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
699. Cardinal Francesco Gaude (1809-1860) a Dominican, had been Provincial of Lombardy and Procurator General of the Order. [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
700. ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
701. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’«Oratorio». Una «Congregazione degli Oratori». Documenti,* LAS, Roma 1988, pp. 119-120. Fr Alberdi writes: “It is difficult to know precisely what was discussed during the audiences granted by Pius IX to Don Bosco on 9 March and 6 April 1858. This is because there was no other interlocutor apart from Don Bosco himself, who was always keen to demonstrate to everyone that the paternity of his religious congregation necessarily passed through Pope Pius IX, as he reminded His Holiness on more than one occasion: ‘Hujus operis tu fuisti suasor et impulsor’” (ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,*cit., p. 168). In any case, however, Pius IX was still alive and reigning when Don Bosco presented this memorandum to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars; therefore, I do not believe that its substance can reasonably be called into question. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
702. The manuscript is preserved in the Salesian Central Archives in folder A 022. For the dating of this manuscript, see the comments by Fr Francesco Motto. in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* LAS, Roma 1982, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
703. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
704. In the historical period I am considering, the two terms are to be regarded as synonymous. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
705. In addition to the texts by Stella and Desramaut, which have been cited several times, I will also draw on *Tavole Sinottiche: il tempo di Don Bosco* appendices to the DICASTERO PER LA FORMAZIONE, *Sussidi 1. Il tempo di Don Bosco*, Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1986 and chapters VIII and X of WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani. Centocinquant’anni di storia,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1970, pp. 94-104; 116-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
706. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica…,* cit., pp. 295-296. Of these three young men, only the first would die a Salesian. Fr Francesco Cerruti (1844-1917) would also become a member of the General Council in 1885. [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
707. Cf. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Canonica, Torino 1895, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
708. MO p. 119 [125]. [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
709. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 610-611. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
710. BONETTI G., *Annali III,* p. 2; cf. BM v. 7, p.102. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
711. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
712. Cf. BM v. 5, pp. 193, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
713. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani…,* cit., p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
714. I will come back to saying something about the question of the *novitiate,* the *extern members* and the *retreats* since they directly or indirectly affect this study. For an understanding of the main difficulties faced by the founder in response to the objections of the consultants, see the *Osservazioni sulle costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales e loro applicazione* in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit. pp. 245-247. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
715. ALBERDI R., “Don Bosco fondatore dei salesiani”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., pp. 191-192. [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
716. BOSCO G., *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco,* ed. CERIA E., SEI, Torino 1955*,* v. 2, p. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
717. BOSCO G., *Epistolario…,* (ed. CERIA E.), cit., v. 2, p. 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
718. In 1848, Don Bosco had published a newspaper entitled *L’amico della gioventù. Giornale politico-religioso,* which ceased to exist the following year. From 1853 Don Bosco was the enthusiastic promoter of the *Letture cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), a series of pocket-sized books publishing hagiographies, moral instruction booklets, stories and short apologetic treatises of a popular and informative nature. Distributed by subscription, together with a sort of annual almanac entitled *Il Galantuomo*, they were printed from 1862 onwards at the oratory's printing house. These publications were widely distributed. According to some printing notes from the then publisher Paravia, 82,500 volumes were printed in 1859; Fr Lemoyne claims that, starting in 1860, there were more than ten thousand subscribers and, from 1870 onwards, between twelve and fourteen thousand (cf. BM v. 4, p. 372). This and plenty of other information on the *Letture cattoliche* can be found in STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale…,* cit., pp. 351-368. [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
719. There are not many critical editions of his works available today. In some cases, there are even questions regarding their authenticity. Fr Francis Desramaut, in his *Don Bosco en son temps divides the published works into three groups*: 1. Publications signed or acknowledged by Don Bosco; 2. Those published anonymously but presented and, at least, checked and revised by Don Bosco; 3. Finally, those published anonymously, of uncertain origin but often attributed to Don Bosco. (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps,* cit., pp. 1369 ff). For this classification, he also draws on two bibliographic studies: the first is found in the work of RICALDONE P., *Don Bosco educatore,* SEI, Colle Don Bosco 1952, v. 2, pp. 631-650; the second is by STELLA P., *Gli scritti a stampa di S.Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1977. I will avoid using this third group of works, unless referred to in a footnote [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
720. The quote is taken from the first manuscript of the constitutions. (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
721. Frequent references are made in the pages of the *Biographical Memoirs* to this criterion of immediacy and simplicity chosen by Don Bosco as a priority in the writing of his works. The best-known anecdote is recounted in the second volume (p. 307), according to which Don Bosco had his writings “corrected” by the porter at the *Refuge* of the Marchioness Barolo, where he had served as spiritual director shortly after his ordination, in order to avoid any words or expressions that were difficult to understand. He himself reviewed the writings of his first disciples for this purpose. For example, he advised Fr Giulio Barberis: “Always keep your sentences short. When possible, break up a long sentence into two or three. short ones. A long sentence concluding with the verb is all right for other writers, but we who write for the common people must always avoid that construction. Some writers keep repeating themselves in different ways. They are amateurs. Once you have said something, go on promptly to another thought."(BM v. 13, p. 313-314). [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
722. FARINA R., "Gli scritti di Don Bosco” in *La formazione permanente interpella gli Istituti* religiosi, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1976, p. 355 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
723. AUBRY J., *Giovanni Bosco. Scritti spirituali,* Città Nuova, Roma 1976, pp. 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
724. His particular pedagogical “theory” emerges not only from his practice, but also from the few pages of the so-called *Trattatello* (called “Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù” in *Regolamento per le case di S. Francesco di Sales,* Tip. Salesiana, Torino 1877, pp. 3-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
725. CAVIGLIA A. (ed.), *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco. Nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti. A cura della Pia Società Salesiana*, v. 4, SEI, Torino 1965, p. XXXIX. [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
726. PACHO E., *Storia della spiritualità moderna,* Teresianum, Roma 1984, p 315. In addition to Don Bosco, Fr Pacho, Carmelite and professor of the History of Spirituality, lists among the mystics of this century Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824), Jacob Liberman (1804-1852), Ven. P. Colin (1790-1875), Bl. P. Eymard (1811-1868), Catherine Labouré (1796-1876), St. Anthony Mary Claret (1807-1870), Emmanuel D'Alzon (1810-1880), Blessed Elena Guerra (1835-1914), Bernadette Soubirous, St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897). [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
727. PACHO E., *Storia della spiritualità moderna,* cit., pp. 308-309. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
728. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella religiosità…,* cit., v. 2, p. 505. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
729. A careful reconstruction of the sources used by Don Bosco is a huge undertaking, given the vastness of the saint's literary output. An attempt at synthesis can be found in DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco e la vita spirituale,* LDC, Torino 1970, alle pp. 33-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
730. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi,* Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales*,* Torino 1868, p. VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
731. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità…,* v. 1, cit., p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
732. Cf. ISS, *Bibliografia generale…,*  cit., pp. 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
733. On the development of this practice of piety and on the sources used by Don Bosco to compose his *Mese di maggio* see STELLA P., *I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il “Mese di maggio” di don Bosco,* in “Salesianum” 20(1958) pp. 648-694; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 508-513. Fr Annibale Dionisi had published a pamphlet in Parma in 1726 entitled *Il mese di Maria o sia il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria coll’esercizio di vari fiori di virtù proposti ai veri divoti di lei.*. Several other Jesuits contributed to the spread of this pious practice of dedicating the day of flowers to Mary, including Fr Francesco Lalomia (†1789) and Fr Alfonso Muzzarelli (1749-1813). [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
734. These are, in particular, some of the characteristic topics of the *first week* in the Ignatian scheme of the exercises. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
735. BOSCO G., *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*, Tipografia G.B. Paravia, Torino 1858, pp. 71-72 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
736. BOSCO G., *Porta teco cristiano ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocché ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1858, p. 48. This book and the previous one belong to the first group, according to Desramaut's classification. [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
737. BOSCO G., *Porta teco cristiano…,* cit., p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
738. BOSCO G., *Il pontificato di S. Sisto II e le glorie di S. Lorenzo martire*, Tipografia G.B. Paravia Torino 1860, p. 75 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
739. Cf. BM v. 4, pp. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
740. MB v. 7, pp. 46-47 [No apparent reference to this in the English BM, v. 7]. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
741. Cf. ACS A 225.02.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-742)
742. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
743. *Ibidem* [my emph.]*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
744. ACS A 003.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
745. [BOSCO G.], *Il Galantuomo e le sue avventure. Almanacco nazionale per l’anno 1865. Strenna offerta ai cattolici italiani,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1865, pp. 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
746. Cf. ISS, *Bibliografia generale…,* cit., p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
747. [BOSCO G.], “Invito alla frequente comunione” in *Pratiche divote per l’adorazione del SS. Sacramento,* Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1866, pp. 20-21 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
748. Cf. RUFFINO D., *Cronache dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales.* n. 1, 1860, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
749. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1860, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
750. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
751. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-752)
752. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., pp. 89-90 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
753. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., p. 33 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-754)
754. Cf. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., pp. 91-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-755)
755. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., p. 95 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-756)
756. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso …,* cit., p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-757)
757. VALENTINI E., “Presentazione” in *San Giuseppe Cafasso. Memorie pubblicate…,* cit., pp. 6-7 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-758)
758. Blessed Philip Rinaldi (1856-1931) was Don Bosco’s third successor. He died in 1931 after serving as Rector Major for nine years, following twenty-one years as Prefect General and nine as Provincial. At the age of ten, he entered the Salesian college in Mirabello which had opened a few years earlier. Impressed by some extraordinary events, he entered the novitiate at the age of twenty-three and was ordained a priest just three years later. Two years before his death, he was able to attend the beatification of his teacher (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit., pp. 238-239). [↑](#footnote-ref-759)
759. The letter, dated 29/9/1926, is attached as an appendix to the documents of the cause (cf. *Aliae novae animadversiones et responsiones. Appendix documentorum*, n.1, p. 4) [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-760)
760. Cf. MO p. 119 [125]. [↑](#footnote-ref-761)
761. LEMOYNE G.B., *Ricordi di gabinetto,* aprile 1884; He included this in the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. v. 4, p. 131). In another place Fr Lemoyne writes “Father Ascanio Savio was convinced that Don Bosco kept vigil during long hours of the night and sometimes for the whole night, deep in prayer. …” (BM v. 3, p. 414). [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
762. Three editions of the *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli carmelitana scalza torinese* (Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1865) were published between 1865 and 1866 (cf. ISS, *Bibliografia generale…,* cit., p. 25).The title page of the first edition is anonymous, while the preface is signed by Don Bosco. [↑](#footnote-ref-763)
763. BM v. 8, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-764)
764. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,*  cit., pp. 4-5 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-765)
765. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,*  cit., p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-766)
766. The editions I consulted are as follows: ELIA DI SANTA TERESA, *La diletta del crocifisso. Vita della venerabile madre Suor Maria degli Angioli religiosa nel monastero di Santa Cristina delle carmelitane scalze di quest'augusta*, Giambattista Valetta Stampatore, Torino 1729; ANSELMO DI S. LUIGI GONZAGA, *Vita della B. Maria degli Angeli religiosa professa Carmelitana scalza,* Tip. G. Speirani, Torino 18662; TEPPA A.M., *Vita della venerabile Maria degli Angeli carmelitana scalza*, G. Marietti, Torino 1864. [↑](#footnote-ref-767)
767. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2., cit., pp. 480-481 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-768)
768. Cf. ELIA DI SANTA TERESA, *La diletta del crocifisso…,* cit., pp. 320-321; ANSELMO DI S. LUIGI GONZAGA, *Vita della B. Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 136-139. [↑](#footnote-ref-769)
769. Cf. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-770)
770. The terms *notte oscura* (dark night) as also *matrimonio spirituale* (spiritual marriage) are not found in Don Bosco; however, their content and the supernatural interpretation of the events narrated have not been silenced, as can be seen from the following quotations. [↑](#footnote-ref-771)
771. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-772)
772. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 51 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-773)
773. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 56-57 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-774)
774. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
775. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 110-111 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-776)
776. This emphasis by Don Bosco is remarkable, but in keeping with what I have said about Cafasso’s biography. The reference to *recreation* also brings to mind what we have seen in the biographies of some young Oratory boys. [↑](#footnote-ref-777)
777. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 50 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-778)
778. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 59-60 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-779)
779. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., p. 178 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-780)
780. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-781)
781. In particular, the second volume of this collection of letters covers the period up to the end of 1868. [↑](#footnote-ref-782)
782. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di MOTTO F., v. 2, LAS, Roma 1996, p. 280 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-783)
783. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 407 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-784)
784. ACS B 517. This is sermon no. 14 in the notebook. The first date is 12 June 1866. [↑](#footnote-ref-785)
785. Cf. BM v. 8, p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-786)
786. PICCA J., *La meditazione nel pensiero e nella prassi di Don Bosco* in “Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana” 2 (1985) p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-787)
787. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco,*  Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, Roma 1960, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-788)
788. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 526 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-789)
789. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 446 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-790)
790. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-791)
791. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, pp. 494-495 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-792)
792. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Ro. ma 1984, p. 23. Si tratta della edizione critica di questa lettera e di quelle che, come diremo, saranno in seguito ricavate da questa. [↑](#footnote-ref-793)
793. An addition by Don Bosco in the margin says: “Think carefully before deciding on important matters and, when in doubt, always keep to those things that seem to bring the most glory to God” (later corrected to ‘take’). (cf. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali…,* cit., p. 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
794. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali…,* cit., pp. 23-24 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
795. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali…,* cit., pp. 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-796)
796. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali …,* cit., p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-797)
797. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-798)
798. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica…,* cit., pp. 318-321. [↑](#footnote-ref-799)
799. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (a cura di MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, pp. 529. [↑](#footnote-ref-800)
800. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, pp. 529-530 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-801)
801. The complete title is [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto per le pratiche di pietà con analoghe istruzioni secondo il bisogno dei tempi,* Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Franc. di Sales*,* Torino 1868. [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
802. Fr Lemoyne recounts how Don Bosco had been invited in 1864 by Countess. Callori Sambuy Vignale, his benefactress, to write a manual of devotional practices similar to *Il Giovane Provveduto*, but aimed at adults. Don Bosco entrusted the task to Fr Bonetti; after lengthy preparation and revision by Archbishop Gastaldi, “the book on which Don Bosco, assisted by Don Bonetti, had worked for several years” was finally put on sale (BM v. 9, p. 72, v. 7 472-473). One of the first copies was sent to Countess Callori on 30 April 1868 (cf. MB v. 7, pp. 472-473; v. 9, pp. 72.). [↑](#footnote-ref-803)
803. At the beginning of a letter from Don Bosco to Fr Bonetti dated 14 February 187. 8, we read: ‘My dear Fr Bonetti, cease your fighting and write peaceful words, as I have recommended to you so many times...’ (BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* (ed. CERIA E.), v. 3, p. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-804)
804. Cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico …,* cit., pp. 46-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-805)
805. In his correspondence, he sometimes refers to Don Bosco as ‘papà.’ ‘Our dearest papà Don Bosco,’ he wrote to Fr Lemoyne in 1883, ‘has already had the room prepared...’(FdR 4620 A 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-806)
806. MB v. 8, p. 45 [This reference is not in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-807)
807. Deletions of words or parts of the text will not be reported because it is impossible to deduce from the manuscript whether they were made by Don Bosco or by Fr Bonetti himself. I have tried, as far as possible, to distinguish between corrections made by one or the other, reporting here only those made by Don Bosco. The text of the manuscript, as it appears after Don Bosco’s corrections, corresponds almost perfectly to the printed text. [↑](#footnote-ref-808)
808. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229.03.02, pp. 1-2 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-809)
809. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229.03.02, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
810. *Ibidem* [my emph]*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
811. Cfr. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229.03.02, pp. 5-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
812. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229 .03.02, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
813. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229.03.02, pp. 9-10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
814. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (manoscritto Bonetti), ACS A 229.03.02, pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-815)
815. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (printed text), cit., pp. 172-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
816. The procedure for approving new institutions had been regulated in 1863 by the *Methodus quae a S. Congregatione Episcoporum et Regularium servatur in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium*, in *Collectanea in usum secretariae S. C. EE. et RR.,* edited by the then secretary of the Congregation for Bishops and Religious, Monsignor Andrea Bizzarri. The need for clearer regulations governing the process for approval of new congregations had been strongly felt in previous decades due to the growing number of new foundations. Fr Francesco Motto informs us that between 1816 and 1862, approximately 120 new male and female institutions had applied to the Holy See for approval; during the 19th century, approximately 200 institutions were founded in Italy, 50 of which were in Piedmont and 24 in Turin alone. (cf. MOTTO F., “Don Bosco fondatore e la curia romana” in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., pp. 227-228). The *Methodus* foresaw two distinct phases: the recognition of the institute, which took place in two stages (the *decretum laudis* and formal approval) and the final approval of the constitutions, after a period of approval *per modum experimenti.* [↑](#footnote-ref-817)
817. From a contribution by Fr Cosimo Semeraro entitled “Curia romana e nuove fondazioni religiose contemporanee a Don Bosco” (in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., pp. 197-233), It can be deduced, however, that this period was one of the shortest in relation to the similar *process* of other male religious congregations that arose during that period (cf. pp. 207-208). Fr Francesco Motto observes in this regard: “The entire Roman ‘process’ of approval of the institute and its constitutions was completed in the space of ten years, that is to say, a period of time that would have been impossible or absurd to imagine being any shorter, given the regulations in force... and the fluidity of the political and ecclesiastical situation at the time.” (MOTTO F., “Don Bosco fondatore e la curia romana”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,*cit., p. 244). [↑](#footnote-ref-818)
818. This view, which I share, is from Fr Francesco Motto in “Don Bosco fondatore e la curia romana”, cit., p. 246. He wrotes “On all fronts, Don Bosco had to (or wanted to) work alone, without explicitly involving any other member of the society he had founded.” (*ibidem).* [↑](#footnote-ref-819)
819. MIDALI M., “Tipi di approccio a Don Bosco fondatore” in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-820)
820. Without going into detail on this subject, I believe that this consideration can be extended to the history of many religious institutions throughout the ages. It often happens, in fact, that some of the founders’ intentions are not immediately reflected in canon law and are only recognised as possible at a later date. This fruitful dialogue between *charism* and *ecclesiastical institution* then becomes the specific place where some of the founder's most characteristic *intuitions* can be rediscovered. [↑](#footnote-ref-821)
821. Something similar can be found in the congregation of the Oblates of Mary Virgin of Pio Brunone Lanteri, as previously stated, as well as in the figures of *affiliate members* and *ascritti* (*novices)* of the constitutions of the *Institute of Charity* of Antonio Rosmini (cf. ROSMINI A., *Costituzioni dell’Istituto della Carità, ed.* SARTORI D., Istituto di Studi Filosofici – Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani - Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1996, p. 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-822)
822. The question of the so-called *establishment of novitiates* was undoubtedly one of the most debated issues in the dialogue with the ecclesiastical institutions. The need for an appropriate *place*, separate from the other works of the congregation, the exclusive occupation of novices in study and *exercises of piety,* and the figure of the novice master, entirely dedicated to their formation, were the points of heated debate until final approval and even afterwards. In the first Italian translation of the definitively approved text, published in 1875, of the fourteen articles approved that made up the chapter *De Novitiorum Magistro eorumque regimine* and which incorporated the observations of the consultors, only four were reproduced, with some modifications. Don Bosco himself had written to the consultors in 1873: “Everything concerning the novitiate was discussed with the Holy Father, whose words were fundamental to me. A separate chapter will explain what is done in the novitiate. But we must: 1. Avoid this name, otherwise we would soon be harassed by the government, which no longer wants to hear talk of religious orders or congregations and indeed intends to suppress everything in civil society that has anything to do with them. 2. For the same reason, it does not seem appropriate to have an isolated house where aspirants gather. 3. Furthermore, since the test of the aspirants consists in knowing their aptitude for assisting, instructing and educating young people, the aspirants must at the same time practise piety and this ministry.” (BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* pp. 246-247). [↑](#footnote-ref-823)
823. The archiepiscopal seminary in Turin remained closed from 1848 to 1863, following the revolutionary uprisings that had shaken Piedmont and Italy during those years. Fr Igino Tubaldo writes: “While acknowledging the immense merits of seminaries in general, and of the seminary in Turin, which produced a host of holy priests, despite the ‘pluralism’ of forms in the formation of the clergy, it is nevertheless a fact that it was the seminary, as a structure, with well-defined rules and a strict discipline that was the same for everyone, regardless of origin, culture, social background of the individuals, constituted a strong conditioning factor... The climate of the Counter-Reformation, the particular conception of a ‘sacred society’ with a theocratic background, the conception of the Church as a perfect, independent, self-sufficient society, the terror of the ‘secularism’ of the world... determined in the educational system of the seminaries a spirituality based eminently on ‘flight from the world’ and sometimes on ‘condemnation of the world’.” (TUBALDO I., *Giuseppe Allamano,* Edizioni Missioni Consolata, Torino 1982, pp. 44-45).It is interesting to note that among the various reasons given by Don Bosco for rejecting the obligation of Salesian clerics to remain at the seminary as boarders was the *unreliability* of the seminary professors, particularly in the fields of moral theology, sacred hermeneutics and ecclesiastical history. (cf. TUNINETTI G., “Gli arcivescovi di Torino e Don Bosco fondatore” in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 263). Formed in the Alphonsian moral code of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, Don Bosco certainly did not approve of the rigour, albeit mitigated, of the seminary in Turin. We note here that, in our opinion, little space has been given to the study of the difficult dialogue with the Turin curia on the different theological positions, highlighting more often the human and character aspects of the “contenders”. [↑](#footnote-ref-824)
824. We read at the end of the chapter on the *Pratices of Piety* in the Latin text of 1873: “Licebit autem Rectori statuere, ut ab his pietatis exercitiis abstineatur certo quodam tempore et a certis sociis prout opportunius in Domino iudicabit” (BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…*, cit., p. 187). This article, whose content is already present in the first draft known to us, disappeared from the approved text; yet its content must not have appeared, in Don Bosco's eyes, to be an excessive privilege, if we consider that the constitutions of the Society of Jesus, certainly known to Don Bosco, which did not assign a specific time to prayer, meditation and other exercises of piety, gave the superior the power to determine the appropriate time for each *subject* (cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, “Costituzioni” in *Gli scritti di Ignazio di Loyola,* ed. GIOIA M., UTET, Torino 1988, p. 570). [↑](#footnote-ref-825)
825. MO p. 116 [124]. [↑](#footnote-ref-826)
826. I note here once again that the two terms *rules* and *constitutions* are to be considered as synonymous in Don Bosco’s language, as can be seen from the title under which the first Latin edition was published in 1874: *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii juxta approbationis decretu die 3 aprilis 1874*. [↑](#footnote-ref-827)
827. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 229. However, other sources besides those cited by Don Bosco should not be ruled out. Francis Desramaut adds, among others already mentioned, the constitutions of the *Vincentians*, on which, in his opinion, two of the nine articles of the chapter on *practices of piety* are based (cf. DESRAMAUT F., “Il capitolo delle «Pratiche di pietà» nelle costituzioni salesiane”, in AA.VV., *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1969, p. 59)*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-828)
828. Cf. MOTTO F., “Introduzione”, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-829)
829. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-830)
830. [IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA], *Regole della Compagnia di Gesù,* Tipografia Salviucci, Roma 1834, p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-831)
831. Fr Francis Desramaut noted in the contribution referred to in the previous note: “He began to give this chapter a title which, despite its ambiguity, should never be allowed to obscure its complex meaning. The Vincentians spoke of *spiritual practices*, the Oblates of *acts of religion*, the priests of the Schools of Charity of *pious exercise. He preferred practices of piety. The future translation in the Latin versions (Pietatis exercitia*, from 1867) and the content of the chapter thus entitled suggest that Don Bosco wanted to refer in this way to both the pious exercises and the exercises of piety of religious societies (p. 59). [↑](#footnote-ref-832)
832. It consists of five sheets bound together and written on both sides, for a total of twenty pages, including the cover sheet. The inside pages are numbered from 1 to 16; the first half of page 15, page 16 and part of the inside back cover are written by Don Bosco and constitute the chapter entitled *Le pratiche di pietà*; The others were written by Fr Rua, but contain several corrections by Don Bosco (cf. ACS D 472.01.01). [↑](#footnote-ref-833)
833. ACS D 472.01.01, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-834)
834. ACS D 472.01.01, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-835)
835. *Ibidem*. The italics are mine and highlight Don Bosco’s comments on the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-836)
836. The dating of this is Fr Francesco Motto’s in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-837)
837. Having joined the oratory in 1855 at the age of twenty, Carlo Ghivarello was also one of the “founding members” and one of the first “*councillors*” of the fledgling congregation. He was also Don Bosco’s first secretary and, from 1876 to 1880, Prefect General. (cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario Bibliografico,* cit., p. 140). [↑](#footnote-ref-838)
838. ACS D 472.01.03, p. 19. The italics are mine. The manuscript is a small notebook with twenty-five numbered pages and some blank sheets. [↑](#footnote-ref-839)
839. He entered the oratory in 1855 at about the age of fifteen and professed his vows in the Society of St. Francis de Sales in 1864. Two years later, he left the congregation, a few months before his death in 1866. (cf. *Memorie Biografiche,* v. 20 *–* Indice analitico). [↑](#footnote-ref-840)
840. It can be assumed that it was returned to the senders and then corrected by Don Bosco, or that, despite the presence of the handwritten signatures and the particular care taken in the handwriting, it is a copy of the letter sent to the archbishop. [↑](#footnote-ref-841)
841. Cf. MOTTO F., “Introduzione”, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-842)
842. ACS D 472.01.07. [↑](#footnote-ref-843)
843. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-844)
844. *Animadversiones in Constitutiones Sociorum sub titulo S. Francisci Salesii in Diocesi Taurinensi, quae adnectebantur decreto diei 23 Jul. 1864,* in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-845)
845. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-846)
846. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-847)
847. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-848)
848. The text of the *animadversio*, in fact, quotes the constitutional article incorrectly and modifies it. It states: “... they shall do mental prayer for at least one hour.” The original, however, referred to “no less than one hour of prayer, both mental and vocal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-849)
849. Cf. MOTTO F., “Introduzione”, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-850)
850. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-851)
851. MOTTO F., “Introduzione”, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-852)
852. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-853)
853. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185. This is a translation of the Italian translation from 1875, which faithfully translates the approved Latin text. [↑](#footnote-ref-854)
854. I would like to point out that the correction ‘one hour’ can be found in the Boggero manuscript, which is dated around the end of 1860, therefore about a year after the first draft of the chapter on practices of piety, which is subsequent to the Rua manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-855)
855. Fr Desramaut writes: “After that, Don Bosco, who had perhaps received a comment, of which I have found no trace, changed his mind. The half hour of prayer, ‘both mental and vocal’, became ‘an hour’.” (DESRAMAUT F., “Il capitolo delle «Pratiche di pietà»…, cit., p. 70). This hypothesis, which is not supported by any documentary evidence, seems to me to be more of a preconception. [↑](#footnote-ref-856)
856. See Article 1 of the chapter on practices of piety (BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 182). [↑](#footnote-ref-857)
857. For some indications on the life of prayer at Valdocco, see, for example, the various *regulations* (cf. for example, the *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales* in BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù,* ed. BRAIDO P., La Scuola, Brescia 1965, pp. 432-436). [↑](#footnote-ref-858)
858. DESRAMAUT F., “Don Bosco fondatore”, in DpFS, *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 139. This opinion of the author essentially echoes the views he expressed many years earlier in the aforementioned article entitled *Il capitolo delle «Pratiche di pietà» nelle costituzioni salesiane,* which, to my knowledge, is the only monographic study on the subject. [↑](#footnote-ref-859)
859. MB v. 9, p. 271 [Not in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-860)
860. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, “Costituzioni” in *Gli scritti di Ignazio di Loyola,* ed. GIOIA M., UTET, Torino 1988, p. 570 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-861)
861. COLLI C., “Elementi di spiritualità salesiana contenuti nelle costituzioni SDB. Sintesi e verifica”, *in Contributi di studio su costituzioni e regolamenti SDB. CG XXII – Sussidi,* Tip. “Don Bosco”, Roma 1982. p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-862)
862. From the *Introduzione alle regole,* handwritten by Don Bosco and kept in ACS A 022, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-863)
863. Don Bosco had written the same, for example in *Il Giovane Provveduto* of 1847: “Just as our body becomes sick and dies without food, so does our soul if we do not give it its food. The nourishment and food of our soul is the word of God…” ([BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica dei suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell’ufficio della Beata Vergine Maria e dei principali vespri dell’anno,* Tip. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1847 p. 18). [↑](#footnote-ref-864)
864. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-865)
865. *Costituzioni Regole Dell’Istituto Delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice. Sotto la protezione di S. Giuseppe, di S. Francesco di Sales e di Sa. Teresa,* in the General Archives of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (AGFMA), Handwritten Rules, Notebook no. 1, p. 16. For the date of the manuscript, see the critical edition of the constitutions, edited by Sister Cecilia Romero.: BOSCO G., *Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885),* Critical text by ROMERO C., LAS, Roma 1983, p. 59. The article cited, like much of the original constitutional text, is taken from the rules of the Sisters of St Anne of Providence, founded in 1834 by the Marchioness di Barolo. (cf. *Costituzioni e Regole dell’Istituto delle Suore di S. Anna della Provvidenza,* Per gli Eredi Botta Tip. Arcivescovili, Torino 1846, p. 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-866)
866. During this time Fr Bonetti was the rector of the *Junior Seminary* at Borgo San Martino, where the similar work in Lanzo to had been moved. The note is on the institute’s letterhead and can therefore be dated to this period. [↑](#footnote-ref-867)
867. I have chosen to start a new paragraph after each item to make the text easier to read; in the original, however, the numbers and their contents follow one after the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-868)
868. ACS B 516. [↑](#footnote-ref-869)
869. ACS D 472.01.07. [↑](#footnote-ref-870)
870. FRANCESCO DI SALES, *Introduzione alla vita devota - Trattato dell’amor di Dio,* ed. MARCHISANO F., UTET, Torino 1969, p. 122 [The English is from the Christian Classic Ethereal Library translation]. [↑](#footnote-ref-871)
871. FRANCESCO DI SALES, *Introduzione alla vita devota…,* cit., p. 142 [my emph.] The English is from the Christian Classic Ethereal Library translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-872)
872. PUENTE L. de la, *Meditazioni del P. Ludovico Da Ponte della Compagnia di Gesù già tradotte dall’idioma castigliano nel nostro volgare da Giulio Cesare Braccini e poi rivedute e corrette e a miglior forma ridotte dal P. Giacomo Bonaretti*, Stabilimento Tipografico di Andrea Festa, Napoli 1851, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-873)
873. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 186. The content of this article would be ‘deleted’ by the Consultors in 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-874)
874. *Costituzioni e regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.,* Tip. Eredi Botta, Torino 1851, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-875)
875. *Constitutiones congregationis Sacerdotum Saecularium Scholarum Charitatis,* Ex Tipis Francisci Andreola, Venezia, 1837, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-876)
876. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., pp. 422-423 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-877)
877. I have already stated in a previous note that Father Salvatore Marsili defines the nineteenth century as the time of maximum liturgical decline in the entire history of the Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-878)
878. Only in the constitutions of the Vincentians (Saint Vincent de Paul) did I find a similar indication. In chapter ten, entitled *Delle pratiche spirituali,* it says: “… whenever and wherever we will recite the Canonical Hours, [with] Attention and Devotion, which we must bring to bear, being certain that at that time we are singing the Divine Praises, and consequently performing the Office of the Angels “(*Regole ovvero Costituzioni comuni della Congregazione della Missione,* [?], 1658, pp. 86-87). This copy, which I consulted at the Centro Studi Don Bosco of the Pontifical Salesian University, does not contain any indication of the publisher or place of publication. [↑](#footnote-ref-879)
879. In Don Bosco’s first manuscript, the expression “of the Liturgy” is crossed out and replaced by “of the divine offices” (cf. ACS D 472.01.01, p. 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-880)
880. ACS D 472.01.01, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-881)
881. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., pp. 182-183. [↑](#footnote-ref-882)
882. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-883)
883. VALENTINI E., *La spiritualità di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1952, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-884)
884. Once again I stress, as I did at the beginning of this chapter, that we can only speculate about the origins of Don Bosco’s project and its development. It is possible that this programme already contained, from the outset, the characteristic features of religious life and that a healthy pedagogy of gradualness required him to keep it hidden, at least in some of its aspects and requirements, from his first collaborators. It is also possible that, over the years, the project became clearer in the mind and heart of the founder. In any case, the two perspectives do not appear to be opposed but, if anything, complementary. [↑](#footnote-ref-885)
885. In the first course, which began on 2 August, the meditations were given by Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi, future archbishop of Turin (cf. BM v. 8, p. 201). For the following course, Fr Lemoyne quotes Fr Bonetti (cf. v. 8, p. 204), Fr Bona (cf. v. 8, p. 392), Fr Rua (v. 8, pp. 410-411). [↑](#footnote-ref-886)
886. Cf. BM v. 8, p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-887)
887. The classic themes of the exercises were probably assigned, according to tradition, to the *meditations,* of which, however, we have no trace. [↑](#footnote-ref-888)
888. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* (ed. CERIA E.), v.1, cit., p. 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-889)
889. Cf. BM v. 9, pp. 38-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-890)
890. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 1003). [↑](#footnote-ref-891)
891. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* [ed. CERIA E.], v. 2, cit., p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-892)
892. BM v. 11, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-893)
893. BM v. 11, p. 253. These words by Fr Ceria would also confirm that meditation was part of the ordinary habits of young boarders. [↑](#footnote-ref-894)
894. BM v. 11, p. 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-895)
895. MB v. 9, p. 909 [No apparent reference to this in the English BM v. IX] [↑](#footnote-ref-896)
896. According to the *Memoirs,* for the first two years the retreats lasted five days; in 1868 and 1869 they lasted six days. For reference in the MB and dates, see: BM v. 8, pp. 201,204 (1866); the remainder of these references are from the MB: v. 8, pp. 909, 910 (1867); v. 9, pp. 341, 352 (1868); v. 9, pp. 697, 720 (1869). [↑](#footnote-ref-897)
897. Cf. BM v. 8, p. 201. As we will see in this section, the subjectof prayer is always linked to the presentation of the vow of chastity; prayer, and meditation in particular, are considered positive means of preserving the virtue of chastity. [↑](#footnote-ref-898)
898. This handwritten sheet by Fr Giuseppe Ciampi, together with a copy by Fr Gioachino Berto, are kept in the Salesian Central Archives (cf. ACS A 025.01.04). The text of these is also reported by Fr Lemoyne in BM v. 8, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-899)
899. Cf. MB v. 8, p. 241 [the reference not found in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-900)
900. Fr Gioachino Berto was also Don Bosco’s travelling companion on many occasions, helping him with his correspondence and meticulously keeping important documents. He never held important government positions but devoted himself tirelessly to the congregation’s archives and to ascetic and spiritual publications. (cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico …,* cit., pp. 38-39). [↑](#footnote-ref-901)
901. Cf. ACS A 025.01.03. Cf. MB v. 8, pp. 908 ff. [BM v.8 p. 438 is the only reference in the English BM] [↑](#footnote-ref-902)
902. Cf. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* (ed. CERIA E.), v. 1, cit., p. 574. This is a letter written on 16 September by Trofarello during the first round of exercises, which mentions the 21st of the same month as the start date for the second round. [↑](#footnote-ref-903)
903. Cf. MB v. 9, pp. 343-348; 352-357. [Difficult to find in the BM, if indeed these references are even included there] [↑](#footnote-ref-904)
904. Cf. ACS A 225.06.04. Cf. MB v. 9, pp 985 ff. [Not in the BM v. 9, though see p 330ff.] [↑](#footnote-ref-905)
905. This copy of the manuscript allows us to place these two other sheets in the context of the Trofarello retreat in 1869. On page 23, at the end of Don Bosco’s notebook, the copy contains the following note in brackets: ‘In a loose sheet of four pages, detached from the notebook.’ It then goes on to reproduce the contents of the sheets. (cf. ACS A 225.06.04). [↑](#footnote-ref-906)
906. Cf. MB v. 9, pp. 997 ff [Not in the BM]. Fr Lemoyne, however, makes no mention of the contents of these papers in the list of topics for the first round in 1869, which began on 13 September. (cf. BM. v.9, p. 330). [↑](#footnote-ref-907)
907. The title of Don Bosco’s copy of the manuscript and the intention, sometimes shown by the founder to give unity to the formation of the fledgling congregation, allow us to hypothesise that, year after year, the instructions at the two rounds involved the same topics. [↑](#footnote-ref-908)
908. ACS A 025.01.10. Cf. BM v. 9, pp. 330 ff. 29 numbered pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-909)
909. ACS A 025.01.03, pp. 1-2 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-910)
910. ACS A 025.01.03, pp. 6-8 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-911)
911. ACS A 025.01.03, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-912)
912. ACS A 025.01.03, pp. 72-74 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-913)
913. Cf. BM v. 9, pp. 166-167 [↑](#footnote-ref-914)
914. Let us note here something that might otherwise escape our attention. The manuscript text says “to save souls”; the meaning is certainly different. In the first case, the emphasis would be on the fact that pious practices are *the soul of every apostolate.* [↑](#footnote-ref-915)
915. BM v. 9, pp. 166-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-916)
916. The dates of the instructions are recorded, day by day, in Fr Berto’s manuscript (cf. ACS A 025.01.10) and also by Fr Lemoyne (cf. MB v. 9, p. 697; these are omitted in the English BM, referring us instead to the MB as indicated here; howeer, see BM v. 9, p. 330); Don Bosco’s, on the other hand, does not bear any date, apart from the indication of the year and the day of the week; it also contains two other different introductions, which suggests that, according to the title of the copy we have preserved…*Esercizi spirituali dettati da D. Bosco ai salesiani in varie occasioni…,* these outlines were used more than once. [↑](#footnote-ref-917)
917. The editor of the *Memorie Biografiche* writes: “Di alcune istruzioni del venerabile noi possiamo offrire ai confratelli un sunto alquanto diffuso, coll’aiuto di varie memorie” (We can offer our confreres a fairly comprehensive summary of some of the Venerable’s instructions, with the help of various memoirs.) (MB v. 9, p. 697). [↑](#footnote-ref-918)
918. ACS A 225.06.04, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-919)
919. ACS A 025.01.10, pp. 22-23 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-920)
920. MB v. 9, p. 709 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-921)
921. The link between these two sheets, which are separate in themselves, is provided by the title of the second, *Segue della correzione fraterna* (Continuation of fraternal correction), which continues the theme of the fourth page of the first. [↑](#footnote-ref-922)
922. This is the opinion of Fr Joseph Aubry in BOSCO G., *Scritti spirituali,* cit., p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-923)
923. ACS A 225.04.03; cf. MB v. 9, p. 997 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-924)
924. The term refers to Saint Alphonsus' classic doctrine on *the necessity of prayer,* expressed, among other places, in his book *Del gran mezzo della preghiera* (The Great Means of Prayer)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-925)
925. The annual retreat, however, had long been part of the tradition of the oratory, as already pointed out; here, however, I am clearly discussing a *separate* retreat for the *congregati*. [↑](#footnote-ref-926)
926. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-927)
927. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-928)
928. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 339. For a further understanding see the entry “Croiset” and “Récollections mensuelles” in the DSp, in volume II/2 and XIII respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-929)
929. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* [ed. CERIA E.], v. 3, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-930)
930. BROCARDO P., “Gli esercizi spirituali nella esperienza di D. Bosco e della vita salesiana”, in *Il rinnovamento degli esercizi spirituali. Simposio salesiano europeo,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1975, p. 39. Fr Brocardo also believed that the Salesian spiritual exercises of those early decades should be classified as *Ignatian-derived exercises.*  “*Derivatives* are exercises based on Ignatian principles, but adapted, applied and re-expressed by the powerful personalities of great saints such as St Charles Borromeo, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. G. Cafasso, which are the exercises that Don Bosco encountered in his experience in Chieri, in Turin with the priests of the Mission, in *Sant'Ignazio sopra Lanzo*, and which he, in turn, left as a legacy to the Congregation, suitably adapted"”(p. 52). The exercises of St Ignatius, in particular, refer, as we have already stated, to the tradition of Lanteri, who had consecrated his life and that of the Congregation of the *Oblates of the Virgin Mary*  which he founded, to the Ignatian exercises. The discussion of spiritual exercises in the early Salesian tradition deserves further study. First of all, it would be necessary to clarify the conditions required, in terms of content and methodology, in order to be able to affirm that a few days of spiritual retreat can truly be considered *Ignatian exercises*. Secondly, it would be necessary to study the numerous written testimonies of the early Salesian tradition, often unexplored, in order to verify them on the basis of the criteria identified. In fact, the Salesian Central Archives contain numerous notebooks of the first disciples of Don Bosco (Rua, Cagliero, Barberis, Bonetti, Francesia, Bertello...), which sometimes contain entire courses of meditations or instructions for exercises for young people, priests and Salesians. [↑](#footnote-ref-931)
931. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-932)
932. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 233. The constitutions of the *Oblated of the Virgi Mary* said in this regard: “Every year ... let them never fail to do the Exercises of St Ignatius, and annual Confession during said Exercises. General confession shall also be made by each member upon entering the Congregation.” (*Costituzioni e Regole della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria V.,* Tip. Eredi Botta, Torino 1851, pp.19-20). See also the Jesuit constitutions, nos. 98, 196-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-933)
933. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-934)
934. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1875, p. XXXIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-935)
935. FdB 1862 C 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-936)
936. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, pp. 865. 887. [↑](#footnote-ref-937)
937. MB v. 11, p. 542 [my emph.] This appendix is not included in the English BM 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-938)
938. cf. BM XIII, 190-191. [↑](#footnote-ref-939)
939. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani. Centocinquant’anni di storia,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1970, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-940)
940. Cf., MB v. 10, p. 1069 [Not in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-941)
941. MB v. 10, p. 1266. [Not in the English BM]. [↑](#footnote-ref-942)
942. ACS B 506.01.01. This is a collection of autobiographical notes by Fr Barberis, written on loose sheets of paper [↑](#footnote-ref-943)
943. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani...,*cit., p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-944)
944. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani…,* cit., pp. 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-945)
945. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 948-949. [↑](#footnote-ref-946)
946. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani…,* cit., p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-947)
947. Cf. BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani. Ammaestramenti e consigli esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1901, pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-948)
948. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. /1858/ - 1875,* ed. MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1982, p.115. Unless otherwise stated in the citation, the text I will generally refer to in this chapter is also the critical edition edited by Fr Motto. Specifically, this is the text approved by the consultors in 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-949)
949. Cf. TUNINETTI G., “Gli arcivescovi di Torino e don Bosco fondatore” in *Don Bosco fondatore della famiglia salesiana,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1989, pp. 274-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-950)
950. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani…,* cit., p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-951)
951. Cf. WIRTH M., *Don Bosco e i salesiani..*, cit., p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-952)
952. CERIA E., *Annali della Società Salesiana. Dalle origini alla morte di San Giovanni Bosco,* v. 1, SEI, Torino 1941, p. 742. [↑](#footnote-ref-953)
953. The first edition of this veritable handbook for formation in Salesian religious life, which has been widely distributed throughout the congregation, is in two volumes and bears the title *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani. Ammaestramenti e consigli esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società si San Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S.Benigno Canavese 1901. This first printed edition celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Fr Barberis’ election as novice director. The second edition, in addition to changing the title and target audience, which is no longer limited to novices but includes all *young Salesians,* has been expanded with a third volume dedicated to the virtues characteristic of religious life. The first two volumes dealt with religious life in general and practices of piety. The title has been slightly modified to reflect the broader target audience: *Il vade mecum dei giovani salesiani. Ammaestramenti, consigli ed esempi esposti agli ascritti e agli studenti della Pia Società si San Francesco di Sales.*  The latest edition I have found is a single volume of 1141 pages, divided into three parts; in this edition, the *edifying readings,* which followed each and every paragraph of the original text, have been removed. This latest edition was published by the Direzione Generale delle Opere Salesiane Turin, in 1965. [↑](#footnote-ref-954)
954. BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani. Ammaestramenti consigli ed esempi esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1901, p. X. [↑](#footnote-ref-955)
955. Unfortunately, there is no documented and complete biography of Fr Barberis, nor is there any scientific study of his ascetic work, which is probably not original (he himself cites the numerous sources he used in the preface to *Il vade mecum*), but it is certainly important for a better understanding of his teaching to the Salesians. For biographical information and to learn about some of the personality traits of the first novice director, the following sources are useful: *Bollettino Salesiano*, gennaio 1928, pp. 12‑13; BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis, direttore spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, San Benigno Canavese 1932; CERIA E., Profili dei Capitolari Salesiani, LDC, Colle Don Bosco 1951, pp. 305‑324. Also see the biographical notes by Fr Brenno Casali in BARBERIS G., *Lettere a don Paolo Albera e a Don Calogero Gusmano durante la loro visita alle case d’America (1900-1903),* ed. CASALI B., LAS, Roma 1998, pp. 14-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-956)
956. Cf. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 15. Fr Alessio Barberis (1875-1942), Doctor of Philosophy and Theology, completed this biography in 1932, dedicating it to Fr Pietro Trione, Spiritual Director of the Salesian congregation and, therefore, successor to Fr Barberis. We can assume, based on a letter written by Fr Trione on 24 August 1929 to the then Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi, that this biography was written with the aim of promoting the cause for beatification of the first novice director. Fr Trione writes: “His life should already be written with the title Servant of God. The initial opinion of some consultant or authority in Rome is not necessary, and it would be difficult to obtain it before his life has been compiled... His reputation for holiness will grow and spread with the publication of his life.” This letter is kept in the Central Archives (B 506-0301). [↑](#footnote-ref-957)
957. Cf. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-958)
958. Cf. ACS B 506.01.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-959)
959. Cf. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-960)
960. Cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico …,* a cura dell’Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, Scuola Grafica Salesiana, Torino 1969, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-961)
961. A reminder hat this is the church attached to the Diocesan Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin.. [↑](#footnote-ref-962)
962. This is a loose autographed sheet containing personal and family details, contained in ACS B 506.01.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-963)
963. Cf. BARBERIS G., *Lettere a don Paolo Albera…,* cit., p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-964)
964. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-965)
965. BOSCO G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855,* ed. FERREIRA DA SILVA A., LAS, Roma 1991, p. 116. Antonio Da Silva Ferreira, who saw to the critical edition, places this text around 1873 (cf. p. 18), p. 24 of the 2024 New Rochelle edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-966)
966. BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani,* [1901], v. 1, cit., p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-967)
967. These are fifteen notebooks written in neat handwriting, preserved in ACS A 000. In addition to these, Don Barberis left us dozens of other notebooks containing testimonies, speeches by Don Bosco, accounts of *authentic events* in his life, and chronicles relating to previous years (cf. ACS A 000 – A 003). We also have a fair number of letters and several accounts of his numerous travels (cf. ACS B 506 – B 511) as well as three notebooks containing the minutes of the Superior Chapter from 1875 to 1879 (ACS D 686). [↑](#footnote-ref-968)
968. ACS A 000.01.05 [↑](#footnote-ref-969)
969. This is evident, as we shall see, from several handwritten documents preserved in the Central Archives. (cf. ACS D 473.02.10). [↑](#footnote-ref-970)
970. Cf. BM v. 14, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-971)
971. Cf. BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum…,* [1901], v. 1, cit., p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-972)
972. I was unable to find any documents to prove this, but this position probably gave Fr Barberis authority over all the novitiates of the congregation. This would be confirmed by his frequent visits to the novitiate houses of the congregation throughout the Salesian world. [↑](#footnote-ref-973)
973. Cf. ACS B 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-974)
974. The International Theological Institute he founded in Foglizzo Canavese. (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico …,* cit., p. 29). [↑](#footnote-ref-975)
975. ACS B 506.01.19, pp. 16-17 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-976)
976. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis…,* cit., p. 10 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-977)
977. BM v. 12, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-978)
978. ACS B 506.03.01. A letter sent from Turin on 24 August 1929. [↑](#footnote-ref-979)
979. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 919 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-980)
980. SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIONE, *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco. Positio super introductione causae,* Schola Typ. Salesiana, Romae 1907, p. 713 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-981)
981. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 919. [↑](#footnote-ref-982)
982. ACS D 579. [↑](#footnote-ref-983)
983. The writing is not Fr Barberis’. However, the opening refers to the “perpetual members of the House of S. Benigno gathered under the presidency of their distinguished Rector and Director of Novices, Fr Giulio Barberis”. (ACS D 579). [↑](#footnote-ref-984)
984. These minutes, preserved among the documents of the first general chapters, are located in the Central Archive in box D 579 [my emph.]. Although undated, the certainly predate the second General Chapter by a short time, as indicated by the initial cap. [↑](#footnote-ref-985)
985. ACS A 000.02.05, pp. 39-40 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-986)
986. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 932. [↑](#footnote-ref-987)
987. As I have already stated, Fr Giulio Barberis’ *cronichette* recount the content of various conversations with Don Bosco regarding the running of the novitiate and the admission of novices. [↑](#footnote-ref-988)
988. ACS B 509.03.01, p. 2 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-989)
989. These manuscripts, which have never been published before, sometimes contain deletions and additions by the author himself. Since our focus is primarily on the content, we will, as on other occasions, content ourselves with a simple transcription, introducing the additions into the text and indicating any deletions only if they are considered significant. [↑](#footnote-ref-990)
990. ACS B 509.03.01, pp. 2-3 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-991)
991. ACS B 509.03.01, p. 3 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-992)
992. ACS B 509.03.01, p. 4 [my emph ]. [↑](#footnote-ref-993)
993. Despite several attempts, I have not been able to identify a single “intermediate” source (with respect to the text of St Ignatius' *Exercises*) from which Fr Barberis may have drawn. A personal summary of content heard or reflected upon cannot be entirely ruled out; however, his habit, sometimes expressly stated, of drawing the subject matter of his writings from the most authoritative ascetic authors of the time makes us believe that the use of a written source is more likely. On the frontispiece of the notebook from which the document we are examining is taken, for example, there is a note written in small letters: "...make a book entitled = Meditation for Salesian novices - for each day of the year. That is, write 366 meditations adapted to us in terms of subject matter and length. Do not write new ones, but collect them from various authors and adapt them to us, ordering them according to the seasons" (ACS A 000.02.05). I wanted to check, among others, the sources cited by Fr Barberis himself in the introduction to the second edition of *Il vade mecum,* but in none of these is it possible to find a precise reference to the 1875 text. [↑](#footnote-ref-994)
994. He original is found in ACS A 000.02.05. Underlining and highlighting is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-995)
995. Cf. LERCARO G., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* Massimo, Milano 1969, pp. 353-354. I repeat that this reconstruction is fictitious from a historical point of view; its sole purpose is to allow for a structured observation of the material contained in these pages, comparing it with a summary of the Ignatian tradition. The numbering in Lercaro’s outline is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-996)
996. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nos. 73,74,78,80. [↑](#footnote-ref-997)
997. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* no. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-998)
998. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* no. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-999)
999. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nos. 112, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-1000)
1000. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nos. 91, 104, 193 etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1001)
1001. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nos. 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-1002)
1002. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nos. 194-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-1003)
1003. This is Father Bruno of the Congregation of St Philip Neri, mentioned in BM v. 12, p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-1004)
1004. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nn 53-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-1005)
1005. The reference to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga is constant in the original Salesian tradition. Saint Aloysius was chosen by Don Bosco, together with Saint Joseph and Saint Francis de Sales, as one of the principal patrons of the congregation (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-1006)
1006. Cf. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* Tipografia Giammarioli, Roma 1988, p.270. [↑](#footnote-ref-1007)
1007. FRANCO S., *Istruzioni per le religiose in tempo di esercizi,* Tipografia Pontificia ed Arcivescovile, Modena (year of publication is lacking) [my emph.]. This is the twenty-third volume in the series collecting the works of Father Franco. Some of his writings were also published by the oratory's printing house, in the *Letture Cattoliche* (cf. MB v. 9, p. 760. 924; v. 10, p. 206. 398. 1170). [↑](#footnote-ref-1008)
1008. ACS A 000.02.05. [↑](#footnote-ref-1009)
1009. *Ibidem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1010)
1010. ACS B 509.03.02, p. 67 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1011)
1011. I will talk more about cleric Vigliocco later. Here I will only quote a short excerpt from his mortuary letter: “His secret to meditating well was this: at the beginning, when placing himself in the presence of God, he imagined that Jesus Crucified appeared visibly before him and that from the Cross he was watching him to see if he was doing it with all his heart.” (BOSCO G., *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., p. 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-1012)
1012. This is a popular expression which should remind the person praying to be present to themselves and to God. [↑](#footnote-ref-1013)
1013. ACS B 509.03.02. [↑](#footnote-ref-1014)
1014. ACS B 509.03.02. [↑](#footnote-ref-1015)
1015. We read in *Il vade mecum*: “But to meditate well and with real fruit, real effort is needed. You have heard many times about St. Alosius’ recollection in his meditations; he never had any distractions. And you will say: Oh, if only I could be like that! You must know that St Aloysius made many, many efforts as a young man to reach this point, and sometimes he spent a good part of the night in prayer: but in this way he succeeded. Make an effort yourself, according to your circumstances and the advice of your teacher, and you too will succeed.” (BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum…,* [19062], v. 3, p.237). [↑](#footnote-ref-1016)
1016. Cf. ACS B 509.03.02. [↑](#footnote-ref-1017)
1017. The notebook is found in ACS B 509.03.04; the reference of  *Il vade mecum*, different in expression but fairly consistent in content, is in BARBERIS G., *Il vade mecum…,* [19062], v. 3, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-1018)
1018. ACG B 509.04.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1019)
1019. The first diagramme I took from the text contained in ACS B 509.03.01; the second is taken from the latest SEI edition from 1965, the content of which is practically identical to previous editions as far as the long passage in question is concerned. The first printed text by Fr Barberis does not contain subtitles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1020)
1020. ACS D 578, pp. 116-117 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1021)
1021. ACS A 000.02.05, p. 68. This is a notebook with 100 numbered pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-1022)
1022. ACS A 000.02.05, p. 74 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1023)
1023. Fr Giovanni Bonetti died just over three years after the founder; therefore, this document can be traced back to the period I am examining. [↑](#footnote-ref-1024)
1024. ACS B 516. This is sheet handwritten by Fr Bonetti, written on both sides. The list continues with eight more points. [↑](#footnote-ref-1025)
1025. Cf. ACS B 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-1026)
1026. Giuseppe Bertello entered the Valdocco Oratory in 1862. After graduating in theology and then in literature and philosophy, he became a member of the Accademia dell'Arcadia and the Accademia Romana di San Tommaso. He died in 1910, one year after being appointed Economer General of the Congregation. (Cf. VALENTINI E. - RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico… ,* cit., pp. 38-39). [↑](#footnote-ref-1027)
1027. ACS B 514. Several other similar outlines by Fr Bertello are kept in the same box.. [↑](#footnote-ref-1028)
1028. ACS B 509.04.12 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1029)
1029. *Ibidem* [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1030)
1030. *Ibidem* [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1031)
1031. Cf. BM v. 12, p. 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-1032)
1032. ACS A 000.01.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-1033)
1033. Cf. ACS B 509.04.12. The term *mental prayer* for us, it is broader and includes *meditation;* however, as we know, in the period we are studying, the two terms are often considered synonymous. [↑](#footnote-ref-1034)
1034. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…*, cit. p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1035)
1035. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii juxta approbationis decretum die 3 aprilis 1874,* Ex Officina Asceterii Salesiani, Augustae Taurinorum 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-1036)
1036. Cf. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco fondatore. “Ai soci salesiani” (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici,* LAS, Roma 1995, p. 7. This is the critical edition of the introduction to the Salesian Constitutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1037)
1037. Cf. ACS D 473.02.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1038)
1038. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1039)
1039. Fr Francesco Motto also notes the following about this edition of the constitutions: “In 1875, the first Italian edition of the constitutional text appeared after its approval. It was certainly not a pure and simple translation of the approved manuscript or of the text immediately printed afterwards, for two reasons. Firstly, because substantial changes were made to the previous texts, both by revising some rules already accepted in the approved version and by reinstating provisions that had been replaced during the approval process, always on the basis of concessions that Don Bosco claimed to have received from Pius IX the previous year, *vivae vocis oraculo*. Secondly, because, rather than a version of the Latin text, it was at times almost a restoration, albeit imperfect, of the first series of drafts in Italian (MOTTO F., “Introduzione”, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-1040)
1040. Fr Motto writes about the Italian edition of 1875: “The edition was preceded by an *Introduction* which Don Bosco composed with the help of Fr Barberis and others.” (BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 20).In reality, this does not appear in the manuscripts; Barberis' additions relate to the subsequent edition of 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-1041)
1041. Cf. ACS D 473.02.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1042)
1042. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Costituzioni della Società di san Francesco di Sales,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1984, pp. 217-235. It is essentially the text of the first edition of 1875 with some additions concerning *fraternal charity* and the *rendiconto* (manifestation), taken from the 1877 edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1043)
1043. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 922-923. [↑](#footnote-ref-1044)
1044. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 37. Fr Braido himself adds later: “The use made of the writings of St Alphonsus and Rodriguez in the period from 1875 to 1885 cannot be considered purely accidental or utilitarian in relation to the ‘religious mentality’ of Don Bosco and Fr Barberis, who from 1873/1874 onwards became increasingly involved by the founder in the formation of the new Salesian generations. Above all, the reference to St. Alphonsus – in this writing, those to St Francis de Sales are marginal and mediated (by St Alphonsus himself) – implies a common adherence to essential themes of religious life. They find in him and in Rodriguez very significant coincidences and confirmations of their experiences as ‘religious’ as founders and formators” (p. 109). [↑](#footnote-ref-1045)
1045. Cf. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 98. This number includes perpetual professed members (64), temporary professed members (107) and noivces (84). [↑](#footnote-ref-1046)
1046. Cf. BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco fondatore…,* cit., p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-1047)
1047. *Entering religion* is presented by Don Bosco as an *advatnage,* an easier way to salvation; clearly his *theology of religious life* respects 19th century beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1048)
1048. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1875, p. XXXI . [↑](#footnote-ref-1049)
1049. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni…*[1875]*,* cit., p. XXXI. [↑](#footnote-ref-1050)
1050. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni…,* [1875]*,* cit. pp. XXXII-XXXIV [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1051)
1051. ACS D 473.03.03 [my emph.]. This is a printed copy from 1875, with blank pages at the back for corrections and additions; next to pages XXXIV and XXXV of the previous text is Barberis’ handwritten text with Don Bosco’s corrections. For the corresponding printed text, see [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1877, p. 38. The same material can also be found in the documents of the first General Chapter. (cf. *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1878, pp. 48-49). The text of the constitutions in the 1885 edition does not present any significant variations here or in the following quotations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1052)
1052. Cf. *Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1882, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-1053)
1053. ACS D 473.03.03. [↑](#footnote-ref-1054)
1054. Cf. RUA M., *Lettere circolari ai salesiani,* SAID, Torino 1910. This is a circular by the second Rector Major, bearing the date 5 August 1900. [↑](#footnote-ref-1055)
1055. The letter from Vincent de Paul, initially addressed to Mr Lambert, Richelieu’s superior, seems to have been subsequently forwarded to the superiors of all the houses of the Congregation. We are informed of this circumstance by Fr Antonio Fiat, who was Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission. (cf. *Avvisi e conferenze spirituali di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli ai membri della congregazione,* Tip. St Giuseppe degli Artigianelli, Torino 1898, p. 618). [↑](#footnote-ref-1056)
1056. The introduction, still perfectly legible, stated: “I believe it is appropriate to reproduce here verbatim a letter from St Vincent de Paul addressed to all the religious of his Congregation on rising early in the morning and all at the same time, so that we may see the sentiments of this great saint in this regard and have guidance and instruction in a matter that can do us so much good if observed, and so much harm to our Congregation if neglected. Here, then, is how the Saint expresses himself.” (ACS D 473.04.01, p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-1057)
1057. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1877, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-1058)
1058. On page 3 of the manuscript, for example, Don Bosco replaces *sortire* with *uscire.* On the same page, however, he adds *della meditazione* to specify and clarify the term *ripetizioni.*  These and all other corrections made would be included in the printed text. [↑](#footnote-ref-1059)
1059. [BOSCO G.], *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo De' Paoli. Opera che può servire a consacrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo Santo,* Tipografia Paravia e Comp., Torino 1848. In the second addition he adds …*in onore del medesimo Santo pel sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*; The volume was republished by Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana in 1876 and again the following year. Fr Lemoyne dedicated the entire chapter XIII of the third volume of his *Biographical Memoirs* to the circumstances surrounding the first edition of this book*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1060)
1060. Cf. STELLA P., *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1977, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-1061)
1061. In the jounral “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” a study was published in 1996 called “*Il cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli”. Analisi del lavoro redazionale compiuto da Don Bosco* by Daniel Malfait and Jacques Schepens*.* This study is essential for a better understanding of the text’s composition. When the authors, on page 377, question the reasons behind this second edition and formulate some historical hypotheses, they make no reference to the particular moment the Salesian congregation was experiencing, nor to the letter annexed that year to the Salesian constitutions, invoking mostly circumstances “external” to the history of the congregation, such as the controversy with the Protestants or the spread in Italy of the Conferences of St Vincent. (cf. MALFAIT D. – SCHEPENS J., “*Il cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de’ Paoli”. Analisi del lavoro redazionale compiuto da Don Bosco,* in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 15 [1996] pp. 377-378). [↑](#footnote-ref-1062)
1062. BM v. 3, p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-1063)
1063. BOŸS du A., *Dom Bosco et la pieuse Société des Salésiens,*  Jules Gervais Libraire-Èditeur, Paris 1884, p. 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-1064)
1064. BOSCO G., *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù…,* cit.[1876], pp. 4-5. This and the subsequent texts cited are unchanged from the previous edition of 1848. [↑](#footnote-ref-1065)
1065. This is the Italian translation of André-Joseph Ansart's work entitled *L'esprit de S. Vincent de Paul, ou modéle de conduite proposé a tous les ecclésiastiques, dans ses vertus, ses actions et ses paroles*, Libraire Rue du Jardinet, Paris 1780, a translation published in Genoa in 1840 entitled *Lo spirito di s. Vincenzo de' Paoli, ossia Modello di condotta proposto a tutti gli ecclesiastici, religiosi e fedeli nelle sue virtù, nelle sue azioni e nelle sue parole,* da Antonio Beuf Librario. Don Bosco drew heavily on this translation, as can be seen in the study by Malfait and Schepens. [↑](#footnote-ref-1066)
1066. BOSCO G., *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù…,* cit.[1876], pp. 39-40 = ANSART A.G., *Lo spirito di S. Vincenzo…,* cit., pp. 7-8 [my emph.]. This text and the following ones are unchanged from the previous edition of 1848. [↑](#footnote-ref-1067)
1067. Under the auspices of Saint Vincent de Paul, the *Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza,*  founded by Joseph Cottolengo, who had discovered his vocation precisely by reading the life of Saint Vincent (cf. MARCOCCHI M., “Alle radici della spiritualità di Don Bosco” in *Don Bosco nella storia,* ed. MIDALI M., LAS, Roma 1990, p. 168). The *Conferences of St Vincent de Paul,* furthermore, had flourished again after 1870 in Piedmont, following some mistrust during the previous thirty years. (cf. PENCO G., *Storia della Chiesa in Italia,* v. 2, Jaca Book, Milano 1978, p. 263). [↑](#footnote-ref-1068)
1068. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1069)
1069. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 43-44 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1070)
1070. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1071)
1071. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 44-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1072)
1072. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-1073)
1073. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 46-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-1074)
1074. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 47 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1075)
1075. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 47-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-1076)
1076. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1077)
1077. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1078)
1078. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-1079)
1079. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1080)
1080. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1081)
1081. It was omitted only from the *bilingual* edition (with Latin text alongside) published in 1907. This omission may have been due to space constraints, as this edition, which also contains the Latin text, is more voluminous than the previous one. However, this is only a hypothesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1082)
1082. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1885], cit., p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-1083)
1083. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1903], cit., p. 140 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1084)
1084. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 1003 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1085)
1085. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1885], cit., p. 102 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1086)
1086. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1885], cit., p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-1087)
1087. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1885], cit., p. 124 [my emph.]]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1088)
1088. The Society’s catalogue was first compiled in 1870, in manuscript form (cf. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis direttore spirituale della Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Don Bosco, San Benigno Canavese 1932, p. 39).In addition to the 1872 printed edition, we were able to consult the 1875 edition and all subsequent editions. Sometimes the biographies of deceased confreres were published in separate volumes, as in 1876, 1882 and 1885. The *Bibliografia generale di Don Bosco,* edited by the Historical Institute, classifies these biographies among Don Bosco’s works. Fr Pietro Stella's bibliography in *Scritti a stampa di S. Giovanni Bosco* (LAS, Roma 1977) instead, specifies in greater detail the information we have, year by year, on the texts of these obituaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1089)
1089. Generally, after the first few brief attempts, they are no more than ten pages long, but there are some very extensive and detailed ones, such as that of the cleric Vigliocco, which I will discuss, which extends over twenty pages, or that of the cleric Giovanni Arata or Count Fr Carlo Cays, who died in 1882, which exceed forty pages. (cf. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882,* Tip. St Vincenzo, S. Pier d’Arena 1883). [↑](#footnote-ref-1090)
1090. In particular, from the documents in my possession, I can mention the name of the first novice director, Fr Giulio Barberis, as well as those of Count Cays, Fr Berto and Fr Rua. [↑](#footnote-ref-1091)
1091. This tradition is still alive today in the Salesian congregation. Upon the death of a confrere, the superior of the community, with the help of other confreres, relatives or friends, prepares a *mortuary letter* which is then sent to the ‘centre’ and to all the houses in the same linguistic region. [↑](#footnote-ref-1092)
1092. The handwritten document by Don Bosco and the corrected copy by Fr Gioachino Berto can be found in ACS A 228.04.01; the printed text is in [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1875,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1875, pp. 15-17 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1093)
1093. ACS A 228.04.02. The printed text, with some modifications (by Don Bosco?) that make it easier to read, can be found in [BOSCO G.], *Letture amene ed edificanti ossia biografie salesiane,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1880, pp. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1094)
1094. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia …,* v. 2, cit., pp. 435-436. [↑](#footnote-ref-1095)
1095. These short biographies always highlight the virtues of the deceased confreres and not their limitations, which in some cases may emerge from an examination of the material collected in the Central Archives. [↑](#footnote-ref-1096)
1096. A careful and comprehensive study of these texts would enable us to gain a useful insight into the very concept of religious life that Don Bosco developed in adulthood. [↑](#footnote-ref-1097)
1097. BOSCO G., *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-1098)
1098. Cf. BM v. 13, p. 367 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1099)
1099. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1885, p. 5 [my emph.]. Possediamo di questa biografia il manoscritto originale di Don Giulio Barberis (cf. ACS B 196.33.02) ed alcune testimonianze e documenti, oltre ad alcune lettere e scritti autografi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1100)
1100. ACS A 228.06.02; cf. BOSCO G., *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1878,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1878, pp. 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1101)
1101. [BOSCO G.], *Brevi biografie dei Confratelli Salesiani chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna*, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1876, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1102)
1102. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* cit., pp. 82-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-1103)
1103. Cf. [BOSCO G.], *Confratelli chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna nell’anno 1875,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1876, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-1104)
1104. [BOSCO G.], *Confratelli chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna nell’anno 1875,* cit., p. 32 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1105)
1105. Cf. MB v. 10, p. 1033. [↑](#footnote-ref-1106)
1106. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,* cit., p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-1107)
1107. The letter can be found in ACS A 228.05.05 [↑](#footnote-ref-1108)
1108. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* cit., pp. 74-75 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1109)
1109. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* cit., pp. 25-26 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1110)
1110. Cf. MB v. 12, p. 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-1111)
1111. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877, p. 36. Fr Desramaut tells us that the manuscript (which I did not find in the archives) has Don Bosco’s corrections (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 1380). [↑](#footnote-ref-1112)
1112. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1879, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-1113)
1113. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,*cit., p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-1114)
1114. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,* cit., p. 38 [my emph .]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1115)
1115. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* cit., p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-1116)
1116. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., p. 33 [my emph]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1117)
1117. ACS A 228.06.02; cf. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1878,* cit., p. 29. The handwritten text by Fr Barberis has Don Bosco’s corrections. [↑](#footnote-ref-1118)
1118. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1881, p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-1119)
1119. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882,* Tip. St Vincenzo, S. Pier d’Arena 1883, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1120)
1120. The biographies of these two clerics are included in the first part of *Il vade mecum degli ascritti salesiani* by Fr Giulio Barberis, already in the first edition of 1901 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1121)
1121. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., pp. 42-43 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1122)
1122. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., p. 43. This passage highlights some of the ideas already expressed in the teachings of Fr Giulio Barberis, who was Vigliocco’s novice director [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1123)
1123. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., pp. 43- 44 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1124)
1124. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* cit., p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-1125)
1125. In reporting this testimony, Fr Barberis replaces the word *leggeva* with the more appropriate *meditava* (cf. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* cit., pp. 33) [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1126)
1126. ACS B 196.33.01 [my emph.]. A letter on a single sheet of paper, written on three sides and dated 21/1/79, bearing the letterhead of the *Arciconfraternita di Maria Ausiliatrice.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1127)
1127. ACS B 196.33.01. The letter, signed but undated, is written on four sides of a single sheet of paper. This personal account resembles a true confession due to the extreme frankness of cleric Arata. [↑](#footnote-ref-1128)
1128. *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale…,* [1878], cit., pp. 49-50 [my emp.]. The same instructions are repeated in the resolutions of the second General Chapter of the Salesians in 1880. (*Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale …,* [1882], cit., p. 53) and in those of the Second General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1886 (Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale delle Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice tenuto in Nizza Monferrato nell’agosto del 1886, [Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1886]). [↑](#footnote-ref-1129)
1129. Cf. BM v. 9, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-1130)
1130. Cf. BM v. 17, p. 613. [↑](#footnote-ref-1131)
1131. BM v. 9, p. 325. This is an excerpt from Don Bosco’s first circular letter; for subsequent deliberations and guidelines, see MB v. 10, pp. 1118. 1048-1049 [Not available in the English edition]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1132)
1132. [BOSCO], *Costituzioni Regole Dell’Istituto Delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice. Sotto la protezione di S. Giuseppe, di S. Francesco di Sales e di Sa. Teresa,* in the General Archives of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (AGFMA), Handwritten Rules, Notebook no. 1, p. 42. This text, like most of this first draft, depends on the *Costituzioni e Regole dell’Istituto delle Suore di S. Anna della Provvidenza,* Per gli Eredi Botta Tip. Arcivescovili, Torino 1846, pp. 61-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-1133)
1133. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni per l’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1872-1885),* Critical texts by ROMERO C., LAS, Roma 1983, pp. 285-286. [↑](#footnote-ref-1134)
1134. Cf. *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale delle Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice tenuto in Nizza Monferrato nell’agosto del 1886,* [Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1886]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1135)
1135. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p.115. Si tratta del testo approvato dai consultori nel 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-1136)
1136. Del Capitolo Superiore facevano parte, oltre al *Rettore*, il *Prefetto,* l’*Economo,* il *Catechista o Direttore Spirituale* e tre consiglieri, tutti eletti dagli altri soci (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., pp. 121.143). [↑](#footnote-ref-1137)
1137. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-1138)
1138. For these approximate figures, I have used the table shown in DICASTERO DELLA FORMAZIONE, *Sussidi 3,* Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1989, p. 171. These figures refer to the *days actually spent* on Chapter meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-1139)
1139. The author notes at this point: “This does not exclude that Don Bosco, especially in his style of government, retained the traits of a very personal government, both regarding the GC, the members of the SC, and even other superiors, such as Provincials and rectors...’[VERHULST M., *Note storiche sul Capitolo Generale I della Società Salesiana (1877),* in “Salesianum” 43 (1981) p. 853, note no. 16]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1140)
1140. VERHULST M., *Note storiche…,* cit., p. 854. [↑](#footnote-ref-1141)
1141. T wenty-one headings: *Common life, Health and care, Study, Study for pupils, Textbooks, Morality among Salesian members, Morality among pupils, Clothing and linen, Economy in provisions, Economy in lighting, Economy in cooking and wood, Economy in travel, Economy in work and construction, Respect for superiors, Inspectorates or provinces, Hospitality, invitations and meals, Religious customs, Habits, Alms, Novices, Holidays* (cf. [BOSCO G.], *Capitolo generale della Congregazione Salesiana da convocarsi in Lanzo nel prossimo settembre 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877). The subject matter is varied and abundant; some of these topics would therefore be taken up again in the Second General Chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1142)
1142. Cf. ACS D 578. It should be noted that the presence of Fr Giulio Barberis in this first Chapter is unusual; in fact, he does not belong to the Superior Council by law and is not yet a rector (he would only become so in 1879). *In fact*, however, He would also participate in subsequent meetings of the Superior Council with the title of *novice director,* despite the rules not expressly requiring this. The person truly responsible for the confreres in formation, in fact, is, in the superior council, the *Spiritual Director or Catechist,* whose role would be defined by the 2nd General Chapter (cf. *Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale…,* [1882], cit , pp. 10-11). [↑](#footnote-ref-1143)
1143. MB v. 13, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-1144)
1144. From 1882 the The Pontifical and Archiepiscopal Printing House of Modena published twenty-three volumes, the last of which were posthumous, of the *Opere del P. Secondo Franco rivedute ed aumentate dall’autore,* a series that collected many previously published books, often bringing together several titles in a single volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-1145)
1145. Many testimonies in the *Biographical Memoirs.* In 1866, Don Bosco offered hospitality to the Jesuits in Turin following their eviction by the government (cf. BM v. 8, p. 185); the Jesuit was then often invited to preach at the Oratory (cf. MB v. 8, p. 623; v. 10, p. 1170; v. 12, p. 181). Some of Fr Franco’s writings were then published starting in 1869 by the oratory’s printing press in the *Letture Cattoliche* (cf. MB v. 9, p. 760; v. 10, pp. 206. 398). Don Bosco had already asked him for advice on several occasions in different circumstances. (cf. MB v. 11, p. 161; v. 12, p. 508) as he himself would testify at the first General Chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1146)
1146. For this biographical information, I have drawn on COLPO M., “Franco (Secondo)”, in DSp*,* v. 5. coll. 1014-1016. [↑](#footnote-ref-1147)
1147. This can be found on pp. 77-78 from the first notebook of Barberis’ minutes in ACS D 578. I note here that references to this and other interventions by Fr Franco would be removed from the copies of the minutes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1148)
1148. *Ibidem* [my emph.]*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1149)
1149. Cf. SOMMERVOGEL C., *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus,* Schepens, Bruxelles 1894, v. 7, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-1150)
1150. Fr Barberis then deletes this sentence and rewrites it as follows (cf. ACS D 578, p. 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-1151)
1151. In the *Istruzioni per le religiose in tempo di esercizi spirituali,* already referred to when speaking of Fr Barberis’ teaching on meditation, we find a eulogy by Fr Franco on De la Puente’s text: “However, I cannot deny that few authors are equal to the Venerable Luigi da Ponte, who exercises his powers so well that he can offer both a model to follow and a subject to meditate on.” (FRANCO S., *Istruzioni per le religiose…,* cit., p. 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-1152)
1152. St Alphonsus’ text is well-known; The second text cited is certainly less well known. It is a work by Ignazio Del Costato Di Gesù with the full title *La scuola di Gesù Appassionato aperta al cristiano con la quotidiana meditazione delle sue pene,* published in Rome in 1851 by Libreria Marini and republished several times in the second half of the 19th century in Rome (in 1855, 1861, 1888, etc.) and in Genoa (1858) by the Tipografia Gio. Fassi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1153)
1153. ACS D 578, pp. 116-117 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1154)
1154. The copies of these minutes report the text as it appears in its final draft, after corrections made by Fr Barberis himself. (cf. ACS D 578). [↑](#footnote-ref-1155)
1155. Cf. SIMON DIAZ J., *Jesuitas de los siglos XVI y XVII: escritos localizados,* Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca - Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid 1975, p. 309 [↑](#footnote-ref-1156)
1156. NICOLAU M., “La Puente”, in DSp v. 9, coll. 267-268. [↑](#footnote-ref-1157)
1157. Cf. NICOLAU M., “La Puente”, cit., p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-1158)
1158. The pages measure 13.5 x 22.0 cm and are written in two columns in very small type. In the edition published in Naples by Andrea Festa’s printing house in 1851, the same introduction occupies about one hundred pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-1159)
1159. PUENTE L. de la, *Meditazioni del Ven. Padre Ludovico da Ponte della Compagnia di Gesù tradotte dallo spagnolo dal Signor Giulio Cesare Braccini corrette e a miglior forma ridotte dal P. Giacomo Bonaretti della stessa Compagnia,* Marietti, Torino 18758, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1160)
1160. The italicised text below shows the titles of the paragraphs in Braccini's translation, followed by brief notes summarising their content. [↑](#footnote-ref-1161)
1161. ACS D 578. It can be found on p. 310 of the large notebook of minutes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1162)
1162. ACS D 578, p. 304 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1163)
1163. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit. p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-1164)
1164. [BOSCO G.], *Capitolo Generale della Congregazione Salesiana da convocarsi in Lanzo nel prossimo settembre 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1165)
1165. These include Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo (1645-1705), Luis de la Puente (1554-1624), Paolo Segneri (1624-1694), Paolo Segneri Iuniore (1673-1713), Robert Parsons (1546-1610), Ludwig Bellecius (1704-1754), Daniello Bartoli (1608-1695), Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595-1658), Pietro Maria Ferreri (1677-1737), Alonso Rodriguez (1537-1616), by Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687-1752), by Frank A. Schmid (1806-1873), and, possibly, Francesco Maria Giordano (1624-1706). [↑](#footnote-ref-1166)
1166. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* pp. 1206-1209. [↑](#footnote-ref-1167)
1167. *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale…,* [1882], cit., p. 0 (not numbered – page before p. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-1168)
1168. *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale…,* [1878], cit., p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1169)
1169. ACS D 579. [↑](#footnote-ref-1170)
1170. Cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps,*  cit., pp. 1223-1226. [↑](#footnote-ref-1171)
1171. ACS D 579 [my emp.]. This is p. 2 of a sheet from the minutes, entitled *7 Settembre sera. Ultima conferenza*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1172)
1172. CERIA E., *Annali della Società Salesiana dalle origini alla morte di S. Giovanni Bosco (1841-1888),* v. 1, SEI, Torino 1961, p. 469. [↑](#footnote-ref-1173)
1173. The forms and the three-page summary can be found in ACS D 579. I will indicate observations taken from this summary with the letter R, followed by the relevant original number. [↑](#footnote-ref-1174)
1174. Don Vespignani (1854-1932) fece parte della terza spedizione missionaria in Argentina, come maestro dei novizi. Nel 1922 fu richiamato a Torino per far parte del Consiglio Superiore (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINO’ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit., pp. 294-295). [↑](#footnote-ref-1175)
1175. Ricevuto da Don Bosco all’oratorio di Valdocco nel 1856, Don Carlo Pane fece parte del prima comunità salesiana in Spagna, per poi raggiungere l’America e fondare la missione del Perù (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINO’ A., *Dizionario biografico…,* cit. p. 212). [↑](#footnote-ref-1176)
1176. Fu amministratore e poi direttore del *Bollettino Salesiano* (cf. MB v. 15, p. 670; v. 18, p. 429). [↑](#footnote-ref-1177)
1177. ACS D 579; vedi anche FdB 1862 D 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-1178)
1178. ACS D 579; FdB 1862 D 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1179)
1179. These are four handwritten sheets, preserved in ACS D 579; the handwriting allows us to attribute them to Fr Pietro Pozzan, mentioned in a previous note. [↑](#footnote-ref-1180)
1180. Cf. ACS D 579. [↑](#footnote-ref-1181)
1181. This text of the *Norme per la direzione degli Esercizi Spirituali,* like the previous timetable, is taken from COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso, con cenni storici sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Editore Canonica, Torino1895, pp. 367-379. [↑](#footnote-ref-1182)
1182. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso,…*, cit., pp. 367-379 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1183)
1183. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso…*, cit., pp. 374-375. [↑](#footnote-ref-1184)
1184. BROCARDO P., “Gli Esercizi Spirituali nella esperienza di D. Bosco e della vita salesiana”, in *Il rinnovamento degli Esercizi Spirituali. Simposio salesiano europeo,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1975, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-1185)
1185. ACS D 579. This reference is also implied in the previous citations, where no explicit indication is given. [↑](#footnote-ref-1186)
1186. ACS D 579; FdB 1865 D 10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1187)
1187. *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86,* Tipografia Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1887, p. 7 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1188)
1188. It was the year of the death of Archbishop Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin. [↑](#footnote-ref-1189)
1189. ACS A 000.04.06, p. 22 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1190)
1190. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 1203. [↑](#footnote-ref-1191)
1191. Cf. MB v. 15, p. 148. The so-called “dream of the ten diamonds” dates back to September 1881 and is recounted by Don Eugenio Ceria in the fifteenth volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. pp. 148-151). [↑](#footnote-ref-1192)
1192. The dating is from Fr MOTTO F., *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio Bosco a’ suoi figliuoli salesiani,* LAS, Roma 1985, pp. 10-11. This is the critical edition of this booklet by Don Bosco, the original of which can be found in ACS A 227.03.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-1193)
1193. Cf. ACS A 227.03.08, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1194)
1194. ACS A 227.03.08, pp. 268-269. [↑](#footnote-ref-1195)
1195. ACS A 227.03.08, p. 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-1196)
1196. Cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINO’ A., *Dizionario biografico …,* cit., p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-1197)
1197. The introduction states: “Remember that this work should not be given to novices, as it is exclusively reserved for novice directors.” ( ACS A 384.01.15, p. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-1198)
1198. ACS A 384.01.15, p. 7 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1199)
1199. ACS A 384.01.15, p. 9 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1200)
1200. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* SEI, Torino 1929, p. 8. Salesian Fr Giorgio Gozzelino, who edited the last (non-commercial) edition in 1988, the centenary year of the founder’s death, wrote: “Since Don Bosco’s death, the dominant concern of his sons... has been to preserve and develop his charism faithfully, without distortion but also without hesitation. This valuable task has given rise to a mass of writings that is impressive to say the least: there are over a thousand biographies of the saint, with more than thirty thousand publications divided between documentary works, studies and popular works. Not all of this abundant material deserves to be remembered. But by now the Salesian tradition has its own classics: books that stand out for their scientific rigour or subtlety of understanding; books that do not age because they are as capable of enlightening and stirring consciences today as they did in their own time. *Don Bosco con Dio* by Fr Ceria is among one of the best.” (GOZZELINO G., “Presentazione”, in CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1988, p. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-1201)
1201. CASTELLANI A., *Il Beato Leonardo Murialdo,* v. 1, Tipografia S. Pio X, Roma 1966, pp. XXVII-XXVIII [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1202)
1202. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, p. VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-1203)
1203. If I may offer an example, it would seem pointless to try to write the spiritual history of a family man without including the testimonies of his wife and children, simply because they are not sufficiently *neutral.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1204)
1204. This is how, for example, the testimony of the Bishop of Aosta, Bishop Giovanni Tasso, a former pupil of the oratory, begins: “I come here to testify because I have been summoned by the Office, and I am very happy to be able to give this demonstration of gratitude and esteem to the Venerable Don Bosco and to bear witness to the truth, and for no other human reason. I ardently desire the beatification of the Venerable for the greater glory of God, for the propagation of his Community and for the good of the Church. No one has instructed me on what I am to testify.” (FdR 2509 E 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-1205)
1205. In addition to the process documents, in the following sections I will refer to the only real monographic study on this subject, published by Fr Pietro Stella in 1988 with the Libreria Editrice Salesiana, a study which constitutes the third volume of his work *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* already cited many times. However, according to the author’s own presentation, rather than focusing on the evidence presented at the trial to demonstrate the *heroic virtues* of Don Bosco, the book considers the problematic issues, 'paying attention to the key points of the trial debate; that is, it focuses in particular on both the “animadversiones” or warnings and objections that the promoter of the faith proposed to examine, and on the responses prepared from time to time by lawyers for the cause” (p. 12). Another study, of more modest proportions, was published by Monsignor Giovanni Papa, then General Rapporteur of the Causes of Saints, with the title *La causa di beatificazione e canonizzazione di S.Giovanni Bosco,* Basilica di S. Giovanni Bosco, Roma 1984. [↑](#footnote-ref-1206)
1206. As already mentioned, he was Don Bosco’s first successor at the head of the congregation, until his death in 1910. Blessed Michael Rua had met Don Bosco in 1845, when he was just eight years old. Seven years later, he began living at the Oratory, wearing the clerical habit. He was Prefect General of the Congregation for 20 years and Rector Major for 22 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-1207)
1207. Cf. PAPA G., *La causa di beatificazione…,* cit., p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1208)
1208. The entire course of the cause, apart from a few minor changes introduced in 1930, when the process was nearing its conclusion, followed the traditional procedure established at the time of Urban VIII with the decree *Coelestis Hierusalem Cives* 5 July 1634. [↑](#footnote-ref-1209)
1209. In fact the cause lasted for 44 years, from 4 June 1890 to 1 April 1934, date of the canonisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1210)
1210. The other most important objections concerned certain predictions that appeared not to have come true, the methods used to obtain money for his works, and his possible moral responsibility in relation to certain pamphlets against the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Gastaldi, who had been a friend of the Salesian work but had become a staunch opponent. [↑](#footnote-ref-1211)
1211. SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIONE, *Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco sacerdotis fundatoris Societatis Salesianae. Nova positio super virtutibus. Novae animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1212)
1212. *Positio super virtutibus,* Roma 1923, p. 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-1213)
1213. *Nova positio super virtutibus. Novae animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1214)
1214. Definitive with regard to both objections to prayer (vocal and mental). There would still be some *Novissimae animadversiones* and related *Responsio* before the declaration of heroicity of virtue. [↑](#footnote-ref-1215)
1215. PAPA G., *La causa di beatificazione…,* cit., p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1216)
1216. PAPA G., *La causa di beatificazione…,* cit., p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1217)
1217. Cf. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione. Trattato di Teologia mistica. Versione riveduta dall’autore sulla settima edizione francese,* Tipografia pontificia e della Sacra Congregazione dei Riti, Marietti, Torino 1912, pp. 15. 64-65. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-1218)
1218. Cf. LERCARO A., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* Editrice Massimo, Milano 1969, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1219)
1219. Bishop Cagliero was the first Salesian bishop. He was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti in 1838 and was welcomed by Don Bosco into the Valdocco oratory at the age of about thirteen. He was Spiritual Director of the congregation and later also of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, before leaving with the first missionary expedition to Patagonia in 1875. He died in 1926 at the age of 88. He was bishop for 41 years and cardinal for 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1220)
1220. There are numerous direct and indirect testimonies. Fr Giovanni Cassano, a Salesian writer who published a two-volume biography of Fr Cagliero in 1935, described him as “Don Bosco's right-hand man” and “his trusted confidant” (cf. CASSANO G., *Il Cardinale Giovanni Cagliero,* v. 1, SEI, Torino 1935, p. 302). [↑](#footnote-ref-1221)
1221. Cf. BM v. 18, p. 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-1222)
1222. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 571. [↑](#footnote-ref-1223)
1223. *Positio super virtutibus. Informatio,* Rome 1925, p. 47 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1224)
1224. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-1225)
1225. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1226)
1226. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-1227)
1227. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, pp. 560. 561-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1228)
1228. Fr Francesco Cerruti (1844-1917) was accepted into the oratory as a young boy in 1855. After graduating in literature, he was one of the first rectors and then Provincial and General Councillor. For thirty-one years he was General School Councillor of the Salesian Congregation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1229)
1229. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* a cura dell’Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, Scuola Grafica Salesiana, Torino 1969, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-1230)
1230. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-1231)
1231. Also a native of Castelnuovo d'Asti, Fr Secondo Marchisio had met Don Bosco in 1873 and remained with him continuously for thirteen years. Upon the founder’s death, he gathered news, memories and anecdotes about his early years in the lands surrounding Becchi, the district where Don Bosco was born. These were later used by Fr Lemoyne for the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. BM v. 18, p. 492. His surname is spelt as Marchesio in the BM)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1232)
1232. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* 546. [↑](#footnote-ref-1233)
1233. Cf. FdR 2509 E 6-7. For this information and subsequent quotations, reference will be made directly to the microfiche relating to Bishop Tasso’s original statement at the apostolic process, filed from 22 November 1916 to 27 February 1917 at the ecclesiastical court of Turin. [↑](#footnote-ref-1234)
1234. FdR 2509 E 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1235)
1235. FdR 2510 B 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1236)
1236. FdR 2510 C 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1237)
1237. LERCARO A., *Metodi di orazione mentale,* cit., p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1238)
1238. This is probably a text by Simon Salamo of which we have found a 1762 edition: *Regula Cleri ex sacris literis, sanctorum patrum monimentis, ecclesiasticisque sanctionibus excerpta. studio, et opera simonis salamo, et melchioris gelabert, presb. doctorum, et Missionariorum Dioecesis Elnensis, Editio prima Taurinensis juxta tertiam Avenionensem, Ab ipsismet Auctoribus post primam, cui titulus erat: Compendiosa Regula Cleri, recognita, emendata, aucta, et in aptiorem methodum redacta*, Apud Jo. P. Xaverium Fontanam, & Ludovicum Gorinum, Taurini 1762. [↑](#footnote-ref-1239)
1239. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-1240)
1240. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium,* 495-496 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1241)
1241. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 568. [↑](#footnote-ref-1242)
1242. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, pp. 332.333. [↑](#footnote-ref-1243)
1243. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-1244)
1244. Honorary Canon of the Collegiate Church of Turin during the years of the informative process, Fr Giovanni Battista Anfossi was also one of the first ‘congregants’ in 1859. He then joined the diocesan clergy and retained a filial devotion to Don Bosco until the saint's death. Together with other diocesan priests, Giovanni Battista Anfossi declared, in relation to the disagreements that had arisen with the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Gastaldi, that Don Bosco had given continuous proof of good will, prudence and respect (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 3, cit., p. 87). [↑](#footnote-ref-1245)
1245. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 547-548. [↑](#footnote-ref-1246)
1246. Secular priest, curate of the Church of St Augustine in Turin at the time of the informative process. Fr Felice Reviglio met Don Bosco in 1847 at the age of sixteen and was a boarder at the *house attached* to the oratory. He then enjoyed “an intimate friendship with the Servant of God throughout his life’ (BM v. 18, p. 488). [↑](#footnote-ref-1247)
1247. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium,* Rome 1907, p. 488. Bishop Giovanni Battista Bertagna (1828-1905), referred to in Reviglio's testimony, was Cafasso’s successor as professor of moral theology at the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Seminary in Turin, starting in 1860. In 1876, he was relieved of this duty by Archbishop Gastaldi, who did not share the Seminary’s views on moral theology and who would close it two years later. Bertagna then “emigrated” to the diocese of Asti. In 1884, a year after the appointment of the new Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda, he returned to Turin where he was appointed auxiliary bishop and resumed his position at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, which had been reopened two years earlier by Canon Allamano, Cafasso’s nephew. Giovanni Battista Bertagna, a fellow townsman of Don Bosco, had collaborated with him as a young cleric teaching catechism in Valdocco; he would preside over the saint’s funeral on 2 February 1888. For further information, see the article by VALENTINI E., *Mons. Gastaldi e Mons. G.B. Bertagna,* in "Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose" 7 (1969) 1, pp. 27-43; 44-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-1248)
1248. Giovan Battista Francesia (1838-1930) knew Don Bosco in 1850. He too was part of the “constituent assembly” of 1859. He was Spiritual Director of the *Salesian Society,* Provincial and General Councillor, as well as a man of letters and a prolific writer. Among his many students was St Dominic Savio. He enjoyed a close friendship with Don Bosco, for whom he had a deep affection. For further biographical information, see VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* cit., pp. 128-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-1249)
1249. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 543. [↑](#footnote-ref-1250)
1250. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 537. [↑](#footnote-ref-1251)
1251. Theologian and moralist, Fr Luigi Piscetta (1858-1925), formed at the school of Bishop Bertagna, disciplie of St Joseph Cafasso, after Don Bosco’s death, was rector of the house for clerics at Valsalice and a member of the Superior Council. (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* cit., p. 223). [↑](#footnote-ref-1252)
1252. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-1253)
1253. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 571 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1254)
1254. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1923, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-1255)
1255. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1923, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-1256)
1256. *Positio super introductione causae,* Rome 1907, p. 480. Fr Francesco Dalmazzo did not testify during the subsequent stages of the process because he was fatally wounded by a reckless individual in 1895 in Catanzaro, where he had gone to direct the diocesan seminary.(cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* cit., p. 104). [↑](#footnote-ref-1257)
1257. This is the Jesuit Agustin François Poulain (1836-1919), whom I have already mentioned in a previous note. His treatise on mystical theology, *Delle grazie d’orazione* (On the Graces of Prayer), was published nine times during his lifetime. For this and other biographical information, see the entry edited by GENSAC H. de, “Poulain (Augustin- François)”, in DSp v. 12/II, coll. 2025-2027. [↑](#footnote-ref-1258)
1258. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-1259)
1259. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1260)
1260. *Positio super fama sanctitatis,* Roma 1915, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-1261)
1261. *Positio super virtutibus. Informatio,* Roma 1923, pp. 48. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1262)
1262. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium,* Roma 1907, p. 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-1263)
1263. *Positio super virtutibus. Informatio,* Roma 1927, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-1264)
1264. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 107 [my emph.]. The Salesian referred to by Fr Stella is Fr Evasio Garrone (1860-1911), who entered the Valdocco oratory at the age of eighteen. After receiving his cassock in 1885 from Don Bosco himself, he left for Patagonia as a missionary and worked as a doctor in the Salesian hospital in Viedma. For this, he was later awarded an honorary degree by the government. Fr Garrone testified that he witnessed Don Bosco’s ecstatic states three times during the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* cit., p. 136; BM v. 13, p. 701-702). [↑](#footnote-ref-1265)
1265. See, in particular, Chapter XV of the second volume of *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* dal titolo *I fatti straordinari* (pp. 475-500). [↑](#footnote-ref-1266)
1266. Cf. BM v. 13, p. p. 701-702. [↑](#footnote-ref-1267)
1267. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps …*, cit., p. 1308 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1268)
1268. DACQUINO G., *La psicologia di Don Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1988, p. 303-304 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1269)
1269. Fr Francesco Giacomelli recounts, for example, in relation to the years 1849-1851 when he lived at the Valdocco oratory: “If anyone had committed a serious offence, he was as saddened as if some misfortune had befallen him, and, deeply distressed, he would say to the guilty party: ‘Why do you treat God so badly, when he loves us so much?’ And sometimes I saw him weeping.” (MB v. 3, p. 587). Here, as elsewhere, the true origin of this weeping appears to be the profound love for God that animated Don Bosco’s life. [↑](#footnote-ref-1270)
1270. MB v. 4, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-1271)
1271. Pietro Enria was born in San Benigno Canavese on 20 June 1841. Having lost his parents in the cholera epidemic of 1854, he was taken in by the oratory, where he remained as an assistant, taking his religious vows only in 1878. At the oratory, he performed various tasks, but Don Bosco always wanted him by his side during his most serious illnesses. (cf. VALENTINI E. – RODINÒ A., *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani,* cit., p.116). [↑](#footnote-ref-1272)
1272. *Positio super introductione causae. Informatio,* Rome 1907, pp. 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-1273)
1273. *Positio super introductione causae. Informatio,* Rome 1907, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-1274)
1274. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Rome 1923, p. 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-1275)
1275. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium,* Rome 1907, p. 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-1276)
1276. For further information on this topic, see the pages by Fr Pietro Stella in *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, pp. 507-569. [↑](#footnote-ref-1277)
1277. The *animadversiones*, as is clear from the context, are the objections raised by the consultors against the beatification of the candidate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1278)
1278. The General Promoter of the Faith was Monsignor Carlo Salotti, former lawyer for the cause, who was mentioned in a previous note. Salotti, who had had to gather a series of objections raised by the consultors and expressions of dissatisfaction, had always been a great admirer of Don Bosco and a keen observer of his life. His regret, as Fr Pietro Stella points out, was that Don Bosco had not, until that moment, had a lawyer capable of handling the situation.(cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella...,* III, 196-197). His advice, as attested by the postulator of the cause, Don Viglietti, was invaluable in bringing it to a successful conclusion [Cf. TOMASETTI F., *Memorie confidenziali in margine alle cause di D.Bosco e di D.Savio redatte da D.Francesco Tomasetti* (giugno 1944), Typescript of 37 pages, in the archives of the Postulator for the Causes of Beatification, Generalate Archives, Rome]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1279)
1279. Blessed Philip Rinaldi was Don Bosco’s third successor. He died in 1931 after serving as Rector Major for nine years, following 21 years as Prefect General and nine as Provincial. He is recognised as the founder of the Secular Institute of the Volunteers of Don Bosco, which is an integral part of the Salesian Family. [↑](#footnote-ref-1280)
1280. The letter, dated 29 September 1926, is attached in the appendix to the cause documents. (cf. *Aliae novae animadversiones et responsiones. Appendix documentorum*, n. 1, p. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1281)
1281. ACS A 000.02.06, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-1282)
1282. Della Cioppa was assisted not only by the then postulator of the cause, Salesian Fr Tomasetti, but also by Monsignor Salotti himself and by Salesian historian Fr Angelo Amadei, author of the tenth volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 3, cit., pp. 197ss). [↑](#footnote-ref-1283)
1283. Cf. *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1284)
1284. Cf. *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 58. The term “mixed” in this case means both active and contemplative. [↑](#footnote-ref-1285)
1285. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1286)
1286. Cf. *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 61. Here and below, I will adhere to the typographical style used in the printed edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1287)
1287. *Ibidem.* 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-1288)
1288. Cf. *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, pp. 63-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-1289)
1289. CICCOLINI A., *Raccolta di meditazioni e documenti secondo la materia e la forma proposte da S.Ignazio di Loyola nei suoi esercizi spirituali,* Camillo Dongo, Roma 1880, II, 227; cf. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 66. Here too the *bold type* and upper case are not mine but belong to the text as reported by the *Responsio.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1290)
1290. Cf. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, pp. 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1291)
1291. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 67 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1292)
1292. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 67-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-1293)
1293. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 68. Upper case is in the original text. [↑](#footnote-ref-1294)
1294. *Responsio ad novas animadversiones,* Rome 1926, p. 69. Upper case is in the printed text. [↑](#footnote-ref-1295)
1295. At this point the *Responsio* goes on to examine the question related to the dispensation from saying the Divine Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-1296)
1296. For the biographical information that follows, I have drawn in particular on the notes of Fr Brenno Casali in BARBERIS G., *Lettere a Don Paolo Albera e a Don Giacomo Gusmano durante la loro visita alle case d’America (1900-1903),* LAS, Roma 1998, pp.26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1297)
1297. Cf. BM v. 18, p. 452. Fr Albera did not arrive in time at the bedside of his beloved father. When he received the telegram from Fr Francesco Cerruti, Don Bosco had already passed away. [↑](#footnote-ref-1298)
1298. FAVINI G., *Don Paolo Albera. “Le petit Don Bosco”,* SEI, Torino 1975, p. 13 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1299)
1299. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani,* SEI, Torino 1922, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1300)
1300. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani,* cit., p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-1301)
1301. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani,* cit., p. 34 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1302)
1302. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*, cit., pp. 406-407 [my emph.]. It may be interesting to note that many years later, Don Bosco’s fourth successor, Fr Peter Ricaldone, quoting this passage from Fr Albera, commented: “May the Lord grant the grace of contemplation to many of Don Bosco’s sons, so that they may imitate their Father and Founder ever more perfectly by rekindling the flames of their zeal in contemplative prayer.” (RICALDONE P., *La pietà*, LDC, Colle Don Bosco 1955, p. 185). [↑](#footnote-ref-1303)
1303. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*, cit., p. 443. [↑](#footnote-ref-1304)
1304. *Ibidem* [my emph.]*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1305)
1305. CERIA E., *Vita del Servo di Dio Sac. Filippo Rinaldi,* SEI, Torino 1948, pp. 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-1306)
1306. This observation by Fr Rinaldi brings us back to the different *levels* of interpretation of the *Memoirs of the Oratory* which I mentioned in the third chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1307)
1307. ACS A 384.01.15 [my emph]. The letter, entitled *Cari maestri degli ascritti* has no date but can be located as being around 1930 (a circular letter from Fr Luigi Tirone from that year is cited) and 1931 (the year of Fr Rinaldi’s death). [↑](#footnote-ref-1308)
1308. The entire address is reported in the “Bollettino Salesiano” 46 (July 1922) pp. 172 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1309)
1309. BORINO G.B., *Don Bosco. Sei scritti e un modo di vederlo. Con una appendice: Pio XI e Don Bosco,* SEI, Roma 19402, p. [191]. The appendix, which contains Fr Borino’s personal account of this memory, does not include page numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1310)
1310. Pius XI’s address is reported in the *Osservatore Romano* of 19 June *1*932 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1311)
1311. Cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia,* v. 3, cit., p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-1312)
1312. SALOTTI C., *Il Beato Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1930, p. 485 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1313)
1313. In BM v. 3, p. 414 we read, for eample: “Father Ascanio Savio was convinced that Don Bosco kept vigil during long hours of the night and sometimes for the whole night, deep in prayer.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1314)
1314. See, for example, in this study, the passages taken from the biographies of Comollo, Besucco, Blessed Mary of the Angels, from the introduction to *Il cattolico provveduto* and the biography of Cafasso, as also some of the biographies of deceased confreres. [↑](#footnote-ref-1315)
1315. Cf. BERNARD C.A., *Teologia spirituale,* Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1987, p. 70. See also all of chapter III entitled *La teologia spirituale come disciplina scientifica* (pp. 69 ff.) and, in particular, pp. 69-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-1316)
1316. BERNARD C.A., *Teologia spirituale,* cit., p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-1317)
1317. BALTHASAR H.U. von, *Sorelle nello spirito,* Jaca Book, Milano 1974, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1318)
1318. Fr Ceria was also a talented humanist, scholar and commentator on Greek and Latin classics, and writer of ascetic works. For further biographical information on Fr Ceria and his literary works, see VALENTINI E., *Don Ceria scrittore,* SEI, Torino 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-1319)
1319. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* SEI, Torino 1929, pp. 7-8 [my emph.]. *Don Bosco con Dio* by Fr Ceria was published and reprinted several times in its two “versions”, which differ not only in a few details but above all in the addition of five new chapters in the second edition. The first edition was published by SEI in Turin in 1929. This first edition is divided into three parts, with evocative titles: I. *Aurora consurgens* (childhood and formation); II. *Sol in meridie* (mature years); III. *Lucis ante terminum* (extraordinary gifts). The last re-publishing of the book was in 1988 (CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1988). In the second edition in 1946, which was expanded with five new chapters added, this threefold structure disappears. [↑](#footnote-ref-1320)
1320. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1321)
1321. Cf. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1322)
1322. Cf. SICARI A., *La vita spirituale del cristiano,* Jaca Book. Milano 1997, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-1323)
1323. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1324)
1324. Cf. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1325)
1325. In a note, Fr Ceria clarifies: “We will refer to mystical life, on the authority of distinguished masters, as *the immediate, loving perception of the world of faith, in particular of the eminently active presence of God in the soul.*” (CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 207). The previous chapter was dedicated to *dreams, ecstasies, visions*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1326)
1326. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. pp. 207-208 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1327)
1327. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-1328)
1328. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-1329)
1329. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,*  Marietti, Torino 1912, p. 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-1330)
1330. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1331)
1331. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., p. 557. [↑](#footnote-ref-1332)
1332. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., p. 559. [↑](#footnote-ref-1333)
1333. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-1334)
1334. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1335)
1335. Cf. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., pp. 213-316. [↑](#footnote-ref-1336)
1336. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. pp. 208-209 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1337)
1337. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit. p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-1338)
1338. Poulain specifies the difference between the first and second degrees, between *quietude* and *full union*, as follows: “The fundamental difference is that [in full union] the soul is more deeply immersed in God, and the unitive bond is much stronger. This gives rise to various consequences: the first ... is the absence of distractions; the second is that personal work is reduced to almost nothing; the third is that one has a much firmer certainty of God’s presence in the soul. And this last characteristic is regarded by St Teresa as the surest sign of this prayer.” (POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., p. 253). [↑](#footnote-ref-1339)
1339. Bishop Tasso and Cardinal Cagliero. [↑](#footnote-ref-1340)
1340. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,*  cit., p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-1341)
1341. Tomás de Vallgornera (1595-1675), expert in the *Summa* of St Thomas Aquinas, with his work *Mystica theologia divi Thomae* is the first author to attempt to explain the entire mystical journey of the soul to God using the teachings of Saint Thomas; his two-volume work stands out for the richness and simplicity of the concise formulas he developed.(cf. LOPEZ SANTIDRIÁN S., “Vallgornera (Tomás de)”, in DSp v. 16, coll. 213-216). [↑](#footnote-ref-1342)
1342. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,*  cit., p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-1343)
1343. I once again stress here that these *laws* are, in essence, well-founded hypotheses rather than deterministic and absolute laws; their scientific value is comparable, for example, to that of experimental psychology (cf. BERNARD C.A., *Teologia spirituale,* cit., p. 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-1344)
1344. Cf. SICARI A., *La vita spirituale del cristiano,* cit., p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-1345)
1345. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia divi Thomae utriusque theologiae scholasticae et mysticae principis,* v. 2, Typ. Pontificia Marietti, Augustae Taurinorum 19113, pp. 140-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-1346)
1346. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-1347)
1347. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-1348)
1348. *Ibidem.* Cf. St THOMAE AQVINATIS, *Summa totius Theologiae,* II.II, q. 82, art 4, ad. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1349)
1349. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-1350)
1350. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-1351)
1351. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-1352)
1352. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-1353)
1353. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-1354)
1354. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-1355)
1355. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-1356)
1356. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-1357)
1357. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-1358)
1358. VALLGORNERA T., *Mystica theologia…,* v. 2, cit., p. 144-145. [↑](#footnote-ref-1359)
1359. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-1360)
1360. *Ibidem.* Cf. POULAIN A., *Delle grazie d’orazione...,* cit., p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-1361)
1361. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., pp. 220-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-1362)
1362. This is Maxime de Montmorand, quoted by TANQUEREY A., *Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique,* Desclée, Paris 1924, e autore di *Psychologie des mystiques catholiques ortodoxes,* Ed. F. Alcan, Parigi 1920. [↑](#footnote-ref-1363)
1363. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* cit., p.221 [↑](#footnote-ref-1364)
1364. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio. Nuova edizione ampliata,* Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle Don Bosco 1946, pp. 347-348 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1365)
1365. The text referred to here and further on by Fr Ceria is, in its Italian translation, HELLO E., *Profili di santi,* Rinascimento del Libro, Firenze 1929. [↑](#footnote-ref-1366)
1366. CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio. Nuova edizione ampliata,* cit., pp. 348-349 [↑](#footnote-ref-1367)
1367. GOZZELINO G., *Don Bosco con Dio. Ritratto di un santo,* in “Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana” n. 6 (1991) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1368)
1368. GOZZELINO G., “Presentazione”, in CERIA E., *Don Bosco con Dio,* Editrice S.D.B., Roma 1988, pp. 7-8 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1369)
1369. BETTI E., *L’ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito. Saggio introduttivo, scelta antropologica e bibliografie a cura di Gaspare Mura,* Citta Nuova Editrice, Roma 1987, pp. 67-68 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1370)
1370. See in particular the *Responsio ad alias novas animadversiones* pp. 56-69 in SACRA RITUUM CONGREGATIONE, *Beatificationis et canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Sac. Joannis Bosco fundatoris Piae Societatis Salesianae et Instituti Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis,* Ex. Tipographia Augustiniana, Romae 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-1371)
1371. GODIN A., *Psychologie des expériences religieuses,* Le Centurion, Paris 1986, p. 17 [my translation into Italian]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1372)
1372. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, LAS, Roma 1981, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1373)
1373. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, cit., p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-1374)
1374. MO p. 47 [68]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1375)
1375. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1376)
1376. Cf. GIRAUDO A., *Clero seminario e società,* LAS, Roma 1993, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-1377)
1377. MO p. 92 [105]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1378)
1378. GIORDANO F., *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti a' giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio,* Dalla Stamperia degli Artisti Tipografi, Torino 1846, pp. 139-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-1379)
1379. MO p. 70 [84]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1380)
1380. BOSCO G., *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6…,* ed. MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1985, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1381)
1381. Cf. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso con cenni storici sul Convitto Ecclesiastico di Torino,* Tip. e Lib. Fratelli Canonica e C., Torino 1895, p. 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-1382)
1382. COLOMBERO G., *Vita del Servo di Dio…,* cit. p. 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-1383)
1383. MO p. 116 [124]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1384)
1384. MO p. 117 [124]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1385)
1385. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,*[Copia Corgiatti] v. 7, pp. 2693-2694. [↑](#footnote-ref-1386)
1386. CAFASSO G., Manoscritti, [Copia Corgiatti] v. 4, pp. 2028-2029. [↑](#footnote-ref-1387)
1387. *Positio super virtutibus. Informatio,* Romae 1925, p. 47. This is an excerpt from a testimony by Bishop Giovanni Cagliero. [↑](#footnote-ref-1388)
1388. Cf. by way of example, MO pp. 62, 85, 89, 110. [Tr note: these are all references to the Italian edition, but similar can be found in English under various entries such as reserve, retiring life, aloofness from the world, climate of recollection...] [↑](#footnote-ref-1389)
1389. Cf. MO p. 89 [102]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1390)
1390. Cf. MO p. 85 [98]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1391)
1391. Cf. MO p. 110 [116]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1392)
1392. CAFASSO G., *Istruzioni per Esercizi Spirituali al clero pubblicate per cura del Can. Giuseppe Allamano,* Tipografia Fratelli Canonica, Torino 1893, pp. 88-89 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1393)
1393. CAFASSO G., *Manoscritti,* v. 5, p. 2085 B [p. 85]. For this quotation I used the work of Flavio Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di san Giuseppe Cafasso,* Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Torino 1958, quoting from the nine volumes of Cafasso's manuscripts, as indicated by the author, and, in square brackets, the page of the text where I found the quotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1394)
1394. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874,* [Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales], Torino 1875*,* cit. pp. XXXII-XXXIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1395)
1395. BOSCO G., *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6…,* cit., p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-1396)
1396. *Positio super virtutibus. Summarium,* Romae 1923, pp. 560. 561-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1397)
1397. *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium,* Romae 1907, pp. 495-496 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1398)
1398. The letter, dated 29 September 1926, is attached as an appendix to the documents of the Cause (cf. *Aliae novae animadversiones et responsiones. Appendix documentorum*, n. 1, p. 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1399)
1399. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri,* Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1860, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-1400)
1400. BOSCO G., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1861, p. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-1401)
1401. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera*, Tipografia dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, Torino 1864, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-1402)
1402. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-1403)
1403. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., pp. 111-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-1404)
1404. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli carmelitana scalza torinese,* Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Torino 1865*,* p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1405)
1405. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 110-111 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1406)
1406. [BOSCO G.], *Il Cattolico Provveduto…* (Bonetti manuscript), ACS A 229.03.02, pp. 9-10 [my emph.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1407)
1407. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877, p. 36. Fr Desramaut informs us that the manuscript (which I have not found in the archives) contains corrections made by Don Bosco. (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996, p. 1380). [↑](#footnote-ref-1408)
1408. LEMOYNE G.B., *Ricordi di gabinetto,* aprile 1884; The content of this confidence was then included by him in the *Biographical Memoirs* (cf. v. 4, p. 131). [↑](#footnote-ref-1409)
1409. BM v. 3, p. 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-1410)
1410. Cf. CAVIGLIA A., *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco. Nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti. A cura della Pia Società Salesiana* , v. 6, SEI, Torino 1965, p. XXXIX. [↑](#footnote-ref-1411)
1411. [BOSCO G.], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega,* Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, Torino 1844, pp. 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-1412)
1412. [BOSCO G.], *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales,* Tipografia G.B. Paravia e Comp., Torino 1859, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1413)
1413. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi …,* cit., p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1414)
1414. BOSCO G., *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso…,* cit., p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-1415)
1415. BOSCO G., *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli…,* cit., pp. 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-1416)
1416. BOSCO G., *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle,* Imprimerie Salésienne, Turin 1882, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-1417)
1417. FdB 1868 D 6; cf. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico …,*cit., p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-1418)
1418. BARBERIS A., *Don Giulio Barberis direttore spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales,* Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, San Benigno Canavese 1932, p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-1419)
1419. FdB 446 A 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1420)
1420. Remember, for example, the dream recounted in BM v. 9, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-1421)
1421. [BOSCO G.], *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell’Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de’ principali Vespri dell’anno coll’aggiunta di laudi sacre ecc.,* Tipografia Paravia e Comp., Torino 1847*,* p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-1422)
1422. BOSCO G., *Il pastorello delle Alpi…,* cit., pp. 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1423)
1423. See, by way of example, BOSCO G., *Cenno istorico sulla Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi chiarimenti,* Tipografia Poliglotta della S.Congregazione di Propaganda, Roma 1874; MB v. 8, p. 809 [omitted in the English BM]; BRAIDO P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: l’”Oratorio”. Una “Congregazione degli Oratori”. Documenti,* LAS, Roma 1988, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-1424)
1424. Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Bonetti, Celestine Durando, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, John Bpatist Francesia: these are some of the first eighteen Salesians who joined the Salesian Society on 18 December 1859. Many others lived through the early days of the *Immaculate Conception Sodality*, close to Savio, Besucco, Magone and Cafasso. [↑](#footnote-ref-1425)
1425. The fundamental unity of this project also emerges from Don Bosco's attempt to unite consecrated persons and lay collaborators under the same *rules*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1426)
1426. In 1874, for example, the intervention of the consultors led to the removal of the chapter on so-called *extern members* from the constitution. For them, Don Bosco founded the *Union of Salesian Cooperators,* recognised by Pius IX in 1876. [↑](#footnote-ref-1427)
1427. CERIA E., *Vita del servo di Dio Don Michele Rua, primo successore di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1949, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1428)
1428. This is the first manuscript of the constitutions that we have preserved, transcribed by Fr Michael Rua probably in 1858 (cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875,* a cura di MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1982, p. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-1429)
1429. Cf. STELLA P., *Valori spirituali nel “Giovane Provveduto” di San Giovanni Bosco,*  Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco, Roma 1960, pp. 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-1430)
1430. BARBERIS G., *Cronichetta autografa,* 27/11/1878 in ACS A 000.02.06. [↑](#footnote-ref-1431)
1431. ACS D 472.01.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1432)
1432. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-1433)
1433. See, for example, Fr Giovanni Bonetti’s daily timetable in one of his handwritten notes in ACS B 516. In addition to the *liturgy of the hours*, Bonetti, the young rector of the college in Lanzo, has the following: meditation in the morning and afternoon, Holy Mass with thanksgiving, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and four different moments of spiritual reading each day (*Memoriale Sacerdotum, Bibbia*, *Imitazione di Cristo*, life of a saint), Rosary, prayers with the boys, study of a treatise in theology … [↑](#footnote-ref-1434)
1434. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico…,* cit., p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-1435)
1435. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico…,* cit., p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-1436)
1436. BOSCO G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico…,* cit., pp. 9. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1437)
1437. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-1438)
1438. On 18 December 1859, when the act of joining the Society of St Francis de Sales was signed, Francesco Cerruti was fifteen, Luigi Chiapale sixteen, and Antonio Rovetto seventeen. The average age of this first group of members, with the exception of Don Bosco and Fr Alasonatti, was less than twenty-one (cf. STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870),* LAS, Roma 1980, pp. 296-297). [↑](#footnote-ref-1439)
1439. Before 1866, the Salesians had participated in spiritual exercises together with young people; some of them had then accompanied Don Bosco to his annual exercises at St Ignatius above Lanzo. [↑](#footnote-ref-1440)
1440. The awareness of the importance of these early experiences in Trofarello is expressed in the acts of the first General Chapter of the Salesian congregation (cf. ACS D 578, p. 304). [↑](#footnote-ref-1441)
1441. See Fr Barberis’ teachings in ACS A 225.04.03. [↑](#footnote-ref-1442)
1442. BOSCO G., *Epistolario,* Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di MOTTO F., v. 2, LAS, Roma 1996, p. 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-1443)
1443. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-1444)
1444. BOSCO G., *Epistolario*, (ed. MOTTO F.), cit., v. 2, p. 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-1445)
1445. MB v. 10, p. 1041; cf. MOTTO F., *I “Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori” di Don Bosco,* LAS, Roma 1984, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1446)
1446. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-1447)
1447. See especially the book of conferences by Fr Barberis to novices in 1875 in ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1448)
1448. Cf. ACS D 578. [↑](#footnote-ref-1449)
1449. MB v. 11, p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-1450)
1450. Cf. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1885], cit., p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-1451)
1451. Cf. VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondance, entretiens, documents,* Paris 1922-1925, lett. n. 2546. [↑](#footnote-ref-1452)
1452. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-1453)
1453. *Ibidem.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1454)
1454. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni …,* [1875], pp. XXXII-XXXIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1455)
1455. BM v. 11, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-1456)
1456. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877, p. 36. The manuscript has Don Bosco’s corrections (cf. DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., p. 1380). [↑](#footnote-ref-1457)
1457. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877…,* cit., pp. 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-1458)
1458. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1881, pp. 74-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-1459)
1459. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1885, p. 5 We possess the original manuscript of this biography by Fr Giulio Barberis (cf. ACS B 196.33.02) and several testimonies and documents, as well as some letters and autograph writings. [↑](#footnote-ref-1460)
1460. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884,* cit., pp. 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-1461)
1461. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1879,* Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1879, p. 38 . [↑](#footnote-ref-1462)
1462. CERIA E., *Vita del servo di Dio Don Michele Rua, primo successore di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1949, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1463)
1463. CIARDI F., *In ascolto dello Spirito. Ermeneutica…,* cit., p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-1464)
1464. CERIA E., *Vita del servo di Dio Don Michele Rua, primo successore di San Giovanni Bosco,* SEI, Torino 1949, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1465)
1465. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni …,*cit., p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-1466)
1466. Cf. BOSCO G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù,* ed. BRAIDO P., La Scuola, Brescia 1965, pp. 291-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-1467)
1467. To this end, I have made particular use of the text by Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, *Metodi di orazione mentale,* Editrice Massimo, Milano 1969. I will not concern myself here with a critical investigation of the *sources* used by Don Bosco, as this investigation goes beyond the scope of this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-1468)
1468. ACS A 225.04.03; cf. MB v. 9, p. 997. [↑](#footnote-ref-1469)
1469. *Ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-1470)
1470. [BOSCO G.], *Regole o Costituzioni…,* [1875]*,* cit. pp. XXXII-XXXIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-1471)
1471. This is a matter of *moral necessity.* See pp. 5-6 and 11-114 of the text by Lercaro cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-1472)
1472. ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1473)
1473. ACS A 000.01.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-1474)
1474. ACS A 000.01.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-1475)
1475. ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1476)
1476. ACS B 509.04.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1477)
1477. MB v. 9, pp. 355-356. [↑](#footnote-ref-1478)
1478. ACS A 025.01.03. [↑](#footnote-ref-1479)
1479. ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1480)
1480. ACS B 509.04.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1481)
1481. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1880,* cit., p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-1482)
1482. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., pp. 43- 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1483)
1483. ACS D 579. This is page 2 of the minutes sheet entitled *7 Settembre sera. Ultima conferenza*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1484)
1484. ACS A 025.01.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1485)
1485. ACS A 000.01.08. [↑](#footnote-ref-1486)
1486. ACS A 000.04.06. [↑](#footnote-ref-1487)
1487. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-1488)
1488. ACS A 025.01.03. [↑](#footnote-ref-1489)
1489. ACS B 509.03.02. [↑](#footnote-ref-1490)
1490. ACS B 509.04.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1491)
1491. [BOSCO G.], *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882,* Tip. St Vincenzo, S. Pier d’Arena 1883, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-1492)
1492. [BOSCO], *Regole o costituzioni…,* [1877], cit., pp. 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1493)
1493. Cf. ACS D 579; FdB 1865 D 10; *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86,* Tipografia Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1887, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1494)
1494. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni…,* cit., p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-1495)
1495. *Ibidem*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1496)
1496. ACS B 196.33.01. A letter on a single sheet of paper, written on three sides and dated 21/1/79, bearing the letterhead of the *Arciconfraternita di Maria Ausiliatrice.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1497)
1497. ACS A 225.04.03; cf. MB v. 9, p. 997. [↑](#footnote-ref-1498)
1498. MB v. 9, pp. 355-356. [↑](#footnote-ref-1499)
1499. Se the lengthy conference in1875 by Fr Giulio Barberis on the *way of doing meditation* in ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1500)
1500. FRANCO S., *Istruzioni per le religiose in tempo di esercizi,* Tipografia Pontificia ed Arcivescovile, Modena (year of publication is missing). This is the twenty-third volume in the series collecting the works of Jesuit Fr Franco, who participated in the first General Chapter of the Salesians in 1877. [↑](#footnote-ref-1501)
1501. ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1502)
1502. ACS B 509.04.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1503)
1503. ACS B 509.03.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1504)
1504. Cf. IGNAZIO DI LOYOLA, *Esercizi spirituali,* nn. 194-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-1505)
1505. [BOSCO G.], *Società di S. Francesco di Sales. Anno 1877,* cit., pp. 43- 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1506)
1506. ACS A 025.01.03. [↑](#footnote-ref-1507)
1507. ACS D 578, pp. 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-1508)
1508. *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877,* Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino 1878, pp. 49-50. The same indications are also found in the resolutions of the second General Chapter of the Salesians in 1880 ( *Deliberazioni del Secondo Capitolo Generale ...,* [1882], cit., p. 53) and in those of the second General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1886 (Deliberations of the Second General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians held in Nizza Monferrato in August 1886, [Salesian Printing House, Turin 1886]). [↑](#footnote-ref-1509)
1509. [BOSCO], *Costituzioni Regole Dell’Istituto Delle figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice. Sotto la protezione di S. Giuseppe, di S. Francesco di Sales e di Sa. Teresa,* in the General Archives of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (AGFMA), *Regole manoscritte*, Quaderno n. 1, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-1510)
1510. ACS B 196.33.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-1511)
1511. For example, Fr Francis Desramaut wrote in 1967: “(Don Bosco) chose for himself and for his followers holiness through action, without, however, renouncing a kind of habitual contemplation...” (DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco e la vita spirituale,* Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1970, p. 219; this is a translation from the French original of 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-1512)
1512. See, for eample, the following documents: *Mutuae Relationes,* no. 15; *Evangelica Testificatio,* nos. 42. 45. 46; *CJC* can. 663; *Orientale Lumen,* no. 16; *Vita Consecrata,* no. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-1513)
1513. This page, taken from Favre’s *Memoriale*, is mentioned in GUIBERT J. de, *La spiritualità della compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico,* Citta Nuova, Roma 1992, p. 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-1514)
1514. *Lettere circolari di Don Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*, SEI, Torino 1922, pp. 406-407. [↑](#footnote-ref-1515)
1515. RICALDONE P., La pietà, LDC, Colle Don Bosco 1955, p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-1516)
1516. Cf. BOSCO G., *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales,* ed. MOTTO F., LAS, Roma 1982, pp. 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-1517)
1517. I have found some references to this influence in other studies, but in reality, the subject is sometimes barely mentioned. “His affinities,” Fr Desramaut wrote in 1970, “with St Teresa and St Ignatius of Loyola are certain: from the former, he had a tender devotion to the majesty of God; from the latter, energy in the fight against evil; and his cult of the greater glory of God was likely rooted in Ignatian spirituality.” (DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco nella vita spirituale,* LDC, Torino-Leumann 1970, p. 221). In reality, the “proportions” of these two different influences, that of Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola, are, in my opinion, considerably different. Much more interesting are the considerations of Fr Giovanni Pignata in his article entitled *La scuola dei santi piemontesi dell’800,* In relation to the numerous saints who characterised nineteenth-century Turin, and in particular Canon Giuseppe Allamano, nephew of Cafasso, he writes: “This school of saints, which had its main foundations in Sant'Ignazio and the Convitto, what characteristics did it have, how did it develop, and how was it continued by Allamano? Father Bona, speaking of the statutes of Diessbach’s *Amicizia Cristiana*, says that they were imbued with the spirit of gentleness of St Francis de Sales, which betrayed a clear Ignatian influence, but that they also drew nourishment from *pietas* as well as from the morality of their contemporary St. Alphonsus Liguori. *St Ignatius, St Francis de Sales, St Alphonsus* truly these three saints who had a remarkable influence, albeit in different ways, on this bed of Piedmontese sanctity... Drawing inspiration from three saints, leaders of three different spiritualities, therefore gives our group *a connotation of syncretism, which in turn is the result of pragmatism* that is very much a part of the Piedmontese temperament, which is neither speculative nor brilliant, but tenacious, modest, taciturn and, above all, practical and organised. (PIGNATA G., in “Il Servo di Dio Giuseppe Allamano”, 22 (1981) n. 2, pp. 528-529). Some interesting references to the spirituality of the Society can be found *passim* in STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica,* v. 2, LAS, Roma 1981. [↑](#footnote-ref-1518)
1518. See, in this regard, the testimony of Fr Felice Reviglio at the beatification process in *Summarium* della *Positio super introductione causae,* Romae 1907, p. 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-1519)
1519. In several official documents, particularly those relating to the first General Chapters, the following heading can be found: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* sometimes followed by …*et Salesianae Societatis incrementum.* See, by way of example, FdB 1853 A 1; 1853 A 4; 1859 A 7; 1868 A 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1520)
1520. One might wonder why, despite the numerous elements that have emerged, there are so few explicit references to St Ignatius and the spirituality of the Society in early Salesian literature. My hypothesis is that a certain mistrust, which characterised the judgement of some circles, including clerical ones, in nineteenth-century Piedmont towards the Society, suggested to Don Bosco that he should prudently avoid such references. On this climate of “anti-Jesuitism”, see, for example, pp. 40 and 269-270 of DESRAMAUT F.*Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888),* SEI, Torino 1996. Despite this, the *Biographical Memoirs* quote a very explicit text from a conference given by Don Bosco to the Salesians on 12 January 1873: “though I most dearly wish our Congregation to grow and its apostles to increase in numbers, my first and most fervent wish is that these Salesians become zealous ministers, as worthy sons of St. Francis de Sales as Jesuits are of the valiant St. Ignatius of Loyola. The whole world-particularly evil men who" in a satanic hatred would like to see this holy seed die out-is astonished. Persecutions, even the most horrible blood-baths, do not dismay these brave souls. So scattered afield are

      they that they no longer know each other's whereabouts; yet, separation notwithstanding, they faithfully observe the rules given by their first superior as though they were still living in community. Wherever you find a Jesuit, there, I say, is a model of virtue, an exemplar of holiness. They preach, hear confessions, and proclaim the Gospel. What more? When evil men think they have done away with them, it is then that their numbers increase and the good done to souls is greater.” (BM v. 10, p. 464). [↑](#footnote-ref-1521)
1521. Let me quote, by way of example the “bosconian” notion of the *rendiconto,* whose derivation from the Ignatian conception of religious life emerges in the recent volume by BROCARDO P., *Maturare in dialogo fraterno,* LAS, Roma 1999, pp. 22-26, Don Bosco’s youthful homilies, clearly inspired by Ignatius, whose manuscripts are preserved in the Central Archives, or the numerous notebooks of homilies prepared for the retreats by the first group of disciples, also preserved at the Generalate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1522)
1522. See, for eample: STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia…,* v. 1, LAS, Roma 1979, pp. 85-102; DpF, *Sussidi 2,* Tip. Giammarioli, Roma 1988, pp. 67-80; DESRAMAUT F., *Don Bosco en son temps…,* cit., pp. 131-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-1523)
1523. These are the words of Giuseppe Tuninetti in *Don Clemente Marchisio [1833-1903],* Torino 19862, p. 20. This text contains many interesting observations by this scholar on the Turin Convitto and its formation programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-1524)
1524. Cf. DpF, *Sussidi 2,* cit., pp. 68-69. Fr Giuseppe Tuninetti, in a contribution entitled “Gli arcivescovi di Torino e Don Bosco fondatore” informs us of the reasons why in 1868 Don Bosco opposed, in a memorandum addressed to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the obligation imposed on Salesian clerics to attend the seminary as boarders: (in DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA, *Don Bosco Fondatore della Famiglia Salesiana,* S.D.B., Roma 1989, p. 263). [↑](#footnote-ref-1525)
1525. Among these, I would particularly like to highlight Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Bonetti, Paul Albera, Giulio Barberis: then Joseph Bertello, Joachim Berto, Francis Cerruti, James Costamagna, Francis Dalmazzo, Celestine Durando, Joseph Fagnano, Charles Ghivarello, Louis Lasagna, Joseph Lazzero, John Baptista Lemoyne, Francis Provera, Philip Rinaldi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1526)
1526. Cf. BROCARDO P., *Maturare in dialogo fraterno,* cit., p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-1527)
1527. BROCARDO P., *Maturare in dialogo fraterno,* cit., p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1528)