

Getting to Know

DON BOSCO

His place in History

February 2012



Br. Dieunel Victor, Br. Ricardo Ramos, Br. Paul Chu, Fr. Arthur Lenti, Br. Willgintz Polynice, Br. Minh Dang, and Br. Gustavo Ramirez meet for Practical Training Workshop at Don Bosco Hall.

Practical Training Seminar: Salesian Communal Life

Don Bosco and the Vow of Obedience

Fr. Arthur came to field questions from the Brothers in Practical Training and opened a window into Don Bosco's understanding of the Vow and Virtue of Obedience.

What we find in Don Bosco's ideas regarding religious community and how it functions:

Don Bosco wrote over a period of many years giving attention to special constitutions as they developed in process at Rome. He developed concepts of religious life which were often in conflict with Rome. The Pope had told him he should have a society with vows which gravitated according to Canon Law. Don Bosco began to write this down in 1858. Don Bosco's first version of Constitutions began with a description of the society and how it functions as found in chapter 3; these constitutions are the basic text describing best what the Salesians would be all about. The particular article of the Constitutions Don Bosco developed and kept through all of the



Don Bosco Study Nights

January 2012 was rich with three evening sessions hosted by Fr. Arthur and John Roche in both northern and southern California.

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Historical Figures

On the Political Stage of Don Bosco's life were key figures with whom he interacted and negotiated his mission.

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Study Nights

Don Bosco in History

Offering a fast and detailed picture of Don Bosco's political setting from his birth in the Kingdom of Savoy through his ministry in the turbulent times of revolutions and re-unification, Don Bosco's place in his own history was the focus of this evening.

Don Bosco & Post-Modernism

Just as much as Don Bosco was a prophetic figure and voice for the age of revolutions and enlightenment in northern Italy, his example speaks even still in "this time of diminishment for the Church in a globalized world."

Don Bosco as a Young Adult

Don Bosco was a product of his own time across the three stages of his own life. His family and personal history is shaped also by the political upheavals and the ecclesiastical struggles of his age.

To understand this saint, it is important for us to examine these stages and to look specifically at Don Bosco's own human experience played across these arena.

On the third study night, we looked at Don Bosco's formation and friendships as a young adult and examined their meaning throughout his life and for a study of Don Bosco for today.

revisions that would be forthcoming.

This article states that the Salesian Society is a gathering of people devoted to religious life who are priests, brothers, and laymen. This gathering includes the people of the whole Church: those who are ordained and lay people are considered on the same rank. He rejected the idea that laymen were a third order with a separate rule of life. What do the laymen do? They are in the circle of the Church. They are bonded together by religious vows .

Though the evangelical counsels were traditionally understood with a preferential order as poverty, then chastity, and finally obedience, the reality was different for Don Bosco depending on his audience. In talking to the boys, chastity always ranked first. In talking to Salesians, poverty took the priority. But overall, to the a wider audience, Don Bosco insisted that obedience ranks first. Obedience is first in consideration and last in execution. Remember the circle. The Society is in the Church and the society is bound together by the vows and by the virtues. Obedience is the vow and virtue that commits the member, the religious member, to the mission. Poverty is the virtue that strips the member like the refining of the athlete for the mission. Chastity purifies the same member to give his all for Jesus Christ.

Three Stages of Don Bosco's Lived Experience

Reflecting upon Don Bosco as a person in history highlights three specific arena upon which all our lives are experienced: the personal, the spiritual, and the political

During the Don Bosco Study Evenings of January, the context for studying Don Bosco as a man had to include three distinct stages across which his life played out. Each of those stages, of course, would amount to rich and detailed studies by themselves. Yet, to understand Don Bosco and to begin afresh from this inspiring figure, it is important to move beyond the legends and even beyond the chroniclers. A detailed and critical study requires delving into the cultural life of the man, the academic and educational setting which shaped him and catapulted him onto the political stage of his world, and his role and mission within an ecclesiastical milieu. It is difficult to dissect Don Bosco and to



Italian Revolution 1848

Personal, Political, and Religious Contexts [continued]

present him to the world simply in historical terms. It is as limiting to recount the saintly facts which are enshrined in hagiographical accounts of his life. Simply to see Don Bosco as the foil for a revolutionary and anti-clerical age would be to miss the subtle nuances of his co-existing as a political, social, and religious figure at any one moment.

The earlier editions of the Don Bosco Study Guides have focused largely upon the personal life of Don Bosco. We have examined some of his childhood experiences, his struggles for placement within his own family, the tug of his dreams, and adult and peer relationships which shaped him, and the influences of persons and events which honed him into the father and teacher for the young that has become a universal symbol of commitment to God's action in the lives of the young for his time and for many ages down to our own contexts.

This issue will examine some key figures of his political life and offer glimpses of the social genius so capable of handling conflicting forces in his mission to educate the young and offer them solid guidance for their places in their own society. Never retreating to mere piety, while never belittling dependence upon divine providence, Don Bosco forged out an educative plan of formation that negotiated the political obstacle courses of his time while fostering lived devotion and service to a God who, in fact, called him and the young into service of their region—practical hands and hearts reaching out to change society. The study of Don Bosco's spiritual and religious contexts uncovers a myriad of forces in tension with his own person. His desire, clearly, was to rescue the image of God caught up in political ideologies and ecclesiastical debates. He wanted the Jesus and Mary of his childhood to become real companions for his young people. He never lost that original innocence, despite the demand to live and function in a cynical age



Key Historical Figures

Don Bosco and Important Political Figures of his Time:

Marquis Cavour, Vicar of the City

The Vicar of the city of Turin was a man that was not particularly liked by many persons and, as Don Bosco predicted, his death proved the point with the lack of interest and lack of attendance for his services. He was a liberal advocate who wanted a free economy, but this ended, often, in losing control of the masses. Cavour was noted for pushing education and economic growth as the city's population exploded beyond some of the greatest cities of Europe and North America. The Marquis had often fallen for the rumors that Don Bosco was gathering a rebellious horde of youth for a revolution. On one occasion, the Marquis met



with Don Bosco and advised him to let his "scoundrels" go on their own. No matter Don Bosco's explanation, the Marquis would not buy it and insisted that he would not

permit any gathering of these young people.¹

Because of the Marquis' cooperation with the French during the Napoleonic occupation, Cavour fell out of favor during the Restoration. Even his ties to Charles Albert, first prince and then king, were detrimental in this period, though his fortunes grew when the prince became king.

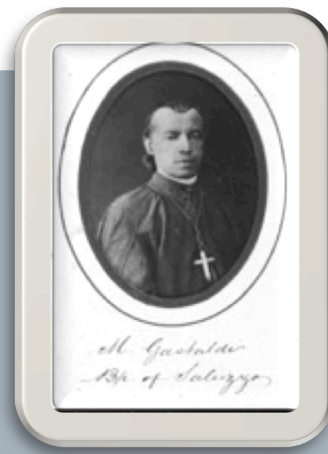
Key Historical Figures (continued)

Under that reign, Cavour carried the authority of the King, but that would end by 1848. Despite Don Bosco's appeal to his obedience to the archbishop, the Marquis called a meeting of his city council at the residence of the archbishop who was rather ill at that moment. The council decided definitively to block all of Don Bosco's meetings as a threat to public security. This ban would last for 6 months until Cavour fell ill. In June 1847, the city guards were called off.¹ During this illness, Don Bosco often visited the sick Marquis and garnered favor and even financial support from the sick man. It was during this time that Don Bosco became familiar with his sons Camilo and Gustavo. A subsidy of more than 300 lire came to the Oratory annually until 1877. In the following year, an anti-clerical shift was apparent.

King Charles Albert

King Charles Albert clung to a throne presiding over the region of Piedmont at a precarious interval between the Napoleonic occupation and the anti-clerical and unifying forces of a new form of government on the rise—a government seeking national unity and freedom from monarchies. The king was fully aware of the growing sentiment, especially during those years of Restoration, and did all in his power to suppress any movement toward a constitution. A movement that would deal the king a rattling blow began in 1831 under Giuseppe Mazzini; it was another secret movement called "Young Italy."¹ The notes in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* English translation offer many insights into the significance of such secret societies and their impact on the life of a young clerical student, John Bosco. It is suggested there that his founding of the *Societa dell'allegria* was an innocent imitation of such groups but for vastly different reasons.

During the 1840s, King Charles Albert faced the rising tensions between the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Austrian Empire. Austria was occupying Venice, Lombard, and Tuscany among other states in the northern peninsula. A note of interest in the *MO, English Translation* is the fact that Don Bosco tolerated the games of the boys playing with wooden rifles, "the Italians" versus "the Austrians." At the height of these games the famous incident of the boys destroying Mama Margaret's



ArchBishop Gastaldi

Excerpted from Don Bosco Builder, Arthur Lenti...



For a closing comment, it bears repeating that, neurotic and unreasoning though he is made to appear in the *Biographical Memoirs*, Gastaldi was proceeding from clearly defined premises. He was truly concerned with clergy reform and formation; he was particularly sensitive and protective with regard to his own seminary program; and he saw Don Bosco's recruiting and formation practices as a threat. Add to this his unimpeachable conviction that it was his right and his duty, as ordinary, to ascertain the suitability and worthiness of candidates for ordination, whether secular or regular. After all, as Desramaut aptly remarks, Salesian candidates had not lived in a closed seminary community; they did not reside in monasteries away from the world; they claimed to be preparing themselves intellectually and spiritually while fully engaged in activities of a largely secular nature. And the ordinary was being asked to confer orders on such candidates without the possibility of ascertaining their suitability. Further, he could not discount the real possibility that, once ordained, they might choose to return to the diocese. In conscience, therefore, as well as in virtue of Church law in force, the archbishop felt obliged to examine Salesian candidates on the subject of their "vocation," that is, religious formation, and on their real suitability for priestly ministry. Nor did he wish to see presented as Salesian candidates for ordination his former seminarians who, after leaving or after having been dismissed from the seminary, had been accepted by Don Bosco.¹

No doubt, throughout the distressing developments of the confrontation that followed, misunderstandings, frustration, anger, spite, and even unworthy motives played a part. But the conflict can be neither explained nor understood merely in those terms. Real issues and real points of view were involved that had larger reference than the character of the protagonists.

Key Historical Figures (continued)

garden occurs.¹

Don Bosco himself authored an account of the King's personal intervention on his behalf against Marquis Cavour's attempt to dissolve Don Bosco's gatherings of young people. In chapter 41 of *MO* he spoke fondly of the King who had sent his support through Count Joseph Provana of Collegno. Don Bosco quotes the king's own words: "It is my wish that these assemblies be promoted and protected. If there is danger of disorders, ways should be studied to forestall and prevent them."¹ Don Bosco reported that these words quelled the rising anger of Cavour and his council and left them to their meetings.

Under mounting pressure, King Charles Albert finally conceded to the granting of a constitution on February 8, 1848, but this caused many uprisings and protests.¹ As Garibaldi rose to power and liberalism held sway, the influence of the King of Sardinia and the other kingdoms began to wane. By the time of the revolution to unite Italy, their influence and the Restoration were at an end.

Cesare Balbo

The rise of the liberals in Piedmont seemed inevitable in a changing Europe. King Victor Emmanuel was resolved to launch and promote a thorough restoration, but this would not last for long. The king replaced the the rights of the



Church, threw out French laws, and even destroyed French architecture. This forced many of the elite liberals and intelligencia to go into hiding. Among these intellectuals would be counted Cesare Balbo. He

withdrew from public speaking and writing awaiting a better moment.

When the founder of Young Italy, Giuseppe Mazzini appealed to King Charles Albert to call the people to arms against the Austrians, his motives seemed linked to a burning desire to found a united republican national state, and the king refused to cooperate and, in fact, tried to crush Mazzini's movement. In the effort to stem the influence of Austrian, however, nationalists insisted that only an independent Piedmont could foster the unity of Italy. Such was the writing of Cesar Balbo.¹ Cesar Balbo would be counted as one of the counts of the Prime Minister of Sardinia-Italo in 1848, but would not remain even the year.

(continued next page...)

Don Bosco & Pius IX

Don Bosco had a warm and trusting relationship with Pius IX and this is one of the well known details of both of their lives. The beleaguered pontiff received much written support from Don Bosco throughout his papacy while Don Bosco received essential guidance for the founding of the Salesian Society and the other branches of the Salesian Family.

Pius was exiled during the taking of the Papal States and the possession of the Church in Rome. Pius IX's long legacy secured the position of spiritual authority even as the temporal powers slipped away. Don Bosco wanted his Salesian Family to be the great defender of the successor to St. Peter, the Bishop of Rome.



Massimo d'Azeglio

Another author and patriot of Piedmont among the *Intelligencia* and one of the elite liberals was Massimo d'Azeglio. He chose to flee Piedmont during the crackdown of King Victor Emmanuel in 1815. He preferred Austrian occupied Milan to the restrictions of the king. This patriot would serve as a Prime Minister of Sardinia-Italo for three years from 1849-1852. This appointment came at the hands of King Victor Emmanuel II, who took the throne of his father, Charles Alber after a horrendous defeat against the Austrians on March 12, 1849. Massimo was commissioned to negotiate with the Austrians but the new king refused their terms because they included abolishing the one year old constitution.

*Victor Emmanuel II*

Victor Emmanuel II would take his throne after the anguished reign of his father, Charles Alber. The elder king fought hard against the liberals in an effort to restore the structures, finances, and governmental policies of the pre-Napoeanic monarchies. His efforts would be forever frustrated as movements rose under his own gaze—movements he could not crush.

Victor Emmanuel II took the throne in 1849, still a very turbulent period. He would cling to his wavering monarchy for nearly 20 years. He earned the name “the Gallant King” by refusing to meet the demands of the Austrians even after bitter defeat at their hands in 1849.

Ironically, this king would actually feign to take the side of his enemies in the effort to defeat the invading armies of Garibaldi. Garibaldi was fighting for a united Italy and had wrestled territory from Austria and headed for Naples and Rome. Both Cavour and the king sent armies to Rome and took it themselves in a

so-called act of uniting Italy and to trump Garibaldi's hand. In all of this, Victor Emmanuel was declared the King of a united Italy in March of 1861.¹ His reign would last another 17 years, but would weaken with the rise of republicanism. He succeeded in uniting Italy and is recognized for that today, though his aims were quite different from the republicanism swallowing much of the regions of Italy clamoring for unification.

*Giuseppe Garibaldi*

Giuseppe Garibaldi was an exile from South America appointed as the general of the army of King Charles Albert. In defense of the Papal States and Papal authority, the King sent his army to push back the possibility of Austrian takeover. Pius IX was considered an anomaly for his apparent liberalism and his appeal to patriotism. The King showed his support of the Pope's defense of his temporal powers with the assistance of Garibaldi's troops. The defense was the idea of Mazzini, the founder of the Young Italy movement, which cast the shadow of doubt over the monarch's intentions, but he saw the advantage of routing the occupied Papal States at Rome.

Garibaldi was himself a member of Young Italy and would vow to spend his life for the liberation and unification of Italy. Because of his campaign against the Austrians, he was caught and condemned to death, but he escaped and went into exile. He went to North and South America, but eventually returned to Piedmont in 1854. In 1859 he defeated the Austrians in the Piedmont-Austrian War. But was embittered by the loss of his home city of Nice in France.

Garibaldi led the conquest of Sicily in May of 1860 and declared himself the dictator of Sicily in the name of Victor Emmanuel II of Italy. But, ironically, he completely distrusted the Piedmontese government of Cavour. He was a patriot and a commander caught between allegiances. But his

reputation would become world-wide, even to the extent that President Abraham Lincoln considered his leadership of the Union forces in the Civil War of the United States. This military leader would not take that lead, but was instrumental in the Prussian-Austrian war because his interests were in retaking Venice. He continued to lead in the Franco-Austrian War where he turned his loyalties back to the French against whom he fought in Rome and elsewhere.



Prince Metternich

The dominant figure to preside at the famous Congress of Vienna held in 1815 was Prince Metternich of Austria. He had a burning desire to restore Europe to the pre-Napoleonic order. He also desired to establish a balance of powers in Europe, with the lesser states of France respecting the powers of France and her allies. Among these lesser states was the region of Piedmont.¹

Metternich did not like the government of Piedmont and considered it to be the lesser state in need of the most attention. By 1820, so much unrest boiled in Europe that the Prince convened the powers of Europe and it was decided to allow the intervention of Austria for the crushing of the Napoleonic Revolution in 1821.

Ten years later, revolutions still on the rise across Europe, King Charles Felix died leaving his throne to the reluctant Charles Albert. Prince Metternich insisted on respect for the heir to the throne. Once a liberal, the new King imprisoned the leader of the Young Italy as a show of defiance to such liberal thinking. But such show of force was incapable of repairing the mess of Sardinia's economy. This paved the way for liberalism threw the back door.

Metternich sent troops to Lombardy and

Ferrara confused by the show of power demonstrated by Pius IX, who set about reforms in Tuscany and Lombardy against their tyrannical powers. He was met with such universal condemnation and the fierce reaction of the troops of Garibaldi that Metternich withdrew.¹ When the two Sicilies were invaded shortly after, Garibaldi turned to Pius IX to pass over through his territory to assist the Sicilies. Pius refused.



Metternich would have to flee Rome at the invasion led by the Second Republic of France engulfing Austria. The pressure for freedom from Austria led and the flight of Metternich prompted Venice and Milan to declare freedom.

¹ BOSCO, St. John, *The Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, English edition translated by Daniel Lyons with notes and commentary by Eugene Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelvechchi, SDB, and Michael Mendl, SDB Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, 1989, p. 243.

² *Ibid*, 280.

³ *Ibid*, 50, in a note quoting the work of STELLA, Pietro, *Don Bosco Life and Work, second revised edition* DRURY, John (translation) Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, 2005.

⁴ *Ibid*, 272.

⁵ *Ibid*, 278.

⁶ *Ibid*, 336.

⁷ *Ibid*, in the translators Introduction p. xiv.

⁸ *Ibid*, 311.

⁹ *Ibid*, xxxvii.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, xlvi/



The Political World of Don Bosco

The late Fr. Michael Ribotta dedicated much of his life to the study of the Risorgimento and its impact upon Don Bosco

For the late Fr. Michael Ribotta, any investigation into the figure of Don Bosco would be incomplete without a thorough understanding of the history of Europe in the ages in which Don Bosco lived. Particularly significant for Fr. Michael was the context *and* the content of the Risorgimento in the Italian regions fighting for independence and unification.

To know the mind of Don Bosco

requires a knowledge of the major political figures and forces of his era. Such a knowledge reveals the strategizing and wisdom of Don Bosco as an educator who was both a political pariah for some and a saint for others. This year of study offers us an opportunity to study the finer details of this rich period of history. For your consideration, two historical studies are most helpful...

Stromberg, Roland N. *European Intellectual History Since 1789: Sixth Edition*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1994.

Header, Harry, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790-1870*, New York, London, Longman House, 1983.

Questions for Fr. Arthur...

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Published by The Institute for Salesian
Spirituality at Don Bosco Hall
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Next Issue: Special Lenten Edition

Don Bosco and the Last Things: Death, Sin, and Evil in Don Bosco's World...