

Saint with a Human Face: Don Bosco in Father Giulio Barberis' Original Chronicle

Arthur J. Lenti, SDB

Introduction

The Central Salesian Archive contains numerous eyewitness reports of Don Bosco's words and deeds, particularly in the form of chronicles and memoirs.¹ I drew heavily on these documents for previous articles which saw the light of day in the pages of this *Journal*. I shall do the same for the present article. Drawing exclusively on Father Giulio Barberis' original chronicle, I will present selected anecdotes which may illustrate Don Bosco's character and personality.

Although not one of the earliest chroniclers, Father Barberis found himself in a privileged position as Don Bosco's closest confidant at what was arguably the most formative and creative period in the founder's life. Thus, as will be explained below, Father Barberis became the chronicler of the latter 1870s.

Who are these chroniclers? What was their respective period of activity? What did they accomplish and hand down to us? In particular what is Father Barberis' achievement in this field? These questions will be answered briefly in Part I, before we proceed to peruse a portion of Father Barberis' original chronicle in Part II.

¹ The *Archivio Salesiano Centrale (ASC)* is located at the Salesian Generalate in Rome. The Don Bosco files (*Fondo Don Bosco*) are available in microfiches (*FDBM*).

Part I: Chroniclers and Chronicles—Documentation Gathered by Early Salesians Who Were Witnesses of Don Bosco's Words and Actions²

When we speak of "chronicles" in the present context we are referring to contemporary written reports authored by Salesians close to Don Bosco who witnessed what he said or did. This initiative was no haphazard effort by some individual; on the contrary, it originated out of a common consciousness and concern.

I. "Historical Committees" and Periods of Recording Activity

1. First Period of Concerted Recording Activity: The Ruffino-Bonetti Period

(1) The Formation of a Committee

Initially there had indeed been sporadic recording activity by some Salesians, such as Seminarians Giovanni Bonetti and Domenico Ruffino, who almost immediately upon joining Don Bosco undertook to record some of master's words and deeds, especially if they had a semblance of the "extraordinary." As will be explained below, the earliest instance of this activity preserved in the Salesian Archive is an entry by Bonetti with the date of October 17, 1858.

Not long thereafter, aware of the importance of the initiative, a whole group of Don Bosco's disciples, probably at Father Michele Rua's suggestion, formed a standing "Committee" whose task would be to record and hand down what they heard and saw of Don Bosco. We have Ruffino's report of some of the meetings of this "Historical Committee." The first meeting remains undated, but it probably took place in early March, 1861. The minutes open with a solemn statement of purpose, which reflects the shared consciousness and conviction that God was at work in the life of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco's outstanding and brilliant gifts, the extraordinary happenings which continue to be the object of our admiration, his unique style of guiding young people along the difficult paths of virtue, and the grand plans he has conceived and articulated for the future, are clear signs of supernatural guidance and portend a glorious future for him and for the Ora-

² Throughout Part I, although working directly with source material (as may be seen from the notes that follow), I am guided by Francis Desramaut, *Les Mémoires I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco* (Lyon: Maison d'Études Saint-Jean-Bosco, 1962), 17, 21-22 and 137-180; and by F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1996), xvii-xix, 1357-1364.

tory. All this lays a strict duty of gratitude upon us; we have the obligation of not letting anything that concerns Don Bosco fall into oblivion. We must therefore do all we can to record these things for posterity, so that one day, like so many shining beacons, they may enlighten the whole world for the salvation of the young. This is the purpose for which we have established this Committee. The following are founding members: Father [Vittorio] Alasonatti, Father [Michele] Rua, Father [Angelo] Savio, Father [Giovanni] Turchi, Chevalier Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano; Seminarian [Giovanni] Cagliero, Seminarian Professor [Giovanni Battista] Francesia, Seminarian Professor [Celestino] Durando, Seminarian Professor [Francesco] Cerruti, Seminarian Professor [Giovanni Battista] Anfossi, Seminarian Professor [Francesco] Provera, Seminarian [Giovanni] Bonetti, Seminarian [Carlo] Ghivarello, Seminarian [Domenico] Ruffino.³

Ruffino adds:

In this first meeting three members were appointed to act as principal reporters: Ghivarello, Bonetti, Ruffino. At a second meeting held on March 30, 1861, even though Cagliero, Anfossi, and Durando were absent, the members proceeded to elect a president, vice-president, and secretary for the Committee. Father Rua, Father Turchi, and Ruffino, respectively, were elected to those offices.⁴

Ruffino goes on to give an account of further meetings held on April 1 and 8, and on May 1 and 7, 1861.⁵ But by and by the initiative seems to have lost momentum, probably because the members of the Committee were extremely busy with other duties. Thus, one year later, in 1862, Bonetti regrets this failure and proposes to remedy the situation.⁶ The situation, however, was only to get worse when the more active members of the Committee began to be appointed to posts outside of Turin. For example, Bonetti was appointed to the school of Mirabello in 1863, and Ruffino (newly ordained) was named director of the school at Lanzo in 1864.

During this first period of recording activity (1861-1864), of the fourteen Committee members only Ruffino and Bonetti produced sustained chronicles which have come down to us.⁷

³ Ruffino, *Chronicle*, Notebook III, 1, in ASC 110: Cronachette, Ruffino, *FDBM* 1211 A10. Cf. *EBM* VI, 505-507.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2, A10-11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3, A11-12.

⁶ Cf. Bonetti, *Annali* II, 59, April 21, 1862, in ASC 110: Cronachette, Bonetti, *FDBM* 922 C5-6.

⁷ We also have short reports by Provera [ASC 110: Cronachette, Provera, *FDBM* 1205 C2-11]. In the *Biographical Memoirs* [cf. *EBM* VI, 507] Lemoyne refers to a "brief chronicle" by Turchi, which, however, has not come down to us. Likewise, such reports as Ghivarello is likely to have produced have not survived.

(2) Ruffino and His Chronicles

Domenico Ruffino (1840-1865), a slight and frail young man whose piety and angelic life (in Don Bosco's own estimation) matched those of St. Aloysius,⁸ was born at Giaveno (Turin) on September 17, 1840. In touch with Don Bosco when still in secondary school, after a try in the diocesan seminary, he entered the Oratory in mid-October 1859. He subsequently completed his theological studies while working as a full time teacher. He was ordained on November 15, 1863, and was appointed by Don Bosco spiritual director (catechist) of the Society—a remarkable choice which made him the third highest authority in the Congregation at the age of 22. In October 1864, he was named director of the newly founded Salesian school at Lanzo. He died less than a year later on July 16, 1865 at the age of 24 apparently of bronchial pneumonia.⁹

Throughout his brief life as a Salesian Ruffino took pains to chronicle events and words of Don Bosco, and produced several notebooks: five *Chronicles* at the Oratory in Turin, and two *Books of Experience* during his assignment at Lanzo. Preserved in ASC 110, they are given in *FDBM* (apparently not in perfect order) as follows: [i] Notebook 1: *Chronicle of the Oratory [...] No. 1, [1859]-1860*; [ii] Notebook 2: *Chronicle of the Oratory [...] No. 2, 1861*; [iii] Notebook 3: [Biographer's hand:] *No. 3. Chronicle, Ruffino MS., 1861*; [iv] Notebook 4: [Biographer:] *Father Ruffino, Chronicle, 1861, 1862, 1863*; [v] Notebook 5: [Biographer:] *Father Ruffino, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864*; [vi] *Book of Experience* [Biographer:] *1864, Father Ruffino*; [vii] *Book of Experience 1865* [Biographer:] *by Father Ruffino, at Lanzo.*¹⁰

Critical questions regarding Ruffino's chronicle have to do with chronology (i.e., to the sequence of the entries, as dated and as entered in different notebooks) and with the form and style of the entries themselves. These are the problems which Don Bosco's biographer, Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, bravely faced but did not always solve, when transcribing and organizing Ruffino's reports.

⁸ Don Bosco's words as reported by Viglietti, *Additional Chronicle of Don Bosco for the Years 1884-85*, 22, October 17, 1884, in ASC 110: Cronachette, Viglietti, *FDBM* 1229 A10. Cf. *EBM* VIII, 86.

⁹ This biographical sketch is based on Eugenio Ceria, *Profili dei Capitolari morti dall'anno 1865 al 1950* (Colle Don Bosco: Istituto Salesiano Arti Grafiche, 1951), 68-73. Cf. also *EBM* VIII, 72-73 and 86.

¹⁰ ASC 110: Cronachette, Ruffino: [i] *FDBM* 1206 A5 - E1; [ii] *FDBM* 1210 D1 - 1211 A8; [iii] *FDBM* 1209 B2 - 1210 C12; [iv] *FDBM* 1206 E2 - 1209 B1; [v] *FDBM* 1211 A9 - 1212 A10; [vi] *FDBM* 1212 A11 - 1213 C1; [vii] *FDBM* 1213 C2 - D7.

There follow in *ASC-FDBM* Father Lemoyne's reorganized transcription of Ruffino's chronicles in three notebooks [*FDBM* 1213 D8 - 1217 A3] and 20 detached, untitled pages in Ruffino's hand [*FDBM* 1217 A4 - B11].

(3) Bonetti and His Chronicles

Giovanni Bonetti (1838-1891), a colorful and talented Salesian, was born at Caramagna on November 5, 1838, and entered the Oratory in 1855 at the age of 17. After a two-year stay he left to receive the clerical habit in his hometown, and for a try in the Chieri diocesan seminary. In 1858, however, a kind of homesickness forced him back to the Oratory. Here he began to record noteworthy events in his chronicle. On December 18, 1859, he took part in the first gathering of the Salesian Society and was elected second councilor at that meeting. He made his triennial profession on May 14, 1862, and remained at Don Bosco's side until the opening of the school at Mirabello (October 20, 1863), when Don Bosco assigned him there as a teacher, under Father Rua as director. He was ordained on May 21, 1864, and made his perpetual profession on November 15, 1865. As a priest, he replaced Father Rua as director of the school of Mirabello in October 1864, a post he held until 1877, when the school was transferred to nearby Borgo San Martino. Called back to Turin at this time, he held important posts at the center of the Salesian Society. He was appointed director of the *Salesian Bulletin* (1877); he served as director of the Oratory of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Chieri from 1878 to 1883, and was personally involved in the controversy with Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi. In 1886 he was elected by General Chapter IV to succeed Bishop Giovanni Cagliero as spiritual director of the Salesian Society and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Aside from chronicles, he authored articles, pamphlets and books. Among them, of special Salesian interest is his *History of the Oratory*, published serially in the *Salesian Bulletin*.¹¹ After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was appointed postulator of the founder's cause of beatification and canonization. In this capacity, he was entrusted by Father Rua with the task of gathering testimonies and recollections from Salesians on Don Bosco. He died suddenly on June 5, 1891, at the age of 53.¹²

As a principal member of the Historical Committee of 1861, he continued fairly systematically what he had already begun in 1858, that is, recording words and deeds of Don Bosco. His chronicles fill five notebooks that have come down to us. They are placed in *ASC-FDBM* as follows: [i] Notebook 1 (containing Bonetti's early, pre-Committee entries): [No cover, no title; first page begins:] *October 17, 1858, Report on Various Happenings*. [ii] Notebook

¹¹ The *Storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, authored by Bonetti, was serialized anonymously in the *Bollettino Salesiano* between 1878 and 1886. After Father Bonetti's death in 1891, it was published in book form as *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio salesiano fondato dal sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco* (Torino: Tip. Salesiana, 1892). *Cinque Lustri* was translated into English as Giovanni Bonetti, *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1908); reprinted for the canonization as *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1934), 500 p. The work spans the years 1841-1865.

¹² This biographical sketch is based on Ceria, *Profili dei Capitolari Salesiani* [...], 135-152.

2: *Annals I* [Biographer:] 1860, 1861, *Father Bonetti*. [iii] Notebook 3: *Annals II* [Biographer:] 1961, 1962, *Bonetti*. [iv] Notebook 4: *Annals III* [Biographer:] 1863. [v] Notebook 5: *Chronicle for the Year 1864*. This last notebook records only a sermon and a conference by Don Bosco. It should be recalled that in 1864 Bonetti was stationed at Mirabello.

The archive contains other reports by Bonetti. Of special interest are two collections of "souvenirs," episodes relating to Don Bosco which Bonetti heard from various sources and recorded. They are: [vi] Notebook 6: [No title, no date] [Archivist:] *MS. by Father Bonetti*. [vii] Notebook 7: [No date] *Souvenirs, Fr. Bonetti*.¹³ Also of interest is a sizable chronicle for the years 1868-1869.¹⁴

Bonetti's main work as a chronicler spans the period 1858-1863. As in Ruffino's case, critical questions arise which have to do with dating and (since the chronicles are a transcription of original notes) with his editorial criteria.

In spite of such drawbacks, both Bonetti's and Ruffino's chronicles are of fundamental importance for our knowledge of Don Bosco in the 1860s.

2. The Second Period of Concerted Recording Activity: The Barberis-Berto Period

(1) Reawakened Awareness and Renewed Effort

It appears that the Committee was for all practical purposes defunct when Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne (who had joined in 1864 and succeeded Ruffino as director at Lanzo on the latter's death in 1865) urged Father Rua to take some action. He wrote:

Reassemble the old Committee for, if I am not mistaken, no one is keeping a record of Don Bosco's doings. These things are too precious to be lost. [...] Appoint secretaries for the specific task of recording events in detail.¹⁵

This was in 1868. True, Father Rua himself chronicled events of the years 1867-1869;¹⁶ but it seems that no action was taken until 1875, when, accord-

¹³ ASC 110: Cronachette, Bonetti: [i] *FDBM* 919 A2 - 920 A12; [ii] *FDBM* 920 B1 - 921 C6; [iii] *FDBM* 921 C7 - 922 E7; [iv] *FDBM* 922 E8 - 924 B2; [v] *FDBM* 924 B3 - D1; [vi] *FDBM* 925 E9 - 926 B3. (Among the extraordinary episodes recorded in this last chronicle are the raising of a young man (Charles) from the dead, appearances of the dog *Grigio*, the multiplication of chestnuts and hosts.); [vii] *FDBM* 926 B4 - C7.

¹⁴ *FDBM* 924 E2 - 925 E2.

¹⁵ Lemoyne to Rua, Lanzo, November 23, 1868, in ASC Rua V, 1, *FDRM* 3758 E3-4.

¹⁶ ASC 110: Cronachette, Rua, *FDBM* 1205 E6 - 1206 A4. Cf. *EBM* VIII, 396. Father Rua's introduction is of interest: "In the conviction that the greater

ing to Father Rua's biographer, Father Angelo Amadei, a new Committee was formed.

The Servant of God [Father Rua] decided to appoint a Committee that would continue to gather memoirs [about Don Bosco] and that would meet regularly to examine them jointly and edit them for the greatest possible accuracy. The Committee was composed of Father [Carlo] Ghivarello, Father [Giulio] Barberis, Father [Gioachino] Berto, and Father [Nicola] Cibrario, under the presidency of Father [Michele] Rua. We owe a debt of gratitude to [Father Rua], if memoirs from those years, many by Father [Giulio] Barberis and some by Father [Gioachino] Berto, have come down to us.¹⁷

By 1875 Father Rua had practically taken over the administration of the affairs of the Congregation and was already beginning to be recognized as Don Bosco's *alter ego*. His duties obviously left him no time for anything else. And again, no reports by Ghivarello or by Cibrario have survived. Nor have we any record of any meeting of this Committee, if one ever existed. But we owe it to Barberis and Berto that extensive records of Don Bosco's words and deeds for this period have come down to us.

(2) Barberis and His Chronicles

Greater attention will be given below to Barberis and his work. Here a brief note for the sake of continuity will suffice. Father Barberis was appointed director of novices at the Oratory after the approval of the Salesian Constitution in 1874. In that capacity he remained at Don Bosco's side until in 1879 the novitiate was transferred to San Benigno, not far from Turin. Barberis' autograph "Little Chronicle," as he called it, spans the period 1875-1879. This chronicle, in Barberis' own hand almost in its entirety, is his most important contribution as a chronicler, although it amounts to a mere fraction of the huge output of reports and memoirs compiled by Barberis, or under his supervision.

(3) Berto and His Reports

Gioachino Berto (1847-1914) was born on January 29, 1947 at Villar Almese (Turin) and entered the Oratory on September 16, 1862. He made his profes-

glory of God and the salvation of souls will be served by this endeavor of mine, on the advice of persons who are supportive of the Oratory, I, Father Michele Rua, do this day, the first of September, 1867, begin to set down reports on the Oratory and in particular on its founder, Father Giò Bosco."

¹⁷ A. Amadei, *Il Servo di Dio Michele Rua [...]* (Torino: SEI, 1931) I, 253-254.

sion in 1865. Even before his ordination in 1871, he was chosen by Don Bosco to be his secretary, a post he retained until ill health forced him into retirement in 1884. But even in his retirement he served as the Society's archivist, and carefully collected and preserved every scrap of information available on the founder. He also authored numerous devotional books. He died at the Oratory on February 21, 1914.

It is during the many years in which he served as Don Bosco's secretary that he made his most valuable contribution. In that job, besides dispatching the staggering amount of work which daily crossed his secretarial desk and recording various events concerning Don Bosco and the Oratory, it fell to him to accompany Don Bosco on a number of trips to Rome and other places, in the times of Don Bosco's deepest involvement in affairs of the Congregation as well as in affairs of state. His invaluable reports of these trips, especially of Don Bosco's activity during extended sojourns in the eternal city, cover the decade 1873-1882. They are as follows: [i] *A Summary of Don Bosco's Trip to Rome, February 18, 1873, Accompanied by a Priest of the Oratory* [Father Berto]; [ii] *Notes on Don Bosco's Trip to Rome, 1873*; [iii] *Brief Notes on Don Bosco's Trip to Rome in 1873-74: Comments—with Particular Attention to 1. Revenues for Italian Bishops, 2. Definitive Approbation of the Salesian Society and Constitutions*; [iv] *Memoir of the Trip to Rome—Starting on February 18, 1875*; [v] *Brief Notice on the Trip to Rome, 1876*; [vi] *Notes on the Trip to Rome, 1877—With Special Reference to the Conceptionist Congregation Whose Reform the Pope Wished to Entrust to Don Bosco*; [vii] [Chronicle of some of Don Bosco's activities in Rome, without title, beginning:] "Today, January 29, 1878, the first conference of Salesian Cooperators was held....;" [viii] *Notes on Don Bosco's Trip to Rome, 1879-80*; [ix] *Memoir 1882: Some Notes of the Trip to Rome, 1882—with Other Matters from 1882-83-84*.¹⁸

With the departure of Father Barberis from Turin in 1880, and with Father Berto's growing commitments as secretary to Don Bosco, coupled with his gradually mental deterioration leading to his retirement, the second Historical Committee for all practical purposes ceased to function.

¹⁸ ASC 110: Cronachette, Berto, *FDBM* respectively: [i] 906 C8 - 907 D7; [ii] 907 D8 - 908 B4; [iii] 908 B5 - 911 A8; [iv] 911 A9 - D3; [v] 911 D4 - 912 A9; [vi] 912 A10 - C11; [vii] 912 C12 - 913 B12; [viii] 913 C1 - 916 B9; [ix] 916 B10 - 918 C12.

3. Third Period of Recording Activity: The Lemoyne-Viglietti Period

(1) Chronicling Don Bosco's Last Years

Although Barberis, Berto, Bonetti, and others continued to record events and words of Don Bosco, systematic recording activity suffered a lull in the early 1880s. It experienced a vigorous resurgence with the appointment of Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne and of Seminarian Carlo Maria Viglietti as general secretary of the Society and as personal secretary (valet) to Don Bosco, respectively. Continuously at Don Bosco's side, taken together (and not without the contribution of other Salesians), they left us a sustained account of Don Bosco's activities during his last years (1884-1888).

I have described elsewhere at some length both Lemoyne's and Viglietti's life and work.¹⁹ For the purposes of this survey a brief note will suffice.

(2) Lemoyne and His Chronicles

Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne (1839-1916) had joined Don Bosco at the Oratory as a newly ordained priest from Genoa in 1864. He was so taken with Don Bosco's saintliness and extraordinary personality that, independently of the Historical Committee nominally still standing at the time, he began to record what he saw and heard. [i] An *untitled notebook* with entries dated from his arrival at the Oratory, October 18, 1864, to April 27, 1865, testifies to Lemoyne's immediate commitment to the cause.²⁰

Following Ruffino's death in July 1865, Lemoyne was chosen to succeed him as director of the school at nearby Lanzo, where Don Bosco was a frequent visitor. From there he continued his recording activity. [ii] A second notebook entitled, *Memoirs 1868*, contains two dreams narrated by Don Bosco in 1867 (in Lemoyne's hand), a dream narrated on May 1 and 3, 1868 (in another hand) and some words of Don Bosco dated May 14, 1868 (also in Lemoyne's hand).²¹

In 1879, Lemoyne was appointed spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at their mother house of Mornese, a much less acces-

¹⁹ A. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Boswell: John Baptist Lemoyne—The Man and His Work," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 1 (1990:2) 1-46; and "Don Bosco's Last Years, His Last Illness and Sainly Death from Eyewitness Accounts," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5 (1994:2) 26-36.

²⁰ ASC 110: Cronachette, (placed by mistake under the name, Sala), *FDBM*: 1219 A7 - 1221 B4.

²¹ Also erroneously placed under the name, Sala: *FDBM* 1221 C8 - 1222 B6. To the Lanzo period belong also some collections of scattered notes, episodes and other materials, in ASC 110: Cronachette, Lemoyne, *FDBM* 949-959.

sible town lying at a considerable distance from Turin. But even during those years of "exile" he had occasional opportunities to add to his chronicle.

In 1883 (after an absence of 18 years) Father Lemoyne returned to the Oratory as secretary of the Superior Chapter (General Council) and could thus personally attend to the gathering of historical documentation on Don Bosco. Lemoyne's appointment inaugurates a fertile period of recording activity spanning the latter eighties up to the founder's death in 1888. Not only did Lemoyne become an indefatigable collector of material which he recorded in numerous notebooks,²² but he also made use of other Salesians who worked under his general guidance. In addition to this, probably at Father Rua's behest, he began to gather and excerpt all prior records for his great collection known as *Documenti*, which he had privately printed, and which later served as the basis for the monumental work of the *Biographical Memoirs*.²³

Lemoyne's most important personal contribution as chronicler for this period is [iii] a notebook entitled, *Office Agenda*, essentially a first-draft chronicle for the year 1884.²⁴

(3) Viglietti and His Chronicles

The person who most faithfully worked in conjunction with Lemoyne, and to whom we owe much of our knowledge of Don Bosco's last years, is Carlo Maria Viglietti (1864-1915). Young Carlo had been won over by Don Bosco

²² Cf. *FDBM* 860-963.

²³ *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione Salesiana*, 45 volumes (printed for private use at San Benigno Canavese or at Turin-Valdocco, from 1885), in *ASC* 110: Cronachette-Lemoyne-Doc; reproduced in *FDBM* 966 A8-1201 C12.

This was the basis of: *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, San Benigno Canavese and Turin: I-IX (1898-1917 by Giovanni Battista Lemoyne); X (1939 by Angelo Amadei); XI-XIX (1930-1939 by Eugenio Ceria) [*IBM*]

English Edition: *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, tr. from the original Italian, Diego Borgatello, Editor-in-Chief, vol. I-XVI. New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1995. [*EBM*]

²⁴ *Ricordi di gabinetto* is a small agenda-calendar book from the year 1846, used in part by Lemoyne during his seminary days, and used again for diary jottings nearly forty years later! It is a small-format notebook of 402 pages. As he often accompanied Don Bosco on slow walks around the Oratory grounds, Lemoyne committed to memory and later jotted down in his notebook the rambling recollections of the saint. These original notes record, among other things, Don Bosco's final encounter with the dog *Grigio* at Bordighera in 1883(!), details of his troubles with Archbishop Gastaldi, his sleeping schedule during his active years, the direction he wished to impart to the Salesian Cooperators, etc. data nowhere else attested. The notebook is in *ASC* 110: Cronachette, Lemoyne 4, but because of its poor condition it has not been reproduced in *FDBM*.

while a student at the Salesian school of Lanzo. As a young seminarian, in 1884, he was chosen by the aging founder as secretary, valet and traveling companion. Both out of his own love for the master, and at Lemoyne's suggestion, he kept careful and detailed records of what he saw and heard.

He was especially concerned with recording Don Bosco's doings during the several extended trips which the founder undertook in his last years, but he did not neglect to record things "at home," even though others were also at work there. [i] His fundamental work is the *Original Chronicle of Don Bosco*, in eight notebooks, with entries dating from May 20, 1884 to January 31, 1888, the day of Don Bosco's death.²⁵ [ii] Subsequently Viglietti transcribed the original work with additions and other editing, thus producing a transcribed and edited *Chronicle of Don Bosco*, in two parts (so it appears) filling five notebooks, spanning the same time period.²⁶ Viglietti, as well as further partial editions of his chronicle, also produced [iii] a *Diary*, which is largely a collection of episodes, dreams, etc., dating from various periods of Don Bosco's life.²⁷

The foregoing paragraphs have described in summary fashion only the main lines and the main periods of eyewitness reporting, focusing on outstanding names. It should be understood, however, that many other shorter or less important eyewitness account of events concerning Don Bosco have come down to us. These fill the gaps between the main periods. I have made no mention of numerous personal recollections and memoirs, some of them very extensive, which add considerably to our knowledge of the founder, but which do not rank as contemporary eyewitness accounts. My purpose in stressing the main lines and the main periods has been intelligibly to situate Barberis' contribution, to which we shall now turn our attention.

²⁵ ASC 110: Cronachette, Viglietti, *FDBM* 1222 D2 - 1237 D8. The eight notebooks are placed in *ASC-FDBM* as follows: (1) 1222 D2 - 1223 B7; (2) 1223 B8-E10; (3) 1223 E11 - 1224 D10; (4) 1224 D11 - 1225 B11; (5) 1225 B12-E12; (6) 1226 A1-D5; (7) 1226 D7 - 1227 B10; (8) 1227 B11-D8. It should be noted that each *FDBM* frame contains two pages of the small note books.

²⁶ *FDBM* 1232 C5 - 1240 E2. The five notebooks are placed in *ASC-FDBM* as follows: (1) 1232 C5 - 1235 A9; (2) 1235 A10 - 1236 A7; (3) 1236 D6 - 1237 D8 + 1237 D9 - 1238 E7; (4) 1238 E8 - 1240 C4; (5) 1240 C5-D2, with a "Conclusion," and an added autobiographical note (D3-5 + D6-E2).

²⁷ *FDBM* 1231 D5 - 1232 C4.

II. Father Giulio Barberis and His Work As a Chronicler

1. Giulio Barberis (1847-1927): Biographical Sketch²⁸

Born at Mathi, near Turin, on June 7, 1847, he entered the Oratory in 1861. His mother presented him to Don Bosco. Father Barberis recalls:

Blessed be that day in March 1861, when my mother brought me to Don Bosco. It was the turning point in my life, for it marked the first step in my vocation. The good father placed a hand on my head, and with words the sound of which remained indelibly imprinted in my mind and heart, said to me: "We shall always be friends; and you will be my helper."²⁹

What impressed him most of life at the Oratory was the reigning family spirit and Don Bosco's fatherliness and personal presence to the boys. Then there were Don Bosco's dreams and extraordinary experiences. The great church of Mary Help of Christians was under construction, and the Salesian Society was in the process of approval.³⁰ Little wonder that Giulio decided "to stay with Don Bosco." He made his novitiate "in the family," that is, in an informal setting, and took his first religious vows in 1865. As a special keepsake, Don Bosco gave him a "rule of life," which concluded with the words: "Do everything possible and willingly endure any suffering for the sake of winning souls to the Lord."³¹ While working full time in school and oratory, he completed his theological studies and was ordained in 1870. Continuing the study of theology, he obtained his degree (*laurea*) from the school of theology of the University of Turin in 1873. After the approval of the Salesian constitutions 1874, he was appointed director of novices, a position which made him also a member of the superior chapter (general council). He held this post some 25 years, until 1901, and under Don Bosco's direction he formed many generations of Salesians. Under his guidance the novitiate evolved and achieved consolidation, first at the Oratory and from 1879 on in the special house at San Benigno near Turin. Later he served as provincial and in 1910 he was elected spiritual

²⁸ All biographical data are taken from E. Ceria, *Profili dei capitolari salesiani*, 305-324, and from Alessio Barberis, *Don Giulio Barberis Direttore Spirituale della Società di San Francesco di Sales*. Cenni biografici e Memorie (San Benigno Canvese: Scuola Tipografica Don Bosco, 1932). Father Alessio Barberis was Father Giulio Barberis' nephew.

²⁹ Ceria, *Profili dei capitolari salesiani*, 306.

³⁰ The church of Mary Help of Christians, begun in 1863, was dedicated in 1868. The Salesian Society, founded in 1859, received the decree of commendation in 1864 and was approved in 1869. Its constitutions were definitively approved in 1874.

³¹ Ceria, *Profili dei capitolari salesiani*, 308.

director of the Society. As spiritual director he undertook journeys through Europe to visit the confreres before and after the First World War. These were fatiguing journeys because through his later years his health had been deteriorating. He died on November 24, 1927, at the age of 80.

In his chronicle Father Barberis reports words which Don Bosco spoke to him on one occasion. He writes:

He said to me: "You will always be my close friend." "I surely hope so," I replied. "You will be the staff of my old age (*baculus senectutis meae*)," Don Bosco insisted. "I'll do all I can to be of help, most willingly," I assured him. Then Don Bosco went on: "It will be up to you people to finish the work which I've just begun; I sketch, you will finish the painting." "Hopefully we won't spoil the work," I ventured. "No, you won't," he said with finality. "I'm just doing the rough copy of the Congregation; the good copy is the task of those who will follow."³²

Father Barberis certainly made an important contribution toward the consolidation of the founder's work. His work of building up the novitiate program and the spiritual influence he exerted on generations of young Salesians are his enduring achievement.

He is remembered as an extremely affable and open person with a "heart of gold." His simplicity and bonhomie, to the point of guilelessness, were a byword. They were also traits that endeared him to all. Although not brilliant, he was endowed with a practical intelligence and a willpower which enabled him to achieve much. He was a persevering and tireless worker.

Father Barberis authored many books, some of them involving considerable research. Besides manuals for religious and Salesian formation, devotional works, and a number of lives of saints, he published in the field of history and geography, which he loved.³³

But perhaps Salesians owe him the greater debt of gratitude for his activity as secretary and chronicler, through which he enriched the Salesian archive

³² Barberis, *Autograph Chronicle*, May 19, 1875, Notebook I, 15, *FDBM* 833 C1. "You will be the staff of my old age" (*baculus senectutis meae*), are encouraging words which Don Bosco spoke to other Salesians as well, for example Father Lemoyne and Seminararian Viglietti, as their own testimony confirms.

³³ In these last categories may be mentioned: *Storia Antica Orientale e Greca* [History of the Ancient Middle East and Greece] (Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1877, 18th ed. 1908); *La terra e i suoi abitanti* [The Earth and Its Inhabitants] (Torino: Libreria Salesiana, 1890). Especially noteworthy is the book on Patagonia which he wrote for Don Bosco to present to Church authorities in Rome in defense of the Salesian missions—now critically edited from MS.: *La Patagonia e le Terre Australi del Continente Americano* [Patagonia and the Southernmost Lands of the American Continent] *Introducción y texto crítico por Jesús Borrego* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 11). Roma: LAS, 1988.

with enormous amounts of eyewitness documentation on Don Bosco and the Oratory.

2. Barberis' Activity as a Chronicler

(1) Father Barberis' Chronicles

The Central Salesian Archive, at the location 110: *Chronachette*, holds several chronicles authored by Father Barberis. [i] The most important is the Autograph Little Chronicle (*Cronichetta di Don Bosco*), to be described below, which is the source of the present article.³⁴ [ii] Little Chronicle-Talks (*Chronichetta-Discorsi*), which consists of 20 numbered and 12 unnumbered notebooks in Barberis' and in other hands. It records addresses, talks and some dreams of Don Bosco.³⁵ [iii] Little Chronicle in Various Hands (*Chronichetta varie mani*), which consists of large sheets in series which are numbered from I to XXXVIII. They contain reports of diverse origin and in various hands collected under Father Barberis' supervision. Some series, or parts thereof, have been lost and are not to be found in *ASC/FDBM*.³⁶ [iv] Also of interest is Barberis' Little Chronicle of Earlier Times, or Notices on the Life of the Very Rev. Don Bosco (*Chronichetta anteriore* or *Cenni sulla vita del M. R. Sac. Giovanni Bosco [...]*). It consists of 12 notebooks in which Barberis assembled materials spanning the years 1815-1870, using various sources, for instance, Ruffino, Lemoyne, etc. It appears that it does not contain any material that is not found in the original sources, but it contains occasional comments and reflections by Barberis which go beyond the purport of the original sources, and sometimes even of historical likelihood.

(2) Structure of Barberis' Autograph Little Chronicle

The Autograph Little Chronicle, with which alone this inquiry is concerned, is a collection of reports by Barberis dated from May 10, 1875, to June 7, 1879. It fills fifteen notebooks, placed in *ASC-FDBM* as follows:

[i]. Notebook I — [Cover:] Little Chronicle I / Talks by Don Bosco/ all transcribed (*Cronichetta 1° / Discorsetti. D. Bosco / tracopiati tutti*).

[ii] Notebook II — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook II / all transcribed / 1875 (*Cronichetta / Quad 2° / Tracopiato tutto / 1875*).

[iii] Notebook III — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook III 1875-1876 (*Cronichetta / Quad 3° / 75-76*).

³⁴ ASC 110: Cronachette, Barberis, *FDBM* 833 A10 - 845 A8 + 1251 A11 - 1254 E4 + 845 A9 - 849 B5. As may be seen the chronicle is not reproduced in continuous sequence in *FDBM*.

³⁵ *FDBM* 849 B6 - 872 C7.

³⁶ *FDBM* 792 A1 - 831 D8.

N.B.: There follows a section containing a number of talks of Don Bosco on various occasions, with a couple of other pieces.

[iv] Notebook IV — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook IV / 1876 (*Cronichetta / Q. 4° / 1876*).

N.B.: There follows a series of talks, good nights (chiefly dream narratives), in a notebook with pages numbered 1-28.

[v] Notebook V — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook V / 1876 (*Cronichetta / Quad. 5° / 1876*).

[vi] Notebook VI — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook VI / 1876 (*Cronachetta / Quad. 6° / 1876*).

[vii] Notebook VII — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook VII / 1876 (*Cronachetta / Q. 7° / 76*).

[viii] Notebook VIII — [Cover:] Little chronicle / Notebook VIII / 1876 (*Cronachetta / Quad 8° / 76*).

[ix] Notebook IX — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook IX / 1876 (*Cronachetta / Quad 9° / 1876*).

[x] Notebook X — [Cover:] Notebook X / Little Chronicle / Talks by Don Bosco / 1876 (*Q. 10 / Cronichetta / Doscorsi D. Bosco / 76*).

[Page 1 begins with the note: "N.B.: Notebook XI is parallel to this one, begun before, finished after. They should be read together."]

[xi] Notebook XI — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook XI (*Cronichetta / Q. 11*) [Note by Lemoyne, who used the chronicle: "Notebook XI should be read in conjunction with X, IX (XII) / 1876, 1877.]

[xii] Notebook XII — [Cover:] Little Chronicle / Notebook XII / Begins with April 1877 (*Cronichetta / Quad. 12 / Comincia dall'Aprile 1877*).

[xiii] Notebook XIII — [Cover:] Number XIII / Little Chronicle / from December 1877 (*N. 13 / Cronichetta / Dal Dic. 77*).

N.B.: There follow 4 inserted pages dated August 4, 1878, describing Past Pupils' Day at the Oratory.

[xiv] Notebook XIV — [Cover:] No title.— [Title on p.1:] Little Chronicle continues / Year 1878 (*Segue la Cronichetta — Anno 1878*).

[xv] Notebook XV — [Cover:] No title — [Date on p. 1:] February 16, 1879.

The Chronicle ends with a short entry dated June 7, 1879.³⁷

³⁷ The 15 notebooks appear in *ASC-FDBM* as follows: [i] *FDBM* 833 A10 - 834 A1; [ii] *FDBM* 834 A2 - E10; [iii] *FDBM* 834 E11 - 836 B3 + Talks: *FDBM* 836 B4 - E7; [iv] *FDBM* 836 E8 - 838 C3 + Talks: *FDBM* 838 C4 - E9; [v] *FDBM* 838 E10 - 839 E2; [vi] *FDBM* 839 E3 - 841 B2; [vii] *FDBM* 841 B3 - 842 C10; [viii] *FDBM* 842 C11 - 844 A5; [ix] *FDBM* 844 A6 - 845 A8; [x] *FDBM* 1251 A11 - 1252 A11; [xi] *FDBM* 1252 A12 - 1253 C3; [xii] *FDBM* 1253 C4 - 1254 E4; [xiii] *FDBM* 845 A9 - 846 D4 + inserted pages: *FDBM* 846 D5-8; [xiv] *FDBM* 846 D9 - 848 D7; [xv] *FDBM* 848 D8 - 849 B5.

(3) Features of Barberis' Autograph Little Chronicle

Except for a few inserted transcriptions in other hands, the Autograph Little Chronicle is completely in Barberis' hand. It is, however, as he himself states and as is generally evident from the text, a good copy produced from his own original notes (if any, not extant), surely aided by memory and by other people's reports. Though generally neatly and legibly written, it is not free from corrections and additions, and occasional hastily scribbled passages. Barberis' punctuation and other points of style are, if not totally arbitrary, remarkably subjective. But the text is easily intelligible.

An interesting feature of Barberis' chronicle are his frequent and sometimes extended personal comments on events and people, on life at the Oratory, and on a variety of subjects, such as education, discipline, etc. This material may not of itself be germane to the literary genre of chronicle and may need critical evaluation besides, but it is obviously of great historical interest, especially when the comments refer to Don Bosco himself.

Most of Barberis' text, however, is "hard chronicle," namely it consists of reports of words and deeds of Don Bosco, as well as of events concerning the founder, which the chronicler witnessed personally. Don Bosco's words, whether uttered in official or familial settings, whether addressed to the confreres or to the boys, appear to have been Barberis' prime concern. Most of the times Don Bosco's words are either quoted directly (obviously, as recalled) or in ways which make them easily identifiable in the text. These passages often feature the distinctively simple, elliptical style which has become associated with Don Bosco's known mode of expression. This trait bespeaks, on the chronicler's part, both good retentive memory and familiarity with the founder's way of speaking.

Many of the reports record familiar conversations of Don Bosco with small, intimate groups of Salesians. It was Don Bosco's custom after the noonday meal and after supper (which he took after hearing confessions sometimes till fairly late in the evening) to enjoy some recreation talking with confreres who happened to be free at the moment. Barberis, who seems to have made it a point to be on hand on most evenings, often refers to the persons present. He would also occasionally be asked to accompany Don Bosco to places in the city, usually to homes of benefactors, for visits or dinner. He would then record the conversation and what took place.

Part II. Don Bosco at the Age of 60: Vignettes from Barberis' Autograph *Little Chronicle*

Father Giulio Barberis' Autograph *Little Chronicle*, all 15 notebooks of it, contains a staggering amount of information about Don Bosco recorded over a period of some 5 years, 1875 to 1879. In the present article I will draw on the first 6 notebooks, which contain entries dated from May 10, 1875 to March 31, 1876: Don Bosco at the age of 60. I will further restrict my inquiry by

selecting only material which may highlight certain facets of Don Bosco's personality and character, aspects which may not be immediately evident from the biographies. For it should be borne in mind that both Lemoyne and Ceria have made extensive, if selective, use of this archival material. But through its being edited and compiled with other biographical data it has lost much of its original vividness and freshness.

Furthermore, since the material I have selected and translated is by its very nature diverse and episodic, I have arranged it in some kind of logical order under general subject headings. Such attempt at organization is aimed simply at encouraging the reader.

1. Don Bosco at His Daily Tasks

Don Bosco is aging but maintains a heavy work load. Barberis describes Don Bosco's daily timetable.

Now that he is getting old, Don Bosco is up at 6 o'clock in the morning. When he was younger he kept different hours. After rising, he celebrates Mass in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. When ill, he celebrates Mass at a private altar set up in his quarters. Very seldom does he accept outside Mass engagements. [...] After Mass he hears the boys' confessions for about an hour on regular days, but for a lot longer on special religious occasions. When confessions are over, usually between 8:30 and 9, he goes up to his rooms, where people are already waiting for him. He remains available for interviews for as long as there are people who wish to speak to him. After the noonday meal he usually spends some time chatting with Salesians who wish to speak to him. Then, back he goes to his room, where he works at his desk without a break till 7:30 or 8 o'clock, time for supper. Both after dinner and supper he attends to house matters, and this is the time when confreres can discuss business with him. [...] He retires at about 9:30.³⁸

Don Bosco confides to Father Barberis that he sits long hours at his desk working with great speed, but can never finish his work.

"So much remains to be done, dear Father Barberis, a great deal indeed! This afternoon, as usual, I was at my desk at 2:15 and worked till 8 o'clock without a break, and still could not clear the desk. There's still a pile of letters and other business waiting to be attended to and dispatched.³⁹ Nor am I a slow worker; I go through a great amount of work. [...]"

³⁸ March 15, 1876, Notebook V, 30-31, *FDBM* 839 C4-5.

³⁹ In the *Biographical Memoirs* Lemoyne, citing Father Rua's testimony, states that "every week [the letters] ran into the hundreds and occasionally into the thousands" [*EBM* VIII, 65]. F. Motto regards this statement as a gross exaggeration. In his introduction to Volume II of the new critical edition, covering the years 1864-1868, he speaks of one letter every three days on average [cf. Giovanni Bo-

“I occasionally think about what the future might bring. I am now 60 years old. But if the Lord were to let me go on till the age of 80 or 85, and keep me in good health and as alert in mind as I am now, I think I could accomplish quite a bit more. Not only Italy, but also Europe and other parts of the world would experience the effects of my work.”

[...] Don Bosco says: “May the Lord do with me as he pleases. As far as I am concerned, I am happy to stay on for as long as the Lord will let me. I will just go on working with all deliberate speed. Time flies, and no matter how many years one may live, one cannot accomplish even half of what one has planned. [...] But I won’t slow down, not until the bell tolls for me.”⁴⁰

Don Bosco’s eating habits are occasionally referred to in the chronicle. One passage is of special interest in this respect.

People call quite early in the morning, and then wait till they can see Don Bosco. After he has heard confessions and celebrated Mass, he holds audiences until noon.

Before midday Don Bosco neither eats nor drinks anything except a cup of chicory coffee, black. In the past he used to take an egg beaten with sugar into a cup of milk or coffee. But since it interfered with his digestion, and made him sleepy besides, he stopped taking it. [...] He also tried bread dunked in the coffee; but again this made him sluggish and gave him yawning fits. So he stopped that, too. For many years now, that is, practically since his ordination, a cup of black coffee is all he takes in the morning.

His only real meal is at noon. He eats in the dining room with us, but countless are the times when his interviews run late, and he comes in when dinner is well along, sometimes as late as 2 o’clock when everything is over. [...]

His meal is frugal indeed. He eats only half as much as I do, and I’m no big eater either. [...] He hardly ever eats meat, and when people press him he helps himself to no more than a sliver. He says that meat “thickens his blood” and he suffers discomfort from it. But he loves fresh fruit. His usual fare consists of a bowl of soup (no appetizers), a plate with two courses, and fruit. [...] When he dines with well-to-do families who would want to treat him lavishly, he asks that they give an offering instead. [...] The duchess of Montmorency has been sending him a quantity of Bordeaux wine for the past few years. He took it on doctors’ orders during his illness and found it very helpful because the claret is dry. After a while he asked the duchess not to send any more, a request which she dis-

so, *Epistolario. Introduzione, testi critici e note*, a cura di Francesco Motto (Roma: LAS, 1991 and 1996), Vol. II, 5]. Obviously, many of Don Bosco’s letters have been lost.

⁴⁰ January 26, 1876, Notebook IV, 12-14, *FDBM* 837 A8-10. Don Bosco died in 1888 at the age of 72. Illness plagued him all his life and he suffered severe lapses in the seventies. During the last four years general physical deterioration greatly reduced his activity and practically forced him into retirement.

regarded. So he told Father Berto, his secretary, to stop serving that wine, but that is the only wine that Berto will put on the table for him. Don Bosco sips one glass of it with his meal. [...] His supper is even more frugal. He will have his bowl of soup, his preference being bread gruel, followed by a vegetable dish and fruit, either or both of which he often skips.⁴¹

Don Bosco complains that he has too many irons in the fire; that he is forgetful, he feels tired, his mind wanders. He seems to be losing his grip on things. So Barberis quotes him:

"Even when engaged in such a simple operation as buttoning my cassock in the morning, I lose track of what I'm doing. I start buttoning, but then I stop to attend to some trifle or other, and in the evening I find that those other buttons are still undone. [...]

"Sometimes while writing a letter thoughts of some other matter come into my mind and I lose track of what I'm writing. You may imagine the puzzlement of the person who receives the letter. Recently I was writing a letter to a lady in Genoa, while at the same time thinking of some complicated affair involving a priest. I addressed her as 'Dear Reverend Sir,' and wrote her a really mixed-up letter. She wrote back asking for an explanation of what I had written. She thought I was joking. [...]

"In writing letters I usually keep a second sheet of paper handy. Sometimes, as I come to the end of a line, without realizing it I keep on writing on the second sheet. The result may easily be imagined. But my most frequent failure is that I tend to omit words or even whole phrases. This is due to haste as well as lack of attention. [...]"⁴²

"My handwriting, however, is fine and, when I can take my time, almost calligraphic.⁴³ But generally speaking either because of the pressure I am under, or because of physical or mental fatigue, things don't turn out too well. But I have no alternative; it's either this or nothing at all. I do what little I can, and may God add his blessing.

"Even while saying Mass I have to make an effort to keep my mind from wandering. There was a time when I could exercise total control at Mass. I could even purposely think of other things and attend to other matters when saying Mass, or while preaching. Now unless I keep my eyes riveted on to the book and consciously check on what I am saying at every point, I get distracted by other thoughts and no longer know what I am saying. I skip prayers, I jump ahead, or I repeat what I've just read."⁴⁴

⁴¹ March 15, 1876, Notebook V, 27-29, *FDBM* 839 C1-3.

⁴² The accuracy of these statements of Don Bosco's regarding his distractions in writing letters is not generally borne out by the critical apparatus of Motto's edition of Don Bosco letters (up to 1868) [cf. note 39 above]. The situation could have deteriorated by 1875/76.

⁴³ This is just a little human conceit. Don Bosco's handwriting was in fact very poor, as even a cursory look at his huge manuscript output will bear out.

⁴⁴ March 11, 1876, Notebook V, 4-6, *FDBM* 839 A2-4.

Don Bosco has his hands full in even more important ways. He has to see to everything and to everybody. Barberis' brief comment is again quite revealing.

Poor Don Bosco! He must attend to a thousand different things without any respite. He must make all important decisions. All of us, his priests, are too young for that, and everything must come down from him. We need only follow his directives. Were it not for him, we would just be adrift. May God bless him and keep him.⁴⁵

2. Sidelight on Don Bosco's Feast Day

In those days people celebrated their name day rather than their birthday. Don Bosco's Christian name was John (Melchior)—after St. John, Apostle and Evangelist. In the liturgical calendar of the Roman rite the feast of *this* St. John was and is kept on December 27. However, Don Bosco's name day began to be celebrated on June 24, which is the feast of the birth of St. John the Baptist. This yearly occasion was always a happy experience, with the participation of various groups, past pupils, and guests. Solemn church services, music, entertainment, food, a playground fair added to the fun. It was also an occasion for the renewal of pledges and good resolutions on the boys' part.

In 1875, on June 7, Don Bosco suddenly left Turin on a fairly extended trip, the purpose of which was to visit recently founded Salesian schools: Sanpieraarena, Varazze, Alassio, and others. Barberis guesses that Don Bosco would be out of town for at least a couple of weeks, the usual length of such visits. He would be back only days before his feast day. Then he adds.

Don Bosco never lets the boys know that he will be away. They don't see him around as usual, but they don't know whether he is at home or out of town. Only his penitents become aware of his absence when they don't find him at his usual place in the confessional. Nor are members of the Oratory staff, except those who absolutely need to know, told that he will be away. He does not even announce the day of his return.⁴⁶

In the evening talk of June 21, so Barberis reports, Father Rua announced that Don Bosco would be back from his trip the following evening [June 22], just one day in advance of his feast day.

Father Rua told the boys not to wait till the evening of the next day [June 23] to go to Don Bosco for confession, but to start going in the morning. No one should go after Benediction that evening, because we will offer the customary bouquet to Don Bosco [for his feast day] and we don't want to put this off till late. (But this is exactly what happened. A great number of boys crowded the sacristy before the Benediction service waiting to go to

⁴⁵ July 8, 1875, Notebook II, 44, *FDBM* 834 E2.

⁴⁶ June 7, 1875, Notebook II, 6, *FDBM* 834 A7.

confession, and Don Bosco heard confessions for a long time after the service.)⁴⁷

Don Bosco arrived at about 8 o'clock P.M. [June 22]. The boys were just coming out of church in orderly files and were heading for the dining room. He came through the front door at that moment. The boys broke rank and ran up crowding around him noisily and shouting, "Hurrah for Don Bosco."⁴⁸

It had been raining for several days, and unfortunately it was still pouring on June 23 in the evening, when the entertainment or concert (*accademia*) was to be held. Since it could not be held out of doors, the large study hall had to be used for the purpose. The hall was crowded, everybody waiting for Don Bosco.

Since Don Bosco had a long session in the confessional, there was over an hour's wait, and the boys were a bit annoyed. But when at last at 9:45 Don Bosco appeared, he was given a joyful, noisy reception. The band struck up the overture, and the theme song that followed went off swimmingly. Written for the occasion, the lyrics were by Father Lemoyne, director of the school at Lanzo, and the music by Father Cagliero.

Then the boys came up one by one to read their compositions in Don Bosco's honor. The reading of these literary masterpieces, some of them ill prepared to boot, took a long time. Eleven o'clock came and went before this operation was over. By that time, some of the lads had fallen asleep, while others had left their place and gone over to the side where the musicians were seated, for the benches had been so badly positioned that a lot of people could not see what was happening up ahead. [...]

When at the end Don Bosco rose to speak, there were many empty seats and some of the lads were sleeping. The majority, however, listened with rapt attention.⁴⁹

In contrast to the fiasco of the evening before, the feast day itself was a success. Even the weather cooperated. Barberis reports:

This morning the rain let up, and the sky was clear and blue. Don Bosco had been hearing confessions since early morning and did not finish his Mass and come in for coffee until 9:30. While he is sipping his coffee, here come the Past Pupils from the city to offer their good wishes, with their band and their presents.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ June 21, 1875, Notebook II, 12, *FDBM* 834 B1.

⁴⁸ June 22, 1875, Notebook II, 12, *FDBM* 834 B1.

⁴⁹ June 23, 1875, Notebook II, 14-15, *FDBM* 834 B3-4.

⁵⁰ The first local Past Pupils' association was formed in Turin in 1870 for the purpose of organizing a yearly feast day in honor of Don Bosco. After Don Bosco's death, the group continued to do the same in honor of Father Michele Rua, keeping the same date of June 24. For many years this was the only Past Pupils' association in existence.

A word about the recently organized Past Pupils' band. As is well known, Don Bosco takes in numerous youngsters and gives them a chance to learn a trade and so to earn an honorable livelihood as honest citizens and good Christians. Instrumental music is an activity which receives much attention at the Oratory and which is exclusively for the working boys. A great number of past pupils who have come out of our workshops live and work in Turin. They love Don Bosco very much and maintain a close connection with the Oratory. Recently our good father has gotten the musicians among them to join and form a "Christian band." Don Bosco himself gave them their statutes: Only past pupils of the Oratory may belong to the band, but no one may belong who has been dismissed for bad conduct. The band must not accept engagements to play in public halls, but is to be available for church services. The members are to attend church and receive the sacraments regularly; they are to help each other, etc. This band has been formed only a few months ago, but it has already made its mark because all players without exception, some 30 in number, were already proficient in their instrument when leaving the Oratory. Today they have come to offer their musical homage to our common father on his birthday [name day].⁵¹

Barberis goes on to report on some of the events of the day, and closes this entry with a rather remarkable comment. After describing the solemn services, he adds:

Don Bosco himself was the celebrant at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. One cannot imagine how much this meant to all at the Oratory. Don Bosco presides at church services no more than two or three times a year, if at all. As for holy Mass, he presides at the solemn Mass at Christmas, and that's about it. He has never presided at Sunday vespers in the 15 years I have been at the Oratory. As I said, he gives the Benediction occasionally. In earlier times, he also gave sermons.⁵²

In 1896 a second Past Pupils' association was formed at Parma (Emilia). Between 1896 and 1908 many similar associations came into existence in places where the Salesians were active. Although not federated, all these groups were inspired by the idea of keeping alive the principles of their Salesian education and working as active Christians in their various walks of life. In 1908 the idea of forming a world federation was launched, to unite all Past Pupils' associations which had sprung up in Europe and the Americas. In 1909 statutes of federation were drafted and circulated, and some 100 local associations, united to form the World Federation of Salesian Past Pupils. The First and Second World Congress, both held at the Oratory in Turin in 1911 and 1920 respectively, were decisive in setting its course for the future.

⁵¹ June 24, 1875, Notebook II, 16-17, *FDBM* 834 B5-6.

⁵² June 24, 1875, Notebook II, 20, *FDBM* 834 B9.

3. Mary Help of Christians Has Her Day

One month before Don Bosco's feast, the Oratory celebrated the feast of Mary Help of Christians, to whom the great church built by Don Bosco in the 1860s was dedicated. The church was planned and begun in 1863. Barberis records Don Bosco's account of how the building permit was obtained and the title "approved."

I accompanied Don Bosco and Father Rua to dinner at Mr. and Mrs. Bonnié. On the way the conversation touched on a variety of topics, including the title of the church of Mary Help of Christians. [...] Don Bosco said:

"When I submitted the plans of the church for the city's approval, the superintendent rejected the plans because of the title, Help of Christians. 'It's too Jesuitical,' he complained.⁵³ 'But, sir,' I explained, 'perhaps in your line of work you have not had occasion of looking into the historic origin of this title. It commemorates the victories won by a coalition of Italian, Spanish, and other forces against the Turks. It also commemorates the liberation of Vienna, etc.' He wouldn't hear of it, and the plans were rejected because of the title. A little later I again submitted the plans and requested approval, but in the petition I refrained from any reference to a title. I simply presented the church as a building to be devoted to divine worship. The approval was given without further ado. After all the papers had been signed and filed, I went to the building office to thank the chief for giving his approval. He said to me: 'I knew that Don Bosco would not be so stubborn as to insist on a title that so smacked of Jesuitical reaction.' 'Sir,' I replied, 'in view of your objections, I refrained from specifying any title. But now that the approval has been given, I am at liberty to choose any title I wish, am I not?' 'But this is arrant deception!' he exclaimed. 'Deception has nothing to do with it.' I replied, 'You objected to the title and approved a church without a title. But as I must now give the church a title I will choose any title I please. Both of us are satisfied that we have each won our point.' He smiled, but he was only putting a good face on a bad deal.[...]"⁵⁴

The church of Mary Help of Christians was solemnly dedicated in 1868, and from then on the feast of Mary Help of Christians on May 24 acquired ever greater importance with each successive year. By mid-1870s the church had already become a place of pilgrimage. People were resorting to Mary on her feast day to obtain "graces," spiritual and corporal healing. They would also seek Don Bosco's blessing.

⁵³ It should be borne in mind that the liberal revolution in 1848, the unification of Italy in 1861, and the taking of Rome in 1870 from the Pope, were accompanied by a great ground swell of anticlericalism, the Jesuits being seen as the chief opponents of the liberal movement.

⁵⁴ June 26, 1875, Notebook II, 23-24, *FDBM* C1-2.

Barberis opens his entry for this May 24, by describing this upsurge of popular devotion.

Today, the feast of Mary Help of Christians, a huge number of people attended Mass and received holy communion. Quite extraordinary also was the number of people who came to seek Don Bosco's blessing. This upsurge of devotion among so many people in distress is probably due to the current issue of the *Catholic Readings*.⁵⁵ [...] Don Bosco stood for long time dispensing blessings to individual people crowding around him in the sacristy. After a good hour, the sacristy was still crowded with people. Since he had to vest for the solemn Mass, he reluctantly gave a general blessing and dismissed the crowd, instead of listening to and blessing each person. After Mass he came in for his coffee. A group of ladies who had come from Milan for the feast were waiting for him. He began by taking out of his pockets a fistful of bank notes, money that people had offered for graces received. He also had three pairs of valuable earrings and two necklaces. The necklaces were of little value, but perhaps they represented the most precious thing those grateful people could afford to give. Don Bosco then related a remarkable episode: "A few days ago I was called to administer holy Viaticum to retired general, Count Vialardi, who was desperately ill and was in fact at the point of death. I urged him to put his trust in our Lady, and to promise to come to receive holy communion on her feast, in thanksgiving for his recovery. No one believed such a thing possible within the few days that remained before the feast. This morning, however, he came to the Church for Mass and communion, and here is his offering." [...] Don Bosco reflected: "If I had no other proof of the truth of the Catholic faith, and proofs I have in abundance, having studied its divine origin in some depth, such happenings would be sufficient demonstration that it is truly revealed by God for our salvation. I can only stand in awe before what I see happening, and I doubt that the miracles of the apostolic age were any more marvelous."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Don Bosco had been publishing devotional booklets on Mary Help of Christians in the *Catholic Readings* (a popular religious series begun by him in 1853), since the consecration of the church in 1868. In May 1875, he published a collection of "graces," chiefly cures, obtained and reported by devotees. The booklet, which drew Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi's ire was entitled, *Mary Help of Christians with an Account of Some Graces Obtained during the Seven Years since the Consecration of the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin* [*Maria Ausiliatrice col racconto di alcune grazie ottenute nel primo settennio dalla consecrazione della Chiesa a Lei dedicata in Torino*, per cura del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (Torino: Tipografia e Libreria dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, 1875); cf. *Opere Edite* XXVI, 304-624]. Archbishop Gastaldi had been hostile to Don Bosco since his appointment to Turin in 1871, but he opposed the publication of "graces" on other grounds. A clash over the issue occurred when Don Bosco published another such collection in 1877.

⁵⁶ May 24, 1875, Notebook I, 24-25, *FDBM* 833 C10-11.

Among the various episodes and comments related by Barberis in connection with the feast of Mary Help of Christians, there is one which is both perplexing and embarrassing. Barberis reports it "as an instance of Don Bosco's extreme reserve with women." He writes:

Last night Don Bosco heard confessions as is his custom, and had a late supper. There happens to be visiting the Oratory two ladies, administrators of a hospital in Bologna; they have come to Turin for the feast of Mary Help of Christians. These two saintly women, somewhat advanced in age already, on hearing that Don Bosco was having supper came into the dining room to see him. Don Bosco spoke to them very harshly: "How dare you come in at this late hour?" he demanded. "We just wanted to have a moment with you, and we took the chance," they replied. "But don't you know that you are not allowed into a cloister at this late hour?" Don Bosco insisted. "We had no idea," answered the one; "but if you object to our being here, we will leave." But the other added, "It was Father Rua who invited us in." Don Bosco was hardly mollified: "I won't put you out," he said, "but think of the penalties you may be incurring for violating the cloister." The two saintly women, finding themselves reprimanded before an audience of some ten priests, were extremely mortified.

Barberis tries to soften the blow on the reader by an interpretative comment :

Don Bosco's words were not really harsh; and they were accompanied by that half-smile which is habitual with him in similar circumstances. In my fifteen years at the Oratory, however, I don't recall having ever seen women in the dining room, whether at supper or after supper. I have recorded this episode as an instance of Don Bosco's extreme reserve with women. Here he was, not in his room but in the dining room, and not alone but with a large group of people. Nevertheless, he would not permit the intrusion of women. As for the cloister, obviously he did not mean it in a canonical sense; he merely wanted to emphasize the impropriety of the situation.⁵⁷

4. Don Bosco Speaks of the Oratory and of the Salesian Society

Looking back over the progress of his work from the vantage point of mid-1870s, Don Bosco saw his whole life as divinely guided. God had placed his life and work under the special patronage of Mary, who in the 1860s and 1870s (for historic reasons) became for Don Bosco the Help of Christians. Obviously, the Salesians around Don Bosco shared the same beliefs, most firmly.

⁵⁷ June 2, 1875, Notebook I, 42-43, *FDBM* 833 E4-5.

(1) The Oratory, a Divinely Guided Experience to Be Handed Down

It was to “show how God has always been our guide,” that Don Bosco between 1873 and 1875 undertook to write his *Memoirs of the Oratory*.⁵⁸ In his entry of January 1, 1876, Barberis writes:

This evening Don Bosco heard few confessions since most of the boys had gone already before New Year's. So we had more time to chat after supper. Speaking of the beginnings of the Oratory, he said:

“Truly the story of the beginning of the oratories is at once so memorable and so poetic that I myself would very much like to gather our Salesians together and relate it in detail. But I did set down in writing part of this story [in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*], and together we shall have to come to a decision as to what parts might be given out to the general public and what parts should instead be kept in the family. For there are things that may be instructive for us, but that are not fit for public consumption, at least not for the duration. [...] I have set down the main events up to the year 1854. It was at that point that the Oratory acquired stability and gradually took on the shape it has now. One might say that with that year the poetic period came to an end and the prosaic period began.”⁵⁹

During the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales,⁶⁰ Don Bosco urged the gathered directors to write a history of their house, and keep a running chronicle of

⁵⁸ The *Memoirs* were first published as *San Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855* [edited by Eugenio Ceria] (Torino: SEI, 1946). We now have a critical edition: *G. Bosco, Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815-1855*. Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di Antonio da Silva Ferreira (Roma: LAS, 1991). The English translation is from Ceria's edition: *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, tr. by Daniel Lyons, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, Lawrence Castelveccchi and Michael Mendl (New Rochelle, New York: Don Bosco Publications, 1989). For the quote on divine guidance, cf. *Mo-En*, 3.

⁵⁹ January 1, 1776, Notebook III, 46-47, *FDBM* 835 D9-10. The *terminus ad quem* of the *Memoirs* is given here as 1854 (not as 1855, as in the title), and Don Bosco gives the reason. The year 1854 was the year in which the first four “Salesians” banded together for the work of charity; it was the year in which the new building capable of housing some 100 boys was ready for occupancy; it was the year when he first drafted a complete set of regulations, etc.

⁶⁰ The conferences of St. Francis de Sales, so called for their being held around the feast of the saint (January 29, at the time), were general convocations of directors and other “superiors” for the purpose of discussing the business of the Congregation. They were the forerunners of the general chapters, and were held every year from 1865 to 1877, when the first general chapter was held in accordance with the constitutions.

events for a historical record. Everybody agreed that it was important. It was also important that the Congregation should have a "historian."

Then, as Barberis reports it, Don Bosco voiced his belief that his own life was inextricably wedded to that of the Society.

Don Bosco said: "As for me, I have set down a summary account of events relating to the oratory, from its beginnings to the present,⁶¹ and up to 1854 [in the *Memoirs*] the narrative goes into details in many instances. From 1854 on, the discourse begins to be about the Congregation, and matters begin to loom larger and put on a different face. Nevertheless I think that a history will be very helpful to those who will come after us, and will redound to the greater glory of God; therefore I shall try to write. It is no longer a matter of having regard for Don Bosco or for anything else. I realize now that Don Bosco's life is totally bound up with the life of the Congregation; and therefore we have to speak of things. The greater glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the increase of the Congregation require that things be known [...]"⁶²

(2) A Well Formed and Divinely Guided Plan

We know that Don Bosco had tried to join the Franciscans at Chieri in 1834-35 and the Oblates of the Virgin Mary in 1844, out of desire to go to the missions.⁶³ In a statement reported of Don Bosco in the Barberis Chronicle, we hear that at one time he also considered joining the Rosminians. We cannot pinpoint a date for this last endeavor, but it may have been in the very early 1850s, when Don Bosco's dealings with the Rosminians are documented. The years 1850-1852 were a time of crisis for the oratories, and he may have been thinking of placing his work under an established congregation.

Chatting with Don Bosco in the dining room after supper, Fathers Giuseppe Lazzero and Michele Rua being present, Father Barberis asked:

Is it true, Don Bosco, that you were for a few days a novice with the Dominicans?

"No," Don Bosco replied, "but I did consider entering the Oblates here in Turin, or the Rosminians. I would visit their houses and would talk with Rosminians when they came through Turin and spent some time here.

⁶¹ "The present" would be 1876. Don Bosco produced a number of "historical summaries," describing the development of his work. But the historical summary referred to here cannot be identified, unless he be referring to the historical summary of 1874: *Riassunto della Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 Febbraio 1874*, transcribed with commentary in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l' "Oratorio" una "Congregazione degli Oratori"*. *Documenti*. (Roma: LAS, 1988), 147-155. Cf. also *Opere Edite* XXV, 377-384.

⁶² February 2, 1876, Notebook IV, 41, *FDBM* 837 D1.

⁶³ For the Franciscans, cf. *Mo-En*, 110-112. For the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, cf. *EBM* II, 160-164.

But on seeing their spirit, I decided against joining them. As far as I was concerned, I think I could have lived in perfect harmony under obedience to any religious superior; in fact, I would have been happy to do so. But I had already formed a well thought-out plan, which I absolutely could not and would not give up. I did explore the possibility of putting that plan into execution within a congregation already in existence; but I realized that it could not be done. That's why I did not join a religious community; rather I myself decided to gather a group of brothers around me, so that I could communicate to them the spirit I felt so deeply about. God knows that I would have much preferred to live under the guidance of others. But [that is not feasible] when one is absolutely committed to the success of a project. For I had a clear understanding of the direction I should follow and of the means I should use to achieve the goal. I just could not let what I had already in hand go to waste."

As often in his reports, Barberis adds his own comment, here clearly voicing what was the firm belief of all Salesians.

At this point Don Bosco seemed embarrassed, as though unable to find the right words to say what he wanted to say without at the same time revealing too much. But, to put it in plain words, I think this is what he meant: "The Virgin Mary had shown me in a vision the field in which I was called to labor, as well as the means I should use to achieve the goal. Since I found myself alone and had no one to help me, I tried to join some congregation in which I could carry forward the plan given to me by the Virgin Mary and which would supply me with helpers to that end. But then I found that the spirit of those congregations, holy though it might be, did not correspond with what I had in mind. So I preferred to work alone and, giving up the idea of using helpers already formed, I raised my own co-workers." Of all this we need no demonstration. We know that at least since 1843-44 Don Bosco had already formed well thought-out plans, that is, plans given to him by the Virgin Mary. That was the year in which he had the famous vision in which he was given the ribbon [of obedience] with which to bind the head of his helpers.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 55-56, *FDBM* 835 E6-7. The "Dream of the Ribbon of Obedience" is a narrative variant of the "Dream of 1844." Don Bosco gives one (shorter) version of it in his *Memoirs* [*MO-En*, 209-210, written ca. 1874-75] as occurring when he was about to leave the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) in October 1844. He told it to Barberis also in 1875 while returning from dinner one evening [Barberis' original draft: *ASC* 110; Cronachette Barberis, "Notizie varie dei primi tempi," 2 Feb. 1875, *FDBM* 892 A11-12; finalized copy: *Ibid.*, "Sogni diversi," *FDBM* 866 B10-C1]. In this version Don Bosco saw wild animals changed into lambs, and lambs into seminarians. The Lady of the dream told him to bind their foreheads with a white ribbon, the bond of religious obedience.

In the *Biographical Memoirs* [*EBM* II, 231-235] Lemoyne edits the Barberis text and gives it a later context, since he cannot accept the fact of a narrative doublet. This is also known as the First Dream of the Holy Martyrs.

As reported in a later entry, Barberis and Don Bosco were discussing the utility of telling his dreams, perhaps presenting them as “stories,” if not for “what they really are, visions.” Barberis made a suggestion to Don Bosco:

Perhaps you could make a collection of your dreams and publish them as stories [*similitudini*] in two or three little volumes. They would be very popular with the young and unlearned, and even with the learned. They would make a hit. “I think so, too,” replied Don Bosco. “They would do a lot of good. But I have no time, and I have forgotten most of them. Those dreams which have to do with the growth of the Congregation are the ones I remember best. [...]” Then Don Bosco went on to speak of a number of visions having to do with the Congregation. All of a sudden he became very serious, almost perturbed, and added: “When I think of the responsibility I have in my position, I am frightened. The things I see taking place are such that I feel overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibility they place on me. [...] I see practically everything that is to take place [in dreams or visions?]. I am led forward by the hand by the Blessed Virgin. True, other congregations have recorded instances of divine guidance at their founding, as well as instances of Our Lady’s protection [...], but only on one or two occasions, that’s all. Our congregation, on the contrary, has been guided step by step and in every circumstance by the Blessed Virgin. It has enjoyed the Blessed Virgin’s visible protection and experienced her deliverance from dangers and obstacles of every sort. And woe to us if we fail to correspond to our Lady’s many graces.”⁶⁵

(3) The Oratory Finds a Place of Its Own

Don Bosco often reminisced about the beginnings of the oratory. As recorded in the Barberis chronicle, in many instances his reminiscences agree with what he had written in his *Memoirs*. At other times, however, he gives a slightly different version or adds interesting new details. A couple of instances will suffice.

One evening Don Bosco spoke of an unpleasant discovery made after renting the Pinardi shed.

“Before long I discovered that the house adjoining [the shed] was actually a brothel. You may well imagine my embarrassment! I started by renting a couple of rooms, paying as much as double their worth, but made no use of them. As I continued to rent more rooms, the landlord would urge me to move in. ‘I don’t really need them now,’ I would reply. ‘We’ll be moving in as soon as I have got them all rented’.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ January 23, 1876, *Discorsetti* Notebook, 21-22 (after Notebook IV), *FDBM* 838 D12 - E1.

⁶⁶ May 26, 1875, Notebook I, 27-28, *FDBM* 833 D1-2. In his *Memoirs* [MO-En, 265] Don Bosco states that the Bellezza house across the yard was a brothel. Here clearly he designates the Pinardi house as a brothel. This is confirmed in other

As reported in another entry, Don Bosco, chatting with some Salesians after supper, talked about the purchase of Mr. Francesco Pinardi's house in a manner which differs greatly from the story he tells in his *Memoirs*.

"I would like tell you how the first little house was purchased, but it's a long story. It stood at this very spot where now is this dining room.⁶⁷ The first thing to note is that it was a brothel. The owner had on previous occasions offered to sell, but he was asking for an exorbitant price: 80,000 lire for a house that was estimated at no higher than 20,000. I wouldn't touch it, but I rented a few rooms in it with the aim of changing its character. It was the last Sunday on which I had use of the [Filippi] field. I was walking along the edge of that field absorbed in thought while Dr. Borel was delivering his sermon.⁶⁸ I look up and I see the man [Pinardi] walking toward me.

"He told me that there had just been a horrible fight in that evil house occasioned by a squabble [over a woman?], and now an army officer lay dead in a pool of blood with his head split open, a short distance down the street.

"The man stood before me greatly distressed. 'It can't go on this way,' he said. 'I can't stand it any more. These fights have got to stop. I want to sell the house.' 'And I want to buy it,' I countered; 'but you don't really want to sell because the price you are asking is unreasonable.' 'No, I really mean it,' he said. 'Just make me an offer.' [...] 'I have had the house and property appraised,' I told him, 'and the whole is worth between 25 and 28 thousand, 30 at the most. This is my offer: 30,000 lire.'"

They still haggled for some time over the final price, and settled for 30,000 lire in gold—with an additional 800 lire thrown in for the wife! Don Bosco goes

conversations recorded in the Barberis chronicle. In the Second Dream of the Holy Martyrs the house is so designated, both in the *Biographical Memoirs* [EBM II, 268] and earlier in *Documenti*: "Elated by this dream, early next morning, Don Bosco hastened to inspect the house [...]. But when he got there, he was painfully disappointed in finding not a building and a church but a house of ill repute [ASC 110: Cronachette-Lemoine, *Documenti* II, 157, *FDBM* 972 B12]. It should be noted that this second dream was compiled by Lemoine "from fragments," and appears to be a variant of the first [cf. note 64 above].

⁶⁷ The building plans for the expansion of the Oratory included the church of St. Francis de Sales (1852), the first section of the new home (1853/54), the second section of the home (1856) which replaced the original little house (Pinardi's). The dining room in the new building was located almost exactly where the Pinardi house had stood.

⁶⁸ Father (Dr.) Giovanni Borel (1801-1873), was chaplain of the charitable institutions founded by the Marchioness of Barolo. He took Don Bosco under his protection and supported his work by every means at his disposal. Other priests also supported Don Bosco and worked with him, but Father Borel was for many years a mainstay.

on to relate how he got the money, some from Father Cafasso, some from Father Rosmini (on a loan). The Cafasso segment is quite remarkable.

“As the man [Pinardi] was leaving, I saw Father Cafasso walking in my direction. ‘Father Cafasso!’ I exclaimed. ‘How extraordinary, since you never go out, certainly never on a Sunday. You are looking for me!’ ‘Yes, I am,’ he explained. ‘A pious lady has offered 10,000 lire in behalf of some work of charity, but it is her wish that the money be turned over to Don Bosco to use as he sees fit.’ ‘What a coincidence!’ I said to him. ‘You saw the gentleman who’s just left. He’s offered to sell me that house of his over there. That’s where I mean to establish my oratory, because we’ve been given notice and can no longer use this field’. [...]”⁶⁹

This extraordinary passage calls for brief comments.

(1) Clearly in this story several successive events, extending from 1846 to 1851, are “telescoped” as one continuous event, set at the fated Filippi field. As recorded in archival documents, the sequence of actions leading to the purchase of the Pinardi house and property by Don Bosco was as follows: [i] Mr. Francesco Pinardi (who had bought the house and surrounding land from the Filippi brothers) leased house and property to one Pancrazio Soave, but the contract excluded a shed which was under construction at the back of the house.⁷⁰ [ii] Mr. Pinardi leased the *shed* to Father Giovanni Borel (for Don Bosco), and the original Pinardi-Borel contract was for a 3-year lease beginning with April 1, 1846. [iii] By contract with Mr. Soave dated June 5, 1846, three rooms on the upper story of the Pinardi *house* itself were sub-leased to Father Borel (for Don Bosco) for three years. [iv] On December 1, 1846, after returning with his mother from his convalescence at Becchi (November 3), Don Bosco sub-leased from Mr. Soave the entire Pinardi house and adjacent lot for a period ending on December 31, 1848. Mr. Soave, however, was to retain the use of the ground floor for his starch business until March 1, 1847. Don Bosco signed as the contracting party for the first time. [v] When Mr. Soave’s lease of the Pinardi house expired, Father Borel (again acting as principal) merely took it over, and signed a lease for the house and property with Mr. Pinardi, for the period April 1, 1849 to March 31, 1852. [vi] The Pinardi house and property were finally acquired by Don Bosco (in partnership with Father Borel, Father Cafasso and Father Roberto Murialdo) on February 19, 1851, for 28,500 lire. By this final action the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was definitively settled.⁷¹

⁶⁹ January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 49-50, *FDBM* 835 D12 - E1.

⁷⁰ The Filippi brothers (Pietro Antonio, Carlo and Giovanni Battista) owned a fairly large tract of land in the area, of which the Pinardi property was but a part [Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 590].

⁷¹ Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 75f. For acquisition and sale of properties by Don Bosco from 1848 to 1884, as recorded in the Deeds’ Office of the city of Turin, cf. G. Bracco, “Don Bosco e le istituzioni,” in *Archivio Storico della Città di Torino*,

(2) On the other hand, the story as reported by Barberis agrees on some points with what is now known to have actually taken place and which differs considerably from Don Bosco's presentation in his *Memoirs*. There, after describing how the oratory had been meeting at various temporary places, and last of all on the field rented from the Filippi brothers, which he must now leave, he writes:

I had no one to help me, my energy was gone, my health was undermined, and I had no idea where I could gather my boys in the future [...]. I began to cry ; [...] I looked up to heaven and cried out, "My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children?"⁷²

At that moment Mr. Soave appeared to tell him about the shed. Now, [i] Don Bosco was never really alone. Father Borel for one was helping, for he is said to be preaching a sermon to the boys at the time, and the leasing contract was in his name. [ii] In a letter contemporary to the events and addressed to Marquis Michael Cavour, Vicar of Turin, Don Bosco states that negotiations with Mr. Pinardi for the *shed* were already in progress at the time of writing (March 13, 1846). This not only differs from the dates given in the *Memoirs* by Don Bosco (Palm Sunday, March 15), and corrected by Father Bonetti (Palm Sunday, April 5, 1846), but also contradicts the melodramatic presentation in the *Memoirs* of a Don Bosco waiting for God to manifest his will.⁷³

(4) Minister Urbano Rattazzi Provides Illumination

In that long familiar evening of January 1, 1876, Don Bosco spoke of the providential guidance that enabled the Salesian Society to come into existence and to survive "in evil times." In this connection Don Bosco made comments on such political figures as Camillo Cavour, Urbano Rattazzi, Paul Vigliani, etc. Barberis then records a comment of Don Bosco's which has since become famous.

Several ministers of state, the very worst types on the political scene [*dei più cattivi che ci fossero*], gave me encouragement and help: Cavour, Rattazzi, Vigliani. [...] Rattazzi for one came to the Oratory several times and had the greatest respect for poor Don Bosco. He even spoke of me as a great man. One might say that it was consequent to his suggestion that I could write into our rules certain provisions which define our society's

Torino e Don Bosco, a cura di Giuseppe Bracco (Torino, 1989) I: *Saggi*, 145-150.

⁷² *MO-En*, 255.

⁷³ For a Photostat of the leasing contract, see *MO-En*, 260. For the letter to Marquis Cavour and comments, see A. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Love Affair with 'Poor and Abandoned' Young People and the Beginnings of the Oratory," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 6:1 (1995) 32-37. For a critical edition of the letter, see F. Motto, *Epistolario* I, 66-68 (from an unpublished MS. in Turin's Historical Archive).

stance vis-à-vis the civil authorities and the state. One might therefore truly say that if we never had any trouble with the civil authority we owe it all to him.⁷⁴

A brief comment here seems appropriate. Although the documents in our possession do not permit us to reconstruct the exact parameters of the relationship, it is clear that Urbano Rattazzi admired Don Bosco and his work.⁷⁵ More importantly, in a conversation with Rattazzi (probably held in May 1857), Don

⁷⁴ January 1, 1876, Notebook III, 57, FDBM 835 E8. "*Varii ministri mi diedero incoraggiamento[,] mi ajutarono, e dei più cattivi che ci fossero: Cavour, Rattazzi, Vigliani, etc.— [...] Rattazzi è venuto varie volte all'oratorio ed aveva una riverenza così grande pel povero D. Bosco che mi chiamava nelle conversazioni un grand'uomo; anzi si può dire che è con lui che io ho combinato varie cose delle nostre regole che riguardano il modo di tenersi della nostra società in rispetto al civile ed allo stato. Si può dir proprio che ciò che spetta le relazioni col civile per non poter mai noi esser molestati fu cosa tutta Sua.*"

⁷⁵ Urbano Rattazzi was retained as minister of the interior in the second Cavour cabinet (1855) and held the post until the elections of November 1857. The "Law of the Convents," a bill which called for the suppression and expropriation of religious congregations, was introduced by Cavour, but was Rattazzi's brainchild. It was passed into law in 1855 and went into immediate effect in the Kingdom of Sardinia. It was later extended to the united Kingdom of Italy (after 1861), and finally to Rome after its occupation by Italian forces in 1870. Rattazzi was probably the most radical political figure active in the 1850s in Piedmont. Conservative Catholic historians of the nineteenth century brand him as a rabid and unrelenting anticlerical force. [e.g., Tomaso Chiuseo, *La Chiesa in Piemonte [...]*, (1887-1904, 5 vols.), Vol. IV, 60-61]. That's why Don Bosco refers to him and others as "*dei più cattivi*," which might be rendered in colloquial English with "real bastards."

Be that as it may, the Salesian sources speak of him as sympathetic to Don Bosco's humanitarian work. He refused Don Bosco's petition for a subsidy in February 1854 [Motto, *Epistolario* I, 218], but he changed his mind. This may have occurred after a visit to the Oratory (probably later in 1854), as related in Bonetti's *Storia [Don Bosco's Early Apostolate]*, 1934, 309-313.] He returned the raffle tickets but gave 40 lire. Obviously the relationship was broken off during the debate and the passage of Law of Suppression. At the beginning of 1856, he again refused a petition from Don Bosco, but then he granted a subsidy of 300 lire [Rattazzi's note edited in *EBM* V, 281-282]. In May 1856 he granted another subsidy of 1,000 lire toward the building designed to house "a greater number of destitute boys" [Rattazzi's note edited in *EBM* V, 299]. At the same time Rattazzi recommended boys to Don Bosco and they were accepted: Romano Chiri [Letter Rattazzi-Bosco edited in *EBM* V, 619]; Cesare Rattazzi, a cousin [Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 496, 421]; Casimiro Fissore [Note edited in *EBM* V, 619]. Besides some further subsidies, Rattazzi supported the raffle of 1857, and donated a painting [Note edited in *EBM* V, 409], issued a decree and ordered a subsidy for the value of tickets which he returned [edited in *EBM* V, 623-624]. Don Bosco got help from others in the liberal, anticlerical establishment, but Rattazzi surely had a soft spot for Don Bosco's valuable philanthropic work.

Bosco is said to have gotten "an illumination," that is, an idea of how he might evade the law of suppression and found a religious society to carry forward the work of the Oratory.

Our sole source for this famous conversation is Father Giovanni Bonetti's *History of the Oratory (Storia dell'Oratorio)* published serially in the newly founded *Salesian Bulletin (Bollettino Salesiano)* from 1878 to 1886.⁷⁶

Probably the minister himself raised the question of how Don Bosco's humanitarian work might be continued after his death. When Don Bosco expressed his fears that a religious association might be suppressed by the government, Rattazzi explained to him that an association of free citizens exercising their individual inalienable rights would not incur the government's sanctions. Rattazzi's advice, as reported in the *Storia*, is coherent with his attested political and juridical principles. It also explains Don Bosco's stubbornness in wanting to give his congregation a non-religious visage.

As Bonetti's words make clear, Rattazzi did not suggest the founding of a religious congregation of any type, old or new. He would certainly not suggest a religious congregation of the kind he was suppressing; nor would he be suggesting a *new kind* of religious congregation, the kind that not even Roman canonists could conceive at the time. He was simply explaining to Don Bosco a *point of law*, dealing with the exercise of inviolable individual rights, which was one of the foundations of liberal jurisprudence: individual citizens are free to associate and use their time, money and ability for any lawful cause they choose, and no liberal government will interfere.⁷⁷

This is the basis of the "civil right" article which Don Bosco wrote into the constitutions, in the chapter on the Form of the Society. The article was later struck down by the Roman authorities before the constitutions could be approved. Don Bosco, however, always maintained that the Salesian Society was an association of free citizens and not a religious corporation needing the government's approval.

This and none other can be the meaning of Don Bosco's oft-quoted words in the Barberis chronicle.

⁷⁶ [Bonetti,] "Storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales," in *Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1883, 97. The *Storia dell'Oratorio* was published in book form after Bonetti's death in 1891 as *Cinque lustri di Storia [...]* (1892), which was translated into English as *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate* (1908, reprinted 1934) [cf. note 11 above]. The text of the book and its English translation should obviously be compared with the source before any argument can be made. In our case the text agrees, but it should be interpreted *in the context of the source*.

⁷⁷ The two fundamental juridical principles of the liberal revolution were: (1) Individual right is inviolable because it is from nature. Hence individual liberties exercised within the state's legitimate laws cannot be interfered with. On the other hand, (2) Corporate right is from the state, and from the state only. Therefore, only the state has the power to approve any corporation, including religious corporations (such as congregations). The Church is a spiritual entity which cannot generate a juridical order of its own.

Then Bonetti writes further:

The foundations thus laid, Don Bosco soon perceived that [...] much more was needed. The Society suggested by Rattazzi *was a purely human one.*[...] He therefore began to reflect, and to ask himself: "Cannot this Society, whilst having a civil character before the Government, acquire also the nature of a religious Institute before God and the Church; cannot its members be free citizens and religious at the same time?"⁷⁸

However, Don Bosco's discussion of his plan with Pope Pius IX the following year started a process which ultimately brought the Salesian Society well, if not squarely, within the traditional model for a religious congregation.

One evening after supper, when only four Salesians remained in the dining room, Don Bosco began to speak about the Society in earlier times. In those days he would not even talk about setting up a religious congregation, and not just for political reasons. Barberis reports:

In those days Don Bosco would not speak overtly of a religious congregation in order not to frighten us away. He kept it all under wraps. When inviting someone to be part of the Society, he would carefully avoid even the least reference to its being a religious congregation. Anything more explicit would have scared us all away. The four of us agreed, and so would all other first-generation priests and brothers, that if Don Bosco had openly proposed to us life in a religious order, none of us would have entered. In those days Don Bosco would simply use such expressions as, "Do you love Don Bosco? Would you like to do your seminary studies here at the Oratory? Would you like to help Don Bosco when the time comes?" [...] This is how we were baited and hooked. And fortunate are we for letting ourselves be so deceived. [...]

"Don Bosco," I asked, "You tried to deceive us and draw us in against our will, didn't you?" "I had to be cautious," Don Bosco explained. "I did it that way so as not to frighten anybody. Now things have changed, and religious life is seen in a different light. For a long time I carefully avoided using the very word novitiate, for example, so as not to arouse people's suspicion about our being a religious order. Now I see that the word is used as a matter of course. But only two years ago using the word novitiate would have been, shall we say, counterproductive. We've come a long way!"

Don Bosco continued: "Things have changed also with respect to external discipline. Seminarians in those days carried on with great freedom. You could hear them shouting and arguing about literary or theological points at all hours. They would raise a din in the study hall when the boys were not there. They might stay in bed in the morning and fail to ap-

⁷⁸ Bonetti, *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate* (1934), 345. Italics mine.

pear in class without warning. They would skip meditation and spiritual reading as a matter of course, and the boys' spiritual retreat was enough retreat for them. I was well aware of all this, and would have liked to put a stop to it, but I preferred to let things be. The situation gradually improved, and order and discipline were established. If I had acted to enforce religious discipline all at once my seminarians would have walked out, and I would have had to send the boys home and shut down the Oratory. But I could see that most of those young men had a lot of good will and were very good at heart. Once the youthful phase passed they would settle down and be a great help to me. A number of priests in our congregation are of that vintage, and they are exemplary for their dedication to their work and for their priestly spirit."⁷⁹

(5) "School of Fire" and "Work of Mary Help of Christians"

At the beginning of 1876, Don Bosco, as Father Barberis reports, began to speak of a "great new project completely aimed at increasing quickly the number of Salesian seminarians." He called it the "school of fire" (*scuola di fuoco*). Don Bosco would select the best and somewhat older boys from the fourth, third, and even second year of the Oratory school and put them through an accelerated course of studies. It was to be so basic in subjects studied and so intense in application (hence the name) that in a few months (March-October) the candidates would be ready to don the clerical habit and start their novitiate. These young men from the Oratory school would be joined by the men of the Work of Mary Help of Christians (Sons of Mary).⁸⁰

Don Bosco explained:

⁷⁹ December 7, 1875, Notebook III, 43-45, *FDBM* 835 D6-8.

⁸⁰ The Oratory school was a standard "*ginnasio*," that is, a five-year course of secondary study roughly equivalent to the American high school.

The Work of Mary Help of Christians was an intensive, that is, accelerated seminary program which Don Bosco designed to foster young adult vocations to the priesthood. Experience had taught him that the perseverance rate in that age group (16 to 30) was much higher than in the younger age group. Pius IX enthusiastically encouraged the project, and "approved" it by Decree of May 9, 1876, together with the Salesian Cooperators. For the Sons of Mary, petition and decree, cf. *IBM* XI, 533-535, Appendix 3 (omitted in *EBM*). For the Cooperators, petition, cf. *EBM* XI, 65; decree, cf. *IBM* XI, 546f., Appendix 7 (omitted in *EBM*).

Speaking of the Work of Mary Help of Christians Don Bosco voiced high hopes for its success. He said: "When the bishops see how successful this experiment turns out to be, they will hasten to imitate our example. [...] I entertain the highest hopes for these Sons of ours. They are the most reliable resource of the Church today. I would wager that within five years we shall have over 500 such men in the program—counting, of course, not only those in our houses but also those in other places where the program is established [February 5, 1876, Notebook IV, 52, *FDBM* 837 D12].

"This is what I have in mind. Some time around the middle of March, once the mid-term exams are over, [I plan] to establish a new course of studies. I would bring together into this program all those young men who are somewhat advanced in age and who desire to don the clerical habit without much delay, even though they may be only in the third year [of *ginnasio*]. I would also bring in as many as possible of the Sons of Mary Help of Christians. An instructor would be appointed especially for them. He would give them a crash course in Latin and Italian only, so that by the Feast of All Saints [November 1] they can don the clerical habit."⁸¹

In speaking of these projects to the directors during the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco voiced his certainty that he was acting under divine inspiration, and added:

"The reason why we press forward and never look back is that we are walking with certainty. Before any undertaking we have to ascertain God's will in that regard. Once we have this certainty we press forward. From then on difficulties which may be met with on the way are of no consequence. If God wills it, we have nothing to fear."⁸²

A couple of days later, Don Bosco announced his plan to the boys. He said, "I'm after a big catch of fish;" and after outlining his idea he explained:

"I call it a 'school of fire' because by a combination of high-pressure study (*gran fuoco*), good teaching, and the will to succeed, this program will make a student ready to don the clerical habit by the feast of All Saints. [...]

"And here are the conditions: (1) Those who join the program must elect to go to the novitiate here or leave for the missions.⁸³ Those who would join the novitiate here should be from outside the Turin diocese, because in this diocese to be admitted to the exam for the clerical habit a candidate, no matter how proficient, must have completed the fifth year [of *ginnasio*].⁸⁴ [...] (2) Those who join the program will have to give up

⁸¹ January 31, 1876, Notebook IV, 32, *FDBM* 837 C4.

⁸² February 6, 1876, Notebook IV, 53, *FDBM* 837 E1.

⁸³ The first group of Salesian missionaries had left for South America but a few months before, November 1875. But the need of supplying the missions as well as the expanding Salesian work with priests was the reason why Don Bosco established these programs.

⁸⁴ Some dioceses did not require a five-year course (that is, completion of the *ginnasio*) for the reception of the clerical habit and for admission to the seminary, but Turin did. Perhaps, however, the real reason for this "condition" was that Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin was against these programs and had already strongly objected to the Work of Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco established the latter program officially not in Turin but in Genoa, where the archbishop was favorable.

the idea of taking the state examinations for the diploma.⁸⁵ The reason is that to have access to these examinations one must have taken all the subjects required by the state programs, whereas we would require only the basic subjects, such as Latin and Italian. [...] Therefore those who wish to take examinations for the diploma cannot join this course. (3) Participants will also have to give up regular summer holidays, except perhaps for a few days' recess, or for the spiritual retreat at Lanzo. We can't afford longer vacations, since our time is short. However, from early March, when the course is scheduled to begin, to the feast of All Saints on November 1 we have some 8 months. In 8 months, with intense and persevering application, much can be accomplished. [...]

"One should also bear in mind that [...] subjects not offered now will be offered later and may be made up."⁸⁶

A few days later (March 13, 1876), Barberis reports that the "school of fire" got off to a good start, and that the teacher appointed was a seminarian named Bodrati, a talented man, "who joined us after some experience of [professional?] life in the world." He continues.

There are some 30 students in the program, and the number may yet increase in the next few days with the addition of some who for various reasons could not immediately join the group. Five of the young men are from the second year of *ginnasio*, but besides being already somewhat advanced in age they are truly select. [...] Two or three are fourth-year students. They are very good lads, but they were not doing too well in their studies. In this course they will be doing fine, since they won't have to bother with accessory courses like mathematics, Greek, etc. Most of the students are third-year men, a few being from the group of the Sons of Mary.⁸⁷

(6) Comments on the Novitiate and Further Studies

In this connection Barberis speaks of the large novitiate classes that are anticipated, and the problem of relocating the novitiate. Again his comments reveal an interesting aspect of Don Bosco's public relations strategy.

The prospective number of young men who desire to don the clerical habit in our Society is on the increase. Besides those who wish to join from the fifth and fourth year of our school, there are those from the program of the Work of Mary Help of Christians and of the School of Fire, as well as sev-

⁸⁵ At the completion of the five-year course of secondary studies (*ginnasio*), a student could take a comprehensive examination and be awarded a diploma. This gave access to a higher level of study.

⁸⁶ February 8, 1876, *Discorsetti* Notebook (following Notebook V), 25-28, *FDBM* 838 E4-7.

⁸⁷ March 13, 1876, Notebook V, 9-11, *FDBM* 839 A7-9.

eral from our other schools. This raises the problem of where to house the novitiate in the coming year. [...] It looks like Don Bosco would not be averse to open a house of novitiate outside of Turin. [...] But how can I manage as director of novices away from him? It's a frightening thought. [...] I think that he is inclined to go out of the city so as to make the novitiate less noticeable. "True," he says, "the novices never go out as a group, and here at home they appear to be part of the staff in a very large educational program. Nevertheless, we can't completely escape public scrutiny."

It should be noted that the Oratory has the dubious reputation of being an assembly line for the production of seminarians (*fabbrica di chericci*). People don't see them being "made," but they see so many around all the time. Now, unlike the Jesuits who have the reputation of being secretive schemers, we enjoy the reputation of doing things in the open and of having nothing to hide. But this is only a clever strategy on Don Bosco's part. He does indeed give publicity to things that are harmless or of little moment, but not to other important matters that might alarm hostile people (*cattivi*). The vesting of novices and the ordination of priests are cases in point. As a rule no publicity is given to these events. For example, candidates are given the clerical habit either at Lanzo during the closed spiritual retreats, with no one but Salesians in attendance, or, if here in Turin, in the church of Mary Help of Christians and with the boys in attendance, [...] only after 9 o'clock in the evening and behind closed doors.⁸⁸

In view of the recruiting system described above, the problem of having Salesian seminarians complete their studies at a later date and eventually obtain teacher's certification or degrees had to be faced. Chatting with Father Celestino Durando (in charge of studies), and with Father Barberis, Don Bosco made the following points "quite emphatically:"

"We must be guided solely by this principle, Is the Congregation benefited by sending on to examinations this or that seminarian? We should not give any weight to whether an individual would or would not like to take the examination. I would go as far as to say that neither should we have any regard for the good of an individual, that is, whether he will or will not benefit by it. The good of the Congregation should be our sole concern. Now, I would not like to push this principle so far as do the Jesuits, for example; but as a general rule all our decisions must have the good of the Congregation in view rather than that of an individual confrere.

"A second guideline, to be carefully considered, is this: allow only those seminarians to take the examination who are very bright and are likely to make a career of it. Above all choose young seminarians. Those who are already advanced in age should preferably be put through a basic

⁸⁸ March 16, 1876, Notebook V, 34-36, *FDBM* 839 C8-10.

course of studies, without any secondary subjects, and sent on to the priesthood and the practical ministry.”⁸⁹

(7) Plans for Salesian Cooperators, Men and Women

As already noted, in May 1876 Don Bosco obtained “approval” from Pope Pius IX, not only of the Work of Mary Help of Christians but also of the Salesian Cooperators. Don Bosco had been working at this second project for some time and had already drafted several statements of purpose for the association. As reported by Barberis, Don Bosco said:

“Now that the new course of studies [for the Sons of Mary] is about to get off the ground, I have got another important project on the drawing boards, namely, the Salesian Association. I have been working at it for the past two years, and I’ll need another two years to put it on a solid basis. I have already sketched out a further project, and shall be working on it during the next two years. Once the Salesian Association is firmly in place, I will announce the new one.”

Don Bosco has been speaking about this Salesian Association for some time, especially since last year. Now, however, he has given it a new name, different from “association.” I don’t remember what he called it.⁹⁰ The further project has to do with setting up a kind of third order for women, which, however, will be attached to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, not to our congregation.⁹¹

At the Conferences of St. Francis de Sales of 1876, already mentioned, Don Bosco announced a great work that would be begun that year, clearly referring to the Cooperators. Barberis reports:

⁸⁹ March 25, 1876, Notebook VI, 25-26, *FDBM* 840 B3-4.

⁹⁰ Between 1873 and 1876 Don Bosco produced a number of statements of purpose for the association, using different names: (1) Associates to the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales (*Associati alla Congregazione di San Francesco di Sales*) (ca. 1873); (2) Christian Union (*Unione Cristiana*) (1874); (3) Association for Charitable Work (*Associazione di opere buone*) (1875); (4) Salesian Cooperators, or Practical Way of Advancing the Moral and Civil Good of Society (*Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*) (1876). These four fundamental statements produced by Don Bosco during the planning and founding period of the Cooperators, are transcribed from MS. or from original editions in *Il Cooperatore nella Società contemporanea*. Colloqui sulla Vita Salesiana 6, 1974, ed. F. Desramaut and M. Midali (Leumann-Torino, Elle Di Ci, 1975), 355-373. For excerpts and discussion, cf. *EBM* X, 558-568 and XI, 60-77.

In view of the above, the name which Don Bosco used but which Barberis could not recall, was evidently “Salesian Cooperators.”

⁹¹ February 19, 1876, Notebook IV, 81-82, *FDBM* 838 B5-6.

Don Bosco also rose to speak. He talked a long while and grew more emotional as he proceeded. Toward the end his speech acquired extraordinary energy. He touched on a number of topics, and then announced that this year a great and wonderful work will be started which will arouse tremendous admiration. He would be glad to go into details at the conferences of the following year.⁹²

Later that year, the night of December 6-7, Don Bosco had a dream (the Lanzo Dream) in which Dominic Savio "appeared" to him and made predictions about the future of the Society. He told Don Bosco that in the following year (1877) "a bright day will dawn for the Salesian Congregation from the four corners of the earth." This "prophecy" is generally understood to refer to the Cooperators.⁹³

5. Aspects of Don Bosco's Educational Strategy

Father Barberis often records episodes and utterances of Don Bosco which reflect the educational approach of the founder. For Don Bosco the seventies were a time of reflection on every aspect of his work. He wrote the little treatise on his educational method (the Preventive System) in 1877. In the chronicle, however, Father Barberis, although deeply interested in the subject of the education of the young and closely associated with the formation program of the Society, only seldom reflects on the method *expressly*.

The notable exception occurs at the beginning of Notebook II, where Barberis gives a seven-point summary of Don Bosco's educational strategies.

Secrets of the Oratory

1. The youngsters are poor and are kept at the Oratory either free of charge or at reduced rates. Those who are bad (*i cattivi*) are promptly dismissed. This keeps all the boys on their toes, especially those who under the circumstances would have no home to go back to.

2. The sacraments are received with great regularity and devotion. Consequently the boys act and obey from conviction rather than from fear of punishment. All the priests on staff are available to hear the boys' confessions.

3. All staff members (teachers, supervisors, even the kitchen personnel) belong to our Congregation. There are no outsiders on the team.

4. Moral and religious guidance is given in talks (*conferenze*) which are freely attended by the best young men. They thus freely seek and receive the kind of formation which is adapted to their need.

⁹² February 5/6, 1876, Notebook IV, 45, *FDBM* 837 D5.

⁹³ Don Bosco's autograph, in ASC 132: Autografi-Sogni, "Sogno-Lanzo 6-12-76," *FDBM* 1346 B7-C4. For a longer version based on reports of Don Bosco's narration cf. *EBM* XII, 432-441.

5. There is mutual trust between educators and boys. Staff members are always present among the boys, though they are careful to avoid particular friendships.

6. There is another "secret" which I believe to be very educational. I'm referring to the short talks, informal and from the heart, addressed to the boys after evening prayer. They go a long way in forestalling disorders before they arise.

7. A joyful environment is provided with choral and instrumental music, and lively games which allow the boys full freedom.⁹⁴

The presence of the educator among the boys, especially during recreation, is an important point of the method. In the time of his direct personal involvement, chiefly in the fifties and the sixties, Don Bosco's uninterrupted presence was a given. In the late sixties and thereafter, the cares of the founding and winning approval of the Society and the rapid expansion of the work left him little time for direct involvement. But his was still a visible and significant presence in the 1870s, even while visibly aging and plagued with deteriorating health. Barberis comments on how Don Bosco spends his recreation time.

After the noonday meal, Don Bosco lingers for some time in the dining room so as to be available to members of his council or other Salesians who need to speak to him. They may want his advice on urgent personal matters, or may need to ask for permissions or directives. Often he must spend time with outsiders who come to see him at lunch time so as to be sure to find him. In this respect the Oratory is a busy port of call. It is a rare day in which there are no visitors to see Don Bosco at lunch time.

As soon as the interviews are over, however, he heads for the playground. Immediately the boys crowd around him to greet him and kiss his hand. One who does not know Don Bosco by sight need only survey the playground for a large bunch of boys crowding around a priest, and will have found him. Don Bosco engages the boys in conversation, makes a point, cracks a joke, rewards one youngster with a kindly look of encouragement, another with a whispered "little word." When someone wants to tell him something personal amid all the noise he bends down to hear what the boy has to say to him.

The boys love him with a filial, almost worshipful love, and everybody tries to have a moment with him. When he happens to be crossing the yard at recess time, boys swarm all around him. It takes him fifteen minutes or half-an-hour to walk the hundred feet, for he likes to stop and chat a while with the boys who run up to greet him. He wants to get to know them, and wants them to get to know him.⁹⁵

In the above-quoted summary Barberis tells us that dismissal of "bad boys" was an important point of Don Bosco's educational strategy. Clearly the boarding

⁹⁴ No date, but between June 4 and 24, 1875, Notebook II, 1, *FDBM* 834 A3.

⁹⁵ No date, but between July and December, 1875, Notebook III, 23, *FDBM* 835 B10.

school setting, especially when premises are grossly overcrowded (as the Oratory was in the seventies), creates problems of immoral or otherwise undesirable behavior. Obviously, Don Bosco and the educators around him would be faced with this problem and with the need to take action. Don Bosco, however, was never hasty, and preferred "to talk" to the boys privately or publicly.

In a talk given at the beginning of the working boys' spiritual retreat, he urged the lads to use that God-given opportunity, and expressed his satisfaction with most of them. But he added, as Barberis reports:

"I regret that I cannot say, 'All of you.' Unfortunately some of you just don't care and would rather skip the retreat. Such boys are to be pitied because they are the ones who need it the most. But let such people take warning, because we may have to show some of them the door before the retreat is over. In the case of others, we shall wait and see if they really mean to turn over a new leaf. If not, they will have to be expelled. They are the ones who are doing the devil's work by sowing the bad seed: immoral talk and behavior. Then there are those who break the rule. As late as this evening I have had a report that some boys went out without permission. In some schools this would draw immediate expulsion, and deservedly so. But in our case I would rather not take such drastic action."

Barberis adds a comment which reveals the general belief that Don Bosco was clairvoyant. He writes:

As Don Bosco was speaking, I overheard a couple of the older boys whispering behind me. One of them remarked: "We are in for it. How can he know that we went out, and know it so soon. It doesn't seem possible." It is, however, true. When as yet no one in the house is aware that anything is wrong, Don Bosco already has knowledge of it in detail.⁹⁶

Meetings of the house council, the purpose of which was to deal with disciplinary problems and discuss educational strategies, were held on a weekly basis. Father Rua usually presided and took down the minutes.⁹⁷

At one point in his chronicle, Barberis speaks of the advantages of such meetings, adding that all important decisions are referred to Don Bosco for a final disposition. The latest meeting dealt with the problem of immoral behavior (*disordini d'immoralità*) on the part of some boys, with the result that two of them were dismissed. Then Barberis adds a personal comment.

Lest anyone be shocked by this decision to expel some boys from the Oratory who were guilty of immoral behavior, it should be remembered that

⁹⁶ May 30, 1875, Notebook I, 33-34, *FDBM* 833 D7-8.

⁹⁷ For a critical edition of these minutes covering the years 1866-1877 (and of other similar documents), cf. José Manuel Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866-1889)*. Documenti e testimonianze (Roma: LAS, 1992), 123-218.

this is an established policy which is adhered to with utmost severity (*arcirigorissimamente*). When it is ascertained without a doubt that someone has been guilty of bad talk, we proceed without further ado. Likewise, when certain actions come to light which may not appear to be gravely immoral in themselves and might just be put down to childishness, but which cause scandal, then we have no alternative but to act. It has been our experience that *modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit* ["A little leaven corrupts the whole lump," 1Cor 5:6, Latin Vulgate]. Hence the culprits are immediately dismissed.

What happened last year is worth a comment. A number of working boys, among the most proficient in our workshops and in their musical instrument, were involved in immoral behavior. These youngsters were expelled regardless of work in progress or of our need of a band. Then it was discovered that the whole band as a group was "infected" with the virus: it was first suspended for a time, but finally dissolved outright. Several months later it was reassembled, but on a different basis and with new membership chosen from among the best in conduct and musical ability. The new players were drawn both from the workshop population and from the junior brothers of the Society.⁹⁸

6. Unusual Aspects of Don Bosco's Missionary Commitment

Don Bosco for years had been considering launching the Salesian Society into missionary activity. Every since Vatican Council I (1869-70), at which he had met bishops from all parts of the world, he had been looking for an "opportunity" to realize the dream. In 1871 or 1872 (as he later related) he had dreamt of Salesian missionaries evangelizing a population of swarthy natives, whom he could not identify. In 1874 Mr. John Gazzolo, an Italian who had emigrated to Argentina and subsequently been appointed Argentine consul in Savona (Liguria, Italy), having become acquainted with the Salesian work, put Don Bosco in touch with Church authorities in Buenos Aires. Negotiations progressed rapidly, and toward the end of 1875 a group of 10 Salesians left for Argentina. They were to staff a church and a school, chiefly in behalf of Italian immigrants, while exploring the possibility of undertaking missionary activity among the natives of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

(1) Missionary Strategy

The Argentine consul visited the Oratory on a number of occasions. Toward the end of May 1875 he was entertaining some priests in the dining room after supper. He was describing the customs of early Patagonian natives as recorded

⁹⁸ January 23, 1876, Notebook IV, 27, *FDBM* 837 B11.

in reports written at the time of the discovery of those regions. Barberis comments, "It appears that all those early inhabitants practiced cannibalism."⁹⁹

This discussion took place when the mission was still in preparation. Some time after the missionaries' departure, one evening after supper Don Bosco told a number of seminarians and priests how he thought the evangelization of "Patagonia and the Pampas" might be accomplished, taking into account the (imaginary) character of the natives. Other missionaries had failed miserably, he said, but a new strategy might produce results.

"True, other missionaries, Jesuits in particular, tried without success to evangelize those regions. All those missionaries were torn to pieces and eaten by the natives. We, however, should profit by their experience, and by taking due precautions we might be successful. With this aim in view, we would establish a school (*collegio*) in a town already fairly civilized and as near as possible to the region where the natives live. While serving the local population in the school, the missionaries would study the character and the culture of the natives living nearby. It would be very helpful to take into the school some of the natives, or their children. This would not be too difficult, since (as I am told) they come to the towns to trade. By dealing kindly with them, by giving them gifts, we would find acceptance, and a door would be opened. Then, if we could take as a guide one of the natives who has spent some time in our school, this would facilitate our approach. It is of paramount importance, however, to avoid acting recklessly or in haste; we must first prepare the way. Nor should we even let out that we are interested in them; we would instead set up a school at their borders and begin to make ourselves known and loved with band, with singing, as well as with goods and gifts. The next step would be to get a priest to visit their territory for a few days, and thus open the way for more permanent activity in the region. And if it should please the Lord that some of us die a martyr's death by being killed and eaten by those cannibals, even this should not frighten us away."¹⁰⁰

(2) Editing the Missionaries' Letters for the Purpose of Publicity

⁹⁹ May 29, 1875, Notebook I, 39-40, *FDBM* 833 E1-2. On the same occasion Gazzolo went on to talk about money that he could lend; about his building the church of Our Lady of Mercy in Buenos Aires; about property he owned in the vicinity which could eventually be given "to a religious order." He must have done well for himself in Buenos Aires, as his subsequent dealings with the Salesians in that city would confirm.

¹⁰⁰ January 7, 1876, Notebook III, 66, *FDBM* 836 A5. Obviously the Patagonian natives were no cannibals. This notion, like their designation as "savages," was part of the Romantic lore purveyed in the literature and encyclopedias at the time. However, going into the natives' territory south of the Rio Negro was not without its dangers. The natives would naturally resent any intrusion.

Communication between the missions and the center in Turin could only be by letter. True, the submarine telegraph cable connecting Portugal with Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina was in operation. But apparently it did not service other areas. A letter would take over a month, but one is amazed at the flow of correspondence. The letters from the missionaries formed the basis of the publicity made on behalf of the Salesian missions in the Catholic papers.

As Don Bosco was chatting with a group of Salesians after supper, someone remarked how people looked forward to the letters from our missionaries published in the newspaper, *L'Unità Cattolica*. Barberis describes how this publicity was handled.

Don Bosco has entrusted to Father [Cesare] Chiala the task of abstracting the more interesting news from the many letters received from South America—from Father [Giovanni] Cagliari, Father [Domenico] Tomatis, Father [Giacomo] Allavena and others. Out of this material Father Chiala will compile 5 or 6 letters to be sent in to the newspaper *L'Unità Cattolica* for publication on stated days. The new mission seems certain to bring about a resurgence of popular interest in the foreign missions in Italy and other countries as well. Never before have news reports from the missions caused such a stir. [...] These letters are eagerly awaited and read, and the newspaper issues in which they appear make the rounds of the neighborhoods.¹⁰¹

On another evening, as a group of Salesians were talking about how successful this kind of publicity was turning out, Father Chiala's name naturally came up in the conversation, for he was in charge of editing the letters for the newspaper. Don Bosco exclaimed: "Father Chiala is a most precious asset (*una vera perla preziosa*) for our Congregation in every respect."

Barberis comments:

Let me say a word on how those letters are compiled for publication. Father Cagliari and the other missionaries are the source of the subject matter which has to do with the missions, but the form is exclusively Father Chiala's work. I mean to say that the news items about our missions are edited and compiled from different letters, whereas matters of history, geography, anthropology, etc. are taken from standard books and encyclopedias. This method of editing the letters for publication was Don Bosco's idea entirely. Father Chiala submits the drafts to Don Bosco, who invariably adds some appealing touch. For example, in one he might insert, "We have received copy of *L'Unità Cattolica*, and we thank the editors..." [...]; or: "The feast of the Immaculate Conception here in our mission is marked as a day of special prayers for our benefactors;" etc.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ January 22, 1876, Notebook IV, 17, *FDBM* 837 B1.

¹⁰² March 11, 1876, Notebook V, 7-8, *FDBM* 839 A5-6.

(3) Great Illusory Ideas

Don Bosco was scheduled to go to Bordighera to open a new Salesian school. From there he was planning to go on to Rome to promote the cause of the missions. He would also present to Prime Minister Marco Minghetti the proposal for an Italian colony in Patagonia.

Don Bosco has been seriously working on an idea which may seem ludicrous at first, but which he will nonetheless present to [Prime Minister] Minghetti. Don Bosco's proposal is that a colony [of Italian immigrants] be established in South America, specifically in Patagonia. The first step would be to establish a fort as a base; then gradually by successive forays the whole region could be reduced, while at the same time the natives (*selvaggi*) are civilized. Salesian missionaries would be available to facilitate the process in this latter respect [civilization or evangelization].

Don Bosco first outlined this idea of his some time back (February 5). Letters meanwhile arrived from Father Cagliero bearing exciting news of the missions. So, the following evening Don Bosco spoke again of his plan in greater detail and in a manner which made it look feasible. He added, "The first thing I'll do on arriving in Rome will be to take it to [Prime Minister] Minghetti."¹⁰³

A little later, since several letters had again arrived from Buenos Aires, the conversation after supper was chiefly concerned "with our affairs in South America." Don Bosco spoke of proposals which he would present to the Prime Minister. Barberis reports:

Don Bosco has been waiting for the chance to put a number of proposals before Prime Minister Minghetti, two in particular.

The first I have already mentioned. Don Bosco is proposing colonizing parts of Patagonia, that is, setting up an Italian colony with the Italian immigrants in that "no-man's land," which would therefore belong by right to the first occupants.

The second proposal concerns setting up a postal union between Italy, Argentina and Uruguay. The advantages of such a union would be enormous, not only for the purpose of trade, but also for immigrants and for us. At present postage rates are exceedingly high. With such a convention the rates could be cut to one-tenth the present level, and Italy would be the winner. I'm not privy to the fine points of this proposal, but I know that Don Bosco has already worked it out in detail. He never puts out ideas before researching their feasibility, and so is able to suggest practical ways of implementing them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ February 5/6, 1876, Notebook IV, 46-47, *FDBM* 837 D6-7.

¹⁰⁴ February 19, 1876, Notebook IV, 82-83, *FDBM* 838 B6-7. The idea that Patagonia was unclaimed no man's land was obviously quite incorrect.

As was to be expected, from the start the South American missions were accorded top priority. But even while planning and making specific preparations for Patagonia, Don Bosco was already dreaming of a worldwide missionary effort. One evening "the conversation moved from our present missions to those that are now being planned." A mission in Australia, from where he had repeated requests, would be possible in a couple of years. This would require a knowledge of the English language. Don Bosco was also looking beyond Australia and thought he might divide those who opted for the missions into three groups: Spanish-speaking, French-speaking and English-speaking.¹⁰⁵

As early as 1875, Don Bosco was already thinking of missions in the Far East (an area which would be uppermost in his mind and in his dreams in mid-1880s). Barberis reports that during a familiar moment after supper when the conversation had been on the missions, Don Bosco remarked:

"Missionaries in huge numbers are needed if the millions and millions of people that still haven't heard the Word are to be brought to the faith. This is particularly true of Asia. There are over 800 million people on that continent, 500 million souls in China alone, and 200 million in India. Think of the need in those countries. We imagine Europe to be a big place; but China alone has more than twice the number of people. We speak of Piedmont and its variegated history with pride; but Piedmont is no more than a grain of sand in the midst of an ocean! And what about this little atom, our puny Oratory here in Valdocco, which keeps us so frantically busy? But we are planning to send missionaries out to convert the world!"¹⁰⁶

7. Encyclopedic Bosco

The South American mission had the further effect of focusing Don Bosco's keen and inquisitive mind on interests which went beyond the immediate missionary concerns. One might say that Don Bosco's interests were encyclopedic. He took great pleasure in reading and talking about "scientific" matters, and he was especially interested in history, geography and anthropology.

(1) Speculations about the American Continent and Its Early Inhabitants

The dream on the missions of 1871-72 fired Don Bosco with a desire to ascertain the identity of those natives. When finally, after the offer from Argentina, he identified the natives as Patagonians, he embarked on a veritable mental journey of exploration. Anything that had to do with South America and its native people became the object of research and the subject of conversation. Barberis reports:

¹⁰⁵ January 7, 1876, Notebook III, 66, *FDBM* 836 A5.

¹⁰⁶ May 20, 1875, Notebook I, 21, *FDBM* 833 C7.

Don Bosco and I were walking under the portico, and the subject of Buenos Aires and voyages of discovery came up in our conversation. Don Bosco is extremely fond of such subjects. He is thinking of writing a book about Buenos Aires and about the prospective voyage of our missionaries. Their departure and arrival, and the events of the voyage would be described in detail. The book would go into the history and geography of the city and touch upon the people's culture and eating habits, and the fauna of the area. [...]

Don Bosco went on to talk about the first settlers of the Americas. He believes it to be very probable that the continent was settled by descendants of Arpachshad crossing over the Bering Strait from Asia into North America.¹⁰⁷ It is also possible, so he believes, that people could have crossed the Atlantic from the westernmost point of Africa to the easternmost point of Brazil. [...]

Don Bosco takes the keenest interest in everything that has to do with explorations and scientific discoveries.¹⁰⁸

Barberis adds a note which reveals his own abiding interest in the subject. He writes:

With all this talk of geography, ethnology, discoveries, etc. my excitement knew no bounds. So the following day, Thursday [day off from school], I managed to set aside a few hours and to begin my research on Buenos Aires. Using history books and various encyclopedias I put together some ten pages of data relating to the discovery of the place, the founding of the city, the topography, ethnology, and culture of the area. In the evening I submitted the papers to Don Bosco for him to review.¹⁰⁹

One evening Barberis was working in the library, when Don Bosco came by on a short break. Barberis reports:

We walked back and forth and talked for about three quarters of an hour. At one time Don Bosco stood before a large globe which I have installed on the main table. He pointed to the Isthmus of Panama and to the exact location of the projected canal. He then pointed to the Strait of Magellan, and

¹⁰⁷ Arpachshad is first mentioned in the "Table of Nations" in Gen 10:22: "The sons of Shem were Elam, Assyria, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram." The name recurs in Gen 10:4; 11:10-13; in 1Chr 1:17f., 24; and in Lk 3:36 in Jesus' genealogy. In a dream Don Bosco is said to have had around 1885, the "Angel of Arpachshad" appears as the angel of Asia. This was in accord with the view of early Biblical interpreters, that the descendants of Arpachshad peopled the Asian continent.

¹⁰⁸ May 15, 1875, Notebook I, 16-17, *FDBM* 833 C2-3.

¹⁰⁹ May 15, 1875, Notebook I, 18, *FDBM* 833 C4. This initial efforts by Barberis may well be regarded as the beginning of his extensive research on Patagonia, which he undertook at Don Bosco's request and completed the following year [cf. note 33 above].

we talked about Magellan's perilous journey and noted the extreme degree of latitude he had to reach in order to circumnavigate the southern tip of South America.

Traveling up the globe to the opposite pole, we fixed our attention on the Bering Strait. It appears more than likely that ancient Asiatic people could migrate over the strait and settle North America. [...] Don Bosco then asked me to find out whether the two continents had common flora and fauna. "It's not just out of intellectual curiosity," he explained, "that we should take an interest in these matters. This knowledge helps corroborate principles which we already possess on much surer grounds [the Bible!] but which are disputed or rejected by people in our own day. For, if we can ascertain that the plants and animals of the new world are similar to those of the old, we would have at once proof of the settling of the new world by people from the old, and proof of the unity of the human race. [...] And as for the different human races themselves, there is no longer any argument but that variations are purely accidental. Furthermore, voyages of discovery have revealed an amazing anthropological fact: namely, that many Biblical traditions have survived in the folklore of human groups almost everywhere. [...]"

He went on: "I'm especially curious to know if the primitive inhabitants of the new world had the domestic animals that are part and parcel of our daily lives today: horses, cattle, dogs, cats, poultry, and the like. If not, what draft animals did they use for transport of goods and for agricultural work?" I replied that, as far as we can tell from the way they are depicted, American natives seem to have been too weak and shiftless for agriculture and commerce. They lived off of the natural bounty of the land. [...] Nor did they have the use of such pack animals as horses or oxen, nor of any other comparable beast of burden. "However," I added, "I shall have to read up on the subject."¹¹⁰

(2) Tobacco, Coffee and Archaeology, Too

Don Bosco was against smoking, but after meals he enjoyed a pinch of snuff or two. He also kept his snuff box handy for others to sample. Once, as Barberis relates, this led to a disquisition on tobacco.

Don Bosco and I were walking under the portico after the noonday meal. We were immediately joined by a group of seminarians who crowded around Don Bosco for their pinch of tobacco [snuff]. During the conversation which ensued, someone asked what the Latin word for tobacco was, and by what name was tobacco known when first introduced. Don Bosco explained: "Tobacco was first introduced to Europe from America by a gentleman named [Jean] Nicot, who was a minister of the queen of France. The queen sent samples to various sovereigns and nobles with the note that it was a powder which her minister Nicot had sent from America, and which

¹¹⁰ May 20, 1875, Notebook I, 18-20, *FDBM* 833 C4-6.

was capable of working peculiar effects.¹¹¹ Since the name of this substance was unknown, it was soon named *pulvis Nicotina*, that is, Nicot's powder, and this name remained in use for a long time." Then the toxic effect of tobacco was mentioned, and Don Bosco added: "Tobacco contains a toxic substance and it is very harmful when smoked. Chemists named this substance nicotine, or poison of Nicot's powder. Because of this a ban was placed on the sale and use of tobacco in Europe. Such a ban remained in effect for a long time and it was aimed at preventing disease or even death. The use of coffee was likewise banned at first." [...]

The conversation continued and ranged over a variety of "scientific" topics. Barberis concludes:

Don Bosco is very fond of discoursing on discoveries, inventions, and achievements of earlier times. He can recall verbatim pages he barely read once 40 or 45 years ago. It's truly amazing.¹¹²

It is a fact that Don Bosco's interest in science and discovery in general equaled his curiosity about the early populations of the American continent. For example, one evening when a number of priests were chatting with Don Bosco after supper, as Barberis reports,

The topic of archaeological discoveries came up in the conversation. Don Bosco spoke of the identification and excavation of the city of Troy. Then he went on to talk about Babylonian cuneiform writing, and about a great headstone (lapide) unearthed a short time ago in those ancient ruins. He also discoursed on Egyptian hieroglyphics and on the method by which Egyptian mummies were embalmed.¹¹³

8. Tender Loving Care

Most in evidence in Barberis' chronicle is Don Bosco's fatherly love for all his spiritual children. He cared about them and made it a point to show his affection. Numerous times we find Don Bosco dealing with the humblest confreres with loving respect and beautiful sensitivity.

¹¹¹ Jean Nicot (ca. 1530-1600), French diplomat and scholar, served as ambassador to Portugal (1859-61), and introduced the use of tobacco from Portugal into France. The terms nicotine and *Nicotiana* (botanical name of the genus) derive from his name [*Webster's New Biographical Dictionary*].

¹¹² June 5, 1875, Notebook II, pp. 3-4, *FDBM* 834 A4-5.

¹¹³ January 22, 1876, Notebook IV, p. 22, *FDBM* 837 B6. The site of Troy was identified by the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who in 1870 began excavations of the mound and noted 46 strata. The stratum known as Troy VII is believed to be that of the Homeric city.

It is impossible to tell what the "great headstone unearthed a short time ago in those ancient ruins" may have been.

Barberis relates that once he was asked to accompany Don Bosco on a visit to some benefactors, and writes:

On our way out, the porter ([Brother Giuseppe] Bassino) greeted Don Bosco and kissed his hand. Don Bosco stopped a while and in a most kindly manner said to him: "I did read the letter you wrote to me. I want to assure you that you are often in my thoughts and that, if there's anything I can do for you, I shall be very happy to do it."

When we got home, [Brother Luigi] Dep[p]ert came up to greet him and kiss his hand. "Dear Dep[p]ert," Don Bosco said to him placing his hand on his head, "I think it's time for you to set aside these secular clothes and put on the clerical habit. Leave it to me. You have placed your trust in me and I won't let you down. You are in my thoughts, and I desire nothing more than to make you happy in this world and the next."¹¹⁴

Barberis remarks that Don Bosco always took someone along with him when invited to dinner. They could thus have a good talk on the way. He writes:

Don Bosco was invited to dinner at Marquis [Domenico] Fassati's house. Around 6 in the evening, he sent for [Brother Andrew] Pelazza, and asked him to go along. So they left together. Don Bosco does this very often, whenever he needs to talk to any confrere or when someone needs to talk to him. It is very difficult to have a leisurely talk with Don Bosco at home. By this method the two can talk undisturbed on the way about personal or business matters. These private conversations are a great boost to the morale of the person involved, for the very gesture is a sign of trust as well as an honor. And since Don Bosco is invited out two or three times a week, many are the confreres who, being troubled or in pain, have found strength and consolation in these heart-to-heart exchanges.¹¹⁵

Don Bosco had left the Oratory to accompany the departing missionaries and to dedicate St. Pierre's orphanage in Nice—25 days on the road. Barberis describes the touching scene on his return.

At supper time he walks into the dining room while the reading is in progress. Immediately the bell is rung for the reading to end, and we greet him with a thunderous ovation expressing all the joy of having our common father back among us. Don Bosco makes his way slowly across the dining room smiling and greeting everybody. He has a fatherly glance for one, a friendly pat for another, a reassuring word for a third confrere. Some of us have written letters to him while he was away. As he walks from one to the other he also has a word about the letters. It is as though he has had nothing else to think about except the matters presented in them, and he makes everyone happy.

¹¹⁴ May 27, 1875, Notebook I, p. 31, *FDBM* 833 D5. Deppert was ordained a priest and died in 1889.

¹¹⁵ March 22, 1876, Notebook VI, pp. 16-17, *FDBM* 840 A6-7.

When he got to me, he stopped only a few seconds; but he looked at me with inexpressible kindness and said: "I have taken your proposal very seriously to heart and am looking at ways of acting on it." Such simple reassurance filled me with joy, and the worries and doubts I entertained in this regard instantly vanished.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Father Barberis' chronicle is truly a vast canvas depicting from life, and sometimes with fastidious realism, the figure of Don Bosco and of the Oratory in the middle and later seventies. In this article, after describing the activity of some outstanding chroniclers, Barberis' in particular, I limited myself to presenting small selections, barely skimming the surface. My only aim was to bring together some episodes in the life and times of Don Bosco that would illuminate facets of his personality and thought.

There is no question that for the chroniclers, as for all the Salesians of their generation, Don Bosco was the saintly founder guided by God and the Virgin Mary at every step in his great undertaking on behalf of poor young people. The charismatic figure of the founder, surrounded by a halo of the supernatural, stands out from every page. Every word of Don Bosco, in fact everything that had to do with him, was therefore precious and to be treasured.

But what is remarkable is that Don Bosco also appears a totally *human* saintly founder. Perhaps precisely because of the general belief that Don Bosco could do no wrong, and that what he did or said was never without justification, Barberis can maintain the detachment necessary for a presentation of the founder as a real person.

Above all, Barberis presents us with the picture of a beloved and loving father. Barberis clearly loved him passionately and felt loved in return; so did all the confreres and boys. And clearly Don Bosco deserved this worshipful love, for he himself was most devoted to each and all, and everyone felt himself to be the object of his special love and concern.

¹¹⁶ December 6, 1875, Notebook III, pp. 34-35, *FDBM* 835 C9-10.